



Title:

Dave Sperling's Guide to the Internet's Best Writing Resources

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Bio:

Dave Sperling lives in Los Angeles, California and is the creator of the well-known ESL/EFL website, Dave's ESL Cafe, as well as the author of 'The Internet Guide for English Language Teachers,' 'Dave Sperling's Internet Guide,' and 'Dave Sperling's Internet Activity Workbook.' Dave began his teaching career in Asia in 1985, where he taught several years in Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. After returning to the United States, Dave completed his MA in Applied Linguistics at California State University, Northridge in 1995, and began teaching in their Intensive English ESL Program. He runs Dave's ESL Cafe full-time:

"What I find when I speak to other public school teachers is fear. They are afraid to get involved and try. It sounds strange coming from teachers, but that's the truth. In many cases, however, this fear comes from lack of experience or exposure to the Internet."

-Lynore Carnuccio, Mustang Public School System, Oklahoma

"Wow! They've got the Internet on computers now!"

- Homer Simpson, The Simpsons

I was truly amazed the first time I bought a computer, logged onto the Internet, and sent my very first e-mail message. Within a few hours I was communicating with other human beings throughout the world, logging onto university libraries, conducting research for my graduate studies, and chatting "live" with friends in England, Canada, Japan, and Thailand. A computer can do all this? Wow! It was this excitement and curiosity that motivated me to begin building web pages, resulting in the creation of my website, Dave's ESL Cafe.

Here we are, half way through 2003, and I still run into teachers who are afraid of computers and the Internet. Well, here is a little secret: the Internet is a fun, exciting, and extremely powerful learning tool for you and your students. I made this discovery back in 1995 when I introduced my intermediate writing class to the Internet. What were the results?

- My students found the Internet fun and "cool."
- My students were thrilled to share their creativity with the entire world.
- My students increased their reading and vocabulary in English because they were exploring the World Wide Web and discovering material that interested them.
- My students were writing e-mail messages in English every day.
- My students were meeting and communicating with others from around the world.
- My students were becoming more motivated and excited about learning English.
- My students were coming to my class early!

The Internet is quickly becoming the premier resource for students to practice and improve their writing skills in English. On the World Wide Web students can find numerous high quality websites that include online dictionaries, encyclopedias, and libraries, as well as worksheets and exercises on grammar, punctuation, spelling, and essay writing. Students can even practice what they've learned by communicating in English with people from around the globe. This guide will highlight some of my favorite online writing resources for ESL students. Have fun!

Business Writing

"In the business world, the rearview mirror is always clearer than the windshield."

- Warren Buffett

Bull's Eye Business Writing Tips

<http://www.basic-learning.com/wbwt/tips-index1.htm>

Archive of over 300 tips on how students can improve their business writing skills. It's also possible to sign up to receive their free weekly business writing tips via e-mail.

Business English for Teachers and Learners

<http://www.wfi.fr/volterre/businessenglish.html>

Outstanding resource that focuses on on teaching and learning business English as a foreign or second language.

Business English on the Net

<http://www.wfi.fr/volterre/bizenglish.html>

Linda Thalman's guide on how to improve Business English skills using the Internet.

Business Letter Writing Basics

<http://esl.about.com/library/weekly/aa041399.htm>

Kenneth Beare produced this very useful guide for about.com.

Professional Writing

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/>

From the Purdue University Online Writing Lab, students can find information about various aspects of business, technical, and professional writing.

Dictionaries and Thesauruses

"If a word in the dictionary were misspelled, how would we know?"

- Steven Wright

Language Dictionaries and Translators

<http://www.word2word.com/dictionary.html>

This awesome resource is produced by Word2Word and has links to dozens of language dictionaries and translators ... from Abadani to Zapotec!

Miriam-Webster Online

<http://www.m-w.com/home.htm>

Don't know the meaning of a certain word? Help is on the way with Merriam-Webster Online, a fast and extensive online resource that is based on Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Enter a word or phrase in the search box and you'll quickly get its pronunciation, part of speech, etymology, and definitions. You can also locate its synonyms by clicking on the thesaurus button. This is an extremely potent resource.

OneLook Dictionary Search

<http://www.onelook.com>

Wow, what an amazing resource! If you have a word, idiom, or slang that needs a definition or translation, this resource will quickly search more than 5 million words in more than 900 online dictionaries.

Thesaurus.com

<http://thesaurus.reference.com>

Simple and powerful online thesaurus.

Yourdictionary.com

<http://www.yourdictionary.com>

This is a newly discovered resource for me and I ended up spending several hours here exploring dictionaries in over 280 languages, 100 different language courses, and 50 different glossaries.

E-mail

"Human beings are human beings. They say what they want, don't they? They used to say it across the fence while they were hanging wash. Now they just say it on the Internet."

-Dennis Miller

A Beginner's Guide to Effective Email

<http://www.webfoot.com/advice/email.top.html>

This informative article, written by Kaitlin Duck Sherwood, will teach you the fundamental differences between e-mail and paper-based communication. This is a must read for anyone new to email and the Internet.

E-mail Keypals for Language Fluency

<http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~trobb/keypals.html>

Excellent article by Thomas Robb covering all aspects on how to make e-mail work for you and your students in the language classroom.

EPals Classroom Exchange

<http://www.epals.com>

The Internet is an fine place to make friends from around the world and, of course, to practice your English writing. Over 4.5 million students and teachers are building skills and enhancing learning with ePALS. Established in 1996, ePALS has 79,767 classroom profiles bringing people in 191 countries together as cross-cultural learning partners and friends.

Keypals Club

<http://www.teaching.com/keypals/>

Start a project with another class, or just create a new friendship with someone on the other side of the globe. KeyPals Club is a free educational service from teaching.com.

Students of the World

<http://www.studentsoftheworld.info>

Very good keypal and "snail mail" resource for students, brought to you by Etudiants du Monde, a french non-profit organization.

Encyclopedias

"Wisdom begins in wonder."

-Socrates

Assorted Encyclopedias on the Web

<http://edis.win.tue.nl/encycllop.html>

Columbia Encyclopedia

<http://www.bartleby.com/65/>

Containing nearly 51,000 entries (with six and one-half million words on a huge range of topics), and with more than 80,000 hypertext cross-references, the current Sixth Edition is among the most complete and up-to-date encyclopedias ever produced.

Encyclopedia Britannica

<http://www.britannica.com>

Search the 32-volume Encyclopedia Britannica, Britannica's Student and Concise Encyclopedia, websites, magazine article, and more.

Infoplease

<http://www.infoplease.com>

Combining the contents of an encyclopedia, a dictionary, an atlas and several up-to-the minute almanacs loaded with statistics, facts, and historical records, Infoplease places the resources of an entire reference information center at your fingertips.

MSN Learning and Research

<http://encarta.msn.com>

Comprehensive online encyclopedia powered by Microsoft's Encarta.

Free Web Space

"Looking at the proliferation of personal web pages on the Net, it looks like very soon everyone on earth will have 15 Megabytes of fame."

- MG Siriam

Angelfire

<http://angelfire.lycos.com>

Free web space from Lycos.

Blurty

<http://www.blurty.com>

Free space to create an online journal for all the world to read.

WebSpawner.com

<http://www.webspawner.com>

My 12-year-old son turned me onto this website because he was able to create a very sophisticated website in minutes. Just click on "Create Webpage," fill out the form, and away you go!

Yahoo! Geocities

<http://geocities.yahoo.com>

This has been around for quite a number of years and is still one of the most popular. Free and paid versions are available.

Fun

"To me, growing up digital means having fun while you're learning."

Chris, 8 years old, from the book *Growing up Digital*, by Dan Tapscott

Celebrity Address Emporium

<http://www.springrose.com/celebrity/>

Practice makes perfect, so students can practice their writing by communicating with their favorite singers or movie stars. Celebrity Address Emporium has a listing of thousands of addresses of celebrities from around the world.

Gradpa Tucker's Family Fun: A Time for Rhyme

<http://www.grandpatucker.com/rhyme-time1.html-ssi>

Bob Tucker's fun guide on how to rhyme and create poetry.

Pizzaz! Creative Writing and Storytelling Ideas

<http://www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html>

Created by Leslie Opp-Beckman, PIZZAZ! is dedicated to "providing simple creative writing and oral storytelling activities with copyable (yes, copyable!) handouts for use with students of all ages."

Wacky Web Tales

<http://www.eduplace.com/tales/>

This fun resource from publisher Houghton Mifflin allows students to create funny stories by filling in various parts of speech. Recent stories include The Mummy, The Camping Trip, and The Box. Great for children and adults!

Encyclopedias

Grammar

"I am the Roman Emperor, and am above grammar."

-Emperor Sigismund

Common Errors in English

<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/index.html>

Online version of Paul Brians' book, Common Errors in English Usage.

Grammar When You Need It

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/7583/index.html>

A unique resource developed by David Tillyer, Grammar When You Need It is dedicated to the idea that it's best for student to learn grammar when they need it. Color-coded lessons offer advice to beginning, intermediate, and advanced students.

NetGrammar

<http://busboy.sped.ukans.edu/~allenq/netgrammar/>

Written by an ESL/EFL practitioner, NetGrammar focuses on English grammar through interactive listening, reading and writing activities. 15 online units include a preview, grammar focus, listening, reading writing, and review.

The Online English Grammar

<http://www.edufind.com/english/grammar/>

This is an amazingly comprehensive grammar resource from Anthony Hughes. Not to be missed!

Libraries

"I must say that I find television very educational. The minute somebody turns it on, I go to the library and read a book."

Groucho Marx (1895-1977)

Libraryspot.com

<http://www.libraryspot.com>

LibrarySpot.com is designed to make finding the best topical information on the Internet a quick, easy and enjoyable experience.

Libweb

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Libweb/>

Updated daily at midnight, Libweb lists over 6,600 pages from libraries in over 115 different countries.

Stardots.com

<http://www.stardots.com/index2.shtml>

I just discovered this site and I'm really glad that I did! Stardots.com is a directory of the Web's best resources, from Art to Zoology, and everything between!

Yahoo! Libraries

<http://dir.yahoo.com/Reference/Libraries/>

Awesome collection of links to online libraries from around the world, with topics ranging from art to transportation.

Online Help

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Ask an Expert

<http://www.askanexpert.com>

Ask an Expert is a must for anyone working on a research project because you'll find the Web sites and e-mail addresses of over 300 experts on hundreds of subjects ranging from "Amish to Zoo Keeping." Do you have a question? If so, surf over to Ask an Expert!

ESL Cafe's Help Center

<http://www.eslcafe.com/help>

Need a question quickly answered? Free help is on the way at ESL Cafe's 24 hour ESL Help Center. Hundreds of questions are answered each month from a high quality team of English teachers from around the world. This site was created specifically for English language students.

Online Writing Labs (OWLS)

"Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."

Ben Franklin

The Online Writery

<http://www.missouri.edu/~writery/index2.html>

Located on the campus of the University of Missouri-Columbia, you'll find a considerable collection of online references and search resources, as well as "cybertutors" that will answer your questions and problems about writing. Try joining the discussions at the Writery Cafe, where you can "kick around ideas, dream up projects, commiserate about problems, plot & scheme, goof, theorize, etc."

Paradigm Online Writing Assistant

<http://www.powa.org/>

This is a newly discovered resource for me and truly one of my favorites. Created by Dr. Chuck Guilford from Boise State University, students will find loads of help on what to write, how to organize, revise, edit, compose essays, and how to document sources. This resource is not to be missed!

Purdue Online Writing Lab

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

This was one of the very first 'OWLS' or Online Writing Labs and is still one of the very best. Located at Indiana's Purdue University, you'll find a large collection of Internet search tools, links to some of the best writing resources on the Web, and over 130 instructional sheets that include help with general writing concerns, writing research

papers, citing sources, writing on the job search, professional writing, English as a Second language, parts of speech, sentence construction, punctuation, and spelling. This site will keep you busy for months!

The Write Place Catalogue (LEO)

<http://writing.richmond.edu/writing/wweb.html>

This is a terrific resource from Sharon Cogdill and Judith Kilborn of St. Cloud State University. You can spend hours on their tutorials on Business Writing, Citing Sources in Research Papers, Grammar, The Process of Writing, Punctuation, Research Papers, Sentence Structure, and Style of Writing.

Punctuation

"You know you've been spending too much time on the Internet when every colon appears as a pair of eyes."

- Erik

OWL Handouts: Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar>

Brought to you by Perdue University Online Writing Lab, you'll find handouts and exercises on grammar, pronunciation, and spelling.

Punctuation

<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/punct.html>

Excellent punctuation guide created by Frances Peck from the University of Ottawa.

Yes English Guide to Punctuation

<http://www.yesenglishonline.com/punctuation.htm>

Super tutorial covering the Capital letter, Full stop (period), Ellipsis, Semicolon, Comma, Colon, Question mark, Exclamation mark, Apostrophe, Quotation marks, Brackets, Dash, and the Hyphen.

Search Tools

"To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism, to steal ideas from many is research."

-Anon.

AlltheWeb

<http://www.alltheweb.com>

This is a new one for me, but I like it a lot because it's extremely fast and comprehensive.

Ask Jeeves

<http://www.ask.com>

A search tool that is actually cool, easy, and fun.

AskJeeves for Kids

<http://www.ajkids.com/>

Great for K-6 students and teachers.

Google

<http://google.com>

What can I say? This is my all time favorite search engine and the one that I use every day.

Don't forget that you can also search for images and news.

Yahoo

<http://yahoo.com>

It's still one of the best after all of these years. This is a terrific place to just explore.

Spelling

"I have a spelling checker

It came with my PC;

It plainly marks four my revue

Mistakes I cannot sea.

I've run this poem threw it,

I'm sure your pleased too no,

Its letter perfect in it's weigh,

My checker tolled me sew."

-Janet Minor

Frequently Misspelled Words

<http://www3.wcu.edu/~mkiser/misspell.html>

This list of the most frequently misspelled words in English was even helpful for me!

Guide to American English Spelling

<http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides/spelling.htm>

This resource from the University of St. Thomas offers strategies on how to improve one's spelling.

How Well Can You Spell?

<http://encarta.msn.com/quiz/quiz.asp?QuizID=36>

Test your spelling skills with a quiz on the most commonly misspelled words in English.

Fun!

Musical Spelling Rules

<http://gardenofpraise.com/spell1.htm>

This unusual resource by Patsy Stevens uses music to help student learn English spelling rules.

* * *

7 Useful Internet Tips from Dave:

1. Don't be afraid of knowing less than your students

Personally, I just can't keep up with all this new technology, and I am constantly learning from my students, my nephews, and now my 12-year-old son!

2. Don't get frustrated

The ride isn't always smooth sailing, so try to keep your cool when things don't go as smoothly as planned.

3. Don't abandon pen and paper

I make my students keep a notebook handy when surfing the Net so they can take notes, jot down new vocabulary, and interesting and useful information.

4. Make it social; not antisocial

When working in the computer lab, I often pair students together or have them work in small groups. This makes the class more communicative, interactive, and fun.

5. Sometimes you've got to get your students away from the computer

Break into groups and discuss what students have learned and discovered from their Internet journey.

6. Don't be afraid to experiment

Remember: what doesn't work for one group may very well work for another.

7. Integrate the Internet into what you're teaching in class

If, for example, you teaching about food, have your students search the Web for recipes.

It's imperative that teachers do not use the Internet as a babysitting tool, but instead as a powerful learning and teaching tool where your students can read, write, explore, and communicate.

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