

Google Street View for Language Learning

a guide for teachers



How to use Google Street View in Language Lessons

The ability to virtually visit real places offers practical and yet immersive ways to carry out real-life tasks. Services such as Google Street View allow language learning activities to focus on more descriptive language, while remaining relevant to the learners' everyday life.

What is it? And how is it normally used?



Google Street View is a service from Google that complements Google Maps and Google Earth. It allows users a street level view of certain cities and towns through the seamless combination of eyelevel photos. Users can now see what a place actually looks like before going there: perhaps to see what kind of neighborhood a house is in or where to actually meet someone in a new location. As such, its uses are varied, yet practical.

The easiest way to access Google Street View is simply via Google Maps. When there are places in the map that are available in Street View, the grey man (top left corner) turns yellow. Drag and drop the yellow man onto the street you would like to

virtually "walk" along.

Why would we be interested?

- **Practical:** Street View is a very practical tool for finding out what a place looks like. It allows us to see what a place really looks like and it is especially useful for tasks that involve visiting places.
- **Explorative and immersive:** the program allows us to virtually explore a location and it therefore offers immersive experiences similar to a 3D virtual world. Of course, 3D virtual worlds are also social spaces, where fellow users can meet each other and this is not the case with Street View.
- **Browser-based:** Google Street View can be accessed through Google Maps and so is available within a browser such as Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox, without the need to download any programs or have any special login. It can also be accessed from within Google Earth.

How can we use it for language learning?

Google Street View is a useful and everyday tool, so it is easily incorporated into real-life activities that offer language learning opportunities.

- I. **Virtual Field Trips:** Students can virtually visit places to see what they look like. As the field trips are online they can be informationally rich experiences. That is to say that students can look up information (in another browser window) while they are virtually visiting a real location. It is also flexible, because the field trip can be paused and restarted throughout (a little difficult on a real life field trip). Students can describe how they relate to a location (would they want to live or work there) or compare different neighborhoods and discuss the relative advantages of each.
- II. **Virtual City Tours:** Students can research a location and give a city tour, acting as a tour guide to others who are new to the area. This can be combined with preparatory tasks to research the location and follow up tasks to document or reflect upon the experience (with recordings, screenshots etc).



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- III. **Combining with Google Maps:** Both the map view and the street view can be used for direction giving activities that are more authentic. Not only can students give directions according to a map (“turn left at the traffic light”), but they can also include visual descriptions (“When you see a building with plants running up the wall...”). This is a much more realistic exercise and one that expands direction giving beyond simple instructions into a more descriptive activity.
- IV. **Combining with real life websites:** Google Street View complements many online resources we already use in real life, such as finding a property, deciding upon a suitable place to meet someone or better understanding directions to a new place. Google Street View can therefore be easily integrated into real life tasks using these conventional websites. For example, students can search for property for rent/sale in a city and then visit the neighborhoods to compare the description with the real-life surroundings. If the teacher selects the properties, a matching exercise can be arranged where the student relates the description to the price to the address and to the images in Street View.

Pedagogies for Google Street View

- **Dogme:** as with the immersive experiences in 3D virtual worlds, Google Street View can be used as a stimulus to conversation. The focus can be on how students feel and react to the location: would you like to live here? What would it be like to live next door to this construction site? What kind of person probably works here?
- **Task-based Learning:** Google Street View is extremely practical for everyday use and so it naturally lends itself to a TBL approach. Information gap situations can be created where one student is guiding another (each with separate computers). Street View can also add an immersive component to other tasks.



Practicalities

Visit <http://maps.google.com> to start using Google Street View in your browser. Google Street View does not require any downloads or login if used via the browser.

Visit <http://earth.google.com> to download Google Earth if you would like to use Street View within Google Earth. Users do not need to be signed into their Google account to use Google Street View (either in Google Maps or in Google Earth).

Further Information

- Avatar Languages [Blog post about Google Street View in language learning](#).
- YouTube guide explaining [how to use Street View in Google Earth](#).
- Wikipedia has a list of [locations for which Street View is available](#).
- Other services similar to Street View are available for certain locations, such as [Sweden](#), [Austria](#), [China](#), and [Russia](#).

Visit <http://www.avatarlanguages.com/teaching/twitter.php> for multimedia and links.



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