

Business English Course



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Background to the Course Concept

The original concept for the *Business English* course built on from what other language teachers had already been doing in virtual worlds (role-play, conversational-based), but moved away from role-play, towards a more extended business simulation. The idea was that getting the students working together in a fictitious company, and working towards pitching a business idea that they themselves had developed would make them become emotionally involved in the course. It was also felt that in this type of experiential learning, the language practised and learned would come from their desire and need to communicate as they became interested and engaged in their project..

The course was driven by the necessity for the students to present their ideas for a business to a team of potential investors, and this was loosely based on the popular *Dragon's Den* TV series ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragons' Den](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragons'_Den)).

For more details and notes from the course reiterations see:
<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Business-English-Course>

Overview of the Course

The *Business English* course is a project-based short course that asks students to work on the development of a business plan for a business they decide on, which can be in Second Life or in Real Life.

During the six classes, students form a business, taking on distinct roles (e.g. project manager, financial manger, marketing manager) by interviewing for the positions, and then work together in groups to develop a business idea of their choosing. Once chosen, they work on a business plan and presentation, helped by a mentor and then the final class is a presentation to a board of potential investors (similar to the *Dragon's Den* TV show).

Requirements and Recommendations

Language Level: B1-B2

Prior knowledge of virtual worlds: The students require no prior knowledge. The teacher should have intermediate skills (communication and movement etc.) but does not need advanced skills like building or scripting.

Recommended size of group: 8-16 (teams of four work best)

Target audience: Learners with an interest in strengthening their skills in using English in typical business situations.

Number of lessons:

- 2 intro-sessions with introduction to Second Life and team building (optional)
- 6 sessions with a teacher (bi-weekly) and
- 5 sessions in between as group meeting with a tutor on-hand to help

TOTAL: 13 sessions (90 minutes each). Total contact time = 18 hours.

The reason for holding classes bi-weekly is to give each group a chance to meet each other to plan / prepare for each class, and (towards the end of the course) to work on their presentations. Having the course tutor available to help during these more informal sessions means that any language questions or doubts about tasks can be answered. It also allows the tutor to monitor the language used by the students and to prepare an activity related to this for the next class.

SL environment requirements:

- open space / auditorium for meeting the teacher and discussions
- team-rooms (separate parcels, with isolated voice settings, thus teams do not disturb each other)
- auditorium for final presentation to the '*business dragons*'
- suitable location for the job interview role-play (with desk and chairs)

SL objects needed:

- A SL whiteboard for showing slides (can also be a SLOODLE-presenter)

SL tools used by students during the course: Basic movement, voice, chat, IM, friendship tools, teleport, notecards

Course management tools: Some form of 2D online space where the course description and information can be communicated. During the three pilots of the course, we experimented with a blog (<http://avalon-biz.blogspot.com/>), Moodle (<http://lms.workademy.net/course/view.php?id=10>), and Grouply (<http://avalonbeo3.grouply.com/>)

We also used in-world groups, with information about each session (on notecards) and landmarks being distributed through group messaging.

Student in-word initiation: Basic technical issues were resolved using a pre-course check in process ([check-in email](#)), thus when the course started, students were already able to run Second Life on their computers, had an avatar and had basic information about using voice in SL . During the first two iterations of the course, sessions were

dedicated to learning further basic Second Life skills, but this was not felt to be necessary and was dropped from subsequent iterations.

Learning Goals

The main course objectives are:

- **Language:** to provide learners with English language practice and business vocabulary/functional language. Much of the actual language input was gauged from the requirements/needs of the students and also dependent on the project they chose to do.
- **Technical/Social:** to provide learners with the necessary technical knowledge to be a student in *Second Life*, in order to make this language learning experience effective and meaningful for them as learners of a foreign language for business.

Storyboard

Students find themselves in a business plan competition. They meet and form a company based on their interests and strengths and then work on developing their business plan together.

In each session, they progress one step forward toward the final product, which is the presentation to the 'business dragons'. Important steps are:

- Deciding on a business idea
- Taking on team-roles
- Developing a project plan
- Working on a midterm-presentation to a mentor

There is no explicit English teaching, but the teacher helps the students with the language they need to use to express themselves during the course, and to accomplish the mid-term and final goals (the interview, business plan, presentation, etc.).

In the company that the students form, there are several suggested roles:

- Project Manager (and team leader)
- Product manager
- Marketing manager
- Chief financial officer c
- Sales manager
- Quality manager

The actual roles taken by the students depend on the size of the teams, their choice of business and their interests. Roles become assigned as the result of a job interview.

Participants choose their business as a result of their own interests, knowledge and research and are helped by a guided discussion process at the beginning of the course.

Although not strictly necessary, it is suggested that outside guests are invited to be mentors (these can be former students of the course – this was the case in the second pilot) and a suggested 2-3 guests are required to play the dragons for the final presentation (although if not available, the Teacher can take this role).

Reward Models

Developing a convincing business plan and standing one's ground facing the dragons can be quite a strong motivation on its own. The winning teams of the Business English course pilots were awarded special cheques by the dragons to use in the Avalon shop in the village.

There were also special awards for specific members of each team:

- a red Avalon T-Shirt as “special social award” in recognition of best teamwork and support for colleagues
- a blue Avalon T-Shirt as “special technical award” for mastering technological challenges

In addition, all participants of the course were given Avalon certificates of attendance, signed by the course tutor.

Pre-Course Technical Initiation

It is best to resolve basic technical issues prior to course start (with a [check-in email process](#)), thus for the first meeting, students are already able to run Second Life on their computers, have an avatar and are able to hear and speak. In the initial pilot, the first 2 sessions were dedicated to learning further basic Second Life skills, but this was not felt necessary for later iterations.

SECOND LIFE INTRODUCTION PARTS 1 & 2 (Optional)

Whether or not you start with one or two introductory classes to Second Life, or feel this is not necessary, will depend on your learners. If they have some experience of a virtual world, then this will not be necessary. If they are complete novices, then a gentle introduction to Second Life may be of benefit.

Suggested virtual world environment: big open space (e.g. a sandbox)

3D objects used: nothing special needed

2D materials used (slides, text, etc): a general forum space for students to post their questions / ask for feedback. Help can also be given in the form of videos showing the basic features of Second Life (see [The Avalon Introductory Multimedia Kit](#)).

Course management tools:

Aims:

- To begin the process of team-building
- To provide learners with a basic knowledge of *Second Life* so that the Business English course is effective and meaningful for them as learners of a foreign language for business.
- To give the teacher a chance to undertake language needs analysis so that the Business English course can be adapted to lower/higher level learners as required.

Summary of Activities:

Part A – Waiting for students to arrive: Warmup and introduction

Part B - Second Life skills to practice: Chatting, talking, moving, camera control

For a detailed description:

see <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Second-Life-Introduction-Part-1>

LESSON 1 – INTRODUCTIONS AND COURSE OUTLINE

Suggested virtual world environment:

- Part one (introductions): an inviting, open space.
- Part two (guided discussion): auditorium or similar (something with seats)
- Part three (language focus): this can happen anywhere
- Part four: parcels of land with voice limited to the parcel for each group

3D objects used: Whiteboard for showing slides; seats; [Avalon Business English Teacher Briefcase](#)

2D materials used (slides, text, etc): notecards (information duplicated on the course management LMS), copies of slides for students to look at later.

Course management tools: Forum for pre-class and post-class discussion / questions, etc.

Aims:

- After the session students should have a clear understanding of what the course is about and what they are expected to do.
- Language practice : introductions, small talk, etc.

Summary of Activities:

Part One – Introductions: Warmup incl. voice-check, course outline

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Part Two – Guided Discussion:

- What makes a good business?
- Real Life vs. Second Life
- Business plan

Part Three – Language Focus / Error Correction: Reading examples of language that students used and correct them together

Part Four – Group organisation & questionnaire development: Students form groups and work out a questionnaire for their research about potential business ideas).

Class conclusion / Round-up:

- Students share the answers / reflections to the questions
- Discussion of homework (research on possible business ideas)

Homework: Students do some research on business and businesspeople with potential ideas for their own businesses

For a detailed description: see <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Introductions-and-course-outline>

LESSON 2 – GET INSPIRED: BUSINESS IDEAS

Suggested virtual world environment: An attractive businesslike space set up that allows discussion (e.g. such as the Business Barn at the Avalon Learning island)

3D objects used: desk and chairs for the interviews

2D materials used (slides, text, etc): notecards (information duplicated on the course management LMS), copies of slides for students to look at later.

Course management tools: Forum for pre-class and post-class discussion / questions, etc.

Aims:

- Students form their companies and share information about their business ideas, interests and their strengths and weaknesses (which will be used to determine who interviews for which positions in their companies).
- Language of describing business operations and functions, roles, etc.

Summary of Activities:

Part One: The class starts with a discussion about the students' research into potential business ideas that they may be interested in and are then asked to form businesses / groups according to their interests. If this proves to be difficult, then the teacher can suggest groups based on their observation of the students.

Part Two: Field trip to several interesting businesses in Second Life. This will depend on the group and their interests, but some examples have been provided on the Avalon Learning wiki. A selection of Second Life and Real Life businesses can be used.

Part Three: During the field trip, encourage a discussion of what kind of businesses they are and how they could make money. During the discussion, the teacher makes notes on language used by the students and uses this information to provide help at the end of the class and on the LMS after class.

Class conclusion / Round-up: If there is time, a good way of finishing is with a class discussion. If necessary, changes can be made to groups according to interest in types of businesses. The homework should also be outlined before the end of the class. You can also ask the students to meet together before the next class to talk about possible ideas for their business.

Homework: Students prepare interview questions and answers (typical examples of questions can also be given)

For a detailed description: see

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/7682828/Job-Interviews>

LESSON 3 – JOB INTERVIEWS

Suggested virtual world environment: An area resembling an office and suitable to hold interviews with space for observers (e.g. the Avalon Business Barn)

3D objects used: Table, chairs. A way of displaying language feedback to the group (a dynamic slide presentation tool, for example). The Opinionator (SL bought tool – this is optional).

2D materials used (slides, text, etc): Notecards with instructions, help with interview questions, etc.

Course management tools: Forum for pre-class and post-class discussion / questions, etc.

Aims:

- Practice in interview skills (asking and answering questions)
- Practice in applying for a job (roles in the companies they set up last class)

Summary of Activities:

Part One: The students meet, are engaged in small talk, and encouraged to engage the others in small talk while waiting for everyone to turn up. This is also the time to check whether all of the students have questions to ask and have thought about the answers to those questions. This is followed with them being encouraged to talk about their strengths and weaknesses (input via a notecard).

Part Two: An explanation of the interview process. If there are several teachers available, then the interviews can be held in groups. If not, then the students take turns to interview each other for roles in their companies, using the questions they have prepared at home. The teacher observes and takes note of any language that deserves remarking on (either very good or which needs improving on).

Part Three: Feedback on the interviews themselves is given after each interview, and general language feedback saved for the end, with all the students together.

Part Four: Good or Bad business idea? With all of the students together, several real business ideas are presented, some of which are odd, and the students have to vote for those they think are good / bad ideas (using *the Opinionator* if available will help graphically show the opinions of the students). After each round of voting, students are encouraged to express their opinions further.

Class conclusion / Round-up: A final feedback session is a good way of finishing, with students having the opportunity to talk / ask questions about anything that may have come up during today's lesson. The homework should also be outlined before the end of the class.

Homework: Students are given some input on language used when negotiating and expressing their opinion to look at before next class. The students should also be encouraged to meet together in groups before the next class to continue discussing their ideas for their business.

For a detailed description: see

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/7682820/Get-Inspired!>

LESSON 4 NEGOTIATING

Suggested virtual world environment: Separate group parcels (such as the Business Huts on Avalon Learning) and an area sufficient for everyone to meet and talk.

3D objects used: None

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2D materials used (slides, text, etc): Notecards with help creating a business plan, and examples, etc

Course management tools: Forum for pre-class and post-class discussion / questions, etc.

Aims:

- to make students think carefully about how best to convince others of their business idea
- Practice of language for negotiating, etc.

Summary of Activities:

Part One: The students meet and are engaged by the teacher who talks about their week, their business ideas, etc. When all of the students have arrived, the homework notecard is discussed, and any questions cleared up about language used to express opinions and negotiate.

Part Two: In separate groups, the students use the language on the notecards and their ideas to voice their opinions about the possible business ideas they have in mind. They should be encouraged to come to an agreement today and choose just one idea to follow. Groups who do this can start to look at the example business plans and talk about what they need to do before they can create their own. Meanwhile, the teacher monitors the students while negotiating, helping out when called for, and taking note of language that can be improved on or examples of good language in use.

Class conclusion / Round-up: A longer final feedback session is a good way of finishing this class, with students having the opportunity to talk / ask questions about anything that may have come up during today's lesson. The teacher can also present any examples of language the students have used that were either very good / could be improved upon (this could be presented as a sentence auction). Finally, the homework should also be outlined before the end of the class.

Homework: Students are encouraged to meet before next class to work on their business plans. Example plans and questions for the students to consider before they can complete theirs are given as homework. They are also asked to look at a video of 'how to give an elevator pitch' (with comprehension questions) as this is something they will be doing the next class.

For a detailed description: see

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/32591063/Negotiating>

LESSON 5 - PROJECT PLAN / MENTOR PRESENTATION

Suggested virtual world environment: Separate group parcels (such as the Business Huts on Avalon Learning) and an area sufficient for everyone to meet and talk.

3D objects used: None

2D materials used (slides, text, etc): Notecards with help creating a business plan, and examples, etc

Course management tools: Forum for pre-class and post-class discussion / questions, etc.

Aims:

- to make students think carefully about the necessary steps to realize their business idea and how best to present this to other people in a convincing way.
- Practice of language for presenting ideas, negotiating, etc.

Summary of Activities:

Part One: The students meet and while waiting for the others to arrive play a game of 'Business Taboo'. When everyone has arrived, the answers to the elevator pitch comprehension (last homework) are given and students encouraged to comment on this type of presentation and it's effectiveness.

Part Two: The students are assigned their mentor (if applicable) and go off in groups to work on their business plans and elevator pitches. They are told to prepare to present their elevator pitch and business plan to the mentor, who will arrive in the second half of the class (the teacher can perform this role if mentors are not available). The teacher/mentors can take note of any language that needs to be corrected / or examples of good language in use to present to the others.

Part Three: The students present their business ideas to the mentors in separate groups (business plans and elevator pitches) or to the whole class and the teacher if mentors are not available.

Part Four: The class should finish with a short final get-together, with the students having an opportunity to ask any final questions. Examples of language used by the students can be presented here. Finally, homework can be presented and an outline of the next class (the final presentation) given.

Homework: Students are encouraged to meet before next class and develop their elevator pitch into a longer presentation and encouraged to produce visuals to go with

this. Help with language of presentation is given to the students so that they can practise.

For a detailed description: see

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/7682848/Project-Plan>

LESSON 6 – FINAL PRESENTATION

Suggested virtual world environment: An area suitable to hold presentations (e.g. the Avalon Business Barn) and separate places where groups can work before the presentations.

3D objects used: A system for displaying the visuals that the students produce (either a static display board or a dynamic web display board)

2D materials used (slides, text, etc): Student produced presentation materials

Course management tools: Forum for pre-class and post-class discussion / questions, etc.

Aims:

- Students have an opportunity to present their ideas
- Practice using the language of presentation, responding to questions about their ideas, convincing people

Summary of Activities:

Part One: The students are met and the format of the last class is outlined. There is an opportunity for the students to ask any questions they like and this could also be an opportunity for language feedback from previous class if there was not time to do this then.

Part Two: The students are given time in their groups to finalise their presentations / business plans and to practise

Part Three: Everyone assembles for the final presentations to the Business dragons (if no dragons are available, then the other groups will need to be encouraged to question the business ideas of the others and they should be asked to prepare something relating to this beforehand). The presentations take place, with the business dragons (suggested number = three, ideally) given feedback on the business ideas after each presentation. The teacher observes and takes note of any language that could be better, etc.

Part Four: While the business dragons retire to make their decision on which group is the winning one, the teacher has an opportunity to present the language used by the students and which could be better / examples of good language use. Feedback can also be given to the students on their presentation techniques (but not on the content – this is the job of the business dragons)

Part Five: The dragons return and present their findings. They should be encouraged to give reasons why they have decided / not decided to choose a particular business idea. The winner is announced and awards given

Part Six: A good way to end the course is with a light-hearted social activity (perhaps involving music) and the students can be encouraged to keep in touch with each other after the course, etc.

Evaluation of Students

There does not need to be explicit evaluation, but if required/desirable, then the teacher should have been able to collect a lot of information through observation of the students' performance and progress. This can be used to produce an 'Final Evaluation' sheet (notecard) for each student (see example in the wiki) . The written business plan, the final presentation, the postings in the forums, participation in class, etc. can also be used for evaluation purposes if necessary.

Reflections

One of the biggest challenges in this course comes from it being different from courses that students have experienced before. The course design does not feature a 'sage on the stage', but puts the students in the driving seat. It tries to encourage reflection and build on the students' self-awareness of their business language use. Rather than an emphasis on set vocabulary sets and grammar, the teacher is encouraged to work with the language that the students use when working on their business idea, and to observe and correct this language, and help each student produce the language they need.

This can work out very well, but if not handled carefully could cause confusion and result in a lack of involvement and motivation, especially if students are more used to a more teacher-fronted course. It is expected, with so much group work that the students can learn a lot from their peers and by their own active participation as well as by reflection on their own business language use, but the teacher needs to make this clear and to encourage self-reflection.

Another challenge is the technology. On a modern computer with stable broadband internet we normally do not experience technical problems. However, having a student

in the group with technical problems could ruin the experience for the whole group. This can be addressed by taking the pre-course check-in seriously (thus detecting any potential problems before the course starts) and by having trouble-shooters in the team that can pick out students from the class, help them solve their problems and then send them back afterwards.

Finally not all students are interested in business in Second Life. This is why we decided to open up the course to real world business during the second pilot course, and it was felt that this was more successful.

Above all, it must not be forgotten that the project is a language course and not a business course. Lively, interesting communication is the goal – not necessarily a perfect business plan. If business in Second Life does not seem appropriate for a special group of students, any other topic can be used (see chapter on 'Adaptions' below).

Adaptations

There are many different ways to adapt this course.

- The pilots were run with English as the target language, but the course can be easily adapted to suit any language.
- Other topics: Depending on the type and interests of the participants, other topics may be considered more appropriate. Examples include e.g. media-production (machinima, comic-book, novel), development of role-plays (e.g. murder mystery dinner party) or games, becoming a curator for an exhibition (also nice for cross-curricular activities in schools), setting up a hotel, etc.
- This document outlines the basic course. It would be easy to expand this and add more language work / classes. Depending on the student's levels and needs, more explicit language work could be integrated into the course.
- As this is a course-setup that could be used for students of different curricula it would be attractive and beneficial to try 'mixing in' native speakers of business studies.
- Other business-related sessions could be added to a longer course, e.g. 'Meet your customer' (a session about sales-pitches), 'Negotiate your budget' (a session about setting up a financial plan, then suffer a cut and re-negotiate) or 'Fine-tune your presentation', etc.