

COURSEWARE REVIEWS

ELLIS Opens a Doorway to English

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In the past Ellis Island served as the gateway to America for earlier generations of immigrants. Today this tradition continues as ELLIS opens the door through which a new generation of learners is introduced to the English language. ELLIS English Language Learning and Instructional System is an individualized learning system that uses computer technology to integrate video disk, CD-ROM, and computer storage to display and manipulate video, audio, text, and graphic information.

Overview

The Main Activity Menu is the initial screen to appear upon entering ELLIS. Menu options include: Conversations; Conversations with Choices; Practice; Games; Skill Check; and your Performance Status. To begin ELLIS, students must first select

either Conversations or Conversations with Choices in order to load a lesson into memory. The Conversation Menu then appears, giving students the option of selecting from a variety of lesson structures along notional/functional lines. Survival and communication skills are presented from the perspectives of both academic and non-academic language needs. Additional components focus on long-term and short-term aspects of financial management and budgeting. Regardless of the topic or focus, however, all lessons are suitable for the overall purpose of language learning.

Within the Conversation Menu lessons may be selected according to language function. For example, non-academic survival skills include the following lessons: Getting a Driver's License; Shopping at a Convenience Store, and Job Hunting. Each lesson has three to six modules that teach specific skills. They are all acted out within a single skit with the same actors, but from a distinct focus within the lesson. For example, the lesson on Job Hunting includes: Reading want ads in a local newspaper; Calling for information about a job; and Calling to set up a job interview. Each of these modules not only focuses on various language functions (that is "how to do something" in

the target language") but also teaches grammatical structures appropriate to that use. For example, "Calling for information about a job" might provide practice on *yes/no* or *wh*-questions.

Once a scene corresponding to a given objective has been selected from the Conversation Menu, the lesson begins. Each lesson consists of a videotaped sequence of approximately five minutes in duration. After the scene has been completed once, the selected module (subunit) replays itself. Once the module has been repeated, the scene splits, displaying the script on one side and the video action on the other. Here is where ELLIS distinguishes itself from other language-learning software.

Features of Each Lesson

The multimedia features of ELLIS allow the student to focus on any line in the video. By clicking on the line, the single line of dialogue is replayed. Additionally, students can choose to focus on numerous aspects of the material, including script, culture, vocabulary, grammar, video, phrases, translation, and pronunciation. These selections, in turn, allow students to study different components of the lesson from various aspects and in differing degrees of detail. To illustrate, if culture is selected, then words and phrases from the script are highlighted on the screen. These may then be individually accessed providing detailed information.

The video mode replays the scene with full script, phrases, key words, or role play.

Or, if students select pronunciation, then they can concentrate on the pronunciation of vowels or consonants using words from the script in both slower and faster speeds. ELLIS' multimedia approach allows the students to view the target words as pronounced by a man or woman in actual or x-ray sagittal views. Furthermore, they

can record their own voices and compare them to the target items.

Other Features

After a given scene is finished, other activities are also available. Perhaps the most popular aspect of ELLIS is the practice mode wherein students can match their wits against the computer in areas of Vocabulary, Culture, Grammar, or Listening Comprehension. Each practice is linked to a particular scene through the computer's memory and varies with each lesson. Students are given the option of selecting Easy, Medium, or Difficult levels of mastery. In this way the material can be used by a range of language learners.

Each practice takes about 15 minutes and consists of a number of items presented in various fashions: video scenes, multiple choice, matching, true/false, etc.

In addition, students can select Games, which in version 1.0 of ELLIS consists only of Hangman. This, however, is popular among language learners as it focuses only on those vocabulary items associated with the unit in question.

Finally, if students begin ELLIS by entering their student ID numbers, they can then check their individual performance at the end of each lesson or over the course of the entire program. This feature, however, requires a special set-up.

Conclusions

There can be little doubt that the video generation has arrived in the language classroom. Students greet ELLIS with overwhelming approval. Even teachers leery of computer technology find ELLIS both user-friendly and flexible as a classroom supplement.

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ELLIS' strength lies in its individual multimedia approach to language learning. Nonetheless, it is surprisingly successful in a classroom context. Students who are often silent in group or one-on-one settings often come forward to voice their views. It may be that a video context is less threatening than drills, exercises, or tests.

A Student Workbook and Teacher Reference accompany ELLIS. Both are independent of the video material. The Student Handbook can be used by individual students or in paired, group, or class activities. The Teacher Reference is useful for both experienced and inexperienced teachers, offering tips on using the material in class settings or as follow-up to individual sessions.

ELLIS represents the first generation of multimedia software designed to teach English as a foreign/second language. Whether used individually or in class, ELLIS is the cutting edge in current computer technology. Although improvements could be made in some components, future upgrades will undoubtedly improve this already formidable material.

ELLIS provides, without question, an essential tool for the language classroom.

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ELLIS is available from CALI, Inc., 734 E. Utah Valley Drive, Building 1, Suite 200, American Fork, UT 84003, (801) 756-1011, fax (801) 756-1012. The product reviewed here is intended for intermediate/advanced students with 2-4 years of formal language study. ELLIS is designed to raise the student's mastery level to score on the TOEFL at an appropriate level for entrance into a U.S. university, or a workplace equivalent. Programs in the ELLIS family are also available for students at lower levels.

ELLIS technical requirements: IBM compatible computer (386 or higher), Windows 3.1, sound card, CD-ROM drive, videodisc player, overlay board. A DVI version is also available. For the lower-level programs in the ELLIS family, DOS-only, full-motion video versions are available for 80/86 machines with CD-ROM drives and sound cards.

Cost of videodisc version: \$2,995 for first station; \$750 for additional stations.