Website # 1: Using English for Academic Purposes
http://www.uefap.co.uk/

In my search for ESL websites that would be useful for a teacher teaching a high school population at varying levels, one of the first ones that seemed worth taking a look at was the Using English for Academic Purposes website. Though the site seemed to be directed toward the student, as a teacher, I would not directly recommend it to my students as a resource.

I do however think that in the hands of the teacher, this site could potentially be a powerful tool. This is because it specifically addresses the reading, writing, listening, and speaking study skills Intermediate and Advanced students will have to use in their ESL classes and eventually in mainstream classes. The website has one link (“Materials”) that contains lists of readings on all four of these areas, as well as separate links dedicated especially delineating what effective reading, writing, listening, and speaking is and why it’s necessary.

In addition to explaining the reasons why the student needs effective reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, each of the reading, writing, listening, and speaking links on the UEFAP site include strategies for achieving success in these academic areas. Another positive highlight of this website is a comprehensive checklist that prompts students to assess themselves in all four proficiency areas. This helps students to become aware of their academic needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

One problem with the site that I immediately noticed was the “Exercises” links on the corresponding “Reading”, “Speaking”, and “Vocabulary” links. When clicked, they did not bring up any type of exercises. Instead of being under the advertised links, the exercises were actually found at the end of each lesson. Also, as I previously mentioned, although the site was probably intended for highly motivated students who would read through all the material and look up the references by themselves, the quantity of reading expected of the student did not seem practical or likely to me, especially since one of the areas the site addressed was the bettering of reading skills. The site seemed better suited as a tool in the hands of a teacher who could implement the teaching of these skills into lessons and guide and prompt the students along in learning the skills.
**How does the site apply to learners?**

The material on this site would be most appropriate for middle or high school learners who are at an Intermediate to Advanced level of English proficiency. However, the site itself is a little intimidating in terms of layout and text, so it doesn’t seem too well suited for a student to go through without first having the concepts introduced in the classroom.

In terms of learning styles or multiple intelligences, the website leaves addressing these differences up to the teacher’s instruction and presentation of the material, but if the material were presented as-is, it would probably appeal to the Intrapersonal and Logical intelligences and the Sensory/sequential and Orientation-to-closure learning styles.

**Is the site content-based?**

Although the UEFAP site does not address the four essential proficiency skills in specific content areas, a general teaching of the skills presented on the site could be implemented into any content-area classroom, with good results, since good academic skills are necessary for performing well in content areas.

**Methods represented**

Since this site is providing students with learning strategies to be used in the content-based class and its intent is to develop academic language skill in ELL’s, the approach used on this website would be the CALLA Approach (Haley & Austin, p. 44).

**Assessment possibilities**

The exercises\(^2\) provided for each lesson could be used to determine whether or not the student understands and can effectively use the concepts outlined on the UEFAP website, since they were formulated specifically for that purpose.

**Sample pages**

1. [http://www.uefap.co.uk/materials(matfram.htm](http://www.uefap.co.uk/materials(matfram.htm) (click on “Needs”)

2. [http://www.uefap.co.uk/listen(exercise/standex/standex.htm](http://www.uefap.co.uk/listen(exercise/standex/standex.htm)
Unlike the UEFAP website, which was pretty dry and clear-cut, Learn English Central is much more visually appealing and is a rich source of ideas for the teacher accommodating all types of learning styles and multiple intelligences, while trying to make learning interesting. The readings suggested for student learning are extremely engaging and interesting, and the format of the website is self-explanatory and highly interactive. The site offers poems, short stories, and cartoons with jokes that are plays on English words. These are all fun anecdotes best suited for higher level proficiency students, as the reading texts seemed too challenging for a beginning class.

There is also a page devoted to popular songs that students hear on mainstream English-language radio. This page provides lists of vocabulary found in the songs that might be difficult for or even unknown to ELL’s. It also includes the lyrics and post-listening questions. Teachers can browse the list of 25 songs and pick one that may be appropriate for certain terminology or concepts about to be learned. This page provides the framework for some really neat listening/reading activities.

In addition to a wide range of language arts possibilities, Learn English Central also offers links to its history pages, which include archives with historical events from around the globe and links (provided by the New York Times) to historical highlights of the day. There are also science pages, trivia links, and grammar pages as well. All of Learn English Central’s pages, no matter what content-area they are dedicated to, feature reading with an emphasis on vocabulary.

Aside from being a great resource for teacher ideas, this site seemed very student friendly. Most information was presented in smaller chunks, so reading did not look as overwhelming, graphics were much more attractive, and one of the really great things about the layout of the site itself was that I could double-click on any word of any piece of text, and Cambridge Dictionary Online would generate some kind of definition. Because of these learner-friendly features, I would have no trouble recommending this site to students as well.
I saw one problem that, although it would not be major to native speakers, it would be a concern for ELL’s. Since the website is British, the spelling of some of the words was different than that of the American spelling. This would not be a problem, except for the fact that students may pick up on the British orthography, which may cause them problems later in a mainstream class whose teacher prefers the American way of spelling. Another related issue to watch out for is the possibility of unfamiliar British colloquialisms featured in the cartoon jokes.

**How does the site apply to learners?**

One of the things I loved about the Learn English Central site was its cosmopolitan feel. I liked that many of the articles chosen for student study were news that might not otherwise have made it across the Atlantic; but through the website, students in the U.S. now have a chance to read about what’s going on in other English-speaking cultures.

This site’s texts were definitely geared toward the high school crowd, and in their original form, required at the very least, high Intermediate to Advanced proficiency. However, apart from the poetry, the texts and short stories could be adapted to fit lower proficiency level students. Many activities however, such as the one shown in the second sample would work fine for lower proficiency level students.

As far as multiple intelligences or learning styles, this website would appeal to the Visual, Verbal, Musical, Logical, and Intrapersonal intelligences and would work well for those who are Analytical, Sensory, and Intuitive/random learners.

**Is the site content-based?**

This site was very content-based, as it covered topics ranging from language arts, to science, to history. The only areas I did not explicitly see covered were social studies and math.

**Methods represented**

Both the Cognitive-Code Method and Cognitive Anti-Method are employed on the Learn English Central website, since the text materials and subsequent activities presented on the website were made to “promote creative use of language” (Haley & Austin, p. 42) and the wide variety language use on the website increases exposure to the target language and promotes acquiring the language globally (Haley & Austin, p. 40).

**Assessment possibilities**
Activities provided on the webpage could be used as forms of assessment. Also retelling the story, article, or song in question or answering post-reading questions could also be possible ways of assessing the material learned from this webpage.

**Sample pages**

Karin’s ESL Partyland is a teacher/student website that takes the Using English for Academic Purposes webpage a step further. Whereas the UEFAP webpage was more of an explanation of the academic skills necessary for scholastic survival and why and how they needed to be learned, Karin’s ESL Partyland has some great ideas on how the teacher can actually apply these academic skills in an engaging manner.

On the teacher’s version of the site, there are a variety of ideas for introduction of vocabulary and pre and post-reading activities that integrate writing skills as well as critical reading. The teacher pages also provide activity ideas for listening and speaking, grammar, conversation, and ideas about how to integrate video, music, and internet into ESL lessons for a more interactive classroom experience.

In addition to these activity ideas, many of the pages on the teacher’s version of Karin’s ESL Partyland are interspersed with extras such as the Newsweek Lesson Classroom Handout (a reading and discussion handout adaptable to any Newsweek magazine), links to classroom conversation starters, ideas for using authentic text with lower-level ELL’s, and internet worksheets that go hand-in-hand with websites like Dave’s ESL Café and the Discovery Channel Online so that students learn to navigate and use helpful online resources.

The student version of the site offers seven “lessons” with themes ranging from dating and relationships, to food, travel, and music. Each of these lessons contains activities, games, and quizzes based on the themes, opportunities for students to post messages for discussion, and a list of other external links related to the specific topic. However, just as the Learn English Central website was created for both students and teachers, the student page on Karin’s ESL Partyland is a source of some good activities that can be used by teachers as well.

Both the teacher and the student version of Karin’s ESL Partyland have a “Links” page which offers lists of external links for both students and teacher alike. For the students, there are links to pages covering topics such as grammar, idioms, vocabulary, interactive listening, reading online, and preparing for the TOEFL. For the teachers, there are links to pages dedicated to topics such as educational resources,
jokes, movies, music, magazines, reference, and lessons. All of Karin’s links offer the student or teacher multiple possibilities under each category, most of which are worth taking a second look at.

The downside to this great collection of resources and materials is that it is more of a compilation of links to other websites, as opposed to everything being located on one centralized site. As a result, the user has to keep switching between Karin’s ESL Partyland and the other URL’s in order to go back and forth.

**How does the site apply to learners?**

The general feel of the website is that the lessons are for students at a middle school or high school level. Many of the teacher’s activities on Karin’s ESL Partyland are also appropriate for lower levels of proficiency, and most of the activities can be modified to fit all proficiency levels. However, the activities and lessons on the student version of the page would probably be more appropriate for higher levels of proficiency and would probably work best for the student in conjunction with the guidance of a teacher’s instruction, as opposed to the student going through the site alone.

Activities featured on this site would appeal to the Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Musical, Logical, and Verbal intelligences best. They would also go best with the Analytical, Sensory, Sensory/sequential, Orientation-to-closure, or Competition-cooperation learning styles.

**Is the site content-based?**

As mentioned before, the student pages are organized according to cultural content; but the site is not content based, in terms of scholastic content (i.e.: social studies, science, math, language arts). The teacher pages offer general ideas for teaching the four academic skills, and this leaves it up to the teacher to adapt these ideas to the content they are teaching.

**Methods represented**

The exercises and activities suggested on Karin’s ESL Partyland were a combination of the Natural Approach and CALLA Approaches and the Cognitive Code Method, since many of the activities were created to foment communication and involved much listening comprehension (Haley & Austin, p. 51), while at the same time, serving the dual purpose of encouraging creative use of language and honing academic language skills of students (Haley & Austin, p. 42, 44).

**Assessment possibilities**

Most of the activities mentioned on this website could be used as informal assessments in and of
themselves. Other possibilities for assessment could include cloze activities and retelling of text (for the text based activities), as well as hands-on projects.

Sample pages

1 http://www.eslpartyland.com/teachers/reading/prevocab.htm

2 http://www.eslpartyland.com/teachers/reading/authentic.htm
This website is not explicitly an ESL website; however, it is a content-based website and has great material that teachers can integrate into their content-based ESOL classrooms. The website is divided into four main pages: art and culture, literature and language arts, foreign language, and history and social studies, and includes lessons plans for topics in each area. These lesson plans are true lesson plans and not just lesson ideas, unlike the other sites critiqued in this project. The lesson plans from EDSITEment include objectives, activity ideas, assessment ideas, lesson extension ideas, and additional websites related to the topic.

EDSITEment is a website exclusively for teachers. It is not a direct student resource. Each lesson is clearly marked for the grade level it's intended for, so there is no ambiguity as to which lessons should be taught at the high school level. Example of lessons at the high school level include: “Analyzing Poetic Devices”, “African-American Soldiers in World War I”, “Chaucer's Wife of Bath”, and “In Old Pompeii”. And since the EDSITEment website is sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the content and lesson plans found on the site are a nice complement to national standards of learning.

How does the site apply to learners?

Although EDSITEment has conveniently labeled lessons for grade-appropriateness, in the ESOL classroom, some of what is marked as high school material may not match the proficiency level of ESOL students. For example, I would not introduce Beowulf (read by mainstream students in Elizabethan English), even to the Advanced ELL’s. Conversely, some of what is marked as junior high or even elementary level lessons may be appropriate for ELL’s. Lessons such as “Can You Haiku?” (Grades 3-5) may be just the thing for ELL’s still developing their writing skills. And since many ESOL students enter the classroom with little or no background knowledge of this country’s history and government, lessons like “I Do Solemnly Swear” and “Jamestown Changes” (Grades 3-5) help fill in the knowledge gaps between high school ELL’s and their mainstream peers.

On a positive note, many of the lessons, especially those on the art and culture and foreign language pages, include lessons that are both instructive and relevant, while also promoting cultural diversity. These types of lessons are good to integrate into the content-area classroom from time to time, because
not only will the students see things in a broader perspective, they have the chance to have their own culture or country validated in the classroom.

The material and activities on this site would appeal most to the Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Musical, Verbal, and Visual intelligences, as well as those who are Competition/cooperative, Sensory, Analytical, Intuitive/random, Sensory/sequential, and Orientation-to-closure learners.

**Is the site content-based?**

As mentioned previously, the website is content-based in the areas of art and culture, literature and language arts, foreign language, and history and social studies.

**Methods represented**

EDSITEment's lessons and activities were a combination of the Cognitive Code and Cognitive Anti-Methods, since all the lessons presented on the website were content-area, which provides more exposure to the target language, in a variety of uses, while the output demanded by the lessons provided the opportunity for the creative use of language (Haley & Austin, p. 41-42).

**Assessment possibilities**

Fortunately for the teachers, there are assessment activities already included in almost all the lesson plans, but the teacher will probably have to modify some of the suggested assessments to fit students’ proficiency levels since this site was not made specifically for the ESOL classroom. The second sample page shows an example of an assessment provided by the site that would need some modification.

Also, depending on the preferences of the teacher, any number of other assessments apart from the ones suggested on the site can be implemented into the lessons.

**Sample pages**

1. [http://edsitement.neh.fed.us/subject_categories_all.asp](http://edsitement.neh.fed.us/subject_categories_all.asp)

UsingEnglish.com is another wonderful, free online resource for ESOL teachers, although not as comprehensive as Learn English Central or EDSITEment as far as content material. It is primarily a grammar and vocabulary-focused website that offers worksheets and activities at three different proficiency levels: Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. In addition to these activities, the website features a collection of mini-explanations rule usage for English grammar. These are useful in conjunction with many of the worksheets included on the teacher’s page.

Another teacher-friendly feature of the UsingEnglish.com website is the “Analyze a Text” tool. This bonus feature claims to be able to take any text and give statistics about word count, unique words, number of sentences, average words per sentence, lexical density, and the text’s Gunning Fog readability index. On a whim, I took a snippet from a UsingEnglish.com handout and pasted it in the “Analyze a Text” tool. The results can be seen on the second sample page.

UsingEnglish.com also offers a comprehensive alphabetical list of English idioms and their definitions, many of which are not encountered in normal day-to-day interactions; nonetheless, this seemed to be an advantageous tool for explaining less common idioms that may come up in Advanced level texts.

Although UsingEnglish.com is a wonderful source of free worksheets, it did seem to emphasize multiple choice activities too much. It would have been nice to see a little variety in the activities presented, since other types of worksheets can often be used as informal assessments without seeming like assessments, while multiple choice seems more like a quiz, than an activity.

How does the site apply to learners?
UsingEnglish.com is another one of those sites that, like the UEFAP website and Karin's ESL Partyland, offers student resources that, in reality, would be more beneficial to the students if these were accompanied by the teacher’s instruction and not just given to the students to study on their own.
Most likely, the material presented on this site would appeal to the Logical and Verbal intelligences and to Analytical, Sensory/sequential, and Orientation-to-closure learners.

**Is the site content-based?**

No. The focus seems to be on grammatical instruction, not on content-instruction.

**Methodology represented**

Knowledge of grammatical rules is what this site is all about. Listening, speaking, or writing skills are not emphasized at all; so the Grammar Translation Method is the closest approximation of the UsingEnglish.com website’s methodology.

**Assessment possibilities**

There are all kinds of assessment possibilities offered on this website. Although UsingEnglish.com does not have a page that is explicitly for assessment, there is a page for quizzes on numerous grammatical concepts. Because all of the quizzes are multiple choice, I would steer away from giving them as assessments too frequently. Another alternative to assessing students’ comprehension could be the free worksheets provided by the site or asking students to do some type of writing sample that includes use of the rules just learned.

**Sample pages**
