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## 1. Introducing FLAX

FLAX is both a vision and a tool that you can use to create language learning exercises and facilitate your students' language production.<sup>1</sup>

The vision is to empower teachers to create engaging activities, to entice learners into intriguing language play, and to provide fingertip access to enormous collections of authentic phrases. The Web contains innumerable language activities, quizzes, and games, but they are fixed: the activities are cast in stone and the material is chosen by others. Our vision is to put the control back where it belongs, in the hands of teachers and learners. As well as language activities, the Web hosts countless ready-made texts and massive collections of writing in different areas – but they are hard to access in ways that facilitate language learning. Our vision is to capitalize on this wealth and process it into accessible and reusable language resources.

As an activity creation tool, FLAX lets teachers (or learners) design activities easily and rapidly by automatically transforming existing language material. The activities are either developed from popular games (e.g., Hangman, Dominoes, Tetris), or use game thinking to convert language learning into a form of entertainment. As a learning facilitation tool, FLAX can automatically process text, identify linguistic expressions with different patterns, and order them in terms of usage frequency, most popular first. This makes language patterns easily accessible to users. With an adequate repertoire of word combinations, learners can effectively build their ideas from blocks of words (e.g., *alcohol consumption, on the other hand, It should be noted that*), instead of having to choose every single word and struggle to organize them into the right sequence.

FLAX enables teachers to build bespoke libraries very easily. It is built upon powerful digital library technology, and provides access to vast linguistic resources containing countless examples of actual, authentic, usage in contemporary text. But teachers can also build collections using their own material, focusing on language learning in a particular domain (e.g., business, geology) or motivating students by using text from a particular context (e.g., country or region, common interests).

FLAX focuses on written language, and on learning English. Audio can be incorporated into dictation-style activities, and some activities use images to help conceptual understanding and foster descriptive power. The underlying ideas are language independent: we envisage different language versions in the future. FLAX encourages group learning and communication – some games embody built-in chat facilities and real-time scoreboards. All interaction takes place using a Web browser.

FLAX is an open source project. You can use it on our demonstration site, or download the software and run it yourself. Please help yourself! – and help us by providing feedback, and, if you can, technical expertise to extend it in different ways and to other languages.

Through examples, this book sets out the vision and the system that embodies it.

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<sup>1</sup> It's confession time. The name originated as a bad acronym: *Flexible Knowledge Acquisition*. We prefer to think of it simply as FLAX.

How to use FLAX You are currently using guest access (Log in)

Home ► How to use FLAX

**Topic Outline**

**FLAX**  
Flexible Language Acquisition




FLAX helps automate the production and delivery of practice exercises for learning English. You, the teacher, can easily create exercises from the textual content of digital libraries. You can also create your own digital library collections.

This short course demonstrates how to use FLAX, both as a student and as a teacher. But you can't edit it (sorry!).


To try your hand at using the facilities for teachers, go [here](#) and log in to the "Sandbox course" with username *visitor*, password *visitor*. Then you can add activities and build collections, just as if you were a teacher of the course.

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 [News forum](#)


**1 What is FLAX?**

*The Best of Password* is one of the standard digital library collections distributed with FLAX. From within Moodle you can create your own collections and make them available on Moodle to your students or throughout your institution.


 [The Best of Password](#)


You can search for documents that contain any word or word combination, or browse the documents in the digital library by title (or by difficulty level). Take a look at *Going to the doctor*, the *Maori creation story*, and *Working on organic farms*. We will use these articles in the exercises that follow.

You can add a digital library collection to your course, as illustrated above with the *Best of Password* collection. You can also add individual documents in a collection, to make them available for students to read. As an example, here is the *Adventure sports* article from *The Best of Password*.

 [Adventure sports](#)

Here are two videos that introduce the [FLAX project](#) and the Moodle version of FLAX.

 [Watch a video about FLAX \(6 minutes\)](#)

 [Watch a longer video about FLAX \(40 mins\)](#)

The *How to use FLAX Moodle course*

## What FLAX is ...

FLAX is a tool for teachers to create a language learning environment for their students – or for motivated students to create language exercises for themselves. It is “authorable” software; teachers can adapt the material to their students’ needs.

Using FLAX, you can create activities for your students very quickly. The language content is automatically drawn from a digital library and configured according to your specifications. This is far quicker than creating the content yourself. Moreover, before the activities are made available to students you can check them to ensure that every item reaches your own standards, and discard any that do not.

We also envisage that you will build your own digital library collection from material suitable for your class. You can do this quickly and easily if you have documents in electronic form (e.g., Word files) or text that you can cut and paste from elsewhere (e.g., a Web page).

### ... and what it's not

FLAX is not a course for learning English (or any other language). And it does not by itself allow you to create such courses. With FLAX, you can create individual activities of different types. If you want to put them together into a course that learners proceed through in a predetermined sequence, you will need to use a learning management system. FLAX fits smoothly into the Moodle course management system. It also works stand-alone as a way of creating and presenting activities – but it does not lead students through them.

## What this book is ...

This book describes how to use FLAX, including how its various activity types look to students, how teachers create them, how to build a digital library collection from your own content, and a little bit about how it works. We cover both the Moodle and stand-alone versions of FLAX. The book is based on the Moodle course illustrated on the facing page.<sup>2</sup>

We begin by looking at activities made from the material in an existing digital library collection, in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 illustrates the language environment that FLAX provides. Then Chapter 6 shows how to build your own collection. In practice you will work in the reverse order: first build a collection; then create exercises based on it. Chapter 7 shows what you can do with the language resources that FLAX provides.

### ... and what it's not

The examples in this book are chosen to illustrate the different facilities that FLAX provides. Many are drawn from a particular digital library collection that reflects our context in New Zealand and is probably not a suitable collection for teaching in your own environment.

Our advice is to make a collection of your own material, and then design activities!

<sup>2</sup> <http://flax.nzdl.org/moodle/course/view.php?id=2>