

CASE STUDY

University of California, Santa Barbara German Language Program



The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) is a public research university based in Santa Barbara, California.

With over 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at the university, UCSB is among the nation's top-ranked public universities. The student body includes international students from 79 different countries, forming a strong multicultural and multilingual community. Students in the College of Letters and Sciences at UCSB have a language requirement that can be fulfilled by the completion of a third level course of a foreign language.

Extempore at UCSB

Extempore was first used at UCSB for first year German courses in the Fall 2019 Quarter. UCSB's German language program has grown over the past few years, and now has 7 full time instructors. German classes are typically between 26 and 32 students. Instructors have opted to avoid using textbooks, instead creating their own more personalized and unique course curriculums.

Before Extempore

Prior to adopting Extempore, German instructors at UCSB relied on other methods for speaking practice and exams. They

attempted to move speaking assignments online via Flipgrid, but encountered technical difficulties. Some instructors had students upload videos of them speaking to Moodle, their LMS platform, but grading through the LMS was slow and inefficient.

Initial Rollout Process

The use of Extempore at UCSB began with a small pilot program led by Dr. Kelsey White, who used Extempore in her German 1 courses in the fall. Following the success of the pilot, Dr. White added Extempore to her German 2 class for the winter quarter. Eventually, the department expanded Extempore use to German 3 and German 6 courses due to the switch to distance learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Extempore Activities

Dr. White's German classes used Extempore outside of class, and students primarily accessed the platform through their personal devices. One aspect of class that she found translated particularly well to Extempore was pronunciation practice. Once all classes were forced to take place online, Extempore effectively replaced in-class oral repetition, which was difficult to recreate on Zoom. Dr. White was able to easily provide feedback on pronunciation by recording videos of herself pronouncing difficult words.

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“It was more effective than other methods, and something that I’d like to continue doing even when we go back to ‘normal’ teaching” -Dr. White

Listening comprehension activities and discussion questions were also easy to transition to Extempore. Dr. White would often pose a question related to a class topic, and ask students to record their answers. This practice was helpful for reviewing vocabulary and pronunciation from previous classes or assisting students to prepare for future classes. It can also be used for “getting-to-know-you” questions with new students, and Dr. White plans on using it in the first week of subsequent quarters to learn about her students.

While Extempore was easily applied to low-stakes, participation-graded assignments like pronunciation practice and discussion questions, it was also used for graded quizzes. Dr. White used the platform to administer vocabulary quizzes that required students to record themselves saying a vocabulary word based on a given definition. Although some students were initially somewhat nervous about the timers and video recording along with typical quiz anxiety, they became much more comfortable over the quarter as they adjusted to the technology and got to know their instructor better.

Feedback

Dr. White and her TA’s provided most feedback in audio or video form, which the students appreciated. They also utilized the text

feedback feature occasionally for quick notes, such as a link to other resources. One significant advantage of grading with Extempore is that instructors give feedback question by question, rather than for one large file, like it is on Moodle, Dr. White noted.

Instructor Perception of Extempore

Overall, Dr. White found Extempore to be very user-friendly and much faster to grade on than the school’s LMS. She particularly appreciated that it reduced the need for more Zoom meetings during the quarter of distance learning. Dr. White said that Extempore was useful in both face to face classes prior to the pandemic and remote learning classes. She and her students ran into few issues with Extempore, and any problems were easily solved when they arose due to “great tech support and customer service.”

Student Perception of Extempore

During the 2019-2020 school year, Dr. White gave a survey to her Winter 2020 (German 2) and Spring 2020 (German 101C) students asking for feedback on Extempore.

She asked four questions about each student’s experience with Extempore. Here are various student responses:

How did you feel about using Extempore for speaking practice compared to previous methods?

“I think it’s good practice to speak since I never have the chance to speak German outside of class.”

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"I think it is great! It is really easy to do and the feedback the professor gives helps me know how I am progressing"

"Awesome! It provides a platform for us to speak out and get feedback from the instructor."

"Extempore is something that is easy to use and makes the practice of the language fun."

Do you feel that Extempore has helped increase your speaking fluency? Why or why not?

"Yes, it helps me focus on pronunciation and rhythm compared to speaking in class. Since I am able to prepare what I'm about to say, whereas in class, I have to think on the spot."

"Yes! It forces me to try and say things without hesitation"

"Yes, because I have to practice what I've written beforehand which means that I more thoroughly understand what I am saying and how to say it."

"Yes, it is good practice without the stress of doing it in front of a real life person."

"Yes. And it improved my pronunciation as well because it allows us to speak multiple times before turn in."

Do you feel less anxious practicing with Extempore than face to face or other speaking methods? Why or why not?

"Yes, I feel more comfortable practicing with Extempore, because I'm able to prepare what I'm about to say, and how I'm going to say it."

"Extempore is much lower stress than being in front of a classroom of people, but not much different than just talking to one other person."

"Yes, it does alleviate anxiety because at that moment, it's just you trying to figure things out."

"Yes, because I am not good at the pronunciation so when I talk to people face to face I will afraid I don't know how to say the wording"

"Yes. because practice makes perfect"

Future Development Requests

Extempore relies very heavily on customer feedback to help us progress with product development. We prioritize input from our actual users to ensure we can advance the product. UCSB's feedback in this regard has been invaluable since they started using the platform. As future requests, Dr. White wanted to see multiple choice questions added as an additional assessment feature, and this feature was added shortly after the completion of her Spring 2020 semester. She also requested a "thumbs up" functionality to quickly grade assessments, and the ability to notify students when they have feedback available via email. The Extempore team is working on adding these features soon.