

Non-native speakers can choose from a vast range of titles on CD-Rom for the learning of English as a Second/Foreign Language (EFL/ESL). Some offer English as the sole target language, others a range of possible languages to study that includes English. In either case, many of these products can be classified (and indeed are marketed) as *courses*. While these vary in terms of the content and activities proposed (especially when it comes to courses devoted to young learners), they present a number of common characteristics that permit some rough generalisations.

Typically, multimedia English language courses are tutorial in nature and are often hierarchically structured into levels, units and lessons of graded difficulty that are designed to be tackled progressively. They are often quite wide-ranging in curriculum coverage and offer a relatively large quantity of study material. A variety of learning activities is usually available, often coupled with support tools like dictionaries, glossaries, grammars, etc. Courses usually provide opportunities to practise listening, reading, speaking and writing skills; grammar is often dealt with explicitly as an area for special study. There is generally a high degree of hypermediality (integration of text, audio, graphics, video) and of interactivity. While some courses adopt a "full-immersion", English-only approach, many others use the user's native tongue in the support language, and in some cases even in the study material itself (especially within support tools).

Taken all together, these characteristics make multimedia English language courses particularly well suited to individual study and self-learning; indeed on the most part they are designed for use without teacher/tutor mediation. In this context, a balance needs to be struck between guided learning and flexibility, so that individual users can harness the program's educational potential to meet their specific learning needs. Accordingly, while most courses present a hierarchical structure of units and lessons designed for progressive study, provision is usually made for choosing an individualised sequence of activities and/or for following individual learning paths. Another way English courses incorporate flexibility is personalisation through adjustment of operational parameters (hiding/displaying text, access to translation, setting severity of voice recognition, etc).

The specific features commonly found in English language courses on CD-Rom are:

- [activities for practising all four communication skills](#)
- [series of multimedia dialogues](#)
- [resources for studying grammar](#)
- [lexical support tools](#)
- [assessment tools](#)
- [student tracking](#)
- [activity sequencing and individual learning paths](#)
- [gateway to Internet learning activities and resources](#)

Activities for practising all four communication skills

Opportunity is usually provided for some degree of practice in all four communication skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Sometimes these activities are grouped within specific sections ostensibly dedicated to an individual skill (ostensibly in that overlap is common). Obviously comprehension activities are ubiquitous, facilitated as they are by the enormous potential of multimedia to deliver rich learning material. Conversely, the scope for expression-based activities, namely [speaking](#) and [writing](#), is somewhat limited by the self-learning framework (no teacher/tutor evaluation of the learner's natural language output) and by the technical difficulties inherent in processing learner output.

Speaking Activities

Speaking activities are based on the use of two tools: audio-active comparative (AAC) recording/playback and automatic voice recognition (AVR).

The former allows users to record their voice and compare their pronunciation and prosody with the model. Where this is applied to [dialogues](#), a "dubbing" facility is sometimes available so that the user can substitute the voice of a speaker with his/her own.

In AAC-based speaking activities, it is generally assumed that speaking skills, particularly pronunciation, will improve through repeated attempts at emulating a model. Some programs seek to focus attention on emulation "accuracy" by displaying voice-graph analysis of the user's vocal output for comparison with the model. However, the delay between utterance and graph display often makes it difficult for the user to adjust output suitably in response to the feedback given.

Early applications of automatic voice recognition (AVR) technology in language courses were mostly aimed at providing (not always reliable) assessment of the user's pronunciation and (to a lesser extent) prosody, with feedback in the form of a graded scale of correctness or on an accept-reject basis. In many cases, AVR was, and is, used in pronunciation drills of the type "first read the word/expression and listen to how it's pronounced, then you try saying it". Technological developments have led to considerable improvement in AVR accuracy and there is now greater variety in applications. For example, some courses feature exercise (multiple-choice, cloze etc.) where speech is offered as an alternative form of input to the mouse/keyboard. Speech input with AVR is also applied in branching dialogues, with the aim of creating a sort of limited "conversation" with a virtual interlocutor. Another recent application is voice piloting, which allows program commands to be given vocally instead of via mouse/keyboard.

Title	Audio Active Comparative (AAC)			Automatic Voice Recognition (AVR)			
	no feedback	with graphic feedback	in dubbing mode	pronunciation exercises	exercise input	branching dialogue	voice pilot
Business English. Livello Professionale (Syracuse)		X		X	X	X	
Business English (De Agostini multimedia)	X	X					
Click on english		X					
Corso base 31 Lingue	X						
English+		X	X	X			
English for you	X		X	X	X		
Give me 5		X	X				
Happy English				X	X		
Hyperteach First		X					
Hyperteach Second		X					

Hyperteach Third		X					
Instant English	X						
Interactive English	X				X		
Interactive english academy			X				
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato	X		X	X			X
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base	X		X	X			X
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio	X		X	X			X
Let's do business - Meetings	X						
Let's do business - Negotiating	X						
Let's do business - Telephoning	X						
Snapshot	X		X				
Talk to the World			X				
Tell me more 1		X	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 2		X	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 3		X	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 4		X	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more pro		X	X	X	X	X	X
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level I	X	X			X•		
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level II	X	X			X•		
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level I	X	X			X•		
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level II	X	X			X•		
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English	X		X	X		X	X

Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1	X	X	X	X	X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2	X	X	X	X	X

- with feedback grafico

Writing Activities

The technical difficulties inherent in computer-based natural language processing means that writing activities are usually limited to "controlled" activities: manipulation of single words, phrases or sentences (cloze, multiple choice gap-filling, unscrambling, pairing, transformation, etc.), dictation*, translation of single words or even short phrases. One course even proposes a "Writing" section in which the keyboard is not actually called for! Manipulation-type exercises feature in almost every multimedia course except some designed for young children, and often appear in sections dedicated to "language focus" and/or grammar.

"Open" writing activities involving free written expression are a rarity. Where they do occur, they usually entail analysis of annotated texts of different kinds and then production of new versions following those models; feedback is seldom given, unless provided via supplementary online tutoring offered via the [Internet](#).

*From a didactical viewpoint, the presence of dictation exercises in "innovative" multimedia language courses might be viewed as somewhat paradoxical, given that this activity is largely associated with teaching approaches many consider to be outmoded.

Title	Mixed exercises	Dictation	Translation	Open writing (with feedback)	Open writing (without feedback)
Business English. Livello Professionale (Syracuse)	X				
Business English (De Agostini)	X	X			
Click on english	X				
Corso di preparazione per il TOEFL TEST	X				X
English+	X				X
English for you	X	X	X		
Get ready 2000	X	X			
Give me 5	X				
Happy English	X				
Hyperteach First	X	X			
Hyperteach Second	X	X			
Hyperteach Third	X	X			

Instant English	X	X		
Interactive English	X	X	X	
Interactive english academy	X			
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato	X			
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base	X			
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio	X			
Let's do business - Meetings	X	X		
Let's do business - Negotiating	X	X		
Let's do business - Telephoning	X	X		
Snapshot	X			
Talk to the World	X	X		
Tell me more 1	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 2	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 3	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 4	X	X	X	X
Tell me more pro	X	X	X	X
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level I		X		
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level II		X		
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level I		X		
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level II		X		
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English				
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1				

Series of multimedia dialogues

As to learning material, many multimedia courses are in effect centred around a series of dialogues set in various communication situations, a characteristic shared by modern textbook/cassette language courses, especially those that embrace a communicative approach to language teaching.

While varying in [content type](#), dialogues share a number of common characteristics. They almost invariably feature audio and text supported by [images](#), whether moving (video or animation) or, less commonly, still (photos or illustrations). The learner can usually replay passages at will, and in some cases can reduce playback speed for easier listening comprehension. The text can normally be displayed or hidden as desired, and may be available both in the target language and in translation. [Lexical tools](#) like dictionaries, glossaries and annotations may be provided to support comprehension.

Apart from providing substantial listening/reading practice (often coupled with comprehension exercises in the form of multiple choice questions), the dialogues usually serve as the principal vehicle for presenting language items (functions, grammar, vocabulary); these can then be studied in specific follow-up exercises. In many cases, [supplementary speaking activities](#) are also proposed, in which learners emulate model pronunciation and prosody.

Dialogue content type

In terms of content, most dialogues fall into one of these three categories:

- fictional narrative divided into episodes that follow a storyline and involve an identifiable group of characters;
- connected series of dialogues exploring a given theme (e.g. meetings) or illustrating moments in a connected sequence of events (e.g. going to a restaurant);
- individual dialogues, often illustrating a specific language function like making someone's acquaintance or asking permission.

Title	narrative in episodes	connected dialogues	unconnected dialogues
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[Business English \(De Agostini multimedia\)](#)

X

[Business English. Livello Professionale \(Syracuse\)](#)

X

[Click on english](#)

X

[English for you](#)

X

[English+](#)

X

[Get ready 2000](#)

X

[Give me 5](#)

X

[Hyperteach First](#)

X

[Hyperteach Second](#)

X

[Hyperteach Third](#)

X

[Instant English](#)

X

[Interactive English](#)

X

[Interactive English Junior](#)

X

[Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato](#)

X

[Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base](#)

X

Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio		X	
Let's do business - Meetings		X	
Let's do business - Negotiating		X	
Let's do business - Telephoning		X	
Snapshot	X		
Talk to the World	X		
Tell me more 1			X
Tell me more 2			X
Tell me more 3			X
Tell me more 4			X
Tell me more pro			X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English			X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1			X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2			X
You & Me. A children's English course			X

Dialogue images

Among the various educational benefits of multimedia is the potential to enrich learning material (and hence the learning experience) with images, both static and moving. This can result in more effective communication and greater sensorial, cognitive and affective engagement on the part of the learner, all of which is particularly valuable in language learning. In order to harness this potential to the full, however, images need to be both pertinent and significant.

Dialogues in English language courses are often presented in video clips with "live" sound (but alas rarely with smooth lip synchronisation). While these provide learners with an opportunity to study (and, to an extent, interact with) "real" situations, the visual element is seldom central to message conveyance and serves mainly to make listening comprehension more appealing.

Title	Video	Photo	Animation	Graphics(cartoon)
Business English (De Agostini multimedia)	X			
Business English. Livello Professionale (Syracuse)	X			
Click on english	X			
English for you	X			
English+	X	X	X	
Get ready 2000		X		
Give me 5		X		
Hyperteach First	X			
Hyperteach Second	X			
Hyperteach Third	X			
Instant English		X		
Interactive English	X			
Interactive English Junior		X		
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato	X			
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base	X			

Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio	X		
Let's do business - Meetings	X		
Let's do business - Negotiating	X		
Let's do business - Telephoning	X		
Snapshot	X		
Talk to the World	X		
Tell me more 1	X	X	
Tell me more 2	X	X	
Tell me more 3	X	X	
Tell me more 4	X	X	
Tell me more pro	X	X	
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English		x	
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1		X	
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2		X	
You & Me. A children's english course		X	X

Dialogue speaking activities

The dialogue section usually offers the main, but not necessarily the only, opportunity for practising speaking skills.

For a description of the different types of speaking activities on offer in EFL/ESL multimedia language courses, see [speaking](#).

Title	speaking activity AAC in dubbing mode	
Business English (De Agostini multimedia)	X	
Business English. Livello Professionale (Syracuse)	X	X
English for you	X	X
English+	X	X
Give me 5	X	X
Interactive english academy		X
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato	X	X
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base	X	X
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio	X	X
Talk to the World	X	X
Tell me more 1	X	X
Tell me more 2	X	X
Tell me more 3	X	X
Tell me more 4	X	X
Tell me more pro	X	X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English	X	X

Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1	X	X
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Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2	X	X
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Resources for studying grammar

In EFL/ESL courses, grammar resources may include reference information, exercises, or both, and they are often identified with a generic label such as Language, Language Focus, Language Functions, Study Focus etc. (possibly to avoid association with grammar-based teaching methodologies considered to be outmoded). Conversely, resources ostensibly devoted to grammar can in some cases cover other aspects of language, such as language functions, syntax, etc.

Grammar resources are generally made available in one of three ways:

- in the foreground, within a separate section dedicated to the specific study of grammar topics - in some courses bi-directional links allow the user to pass from the selected grammar topic to instances occurring in the multimedia material presented elsewhere in the course and vice-versa;
- in the background, as a support tool to be drawn upon at any time the student wishes to explore the grammar encountered when working in the different areas of the course. This may be grouped together with other supports ([dictionary](#), help section, [student record](#)) accessible from a tool bar or scroll-down menu;
- incorporated within activities dedicated to the study of various aspects of the language (e.g. language functions, syntax, semantics, etc.) often this study is designed as a follow up to work with [dialogues](#) or other multimedia material in which such language aspects have been presented.

Of those courses that do not feature resources explicitly dedicated to grammar, most are designed for use by young children. Others strongly embrace teaching methodologies in which the explicit study of grammar is considered secondary, if not irrelevant, in Second Language Acquisition, e.g. Krashen's Natural Approach (for a brief overview, see [The Natural Approach](#); for a more detailed analysis **Krashen & Terrell's Natural Approach**).

Title	Explanations in L1	Explanations in L2 Exercises	
Click on English			X
Corso base 31 Lingue	X		
Corso di preparazione per il TOEFL TEST			X
English+	X •	X	X
English for you		X	X
Get ready 2000		X	X
Happy English		X	X
Hyperteach First	X		X
Hyperteach Second	X		X

Hyperteach Third	X		X
Instant English	X		X
Interactive English	X	X	X
Interactive english academy		X	X
Interactive English Junior	X	X	
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato		X	X
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base		X	X
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio		X	X
Let's do business - Meetings		X	X
Let's do business - Negotiating		X	X
Let's do business - Telephoning		X	X
Snapshot			X
Tell me more 1		X	X
Tell me more 2		X	X
Tell me more 3		X	X
Tell me more 4		X	X
Tell me more pro		X	X
You & Me. A children's english course			
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English	X		X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1	X		X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2	X		X

• basic level only

Language support tools

The most common form of language support is provided by a "comprehensive" dictionary or a glossary containing some or all the terms used in the course. This may be available in English only with translation into the user's native language (in the case of multilingual courses this is selected when installing the program or when logging in).

Access to a language support tool may be effected one or more of the following forms:

- As a separate resource that enables the user to look up words in much the same way as with a print dictionary. This resource may be accessible from a main menu or from a tool bar featuring other support tools like a grammar, help section, student record, etc;
- As a hypertext function integrated into the text of some or all of the sections of the program, with definitions/translations available for a limited number of explicitly presented "hot words";
- As a hidden background function accessible on call by, say, clicking a word with the right mouse button.

Other forms of language support that may be on offer include [grammars](#), pronunciation models and text annotations (commonly providing cultural information).

Title	English dictionary or glossary	LI/L2 dictionary or glossary	with audio	with pronunciation activity
Business English (De Agostini multimedia)	X		X	
Business English. Livello Professionale (Syracuse)	X			
Corso base 31 Lingue		X	X	
English for you		X	X	X
English+		X	X	X
Hyperteach First		X •	X	
Hyperteach Second		X •	X	
Hyperteach Third		X •	X	
Instant English	X	X	X	
Interactive English		X ••	X	X
Interactive english academy	X			

Interactive English Junior		X		X	
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato	X				
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base	X				
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio	X				
Let's do business - Meetings	X				
Let's do business - Negotiating	X				
Let's do business - Telephoning	X				
Tell me more 1	X	X ...		X	X
Tell me more 2	X	X ...		X	X
Tell me more 3	X	X ...		X	X
Tell me more 4	X	X ...		X	X
Tell me more pro	X	X ...		X	X

Assessment tools

Designed as they are to cater for self-study, many courses include one or more assessment tools such as placement tests, progress tests* and final evaluation. Test results may be displayed in a [student record](#) section containing other information like course activities tackled, study time/duration and results achieved.

Assessment tests are either hosted on the CD-Rom itself or accessible at the course's [dedicated web site](#) along with other services.

*In some programs individual series of exercises can be tackled either in "free" or "test" format, the difference usually lying in the availability of support tools and/or answers, feedback on results, score recorded. For our purposes, progress test is considered to be a test that either evaluates learning gained in more than one type of activity, or proposes a series of exercises that differ in content or at least in presentation order from those used in the "free" exercise.

Title	Placement test	Progress test/evaluation	Final test
Business English (De Agostini)			X
Click on english		X	
Corso di preparazione per il TOEFL Test		X	
English for you	X		
English+	X	X	X
Get ready 2000	X	X	X
Instant English		X	
Interactive English	X	X	X
Snapshot		X	
Tell me more 1	X •		
Tell me more 2	X •		
Tell me more 3	X •		
Tell me more 4	X •		

Tell me more pro	X •			
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level 1			X	
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level 2			X	
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level 2			X	
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level 1			X	
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English	X		X	X •
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1	X		X	X •
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2	X		X	X •

•Available at the publisher's dedicated web site.

Dedicated web sites

Services on offer at dedicated web sites may include study activities, supplementary resources, tutoring and communication with other learners. Access may be open or restricted to users of the CD-ROM course, sometimes with special areas reserved for subscribers only.

Title	access to an online tutor	links of interest	supplements to CD-Rom activities	chat/forum	other features (dictionary, magazine, games, test, etc.)
English for you	X	X			X
English+		X	X	X	X
Tell me more 1	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 2	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 3	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more 4	X	X	X	X	X
Tell me more pro	X	X	X	X	X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English	X			X	X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1	X			X	X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2	X			X	X

Student Tracking

Student tracking is extremely useful for self-study and essential to effective educational application of the course within organised learning. Data related to the activity that one or more learners undertake during each work session is stored on the computer's hard disk so that it can accumulate from one session to the next and thus give an overall picture of the progress being made.

In many courses this data is displayed in a student record section that can be consulted as required (as opposed to transitory, "volatile" feedback like the momentary displaying of a final score obtained after completing a series of exercises).

Along with the results of [assessment tests](#), the student record may display a simple list of the course activities that have been tackled, sometimes including the time and duration of study. More often than not, the record shows the results obtained within those activities, either as a percentage or numerical score.

Title	Activities tackled yes/no	Time/duration of activities tackled	Results of activities tackled
Business English. Livello Professionale (Syracuse)		X	
Business English (De Agostini)			X
Corso di preparazione per il TOEFL TEST		X	X
English+	X•		X
English for you	X		
Happy English	X		
Interactive English	X		
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Avanzato		X	
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Base		X	
Larousse English Learning Course Livello Intermedio		X	
Let's do business - Meetings		X••	X
Let's do business - Negotiating		X••	X
Let's do business - Telephoning		X••	X

Tell me more 1		X...
Tell me more 2		X...
Tell me more 3		X...
Tell me more 4		X...
Tell me more pro	X	X...
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level I		X
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level II		X
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level I		X
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level II		X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo – Business English	X	X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo – English 1	X	X
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo – English 2	X	X

•Only in “Routes” (pre-set learning paths)

••Includes number of attempts

•••Includes percentage of activity performed

Activity sequencing and individual learning paths

The number of options available for selecting the sequence of activities and/or for creating a learning path varies from program to program. These days, with the exception of some software designed for young children, language courses do not oblige the user to follow a single preset learning path; even in highly structured courses there is generally some opportunity to choose the sequence of activities to be tackled. Some courses provide an "ideal" sequence of activities, a sort of digest of all the resources on offer. In other cases, the learner can opt to follow a personalised learning path defined according to ability level (often based on the results of a [placement test](#)) or to area of particular interest.

Title	Single preset path	Multiple preset paths	Personalised path
English for you		X	
English+		X	
Get ready 2000		X	
Interactive English		X	
Interactive English Junior	X		
Tell me more 1			X
Tell me more 2			X
Tell me more 3			X
Tell me more 4			X
Tell me more pro			X
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level I		X	
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level II		X	
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level I		X	
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level II		X	
Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - Business English		X	X

[Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 1](#)

X

X

[Viaggio Linguistico Interattivo - English 2](#)

X

X

... multimedia English Language Courses on CD-Rom

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a cura di [Jeffrey Earp](#)

Gateway to Internet Learning Activities and Resources

Increasingly, English language courses on CD-Rom tap into the Internet to make use of the enormous educational potential offered by web-based resources and tools (a panorama of Internet material for English language learning is available at [EFL/ESL Online](#)).

Some CD-Rom courses incorporate a simple off-line section with a [list of interesting web sites](#) to visit, while others provide access to a [dedicated web site](#) that may offer a variety of services.

Web Site List

Web site lists may include English language resources in general, such as news services, encyclopaedias, webcasters, etc., as well as sites designed specifically for language learning.

In some cases links are coupled with a short description of each site.

Title	List of links
Give me 5	X
Instant English	X
Interactive English	X