

International Space Station

Language

Science vocabulary; comparatives and superlatives

Level

Pre-Intermediate (equivalent to CEF level A2–B1)

Comment

This eLesson is about the International Space Station, which recently celebrated its tenth anniversary. It gives students the chance to read a more technical text, including numbers, and also exposes them to comparative and superlative forms of adjectives.

How to use the lesson

- 1 Before handing out the worksheet, say to the class: *You are walking alone and you see a light moving across the sky. What could it be?* Ask students to give their different answers and teach the words *UFO*, *rocket* and *spaceship*. If possible, then show a picture of the International Space Station. Tell students it's often called the ISS for short. In small groups they should discuss what they know about the ISS. You could put students' ideas in two columns on the board (*Know / Don't know*) and return to this at the end of the lesson to see how much they have learnt from the text.
- 2 Students read the text to complete exercise 1. Encourage them to read quickly to improve their skimming skills. If necessary, explain that *purpose* means 'reason for doing something'. For instance, the purpose of learning English could be to get a good job, to travel etc. Students may have more ideas to add.
- 3 Before doing exercise 2, ask students to say the numbers in order from smallest to largest in order to check pronunciation. Then they do the exercise and check answers in pairs or groups before whole class feedback. Again, encourage them to read quickly. Exercise 2 will give good practice in scanning – reading different parts of the text in order to check the significance of the numbers. In feedback, you could ask the students which of the numbers they found most interesting or surprising.
- 4 Before doing exercise 3, review comparatives and superlatives. One way could be to compare three vehicles that students might know. Write the names or stick pictures of the vehicles on the board with the cost and maximum speed underneath (students can guess if they don't know). Then you could elicit sentences, eg *A Ferrari is the fastest and the most expensive* or *A skateboard is cheaper than a motorbike*. Finally, put the grammar in a table on the board, including the irregulars *better / best* and *further / furthest*. Leave this on the board for reference during the rest of the lesson.

This exercise gives practice in detailed reading comprehension. You could do the first question together to help demonstrate that students need to read carefully and check if the sentence really gives the same information as the text. In feedback, ask them to say why the sentences are true or false – this encourages further detailed reading.

- 5 Exercise 4 provides word-building practice with useful vocabulary and highlights how flexible English words can be – many can be used in different forms with little or no change. The words in the table are in the same order as the text. Do the first one together. In feedback, check the pronunciation of *tasty* and the shifting stress in *ex'periment / experi'mental*, *'complicated / compli'cation*, *ex'plore / ex'ploratory / explo'ration*. As a follow-up, students could write sentences or a short story including these words.

Reading eLesson

Week starting 6 December 2010

- 6 Encourage students to give reasons for their opinions. Listen for their use of comparatives and superlatives – in feedback, you could give some examples that you have heard, or refer students to the comparative / superlative table on the board.
- 7 If students have access to the internet, they could find out more about the topics of space tourism, travel to Mars and the ISS and report back to the class. This topic also lends itself very well to short stories. Ask students to write story titles on paper, collect them and put them in a box. Students take a title from the box and write a short story of around 200 words based on the title, without including the title on the page. In a follow-up lesson, other students read the story and try to guess the title.

Answer key

1

a para 5 b para 3 c para 2 d para 1 e para 4

2

1 100 billion 3 450 5 15 7 27,500
2 15.7 4 200 6 10 8 460

3

- 1 F (the Sun is the brightest object in the sky – the ISS is the brightest man-made object)
- 2 F (fastest man-made object)
- 3 T
- 4 T
- 5 F (some have stayed for more than six months)
- 6 F (the ISS is the same size as a five-bedroom house, but the text does not say whether it has any bedrooms at all)
- 7 F (in space you begin to lose your sense of taste)
- 8 T

4

cost	costly	cost
—	important	importance
experiment	experimental	experiment
complicate	complicated	complication
—	spicy	spice
taste	tasty	taste
smell	smelly	smell
develop	developed	development
—	expensive	expense
explore	exploratory	exploration

Related websites

The following websites might be useful, for either yourself or your students.

http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/videogallery/index.html?media_id=25688011 (video update from NASA)

http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/main/index.html (official NASA website)

<http://www.esa.int/esaHS/iss.html> (European Space Agency website)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2010/oct/24/international-space-station-experiments>