



e-lesson

Week starting: 17th December 2007

1. Computers

The subject of this week's lesson is computers. The nineteenth-century British mathematician and philosopher Charles Babbage is credited with having drawn up the first ever designs for a machine capable of operating as a rudimentary form of computer. He was born on 26th December 1791.

Level

Pre-intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level A2-B1 and above)

How to use the lesson

1. Brainstorm on the subject of computers. What do your students use them for? In what ways do they think computers are beneficial to society? Do they think there are any ways in which computers have had a negative impact?
2. Divide the students into pairs and give them five to ten minutes to read through the text on Worksheet A, encouraging them to look up new vocabulary. Tell them that in exercise A they are going to fill the gaps with appropriate words. You could suggest that they guess what those words might be before starting the exercise.
3. When the time is up, hand out Worksheet B and give the students another ten minutes to fill the gaps using the correct words from the box. Make it clear that (a) there is only one possible word to fill each gap, and (b) there are sixteen words in the box but only twelve gaps in the text, meaning that four of the words should not be used.
4. When the time is up, check answers in open class. You could also ask the students what they thought of the opinions expressed by Caroline and Bob, and whether they identified with either of the two characters.
5. Next, keeping the students in their pairs, give them at least five minutes to try the second exercise on Worksheet B, in which they have to put the mixed-up transcript of a conversation back in the correct order.
6. Check answers in open class.

Answers

A (gap-fill)

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. lost | 7. technology |
| 2. documents | 8. electronic |
| 3. past | 9. office |
| 4. essential | 10. useful |
| 5. organisations | 11. replying |
| 6. buying | 12. screen |

(Words that should not be used: top, price, happy, people)

B (mixed-up transcript of conversation)

G	Bob, I can't believe you've still got that old computer!
J	Can't you? It's good enough for me.
C	What do you mean, 'good enough'? I bet the internet connection is really slow.
E	And why would I want to use the internet?
K	What? You mean you don't use the internet?
A	No. Why should I?
H	Bob, tell me you're joking, please.
D	No, I'm not, honestly. I know there are all those websites, but most of them are probably rubbish.
L	No, that's not true. There's something for everyone on the internet.
B	Well, there's probably nothing for me. I'd rather read a book.
F	Yeah, but you can read books <i>as well</i> as use the internet – you don't have to choose between the two. Anyway, what <i>do</i> you use your computer for?
I	I use it to write letters occasionally. That's all, really.

2. Related Websites

Send your students to these websites, or just take a look yourself:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_4780000/newsid_4786500/4786565.stm

A BBC *Newsround* forum (2006) asking 'How important is your computer to you?' Aimed primarily at children and younger teenagers. Appropriate for pre-intermediate level.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/youandyours/technology_launch.shtml

From the BBC Radio 4 website, this shows the results of a survey that asked people what they regarded as the most important technological innovation since 1800. The computer came in fourth place, with the bicycle far ahead in first. Intermediate level and above.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/sci_tech/2000/dot_life/1488567.stm

Another BBC article (2001), published on the twentieth anniversary of the launch by IBM of the one of the first ever 'personal computers'. The piece is followed by comments from various people on the impact personal computers (and the internet) have had on their lives. Some of the comments would be accessible to pre-intermediate level.

Computers

WORKSHEET A

Caroline

Where would we be without computers? I'd be (1) _____ without mine. As I run a small business from home I'm always writing all sorts of (2) _____, and I can't imagine doing them by hand or using a typewriter, but that's what people had to do in the (3) _____, isn't it? Then there are the business accounts, which I couldn't keep track of without spreadsheets. As for email, there's no way I could have built up my business without it, as it's (4) _____ for me to be able to communicate quickly with my customers and suppliers.

It's weird to think that until the early 1980s hardly anyone had a computer at home, as most computers were so big and expensive that they belonged to (5) _____ rather than individuals.

I'd say my computer is on for most of the time I'm in the house – if I'm not using it for work I'm probably surfing the internet, downloading music, or (6) _____ other stuff online.

Bob

Basically I'm a bit of a technophobe. There's a lot of modern (7) _____ I don't like using, and a lot I don't really see the point of. I can't believe how people think they have to get the latest (8) _____ gadgets, even though most of them are so obviously unnecessary.

As for computers, I use one at work, but that's only because everyone in my (9) _____ has to have one. I suppose computers help workplaces function more efficiently, but I don't think they're as (10) _____ as most people think they are. Email, for example, probably wastes as much time as it saves, as most of my colleagues seem to spend half the day (11) _____ to pointless messages.

I also have a computer at home, but I haven't used it for ages. I made an effort with it for a little while, but found it very frustrating – I got fed up with all those 'error' messages appearing on the (12) _____ whenever I tried to do something.

Computers

WORKSHEET B

A

Fill the twelve gaps in the text on Worksheet A with the correct words from the box below. There are four words that you will not need to use.

organisations	price	past	office
electronic	documents	screen	replying
essential	technology	people	buying
top	happy	useful	lost

B

Below is a conversation between Bob and one of his friends, but the different parts of the conversation have been put in the wrong order. Can you put them back in the right order?

A	No. Why should I?
B	Well, there's probably nothing for me. I'd rather read a book.
C	What do you mean, 'good enough'? I bet the internet connection is really slow.
D	No, I'm not, honestly. I know there are all those websites, but most of them are probably rubbish.
E	And why would I want to use the internet?
F	Yeah, but you can read books <i>as well</i> as use the internet – you don't have to choose between the two. Anyway, what <i>do</i> you use your computer for?
G	Bob, I can't believe you've still got that old computer!
H	Bob, tell me you're joking, please.
I	I use it to write letters occasionally. That's all, really.
J	Can't you? It's good enough for me.
K	What? You mean you don't use the internet?
L	No, that's not true. There's something for everyone on the internet.

Computers – Glossary

account noun [count]

a detailed record that a business keeps of the money it receives and spends in a particular period of time

The accounts showed a loss of £498 million.

belong to phrasal verb

to be owned by someone

The car belongs to the woman next door.

by hand phrase

using your hands rather than a machine

colleague noun [count]

someone who works in the same organization or department as you

customer noun [count]

a person or company that buys goods or services

Discounts are available for our regular customers.

download verb

to move information to your computer from another computer system or the Internet

You can download this software for free.

efficient adjective

something that is efficient works well and produces good results by using the available time, money, supplies etc in the most effective way

essential adjective

completely necessary

In a large organization, good internal communication is essential.

frustrating adjective

making you feel annoyed and impatient because you are prevented from achieving something

It's frustrating to wait all day for a repairman who doesn't show up.

fed up adjective

annoyed or bored with something that you feel you have accepted for too long

I'm fed up with this job.

gadget noun [count]

a small tool or piece of equipment that does something useful or impressive

kitchen gadgets

keep track phrase

to have all the information that you need about something

We need a system to keep track of all our expenses.

online adjective

connected to or available through a computer or a computer network (=a group of connected computers), especially the Internet

point noun [singular]

the reason for something

I'm sorry – I just don't see the point of doing this.

pointless adjective

lacking any purpose or use

It's pointless just waiting here, he's not coming.

run verb

to control and organize something such as a business, organization, or event

Sue's been running a mail-order business for ten years.

screen noun [count]

the flat surface on a computer, television, or piece of electronic equipment where words and pictures are shown

spreadsheet noun [count]

a chart produced on a computer that shows numbers in a way that makes them easy to compare

a spreadsheet analysing business in 2006

supplier noun [count]

a company, organization, or country that supplies or sells a product or a service

Colombia is our main supplier of coffee beans.

surf verb

to look at various places one after another on the Internet or on television

She spends hours every day just surfing the Net.

technology noun [uncount]

advanced machines and equipment developed using advanced scientific knowledge

technophobe noun [count]

someone who does not like, trust, or want to use technology, especially computers

waste verb

to use more of something than is necessary, or to use it in a way that does not produce the best results

A great deal of time was wasted arguing over the details of the contract.

weird adjective

strange and unusual, sometimes in a way that upsets you