

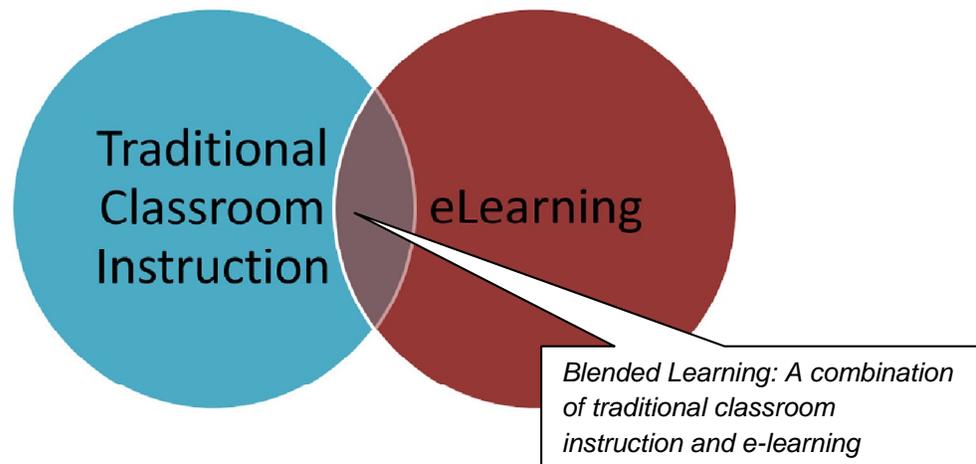


Effective Approaches to Blended Learning for Independent Schools

By Radames Bernath, Vice President, ACT360 Media Ltd.

What is Blended Learning?

A blended learning program uses a combination of e-learning and classroom instruction. Independent schools that teach English as a second language and TOEFL / TOEIC prep are using this learning solution to save time, lower costs, and improve quality of service to students.



Kaplan, one of the world's largest private education providers, sees blended learning as an essential part of its business strategy:

Our Blended Learning approach to instruction stems from the best practices, research, and experience available in the field of education today. We developed our revolutionary approach because we know that children learn best when exposed to different methods and approaches to instruction. We offer a unique blend of personal and online instruction. (Source: www.kaplan.com)

How does blended learning work?

Blended learning is flexible. Students in these programs can learn at their own pace while benefiting from personal instruction in the classroom. ACT360 Media's **TestDEN.com** service makes it easy for large and small schools to integrate custom e-learning solutions into their curriculum.

Case study 1: Online English Placement Tests

Teachers at an independent ESL school were spending a significant amount of time marking tests. The first week of class was particularly chaotic as they finalized schedules, organized school orientation, and administered English placement tests for all incoming students.

In search of a solution, the school's academic director partnered with TestDEN.com to create an online version of the English placement test. The school provided their test content and answer key to the TestDEN team, who authored the content into a custom online test.

The online test includes listening and reading sections and a customized log-in page to access the online test. All pages are branded with the school's logo and colors. After the initial setup, the academic director purchased passwords in blocks of 50 from TestDEN.com. Each incoming student gets a password to access the online test and the school buys additional passwords in blocks, as needed.



New online test saves teachers' time and improves school image

The school saw immediate gains in productivity. Incoming students take the placement test online before they arrive at the school and overseas agents issue it to students before they leave their home country. Teachers see the results as soon as the tests are submitted and they can assign students to the correct class before they even arrive at the school.

The academic director decided to retire the paper exam and use only the online version. Now she is considering other tests and practice materials that can be offered online.

Adopting this blended learning approach gave the school several important advantages:

- Teachers now spend less time grading exams and more time on classroom instruction and higher value student services.
- The school differentiated itself from competitors by projecting a technology-savvy image to its customers by having its overseas agent issue the placement test online.
- Students received a good impression of the school because it was well-organized, with orientation and classes beginning as soon as they arrived.

Case Study 2: TOEFL Test Prep



The same school offers a four-week TOEFL prep course. During the classroom-based course, teachers provide instruction and practice materials to help students improve their TOEFL scores.

Each student is issued a set of paper-based practice materials. Some of these practice sets are submitted for teacher grading and feedback, while others are provided for supplemental use only.

To improve the effectiveness of the TOEFL test prep course, the academic coordinator decided to add online practice tests to the course. She signed up the school for **the TestDEN Academic Partners** program and selected the TOEFL Practice Test option for each student. The program works as follows:

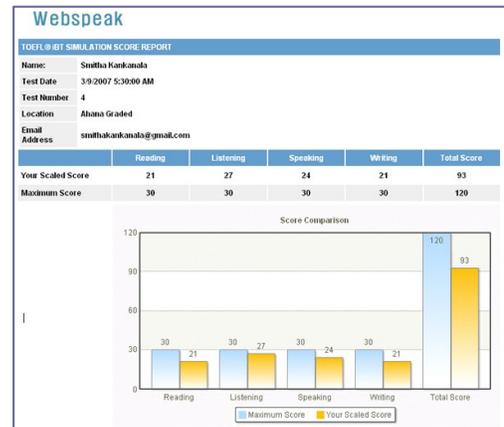
1. Each student is issued a unique password for accessing online course materials.
2. Students log in from a custom login web page that displays the school's logo.
3. Once inside, students have access to four complete TOEFL tests that include listening, reading, speaking, and writing sections.

After-class access to online practice tests

With the new blended learning curriculum, the TOEFL class instructors continue to provide English instruction in person. Students complete online practice tests outside of class hours – freeing up time for additional face-to-face instruction.

Teachers assign one practice test each week and monitor student progress using an administrator login. This allows them to see each student's progress and identify areas to work on. Instructors may also grade student speaking and writing responses.

They are prepared for each student and are able to address highest priority needs. The end result is that each student receives personal attention to achieve skill mastery.



For more information about how TestDEN.com can help your independent school create blended learning programs, visit our website at www.testden.com/partner