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What You Can Do with LangLab

Combinations of functions and how you can use them

Basic Functions

LangLab lets students do the following general things in an item, singly or in combination:

- Listen to an “internal” audio clip that can range from something very brief to one fifteen minutes long. “External clips” that a student listens to by clicking the URL button and bringing up a media player can be even longer. (They can stream to avoid delays in loading large files.)
- Record what they say
- Read things, either passages that appear in the text window or text that appears in documents of various kinds brought up by clicking the URL button
- See images, including watching video clips, series of images displayed automatically in a Powerpoint show, etc.
- Type written answers in response boxes.

Combining Functions

A main strength of **LangLab** is that it supports integrated learning of all skills simultaneously, using activities in which an element that teaches one skill reinforces learning of the other skills. Additionally, the lesson/item structure and the flexibility of lessons and items—the fact that lessons can have as many items as desired, and items can be of greatly varying types and lengths—makes it possible for knowledge and mastery of skills to be organized in small, manageable steps. A simpler item that concentrates on one skill or one aspect of language can lead to other items that focus on the same element in conjunction with other skills, often by using several of the basic functions in the same item. It is useful, then, to consider the many different ways in which a teacher can combine functions, and representative purposes that such combinations may serve.

With just the five basic categories of activities, there are ten general ways of using two activities together, ten general ways of using three functions in the same item, five ways of combining four, and, of course, the possibility of using all five together!

Here are the combinations of just two functions, with general ideas for each:

1. *Listening and speaking*
An item can have a student listen and repeat or listen and respond orally.
2. *Listening and reading*
An item can teach vocabulary or other aspects of language by having a student listen to a speaker while reading the text of what the speaker is saying (in the text window or as an external document brought up by the URL button).
3. *Listening and viewing something*
A video clip, of course, involves both, but items can also have a student view pictures or drawings of things while hearing a speaker or speakers talk about them.
4. *Listening and writing*
An item can have an audio clip that not only presents material but also asks a question or questions to which the student is directed to respond by typing an answer in a response box. It can also be a dictation, or an aural discrimination exercise in which the student listens to related sounds and transcribes them (including by use of the phonetic alphabet) or checks checkboxes to indicate which sound was heard.
5. *Speaking and reading*
An item can present text and ask a student simply to read it aloud, recording the reading. It can also ask the student to summarize the text orally, or to respond orally to written questions that follow the text. Or the reading in the item can simply be a series of questions to which the student records oral answers.
6. *Speaking and writing*
An item can ask a student (particularly advanced students) to write something fairly substantial and then read it. Such items are particularly good for helping students prepare for oral presentations they are going to do in class.
7. *Speaking and viewing*
An item can ask a student to look at a picture and describe it, name things in it, record a reaction to something it illustrates, summarize something presented in a video clip, or use illustrations of mouth position or intonation patterns presented in an image for help in saying something.
8. *Viewing and reading*
A passage in the text window that the student reads can be illustrated by a small picture that pops up automatically or by a large image file, video clip, etc. brought up by clicking the URL button. The material presented can range from information on how to pronounce something or vocabulary words to cultural or literary material—say, a scene from a play, with the student reading it and then seeing it performed or viewing stills from a performance, or material dealing with history, art, or architecture, illustrated by paintings, photos, or drawings.
9. *Reading and writing*

An item need not use an audio clip at all. It can simply be a vehicle for presentation of material that might be taken from a textbook (or similar to what would be found in one), with written exercises ranging from simple fill-in-the-blank answers to essay-type answers.

10. *Viewing and writing*

An item can ask a student to view a video, picture, etc., and write a summary, comment on it, describe it, or otherwise use the information in it (as with a map) to write something.

Three functions combined

There are also ten distinct combinations of three functions:

1. *Hear, speak, read*

- For vocabulary, the text window can have a list of vocabulary words and ask the student to listen to a clip that uses them in sentences the student repeats, or that asks the student questions the student must answer, using at least one of the vocabulary words in each response.
- The text window can also present points of grammar, with the audio clip illustrating them and asking students to practice by repeating or in responses that entail grammatical transformations.
- Additionally, the text window can present a literary passage or a text dealing with civilization, with the clip asking questions about it that the student is supposed to answer orally.

2. *Hear, speak, write*

- For practice in distinguishing between closely-related sounds, the clip can ask the student to transcribe something (a passage in the audio clip that uses them), then read it aloud.
- In a literature or civilization course, the clip might also present something (a narrative passage, monologue, scene involving several characters, or other excerpt) and ask questions about it, with answer boxes for the student to type answers as directed to certain questions.

3. *Hear, speak, view*

- An item can use a video clip and, in the internal audio clip, ask questions to which the student records responses.
- It can show a picture or drawing of someone or something (including a series of drawings illustrating an action or process), a map, etc., with the audio clip asking questions about it to which the student records answers.

4. *Hear, read, write*

- Students may listen to a clip of a debate, read questions about the topic, and write answers.

- In a more elementary course, students may hear a conversation in which certain things said illustrate aspects of grammar—with the grammar points possibly presented in the clip also—then do written exercises on those aspects.
- They could also listen to a speaker reading something that uses certain words, then take a Cloze test that uses what was said.

5. *Hear, read, view*

- In a civilization class, students might see a picture or view a video clip of a political figure or celebrity, listen to an internal audio clip that talks about the person, and read in the text window an excerpt from a speech by the person or an interview with the person.
- In a language class, a video clip (or an image with a number of drawings in it) might be used to show objects or actions and teach vocabulary. The internal audio clip could contain listen-and-repeat or listen-and-respond exercises that use the vocabulary, and the text window could contain a passage to read that also uses the vocabulary

6. *Hear, write, view*

- As a test of listening comprehension, an item could display a picture and feature a clip that both talks about what was shown and asks oral questions, directing students to answer in writing.
- In a civilization course, the video clip or picture used might show a prominent figure, a famous place, a custom, etc.

7. *Speak, read, write*

- In an advanced language or civilization class, in which students are asked to write compositions and make oral presentations, an item might present information in a document brought up by the URL button and ask the student to use the information in a short composition written in a large response box in the text window. The item might then ask the student to read aloud and record what the student has written.
- In a more elementary class, the document brought up might contain an explanation of grammar with examples. The text window could then contain written exercises, and the item would ask the student to read aloud and record the exercises to accustom the student to using the structures in speaking.
- In a course that introduces students to literature (and to the vocabulary needed to analyze it), the document could contain a passage from a work being studied and perhaps some discussion of it. The item could direct students to answer questions about the structure and devices used in the passage, of the sort that a teacher might ask in class, with the student again directed to answer in writing, then read aloud and record the responses. The document might also illustrate the meaning and use in exegesis of the critical vocabulary, and the specific questions could involve short excerpts from works in which the student is asked to apply one of the concepts.

8. *Speak, read, view*

- The item could include a link to a video clip that is a scene from a film or play, a sketch of some kind, a news bulletin or extract from a documentary, etc. The text window might contain a short discussion of what the student has viewed or

- questions about it, with the student asked to record a reaction to what was shown, answers to written questions, etc.
- The item might also use a static image of a person or place and use the text window to present information about what is shown in the image or questions a person shown is asking the student. It could then direct the student to do something—e.g., ask the person shown questions, give the person information that the person supposedly needs, answer a question or questions related to a picture shown and the information presented, etc.

9. *Speak, write, view*

As in (7) above, the item could show an image or present information in a video clip and ask the student to write about what was shown, then read aloud and record what was written. The writing exercise could be simply a response to what was shown: for example, an image could show a typical meal or a popular sporting event in another country, with the student directed to describe a typical or favorite meal or a popular sport in the student's own country. Such an item would normally follow items that teach the vocabulary of the semantic domain, so that the student would have the tools to talk about whatever was shown.

10. *Read, write, view*

- A student could view a document that explains grammar points, contains a dialogue in which they are illustrated, etc., and then do written exercises that involve practicing what was taught.
- A student could also view a video clip or image about a topic, read passages dealing with the topic, and type answers to reading-comprehension questions about the passages.
- The item might also teach vocabulary: the image could contain pictures or drawings of things and the words for them, and the item would feature a written exercise with fill-in-the-blank questions for which the vocabulary taught is required.

Items using four functions

If the item combines four functions, there are five possibilities:

1. *Hear, speak, read, write*

- The most obvious case is an item that teaches grammar or vocabulary using both a listen-and-respond audio clip and written exercises.
- An item could also have a link to a streaming radio program about a topic (perhaps an interview with someone), a dialogue or conversation among several people, etc. It could then have the student record comments about what was heard to test understanding as well as speaking ability, and ask the student written questions as well, to which the student types answers.

2. *Hear, speak, read, view*

To teach vocabulary or pronunciation, an item could show a student a video clip or a picture with things labeled, use the text window to present again in written form the words associated with what was shown, then have the student listen and respond to an audio clip that uses the words taught. For pronunciation, the things displayed might have names that involve similar sounds, sounds difficult to pronounce for non-native speakers, etc.

3. *Hear, speak, write, view*

- The student might see a picture that illustrates what a speaker is saying in the video clip. The item then might ask the student to write something about what the speaker has said and to record it.
- Alternatively, for an activity that is basically a dictation, an item could have a video clip of a speaker saying something at a normal speaking pace. The audio clip could then present what the speaker said broken into segments appropriate for a dictation, and could test the student's listening comprehension by having the student repeat each segment. The item would then ask the student to transcribe each segment.

4. *Speak, read, write, view*

- An item might have a video clip of a conversation that the student watches (or an audio clip to which the student listens), with one speaker responding to the other and a number of relatively short utterances by each person. The text window would then display the series of statements by the first person, and ask the student to supply in writing the second speaker's responses to each. Cues might also ask the student to respond in a different way—to supply responses opposite to what the second speaker has said, or that might apply to the student rather than the speaker, for instance. The instructions might then ask the student to read aloud and record the resulting dialogue.
- At a more elementary level, the item might display a document explaining grammar points, have the student do written exercises designed to teach them, and ask the student to record the exercises.

5. *Hear, read, write, view*

For phonetics or intonation patterns, the student could view diagrams showing mouth position or the intonation patterns and hear the sounds or tones in the clip. The text in the text window could discuss how to produce the sounds or intonations (or differences in meaning arising from different tones), and a second section of the clip could feature a speaker using the sounds or intonations and ask the student to write the words uttered.

Specific Suggestions

1. *Enhancing simple listen-and-repeat exercises*

To improve these common exercises in which students repeat words, phrases, or sentences to learn vocabulary, syntactic patterns, tones in tonal languages, or intonation patterns:

- a. For greater realism, have the students first view a video clip of a native speaker saying the words, phrases, or sentences; then have them use the internal audio clip of the item with recording pauses.
 - b. Prepare an image file or a mixed text-image document (to be launched by the URL button) that shows pictures or drawings illustrating the vocabulary words, phrases, or sentences; then have the student use the internal audio clip to listen and repeat. For vocabulary words in a particular semantic domain, it may be possible to use an image file of a drawing illustrating a number of them at the same time; this image file can be a small picture that pops up automatically when students come to the item. Since items can be short and since you can have as many as you want in a lesson, however, you can also have one sentence per item, with a small pop-up picture or drawing illustrating it.
 - c. List the words, phrases, or sentences in the text window, so that the student can read them while listening to the audio clip.
 - d. Create a video clip that illustrates the words, phrases, or sentences, and have the student click on the URL button to view it before using the audio clip.
 - e. Deliver the audio material and have students repeat it at different speeds in, say, three sequential items. In the first, the clip has the words, phrases, or sentences uttered slowly enough so that students have no trouble grasping them. In the second, the same material is presented as it might appear in normal conversation, and in the third, the material is presented as it might be heard in the speech of a fast speaker. It is also useful to have the student repeat more slowly something a speaker says fairly quickly, to demonstrate that the student grasped what was said.
 - f. Follow the initial presentation of the words, phrases, or sentences with a following item that has an extract from a song, poem, play, or film script that uses them, and have the students listen to and repeat this extract.
 - g. For vocabulary, have the student repeat sequences of words or expressions first, in one item; in the next item(s), have students repeat sentences in which the words are used; and in subsequent items, have students repeat sentences (one or two together) in which the word is used, and in which the rest of what is said makes clear and reinforces the meaning of the word. Oral vocabulary work becomes more effective when following items reinforce it with written vocabulary work in the text window, involving Cloze tests and other fill-in-the-blank exercises.
 - h. Poems and songs can easily be broken into individual lines and used in listen-and-repeat exercises; students repeat what they have heard during the recording pause.
2. *Aural comprehension and discrimination*
- a. Have students listen to utterances that contain somewhat similar or related sounds (tones, words, pronunciations of words, verb forms, etc.) and have them check which they heard in checkboxes in the text window.
 - b. For utterances written differently, have students listen and then type the words, utterances, etc. that they heard in fill-in-the-blank boxes.
 - c. Use these aural discrimination items first as a simple list in the audio clip. Then have an audio clip that tests the same items, but woven into a meaningful text of some kind.
 - d. Use listen-and-repeat for related sounds and words, first in isolated words, then in short sentences using them.

- e. Make a document with the correct answers available to the student by having it brought up when the student clicks on the URL button.
- f. In the case of sounds, reinforce the distinction with a video clip presenting the sounds and showing mouth movement, including as a cutaway diagram.
- g. In the case of tones, link to the item a diagram showing words and symbols illustrating the proper tones. (The same idea works for teaching intonation patterns and stress in non-tonal languages.)

3. *Simple structured responses*

- a. Combine documents explaining grammar with listen-and-respond and written exercises to teach grammatical transformations, with the student following a model of such a transformation. The transformation can involve any element of grammar relevant to the language in question: singular-plural, person, tense, change of case, combination of sentences by use of relative clauses, etc.
- b. Use listen-and-respond to teach vocabulary by asking a series of simple questions in the audio clip that essentially involve a definition of the word, then furnishing the vocabulary words required for the responses, and having the student use them in simple sentences. The vocabulary words can also be listed in the text window and the concepts reinforced through an image file that illustrates each word.
 - i. In the next step, there can be a series of questions that involve a word that isn't the right one—e.g., “Is the sky green?”—and to which the student has to respond by using the appropriate word (“The sky is blue”).
 - ii. The activity can also ask the student to rephrase as questions statements heard in the clip.
 - iii. Additionally, the clip can contain statements that involve definitions of words, with the student required to respond in a sentence that uses the corresponding word.
 - iv. An audio clip can require a student to agree with a statement and use a synonym, or to contradict a statement and use an antonym.
 - v. The above suggestions are more effective when used in an integrated approach to vocabulary, with oral practice reinforced by written practice involving fill-in-the-blanks tests, including Cloze tests.
- c. After students listen to a series of sentences designed to teach vocabulary and syntax, the audio clip can contain a series of questions for which those sentences represent plausible responses. This exercise works best when the questions and sentences relate to the same general subject and might occur together in the context of a conversation. The oral practice can be reinforced by parallel written questions and responses. For greater realism, it is useful to have an initial video clip showing a speaker asking all of the questions; the student would listen to the audio clip and respond afterward viewing the video clip. One variant of this activity concentrates on teaching a repertory of common expressions appropriate for particular social situations, furnishing in the clip a statement that defines the situation and a clue (image clues are also useful) that specifies the desired response, and having the student come up with the appropriate response.

- d. A good way to teach a combination of reading and oral skills is to have students take one part in a dialogue (including interviews), sketch, or scene from a film or play, and record what the character says during recording pauses of a clip in which the rest contains what other characters say. The script can be supplied in the text window or as a document that pops up in a browser. The whole scene can be presented in a video clip in one item, and the following item would then call for this role-playing activity. Short quiet sections of the clip that are not true recording pauses can precede each recording pause and give the student enough time to scan the lines and prepare to speak during the actual recording pause.
- e. Similarly, as a modification of activities that involve simple repetition of lines in songs, poems, etc., an item can have a student hear one line and respond by supplying the next one, again with the text available.

4. *Recording without an initial audio clip*

- a. To test vocabulary, an item can show a numbered series of things in a picture and have the student name them.
 - i. In addition to asking the student to record the words for the things shown, the item can ask the student to write them in response boxes.
 - ii. One variant of the above is to make the activity a memory game as well: the item can have a video clip or Powerpoint show associated with it, in which pictures or drawings of things are displayed in sequence, and the item asks the student to recall and name as many as possible.
- b. Phonetic work often simply asks a student to read material, which can focus on such matters as discrimination between related sounds, sounds particularly difficult for a non-native speaker, etc. An item can enhance these exercises with pictures of the things that involve related sounds, with a video clip of a native speaker delivering the material, and with written exercises that test the ability to discriminate between the related sounds.
- c. Material read may also focus on other aspects of language: it may be a list of sentences illustrating grammar and syntax, or it may be a passage about a particular topic (a newspaper story or news bulletin, say), designed to illustrate use of the vocabulary associated with the topic in context. It is possible to precede this exercise with a video clip of a speaker uttering the sentence, a video clip or documents related to the vocabulary taught, etc.
- d. Items can have more advanced students record whole poems, songs, jokes, etc. An item can include a choice of material in a document brought up by the URL button, with the student then selecting one example and recording it.

5. *Unstructured responses*

Recorded responses for more advanced students can call for them to talk about almost anything, and the focus of the activity can range from unstructured use of vocabulary related to a semantic domain or topic (e.g., adjectives and other vocabulary of moral characteristics elicited by a question like, “Describe your ideal friend”) to preparation for discussions of literary works or topics in civilization in class. An item can ask questions direct students to respond in the audio clip or can

do so in the written instructions in the text window. It is often useful to provide some sort of stimulus, like the following ones:

- a. An image of a person, a thing, or a scene that the student is asked to describe. An external video or audio clip can present material that makes the exercise more realistic: e.g., for a person, the student hears the person speaking, and perhaps describing himself or herself, so that the student can compare his or her description to that given by the person.
- b. A map, with the student asked to explain how to get from one place to another. An external audio clip might have someone who hails the student and asks directions, along with providing some background explaining why the directions are needed.
- c. An image of a series of things a student might like to have, with the question asking the student to choose one and explain the choice.
- d. A restaurant menu, with the student asked to compose a meal and explain the choices. A video clip could show a restaurant scene, with voices of other diners ordering meals.
- e. A video clip of a scene from a movie or play, with the student asked to summarize what happened orally (and perhaps in writing also).
- f. A video of a news story on television, with the student asked to record a summary.
- g. A fairly long text, presented either in the text window or as a document brought up by the URL button, with the student asked to provide an oral summary. The item can ask written questions and elicit typed answers as well.
- h. In civilization courses, an article about something, or a longer audio clip dealing with a subject (including radio programs that might have various people expressing views), with the student asked to express opinions, explain the background or relationships involved, or comment on what speakers say.
- i. In literature courses and courses that teach both language and literature, excerpts from works being studied, accompanied by the same kinds of questions (written or oral, in the clip) a teacher might ask a student in class about a literary text or passage, with the student directed to record answers. *LangLab* is a wonderful tool for teaching students the vocabulary they need to talk about literature (rhetorical terms and concepts such as metaphor, metonymy, alliteration, dramatic irony) and getting them to practice the kinds of responses they will need to provide in class discussion and in written answers to essay questions. It is often useful to elicit oral answers to questions students will have to answer later in writing, as a sort of crude “rough draft.”