

Software Evaluation Guide

Consider these questions before choosing a software program as a tool for your language learning or instruction. Not all of these features will apply to your needs, but this checklist may help you determine how useful your software can be to you.

Based on "A methodological framework for CALL courseware development" by Philip Hubbard, copyright 1992.

- **Your Software's Methodology**
 - **What are the objectives of the software?**
 - **What does the program claim to help learners achieve?** What features does the program offer that will make learning easier (adequate "help" options, clear instructions, helpful feedback, option to correct mistakes)
 - **How does the program help instructors?** Does the software offer exercises that are supplementary to the kinds of things being taught in class already? Does it provide information that the instructor is unable to/lacks time to provide? Does it free up class time for new information by providing extra practice outside class hours?
 - **How easy-to-use is the software?**

Is there an instruction manual? Can the program and lessons be opened quickly and easily? Can the learner move from lesson to lesson easily while saving previous work? Can the learner quit from any point in the program/save previous work? Are program functions self-explanatory or based on a set of rules or instructions?

- **How does the software evaluate the learner's responses?**

Will the learner receive informative feedback for their responses? Does the software judge responses in a way that fits with the learner's/instructor's standards for appropriate feedback? (See Procedure)

- **Your Software's Approach to Language Instruction**
 - **What linguistic assumptions does the software make?** Do the authors base their program on a structural/functional/interactional approach to language?
 - **Does the software approach language learning as different from other types of learning?** Does it take into account internal processes in learning, or observe a distinction between mechanistic and analytical thought processes?
 - **Does the software support a particular method of language teaching (the Direct Approach, the Audio-Lingual Method, the Natural Approach, etc.)?**

- **What platforms is the software available for (MS-DOS, Macintosh, Windows, Windows '95, UNIX, other)?**
- **Your Software's Design**
 - **Does the software offer exercises geared toward or adjustable for any of these learner variables:**

age	field-dependent/-independent reasoning
sex	deductive/inductive reasoning
native language	visual-graphic, visual-textual learning
interests	auditory, kinaesthetic learning
specific learning needs	introverted vs. extroverted learners
tolerance of ambiguity	

- **How do the authors arrange the syllabus of exercises?** Are exercises grouped according to notional/functional purposes or according to related skills and subskills? Are the exercises designed and arranged on a progressing scale of difficulty?
- **Does the program integrate information into the exercises about culture/literature/daily situations that may accompany the language?**
- **Does the program focus on different learning styles in the exercises, such as recognition, recall, comprehension, experiential learning (learning by doing), and constructive understanding (using computer as a tool to discover new information)?**
- **What linguistic levels are the exercises concerned with?** Does the program focus on objective discourse/text, syntax, lexis, morphology, graphology/phonology, or a combination of any of these? Will concentrating on any of these levels improve the learner's understanding, spoken or written skills?
- **Does the program offer exercises that can be worked on by a pair or a group of students as well as an individual?** How well do the exercises lend themselves to class discussion or competition?
- **How does the program keep track of students' scores/make them available to the instructor?** Does it record the number of attempts in addition to the number of correct/incorrect answers? Does it keep track of total time spent on an exercise? Does it calculate students' average scores, chart their progress, etc.?
- **Are color, graphics, or sound necessary or important to the efficiency of the exercises?** Is the program available in a network format? Can the learner save completed exercises while using the program/after quitting the program?

- **Your Software's Procedure**
 - **What types of activities does the software offer?**
Does it provide a range of exercises such as :

games	text construction
quizzes	text reconstruction
simulation	problem solving
tutorial	drill-and-practice
exploratory activities	
 - **Which of these activities will help your learners acquire certain skills and/or suit their interests and needs?**
 - **How does the software present these activities?** For example, text reconstruction can be presented in the form of a cloze, a storyboard, jigsaw reading, etc. What kinds of input are expected from the student (speech, text) and what kind of information do they receive (graphics, audio, text)?
 - **Does the software anticipate learner responses by offering information on commonly -made mistakes, frequent misspellings, etc.?** Does it accept misspelled answers as correct if close to the ideal answer?
 - **Does the software offer a selection of possible correct responses (where appropriate)?** Does the software provide feedback for both correct and incorrect answers? Does it "flag" errors, such as by highlighting a particular part of a response that is incorrect? Does it specify different levels of errors, such as the difference between a syntactic error and an incorrect word choice? Does it allow students to repeat exercises (correct mistakes) indefinitely?
 - **How much control does it allow learners and/or instructors over the content of the lessons?** Is it possible to modify lessons or add customized lessons to the syllabus?

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