



Low-teaching teaching (3): Three email writing tasks

by Paul Walsh and Dale Coulter

Lesson Topic: Email writing

Class: Suitable for groups/ one-to-ones

Level: All Levels

Time: 25-30 mins for each task+

Activity: Email writing - with no internet connection!

Materials: No materials - just card/ paper/ pens/ scissors

Language: Useful email set phrases/ formal language

Mail

Contacts

Tasks

Compose mail

Inbox (20597)

Starred ★

Important 📌

Sent Mail

Drafts (131)



(1) Paper Email Chain

1) Put the learners into pairs and say that they are going to write an email - an email to each other. Print out the task sheet (page 5 of this document) and in each pair give one learner Student A task, one learner Student B task.

The teacher should also fill in the 'blank' in the Student A task - "You recently met someone who works for this company at a conference and he/she said that they need a solution to their problems." Of course, learners can also fill this in themselves.

NOTE: the task sheet is generic - please change for your particular context!

2) Tell learners to read the task sheet and ask questions if they are unsure of what to do.

3) Give each learner a 'paper email' template. Basically this is piece of paper cut from a long paper roll then folded five or six times. My 'paper email' template measures approximately 14 cm across and 9 cm high.

Learners will write five or six messages back and forth - just like a real email exchange.

4) Each learner then starts writing to the other. They write out their 'email' and then 'send' it to the other person. Then that person turns the paper over and writes a reply.

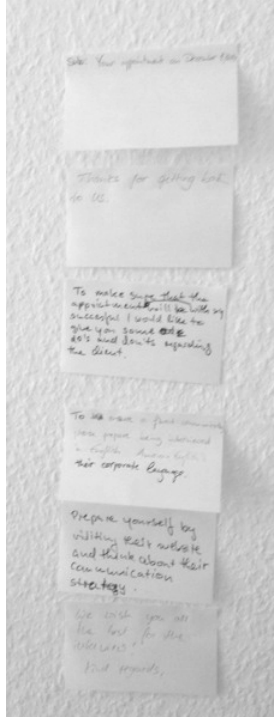
5) Continue until the paper is full or the task is finished.

6) Look at the paper emails and give feedback on mistakes and examples of good language use. Here is an real paper email from a recent lesson.



(2) Sticky note emails by Dale Coulter

In this task learners complete emails on sticky notes/ post-it notes - moving around the room while they do it. The aim of this task is get learners to pay attention to discourse, coherence and cohesive devices as well as formality.



1. Tell learners to think of one subject line from an email they've sent in the past week (could be in L1 or L2). At this point, they could check their emails to refresh their memories.

2. Ask them to write the subject line on a sticky note. Once they're done, stick all the sticky notes around the room in different locations.

3. Tell learners they are going to write all the emails together. On another sticky note, each learner writes the first line(s) *for their own subject line* and sticks it below the subject line.

4. Then each learner moves left to the next 'email' and writes the next part of the email on another sticky note.

5. Repeat the process until you have complete emails.

Trainer's role:

Proactive: you could use this activity to practise a language exponent. I used it to practice fronting paragraphs with *to + infinitive* to give the reason for asking someone to do something before a request.

Reactive: you can monitor for useful language or missing chunks and use that as a language focus. Areas to draw from could be cohesive devices or continuation of formality set at the start of the email. You can even put the sticky notes on the board to annotate for language feedback.

(3) Paper Inbox (for one-to-one classes)

This lesson was the result of something that has happened to every teacher: I forgot all my books. So I needed to think of a quick way of teaching a 90 minute class with NO materials.

Luckily I never leave home without scrap paper and scissors...

Preparation

Find out in previous lessons from your learner what important emails they have to deal with at work. You will use this as a basis for the task. You might want to talk about internal versus external emails. I often ask learners 'Which emails annoy you?' (always a winner).

In preparation, write down three emails *to your learner* on scraps of A5 paper. You might want to write two formal emails, and one informal. It depends on your context.

Procedure

1. Give the three paper emails to your learner in class and say "This is your email inbox. You have to answer all these emails. You have minutes". Give extra time if needed.
2. As your learner finishes one email - he/ she *sends* it over to you. Then you write a reply to this email while he/ she works on the second email.
3. This process of sending and receiving paper emails continues until you have received all three emails. N.B. with the final email it's not necessary to send a reply.
4. Take all the learners' emails and spread them over the desk. Point out examples of good use and highlight areas for improvement.

Follow-up task

Create a follow-up task based on one of the emails. I find that a phone call task is a good follow-up task e.g. 'Arranging an appointment'. Also, clarifying details by phone is a good authentic task.



Task sheet for (1) Paper Email chain

Student A

You're writing an introductory email to a company. You recently met someone who works for this company at a conference and he/she said that they need a solution to their problems.

1. Start an email conversation by introducing yourself politely, mention the person that you met at the conference, and talk about some of the services that your company offers.
2. Ask if it would be possible to arrange a meeting to discuss their problems.
3. If they agree, ask politely for a time that is suitable.
4. Agree a time and location to meet and make suitable travel arrangements.
5. End your email conversation politely.

*Write your email to Student B. Student B will also write you an email that you should answer.

Student B

You're writing an introductory email to a company. You are looking for new clients and you think that this company could benefit from your product. You believe that this company uses an inferior product at present and you are going to explain the benefits of *your* product.

1. Start an email conversation by introducing yourself politely and mention some of the services your company offers with the potential benefits (say why you are better than your competitors here).
2. Ask if it would be possible to arrange a meeting to discuss their current product/service and present the advantages and potential benefits of using your product.
3. If they agree, ask politely for a time that is suitable.
4. Agree a time and location to meet.
5. End your email conversation politely.

*Write your email to Student A. Student A will also write you an email that you should answer.

