

What is a VLE and why use it?: individual activity

Collection: Online teaching

Resource: What are VLE's good for?

Approximate duration

20 - 30 minutes or 1- 2 hours depending on the type of activity chosen.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity you will have been introduced to some of the key concepts and definitions underlying e-learning. Further, you will have had a chance to think about how different e-learning tools could be used with students and the potential successes and pitfalls you might encounter when using them. This exercise may assist you in thinking about the next steps to take in the areas of e-learning you are most interested in developing for your students.

Introduction

It would be useful to document your thoughts and ideas about e-learning from the beginning of your encounter with it. You may like to capture the thoughts you have while doing this exercise by keeping an online record in a blog (try [Blogger](#), [tumblr](#) or [WordPress](#)) or in an online [google doc](#).

The activity

1. To get you thinking about what technology is in relation to learning, how it has or hasn't changed over time, how it impacts on your work as a practitioner and your students' work, how many potential barriers there are to overcome, how it is

supported in your institution etc. it may be useful to watch a videoclip as a warm-up exercise or icebreaker. Here are two that provide a useful start.

- The '[Medieval Help Desk](#)' is a short clip (< 3 minutes) accessible on YouTube or by selecting the embedded clip below:



- or..A longer plenary address (almost 45 minutes) from a recent e-learning conference in the United Kingdom , Martin Bean, Vice Chancellor of the Open University talks about a 'Journey through Innovation' and in it he presents a vision of the potential of technology in education both now and in the future. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJSRkhx4T3k>)



2. After watching these videos consider how our attitude to technology has changed over time...Feather quills, the printing press, the overhead projector have all been new technologies in their day.
 - How does the ever quickening pace of technological change affect us as educators?.
 - How about support? where do you go to find it? Is it sufficient or effective?
 - How do we overcome fears about technology?
3. When you feel ready browse online and find possible answers to the following questions:
 - What do we mean when we say 'e-learning' or 'blended learning' are they the same? How do they differ from 'distance' learning?
 - What is a Virtual Learning Environment (sometimes abbreviated to VLE or LMS)?
 - Find out what kind of VLE is available for staff at your institution to use and what tools/functionality it has?
 - What additional software or hardware is available to academic staff to augment the VLE on your campus? Examples might include:
 - Additional software for creating formative and summative quizzes
 - Podcasting equipment and software
 - Desktop screen capture software (for recording what you do on screen...useful for feedback)
 - Plagiarism detection software/systems
 - Lecture capture software
 - Handheld voting systems
 - Synchronous conferencing /videoconferencing systems
 - Blogs and or wikis

You may find some of the links in the reference section below useful.

4. If you are unsure of any of the above terms then browse through the e-learning [case studies](#) or [projects](#) on the Subject Centre website or search for the terms on the [JISC](#) website.
5. Ask yourself the following questions and jot down some thoughts



- What are VLEs good for?
- How are you using your VLE now?
- How would you like to be using it?
- What don't you like about your VLE?
- What sort of things are you doing with your students?
- What would you like to be doing?
- What do your students think of it?
- What modes of assessment are most commonly used?
- Are you supported in your online efforts? / Where do you get support from?

Examples

In 2005 The English Subject Centre surveyed the community to find out attitudes to and uses of online learning. This document contains some examples of what your colleagues thought were the benefits of [using a Virtual Learning Environment](#).

Links & References

- [Wikipedia](#) has a comprehensive history of the Virtual Learning Environment dating back to 1728.
- [The English Subject Centre's e-learning projects](#) - There are a lot of project reports on the Subject Centre website that mention the benefits of VLEs
- [The English Subject Centre's e-learning case studies](#) - The E-learning Case studies on the Subject Centre website provide a window into innovative teaching practice in English departments across the UK
- [The Duologue project website](#) - A website that explores how BlackBoard was rolled out in the English Department at Durham University
- [Effective Use of Virtual Learning Environments](#) - This very useful infokit from the JISC provides a great deal of information about getting started with VLE's

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework (PSF)

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme



4 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

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- **Core Knowledge 4:** The use of appropriate learning technologies

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>

Resources in the Online teaching Collection

- Online teaching: introduction to the collection
- What are VLE's good for?: resource overview
 - What is a VLE and why use it?: group activity
 - **What is a VLE and why use it?: individual activity (*you are here)**
- The design of online activities in English Studies: resource overview
 - Evaluating online activities in English Studies: group activity
 - Evaluating online activities in English Studies: individual activity
- Designing learning with new media: resource overview
 - Exploring new media and its potential in teaching: group activity
 - Exploring new media and its potential in teaching: individual activity
 - Designing an online activity in English Studies: group activity
 - Designing an online activity in English Studies: individual activity
- Teaching with digital archives: resource overview
 - Teaching with digital archives: group activity
 - Teaching with digital archives: individual activity
- Online discussion in English Studies: resource overview
 - Should online discussion be assessed?: group activity
 - Should online discussion be assessed?: individual activity
- Workshopping online: resource overview
 - Designing an online Creative Writing workshop: group activity
 - Designing an online Creative Writing workshop: individual activity

