

## Evolution in an EFL Classroom

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### Abstract

The educational environment has changed, is changing, and will continue to change. In this paper I describe how I as a teacher have been coping with the changes, particularly how I try to use the new technology to full advantage.

What is the goal of English classes at Japanese universities? This decision is primarily the responsibility of each individual instructor. When I joined Aichi Gakuin in 1996 I decided that in my speaking and reading classes I would focus on *discussion*. This would allow for a broad range of topics from personal to academic, based upon readings and/or personal knowledge. Within each topic the content of the discussion would be flexible so that the students could, in fact would have to, decide for themselves (a) *what to say* as well as (b) *how to say it* in English, just as they will have to do in real life. Such discussion contains many of the elements of the Communicative Approach as described in Larsen-Freeman (1987, 62–63), but without the typical functional syllabus, which is more appropriate for second language learning ESL than foreign language classes EFL. Students work in small groups, have a wide choice of linguistic forms, are free to express their individuality, and receive feedback from a teacher who acts as facilitator, adviser, and at times interlocutor. My discussion

syllabus is organized around topics, rather than functions.

Class sizes at the junior college were generally between 32 and 36, and the class period was only 40 minutes long. If students only practiced one-on-one with the teacher, each student could only get about half a minute of speaking practice per class. Some classes met once a week, some met twice, so students would only get a total of 7 or 15 minutes of practice a semester. I decided to have students practice with each other in groups of 3–4 students each, just like the groups that naturally form at parties. These small groups would allow them to get 16 to 18 times as much speaking practice. The teacher would be free to circulate, monitor, and participate in these discussions.

There was also written homework (in paragraphs) almost every week to get them mentally prepared for the classroom work, to decide before class (a) what they wanted say and (b) how to say it in English. Since discussion is an interactive process—conversation rather than a speech—group members were encouraged to show interest in each speaker’s contribution and probe deeper by asking their own follow-up questions. They reported these questions (without answers) in the group reports that they submitted at the end of class. I collected, revised, and added my own questions to create a list for each topic, which I posted on my website (see <http://www3.agu.ac.jp/~jeffreyb/spking/index.html>), printed up, and have distributed to later classes.

After six years of English instruction in junior high and high school and before they go out into the real world, the college years are a good time for students to take the jump, escape from their textbooks and express *their own* thoughts, feelings, and knowledge in *their own* English ... not some artificially concocted discussion activities, but natural free discussions on set topics ... no mimicry, no parody, *no textbooks*. Their homework gave me insight into the shape of their *Interlanguage*. I would read it and write my comments, and that was *their feedback*. My insights from reading homework provided me

with the *feedback that I needed* to revise course content and my explanations of the material. In other words my classes operate on the plan-do-see cycle. *I plan* lectures, topics, and activities for the students. *They do* the classwork and homework. When *I see* what they have done (by reading the homework and group reports or observing them in class), I revise the plan for the next topic. Topics changed frequently, almost every week.

This system seemed to work well enough for several years, but “life is change, how it differs from the rocks” (Kantner, 1968). Two major changes have occurred in the educational environment since then (a) *demographic changes*—a decrease in the college-age population due to a low birth rate and (b) *advances in technology*, especially computers and cellphones.

### **New Educational Environment**

The college-age population in Japan has been dropping quickly, year after year. Post secondary schools have been competing to protect their enrollments, but the Law of Supply and Demand is unyielding. Many junior colleges, where the bulk of the English language programs have traditionally resided, have closed. Four-year university programs seem to be more resilient, but they too have suffered drops in their enrollment or been forced to accept applicants of lower academic ability. Examination Hell has become Examination Heaven for high school graduates. The entrance exams no longer keep students out of the university system. It allows in students who lack basic knowledge, the ability to concentrate and use their imagination, or the motivation to study seriously.

The Japanese educational system has depended heavily on entrance exams to maintain academic standards and ensure the quality of its graduating classes. Once Japanese students enter a school it is usually not very difficult to

graduate. Mandatory education through junior high school has been interpreted to mean that every student must pass regardless of ability or effort. Academic competition begins with high school. There are not enough public high schools for everyone, so entrance exams determine who gets into the public schools. Private high schools take up the slack so that almost all students can enter high school. Standards vary among high schools, but once a student is accepted, academic pressure is usually low. Typically a student must get a score below one half of the class average to flunk a test. Even then students can often take a retest, rather than repeat the course.

Lectures permeate the Japanese educational system. Students listen, write notes, memorize, and display their declarative knowledge on examinations. English courses are commonly based on a structural syllabus that is timed as accurately as a city subway schedule. Each point of grammar is another stop, hopefully, on the way to perfect grammar and communication. But the train does not stop at any one station for long and the memory of past stations fades soon after each exam is completed. The result is that while Japanese students are exposed to a broad range of discreet English grammar rules, many come away from it with little understanding of which structures are most useful and how they are used to communicate ideas.

The Ad Hoc Committee for Education Reform recognized in 1984 the shortcomings of English education in Japan despite the great efforts made by those involved (Koike and Tanaka, 1995, 19). Classes were seen as too large to control and class hours too few. A communication-centered, as opposed to culture-centered approach was proposed. Twenty-five years later improvement is hard to see. On the contrary, standards seem to have dropped. More than a few students come to college classrooms in utter confusion.

The other change, technological progress, holds a great deal of promise, but also has its dark side. A vast collection of information and language samples

are posted on the World Wide Web, which is available almost instantly on computers and cellphones throughout the world. The sheer volume and checkered quality of the information can be a problem and becomes the first hurdle to be overcome. Will students take the time to go through such large volumes of material, reflect upon what they find, analyze and evaluate it, and then separate the wheat from the straw? If they do, the World Wide Web will become an invaluable resource. On the other hand, if they blindly extract just the amount they need for an assignment or copy large sections of text, their education will be short circuited causing their teachers to curse the new technology that allows them to be so lazy.

As the educational environment changes our teaching must adapt, based on our own knowledge, experiences, and “evolving personal, professional theoretical bases” (Holly and Mcloughlin, 1989, 260). Evolution is a very slow process, but the process of trial and error that powers it can bring about amazing results. Effective innovations are preserved and expanded upon, while wrong turns are eventually discarded. Such a spirit of experimentation in the classroom may be as useful to education as biological evolution is to life. So as a teacher I study my students, looking for opportunities to improve their English abilities and fuel their motivation.

### **Adding Images and Hyperlinks**

As the lists of questions on my webpages became longer, I realized that embedded images would provide some visual support and break up an otherwise monotonous text on the screen or printed page. Luckily the World Wide Web is bursting with photos and pictures as well as information, and I realized I could kill two (or three) birds with one stone. A direct link to images

on the Web make them appear to be imbedded in a webpage (see Blair, 2006). By linking each image (usually reduced from its original size) to its own website, anyone viewing it can click on the image to see it in its original size with its URL address displayed in the address box, thereby giving credit to the owner. Viewers can also truncate the address (from the right) in order to explore the website that contributed the image. In this way interested viewers can use the hyperlinked images and text on my lists of questions as springboards to vast amounts of information posted on the World Wide Web.

Linked images can also be used in tandem with text links to avoid a common problem with the text links: they go dead without any visible sign of their demise. Connections on the Web continually change. Webpages disappear or are relocated (with new URL addresses) with great frequency. Nothing in a text link reflects that change. Unsuspecting readers find out when they click on the link and a “404 Not Found” message appears instead of the desired webpage. It gets a bit frustrating for readers. Checking text links at regular intervals is extremely time consuming. If a linked image is coupled with text linked to the same website, however, both links will normally break at the same time (ie. when the website disappears or takes on a new URL address). The text hyperlink will appear unchanged, but the image will disappear, giving a visible signal that both webpages’ new URLs need to be relocated or their links removed.

Hyperlinks are a convenient way to provide curious students with access to more information (in their native language or in English) on the topics that come up in class. The bottleneck in the process is the time it takes to locate Internet information of satisfactorily high quality. The situation has been improved greatly by the creators of Wikipedia (see Blair, 2008). It has provided a great deal of high quality (by Web standards at least) interlinked information, which is easily accessed in numerous languages by keywords. While the information and writing are not flawless (neither are they in books, by the way),

Wikipedia does provide an excellent first reference. To take full advantage of this resource, I have tried to place hyperlinks to Wikipedia in most of my webpages at frequent intervals, so that at least one appears on the screen at all times (regardless of scrolling).

### **The Five Basic Sentences**

These technical innovations can supplement the information students get in the classroom and help them find out *what* they want to say. Then they have to decide *how* to say it in English. Since an increasing number of students had been coming to class with gaping holes in their knowledge of English grammar, I decided to inject some lectures into the curriculum. This would help focus attention on grammatical sub-tasks that need to be refined and practiced in order to enable automatic encoding of English sentences and achieve successful restructuring of interlanguage forms (see McLaughlin, 1987 and 1990).

At about the same time, as luck would have it, my daughter came to a couple chapters in her high school English textbook that she did not understand. This was the one and only time she ever asked for my help with her English, she could not understand the value and purpose of the Five Basic Sentences. It was destiny. Twenty years earlier one of my students had mentioned the five basic sentence patterns. Like other native speakers I had no idea what those patterns were, and had been wondering about them in the back of my mind for two decades.

The idea is simple and fundamental to English grammar: almost all sentences have a subject (S) and a verb (V). Two kinds of noun phrases can come after the verb: an object (O) or a complement (C). A complement is slightly different from an object in that the noun (and its article) can often be deleted, leaving just

an adjective.

Junya is *a cheerful boy*.

Junya is *cheerful*.

Only a few verbs are followed by complements, notably the verb “be”. The difference between O and C explains a very common error that students make with the “be” verb. Unlike Japanese “です”, in English the S and C nouns must be of the same type.

- Junya (S=*person*) is a college student (C=*person*).
- × His father (S=*person*) is diabetes (C=*disease*).
- His father (S=*person*) is a diabetic (C=*person*).

Once students understand the difference between O and C. The Five Basic Sentences are easy to explain and remember: SV\_, SVO, SVC, SVOO, and SVOC. We can think of the core of an English sentence as having three slots: one for the subject (a noun phrase), one for the verb phrase, and one for objects and complements (noun phrases, though C is often reduced to an adjective). The most common of the five patterns—the SVO pattern—can be compared to a hamburger. Nouns are bread and the verb is the beef. (This sentence has no verb! Where’s the beef?!)

Unlike Japanese noun phrases, S, O, and C nouns have no particles (助詞, like が or を) to connect them to the verb. We do use particles (prepositions—at, on, in, etc.) to add information about time and place to sentences. I have my students put this kind of additional information in a fourth slot, the +A slot. The + sign represents the preposition and “A” the noun phrase attached to it. “A” can also stand for adverbial phrase and plus alpha, in other words extra



information attached as an adverbial phrase.

I used to deliver these grammar lectures in Japanese accompanied by English handouts. Initially I assumed that students would understand the explanations, but later realized that a quick in-class check was needed in addition to the feedback that monitoring homework would eventually provide. Having four slots turned out to be very convenient, because students can easily fold a piece of paper into four columns for sentence dictation practice. They write sentences, putting all the words in the appropriate slots.

S	V	O/C	+A
Many students	go shopping		in Sakae.
My grandfather	was born		on May 10, 1879.
A young guy	asked	the actor a question	about kabuki.
Akiko	dyed	her hair brown	in high school.
Some girl	left	a message	on Toshi's cellphone.

S	V	C	+... ... R(s v c +a)
She	felt	very upset	because ...
R= ... she	was	alone	on her birthday.

Verb phrases (including modals) go in the V slot, noun phrases with prepositions go in the +A slot, and the O/C slot remains empty after intransitive verbs and in most passive sentences.

If we use a hamburger image for the SVO core (of most sentences), then +A components—and there is often more than one—can be thought of as a drink or french fries, which when added turn the hamburger into a full meal. At the center of this meal is still the verb. (Don't forget the beef.) All the phrases S, O/C, and +A are tied to it. I explain four modals (have, be, do, will) and six verb forms (to V, V-ing, V-s, V-ed, V-en, and V itself). The three most essential forms

for students are: (a) *simple present tense* (V-s with singular and uncountable subjects) for repeated actions or continual states of being, (b) *simple past tense* (V-ed) since we usually talk about things that have already happened, and (c) *present progressive* (be V-ing) for actions in progress. We sometimes talk about the future (will V and be going to V), but not as often as we talk about the present and past. The infinitive (to V) and gerund (V-ing) are useful to string verbs together (V to V and V V-ing). I also explain perfect aspect (have V-en) and passive voice (be V-en), but suggest students avoid using them without good reason (see [www3.agu.ac.jp/~jeffreyb/verbs.html](http://www3.agu.ac.jp/~jeffreyb/verbs.html)).

## Machine Translations

Like the lists of questions for each topic I posted these grammar explanations on my university website. The webpages were originally written in English. I would print them up to use as handouts in class. I explained the grammar in Japanese during class and expected students to read the English at their own convenience outside of class. If they misplaced a handout they could always find it on the Web and print it themselves.

I often consult these webpages myself. I found it easiest to go to Japan Yahoo, type “jeffreyb” into the search box, and click on one of the two top-ranking webpages. (Now I type “jeffreyb” and “kabuki”). One day when my Kabuki webpage popped up in this search, I noticed a hyperlink for people that wanted to read it *in Japanese*. I was particularly curious, because I had never written it in Japanese. That is how I discovered machine translation on the Web. By inserting similar hyperlinks in my own webpages, people reading them could almost immediately go from the original English to Japanese machine translations and, of course, print them up.

In 2008 I moved from the Junior College Department of English Communication to the University's General Studies Department full-time. I started teaching a "seminar" (a combination homeroom and English class). I had taught a similar class at the junior college, a class where we studied the histories of various foreign countries. Students were divided by ability, I always managed to get the top section, and things went fairly smoothly. At the University, however, students from particular departments choose three seminars and rank them. In that first year my students were business management majors, but all of them had made my seminar their first choice. That made me rather optimistic until ... on the first day of class one of my students asked me how to say 3月 (March) in English. Then I realized this was not going to be an English only class. My other classes were also filled with students majoring in subjects not necessarily related to English (law, religion, psychology, nutrition, etc.). When I handed out English materials, I found it increasingly hard to imagine that more than a handful would actually take the time to try to read them.

My first step was to add Japanese machine translations to my English handouts, English on the front, Japanese on the other side. It later became apparent that the machine translations were very rough indeed. An English phrase like "a pair of black loafers (the shoes)", for instance, was translated as 二人の黒人の怠け者 (a couple of lazy black people). I came across similar mistranslations when my computer translated from Japanese into English. A lot of useful vocabulary popped up, but mistakes were common (むりやり was mistaken for a mysterious homonym 無理槍 "impossible spear", rather than being translated correctly as "by force"). Moreover the translation software jumbled the word order in English sentences to such an extent that it took a great deal of imagination to reassemble the words and assign an overall meaning. The use of translation software still requires *highly motivated*,

*inquiring, critical minds* to convert output into meaningful communication. Unfortunately not many Japanese college students are willing or able to attempt that arduous feat.

The solution for my seminar was to rely on Japanese Wikipedia articles to give students some historical background on the foreign countries that we studied. I used four-slot dictation practice of English sentences based on the content of those articles to check students' grammar. It revealed that many students had trouble spelling foreign names, even common ones (like Charles, as in King Charles I). So I decided to modify the articles by replacing the kana (Japanese syllabary) in foreign loan words and names with their English spellings. This allowed them to make connections between spelling and pronunciation and also served to highlight the names and some key foreign loan words.

The written grammar explanations remained in English for a few more months until one particularly low-level class convinced me to embark on the long journey of putting them into Japanese. The *imagination* necessary to figure out Japanese machine translations are also necessary to decipher the flawed Japanese of many foreign instructors (including the author). In order to motivate my students to listen carefully to my strange Japanese and think deeply about its intended meaning, I told them to take notes *in Japanese* of my explanation and to put it into authentic Japanese that would be *easy to understand*. It took a lot of time to read their notes, but it gave me (a) a glimpse of *what they thought* I was saying and (b) numerous *samples to consult* as I wrote up my own Japanese version of the grammar explanation. This was the first step of a long, never ending journey to put my teaching materials, new and old, into Japanese.

I post these Japanese explanations on my website and link them to the corresponding English explanations (and the English explanations to them). These two-way hyperlinks replace the one-way link to Japanese machine

translations. When I print them up for classes, I usually put English on one side and Japanese on the other. Since the students can read the Japanese, I can skip those lectures and pass them out while returning homework at the beginning of class, giving the students something to do and thereby reduce classroom chatter. Later I can quiz them about, refer to, or elaborate upon what they have read.

### **From Batting Practice to Baseball**

Students sometimes tell me that they do not want to study any more grammar, “just English conversation”, as though grammar and communication are independent of each other. Can 40 students ignore grammar, simply chat away with one native speaker of English and pick it up? My students all seem to know the phrase No Music, No Life. I tell them No Grammar, No Communication. I have tried to imagine for myself what grammarless communication could possibly be. (My computer just underlined grammarless. Apparently even computers do not believe grammarlessness is possible.) I finally came up with a candidate ... party conversation, like when you meet someone at a bar.

Hi, there. Nice outfit.

Empty glass. More beer?

So I guess it is possible, but not very interesting, certainly not intellectually interesting.

The SVO grammar discussed above can help my students make sentences, but that is only the first step in a normal conversation. Real people *string sentences together* into longer discourse. So what happens when a teacher tries

to have a real conversation in the classroom full of Japanese students? They are used to lectures followed by the teacher (who knows the answer) asking *display questions* (to see if the student remembers).

T: Who was the first prime minister of Japan?

S: Ito Hirobumi.

T: Very good.

The teacher is satisfied with the correct answer, a short one, and goes on to question someone else. The student is happy to be off the hook. Quite often a student who does not know the answer simply remains silent and waits for the teacher to go on to the next student. I believe that “no answer” is the worst possible response to a question. I have encouraged such students by telling them that it is *like batting*. It is better to swing and miss than to strike out without taking a swing. That got me thinking about questions and answers in terms of batting. The question seemed like a *pitch*. Hopefully students take a swing. A meaningful answer was a *hit*, while an incomprehensible or incompatible answer was a *strike*.

In an English classroom *display questions* are often used to check comprehension. “Read the passage (or listen to the video) and answer these questions.” The ultimate goal, however, is to get students to communicate in English—to tell us what they think, how they feel, or something that we really do not know. How do such conversations start? They often start with a question. Even when you have some news you want to announce, you might start with a question.

A: You know what?

B: No. What?

A: My son just graduated from college.

In this instance, a question was used to elicit a question. B will probably add a comment and ask another question, which is a sign of enough interest to continue the conversation. Once A has confidence that B really has some interest in the topic, his answers and then B's comments will become longer, maybe three or four sentences long. Then you have a *real conversation* going.

In the classroom I would like to stimulate the students into having *their own real discussions*, that is my goal. We begin with a topic and a list of discussion questions as described above. Too often, however, it's like pulling teeth. It is difficult to get anything to come out of their mouths. The teacher tosses out a *discussion question* to the class. There is the pitch. But, of course, there is no answer. You have to choose a batter, call on a specific student. Still no answer, so you encourage them to take a swing. Finally an answer comes, not a full sentence, simply a noun. And it makes sense, it's a hit. Then the conversation stops. The student is happy, because he gave a good answer and avoided the need for any grammar. Now the teacher will pick another batter and toss him the next question. The teacher can pump reluctant students for information, peppering them with questions. But these one-sided *batting practice conversations* become like a police inquisition.

A better model is needed—maybe “*catch ball*”. This seems to be a popular metaphor in Japanese English classes. If the *throw* is a question, then a *catch* would be an appropriate noun phrase answer, I guess, like a hit in the previous model. *Catch ball conversations* enhance the student's role (short answers and questions) making them equal partners in the interaction. The fact that they ask their own questions also gives them some initiative and control in the direction of the discussion. Connecting each succeeding question to the previous noun phrase or its question soon becomes difficult to achieve, and the relentless

alternation of questions and answers seems mechanical, and thus artificial.

There are *three ways* to move a conversation forward: (a) ask a question, (b) utter a phrase, or (c) *make a statement*. Statements, not questions and answers, form the bulk of most discussions. This third element can be worked into the model by expanding it from batting practice, through catch ball, to baseball ... pitch, hit, *run, run, run* (to first base, then to second and third). People in real conversations add information to their initial answers. Students should be encouraged to add three or four sentences (a homerun) to their short answers. By engaging in *baseball conversations* they can demonstrate that they are interested in the conversation and also provide a place to hook subsequent questions.

### Four-Slot Grammars and the Triangle of Words

A four-slot grammar for statements has been described above. A slightly modified four-slot grammar can serve to explain the transformation from a statement to its corresponding questions. The S-slot becomes the Wh-slot, which remains empty for yes/no questions, while the noun phrase that contains the unknown information disappears (but, except for the subject, not its slot). If the unknown information happens to be the subject, then the modification is complete.

Wh/s	V	O	+A
Who	left	the message	on Toshi's cellphone?

On the other hand, if the subject remains, we move it to the V-slot and precede it by a modal.



Wh-	m-S-V	O/C	+A
What message	did Mai leave		for Toshi?
Why	did she feel	upset?	
	Did she feel	sad or angry?	
Who	did she want to spend	her birthday	with?

When the V-slot for the statement has no modal, a “do” modal is inserted. Voila, we have a handy four-slot grammar, convenient for dictation practice.

These two simple four-slot grammars, one for statements (S V O/C +A/R) and one for questions (Wh mSV O/C +A/R) explain the macro grammars of full sentences. That covers two of the three elements of a conversation. We can devise a four-slot grammar for noun phrases as well. The noun (n) is located in the third slot. Adjectives (a1, single-word adjectives) go in front of the noun, in the second slot. Determiners (d), a class of special adjectives that includes articles and possessive pronouns, go in the first slot. While several adjectives can fill a slot, only one determiner is allowed. The slot that comes after the noun contains adjectival phrases (a2, including prepositional phrases (+a) and phrases that begin with relative clauses (+r)).

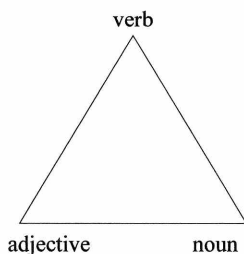
Determiner	One-word Adjective	Noun	Adjective phrase = +a/+r
those	six white	rabbits	under the tree
the	tall	woman	in the black dress
a	large	asteroid	that _ is going to hit the Earth
the	music	group	that I like _ best

The four-slot grammar for noun phrases not only explains how to give short answers to questions, it also explains the micro grammar of full sentences—the internal structure of S, O, C, and A noun phrases.

The three grammars taken together form a simple map for students to go

from words to phrases to sentences. I like to think of it as the triangle of words. The semantic load of a sentence is carried mostly by three classes of words: verbs, adjectives, and nouns. Let's arrange them in a triangle with verbs (V) at the top and adjectives and nouns at the base. Below the base go the four noun phrase slots, so that a1 lines up with the adjective vertex and n is aligned with the noun vertex. Above the apex go five slots with V in the middle and the S and O/C slots on either side. The fifth slot is for +A phrases. The first is also, because unlike S and O/C phrases, +A can move to the front.

(+A/R)	S	V	O/C	+A/R
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d	a1	n	a2
a, some, the my, your, their (name)'s this, that, those which?, what?	number size color	S O C A	+ a (o)  + r (svo)

We can think of the four slots at the base of the triangle as a micro grammatical assembly center for noun phrases which then get embedded into the macro grammatical frame at the apex.

## From PCs to Cellphones

Though one can always find exceptions to any rules, and it is far from a complete grammar, these four-slot mini grammars provide a lucid, learnable description of English conversations for low and intermediate-level students. Well, that's half the cure. The other half is its distribution, how to get the information out to the students. The obvious answer is to give lectures in Japanese. Not much information may actually be absorbed, however, and even less will be retained for long. That is my experience from having students take notes in class (see above). The next step is to give them handouts in Japanese and have them read the handouts in class (while you are passing back papers, perhaps). Right after they have read the handout, ask for questions. In most classes you will not get any questions, so quiz them about the main points.

That is your best chance as a teacher to get them to absorb the information, but they will probably forget it by the next class. Well, they have it in writing. They can always refer back to your handout ... if they can find it. Many students squirrel away handouts without reading them, intending to review the most important points just before the final exam. They count on their teacher telling them which points which are the important ones. That is what they really want when they ask, two weeks before the exam, "how to study" for it.

Even well-intentioned students may have trouble locating handouts and finding a good time and place to review. Luckily language has evolved from spoken to written *and beyond* (see Logan, 2007). Almost all teachers and student now have their own personal computers or at least access to school computers. I have taken advantage of this infrastructure by posting virtually all my handouts on the World Wide Web. On the first day of class I pass out a printed version of my homepage, which includes its URL address. It has my teaching schedule, and each class is linked to the class schedule. The class

schedule in turn is linked to almost all the handouts. I have noticed, alas, that few students actually take advantage of this instant, easy access. It seems easy for the generation that used typewriters and located information in libraries with the use of card catalogs, but the cellphone generation has much higher standards for the term “easy access”.

One other problem with handouts is that they address general problems, not the specific problems of any one individual. Students think they are material to be *memorized* for the final exam, rather than *applied* to their own English. Although teachers often write individual corrections and comments on homework papers, there is little time to write full explanations.

I think we can kill two birds with one stone by posting short, simple grammar explanations and other common homework comments on the Web, in formats that can be viewed on cellphones screens. This would reinforce the handouts and be accessible anytime, anywhere—especially in buses and trains during their daily commutes, when students have lots of free time and often spend it gazing at their cellphones anyway. Students could be encouraged to add a bookmark or screen memo on their cellphones of an index webpage. Click, click ... there is the index with instant, in-your-face review of important points. In addition teachers could print up copies of the index page, circle the links to the appropriate comments, and staple them to students’ homework, thereby providing fuller explanations of their weak points than time permits for hand-written comments.

Times have changed and will continue to change. We teachers need to take full advantage of the new technology—including cellphones, Wikipedia, and YouTube—and our students’ infatuation with it. Yes, we can ... turn them away from the Dark Side of the Internet and make it a positive force in their education.

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### Points of Contact

Any comments on this article will be welcomed and should be mailed to the author at Aichi Gakuin University, General Education Division, 12 Araiike, Iwasaki-cho, Nisshin, Japan 470-0195 or e-mailed to him. Other papers and works in progress may be accessed at <http://www3.agu.ac.jp/~jeffreyb/research/index.html>.

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