

Teaching speaking online: What every ESL teacher needs to know

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Teaching speaking online: What every ESL teacher needs to know		
Author:	Pamela H.S. Bogart (2020)	
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Pamela Bogart's E-book, *Teaching Speaking Online: What Every ESL Teacher Needs to Know* (2020), provides useful tools, apps, and websites for teachers who are planning to teach an ESL/EFL speaking course asynchronously online. Drawing on Young (2018), Bogart argues that although the asynchronous environment may make it harder to replicate all the possibilities afforded by a synchronous teaching mode, teachers can nonetheless create opportunities for their students to practice fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Therefore, different strategies and resources to practice this particular subset of skills are emphasized throughout this book. At the same time, Bogart has dedicated one section of the book to synchronous or live online teaching, describing activities that lend themselves equally well to synchronous modes of teaching. The author's direct presentation of practical ideas in this book will greatly benefit both novice and experienced EFL/ESL professionals seeking to learn more about how to teach speaking online.

Teaching Speaking Online is divided into seven chapters, with each of the first six chapters being pragmatically organized around a major question of interest to teachers. At the end of each chapter, after discussing the proposed question in great detail and anticipating possible hurdles when implementing them, Bogart revisits the same question in light of three fictional teaching scenarios that represent three major sectors of English language education in the United States, namely: college/university, K-12, and adult/workforce education, to illustrate how the strategies outlined in the book could apply in real life. In organizing her book's chapters in this way, Bogart cleverly makes the book more

approachable and relatable to instructors everywhere, rather than confining it to a restricted audience, such as that of a college or a language institute. As an unexpected bonus, at the end of each chapter is a reflection section that invites the reader to think deeply through a series of thought-provoking questions.

In Chapter One, Bogart explains how teacher-student rapport – a prerequisite to effective speaking classes – can be established in the online setting through the use of teacher-created videos coupled with rapport-building strategies that work in face-to-face classes and that can be easily transferred to the online environment. Bogart doubles down on the importance of building teacher presence in online classes, especially if the course is to be taught fully asynchronously.

Chapters Two and Three address how to teach speaking and pronunciation online and are chock-full of the kind of practical suggestions and ideas suitable not only for instructional use, but also for assessment. Some of the ideas might entail some planning beforehand, such as in the activity titled *Creating a Scene*, which requires students to use turn-taking strategies in conversation. This type of activity requires students to grasp the concept of turn taking first. Other activities immediately translate into easy-to-administer activities, such as getting students to create a vlog and interact with their peers. Throughout this chapter, Bogart provides practical examples of media-based activities that can be used for individual tasks and for asynchronous group collaborations alike. Especially noteworthy is Bogart's concern with the sociocultural implication of equating pronunciation with accent reduction.

Chapters Four and Five are extremely relevant to teachers preparing to transition to synchronous instruction mediated by web conferencing tools such as Zoom. Several tips are given in this chapter to ensure that teachers make the most of technology. In Chapter Five, Bogart invites a candid discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of transitioning to an online setting and raises an interesting point that many teachers need to be prepared to experience a paradigmatic shift in their conception of what teaching entails. In particular, those who rely on much of their own charisma to lead a face-to-face class may find themselves needing a little more time to adjust to a more student-centered approach.

In Chapter Six, Bogart explains that no teacher should ever feel lost or anxious when teaching online classes even if they have limited experience in that realm. With so many professionals in our ESL/EFL field transitioning to the virtual environment, teachers can undoubtedly tap into resources freely shared by a vast community of like-minded teachers. Bogart has a valid and reassuring argument. Nevertheless, considering that a Google search of resources and communities of practice can often be overwhelming, the author has done a very good job at sifting through online resources, providing a long list of invaluable media and platforms, including blogs, podcasts, and video channels, to nudge the novice in the right direction. Equally important is the explicit caveat that these resources are here now, but they may not be tomorrow. However, the selection is largely based on websites, applications, online journals, etc. that have been around for quite some time and are unlikely to vanish at any time soon.

The final chapter (Chapter Seven) wraps up the conversation on asynchronous classes. Preparation, Bogart says, is not only key, but it is also time-consuming. What's more, continuous tweaks must be made if the course is to maintain its relevance semester after semester. Teachers also need to ensure that they are continuously chiming in, fostering discussions, and moving conversations forward. That said, if these steps are diligently

taken, students will become increasingly interested in the content being discussed and will naturally engage with one another.

Overall, the major strength of Bogart's *Teaching Speaking Online: What Every ESL Teacher Needs to Know* is its straightforward, what-to-teach-on-Monday approach to writing coupled with the thoroughness with which she addresses the question posed at the very beginning of each chapter. Furthermore, her well-thought-out suggestions on how to practice speaking skills with ESL/EFL students asynchronously are helpful to the novice and the expert alike.

While the author did include a wealth of resources and suggestions for the asynchronous environment, *Teaching Speaking Online* does not address live online teaching with the same depth. The explosion in live online teaching over the past year due to Covid-19 has shown that many of us will continue to rely on synchronous modes of teaching, not only because both modes can coexist side by side, but also because there is market demand for live classes. Considering how ubiquitous live online classes have become, a comparison of the many web conferencing applications available in the market today (e.g. Zoom vs. Google Meet vs. Whereby vs. MS Teams) would have brought an invaluable discussion to the table.

To sum up, *Teaching Speaking Online* encourages both novice and well-seasoned teachers to make the transition to the online environment, providing sound advice on the issues that affect them, especially those whose backgrounds may not include any training on how to integrate technology in their EFL/ESL classrooms. Its useful ideas for asynchronous classes will ensure that it stays on the top of your pile of practical books for a long time.

Reference

Young, E. H. (2018). *Promoting second language learning through oral asynchronous computer-mediated communication* (Publication No. 7051) [Doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University]. BYU Scholars Archive. <http://hdl.lib.byu.edu/1877/etd10528>

Reviewed by

Marcio Rubens Soares Gomes
University of Central Florida, USA
<marciorubens.soaresgomes@ucf.edu>

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