

USING THE INTERNET AND A WORD-PROCESSOR TO CREATE MATURA STIMULATING MATERIALS

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First of all, I need to say a few words of introduction about a secondary school-leaving examination, or *matura*, in Poland. Until 2002, students finishing secondary school take an examination in two parts: the written one, including an exam in Polish and a chosen subject (either foreign language, maths, biology or history); and the oral part, including an exam in Polish, a chosen subject, and a foreign language. The foreign language oral exam comprises a text to read and questions to answer about it, ten grammar points and two situations to act with the examiner. From 2002, the *matura* exam in Poland is going to be altered, and it will be obligatory to take a foreign language both for the oral and the written part. As for the oral part, the text to read and answer questions about is going to be replaced with so-called stimulating material, which must be created by teachers. In this short essay, I will try to explain how teachers can use the Internet and a word-processor to prepare this stimulating material.

A stimulating material set, according to the Central Examinations Board, is a collection of different elements (a short text, a picture, a headline, a chart, a cartoon) on one sheet of paper, all dealing with the same subject. The idea is that the material should stimulate the student, so that he actively tries to find links between different elements, draw logical conclusions, synthesise and analyse. Students are asked questions about the stimulating material, with the first two questions to describe, the second two to find connections between pictures, and final two to relate pictures to the student's own life and experience. What is more, the material must be in full colour and all elements of good quality, so that students' understanding of it is not influenced by the material itself.

At present, teachers have been obliged to create such sets and send them to Regional Examination Boards, which approve them and send them back to schools. Now, what does it look like to make a set like that with traditional methods? Collecting a number of newspapers, magazines, maps, booklets; cutting out pictures, reproducing maps, sticking all these elements on a piece of paper and making photocopies in colour. Of course, there are numerous problems here. First of all, it is expensive to make colour photocopies, but even then the quality gets worse and pictures may be too blurred to interpret correctly. Next, it does take a

lot of time, effort and money to collect materials in this way. Finally, which did not bother the reform proposers, however, making stimulating material sets in this way breaks the copyright law, as every material such as newspaper headline, picture, chart, is the intellectual property of its creator and may not be used for any purposes without the written permission of the copyright holder.

So, how can technology help? How can we make *matura* sets in an easier and inexpensive way, without getting worse quality pictures, and, what is the most important, without breaking the law?

1. Using the Internet as a source of materials - the legal issues. The Internet as a collection of all kinds of materials is invaluable for a teacher, as we have all newspapers, picture galleries, etc at a click of a mouse. As I said before, the Central Examinations Board just tells the teachers to make the stimulating material sets, and does not bother that it will involve breaking the law (after all, it will be the teachers to do that, not the Board officials). All materials published on the Internet are copyright, and what breaks the law is saving pictures, parts of texts, artwork, without the written permission of the author or the site owner. However, it is possible **not** to break the copyright law when preparing such sets with the help of the Internet.

- a) use copyright-free resources: there are many Internet sites with copyright-free pictures, that is pictures which can be freely reused without breaking the law, thus teachers should use such sites where it is explicitly stated that pictures are copyright-free and can be used, modified, copied, etc. (see the links section at the end where some links for free pictures are provided)
- b) check the copyright policy of specific sites, as there may be some organisations which do not mind copying their material
- c) do not hesitate to email e.g., an online newspaper to ask if they allow the use of their newspaper headlines to create stimulating material sets (I did some queries like that some time ago, and among a few newspapers I asked there was one which replied that I might do with their articles whatever I wished provided this is non-commercial and purely educational use
- d) generally speaking, email the webmaster/owner of the site, explain your situation, emphasise your non-commercial and strictly educational use, and ask for permission to use the materials
- e) use materials from the Internet (short texts, charts) as a stimulus for you, and create materials by taking your own photos, producing charts or writing short texts

2. Searching the Net:

- a) searching from English-speaking portals (www.yahoo.com, www.altavista.com, www.lycos.com, www.webcrawler.com, www.google.com)
- b) searching from portals for kids (www.yahooligans.com, www.lycoszone.com, www.ajkids.com)
- c) searching by catalogue (if we want to find "diet", we choose entries from portal catalogue, and going deeper and deeper we eventually get "diet" websites)
- d) searching by a key word (typing a word to be found). Portals allow us to search for the entire phrase (put it in inverted commas - "Tower of London"), to search for a phrase containing a given word and some other word (with a plus - London +sightseeing) or without a given word (with a minus: London -sightseeing). Also, we can choose the language of the sites we want to get (go to www.altavista.com and specify the language you want your search hits in). Next, we can search for websites with a given word in the title of the site (title: diet) or in the address of the site (URL: diet). As for pictures, we can search the Web for pictures of a given title (image: diet), or, which some portals such as Altavista allow, searching for pictures on a given theme.
- e) searching by a natural language question: when going to www.askjeeves.com (or its kids' branch, www.ajkids.com), you can ask a real question such as "Who won the FIFA World Cup in 1982", and the portal searches for a list of sites which could answer your question.

3. Retrieving information from the Net¹ (providing that resources to be retrieved are either copyright-free or that the user has obtained the permission of the site owner/copyright holder to use the resources):

- a) retrieving pictures: right-click on a picture, choose "Copy", left-click on "Copy", then switch to a word-processor, right-click, choose "Paste" by left-clicking on it, and a picture is copied to your document
- b) or right-click on a picture, choose "Save Picture As", specify where and under which name you want the picture to be saved, then switch to your word-processor, choose "Insert", then "Picture from File", specify which picture to insert, and you will get the picture in your document
- c) retrieve a part of text: highlight a part of text by left-clicking and dragging the mouse until you have a desired piece of text highlighted, then release the left button of the mouse, right-click on the highlighted text, choose "Copy", then switch to your word-processor, right-click, choose "Paste", and you will get the highlighted piece of text from the Net to your document

- d) copy the whole content of the site: highlight the whole site by clicking Ctrl + A, then right-click on the highlighted text, choose "Copy", then switch to your word-processor, right-click, choose "Paste", and you will get the whole site copied to your document

4. Arranging the elements in a word-processor:

- a) make a text box: in order to make your life easier, it is a good idea to create a text box ("Insert", then "Text Box"), and then paste a picture or a piece of text into a text box. In order to do that, first create a text box ("Insert", "Insert Text Box", then left-click and drag the mouse to draw a text box, then switch to an Internet browser, copy a picture or a piece of text, switch to a word-processor, left-click **in** the text box, right-click in the text box, choose "Paste"). When you have elements in a text box, you can easily make them larger or smaller, move them in the page, etc.
- b) changing the position of elements: when you left-click once on a given element (e.g., a picture or a text box), it is highlighted (which you can see by anchors, small boxes in the corners of the picture), and if you want to move it, you just left-click on the object and holding the left button pressed drag the object to the place you want and release the left button
- c) changing the size of elements: to make object bigger or smaller, you also need to highlight it (left-click once on a picture), then click on one of the anchors (small boxes on the corners), hold the left button and drag until your picture is large/small enough, then release the left button
- d) add attractive headlines: in order to make appealing headlines, it is a good idea to use "WordArt" (for MS Word). In order to do that, choose "Insert", then "Picture", then "WordArt". You need to specify the style, type in the text, set the font type and size. After having created a WordArt element, you may change its size, style, its colours and lines, rotate the word or make your text horizontal or vertical.
- e) save the whole document, so that it can be printed again and again, edited, etc.

5. Useful links:

- a) portals: www.yahoo.com, www.altavista.com, www.askjeeves.com, www.lycos.com, www.excite.com, www.webcrawler.com, www.google.com, www.metacrawler.com, www.yahooligans.com, www.lycoszone.com, www.ajkids.com
- b) news: www.onlinenewspapers.com, www.telegraph.co.uk, www.newspapers.com, www.guardian.co.uk, www.bbc.co.uk, www.cbs.com, www.foxnews.com
- c) copyright-free pictures: <http://ww3.bay.k12.fl.us/ctech/WebResources/images.html>, <http://www.wolfenet.com/~gtang/images/noframe.html>,

- <http://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/imagedb/>, <http://uptrans.com/spacepic1.htm>,
<http://members.tripod.com/~darkage/fl1pict.htm>, http://www.thefreesite.com/Free_Graphics/,
<http://pdimages.com/pd/054.html-ssi>, <http://www.london-gb.com/>,
<http://www.peacegallery.wyenet.co.uk/>,
<http://www.mindblown.com/CheapSkate/graphics.htm>,
<http://www.coolfinder.com/free/graphics.htm>,
<http://archive.lis.unt.edu:2000/fall819u/freart.htm>,
- d) sources for statistics: www.britannica.com, www.guinnessrecords.com,
<http://elt.britcoun.org.pl>,
- e) entertainment and sports: www.imdb.com, www.film.com, www.mtv.com, www.nba.com,
www.ioc.org, www.sportsnetwork.com, www.sonicnet.com, www.oscar.com,
www.hollywood.com
- f) politics: www.royal.gov.uk, www.parliament.uk, www.whitehouse.gov,
www.greenpeace.org, www.amnesty.org, www.politicalindex.com
- g) travel: <http://travelsearch.com>, www.visitbritain.com, www.tourism.wales.gov.uk,
www.travelfinders.com, www.londontown.com, www.pti.org.uk
- h) weather: www.weather.com, <http://weather.yahoo.com>
- i) jobs: www.topjobs.com, www.jobsunlimited.co.uk
- j) weddings: www.weddings.co.uk
- k) health: <http://health.yahoo.com>, www.cyberdiet.com,
- l) cooking: www.idontcook.com
- m) humour: www.funny.com, www.humour.com
- n) house: www.homefileuk.co.uk, www.bushells.com,
www.nettrader.co.uk/property/residential, www.estate.de, www.tenant.com,
www.europropertynet.com
- o) clothes: www.gap.com, www.diesel.co.uk
- p) famous people/quotations: www.famous-quotations.com, www.invent.org/book,
www.biography.com
- q) teenagers: www.cyberteens.com, www.ttt.org.il, www.theteenzone.com,
www.teenadvice.com

1. Note: All commands refer to Microsoft Word 97 and Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0. In other applications, the commands might be slightly different.