



Digital Multimodal Simulation for Speaking Communication

by [Alexandra Serbinovskaya](#)

Simulation is a modelling or imitation of a real-life process or situation. Simulations have been shown to be a wonderful tool to bridge the classroom and reality because of a number of benefits, such as providing an engaging way to safely practice target skills while allowing learners to (1) experience real-life scenarios that depict true events and (2) gain personal experience in problem-solving (e.g., Cheng, 2007; Halleck et al., 2002). The benefits of simulations can be easily incorporated into the digital multimodality that has entered our lives and is gaining importance in the classroom (Oskoz & Elola, 2020).

Because our aim as teachers is to prepare students for communicative practices essential for success in real life, it is necessary to include multimodal digital aspects in classroom activities. One of the simple and efficient ways to incorporate digital literacies into teaching practices is through simulations. This article introduces a digital multimodal simulation in a second language communication course.

How to Design a Digital Multimodal Simulation

Simulation design should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (Cheng, 2007; Halleck et al., 2002). Specificity includes the goals and expected achievements and/or outcomes that can be measured for assessment purposes. All the tasks of the simulation need to be within the learners' capabilities or Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and relevant to their future career and work-life situations, and all the activities should be timed to fit the class schedule.

Begin by preparing the main components of the simulation:

1. *Scenario*: The scenario reflects a real-life situation and the problem to be solved.
2. *Roles and their scripts*: Roles and their scripts describe each participant's functions, required knowledge and/or skills, and responsibilities. Roles can be assigned individually or to small groups of two to four students.
3. *Case or problem*: Case or problem is the issue that requires a solution or a decision to be made by the simulation participants. The issue requires participants to study the situation,

propose solutions or decisions regarding the issue, and argumentatively persuade others to support the proposed solution/decision.

4. *Prebrief and debriefing questions*: Prebrief introduces the students to the simulation environment and can include readings, video, and audio materials. After the simulation is complete, debriefing questions help summarize the students' achievements and enhance the gained knowledge and skills.
5. *Evaluation criteria*: Evaluation criteria depend on the simulation purposes, genres, technologies, and environment used for achieving language/content gains.

Example of a Digital Multimodal Simulation: Business Communication

The following example simulation is called “The Board Meeting.” The goal of the simulation is to practice work-related communication genres of emails and presentations as well as to develop students' public speaking and negotiation skills, critical thinking, and teamwork by creating a challenging true-to-life communication situation.

Before the simulation, students need to be acquainted with emails (compulsory) and memos (optional) as business correspondence genres, and the following digital tools: Google Docs, Google Earth, and at least one online conferencing tool, such as Skype, Zoom, Google Meets, Microsoft Teams, or Telegram. This example simulation takes five 1-hour class periods to complete in an intermediate or higher level class.

1. Scenario

Your school/organization is planning to organize a weeklong (field/incentive) trip for their students/staff/employees. The student council/activity board/designated department and a board of sponsors will meet to discuss the itinerary. Before the meeting, four project groups are assigned one destination each to explore, evaluate, and present to the council/board. At the meeting (to be held online using the conference tool of your choice or in person), each group will present their itinerary along with its advantages and disadvantages (using Google Earth for descriptive purposes and clarity), with the aim of persuading the council/board and sponsors to approve their trip.

2. Roles and Their Scripts

Each group is provided with a preliminary location description. Each location has several advantages and one drawback. Each group needs to choose two primary means of communication (e.g., emailing/texting and a messenger of their choice) and collaborate in a Google Doc.

Detailed scripts for two sets of possible locations are provided in Appendix A (Option 1: four English-speaking countries; Option 2: four states in the United States). For your educational context, you should consider choosing destinations in your home region or locations connected

to your curriculum and students' goals and interests. You can include emphasis on culture, traditions, food, transportation, environmental issues, and so on to fit your thematic calendar.

3. Case or Problem

Here, we are at the meeting with the sponsors/school administration/company officials to decide which itinerary to choose for the trip. Each project group presents their itinerary for 10–20 minutes (presentation time should be adjusted to your students' proficiency level) and answers questions for 5–10 minutes.

4. Prebrief and Debriefing Questions

At prebriefing, participants get acquainted with the simulation scenario, choose or get assigned their roles, and learn how to use or refresh their skills using the digital tools and platforms to be used during the simulation.

Debriefing is an essential part of the simulation because it maximizes the learning outcomes. As a constructive teaching strategy, debriefing consolidates knowledge and skills gained and sums up the achievements and problems solved. Debriefing also facilitates self-reflection and promotes satisfaction with the simulation, thus increasing learners' motivation, and it can also reveal the issues and challenges students encountered while performing/completing the simulation tasks and help resolve the issues and address the challenges to gain more knowledge (Halleck et al., 2002).

Debriefing usually consists of one or two parts: a class discussion (necessary) and a writing task (recommended). The discussion addresses the stages of the simulation and its core problem. The writing task can be of any genre.

Apart from the general pedagogical strategies of preparing meaningful debriefing questions in advance and allowing students some quiet time to think before answering, the following tips may help you maximize the efficiency of debriefing:

- Encourage your students to discuss the tasks and the process of the simulation because the process is as important as the outcome.
- Stimulate students to discuss their own experience.
- Guide students into realizing what they have learned without telling them.

5. Evaluation

Formative and summative assessment for this simulation may include observation and review of individual and/or collaborative writing (email, memo, presentation slides), speaking skills (presentation, discussion), and digital literacy usage (digital tools skills).

The Simulation Process

Following, I outline the student tasks in The Board Meeting simulation activity.

Task 1: Focus on Email Writing

Using email, project groups need to agree on an online group meeting day and time to discuss their itinerary. Groups also need to agree on which online technology they will use for the meeting. Group email exchange can be performed in or out of class.

Task 2: Focus on Negotiation Skills and Collaborative Writing

Each project group meets separately two to three times during class with follow-up collaboration outside of class using the online conference tool they have chosen in Task 1. They use these meetings to complete the following:

- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of their destination.
- Discuss details of their itinerary.
- Select which Google Earth views to include in the presentation.
- Create presentation slides.
- Practice their presentation.

Encourage groups to use separate Google Docs for information sharing, ensuring it is a collaborative writing task.

Task 3: Focus on Presentation Skills

At the council/board meeting, each project group presents their itinerary as the best for the upcoming trip, using PowerPoint or Google Slides. In addition to anything the group decides would be helpful to add, the presentation should include

- Google Earth coordinates and street views;
- all aspects of cultural/sport/entertainment activities they propose to have during the trip;
- venues, such as hotels and restaurants; and
- transportation infrastructure, depending on the focus of your curriculum and thematic plan.

Each opponent group asks at least one meaningful question to the presenting group. After the presentations, sponsors/school administration/company officials (the teacher or the invited judges) decide which destination to choose for the upcoming trip. Choosing more than one destination is also a feasible option.

Task 4. Focus on Email/Memo Writing

Once the itinerary is chosen, each participant writes an email or a memo (choose one format to meet your curriculum goals) to inform everyone at the school/university/organization about the decision and the chosen location. The email/memo can be turned into a collaborative writing task using Google Docs.

Task 5. Focus on Reflection

During the debriefing stage in The Board Meeting simulation, I recommend two-stage debriefing. Download the sample debriefing questions and a writing prompt in Appendix B.

Conclusion

The digital multimodal simulation example provided here can be easily incorporated into a second language classroom and adapted for the overall goals of the course. With the versatile nature of modern communication, learning the necessary genres of email, memo, and presentation using varied digital tools efficiently prepares students for diverse work situations. Presentations can include a variety of aspects, such as local food, banking systems, and politeness strategies.

Overall, digital multimodal simulations provide students with great opportunities to learn genres and practice skills they need in work-related situations as well as gain personal problem-solving experience using technologies and employing their digital literacies.

References

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Alexandra Serbinovskaya is a TESOL teacher and a university professor with more than 20 years of experience in Russia and the United States. She has worked with thousands of diverse students in roles as a university professor, professional development creator and instructor, professional tutor, high school teacher, and curriculum designer. At the moment, Alexandra is working on her second PhD in applied linguistics at Oklahoma State University. Her research interests include working with multilingual students, collaborative writing, student-centered learning, and teacher cognition.

Appendix A: Role Descriptions and Scripts

Set 1. English-Speaking Countries: Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa

1. Your project group wants to go to **Great Britain**. You propose to start in London, the capital, and visit the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, and the Tower of London. Then, the group will continue to Bristol to admire the beauty of the River Avon, Iron Age hillforts, and Roman villas and to listen to the pirate tales of the Bristol Port. After that, you suggest visiting Liverpool, home of the most popular music band of the 20th century, the Beatles, and two rivalry Premier League football teams—Liverpool FC, and Everton FC. However, the rainy weather of Albion may be considered a drawback.
2. Your project group wants to go to **Canada**. You propose to start in Ottawa, the capital, and visit the ByWard Market in Lower Town, Parliament Hill, and the Golden Triangle in Centretown, which is the downtown area, as well as the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum. Then, the group will continue to Toronto to go shopping at the PATH network, which is the world's largest underground shopping complex, explore world culture and natural history at the Royal Ontario Museum, and see one of the world's most diverse collection of distinct animal species at the Toronto Zoo. After that, you suggest visiting Calgary to explore the National Music Centre, Telus Convention Centre, Chinatown district, and St. Patrick's Island. However, traffic, congestion, and long commute times may be considered a drawback.
3. Your project group wants to go to **New Zealand**. You propose to start in Wellington, where the movies *Avatar* and *The Lord of the Rings* were filmed and the capital city of New Zealand, where The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and the Wellington Museum of City and Sea are worth visiting. Then, the group will continue to Auckland, the largest city of New Zealand, also known as "City of Sails," where you can try the most popular pastime of sailing; take a pleasant walk at Auckland Domain, the largest city park; and admire the largest painting, sculpture, and print collection of prominent New Zealand and Pacific Island artists. After that, you suggest visiting Whanganui, the area around the mouth of the Whanganui River and the major site of Māori settlements, home of Queen's Park, Sarjeant Gallery, and Durie Hill Tower, a World War I memorial. However, the time and distance to travel to New Zealand as well as the abundance of mosquitos and sandflies all year round may be considered a drawback.
4. Your project group wants to go to **South Africa**. You propose to start in Cape Town, the oldest and the second largest city in the country, where you can see traditional Cape Dutch style buildings in the Central Business District and along Long Street, as well as visit Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, which contains protected natural forest, fynbos, and a variety of animals and birds. Then, the group will continue to Johannesburg, the largest city and a cultural hub in South Africa, where you can visit the South African Ballet Theatre to admire a classic or modern performance, the Johannesburg Art Gallery for modern art, and the Apartheid Museum to learn about the history of the country. After that, you suggest visiting Pretoria, where you can admire the thousands of jacaranda trees planted along its streets and in its parks as well as a 9-metre-tall statue of former president Nelson Mandela,

and the Pretoria Art Museum, home to a vast collection of local artworks. However, large South African cities report a higher risk of violent crime than other cities, especially after dark, and rural roads are often unfenced, allowing livestock to wander and cross roads, which may be considered drawbacks.

Set 2. U.S. States: Oklahoma, Arizona, Florida, Wyoming

1. Your project group wants to visit **Oklahoma**. You would like to explore the life of cowboys and Native Americans at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, admire world and local arts as well as modern and traditional crafts at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, and get acquainted with the wild prairies and local vegetation at the Botanic Garden of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. However, an abundance of such wildlife as skunks and venomous snakes may be considered a drawback.
2. Your project group wants to visit **Arizona**. You would like to explore the well-known Grand Canyon National Park and learn more about the natural history of the Petrified Forest National Park. Arizona is also the place to admire the saguaro cactus, which is one of the defining plants of the state, known for its large, tree-like columnar shape with arms or branches. However, the desert climate of Arizona, with extremely hot weather in summer, may be considered a drawback.
3. Your project group wants to visit **Florida**. You would like to explore the Kennedy Space Center, relax at Miami Beach, and have fun at Walt Disney World. However, Florida's wildlife includes sharks in the water as well as crocodiles and snakes on land, so visitors should be cautious all the time, which may be considered a drawback.
4. Your project group wants to visit **Wyoming**. You would like to explore Yellowstone National Park, the home of world-renowned geysers; admire the first U.S. national monument Devils Tower and natural igneous rock; and watch numerous species of birds (e.g., swans, bald eagles, and sage grouse) and dozens of species of mammals (including coyotes, porcupines, pronghorns, mule deer, bobcats, and moose) at Seedskeadee National Wildlife Refuge. However, because the state's population is small, places to stay and eat are limited, and although the scenery is beautiful, it can also be very rugged and sometimes monotonous.

Appendix B: Debriefing Materials

Debriefing Questions

Debriefing questions are aimed at the task, the process, and the feelings of the participants.

- What have you accomplished in the simulation?
- How did you feel while you were doing the activity?
- What were the most challenging things about doing this activity?
- What did you do to succeed?
- How can you apply what you just learned to your school, work, and life?
- How did you feel when you first started the activity?
- How do you feel now?
- If you could change one thing in the simulation, what would it be? OR What would you do differently next time?
- What advice would you give to other students participating in this simulation?

Writing Prompt

Write a reflective essay (e.g., 300+ words) sharing your experience in the simulation and describing at least one thing you enjoyed, two or more skills you practiced, and three or more things you learned.

Note: An option here could be to write an Instagram or a Facebook post of 2,200 characters maximum on the same prompt. The genre of social media posts is gaining popularity and applicability as more and more businesses and entrepreneurs market themselves online.