

Foreign Language Lab Student Employee Handbook

Created for the Foreign Language Department
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Companion Website:
www.neiu.edu/~flanglab/training

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Overview

Welcome, new employee of the Foreign Language Lab. This manual was designed to answer whatever questions you have about the lab's mission and equipment that you will have to use on the job, and give basic training that will carry you through your first semester at the Foreign Language Lab.

The mission of the Foreign Language Lab is a simple one: To research, assist, and guide students in the acquisition of a second or even a third language. To make sure that students have a grasp of that language and to encourage those students to contribute to the community. The Lab's mission hasn't changed since it's creation. The only things that have changed since then are the technology used and the methods that are used by the professors to help those who have chosen to pursue a language, whether it is for a couple of months or to help those who have made it their field of study.

As a lab assistant your job is to help students and faculty use the technology and resources available in the lab to cement their understanding of a particular language. This is done with a combination of both multimedia and language acquisition software that allow users to type and hear in other languages. The lab has an adequate research and reference library which any student can use to find information about any specific country. This library includes books, magazines, travel guides, and videos that can give students a glimpse into that country's culture. The lab also has a large movie library that can be viewed by students to deepen their understanding of a language.

As a lab assistant your job will also include giving limited technical support for any equipment that is needed by students using the lab. You will sometimes be working with professors, so we ask that you give whatever assistance you can in order to make the professors job easier. From time to time you will be asked to provide technical support for the equipment that we have, this ranges from basic computer technical support to basic multimedia operations (How to use a VCR, DVD, or cassette player. Questions about the equipment are asked with relative frequency). You are not expected to know everything about the equipment here, but if you know how to troubleshoot technical problems, you should do the best you can. Otherwise, ask the lab supervisor or more experienced student lab assistants. It takes more than one semester to learn everything so don't be discouraged if you if you can't solve the problem right away.

Again, welcome to the Foreign Language Lab.

Enjoy the rest of the manual; it gets very informative from here on.

Before you begin:

- Remember, this handbook was made by a student lab assistant with 5+ years of experience. If you don't understand something at first, don't feel discouraged.
- After each section take a 5 minute break, so that the material can start to sink in.
- This is a student-oriented organization, you being a student, can benefit from working here.
- If any problems arise, ask the lab supervisor until you are able to handle it yourself.

Like any other job, this one has its perks. Some of them are:

- Unlimited computer access and a place to study during normal open hours when you are not scheduled to work.
- Access to software and audiovisual media that can help you learn a language.
- A pleasant and friendly work environment.
- An opportunity to meet new and interesting people from many cultures.
- Technical and customer service skills for future career growth.

And now for the rules: The most important rule is, that “THE WORK COMES FIRST”. There is some flexibility with regards to schedules and studying if the lab is not busy. If you are on the clock, you are required to help any student or professor with whatever they need. Most things are simple for anyone to do. Others require the lab director's presence. In such a case, tell the person/s to come back later during the lab director's hours which are usually between 9 am and 4 pm.

Eating or drinking is not allowed near the computers or in the lab. We have to make the equipment and furniture last as long as possible because it is difficult to replace. Student employees may only eat or drink in the back of Room A134. Please keep that room and the rest of the lab clean.

Be as courteous as possible to students and faculty. If you can't handle a person, just get the supervisor. 85 to 90 percent of conflicts arise from miscommunication and misunderstanding. Don't try to help someone with something if you don't know the answer. It is important to give correct information. Unless you are 100% sure you are correct, ask the lab director (supervisor) or a more experienced student lab assistant. Words that usually help when dealing with this kind of situation are “I don't know, but I know someone who does.”

These and other rules are posted on signs everywhere in the lab, in case you forget.

Operations

The lab's hours of operation are usually from 9.00 am to 7.00 pm weekdays every semester, except summers when the lab closes earlier. Evening hours are determined by which student employees are available to work. Computers, monitors and all lights are to be on at 9:00 sharp and turned off when closing the lab at the end of the day. All equipment is to be on and functional by the time any students show up at the lab. If you go to the [lab's training web site](#), all the equipment and the functions are explained. As with any lab, this lab is open to all students, but we give preference to Foreign Language students.

The first thing to turn on is the Tandberg lab console; this allows for video and audio to be played from the VCR's and the tape cabinet located in the A134. If you don't remember what they look like, on the [training web site](#), there are pictures and more detailed descriptions of the equipment.

The following are instructions on how to play VCR content in the computer:

- 1.) Make sure Tandberg console is on.
- 2.) To view the tape or cable TV, the VCR has to be set to channel 3.
- 3.) Put a VHS tape into either VCR labeled A or D. (Keep in mind that you have to have to select the VCR in which you put the tape with the Tandberg console)
NOTE: on the [web site](#) you will see how this is done.
- 4.) Now press the "Video" button and either the A or D button, while holding down the selected button, press the station number where the person is sitting. (The instructions will be better illustrated on the web site with step by step pictures.)

The following are instructions on how to play tapes using the Tandberg cassette cabinet:

It's very simple to get regular cassettes to play in a computer terminal. If you look on the side of the computer there is a black panel on the desk with buttons to control play, rewind, fast forward, record, and volume. (There are more but these are the basics that you have to know. Everything else can be learned later on.) Tandberg headphones are plugged into this panel for listening to the cassette decks and VCRs. The Sony headphones are for listening to the computer. There's a large black media rack in the front of Room A134 with cassette decks, VCRs, laser disc players and the computer network router. This is where you put the tapes needed by the students. There are numbered stickers on the lab console, the tape decks in A 134, and in front of each student's desk. Put the tape in the deck that corresponds to the seat number. In regards to volume control, make sure you explain to the student to put the student volume all the way down and the master volume to their desired level, otherwise, the headphones, which have a built in microphone, will pick up conversations and noises from around the lab.

The Student Volume is only needed if students need to record themselves talking. They can then put the volume level in the middle which is shown by little black bars on the LCD screen of the student's control panel. Remind students to label their tapes with their name so they do not get confused with tapes that belong to the lab.

Once the student is done recording or listening, all you have to do is either give them back the tape (if it's theirs) or put it back in the professor's tape cabinet or the lab's tape shelf if it belongs to the lab.

The following are instructions on how to record multiple tapes using the tape duplicator:

As you can see on the Telex tape duplicating machine on the black cart in Room A-134, the slots where the master tape and the copy tapes should go are clearly labeled to simplify the process. **Put the master tape (original) in the "MASTER" slot first to avoid erasing it!** Then put up to three blank tapes into the slots labeled "COPY". Make sure all tapes are properly placed in the machine with Side A facing up. If you are copying both sides at the same time, make sure the AB button is on, to record just one side press the A button. Press the "COPY" button (shaped like an arrow). All cassettes will automatically rewind and then start recording. When finished, they will automatically rewind. Put on the appropriate label and test the sound quality using the portable cassette player on top of the black cart. The master tapes are located either in each teacher's drawer or the tray next to the tape duplicator for textbook and workbook cassettes. When finished put the copies in the appropriately labeled slots on the cassette shelf in A-134.

If the lab gets new computers, we will make CD's instead of tapes. But if that happens, not everyone has a computer or a CD player so this tape duplicator will still be used.

To copy tapes from VCR to VCR:

Students sometimes ask for copies of department events or presentations they did in class for their portfolios. Set the Tandberg console to input to A or D (remember to press the Video button after you set the input). Instead of a student's desk number, select number 31 or 32 which corresponds to the TV sets mounted on the walls in Room A133. Remember to hold down the A or D button and press the number like when playing VHS tapes for students. You will now be able to see the video while it is recording. Then put the video tapes into the VCR's and press record. Remember that both VCR's have to be set to channel 3 and the cable TV boxes must be turned off. The original tape must be put in the VCR labeled D (on the left side of the rack) and the blank tape is put in the VCR labeled A (on the right side of the rack.).

(Recording from TV is similar, but the cable box has to be on the channel you want and only one VCR and cable box is used.)

Software

The Software the lab uses to serve the university community is split into two parts:

Administrative (Programs we use to track the amount of students that come in, how long they are here, when they leave, etc.) Under this heading are three main programs that we use: Excel, Paradox, and Question Mark.

Excel is a good spreadsheet program that we use to display the results of placement tests that are given in the Question Mark system. This allows us to look up students who took the test but for whatever lost the placement sheet we give them. This also allows us to correlate the amount of total language students to the number of students who took the test and from that we can estimate how many students are going to enroll in the department's major or minor programs.

Paradox is a database program that we use to manage the student population in the lab. It tells us who logged-in, when they logged-out, and for how long they stayed. We use this program for three main things, one, it tells the instructor if a student is doing their assignments or not and if they are getting the support necessary to help them learn their chosen second language. Two, the university provides our funding based on the amount of students we service, so this program allows us to justify our existence to the university. Using this data, we can also approximate work schedules.

Question Mark is the program we use to administer placement tests to the student population. As of the writing of this section of the handbook, they are only two placement test languages that are being offered, Spanish and French. This might change in the near future since multiculturalism and multilingualism are beginning to be important to business and trade, so the advent of more languages being added is a strong possibility.

MS Word is used for typing documents and making signs and by students to type papers for their courses. It has spelling and grammar checks for Spanish and French. WordPerfect is similar but our version has spelling and grammar checks for 20 languages that use the Latin alphabet. The [training website](#) gives information about word processors that use non-Western character scripts and the Cyrillic alphabet for writing in Russian. Most of these programs are simple text editors so they have only basic word processing features.

The second type is **Operational** software which the general university population uses, such as WordPerfect, Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, and language instructional software that accompanies each Foreign Language textbook or that is assigned by FL instructors.

Most of it is pretty straight forward, just pop the CD or disk, look for the program icon in the Start Menu, and click it. On the PCs we made sure that everything is as fool-proof as humanly possible. The Start menu is divided into three, categories, “FL DOS Programs” (network), “FL Windows Programs” (installed on hard drive) and “FL CD-ROMs” (CD required to work) The general use software is listed under “Programs” with the most commonly used software on the Desktop.

Most of the language learning software is on CD-ROMs, located in the grey media cabinets in A-134. This is run with icons in the Start Menu of each computer. Like other media, books, VHS, DVD, etc. students may only use these programs in the lab and you should hold their Student ID until the media is returned, much like the Reserve Desk in the Library. There is usually only one copy of the CD-ROM software so holding the ID ensures we get it back. Students may not take these materials home. The cassettes that we duplicate are the exception to this rule.

Other language instructional software is on the network and can be accessed from the Start Menu. Most of this is MS-DOS based. The instructions for this and the CD-ROM software is contained in the program and shown on the computer screen.

Since there are dozens of programs, with more being added as new textbooks are adopted, and new software is acquired by professors, the best way to learn how to work it is to try it out when the lab is not busy. You will learn, as the students do, by actually trying it out. You can then better assist the students who need to do the software for their courses, and you will start learning another language as you go along. You are encouraged to try all the programs, even if you do not know the target language of them, so that you better understand how to help students and know how they feel about the experience.

You don't have to be an expert in every type of software to be able to use it; you just have to know enough to help those who need it. If you play around with the software you will be more or less able to figure out the main features. Eventually you can learn the more advanced functions. The best way to learn any computer software is trial and error. If you make a mistake, ask the supervisor or an experienced student lab assistant. Mistakes will not harm the computers, or the software. The worst that can happen is that computer freezes and reboots. This is mostly due to the age of the machine, rarely human error.

On the www.neiu.edu/~flanglab/training website, the first part of the software section is the most complicated. We will start there first. Sit at the nearest computer, and go to the [software section of the training website](#). You will learn how to fix student log-in records, how to add new students, check log-in times, and give students a comprehensive time log so that they know how many hours they have spent in the lab for the semester.