

Finding appropriate CAL materials

locating and evaluating computer aided learning materials for your course



Introduction

The sourcing and initial evaluation of computer-based courseware is like the selection of textbooks: it must match as closely as possible the set of educational needs which you have defined in relation to your course. The unfamiliar medium, however, makes finding and evaluating courseware a particular challenge.

Finding courseware

It is always a good idea to build upon the knowledge and positive experiences of others teaching similar courses to your own. You can find out about materials other people are using in the following ways:

- informally at learning technology and learned society meetings
- at workshops and seminars (for example run by the CTI)
- via email discussion lists or newsgroups
- via specialist publications
- via Web sites supporting learning and teaching in your subject area

The effectiveness of courseware depends on how it is used or implemented within a specific learning context. Two academics using the same courseware may reach completely different opinions on its usefulness.

Initial Evaluation

Considerations to bear in mind prior to use or purchase include:

- Does it run on the right hardware/operating environment? Are there sufficient machines accessible at an appropriate time? Does it run adequately on a busy network (if appropriate) and is there room on the server/hard disk? Is the software likely to crash/conflict with existing programs? Is there a cut-down demonstration version to assess before purchase?
- Is the topic appropriate to the course? Are there serious errors? Will it date quickly? Is it likely to be updated? Can the content be modified to local needs (if necessary)? Have I compared it with alternative programs? Is there a good third-party review? Does someone I respect recommend it? Was it produced/ marketed by a 'reliable' source? Is it already being used locally with the students?
- Is it pitched at the right level? Would there be something in it for the strongest/weakest students? Are there different levels of difficulty that facilitate progression? Are there good example and help files? Is the documentation clear? Is there telephone support available?
- Is it cost-effective? Is it replacing existing teaching or is it an unnecessary supplement? Is it affordable in the volume required? Can it be used in more than one context (e.g. lectures as well as tutorials or 'dry' practicals)? Is the learning curve for staff or students excessively steep?
- Does it make best use of the medium? Are other approaches easier/cheaper/more effective? Is it 'intuitive' to use and consistent with standard user interface standards? Is it well-structured? Can you find what you need without being distracted by irrelevant material? Does it exploit features such as colour, sound, animation, still and motion video in a manner that will enhance learning?
- Is it interactive? Are there student activities and self-assessment built-in? Could student use lead to assessed activities directly or indirectly?
- Am I enthusiastic about it? Will my students react positively? Are they likely to have learned something after using it?

The best source of centrally developed courseware is undoubtedly the Web site for the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP). Commercially developed courseware is available from a wide range of publishers, and much of this is listed and reviewed by the CTI Centres. Contact the CTI Centre for your subject area or search across subjects using the CTI Courseware database (see below). Public domain software is frequently available by ftp or is can be downloaded directly across the Web. If you are unfamiliar with such procedures, you may need help from your local CAL support officer or computer services department help desk. It is important, however, to only download software from trustworthy sites to avoid the risk of virus infection, and to ensure that any additional utilities needed to run the software are installed on the computer on which it will be run.

Resources

CERT (Courseware Evaluation and Review Tool): <http://www.mgt.uea.ac.uk/cti/cert/cert.html>

IT in Teaching and Learning: A staff development pack:
<http://www.tltp.ac.uk/tltp/catalogue/phase1/tom15701.htm>

Teaching and Learning Technology Programme: <http://www.tltp.ac.uk/tltp/>

CTI Courseware database: <http://www.niss.ac.uk/education/cti/>

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Sources of accounting & business courseware

TLTP Products	available through the TLTP Central ordering service http://www.tltp.ac.uk/tltp/materials.html
Accounting	Byzantium Software for Financial and Management Accounting Published by Blackwells ISBN 0-631-20750-3. Price £150 +VAT (renewable annually) http://www.blackwellpublishers.co.uk Contact: Anthea Milnes, Senior Marketing Manager amilnes@blackwellpublishers.co.uk
Business Decision Making	BITE/Pandora Tutorial programme for business decision making can be downloaded from http://www.mgt.uea.ac.uk/BITE/
Marketing	An interactive tutorial for an introductory marketing course http://www.lgu.ac.uk/lgu/mmm/
Operational Research from	http://www.mentor.strath.ac.uk/mentor.html

Other TLTP products are available for statistics, mathematics and economics. Information on all these can be found on the TLTP www site.

EQL courseware for **accounting finance and business management**
<http://www.eql.co.uk>

Case Studies The European Case Clearing House has several computer based case studies making use of multimedia
<http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/ecch>

Business games Elgood's Handbook of Management Games (published by Gower ISBN 0-566-07306-4) is an excellent source of information on business games and includes some computer based games

CTI-AFM software catalogue available on-line <http://www.mgt.uea.ac.uk>

Other resources for business education

ACCOUNT CTI-AFM's journal publishes reports of the use of C&IT and software reviews. Selected Proceedings from the Annual CTI-AFM Conference includes many papers describing the use of C&IT. Current and back issues of both publications can be found on the CTI-AFM website: <http://www.mgt.uea.ac.uk>

Accounting Education: An International Journal carries software reviews (since 1997 Vol.6)

Nicholson, A. H. S., (1997), CERT: A Courseware Evaluation and Review Tool for Accounting and Business Education, *Accounting Education: An International Journal*, Volume 6 Number 1 March 1997

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CTI Accounting Finance and Management