



University
of Glasgow



Developing employability skills in a foreign language

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Developing employability skills in a foreign language

Students conduct a business meeting, take minutes and produce preparatory and follow-up emails (all in German, could be used in English).

Context

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

Honours Level

Subject: German

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Key features

A small group of students (< 25).

Focusing on specific GAs: Subject specialist, Effective communicator and Experienced collaborator.

A mix of in-class and out-of-class activities, conducted regularly in form of a 2-hour tutorial/seminar.

The activity is integrated into the curriculum and is partially assessed, which has some impact on the syllabus redesign as well as considerable impact on the staff workload.

Paper materials, slides and projector are used to facilitate the activity, and voice recorders are needed to record the interactions in order to help with the reflection.



Activity description

Rationale

This activity forms part of an Honours course in German Professional Communication. Student feedback has in the past included that they would like more practical language teaching at Honours level which can be applied to real work-place related scenarios.

The aim of this particular activity is to raise student awareness of the practicalities and challenges involved in effective team communication. Students take part in a sequence of tasks from conducting initial research into German-UK business relations, to practising effective email correspondence, taking part in the meeting itself and producing minutes. These tasks allow students to become more skilled in using the target language for specific purposes. Since the activities are largely team-based and require a significant amount of collaboration outside of class time, students learn to collaborate and plan their time effectively in order to meet deadlines.

Although this scenario is conducted wholly in German, the activities could be adapted to many other contexts.



Activity description

Implementation

After conducting some initial research into UK-German business relations and producing German summaries of English strategy documents, students were divided into groups with half the class representing a UK and half the class representing a German company. The following activities were conducted in German: Students were given a relatively detailed brief as to the type of business partnership their company wishes to develop. They were then asked to write an email to a partner from the other team making an initial enquiry with a view to set up a meeting. The teams would then prepare for the meetings outside of class time. The meetings themselves were conducted in class and recorded. Students were also tasked with taking minutes. There would then be follow-up email correspondence between the teams.

Reactions

I have been running this activity for 3 years and the vast majority of students have been taking a very active part. This is partly due to the fact that some of the outcomes (e.g. the minutes) are assessed but also encouraging in general as it indicates confidence levels rising, especially after several practice runs. I did not ask students for specific feedback on this particular element of the course, however, overall feedback on the course suggests that students find it very relevant and useful indeed.



Analysis & evaluation

The activities provide students with the opportunity to gain an insight into the different types of communication likely to take place in a work-place scenario. Allocating each student a specific role helps to ensure everyone plays an active part. My experience has been that even shier and quieter students tend to come out of their shell during the meeting. Students are aware that the meeting itself is not assessed, however, the minutes and follow-up email correspondence are. The meeting is always very well attended and students are well prepared which suggests a deep level of engagement with the task beyond aiming to do well in the assessment.

Contingencies need to be made in the case of absences on meeting day, though these have been infrequent and students are asked to notify the course leader and their team mates if they are absent.

The minutes produced after the meeting were generally of a very high quality which suggests high levels of student engagement, the same holds true for the email correspondence before and after the meeting.

In terms of lessons learned, the activity has been an integral part of my course for a number of years and has been useful in developing students' communication skills and GAs on a number of levels. Adapting the actual content of the scenarios each year is key to (1) prevent plagiarism, (2) to keep content up to date and (3) provide variety (including for teaching and marking staff).



Recommendations

The activity could be used for a number of contexts, embed a particular question/task into a meeting scenario, get students to take minutes, write emails etc.

To ensure everyone participates as actively as possible, it can be helpful to ask students to produce some record of their discussions, which is why I introduced the minutes. Making part of the activity an assessed element of the course would ensure higher engagement levels, however, this may not always be feasible. The scenario could be shortened, e.g. focusing on only the meeting or the email element.

Some input should be given as to how to conduct effective meetings and/or produce email correspondence that is context-specific and appropriate to the situation/culture in question.



This resource is part of the 'Graduate Attributes – Roadmap for Staff' resource:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/goodpractice/graduateattributes>

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