

## Features, Sample Lessons, and Ideas

# ANVILL Overview

**ANVILL** stands for A National Virtual Language Lab, and as its name suggests, it's a modern web-based replacement for the audio and video consoles of old, which used to be such a prominent part of a high school or university foreign language facility.

This "lab", however, like so many aspects of web-based software is eminently portable: any teacher or student with web access (in class, at home, sitting in a cafe) can use ANVILL to listen to the news, watch video clips, or submit voice or video-based assignments. That Internet connection and three commonly found pieces of hardware and software are the only tools necessary for ANVILL: a microphone and/or webcam, a modern browser (e.g., Firefox 3x, Safari 3x, Internet Explorer 7x), and Adobe's [Flash Player](#). Like ANVILL itself, these software tools are free.

With them it's easy for a teacher to create and assess speech-based tasks, either synchronously using ANVILL's built in audio-video chat tool, or asynchronously, using ANVILL tools for recording voice or video. What used to be difficult—whether it was with cassettes, CDs, or folders of .mp3 files—collecting and keeping track of all the materials that students in 4 different classes create over the course of a term, ANVILL simplifies and organizes.

ANVILL's tools allow teachers and students to tell stories, share opinions, or just practice basic elements of the language. These tools can be standalone spaces, say an audio journal that Ss contribute to once a week, or they can be carefully linked as part of an instructional sequence, e.g., Ss work on some web-based problem solving task and then the different groups summarize (in writing or speaking or both) what they learned. The teacher can listen to it at her convenience.

One of the core ideas behind ANVILL is that teachers should be able to assemble a web-based lesson or quiz in about the same time that it takes to do so on paper. ANVILL doesn't make the planning or creative aspect of materials creation any simpler, but we think we've made the tools simple enough so that a teacher who wants to assign a video-based lesson for homework that has some pre-listening and post-listening tasks and culminates with some kind of spoken

language task to signify comprehension can do so in twenty minutes or less.

Every language class has students of many different abilities—ANVILL can't change that. What it can do, though, is provide different kinds of practice. Maybe heritage learner need more work on writing while non-heritage learners more on listening. Cooperative activities like jigsaws or webquests can be tailored to meet those diverse needs and still provide a way for everyone to come back together. ANVILL's "low stakes" quiz and survey tools let teachers assemble media-based assessments, tailored for different Ss if necessary, where Ss can respond as easily by speaking as by writing.

Most teachers now agree that technology can help in providing interesting and challenging opportunities for Ss to interact in the target language. The mistake language labs (and teachers) of the past made was that they emphasized the "sanitization" of language--they broke it down into too many small parts, oversimplified the content, and effectively removed the "authenticity" from the tasks assigned. Today we have perhaps the opposite problem—so much authenticity that "unteaching" starts to occur. With its lesson templates and easy tools for editing, ANVILL helps teaches put "digestible" amounts of content in front of Ss.

Many of us are now teaching "hybrid" classes, ones where significant amounts of student work/practice occur outside of class. One obvious benefit of moving parts of a curriculum into a learning management system is that not only can a teacher structure her lesson material more precisely, but she can easily find what students produce when it comes time to give feedback. This portfolio capability of LMSs seems to make some parents feel more involved in their kids' learning—they can see and hear what their children are learning, and gauge the progress they're making.

The rest of this article describes ANVILL's tools in more detail. I must add that ANVILL is a research project, not a commercial application, currently funded by the [Yamada Language Center](#) and the [Center for Applied Second Language Studies](#) at the [University of Oregon](#).

**For more information about any of these tools, please refer to the ANVILL Wiki:**

**<http://ylclab.uoregon.edu/groups/anvillhelp>**

# ANVILL's Language Tools

## Voiceboards

Voiceboard (VB) is ANVILL's most popular tool—it adds spoken language to discussions, audio journals, pronunciation exercise and other forms of oral language practice.

Like text-based forums, VB allows a teacher to easily post an oral/aural assignment. VB encourages multimedia communication; messages can be text, audio or video-based.

Voiceboard has two modes: one for teachers which allow Ts to create VBs, add "topics" to existing VBs, and edit messages that have been posted. The other is for students (pictured at right). Students can create and post their messages, and, of course, read and respond to those of others.

Voiceboard is easy to set up and administer—in fact, you can create and publish a voiceboard in about 2 minutes. Students will see the VB as soon as they log in to your ANVILL course; they can begin adding their comments right away.

## Forums

Blog-like discussion tool (which incorporates multimedia in addition to text). Useful for a variety of web-based discussion tasks: continuation of an in-class discussion, a multimedia response to a cultural prompt, small group work in preparation for a presentation, etc. As with Voiceboard, your students' postings are only available to those in class.

## Livechat

Livechat is ANVILL's conferencing and tutoring tool. It works similarly to

other web-based chat software with the important exception that it is advertising free and designed for audio and video chats as well as text.

Access is restricted—only registered course participants can access the chat function.

Once an instructor creates chat rooms for his/her class, students can use them for text, audio, and/or video chats. Up to four people can chat at once (network bandwidth is a consideration for video).

Our initial release of Livechat is especially useful for those students and language programs which make use of native speaking tutors, or conversation partners. Only in this case the tutor can be anywhere provided they have an Internet connection.

## Quizzes and Surveys

Quizzes and Surveys (Q&S) is ANVILL's tool for the quick production and grading of on-line surveys and quizzes. It is optimized for working with audio and video, so assessments can be media-rich and very personalized.

Besides allowing for media-rich prompts, Q&S makes it easy to go spoken language assessments. Items can be simple and straightforward, "What did you do last weekend?" to detailed and involved: "Watch the following video, listen to the questions that accompany it, and respond to them as if you were addressing an audience of fellow teachers."

## Lesson Planning Templates

Templates for audio, video, and images make multimedia authoring

easy to do in ANVILL. The basic template lets you create all kinds of lessons, but its chief purpose is to give you a whole page to work with (the other templates use the right half of the screen. Note: you can copy and paste text in from your word processor here.

The image template lets you create all kinds of lessons, but its chief purpose is to give you all the flexibility of the basic template as well as being able to add imagery to the right side of the lesson.

With the audio template you can add high quality audio files to your lesson. This can be used along side the voice recorder. Students can play the audio file, record themselves, and playback so they can monitor how they are doing.

Many teachers want to take advantage of online video resources like Teacher Tube or foreign language news sites. ANVILL's video template accommodates both external resources (linked) and a teacher's own personal videos (uploaded).

## Course Management

ANVILL lets teachers create their own courses and manage who is a member of that class. This is especially useful for language teachers doing distance or hybrid courses. It makes it easy to set up co-teachers so that colleagues can learn and collaborate more readily. And lastly, it lets students work in an online environment that is safe and monitored—only fellow classmates (designated by the teacher) can see another's work.

For more information about any of these tools, please refer to the ANVILL Wiki:

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