

# Learning Link



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## Meeting the Needs of Students with Language-based Learning Disabilities

by Eve Leons, Associate Professor Spanish, Landmark College

Over the past decade, I have delved deeply into the question of what constitutes effective foreign language instruction for students with language-based learning disabilities. In my capacity as a Landmark College Spanish instructor, I have been the lead teacher-researcher in a FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) grant program conducted jointly with the School for International Training, have presented to hundreds of educators, and worked with schools to set up modified classes. Given my unique area of expertise, I have been asked to write about how I use the Sony Virtuoso™/Soloist® digital language lab. I hope that sharing my thinking will give other teachers currently using the lab, or considering using a lab, an idea of how lab activities can improve instruction and meet the needs of all students, not only those with language-based learning disabilities.

I work with students who have a wide range of language-based learning disabilities, and many of my students have also been diagnosed with AD/HD. In general, when I think about the lab, I think of it as a medium for moving language out of the natural spoken realm, where it evaporates into the air before it can be processed to the digital realm where it can be heard clearly over headphones, paired with visual supporting material, slowed, repeated, processed, and practiced and learned. Instruction in World Languages classrooms is often heavily auditory, and for students with difficulty processing auditory information, this type of instruction is problematic. In general, instruction that gives students control over auditory information is much more likely to meet with success. This is how I have used the Sony lab to meet that need.

### Using Songs for Listening Activities

Prior to having a lab, I had all but stopped employing music as an instructional tool for targeted listening practice<sup>1</sup>. My students were challenged with the speed of the content, had difficulty recognizing known material fast enough, and had difficulty identifying where one word stopped and another began. I was

unable to structure the activity to maximize the opportunity for learners' success. With the lab, I can create more levels of support which in turn allow many more students to be successful. A typical listening activity with a song might be structured as follows. I choose a song containing vocabulary familiar to students. I put the song and the lyrics into a folder, which students can access through the Sony Soloist digital comparative recorder and media player. The song and the lyrics are linked so that when the students click on the song the lyrics automatically appear on the screen. The lyrics, with a handful of words removed, will appear in numbered lines. When I had no language lab my option was to play a CD to the class and have the students listen to it as a group. Now the lab gives students control over the content in very critical ways. First, they can listen to the content through headphones which eliminate the background noise of

the classroom. Second, they can tailor the experience to meet their own needs. They are able to quickly determine what they can grasp easily, and what will need more time.

Continued on page 2...



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When they identify a section on which they will need to focus, they can bookmark that section to find it again easily and listen to it as many times as needed. If the speed of the auditory information is still too rapid, they can slow the input down using the Sony Soloist Varispeed<sup>2</sup> tool. While students are working on this assignment, I can either physically or virtually walk around the room, see exactly where students are struggling, and give them additional support. I may suggest the Varispeed tool, give them a letter or two of the word they are listening for, adjust their spelling if it appears to be interfering with comprehension, or say the target word aloud. This kind of targeted practice gives the student more control and gives the instructor more ways to provide focused support to meet a need at the moment that the need arises. Slower students may continue to work on using the song as a structured listening activity, while other students may choose to get a more global understanding of the lyrics by using an on-line dictionary tool such as [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com)<sup>3</sup> or the dictionary in Kurzweil<sup>4</sup>. When available, I will also have students watch a music video of the target song.

## Using Video Clips for Listening Activities

Encoded video can be manipulated as I have described with songs. Students can focus their own listening using the tools in the Soloist software and be supported with guide questions, which focus their listening by telling them at which number on the clip they should start listening for information. As an instructor, I often choose to give students access to video with subtitles in the target language. This type of layered input allows students to hear and see the language simultaneously which provides them with additional opportunities to recognize word breaks, identify known material, work at interpreting cognates, and make educated guesses about meaning, while also seeing the language used in a natural socio-cultural context.

## Structured Spoken Output

Students in my classes typically practice oral communications through a series of dialogs I create for them. The dialogs are designed to give students the experience of using natural language to complete a wide variety of tasks that one would encounter within an everyday context. After working on these dialogs in class, I then record the dialog providing the native speaker lines. The students are responsible for making the conversation complete by speaking their lines. I find that in order to best accommodate the needs of my students, I create two different recordings. I record one in which I

...speak my lines, and pause for what I hope is the appropriate amount of time, and then say my next line. The problem with this type of recording is that what is appropriate for one student still isn't quite right for another. The second way I record is to simply record my lines without large spaces for students to record their lines. When students use the Soloist software to open up this file, which I name as a "right-click record", they will right-click, instead of the traditional left click to insert and record their lines. The benefit of this kind of recording is that students can have as much time as needed for their responses without bumping into the next recorded line.

## Text Chat: Spontaneous Output with Support and Oversight

I have students practice generating spontaneous answers to typical questions using the text chat. In pairs, students text message each other asking and answering questions such as, "What did you do over the break?" or "What did you do last weekend?" As an instructor, I prefer to do this activity as a text chat versus student talking to student, for a number of reasons. On the learner side, it provides students the opportunity to take the communication slightly outside of real time and to think about what they want to say, how they want to say it, and to get support if needed, either from a classmate or from the instructor. On the instructor side, working in chat gives an at-a-glance read on which students are actively working, which are not, and most importantly, if a student is not working, it gives the instructor the opportunity to support the student, in the moment and in the way that will be most beneficial to the student. At the end of a chat session, I will generally work with students to have them look at their written output and have them self correct in areas where they are able.

While the activities I mentioned are by no means the only ones that work well for students with language-based learning disabilities, hopefully the thinking behind how I use the Sony digital language lab will give other teachers ideas about how to best meet the needs of their own students.

Footnotes:

1. When using any songs or music, it is recommended that you follow U.S. Copyright Laws and Fair Use Guidelines for education.
2. Varispeed is a feature built-in to the Sony Soloist Software, enabling you to speed up or slow down audio file playback without affecting pitch.
3. Online French, Italian, and Spanish dictionary.
4. Kurzweil 3000™ Software – [www.kurzweilededu.com](http://www.kurzweilededu.com)

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## Professional Development Coast to Coast

**Having instructional technology tools for language learning is great— having the knowledge and ability to effectively use these tools is vital.**

Language educators from around the country have taken the opportunity to participate in summer technology workshops in Connecticut and Vancouver B.C. Wendy Allerton and Josh Gleason of JWS Educational Technology Consulting led the workshop in CT hosted by Jay Carney and Chip Howe of Chester Technical Services. The west coast session was hosted by Glenn Priest of e-Learning and Teaching Solutions with Sandy Hayward of Language Lab Training and Resource presenting.

The workshop participants worked hands-on with the Sony Virtuoso and Soloist Software and shared ideas and resources that they will use in the new school year.



Workshop attendees get hands-on experience.

A focus on the interactive features of the Sony Virtuoso Software stimulated discussion about providing a comfortable environment for students to develop language skills while keeping instructional control to monitor and assist students collectively or individually. Review of the multimedia authoring tools that are built-in to the Sony Soloist software stimulated ideas for creating lessons with authentic audio/video materials.



Josh Gleason and Wendy Allerton chat with workshop participants.

Most everyone found the workshops to be very beneficial and some teachers are already planning to have the workshop experience on-site at their schools. According to one participant, “All of the material was extremely useful. I especially liked the authoring tools and having a chance to play with the whiteboard and multimedia capabilities.”

## RESOURCE CORNER

### Spanish:

Spanish Grammar Exercises – Colby College by Barbara Kuczun Nelson  
<http://www.colby.edu/~bknelson/exercises/index.html>

### Chinese:

Marjorie Chan's China Links at the Ohio State University  
<http://chinalinks.osu.edu>

### English Second Language:

Activities for ESL Students  
<http://a4esl.org>

### American Sign Language:

Signs For Intelligence, LLC  
Creates fun and easy-to-use fingerspelling curriculum based on real world settings.  
(480) 968-7669  
[info@signsforintelligence.com](mailto:info@signsforintelligence.com)

### School Fund Raising:

cMarket.com – On-Line Auction and Fund Raising (To help fund a new language lab, for example.)  
<http://www.cmarket.com>



Sandy Hayward leading the west coast workshop.

SANS is committed to providing our customers with training and tools to fully understand and apply their Sony and SANS language technology. If you want to know more about our training partners and workshops, please contact us at [info@sansinc.com](mailto:info@sansinc.com).

# Technology on the Move

## Enhancing the Sony Virtuoso and Soloist Language Lab Software

To keep pace with changing teaching and learning styles, SANS continues to enhance the Sony Virtuoso and Soloist Instructional Software. Listening to language teachers, who are the true “practitioners” of our technology, our mission is to take the core language lab technology software to make it work even more efficiently and effectively for language teachers and students. We’ve highlighted some new additions so you can see what we mean.

### More Opportunities for Communication

Language is all about communication. The Virtuoso software offers many new options to communicate individually, in pairs or in groups. In addition to speaking, students are now able to “text chat” in the lab, a communication form that is a part of everyday life for these “digital natives”. With Virtuoso software, the text chats of paired students can be collected and saved, making what is a fun activity for students a great evaluation and assessment tool for the instructor.

Working as a group, when an audio/video file is opened by the instructor for students, the Virtuoso software opens the same file locally at the teacher’s position. In this case, the teacher simultaneously hears and/or sees what the students are hearing and seeing and can determine the “play” and “stop” action of the file. Discussion and collaboration can happen while still keeping everyone in sync.

An ideal tool for independent study assignments focused on developing speaking and listening skills, using their Sony Soloist digital recorders powered by our SANSSpeak™ technology, students can now “call or phone” each other and work in self-selected pairs. The students’ “phone conversations” can be recorded onto separate tracks, making it easy for the teacher to assess each student individually at any time.

### Tools for Assessment and AP® Testing

You may already know that built right into the Sony Soloist Software is a comprehensive set of authoring tools to develop lesson and assessment materials. This toolset includes a Quiz Editor to create tests and other activities with text, audio, video, images or html files. The answers can be setup as multiple choice, true/false, or written responses.

Now these responses can take the form of a “recorded response” from the student providing more flexibility and options for testing students’ comprehension of the material based on their verbal responses.

You all know how important AP testing skill development and practice is. SANS has developed a Virtuoso APT software module specifically for standardized testing including the College Board’s Advanced Placement world language tests. With these modules you get the functionality you need to simply administer the speaking portions of the test, record, and save students’ responses as per the test guidelines. The added bonus is, if you already have Sony Virtuoso Major or Minor versions of our software, you can now run the APT testing module at no additional cost. Again, this is an example of SANS taking our core Sony technology and extending its use for varying applications.

We’ve only touched the tip of the iceberg with what Sony Virtuoso and Soloist Software can do and how it’s continually being enhanced to engage your students and aid in the teaching and learning process. If you are already a Sony Virtuoso/Soloist language lab user and need to get more information on how to implement these new features, please contact your local SANS/Sony salesperson. If you don’t have the Sony digital language lab technology yet but want to know more, please contact us at [sales@sansinc.com](mailto:sales@sansinc.com) or by phone at 877-315-SANS or visit our website at [www.sansinc.com](http://www.sansinc.com).

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