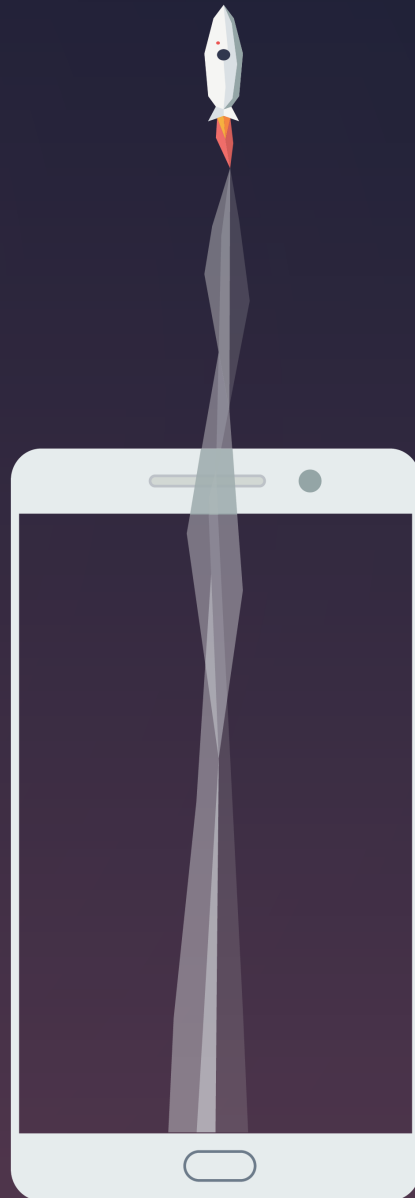


Digitally Assisted Language Training

For freelancers and small schools
in the adult training market



Osborne
Solutions



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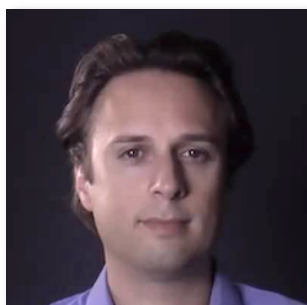
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Foreword

Linguid founder, Joss Frimond



“When I first met Richard I was struck at how creative and passionate he was about language training and about digital language training in particular. He really felt it was being misused, and was adamant there had to be a better way. He was preparing himself to spend a year in order to get a diploma on how to do blended learning engineering. I found the notion ridiculous, as he already knew more about the subject than most trainers would learn in a lifetime.

It’s easy to point fingers in digital language learning and say that it doesn’t work. It’s easy to laugh at the high drop-off rates, at how teachers snub it as inferior to face-to-face classes, at how schools only use it to fill up the number of hours in a program, at how nothing can really replace a good 90-minute in-person class with an experienced trainer.

With DALT, I really believe that Richard has found the solution. I’ve tested it myself and adult language learners have consistently told me (once they see how it works) that they really feel like they’re learning quickly. Teachers have told me they love the fact that they can interact so easily with learners outside of lessons.

DALT is the next step in digital language learning. It fixes what’s wrong with blended language learning and enables the trainer to have far more control over the content they provide. The learner feels like their needs are being properly cared for. Time and money are saved.

I urge you to read this eBook carefully and to consider the implications it might have on your job. Mark my words, DALT will be used for years to come.”

Author, Richard Osborne



Richard is a CELTA and DELTA qualified language trainer and entrepreneur. He started teaching professional English 9 years ago in Paris and became quickly involved in the pedagogic side of his training centre, in particular using digital training tools. He became an expert in digital solutions for the language training market, but felt at that time there were no solutions that satisfied his needs.

He started his own digital training venture in 2017 where, after over a year’s testing and development, he produced his own more efficient approach to training online that could cut down the amount of time he spent with his learners, all the while maintaining quality and rapport.

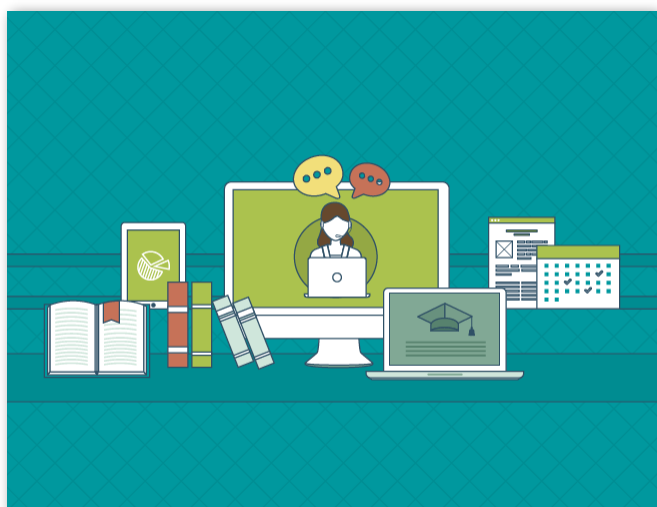
The need for more automation led to the creation of a digital training platform called LearnBook. Being able to develop the platform himself, Richard’s platform perfectly reflects his new-found approach to online training, as well as being built from the ground up to be trainer-friendly.

He has been working with Joss Frimond of Linguid for the last year expanding his market reach and developing training courses on LearnBook and his own approach to digital training.

Introduction

The drivers behind digital training

The use of technology has been prevalent in education since the early 20th century, with the emergence of radio, cassettes and later video as potential classroom tools. At the advent of digital computing and its rapid integration into the school curriculum, there was a belief that computer training formed part of a bright future of increased skilled labour and problem solving, potentially heralding a new wave of social equality in education and society. The emergence of the Internet as a commodity in the 1990s cemented the idea that computers would one day democratise and even revolutionise education. Eventually, the ability to use a computer became so important it was declared a general capability, alongside numeracy and literacy (Howard et al. 2015).



While this led to the birth of many online training courses being offered free of charge or at a comparatively low cost in an effort to achieve the democratisation of education, much of the contemporary drive towards digital training in today's corporate world has been monetary. Once written or recorded digitally, training materials are replicable ad infinitum, and the trainer no longer need be present to deliver the content of the lesson. Trainees can have their efforts assessed through automated correction supplied by a digital learning management system, having been pre-programmed with automated responses and feedback by the instructional designer. Such a course could be delivered to and fully completed by a learner with little to no direct

trainer interaction at all. This moves the training organisation from a model where revenue is capped at the number of hours their trainers are prepared to work, to one of scale with greatly increased profit margins to invest in the development and maintenance of their digital learning platform, as well as the creation and updating of its learning content. Such organisations become known as eLearning or Blended Learning suppliers, with whom today's training market is rife.

From a corporate client's point of view, for example, digital training is equally if not more attractive from a monetary standpoint. Before, large companies with thousands of employees would spend vast amounts of money on staff training on new products, company software, etc. A physically present trainer would be required to deliver the information, with the maximum number of trainees per training session being limited lest some participants be unable to properly follow or contribute. If the same training can be delivered in an automated way through a computer programme, albeit requiring a considerable initial investment, the long term cost saving is substantial. This need has led to a highly developed market of digital training providers targeting large-scale training contracts in the private and public sector.

Digital language training

Language training was not spared the digital revolution. Pimsleur's tape and CD versions of listen-and-repeat language lessons emerged as early as the 1960s. Rosetta Stone first released their PC language learning software in 1990s. In the 2000s, the ability to create dynamic web pages, where information is not just static but can be edited by the consumer, allowed language trainers to put their language learning activities online. The birth of YouTube brought the ability to record and upload videos of trainers giving lessons which, along with the availability of free video conferencing, soon led to the development of language courses being offered partially or entirely

online. Some efforts have gone as far as to completely dematerialise the concept of the language school itself, such as [the EU-funded project, Camelot](#).

Whereas so called ‘hard skill’ (knowledge-based competencies) training can be transformed into online, self-corrected learning exercises, language training and other ‘soft skill’ (practical competencies) training centres, unsurprisingly, around practice. Approaches to training hard skills through digital media are complex, and require a high-level of competency in User Experience (UX) and Instructional Systems Design (ISD), that is, controlling how the user will feel while they interact with the training software and constructing the training course to be delivered using finely tuned methodologies. Such technical and pedagogic engineering would be quite beyond the capabilities of the average freelance language trainer or even small training organisations. As a result, the language training industry at this level has been forced to rely upon mainstream industry trends in digital soft-skills training, such as the ones described below.

Examples of approaches to digital language training

‘Self-access’ eLearning

Self-access eLearning involves providing a language learner with access to a language learning website, such as Altissia or Babbel, or to software, such as Rosetta Stone or Berlitz, either on their own computer or in a computer lab (a room in a training centre with several computers). The term ‘self-access’ refers to the learner’s freedom to access the digital learning materials as and when they want, without necessarily interacting with a language trainer face-to-face.

The belief is that learners will be able to self-motivate through the prospect of being able to choose from a large range of activities based on their personal preferences at a time convenient to them. Unfortunately, studies have consistently shown a predictable decline in attendance rates over the course of self-access eLearning courses. Taking the example of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), where the content of an entire training programme is available through self-access eLearning lessons on a web platform, with little to no interaction with a live trainer, studies show engagement rates of at best around 50%, and at worst less than 13% (Onah et al. 2014).



The Flipped Classroom

Instead of providing total freedom to the learner to access the training programme’s digital materials in their entirety, the flipped classroom approach uses the self-access platform as a means of outsourcing classroom content that would normally be delivered via lecture during class time. This allows the learner the time needed to comprehend the target knowledge, which they might not have been afforded within the constraints of the classroom. This method works particularly well in the context of public education, where the precious time in front of the teacher is better spent putting into practice a particular area of already-studied knowledge coming from auto-corrected digital instruction.

In the context of language training, this approach also has its advantages. A trainer can, for example, free classroom time that would normally be spent on the presentation of technical language points, focussing instead on the greater challenge of developing practical language skills. However, flipped training exists in a fragile equilibrium, where one learner’s failure to complete the assigned digital work can lead

to their inability in the upcoming face-to-face class to engage in learning for which that preparation was a necessary prerequisite.

Additionally, the connection between digital content and classroom themes is not necessarily enough to motivate learners to remain engaged throughout the course. The activities employed in a flipped approach are essentially a digital version of traditional paper homework, adding no particular advantage other than the novelty of digital learning technology. While outsourcing knowledge-based work to outside-of-class time is a well-known and effective technique, one has to question the true value in students completing such activities online over using a pencil, eraser and paper worksheet with the answers hidden on its reverse.

Blended Learning

The principle of blended learning is essentially the same as the flipped classroom. The blended training programme is a mix between face-to-face lessons and digital exercises, which act as either preparation for or consolidation of the face-to-face sessions. This method of linking digital and face-to-face language interaction creates cycles of learning around each language point, for example, a learner would complete digital exercises around the present perfect aspect, understanding its technical points and applications, before attending a lesson focussing on spoken practice of this grammar point, followed by a digital homework task requiring the learner to write a text to further practise the same point.

In language training, as with the flipped classroom, the blended approach maximises the time spent during the language class performing practical tasks to improve spoken or written skills and fluency. It also, however, suffers from the same Achilles heel as the flipped approach - learners have as much chance of remaining engaged and motivated to complete the digital activities as they do a paper-based homework. In my own experience, certainly in the adult world where the threat of repercussion for non-completion of homework tasks no longer carries any weight, the probability of a homework being completed depends on many uncontrollable factors, more than simply whether or not the activity is interesting in itself. Some training organisations I have met have even resorted to forcing learners to complete assigned online tasks by invoking contractual obligations, lest they not be remunerated for the training by government funding bodies requiring proof of digital attendance.

Difficulties with digital language training



Despite the advancements of the above examples, further difficulties than those already mentioned still remain. The first concerns teacher and learner on-boarding. From the teacher's perspective, the introduction of digital tools to their existing pedagogic approach is quite often viewed as an unnecessary nuisance. An experienced language trainer has developed their own eclectic approach to teaching taken from the many existing, well-documented language learning theories and approaches. Had they felt digital tools would be worth including in their own approach, they would have already done so. It can therefore be quite difficult, if

not impossible, to convince a language trainer to adopt a digital training approach purely on the merits of how innovative and practical it is. Even the obvious fact that digital training can be used by freelance trainers to increase their profit margins almost never appeals enough to have them compromise on their long-standing classroom approach.

As for the learner, when offered a language training programme including ‘non-face-to-face’ sessions, the reaction is often the same - all they want is to be sat in front of a live trainer, ideally in one-on-one lessons. One could imagine the motivation for this being maximising contact with what is perhaps the only native speaker they have on whom to practise, and the heightened personalisation such a training format brings. In the end, their point of view is completely understandable. Had they wanted to self-motivate to complete self-correcting grammar gap-fills and multiple-choice questions about YouTube videos, they would have signed up to one of the many free or comparatively low-cost websites which offer that service.

Anyone who has been in this situation knows that for most people learning a language is not a motivating or interesting activity in and of itself. It is the personal contact with the language trainer, often an interesting character given their likely pension for travel and multiculturalism, that drives learners to come back for more after each face-to-face session. This is where the lightbulb appeared above my own head as a trainer and programme creator. Language learning sessions conducted without the presence of the trainer seem pointless with the above realisation in mind. Whether it be self-access



eLearning, flipped classrooms or integrated blended learning, all the learner wants is contact with their trainer. Anything in between is just a chore or nuisance. We can try with all our might to convince a learner of the importance of homework, be it paper or digital, but without the attractive prospect of contact with the trainer we may as well be talking to a brick wall.

One other problem with digital language training is amateurism. Organisations in the language training market, as with many others, too often think reactively rather than proactively. As such, they tend to put their digital solutions in place hastily and without proper training. Neither do they employ recognised norms and frameworks from mainstream corporate training to form a sustainable foundation to their approach. Furthermore, as touched upon earlier, small businesses often lack the resources and internal skills to develop their own complete digital training offer, often settling for a one-size-fits all language learning platform, or making an ill-advised attempt at creating their own. Such poorly thought-out programmes and substandard digital systems then lead to low adoption on the part of both learners and trainers and, eventually, user disengagement. This can result in the abandonment of the digital solution, or even worse, the persistence of a mediocre solution that merely satisfies the most basic criteria of a much grander digital training vision that will never be achieved.

It may sound as if the majority of small training organisations and freelancers who have chosen to go digital have made a mistake. I speak only from my own experience working with language training organisations across France who have been dissatisfied or disappointed with the end-result of a digital training venture. This is in no way to say developing a digital approach to language training at a small scale is impossible. Current models taken and adapted from the highly-developed, corporate hard-skill examples are inefficient and impractical in a language training context. Through surveys and working closely with many talented freelance trainers, I have developed an approach to digital training that uses simple, free tools and familiar pedagogic frameworks to reduce a trainer’s face-to-face presence time while maintaining the pedagogic quality of a classroom lesson. I call this approach Digitally Assisted Language Training, or DALT for short.

DALT

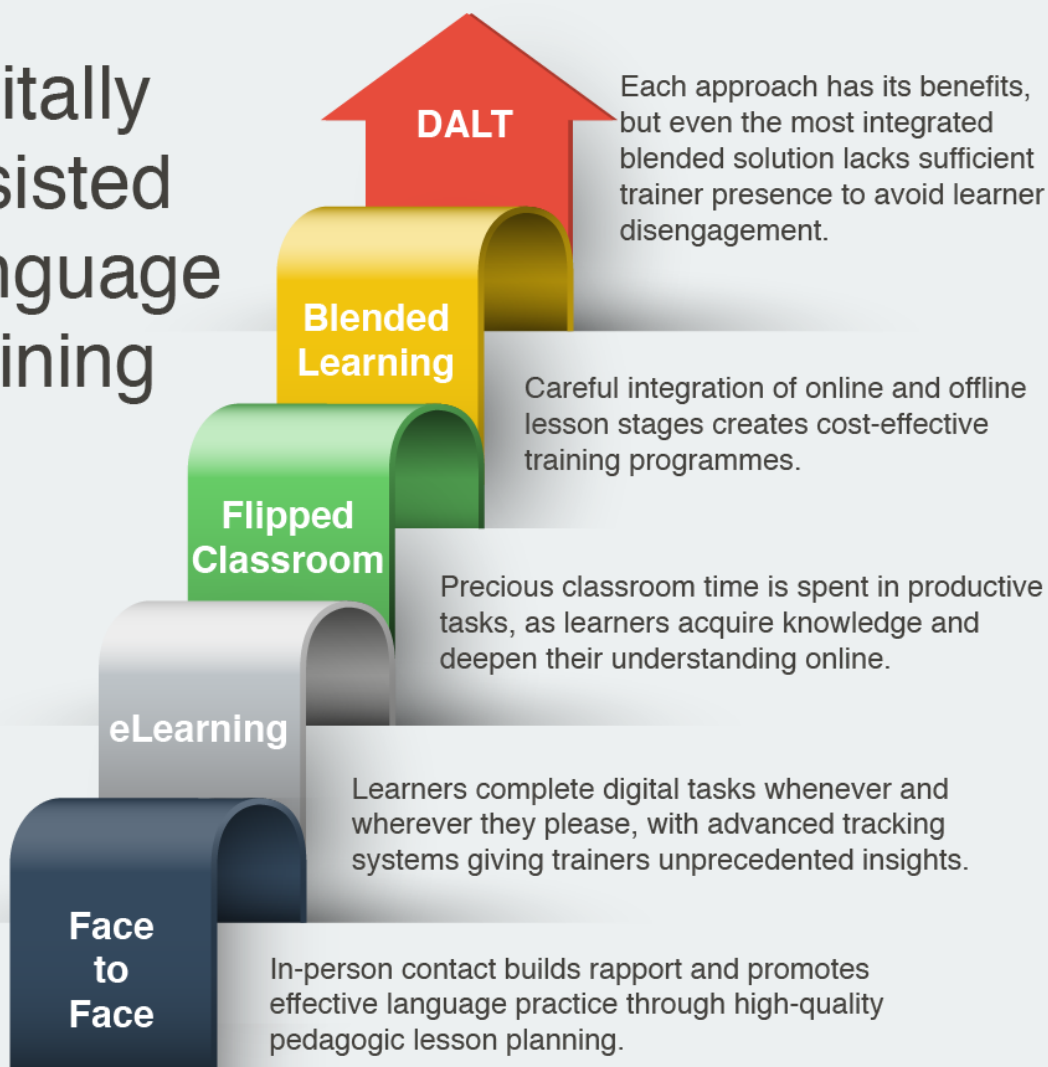
Definition

Digitally Assisted Language Training (DALT), the name inspired by the original approach to using technology in language instruction known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), is the creation of pedagogically-engineered language training programmes including the use of digital tools and media. The emphasis in DALT is following proven language training frameworks to deliver upon training objectives through physical and digital means. The differentiating feature of DALT is that whether the lesson is conducted in-person or digitally, the concept and framework by which it is planned remains the same.

As the presence of the trainer is the lynchpin of training success and learner engagement, the digital tools used in a DALT approach must not replace this presence, nor the interaction between trainer and learner they would normally experience in the physical classroom. DALT does not provide a complement to face-to-face sessions as with the blended or flipped approaches, rather it offers a way to deliver a lesson plan digitally that could have equally-well been delivered face-to-face. Digital lessons in the DALT approach resemble a virtual classroom or digital chatroom. Learner and trainer communicate and exchange while completing their habitual language learning activities, simply doing so through digital means.

DALT is a new approach in the evolution of digital language training, requiring the strict presence of the trainer in all interaction with the learner, no matter the modality. The high-quality pedagogy of the classroom lesson is brought into the digital world, bringing freedom from time and place, the power of repetition and controlled expression, and the focus on productive practice needed for training success.

Digitally Assisted Language Training



Advantages

As stated before, the presence of the trainer is likely the main reason a learner is engaging with their language training at all. Were they able to self-motivate, they would buy a grammar book and regularly visit a bar full of Anglophone tourists to achieve their learning goals. The presence of the trainer gives the learner the needed push to endure and re-endure the admittedly arduous task of improving one's language ability.

Some of the key advantages of the DALT approach are:

- The maintenance of contact between trainer and learner during all activities. Even when the teacher and learner are not engaged in live communication, a DALT lesson maintains the feeling of trainer presence, using recorded audio or video messages, for example.
- The ability to conduct typical communicative classroom activities without the need to be physically present for the full duration of the exchange, such as role plays or open discussions. This frees the trainer from the need to be present while the learner is preparing, recording and re-recording their submission, as well as studying and assimilating their feedback.
- Ensuring the financial considerations for choosing digital training at a logistical level are satisfied.
- Despite the risk of disengagement associated with introducing digital lessons to reduce training costs, the chance of trainer and learner adoption is maintained by permitting the trainer to employ their usual lesson plans and materials, as well as allowing the learner to contribute content and opinions they find personally interesting and engaging.

Key tenets

In order for DALT to succeed and deliver upon the above assertions, 3 key tenets must be respected:

1. Pedagogic lesson planning

One of the key and defining features of DALT is a need for pedagogic excellence. The role of the language trainer in the classroom is to deliver a structured lesson framework that guarantees the maximum chance that the learner will achieve the target lesson objectives. Simple techniques of language lesson design such as 'Test, Teach, Test' or 'Present, Practice, Produce' lay the foundations for language lessons beyond reproach. With the fragile balance between motivation and disengagement at play in digital training sessions, DALT lessons must follow these simple guidelines to minimise that risk.

Language training programmes often specify the amount of training time the learner must spend online. Using the DALT approach, that lesson time must be planned and executed using the same structured pedagogic framework as live face-to-face sessions. There is no place in a DALT programme for self-access eLearning or digital activities that are completed without some skills-based productive tasks or interaction with the trainer. Such digital activities, as would be found in a blended learning programme, are, from a DALT perspective, poorly designed and unlikely to independently achieve any meaningful language learning objective. Their integration with face-to-face lessons may constitute a pedagogically-sound lesson, but the probability the



learner will complete the digital components is too low, and therefore puts the entire lesson objectives at risk.

To put the difference in context, imagine a face-to-face classroom lesson where the teacher enters, writes a sentence of rubric and several gap-fill questions on the board, then silently plays a YouTube video for the learners to watch and answer questions. The trainer then passes out a photocopied grammar explanation with another gap-fill to practise the language point. Once complete, the teacher passes out corrections, then silently stands up and leaves. This is what a self-correcting digital activity would resemble in real life. Any teacher worth their mettle in a lesson such as this would start with an engaging lead-in discussion about the theme of the upcoming video, implicitly exposing learners to the chosen grammar point and activating their 'schema'. After explicit grammar exposure and listening skill practice in the video and gap fill exercise, the rest of the lesson would be spent putting those language points into productive practice to promote acquisition.

Digital lesson plans should be no different from face-to-face classes. DALT lessons must be able to stand up to the same pedagogic standards as face-to-face lessons, be they conducted online or in person. A DALT training programme can include both digital and face-to-face sessions, but every session must, in its ability to achieve linguistic objectives, no matter the delivery method or how well integrated it is, stand alone as a well-designed opportunity to acquire new language and skill.

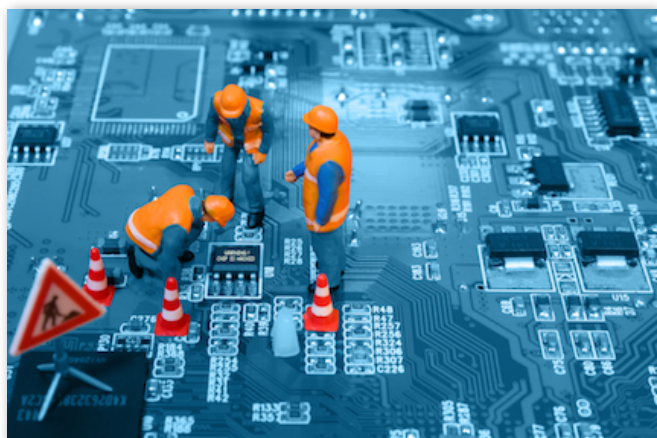
2. Presence

Following on from the above, a question arises: How can the trainer digitise key interactions from classroom lessons, such as lead-ins and role-plays? The answer is simple: The teacher must be in at least some small way involved in every digital activity in a DALT programme. That implies, for example, recording their own short introduction to a lesson task, explaining the rubric, encouraging the learner, etc.

Furthermore, the ability to keep in touch regularly with learners is key to a successful DALT course. In physical classroom lessons, arising questions and comments are dealt with over the course of conversational exchanges. With DALT, these same exchanges should be able to take place digitally, using some sort of chat or communication system. This cements the feeling in the learner's mind that the teacher is really present and so, therefore, is their encouragement and support. It also provides the trainer a means to remind themselves about work to be completed, issues that have arisen, and equally to concretise the idea in their own minds that the digital work they are assigning has importance to the training programme.

This extra work and communication time for the trainer may be unattractive from a perspective of industrialising training and increasing profit margins, but it is essential in a DALT programme to ensure maximum learner engagement. That said, the participation time of the teacher can be markedly less than the time it takes a learner to complete the set activities. Costs undeniably need to be cut in today's language training industry for trainers and their organisations to survive, but it need not be at the expense of learner attendance and course completion.

3. Support



When it comes to digital tools, both trainers and learners run the risk of lacking the needed experience and knowledge to avoid, at one point of another, having technical problems, be it with their devices or their ability to use them. Building a complete DALT approach must include provisions for so-called 'on-boarding' of users who will be following the programme. This includes the initial demonstration of the tools and methods that will be employed

during the training, as well as on-going technical support during the training itself. It may also be necessary to provide support on a level of encouragement or task reminders, as even the most motivated adult language learner can be distracted by their busy life, unable to check their device frequently enough for new assignments and messages. A quick message from the teacher to remind them of an upcoming deadline or to ask if they need assistance completing a digital component of the programme can make a huge, much-appreciated difference to learner motivation and activity completion rates.

The DALT Framework

Introduction

The following tools and advice are based on my own experience developing DALT as an approach. I believe in using free, common digital tools and media for several reasons. First, such tools keep overheads low for freelance trainers who may currently lack sufficient profit margins for more advanced solutions. Secondly, they are often familiar to both trainer and learner, and are therefore easier to adopt as part of a training or learning approach. Finally, they are cross-platform, cross-device solutions, so even the simplest smartphone, be it Android, iOS or Windows, will be able to view emails, install WhatsApp and play YouTube videos, taking many serious technical headaches out of the equation.

Communication



As stated before, the ability to keep in touch with learners is key to a successful DALT programme. There are any number of digital communication tools available, but choosing one as a primary means of training communication requires careful consideration. Trying to convince learners to use the latest high-tech chat system (Slack, etc.) may succeed in individual cases, but is unlikely to gain full adoption as part of a global training offer. Many average learners will likely ignore its notifications and seldom check it for new messages, as they stick to their existing preferred means of digital communication. These include SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and email. Even when choosing one of these more common tools, the choice is not straightforward. For example, in my experience, asking a learner permission to communicate via SMS is an uncomfortable prospect for them - as if SMS messaging is somehow more intimate or private.

Also, SMS features differ from one operating system to another. iOS messages, for example, use certain features that will not display if the receiver is using an Android or Windows device.

WhatsApp, in my own experiments, has been the least risky solution. It is cross platform and extremely easy to set up. No user account creation is required, the learner simply needs a valid mobile phone connection. Furthermore, WhatsApp contains even more functionality than SMS. For organisational purposes, even if only conducting one-on-one lessons, I recommend creating chat groups. With a one-on-one training programme, the name of the WhatsApp group could be something like 'Fabrice pre-intermediate 40-hour course'. Working with a company or a group of individual learners, the group name could be 'Airbus group 1' or 'Advanced group 60-hour', etc.

With the status of 'admin' as the creator of the group, you alone will be able to invite members and customise group information. All members will be able to browse the media, links and documents

that have been shared to the group. They will also be able to 'star' messages they deem important, saving them in a list independent of the cacophony of the complete chat history. The chat text can even be exported, if the teacher wishes to use some of the written messages as the subject of language feedback for example.

Within the chat system itself, both teacher and learner can send text messages, as well as audio and video recordings, that are created directly within the application. Users can also paste in links to lesson content (see [Media sources](#) / [Worksheets](#)) and even copied or self-made images to be used as the subject of language activities. This makes WhatsApp more than a simple communication platform, it is a means to organise lesson structure and deliver rubric, content and activities, as well as receiving and evaluating learners' responses. Used correctly, it can be a very powerful digital training tool, in that it maintains the intimate communicative connection between teacher and learner necessary for successful DALT lessons.

Media sources

First, let me acknowledge the elephant in the room for anyone reading this who teaches a language other than English. The following media sources are markedly richer for English-speaking content than for other languages. Mainstream languages such as French, German and Spanish are reasonable well served, as well as popular hobby languages such as Japanese. Departing from those, for example to Russian or Arabic, makes sourcing materials much more difficult. In cases where media is sparse, I recommend focussing on developing one's own materials using some of the advice for [recording self-made video materials on YouTube](#) later in this eBook. This endeavour requires a large investment on the part of the trainer, but represents an opportunity to build an extremely valuable bank of resources to be used in the development of a high-value, high-quality training offer.

Video

My main and most obvious advice for sourcing lesson content is [YouTube](#). For years now, YouTube has been the host to huge amounts of free material for learning languages. Many contributors have made entire courses available completely free online, each video showing them standing in front of a whiteboard teaching any and every grammar point imaginable. There are also more innovative videos demonstrating language points in context, with varying degrees of professionalism.



Teaching a lesson on how to effectively manage a teleconference, one immediately stumbles upon Tripp and Tyler's '[A conference call in real life](#)', a highly professional recording of a comedy sketch involving a large number of expressions typical of this workplace activity. These are language points to be used in the teaching part of the lesson, as well as lead-in discussion points such as common frustrations related to this professional task. This one video forms the basis of a simple and solid lesson, potentially forming the basis of all stages of the lesson plan, including the obvious follow-on activity of conducting a conference call role-play with the trainer using the same expressions experienced in the video. A further activity could be writing the minutes of the meeting, trying to include the same expressions again for revision purposes. This lesson plan would work equally well in an asynchronous digital lesson, using teacher and learner recorded audio to form conversation and role play combined with a shared document containing rubric and questions, which will be explained in more detail in the [Lesson Planning](#) section.

Another quality source for lesson media, though again with mostly English-speaking content, is TED. Their videos are transcribed into multiple language by human translators, with the transcriptions available for use as lesson content. Videos can also be downloaded with subtitles for offline use, a feature not (legally) available for YouTube. There are of course many other sites for video content, too many to attempt to list here (BBC News, VOA News, etc.). The following advice for selecting and exploiting video content applies regardless of its source.

The key to choosing video lesson content responsibly is considering several important criteria:

- **Length and Objectives:** Tasks based on videos should require no longer than 3 - 5 minutes of video content to achieve their objective. Any longer and the activity risks trying to achieve too much, or overexposing the user to new language. If using a longer video, a trainer can separate it into manageable chunks with individual task rubric, each task with its own individual language learning objective. For example: "Watch the following video from 2:20 to 3:35 to find the following expressions," or, "Watch the first minute of the following video and answer these general listening questions."
- **Levelling:** In self-made language materials, the teacher will normally try to write or record language that is of a level appropriate to the learner. This follows major language acquisition theories such as Krashen's (1987) input hypothesis, which states that effective language input should be only one step of difficulty higher than the learner's current ability level. Unfortunately, most of the video content available online has been recording by native English speakers without consideration to the language level of its listeners. It is thus up to the teacher to design tasks and rubric to cleverly distract learners' attention from language that is far above their current level and therefore irrelevant to their learning objectives.
- **Appropriateness:** Though many comedic videos exist as potentially engaging lesson content online, one must think of how the learner will feel when presented with such material. For example, if conducting serious business English training with high-level managers or in a context of religious sensitivity, showing comedy sketches or videos with informal or vulgar language may be seen as unprofessional or even offensive. Regardless of the quality and significance of the language content, the trainer must put themselves in the shoes of the learner and imagine any possible negative reaction before engaging in task design.
- **Lesson tasks:** Once an appropriate video has been found and a language point identified, tasks and staging must be constructed around the video. Without being coupled with tasks related to the achievement of lesson objectives, even something as simple as inspiring a lead-in discussion to elicit target language, the video risks wasting valuable lesson time. Following lesson planning frameworks described later in this eBook, a trainer can create pedagogically efficient tasks related to identified language objectives.

Text



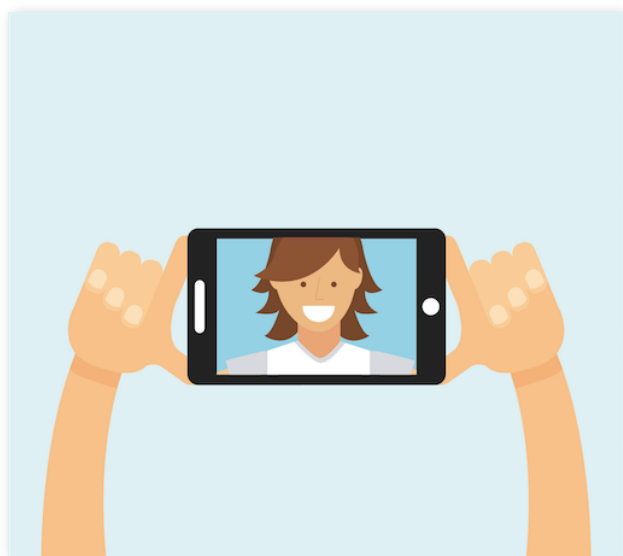
While videos can be used to develop spoken and listening skills, addressing writing and reading requires written content as a base for constructing lesson plans. One of the most obvious sources for free written material is the news website. These contain huge amounts of professionally written current affairs content on a wide range of topics in clear, standard English, as well as being updated several times a day with new content. As before, considering language level and length is important. By copying and editing a news article, the teacher can control the kinds of language the learner is going to be exposed to. However, if teaching for profit, this may imply copyright restrictions. I recommend avoiding editing news articles if possible,

unless you know the copyright laws of the country of origin. Using the same technique as with videos - constructing clever tasks and rubric to avoid overexposure to high-level language, the trainer can exploit native-speaking content as-is through direct web links, saving themselves planning time and the risk of potential legal complications.

There are several well-known sources of pre-made English language learning materials involving news articles and videos, such as One Stop English, Instant Ideas, Busy Teacher, etc. Although some of these services are not free, they provide materials organised into levels with appropriate activities and media. Furthermore, they have most often been designed to the kinds of pedagogic standards of quality compatible with the DALT framework of lesson planning described later in this eBook.

My final recommendation for text-based lesson content is the use of personal or professional blogs. At the moment of writing this paragraph, 31% of all websites on the internet are powered by the popular website and blog building platform WordPress (statistic from <https://w3techs.com/>). With its ease-of-use and relative technical simplicity, WordPress has led to an explosion in the number of blogs on the internet. They provide natural examples of written language, often including natural typing mistakes and colloquialisms, to be used as potential lesson content. The issue of copyright is still present for for-profit organisations, though it may be easier to contact a blog owner to ask permission to use their materials in your training programmes to avoid any complications down the line. Again, providing a direct link to the content avoids this issue entirely.

Self-made audio & video recordings



There exists one sure and certain way of having the right media for your language lessons: making it yourself. There are certain contexts in which a professionally made video makes more sense as lesson content, such as my conference call lesson example above, but for general language exposure the learner need look no further than their native-speaking language trainer. Depending on their context, their trainer may be the only real source of native speaking communication a learner is ever exposed to. Perhaps their English training is for a future contract in their company, or for a vacation to an anglophone country they have yet to visit. The presence of the English trainer provides a valuable source of levelled, comprehensible language input. Recording one's own videos is simply another way of delivering this value to the learner, in an arguably more structured way that

lends itself to controlled lesson tasks focussed on language precision.

Luckily, recording videos today has become incredibly easy. With a smartphone or tablet device equipped with the YouTube application, a teacher has simply to press the video symbol in the top right of the screen to access a quick, user-friendly video recording system. The video is recorded, verified, given a name, and uploaded. A sharable link is delivered within minutes for the teacher to send to their learner along with the lesson rubric and tasks. In terms of privacy, choosing during the creation process to make the video 'unlisted' means only those who have been sent the link will be able to find and access it. The learner can also be asked to record their own videos, giving them the chance to engage in practical speaking development, sharing the result with the teacher through WhatsApp or their chosen means of communication.

This has huge implications for lesson design in the DALT approach. Videos can be used as a simple means of communication between learner and trainer to introduce a lesson, an activity, to

give feedback or encouragement, etc. They can equally be employed in more complex sequences of activities targeting specific language points or communicative skills. For example:

- The teacher records a brief introduction to the current lesson, explaining its objective and posing general lead-in questions such as, “Tell me about the last time you had a business meeting. What was the agenda? Who participated? What was the outcome?” The learner can then reply with their own video, speaking as they would were they sitting in front of the trainer in the language classroom to answer their questions. This forms an effective lead-in to the teacher’s self-recorded video of him or herself role-playing a business meeting with a colleague, demonstrating contextualised examples of the target language implicitly. The learner can then complete some listening activities linked to the video, and afterwards discover the target language point. For freer practice of the vocabulary and listening objectives, the teacher could then start a video message role play with the learner, where the conversation takes place over several individual recordings, all the time being guided in the direction of the use of the target skill and language point. The teacher can also deliver task feedback through video, along with follow-up activities to further promote language acquisition.

Making one’s own video lesson content can reduce technical and language headaches, as there is no question of copyright, language levelling or identification of appropriate objectives. The trainer is in full control of the creative process, and can tweak the content of the video to perfectly suit their lesson aims. While it can be initially uncomfortable to record oneself, the payout is absolutely worth the initial embarrassment. A trainer can garner, within a relatively short amount of time, a huge library of self-recorded videos to exploit in their future training programmes.

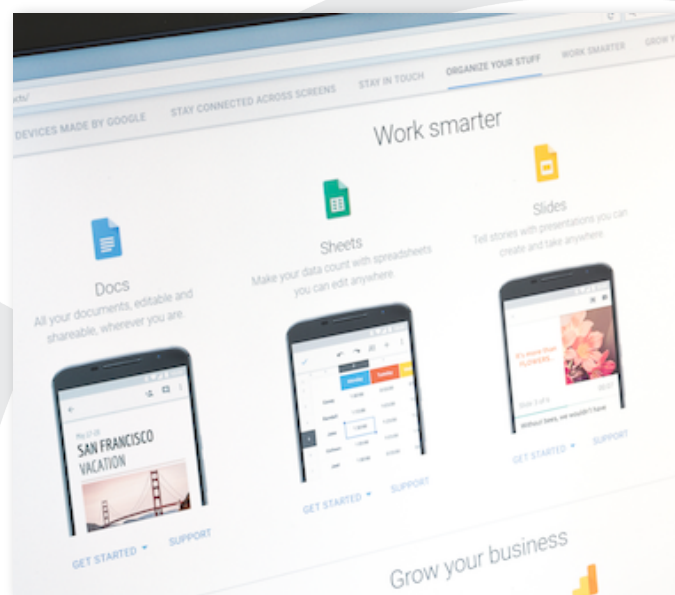
Worksheets

Generating worksheets to use with video or text materials is a key step in course content creation, as well as assuring pedagogic excellence. While sources mentioned above such as Busy Teacher come with pre-prepared worksheets, choosing one’s own resources necessitates the conception of effective and pedagogically-sound language learning activities. This is no small task, and major publishers in the language learning industry spend huge amounts of money on the creation of new course books.

The media must first be analysed to identify desirable language points or examples of skill use related to the identified training objectives. Questions and activities can then be created to suitably expose the learner to the chosen language or skill in a way that will promote acquisition. Here, the teaching frameworks mentioned later in this eBook are invaluable. In the ‘Test, Teach, Test’ approach, the learner is exposed to the media and its chosen language point first, though without their attention explicitly being drawn to it.

Afterwards, the language point is explained and studied, analysing its use in context via the media from the first task. The learner must then try to employ it themselves to measure progress and acquisition. A DALT worksheet should reflect this kind sequencing to be effective as lesson content.

In a DALT lesson, existing worksheets habitually used in classroom lessons with paper copies that were originally created on a word processor such as Microsoft Word, as long as the original files have been conserved, can be delivered easily as attachments via email or WhatsApp for use in online work. For the purpose of fool-proofing or aesthetics, the original can normally be exported from the word processor to PDF form before being shared. This will lock its formatting and avoid accidental deletion of information or incorrectly-displayed content. If



the only available copy exists on paper, the worksheet can be scanned to PDF using a scanner or digital camera, on a tablet or smart phone for example, to be shared with the learner as part of a lesson task.

Another very practical way to share such content is the use of the web application [Google Docs](#). Google Docs is an online word processor that forms part of the [Google Drive](#) suite. Creating and editing a Google Doc requires an active internet connection, as the document is autosaved constantly to avoid data loss. The documents are collaborative, meaning the creator can invite other users who have Google accounts to view, comment on or edit the document. Thanks to its autosaving feature, two people can edit the same Google Doc simultaneously, with their cursors displaying in unique colours to identify the typing user.

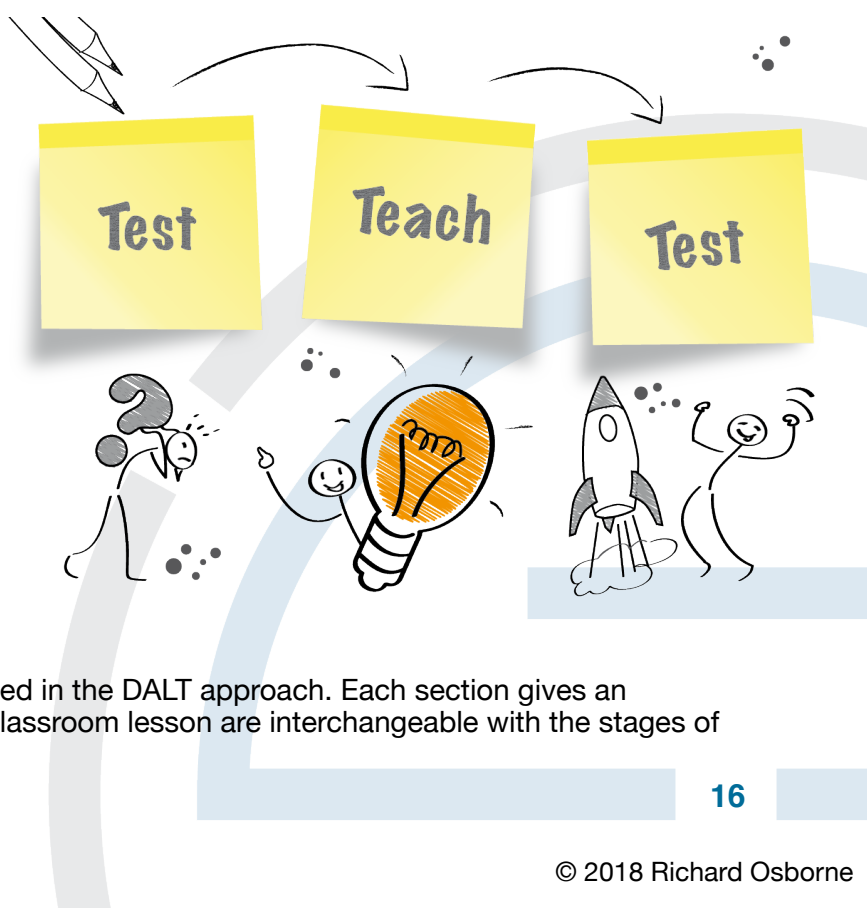
This amazing system of online word processing lends itself perfectly to creating worksheets in a DALT training programme. Worksheets that were before photocopied and completed by the learner in writing can now be completed in almost the same way online. The teacher creates the worksheet template as usual, with exercises such as gap fills and open answer questions, duplicates the template to conserve a blank back-up version, then invites the learners to edit that duplicate document. The link to the document can be shared via the chosen communication platform to be accessed and completed as part of an online lesson. The learners can respond directly within the document, each one writing their name before their contribution to indicate who the answer belongs to if working with groups.

Taking other examples, [Google Sheets](#) (similar to Microsoft Excel) can be used as a practical record for key course vocabulary or expressions, important links, etc. [Google Slides](#) (similar to Microsoft Powerpoint) can be used when preparing presentations for spoken practice, editable by both learner and trainer to perfect language and speaker's notes before delivering the presentation in a live session or recorded video, or even in a collaborative group presentation project. Google Drive, the main file storage application of the other apps presented here, can be used to store important DALT lesson content, such as mp3 audio files, images, scanned PDFs, etc. Google Drive and its associated apps provide a means to almost completely dematerialise the language training organisation.

Lesson planning

As stated before, one of the key tenets of a DALT training programme is a strictly pedagogic approach to lesson planning. Simply sending a video to a learner and discussing their opinion is not an effective digital lesson. There must be a specific linguistic objective coupled with a sequential approach to gradually discovering the new language, otherwise the lesson risks failing to deliver on its goals.

Below are presented both the 'Present, Practice, Produce' and 'Test, Teach, Test' lesson planning frameworks, popularised by teacher training courses such as the Cambridge CELTA. They are presented from the perspective of a DALT training session in which there will be no face-to-face or live contact between trainer and learner, to demonstrate how such lessons are conducted in the DALT approach. Each section gives an example of how the stages of a traditional classroom lesson are interchangeable with the stages of



an 'online-only' DALT session without any live face-to-face contact. As there is much overlap between the TTT and PPP framework, their descriptions have been combined for ease of understanding.

Test - Present

In this part of the lesson, the learner is implicitly or explicitly exposed to the content of the linguistic objective. For example, if the lesson aim is to acquire new vocabulary, this stage would involve a text or video activity containing the target vocabulary. The idea of this stage is to study the material from a general overview that avoids direct need of the target language, such as a general comprehension activity or a 'give your opinion / own experience' discussion. The key is that the target language is not explicitly tackled at this point, rather it is experienced in context, most likely being discretely modelled by the trainer during the activity, showing that a clear knowledge gap exists to justify the overall aim of the lesson.

In an online DALT lesson, this could be accomplished with a link to the content accompanied by a recorded video or audio message from the trainer and learner containing the rubric and discussion questions. These could be delivered through chat app such as WhatsApp, generating a back-and-forth discussion between trainer and learner, or via an interactive Google Document to be completed by the learner and later commented on by the trainer.

Teach - Present

Here the learner is explicitly shown the language point or skill being targeted by the lesson activities. The teacher will help the learner understand the rules, structures, exceptions, etc. behind the target skill or knowledge. For a grammar lesson, this would involve an exploration of the structures and rules associated with the chosen grammatical form. In a vocabulary lesson, it would constitute a discovery of the definition and use of particular words or phrases in context. Skill-based lessons would introduce strategies and tips for effective use of a particular competence, such as how to extract understanding from the key points of a conversation, or using intonation to make a product pitch more attractive.



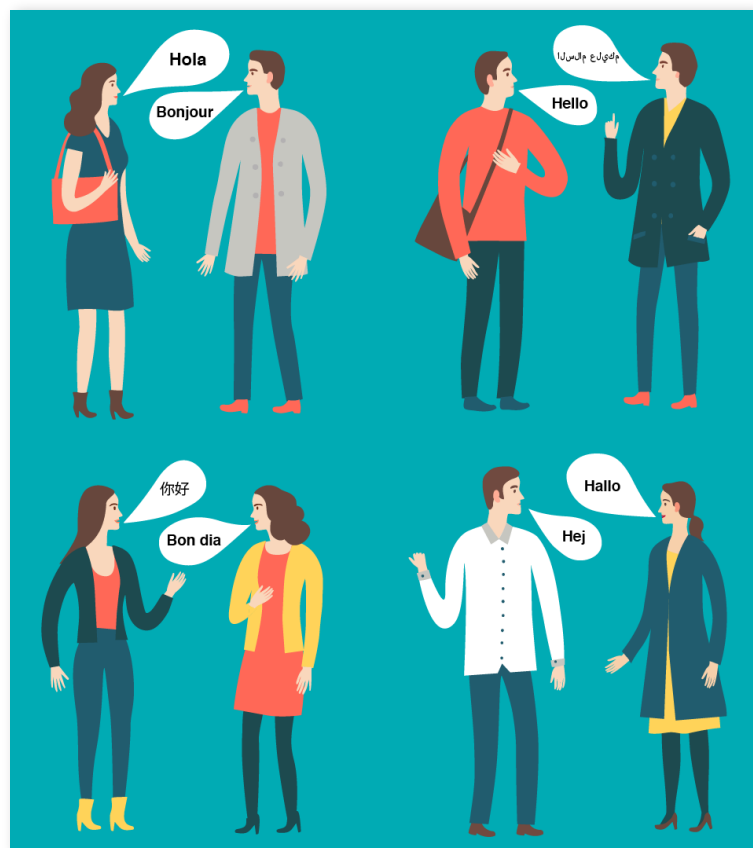
During a DALT online session, the trainer could record a video of themselves describing a vocabulary or grammar point using a screen-recording of a digital whiteboard or word processor, or by sharing a PDF presentation of the language point in question from a published course book accompanied by an audio presentation from the teacher. One medium of delivery that works well here is Google Slides, where an audio voice-over can be embedded into each slide that auto-plays when the learner moves forward in the presentation, presenting the grammar point or new language slide by slide. A learner could use this same tool to fill in slides with their own understanding of the rules and tendencies of the chosen language point.

Test - Practice

Now that the language point has been explicitly understood, practice is required to assist the passage of this new information from the learner's conscious to their subconscious, that is to say, to assist its acquisition by the learner's language system. In the PPP framework, this stage is separated into two parts. In the Practice portion, the learner completes activities created by the

teacher to practise the language point in a highly controlled way, such that the learner may not at this stage improvise a great deal. This is designed to evaluate the learner's understanding of the presented language point, for example using a gap fill to test understanding of new vocabulary, or writing sentences to exemplify one particular grammar point.

This stage is where the advantage of a digital lesson following the DALT approach is clear in terms of reducing trainer presence time versus learner activity completion time. Controlled practice often requires great effort on the part of the learner, especially those with a low level of language ability, as they are applying knowledge that has only freshly entered their language acquisition system. They may need time alone to silently prepare their answers before making any attempt at a contribution. It may also take considerably longer than usual to produce their answers, as they are aware that the level of precision expected is much higher than in free conversation. One particularly useful tool here is Google Docs. The teacher can prepare a Google Doc containing the gap fill and rubric for what is expected from the learner's example sentences. Once shared with the learner, the trainer's work is finished until the activity has been completed and feedback is required.



Strictly speaking, during a classroom lesson, the convention would be for the teacher to circulate and observe, responding instantly or taking notes for later review concerning any overheard misunderstandings of the activity. In a purely online lesson, this would only be achievable if the trainer were to watch the learner writing their contribution live into the Google Doc, effectively negating the possibility of the trainer saving time through their digital lesson. Then again, the nature of an online DALT lesson may open another avenue to achieve the same level of observation and feedback. Lessons following the DALT approach are less time-conscious than face-to-face lessons. In such a lesson, the learner can complete the same activity several times if misunderstandings occur. With each revision, the trainer can send hints and encourage the learner as they would in the language classroom via written or audio feedback. It could be said that the DALT approach therefore provides even more reinforcement of the target language point than can be achieved within the time limitation of a face-to-face language lesson, and is reminiscent of the advantages of the flipped classroom approach described earlier in this eBook.

Test - Produce

In the Produce portion of the lesson, or taking the Test portion further, the learner is expected to use the target language point in a less controlled, more natural and spontaneous fashion. The purpose of this stage is to show that the language point has, at least at that moment in time, been integrated into the learner's productive language system. This can be achieved through oral discussion, role play, free writing activities, etc. The teacher's job is to design activities that will leave the learner little choice but to use the target language forms, while giving them the freedom to express their own personal experiences or opinions.

In a digital lesson targeting written production, this would require the use of either Google Docs or another text form of communication for written production. As for spoken production, YouTube or another means of recording video or audio would be most appropriate. The free discussion or role

play can be conducted as a conversation by email or a chat application, with each contribution being recorded and shared one at a time, resulting in a chain of audio or video recordings that, when played one by one, form a complete conversational exchange. The written practice would be achieved through an open answer question either recorded in a Google Doc or sent directly via WhatsApp or email, depending on the length of answer expected and how many learners will be involved in the activity. With writing activities, Google Docs is often preferable, as corrections and resubmissions can be easily managed using different font colours to separate the learner's and teacher's contributions.

Organising & tracking

Once a credible system has been set up to manage lesson planning and delivery, the trainer must be able to stay on top of the programme calendar and deadlines, as well as ensuring that learner submissions are replied to in a timely manner. There are many possibilities when it comes to organising and tracking DALT programmes. Some issues to be considered are:

- How to know when a learner has completed an assigned task
- How to be alerted to approaching deadlines for those who have not completed assigned tasks
- How to remind oneself to correct or reply to a completed task within an agreed timeframe
- How to remind oneself to assign the next task in a lesson, or to move on to the following lesson
- How to verify that sufficient time has been spent on digital lessons to justify billing



A poorly organised DALT course with an insufficient tracking system will lead to long lead times on learners' submissions and trainer feedback, leading to overlapping with pre-planned face-to-face lessons and eventually compromising the overall coherence of the training. When selling a course with a certain number of face-to-face hours, coupled with a certain number of online-only hours, a teacher may not be able to bill for the training before all the online sessions are completed, making it vital to foster punctuality and frequency in learners' completion of online tasks.

Unfortunately, without a centralised platform such as a Learning Management System, the conception and management of a DIY tracking system is challenging. In my experience, skilful use of Google Sheets can help form an effective base of operation. Having practically the same functionality as Microsoft Excel, a teacher with some existing Excel knowledge, as little as how to use sum, countif and conditional formatting, can construct a visual appealing, user-friendly learner record. In terms of organisation, one must be careful to make the data easily searchable, for example separating first and last names, using consistent identifiers for learner sources (company names, marketing campaigns, etc.), using standardised language level indicators, etc. This way the table can be 'filtered' to show only specific data, making finding one particular learner easier. By creating columns for activity deadlines, and a yes/no column for whether or not these activities have been completed, we can filter to show only entries whose deadline is soon approaching, or those who's 'activity complete' column is currently 'no'. This enables the teacher to focus only on learners who may require support to complete their activities.

As for tracking learner time, there is no way to match the abilities of a professional Learning Management System (LMS). Such software counts the exact number of minutes the learner is connected to it, often providing detailed reports including what activities they opened and how long they spend on each one. These kinds of reports are sometimes strictly requested by corporate training managers, and a teacher-written record such as signed presence sheets may not be sufficient. Of course, in reality, such systems are very easy to dupe, and a learner may be able to

leave the browser window of their LMS containing the current lesson open to run out the clock. Some systems alert the user to inactivity and cut the connection without a response, though this simply requires a periodic click every set number of minutes to remain connected having completed no work at all. Furthermore, when a user clicks on a PDF or digital document that must be viewed outside the browser window, the LMS may consider them inactive and logged out, when in fact they have spent considerable time studying the document outside the platform before returning to complete their response.

While connection-time tracking systems may be required in certain cases, my advice is to very much trust your own instincts as a trainer when creating online lesson plans. A minimum lesson time can be set and communicated to the learners at the beginning of each task, with each duration noted in your learner tracking system as described earlier. This way, both learner and trainer will be clear on how much time should be spent performing the assigned digital tasks.

For those with a more technical background, Google Sheets can be further enhanced through the use of online API engines such as [Zapier](#), where an email from a learner could automatically trigger a new entry being created in a Google Sheet to record the time of their submission and alert the teacher if feedback or response is required. With more imagination, automated calendar entries could be generated to represent deadlines. Using autoresponders such as [MailChimp](#), a learner's email reply to a certain activity could trigger an automated email with the the activity corrections or links to further study. While these technical marvels sound attractive, with Zapier and MailChimp offering accounts with free usage sufficient to satisfy a single teacher's needs, a high level of technical knowledge is required. Furthermore, the time investment needed to put the system in place may be difficult to justify unless part of a conscious plan to create a more elaborate digital training system. It does, however, show that the role of the LMS can almost entirely be replaced by a well-developed, home-made organisational and tracking system.

Conclusion



Language teaching is a profession constrained, like many, by the inextricable link between revenue and physical presence. If the teacher wants to earn more, they have only to give more of their time. With misconception and misinformation rife amongst clients about what makes language training effective or not, it can be difficult for a language trainer to justify charging a higher amount than their peer, regardless of whether or not their training offer is in fact higher quality, better designed and more efficient. While competition at the level of larger training organisations revolves mainly around price, freelance trainers maintain

their hold on a niche population of language learners thanks to their reputation as likeable individuals who motivate their learners to succeed through interesting and engaging discussion and activities, as well as highly personalised face-to-face training. This is enough to hold on to a loyal client base, but insufficient for breaking through the profit margin barrier to a sustainable business model leading to growth.

The DALT approach provides teachers who desire a way to grow as a business a way to do so, without compromising on the classroom teaching quality that forms the basis of their unique selling point. Investment is needed to build and maintain a high quality DALT-based offer, and DIY

solutions will always be more challenging to perfect than industry-standard, out-of-the-box platforms and materials, but the pay-off in the long term is absolutely worth the pain. A teacher with a large bank of digital resources and programmes, a solid organisational and tracking system, and a list of glowing testimonials praising their innovative approach, can perhaps finally construct their business model of growth, collaboration with other trainers, and ultimately increase their earning potential.

Note: After using the tools and techniques to conduct successful training courses myself, I have moved on to develop my own web platform whose features embody the DALT approach. That platform is called LearnBook, and I invite you to evaluate it yourself on its [promotional website](#).

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