

What is an Interactive Whiteboard (IWB)?

Schools and teachers are encouraged to keep up with the latest technology and equip their classrooms with Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs). The IWBs are great and powerful tools, and if you know how to use them, they can transform the way you teach and help your students learn more effectively!

Step-by-step video guide to Interactive Whiteboards

Using Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs) is very easy and can really help engage and motivate your students.

There are many different types of activities you can try in your classroom even if you don't have specially designed IWB resources. You don't need much to use the IWB effectively in the classroom. You can use pictures (ask your students to bring some of their own!) or PDFs with worksheets you'd normally print out and distribute in class. You can also use Student's CD-ROMs attached to their course books or Workbooks.

Not sure how to do it? Watch our step-by-step video guide to making the most of your IWB.

Benefits of using Interactive Whiteboards

So why is it good to use IWBs? Here are some benefits of using the new technology in the classroom.

Benefits for the students:

Get students communicating and interacting

Suit a variety of learning styles

Motivate and engage students

Increase attention span and improve focus

Facilitate knowledge retention

Benefits for the teachers:

Reduce preparation time

Give freedom and flexibility in preparing the materials

Reinvigorate teachers who see how their students are enthusiastic and motivated

The possibilities given by the new technology motivate teachers to try out new approaches and inspire them to innovate their teaching

Benefits for classroom interaction:

Help change classroom dynamics

Introduce the fun and games element

Move the classes towards a student-centred approach

Practice makes perfect. Find time to get to know what you can do with the IWB and what it can do for you.

Avoid using white backgrounds. These can produce more glare and reduce students' concentration span.

Think about your classroom position. You don't want to be throwing a shadow on the board or getting the beam in your eyes. Advise your students of this too.

Remember the activities need to be interactive. The English classroom is not a lecture theatre so it shouldn't just be you at the board. Make sure it is interactive for everyone.

Make sure your classroom set-up allows access to the board. If possible move desks so the students are in a horseshoe formation near the board. Try not to have a barrier between the students and the board.

Don't allow the IWB to dominate lessons. Like anything in the classroom you can have too much of a good thing. The focus in a class should change, so try to use it when it will help you and benefit the class.

Don't make IWB material too complicated. If there is too much on the screen, or too many things that can move around, it will be more difficult to maintain the interest of the class.

Think about different learning styles when designing material. IWBs can benefit a variety of different learning styles so make sure there is something for everyone.

Don't make materials too complete. The teacher shouldn't just be a clicker of the mouse; there needs to be room for the teacher to add things, and for the material to be flexible.

Don't let the IWB do all the work. Students need to be able to follow their own thought processes, make additions and mistakes. This will encourage discussion and help the cognitive process.

FAQs and more

The IWB is difficult to use.

Not if you have a basic understanding of using computers. An IWB is just a big computer screen, which reacts to your touch as if it was a computer mouse. It's THAT easy!

It takes a lot of time to prepare the materials.

It may take some time at the beginning when you're still getting used to the IWB, but then you can save and reuse the same materials in other classes. And don't forget you can also use the Internet resources, ready-made materials, and even the CD-ROMs that come with the Student's Books or Workbooks.

When you have IWB materials, you cannot customize them to the needs of individual classes.

The IWB software lets you change and modify the materials a lot, so you can be sure all materials can be somehow utilized in different classes, even at different levels – it's just a question of choosing the right type of activity.

I'm afraid of using the IWB in front of my students. They all know so much about computers and what if something goes wrong?

Students will be quietly proud of themselves for being able to do something in front of the class. It will also build their confidence and make them feel more responsible for what is going on in class.

The IWB is good for teaching young learners, but doesn't seem to work with adults.

The IWB is intuitively appropriate to use with younger learners, because they readily get involved in games and quizzes. With adults you will just have to go for different types of activities and interaction, e.g. using the board for presentations, graphs, maps, etc.

You have to use the IWB all the time. Not at all! Experts say you can use the IWB in every class, but the attention of the teacher and the students should not be focused on it for more than 20 minutes in a lesson. The IWB is definitely one of the most powerful elements of the teaching mix, but it should not become dominant.

It'll be impossible to manage the class - students will just start shouting out the answers.

It is possible that students, particularly the younger ones, can get excited about the new "gadget" in class. You could try to use this initial interest to your advantage: show them different functions of the IWB, play games, get them to interact with the IWB.