

## Keypal projects

Keypals is the term for pen pals who use email to communicate, and described below is a project between two groups of keypals who are learning English in different countries. Email provides a simple and effective way of putting learners in touch with other learners of the same age and level in other parts of the world. Learners can talk about their experiences of learning English, and, of course, email is the perfect medium for cross-cultural communication. Keypal projects should be started in class but thereafter could combine a mixture of in-class and out-of-class work.

<b>Keypal project: Learners around the world</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	learning English, other countries and cultures
<b>Aim</b>	to find out about another country and what it's like learning English there
<b>Learners</b>	young learners (aged 12+) and adult learners, elementary level and higher
<b>Suggested time frame</b>	5 lessons of 1 hour each
<b>Procedure</b>	
<b>Before starting the project</b>	<b>a</b> Contact a teacher in another country with a similar class via email. The easiest way to find another teacher is via an online professional development group. (See Chapter 11 for more information about making contact with other teachers.)
	<b>b</b> Exchange detailed information about your classes – number of learners, level of English, interests and ages.
	<b>c</b> Decide exactly how you will pair up your learners with the other teacher's learners. Who will work with whom?
	<b>d</b> Decide whether pairs will be using their own email accounts, or one main class email account – for example the teacher's email. This latter option works well for the single computer classroom.
	<b>e</b> Decide on a time frame. When exactly will the first email be sent? When will a reply email be sent? For this project, you will need five one-hour classes.
	<b>f</b> Compile a short list of websites which contain the information that your learners will need to complete the pre-project work below.
<b>Lesson 1</b>	<b>a</b> <b>Pairwork using the Internet.</b> Tell your learners that they will be contacting learners in another country. First, they will need to find out some basic information about that country.
	<b>b</b> As a class, brainstorm what learners already know about the country, and put it on the board.
	<b>c</b> Divide the class into small groups so that each group has access to a computer.

	<p><b>d</b> Give each group a topic to research (e.g. geography, typical food, languages, tourist attractions), and provide each group with a website address where they can find this information. Give them a time limit (e.g. 10 minutes) to find out as much as they can.</p> <p><b>e</b> Regroup the learners to share what they have found out. Now each of these groups needs to write two or three more questions that they would like to ask someone who lives in the other country.</p>
<b>Lesson 2</b>	<p><b>a Writing an introductory email.</b> Tell your learners the name of the keypal they will be sending their email to. Learners (individually or in pairs) compose an email to this keypal, including the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introduce yourself (name, age, gender, interests).</li> <li>• describe what it's like living in your country.</li> <li>• describe what it's like learning English in your country (number of hours per week, types of activities, what you like/don't like about your English classes, how much English is present – or not – outside the classroom, e.g. subtitled films, TV, magazines).</li> <li>• include the questions from the pre-project phase above.</li> </ul> <p>As this email is a first draft, it can be done either on paper, or more effectively in a word processing program.</p>
	<p><b>b Checking and revising the emails.</b> Learners now exchange their draft email with another student in the same class for checking. As the email will be sent to another country and to someone they don't yet know, learners are usually very keen for their email to be as 'correct' as possible.</p>
	<p><b>c</b> Learners give feedback to each other on their emails.</p>
	<p><b>d</b> Learners correct/revise their email until they are satisfied that it is ready to be sent.</p>
	<p><b>e</b> Learners send the email to their keypal.</p> <p>Note: It is important that you have previously agreed a timeframe with the other teacher in the project. Learners should receive an introductory email from their keypal in time for the next class.</p>
<b>Lesson 3</b>	<p><b>a</b> Learners receive and read their emails.</p>
	<p><b>b</b> Learners write a short reply thanking their keypal, and answering the questions in the email. Again, learners spend time in class checking and revising their emails before sending.</p>
<b>Lesson 4</b>	<p><b>a</b> Learners receive and read their second emails.</p>
	<p><b>b</b> In small groups, they need to prepare a poster or presentation describing what they have learnt about the other country. They need to include two main sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what they have learnt about the country itself.</li> <li>• what they have learnt about learning English in that country.</li> </ul> <p>Give learners class time to prepare their poster/presentation. You may want to allow them to download photos from the Internet sites in the pre-project phase to decorate their posters. Allow them some rehearsal time.</p>
<b>Lesson 5</b>	<p><b>a</b> Learners in their small groups now present their poster/findings to the class. If you have very large classes, you could divide the learners into two large groups, so that you have two presentations happening simultaneously.</p>
	<p><b>b</b> At the end of all the presentations, you could have the class vote 'prizes' for whose presentation was the most:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• full of facts.</li> <li>• visually attractive.</li> <li>• amusingly presented.</li> <li>• well researched.</li> </ul> <p>Make sure that there is a prize category for all of the presentations.</p>

<b>Suggested follow-up activities</b>	<b>a</b> Information on what learners have found out about the other country can be presented using other ICT tools such as a blog, a wiki or a podcast, and shared with the keypals. The initial email contact established by a keypal project such as this also provides a good base on which to build more complex follow-up projects using tools such as blogs and wikis.
	<b>b</b> A ‘culture box’ of real objects can be posted to the partner class, and might include audio tapes of favourite English songs, advertising from magazines, food labels containing English and photos of the group. This simply makes the partner groups more ‘real’ to each other.

### *Keypal projects issues*

Here is a checklist of things to bear in mind when planning a keypal project. Some points have already been mentioned.

- Ensure that you agree on clear deadlines and time frames with your partner teacher for emails to arrive, and stick to these. There is nothing more demotivating for learners than to put in the effort of writing emails, and to then get no response, or a slow response.
- Negotiate groupings with your partner teacher, and decide whether emails will be written by individuals in one class to individuals in the other class, in pairs or in groups, or even as a whole class (good for very low levels).
- Decide which languages will be used in emails, depending on who the learners involved are. For example, if both classes are learning English as a foreign language, with one class in Chile, and the other in Germany, English will be used for all of the emails. If one class is native speaker, then it’s worth trying to pair up the languages – for example, a group of English-speaking learners in the UK studying German with a group of German-speaking learners in Germany studying English. In this way, half of each email can be written in one language (German) and half in the other (English), with learners writing partly in their mother tongue and partly in the target language, which can feel less threatening. This kind of exchange is easiest to set up at secondary school level.
- Ensure that all learners have the basic emailing skills and knowledge of email netiquette outlined earlier in this chapter.
- Keep the keypal project short and focused. The keypal project outlined above runs over five classes. Ensure that your learners know how long the project is to last, and when it will be finished by – don’t let things drag on. Focus is provided by having clear tasks for each email, as in the outline above. Don’t expect learners to simply write an email to a stranger without any guidance as to content or language.
- Discuss with your partner teacher to what extent there will be teacher involvement. Will the teacher vet and approve each email, and to what extent will accuracy and ‘correct’ language be an issue? This also needs to be made clear

to learners, especially if their emails are to be used in any sort of assessment procedures.

- Discuss with your learners the issue of possible misunderstandings across cultures. For example, do emails come across as too direct or blunt? Do they sound rude? If so, what might cause this, and what writing conventions do we need to use in English to avoid this? Responding to email using the reader's first name, for example, and signing off in a friendly fashion, is important. Again, this relates to the area of netiquette.
- In terms of general email etiquette in email projects, it is worth reminding learners that it is always a good idea to remain polite, and to not respond to aggressive or insulting emails – although this is unlikely to be a problem if a keypal project is set up well, and monitored. However, misunderstandings can and do arise in email communication, especially when a second language is being used between two different cultural groups, so it is well worth making your students aware of the dangers.