

## SIMULATION IN TEACHING BUSINESS WRITING

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**Abstract:** Business simulation and games have been used quite a lot lately because of the superior results produced in contrast to more conventional teaching techniques. Stimulation is most often used in teaching decision-making or managerial skills. Practice in other skills, like oral presentations or written reports, is very much a sideline when students are obsessed with beating their opponents (Evans and Scully, 1984).

**Key-words:** business, simulation, games, vocabulary, writing

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The business stimulation presented in this paper makes use of the competitive atmosphere to arouse motivation and sustain effort towards language practice. But unlike other business games, where several companies compete in a particular industry, this simulation requires business students to form companies in different industries and trades. That is why there is cooperation and interdependence between students as well as drive for perfection among peers.

I will first give the background within which the simulation was done. Then I will describe how the different components and skills of Business English were incorporated in the course. Lastly, I will try to explain why the course can be a success and how such a design can be used in other settings, too.

### 2. BACKGROUND

This simulation was conducted during the second semester course of Business English with a total of 28 hours for students majoring in Financial Accounting Management in the second year of their four-year degree. The students were young adults, mostly fairly fluent in English, in the age range of 19 to 35. There were 20-25 students in one class. Class sessions were held in the morning over a period of 14 weeks.

### 3. METHOD

The students were to learn and practice the different skills in Business Communication in simulated roles. But instead of having a different business setting in each lesson (as is the case with most Business Communication textbooks), the students took up a certain role and stuck up with it until the end of the semester.

Each session was divided into two parts, with the instructor demonstrating certain writing/communication skills followed by the students

practicing the skills in groups. The first part of the lesson, e.g., teaching students how to write formal letters or memos, will not be dealt with in our paper. But the second part, i.e., the simulation itself, which makes the course different from others, will be described in the following paragraphs, together with illustrations from students' work.

### 4. WRITING COMPANY DESCRIPTIONS

*Teacher's input:* a) format and style of annual reports, b) contents and tone of writing, c) linguistic analysis of real-world annual reports.

*Simulation:* Students formed groups of 3-5 members, based on their interest or knowledge of a specific line of business. When they had made a tentative decision, they went to the board and wrote down the nature of their company. Others who might want to pursue the same line of business had to think of something else to do, preferably a company that could do business with the existing ones. Having fixed on a line of business, they decided on the scope of their business and created a history of their imaginary company. They then organized themselves into executive committees of these companies and described the responsibilities required of their posts. (Figure 1 is a sample of this task). Next, they prepared an annual report of the company that they worked for or owned. The reports so prepared were for exhibition in the next lesson.

In the following lesson, students exchanged their annual reports to be read. After that, a representative from each company came to the front of the class to present a brief description of his/her company and to answer questions raised by members of other companies. In this way, everyone in the class knew exactly what kind of business world they were working in.

#### Job Description

Post: Administration Manager

Report to the General Manager

#### Responsibilities

- oversee delivery services, documentation, and invoicing
- responsible for recruitment, human resource management, and succession planning
- formulate and conduct in-house sales training and development programs
- coordinate with all senior executives to maintain a pleasant working atmosphere in the company

Figure 1 Job description

### 5. FIXING AN AGENDA, CHAIRING A MEETING, AND WRITING MINUTES

*Teacher's input:* a) format and content of an agenda, b) qualities of a good chair-person, c) specific language used in conducting meetings, d) style and language used in writing minutes.

*Simulation:* The students in their respective companies proposed a major business venture for the coming year. They then prepared an agenda with three to four items on the preparation, execution, and follow-up of their business venture. They showed their agenda

to the class by using the white board or an overhead projector. Then they held their meeting to discuss in detail the points raised. While one company was having a meeting, members in other companies took up the role of secretaries. In this way, members in a company could participate fully in the discussion without worrying about jotting down notes. After all the meetings have been held, students wrote up the minutes for one company. They usually drew lots to decide who would write the minutes for a specific company. Such an arrangement gave students practice in making

contributions in meetings, in note-taking, and in

practicing the writing of minutes.

## **6. DESIGNING ADVERTISEMENTS AND WRITING BUSINESS LETTERS**

*Teacher's input:* a) style and language of advertisements, b) analysis of real-world advertisements, c) letters of enquiry, d) letters of complaint and adjustment.

*Simulation:* The companies established by the students were either manufacturers of products or providers of services. But so far they had not had much chance to promote their products or services. This session provided an opportunity for them to make advertisements in both oral and written modes.

Students could work in sub-groups, with one or two creating an advertisement for broadcasting over the radio and the others working out an advertisement to go into a newspaper. After some time, the whole company got together and improved on their work. Members from different companies then took turns recording their advertisements on CD while those involved in drawing and writing continued with their work.

In the next session, the advertisements were displayed in the classroom and the recorded CD was played to the whole class three times. Students were required to identify a certain company to write to. They could write letters to enquire about a certain product or to complain about an imaginary fault based on what they saw or heard in the advertisement. That is to say, each student was required to write either a letter of enquiry or a letter of complaint to another company. The teacher could monitor the number of letters received by each company so that there was a fair share for each. These letters were passed on to the recipients without correction by the teacher so as to preserve an element of genuineness. The receivers of the letters then wrote replies and showed them to the students who had written to them to find out whether they were happy with the replies. Then the teacher collected the letters in pairs, i.e., complaint and adjustment letters or enquiry and reply, and gave feedback to individual students.

## **7. WRITING MEMOS AND REPORTS**

*Teacher's input:* a) format and style of memos, b) function, organization, and style of reports.

*Simulation:* To practice writing memos and reports, both a real-world and simulated business contexts were used. The real world used was Constanta Exhibition and Fair Trade Centre. One or two of the exhibitions relevant to the students' field of interest were chosen as targets for visits by the teacher. Students then wrote a memo to their

colleagues asking them to visit the exhibition and report on useful ideas for their own companies. Since students were required to write to each other, all of them visited the exhibition. Having finished their visit, they wrote a report on their findings. After that, they exchanged reports to be read and gave comments to each other.

## **8. EVALUATION**

The above paragraphs describe the major skills that were practiced through simulation. Over the time, I realized that this course had a favorable feedback from students and it is worth trying it. What follows is an account of the factors contributing to the success of such a design.

1. Both instruction and practice were based on the local business setting. Students did not need to learn about a foreign culture in order to understand the tasks given. Such a simulation enabled students to participate fully and, at the same time, to keep their individuality.

2. Students did not need to adjust to a different position each lesson, as they remained in their self-created positions throughout the course. Hence, they could plan and write in the same context and they could devote more attention to the style and language of writing.

3. Students held senior posts that they aspired to. Students created posts in large companies much more senior that they could have had in real world. Since they functioned in the capacity of these posts, they were enthusiastic and eager to prove that they were able to live up to the requirements of the posts. The quality of work done was generally very good, and the satisfaction gained by students was tremendous. As a result, they became more confident in English.

It may seem from the above description that such a design fits working adults best. However, the course has been practiced with undergraduates with no work experience and has proved successful there as well. With some minor adjustments to the design, it provides a challenging situation for the young students to practice their English. The adjustment required lies mainly with the quantity of input from the teacher. With students lacking real-world experience, the teacher has to show them what it is like to work in a business setting. More time is needed for background information, and the course may have to be extended to two semesters. But once students become familiar with the situation, they show the same enthusiasm and ambition for the tasks, because they, too, aspire to top positions in the business world.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTES**

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