

# Worth a thousand words

**Jason Anderson** puts us in the picture with Google Images.

Some of the most important changes in our teaching over the years can happen without us realising it. I've never thought of myself as a technophile, nor a technophobe – more of a 'techno-so-what' – but I was pleasantly surprised when one day a year ago, another teacher popped into my classroom during the break, saw the range of apps open on the interactive whiteboard (IWB), and said: *'Didn't know you were so much of a techie!'* 'I'm not,' I replied, *'They just make things a lot easier.'*

So it is with *Google Images*. Ever since Russell Stannard's article on using *Google Tools* in *ETp* Issue 98, I've been experimenting more and more with this particular tool, and have found it an essential resource whenever I'm teaching in a tech-enabled class.

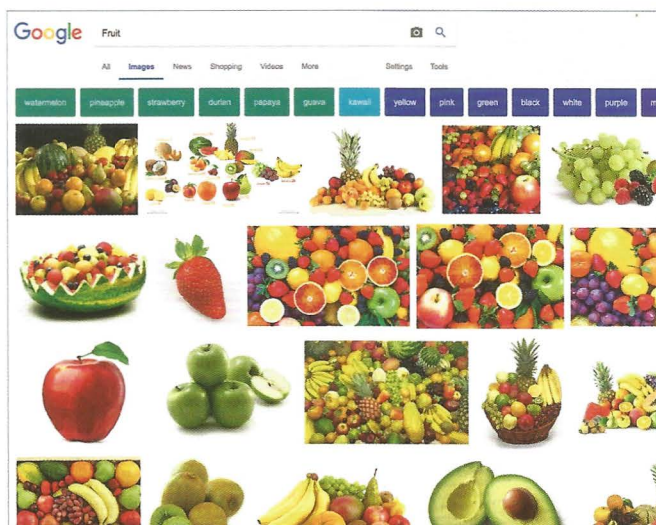
This article will look at a range of ways in which *Google Images* can be used in the ELT classroom. When teaching in the UK, I'm lucky enough to have an IWB and internet access, but even if you just have a data projector or a smaller screen you can share, many of these ideas can still be used.

## Using Google Images in class

Under each section below, I'll start with some simple ideas, in case you're not very tech-savvy, and then scaffold up to more complex ideas for the techies to build on.

But first, some basics. If you can, use the *Google Chrome* browser, as this offers more options, although you can usually do similar things with other browsers. Here, I will describe the procedure for using *Chrome* on a Windows 10 PC. Procedures will also vary on different devices.

*Google Images* can be accessed at: [www.google.com/imaghp](http://www.google.com/imaghp). It's a search engine that looks for images only, including photographs, clipart, etc. It's fast and shows multiple images that meet your search requirements. So if you search for *fruit*, you'll see lots of images showing many different types of fruit. Click on one, and it'll appear larger. You should also see a link to visit the website it comes from (look for a globe icon), related images and



other options. Once you've performed an initial search, just below the search box you'll see an option for 'Settings', where a drop-down menu provides access to 'Search settings' ('SafeSearch', which enables you to avoid adult content, is here) and 'Advanced search', where, under 'usage rights', you can select 'free to use or share'. 'Tools', next to 'Settings', also allows for some of the settings to be accessed directly.

Two things to bear in mind:

- 1 Always check that 'SafeSearch' is on when using the tool in class, to avoid inappropriate images showing up in your search.
- 2 Remember that some of the images are copyright protected, although you can use the 'Advanced search' settings to exclude these.

## 1 Clarifying the meaning of vocabulary

The most obvious use of *Google Images* is also the most common one in my classroom. Most teachers know that you can use the tool to help to clarify the meaning of concrete vocabulary items (eg *cupboard*, *ski* or *haddock*), but perhaps you didn't know that it's also useful when you're trying to explain more abstract ideas. Try searching for *coincidence*, *confusing* or *influence* and then scroll down slowly. What your learners see will help them to understand the concept, with different students finding different images useful. Then there are superordinate categories such as *vehicle*, *profession* and *tool*, or more culturally specific items such as *cottage* and *condo*. By searching and scrolling down through the results, your students can see multiple examples that will help them to understand the parameters of the concept and usage of the term.

More advanced users can try opening two *Google Image* search windows alongside one another to compare two similar concepts, such as *respect* and *admire*. Get the students to describe any differences they notice or, if you share their first language, to guess the translations for the two words, based on the images provided.



## 2 Inspiration for speaking

Both at the start of the lesson and for speaking practice later on, you can use *Google Images* to quickly find pictures to get your students speaking. At the start of a lesson on food, for example, you could search for *food* or *fridge contents*, select one image and enlarge it. This can be done either by using the right-click menu and selecting 'Open image in new tab' (for *Chrome* – this differs on other browsers) or, if you have a keyboard and mouse with a scroll wheel, hold down the CTRL key on the keyboard and roll the scroll wheel to zoom the webpage in and out quickly (this works with most browsers). Tell the students to work in pairs to see how many of the foods they can identify. Or perhaps you want to practise structures such as the present continuous or *there is (somebody) doing (something)*. A creative search such as *people in a park* or *busy café* can bring up images showing a range of different activities that the students can describe. Select the best images and enlarge them for speaking practice.

Before a reading or listening activity, searching for a place name, famous person or interview topic can help to build schemata and pre-teach vocabulary. Get your students to describe what they see and to note down any questions they have. Or display your planned vocabulary items alongside the images and get the students to predict how the words relate to the pictures.

Or how about using it for a 'Guess who' activity – useful in lessons where you want your students to describe features of the face or clothing? Try searching with a random name: *Sarah* or *Ahmed* will do. Then display as many images on the screen as possible (to get a full-screen view, press F11 with most browsers). Student A describes one and Student B has to guess which one is being described; then they swap. You can even select 'faces' in 'Advanced search' (under 'type of image') if only photos of faces are needed.

## 3 Enhancing student feedback

Especially in a large class, it can be difficult to get the students to listen to each other during feedback. For example, when they have been talking in pairs about what they did at the weekend or their favourite film and are reporting back to the class on their discussion, very often, a student will mention something that the others may not know about or understand. Doing a quick search in *Google Images* can provide context and meaning, without interrupting the speaker, and can boost the students' interest, so that they listen to each other more carefully, and understand more. I've even had students stand up and point at things in the image results, which can sometimes extend feedback into impromptu presentations!

## 4 Guessing games

If you search for something and then hide the search box by scrolling down a little, you show a range of images from which the students can often guess your search term. This can be really useful when revising vocabulary. Just get the students to close their eyes or look away from the screen while you do the search. Then they can look back and shout out, write down or whisper to their partner what they think the search

word is. Students can also guess phrasal verbs (try *run out of* or *put off*), collocations (*catch a cold*, *catch fire*, etc) and idioms (*the last straw*) in this way. Often, you can choose just one useful image or cartoon from the search results to elicit your expression.

You can also do this with grammar. After a lesson on superlatives, try searching for *oldest*, *most expensive* or *weakest*, scroll down and get the students to guess what you searched for. Alternatively, try typing a first conditional sentence into the search box, eg *If it rains, I'll cancel the barbecue*, and see if they can guess the whole sentence. Even if they can't, they'll get lots of practice trying!

## 5 Lesson review

Finally, if you've made extensive use of *Google Images* or other aspects of the internet during the lesson, your browser history can provide a very quick, impromptu review of where you've been and what you've covered. The simplest way to review this is to click on the 'back' button (a left arrow located in the top left corner of the browser window) and, for each page, get the students to tell their partner why you went there and what they learnt from it. And if you've closed your browser since the start of the lesson, remember you can access your search history through the browser settings.



One final word of caution: *Google* searches are created by computer algorithms, and sometimes can throw up things that are not very useful, are inappropriate or even offensive. Adults should already know this, but just a quick explanation and disclaimer before you use *Google Images* – 'It's useful, but far from perfect, so apologies if ...' – can help to prepare the students, just in case. And if you're teaching young learners, it's probably better to search in advance of the lesson and have the pages ready on different tabs. Note, too, that the search engine *Bing* has an image search, with a 'strict safe search' setting that is usually safer than *Google's*.

Remember also that trial and error is often the best way to learn to use something, but it's best to make the most of these errors *before* getting to class, so experiment on your own one evening, and see what you can do by playing around with the settings and advanced search features.

Especially for those of us who aren't very good at explaining vocabulary, *Google Images* is a great tool but, as I've hopefully convinced you in this article, it can be so much more besides! ■



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