



## Identifying good practice: English and modern foreign languages

**S**tandards of work in English and modern foreign languages **SAS** and **A-level** classes are generally good – that’s the verdict of a recent Ofsted research report. The best English written work was lively and demonstrated clear engagement with arguments and texts. The best modern foreign languages teaching successfully developed the four skill areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Here we explore what factors contributed to these achievements.

### Improving learners’ grasp of vocabulary

One A-level English language course commended by the inspectors equipped learners early on with the technical terminology they needed to understand and discuss the building blocks of language – phonemes, graphemes and morphemes etc. Strategies used included giving the learners quizzes and word activities such as speaking alliteratively. Some colleges expected learners to keep and update their own glossary of linguistic terms.

### Enrichment activities and study visits

In English teaching and learning, for example, some colleges invited poets to run workshops which helped the learners to develop a broad range of creative and critical skills. Other colleges ran successful debating societies which boosted learners’ confidence and their speaking and listening skills. Other activities which brought learning to life were trips to ‘Hardy country’ and to Ypres for learners of First World War poetry. Modern foreign language learners particularly valued study trips helping them to improve their language fluency, independence and autonomy. Work experience opportunities, such as administrative, tourist or retail work helped develop A-level learners’ everyday language skills that aren’t easily taught in the classroom.

### Using a good range of activities to engage learners

One effective lesson identified by the report involved the analysis of Nissim Ezekiel’s poem ‘Night of the Scorpion’. This lesson engaged learners and stimulated their thinking through a range of group work activities including:

- presenting the poem through performance
- creating art work to reflect the major aspects of the text
- a dramatic enactment of the poem’s events
- a traditional critical analysis, and
- group presentations of the learners’ interpretations of the poem.

At the end of the lesson the learners worked as a class, combining all their “...images, performances and analysis”. According to the inspectors this combination of activities enhanced learners’ ability to get inside the poem.

### Imaginative use of resources to develop skills

The Ofsted inspectors saw many different kinds of resources in use, often in imaginative ways. For example, in an International Baccalaureate class, learners were asked to construct a typical revenge plot using props such as bottles, a skull and a mask. In modern foreign language classes, learners were observed using video conferencing to speak to their peers in France which enabled them to hear colloquial language and learn about the latest issues that were important for French learners.

### Use of information technology to support and enhance learning

A large number of colleges used sites such as YouTube effectively to promote understanding and discussion of current cultural and linguistic issues. In an A2 French lesson for example, the teacher used a video clip of French fair trade to introduce new vocabulary in preparation for written work.

### Assessment to enhance learning

Requiring learners to review their own learning helped clarify their understanding, and what they needed to work on further. In an adult learners’ mixed level Spanish lesson, the learners held up a red or white card to show whether they understood the correct use of present tense reflexive verbs. The teacher then asked them to write on their cards what they felt confident with, and what they would like to focus on a little more. The teacher then used the cards to plan the next lesson.

## Take action

**Is there scope for building on current use of these strategies? Could you:**

- increase the extent to which learners combine different experiences?
- identify specific activities during a team meeting that support learning well? You may like to include students in the discussion – do they agree? Can you identify what makes these activities helpful?

#### Evidence source

Ofsted (2009) Identifying good practice: a survey of college provision in English language and literature, and modern foreign languages. London: Ofsted. Available [here](#)

*Inspectors visited 18 colleges where provision in English and/or modern foreign languages had been judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent inspection. During each visit, the inspectors observed lessons, scrutinised learners’ work, curriculum teams’ plans, schemes of work and self-assessment reports and held meetings with learners, tutors and managers.*