

Internet jigsaws

Jason Anderson describes an activity which can increase cooperation and communication.

What is an internet jigsaw?

Most of us are familiar with jigsaw reading activities, and some of us have tried listening jigsaws. The premise behind internet jigsaws is the same as behind all jigsaw activities and all co-operative learning – the information gap. When different learners have different information and need to exchange it to complete a task or play a game, you have the perfect conditions for a communicative activity. Given that the internet is the biggest source that has ever existed for such information, there are a million and more internet jigsaw ideas out there just waiting for your learners. Internet jigsaws can be adapted to almost any topic depending on what your learners are studying. Once you've tried out a few, you will also notice that different types of internet jigsaw can encourage learners to use different grammar structures, including past, present and future tenses, active and passive voices, comparatives and superlatives, and many more.

Co-operative and collaborative learning

Often used interchangeably, these two terms have slightly different origins and meanings. Co-operative learning is a specific type of activity in which learners must work together in order to solve a problem, complete a task or successfully play a game (Petty, 2014). Collaborative learning generally refers to any activity where learners are working together, such as groupwork or pairwork, so it includes co-operative learning, but doesn't necessarily require co-operation – learners could do the activity individually.

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Why are they useful?

Several studies in mainstream education have demonstrated that co-operative learning, which is not quite the same as collaborative learning (see information box), is one of the most effective ways to increase learner achievement. Meta-analyses by Marzano (1998), Hattie (2009) and Johnson & Johnson (2009) have all demonstrated significant effect sizes (over 0.5) when compared to competitive or individualistic learning, based on over 1,000 separate studies.

Jigsaw activities have proven themselves to be perhaps the most effective co-operative learning activity of all (Petty, 2014). This is because they (or at least good quality jigsaw activities)

don't just require learners to read and retell, they require learners to understand, to analyse, to select what is relevant and then to communicate it as effectively as possible, which often also involves paralinguistic and peer teaching, especially in foreign language classes where meaning must often be negotiated.

Can we see an example?

Let's imagine our topic for this week is travel and holidays, and our grammar area is future forms. The perfect internet jigsaw for us is going to involve the learners arranging and then talking about future holidays. Now we could, with some classes, leave the activity quite open, but let's say I'm teaching a class of teenagers, and I want to provide a clear structure while keeping it as engaging as possible. So let's choose the topic of safari holidays, and all we need to do is create a synopsis, which we can type up and print from a computer, or just explain to the students verbally. Resource 1 is a detailed example of this, and it is photocopiable for you to try out in your class. It has several stages, but notice how straightforward the basic idea is.

How do you organise internet jigsaws?

Internet jigsaws are pretty flexible with regard to time, student interactions and even availability of computers or tablets (see the 'flipped' option below). Students can work on the first stage individually, in pairs or in small groups. Timings are also pretty flexible – anything from 5–30 minutes depending on how much time you've got. Let's imagine for the safari lesson

Photocopiable resource – Budget safari

Your teacher will put you into teams of 4–8 students. You are all going on safari together! But first you have to agree on where to go and what to do. Use only English-language websites. Good luck!

Stage 1 **Time:** _____

Split up into smaller groups. Using the internet, search for a cheap, interesting 1-week safari holiday somewhere in Africa. Your departure date should be in approximately 4 weeks' time. The price of the holiday should be under £800 or €1,000 per person, including flights and accommodation. Take detailed notes of the following:

Travel agent:

Website:

Cost per person:

What it includes:

The country:

Locations visited:

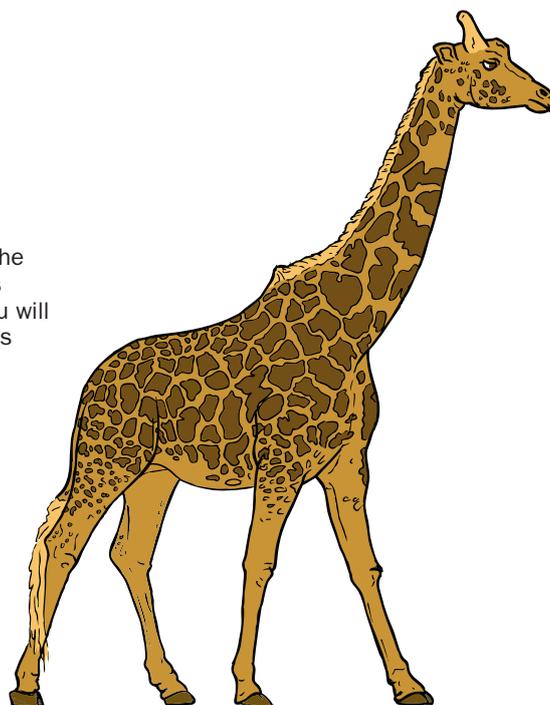
Highlights:

Stage 2 **Time:** _____

Get back together with the other members of your team. Now comes the challenging part. Tell each other about the holidays you found, discuss each of them carefully and come to an agreement about which one you will go on. You all have to go together! All of you should take detailed notes on your final choice and why you chose it – you will need these notes for Stage 3.

Stage 3 **Time:** _____

Your teacher will now put you into new groups. In your new groups, tell each other about where you are going, why you chose that particular holiday, and what you will do on the holiday. When you have finished, decide who is going on the most interesting holiday.



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I've only got eight computers, so for my class of 26 students I create two teams of six and two teams of seven. I then split each team up into smaller groups of three or four, and assign a computer to each group. For the first stage of the safari activity I would allow 15–25 minutes, depending on age and level of proficiency.

Stage 2 should be self-explanatory. There is now an initial information gap. Back in their larger teams, students will need to describe their holidays and come to an agreement. Make sure they all take notes on the chosen holiday – they will need these for Stage 3.

Stage 3 is logistically the complicated one. If you don't have much time, you could miss it out, but the repetition element is highly conducive to learning, so consider doing it next lesson. Create new groups so that there is at least one member of each of the original four teams in each group. Some groups may be slightly larger depending on the number of students in your class. Get them to describe their holidays as per the instructions. If they have access to the internet at this stage, they can even show some of the images from the website. Wrap up the activity by finding out the following.

1. Which destination did each team choose?
2. Which of these destinations did each group think was most interesting?
3. What new vocabulary did they learn while doing their internet research?
4. What aspects of their safaris are they most looking forward to?

Can you 'flip' internet jigsaws?

Yes! Internet jigsaws are great for flipping! Using the example above, give each learner a copy of Resource 1 to take home. For homework they have to complete Stage 1. This will of course lead to more holidays to choose from in Stage 2, which leads to more discussion and debate. If you really want to be creative with your flipping, or you don't have much time in class, you can get them to complete Stage 2 by meeting together online using a multi-person VoIP² program such as Skype or Google Hangout. Then Stage 3 can be done in class.

Any more ideas?

Yes! Finding a flat to rent in London or New York is great fun. So is researching the biographies of different characters to practise past tenses (film stars or musicians are good for this). For a more creative internet jigsaw, get different groups to research different aspects of an illness like the common cold, with one group looking at symptoms, another looking at treatment, a third group looking at prevention, and if you have a fourth group, they can research why a cure has never been found.

And another tip – you can make it more interesting by giving different limitations to each group. This could be a specific search engine (e.g. Google, Bing, etc.), a specific country (e.g. Kenya, Tanzania, etc.), or a different aim (e.g. one group has to find the cheapest holiday, another has to find the largest variety of animals, etc.). This will ensure there is more information to exchange in the final stage.

Notes

1. Just in case you weren't sure, a 'flipped classroom' is a teaching model in which learners do activities at home to prepare for the lesson, often using the internet or computer-based resources. Classroom time is devoted to more challenging, more interesting, or more useful activities, such as discussion, question and answer, etc. See article by Russell Stannard in this issue, pp 4–7.
2. VoIP stands for 'Voice over Internet Protocol'. It refers to programs and technology that allows us to make phone calls and video calls using a computer or other device and the internet.

References

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