

Lesson plan 55: Junk email

'Dear anybody. Your email address has been chosen by our computer. So, for no reason, we'd like to give you a million dollars. All you need to do is give us your bank account numbers. Can we interest you in some diet pills? And, by the way, I want to marry you.'

I hate to let you down, but there is no 'million dollars'. The diet pills don't exist – and your future 'husband' or 'wife' has just proposed to a million others. These and a hundred other stories have been made up to steal your personal information or money or maybe just to infect your computer with a virus. Welcome to the world of junk email.

Junk email – or spam – is probably the biggest global business that's ever existed. Billions of spam emails are sent every day, making up around 80% of all email traffic. These incredible volumes of spam slow down the whole internet and cost businesses millions of dollars just trying to keep up with the next trick.

Your email programme probably includes a spam filter, which sorts out the mail you do want from the junk. But it's impossible to stop it all and if you put together the seconds it takes to see through the deception in each one, they add up to a significant amount of lost time dealing with the spam that does get through.

But who could fall for such obvious tricks? Probably very few of us – one in a million, perhaps. But when you are sending billions of these every day, for next to no cost, it doesn't take a genius to work out that someone is getting very rich.

But who? It's incredibly difficult to find out. Most spam is sent using anonymous networks of infected computers, called 'botnets', some of which are made up of tens of millions of computers across dozens of countries. Maybe your own laptop is sending out marriage proposals right now. It's enough to put you off using email again!

So what can you do to defend yourself? You could set up a separate email account for online use, or maybe leave out the @ symbol when you write your email address online. An up-to-date web browser and antivirus program will help too. And of course, never open strange email, even from a friend's account. Never click on the links. And never ever reply!

1 Which paragraph of the text (1–7) matches the titles below?

- 1 The profits of junk mail para _____
- 2 The technology behind junk mail para _____
- 3 The purpose of junk mail para _____
- 4 Protection against junk mail para _____
- 5 Examples of junk mail para _____
- 6 The amount of junk mail para _____
- 7 Wasting your time with junk mail para _____

2 Decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct answers and correct the false statements.

- 1 The only purpose of junk mail is to infect your computer. T / F
- 2 The majority of emails which are sent are junk emails. T / F
- 3 Businesses spend millions of dollars sending spam. T / F
- 4 Using a spam filter takes up a significant amount of time. T / F
- 5 Very few junk emails result in the sale of goods T / F
- 6 Botnets are networks of laptops used to send spam. T / F
- 7 Writing your email address differently online can be a good idea. T / F
- 8 You should only open email from people you know. T / F

3 The article contains 20 phrasal verbs. They are in the same order as they appear in the article. Find them and complete the missing words below.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 interest someone _____ something | 11 deal _____ |
| 2 let someone _____ | 12 get _____ |
| 3 make _____ (a story) | 13 fall _____ |
| 4 make _____ (an amount) | 14 work _____ |
| 5 slow _____ | 15 find _____ |
| 6 keep _____ | 16 be made _____ |
| 7 sort _____ | 17 send _____ |
| 8 put _____ | 18 put someone _____ (something) |
| 9 see _____ | 19 set _____ |
| 10 add _____ | 20 leave _____ |

4 Which phrasal verbs from exercise 3 have the following meanings?

- 1 invent _____
- 2 discover the deception _____
- 3 arrange or start something new _____
- 4 disappoint _____
- 5 not fall behind _____
- 6 calculate or use logic to find an answer _____
- 7 make you dislike something _____
- 8 believe in a false promise _____
- 9 distribute _____
- 10 obtain information _____

5 Use the phrasal verbs from exercise 4 to complete the questions below.

- 1 Is it always wrong to _____ multiple emails to people you don't know?
- 2 What kind of people do you think _____ the fake offers made in junk emails?
- 3 Is it a good idea to _____ different email accounts for different purposes?
- 4 What stories do they _____ in order to get people to reply to junk emails?
- 5 Does the existence of spam _____ you _____ using email?
- 6 What methods can people use to _____ the tricks used by spammers?
- 7 How can people _____ the latest developments in technology?
- 8 Are young people still able to _____ the answers to problems without using computers or calculators?
- 9 Do you think the public has been _____ by those responsible for internet security?
- 10 Is the internet the best way to _____ about the world we live in?

6 Ask your partner(s) the questions in exercise 5.

Glossary

propose (to someone) (*verb*) - ask someone to marry you

junk email or spam (*noun*) - unwanted email, usually sent in very large numbers in order to sell something to you or infect your computer

infect (a computer) (*verb*) - put a virus on a computer, so that the computer can be controlled by someone else

spam filter (*noun*) - a computer program designed to block unwanted email

deception (*noun*) - dishonest words or behaviour intended to trick somebody

anonymous (*adjective*) - without any name or information to help you identify someone

marriage proposal (*noun*) - when you ask someone to marry you

web browser (*noun*) - a computer program that allows you to use the internet

antivirus program (*noun*) - a computer program that protects your computer from viruses