
Book reviews

ENGLISH FOR UNI

A website developed by Julia Miller, Richard Warner, Fiona Henderson, Kayoko Enomoto, Ben McCann, Wang LiJuan, Anne Harris, and Joseph Miller.

Reviewed by Nicholas Carr

Deakin University

English for Uni is a free website for both teachers and intermediate level students designed to explain and explore the use of difficult grammar, and offer advice on oral presentations and academic writing. The site has been developed by lecturers from the University of Adelaide, Victoria University, Edith Cowan University and Henan University. It provides comprehensive explanations of selected grammatical items that include a variety of options to incorporate practice. As the name English for Uni suggests, explanations are linked to academic purposes whenever possible.

The site offers lessons on: articles, conditionals, passive voice, prepositions, tenses, oral presentations, and essay writing. Other sections of the site include a convenient glossary of terms for learners, and perhaps teachers, who need assistance with the level of metalanguage used in explanations. The site also has a useful websites section which contains a rich list of further self-guided online learning resources, including: dictionaries, pronunciation resources, and time management skills.

Each of the lessons are centred around the adventures of Ms. Parrot (a detective played by Dr. Julia Miller) with other characters such as Bobby Dylan (played by Andrea Duff) making regular appearances. Lessons are introduced via a short video, which often incorporates the witty imitation of a famous TV show. The videos vary in length, ranging from twenty seven minutes for the articles lesson to shorter videos of seven to eight minutes for the lessons on conditionals and essay writing respectively. Each video can be viewed in full, or viewed as separate chapters through a link to YouTube - a handy feature for teachers when using the site's materials in the classroom. All videos, with the exception of the oral presentation lesson, can also be viewed on the Chinese site

Youku. A transcript for each video is available for download (no transcript is available for the oral presentation and articles lesson - however, the articles video has subtitles).

In addition to the grammatical explanations contained in the videos, detailed explanations are provided on the individual lessons webpage. The information and practice exercises for each lesson are available to be downloaded as a word or pdf file. The practice exercises can also be performed online. Regardless of medium, all exercises provide detailed explanations of why an answer is correct - a real advantage for learners navigating the site for self-study. The lessons on articles, passive voice, tenses, and academic writing contain supplementary notes for different languages. The number of languages the notes are provided for varies - with Japanese, Portuguese, Indonesian, French and Chinese learners provided for the lesson on passive voice but only Portuguese in the lesson on articles.

An important feature included with each lesson is the Teacher's Notes. The notes contain teaching ideas and suggested lesson plans for teachers wishing to use the materials in the classroom. With the exception of the oral presentation skills lesson, the Teacher's Notes page of each lesson also have ready to use power point slides. The slides are detailed and can be used in conjunction with the other materials provided for the lesson. The site has a Creative Commons licence, permitting materials to be used worldwide.

English for Uni is easy to use for both teachers and students. Grammatical explanations are very explicit and detailed. The lessons follow a similar pattern throughout, following a 'present - practice' sequence. The developers have gone to great lengths to ensure the language is presented in a reasonably authentic manner throughout. The explanations, while at times very detailed, for example an examination of unaccusative verbs in the passive lesson, remain very useful for learners due to aspects of function and meaning being explained. The practice sections are very much a controlled or restrictive type of practice, usually requiring learners to select a correct answer. Teachers who are looking for freer output for their students will need to add to the resources found in this site. The level of metalanguage and detail of grammatical explanations is quite high at times, and may be off-putting for learners who have low metalinguistic knowledge or are not inclined to participate in such controlled type activities.

Link to site: <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/english-for-uni/>