

## The Electronic Village Online

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The Electronic Village Online, sponsored by TESOL's Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section, is a response to the need for teachers to become more aware of and skilled in the use of technology for teaching languages. It also serves as a means to support and continue the professional development of the international association's Convention, Academies, and Symposia. It is well known that not everyone can afford to come to an annual convention--both time and money constrain many international participants. The Electronic Village Online (EVO) brings the convention to the world.

EVO takes place in January-February of each year and serves over 1,000 English teachers and administrators from all over the globe. Participants do not have to be members of the TESOL association, though moderators do. The moderators need not have more than basic word processing and Internet skills, because they undergo a six-week training period before the EVO gets underway. Moderators learn to use a free online resource, Yahoo! Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com>), which provides a discussion forum, chat facility, archives for files and URLs to good resources, photos, polls, and even a database which can be used as a wiki to write and revise projects together. Yahoo! Groups (YG) has many of the features of expensive course management systems, such as WebCT or Blackboard, yet it is far easier to manage and use, and has the additional advantage of being free.

In addition to learning how to manage the online resources of YG, moderators discuss the advantages and possible pitfalls in conducting an online course. They discuss several readings about online education and access information that has been developed over the four years of past EVO experience in such areas as:

- Online community building
- Tips on "netiquette"
- Creating good online discussions
- Using voice and Webcam for chat

Mentors are assigned from experienced past EVO presenters, and they help the "newbies" through the steps of setting up and organizing their groups.

EVO sessions tend to fall into three categories:

(1) Discussions based on academic sessions or other events at the TESOL convention. For example, at the Salt Lake City convention in 2002, the CALL-IS Academic Session, on the theme "CALL and the Human Spirit," was preceded by a "run-up" EVO session, "The Human Face of CALL" ([http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Human\\_CALL](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Human_CALL)). In 2003, a colloquium for TESOL Adult Education Interest Section was supported by an EVO session "Reading Online" ([http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Reading\\_Online](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Reading_Online)).

(2) Virtual "hands-on" workshops in which some aspect of technology is explored. These may be quite advanced or very "low tech" for the novice technology user. In the 2005 EVO, for example, sessions were held on movie making with

digital video; constructing and using blogs; using Moodle, another free resource used to form online classes; and how to create language games using a word processor. One very popular course each year has been "Becoming a Webhead," which introduces participants to the tools and techniques used by an advanced group of experimenters in online teaching learning. At the other end of the spectrum, each year an introduction to the Internet has also been held to help beginners find and use such amazing free resources as Filamentality <http://www.filamentality.net/wired/fil/index.html>.

(3) Discussions about general themes in the TESOL profession. This year's event included discussion groups on content-based learning in the EFL curriculum, how to create ESP lessons using tools on the Internet, and how to combine cooperative learning with a global education curriculum.

Detailed descriptions of all this year's sessions may be found at <http://www.geocities.com/ehansonsmi/evo2005/announce.html>.

As can be seen from this brief discussion of the EVO topics, the appeal is truly international. Moderators represent many different regions of the world: Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Taiwan, Japan, Mexico, Korea, Kuwait, as well as different regions of the USA. One of the most enjoyable parts of EVO is meeting and "talking with the fingers" to other participants from all over the world. As one participant stated:

I've really appreciated these online courses. I do feel much more connected to the "big picture," after hearing from so many folk around the world, and getting some individual feedback from a couple . . . It gives me such a feeling of being a part of things. Thanks so much. This was very important for many of us who are teaching around the world . . .

Once the moderators have volunteered their time and expertise—and the EVO is totally volunteer-organized—the sessions are advertised through electronic lists, the CALL-IS Website (<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~call>), and an "e-blast" from TESOL to its members. Participants can sign themselves up for as many sessions as they believe they can handle (and usually they sign up for too many because the topics are so interesting). Next year's call for moderators will appear near the beginning of September, and the signups for the new sessions will begin in early January. The EVO invites you to participate and take advantage of this wonderful free resource.