Quizlet

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PRODUCT AT A GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Type</th>
<th>Vocabulary learning website and mobile app</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language(s)</td>
<td>English, French, German, Latin, and Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Novice to advanced, all ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Vocabulary learning, games, translation, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Format</td>
<td>Downloadable mobile applications for iOS, Android, and Windows or website version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating System(s)</td>
<td>Web-based, iOS, Android, Windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware Requirements</td>
<td>Web-based, cross-platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary Software or Hardware</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Price                             | Free (basic version for teachers and students)  
  For teachers: Quizlet Teacher for $47.88 per year  
  For students: Quizlet Go for $35.88 per year or Quizlet Plus for $47.88 per year |
General Description

Quizlet is a vocabulary learning website that launched in 2007. It is also available as a mobile application on iOS, Android, and Windows devices. This review focuses on the website version.

Quizlet offers ready-to-use study sets with online flashcards for English, French, German, Latin, and Spanish. Instructors and students also have the option to create their own study sets or customize existing ones. Each study set consists of a minimum of two flashcards (typically more), and each flashcard consists of a “term” (usually a word, an expression, or a sentence in the target language) and a “definition” (usually a translation into English or another language, a synonym, an explanation/definition, or an image).

As can be seen in Figure 1, Quizlet offers five “study” modes, which are “flashcards,” “learn,” “write,” “spell,” and “test.”

“flashcards” mode allows users to study the written form of the vocabulary items by looking at the terms and their definitions while also listening to computer-generated text-to-speech audio, which is provided by Quizlet for 18 languages. Alternatively, instructors and students with a Quizlet Plus or a Quizlet Teacher account have the option to record their own customized audio. The “learn” mode allows users to choose from four question types (flashcards, multiple-choice questions, written questions, and fill-in-the-blank questions). For example, multiple-choice questions present users with the written form of a term or definition (e.g., a word in the target language) along with the written forms of four terms or definitions (e.g., four words in English), from which users are asked to choose the corresponding option. After clicking on one of the four options, users are immediately informed if their answer is correct or incorrect, and if the answer is incorrect, they are also shown the correct

![Figure 1: Users can choose from five “study” options and three “play” options.](equinoxonline)
answer. The “write” mode presents users with the written form of a term or definition and asks them to type the corresponding term or definition. The “spell” mode asks users to listen to a term or definition and then type what they heard. Both the “write” and the “spell” mode provide users with immediate feedback (i.e., correct or incorrect), and if the answer is incorrect, they are also shown the correct answer. In addition, the “spell” mode asks users to retype their answer. Finally, the “test” mode is a combination of various activities that students can choose from, including translations of written terms, matching activities, multiple-choice questions, and true/false questions. Users receive feedback on their answers upon completion of all “test” questions (rather than immediately after answering each question). For all five “study” modes, users can choose whether they wish to answer with the term (e.g., the word in the target language) or the definition (e.g., the word in English).

In addition to the five “study” modes, Quizlet offers three “play” modes (i.e., games)—“match,” “gravity,” and “live.” The “match” mode is a timed activity that asks users to drag corresponding items (e.g., a term and a definition) onto each other, which will make the two items disappear. The disappearance of the items functions as feedback for users, since it indicates that the matching was correct. Once all the items have disappeared, users will see how long it took them to match all the items, and they will be able to compare their time to other users who have played the game within the same study set. In the “gravity” mode, a term or definition scrolls down the screen vertically in the form of an asteroid, and users are asked to type the corresponding term or definition before the asteroid reaches the bottom (see Figure 2). Users receive immediate

![Figure 2: In the “gravity” mode, users must type the answer before the asteroid hits the bottom.](image)
feedback after providing their answer. The “live” mode is typically used by a
teacher as a classroom activity rather than by individuals. Students can com-
pete in small teams (in face-to-face classrooms) or individually (in face-to-face
or remote classrooms). In the “live” mode, students compete against each other
simultaneously. Their task is to match the terms with their definitions, and the
team or the student who first matches all terms and definitions correctly wins
the game. Immediate feedback is provided to all players.

While the basic versions of Quizlet are free for both teachers and students,
paid ad-free versions with premium features are also available. For instance, the
Quizlet Teacher version allows teachers to add images and audio to flashcards,
track student progress, play Quizlet “live” with custom teams, and to create
an unlimited number of classes on Quizlet. For students, two paid ad-free
versions with premium features are available, Quizlet Go and Quizlet Plus.
Both versions give students offline access to Quizlet on mobile devices, and
the Quizlet Plus version includes some additional features (e.g., custom images
and audio, rich text formatting, personalized study paths, progress insights,
and smart grading).

Quizlet claims that it will help students learn what they need to know to
get good grades in language classes and become more fluent in the language
(Quizlet, 2021). These advertising claims, along with the activities offered on
Quizlet as described above, will be further evaluated in this review.

**Evaluation**

**Technological Features**
The web-based version of Quizlet requires an internet connection during use,
but no downloads or plug-ins are necessary to run the website. While it is pos-
sible to use Quizlet without an account, both teachers and students are well
advised to create an account, since it allows them to create new study sets or
edit existing ones, and to track and save their progress within their account.
Users have the option to link their Quizlet account to a pre-existing Google,
Facebook, or Apple account and log in using their pre-existing account. As
long as users have a stable internet connection, the website is fast and reli-
able. Quizlet can be used on Windows and Mac, as well as on mobile devices.
It is compatible with Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, and
Apple Safari. Quizlet is user-friendly and easy to navigate for both teachers
and students.
Pedagogical Features

Quizlet focuses on vocabulary learning, which includes spelling and often translation activities (if the flashcards in a given study set consist of a term in the target language and a definition in English or another language). Students with an account can track their progress while they are studying (see Figure 3). For example, while using the “learn” mode, students can see how many terms remain to study, how many terms they are familiar with, and how many terms they already know well.

Instructors with a paid Quizlet Teacher account can track their students’ progress. To be able to do so, instructors must first create a class, add study sets to the class, and invite students to join the class. While instructors can see if and when students complete each of the “study” and “play” modes (except for the “live” mode), they cannot see students’ exact progress. For example, instructors cannot see how many correct and incorrect answers were given, or which terms were most difficult for students. Another potential problem for instructors is that students are often not able to use their real names for their Quizlet accounts, since many usernames are already taken, and Quizlet does not allow for a username to be used twice. This can sometimes make it difficult for instructors to determine the identity of the users in a given class.

Regarding the nature of the Quizlet activities, many of them are instructional, including all of the five “study” modes and the “play” mode “gravity.” While the “flashcard” mode is simply a presentation of the material, the other modes (“learn,” “write,” “spell,” “test,” and “gravity”) are best described as drills, featuring activities such as matching and translation. The “match” mode is somewhat interactive, but it still uses the same drill-based approach (i.e., it is
a game that requires users to match terms and definitions). While the “match” mode requires students to play individually in their own time, students have the option to see other students’ scores and compete against them to get the top score, which gives the activity a game-like character. The most collaborative Quizlet activity is the “live” mode, but only when used in a face-to-face setting with teams (rather than individuals). In this mode, students must work collaboratively, because each student in a team will have a few (but not all) of the terms from the study set on their device. Therefore, students must discuss with the other students in their team which terms they have on their devices, and they must work together to match terms and definitions correctly.

Teacher Fit (Approach)

As mentioned previously, Quizlet claims that it will help students to become more fluent in the language (Quizlet, 2021). The website further states that 90% of students who use Quizlet report higher grades. This claim refers to all the subjects that students can study on Quizlet (not only languages; see Figure 4).

While it may be true that students who use Quizlet receive better grades, this does not necessarily mean that students who use Quizlet become more proficient in the language than students who do not use Quizlet. Rather, it may simply indicate that students who use Quizlet have memorized more vocabulary through rote memorization and consequently may score better on tests than students who do not use Quizlet, although this will also depend on the kind of tests that students take.

Research about the role of rote memorization for language acquisition has produced mixed results. As a decontextualized vocabulary learning strategy, rote memorization has often been criticized by second language acquisition researchers, and some studies reported that rote memorization was

Figure 4. Quizlet can be used for other subjects besides foreign languages.
less effective than more contextualized strategies, such as the storytelling method (e.g., Ge, 2015; Khuwaileh, 1995) or the keyword method (Sagarra & Alba, 2006). However, other studies comparing rote memorization with more contextualized vocabulary learning strategies, such as semantic mapping or sentence-making practice, found that rote memorization was at least as effective as the more contextualized alternatives (Khoii & Sharififar, 2013; Mehrpour, 2008; Sagarra & Alba, 2006). Overall, researchers have argued that rote memorization can be quite useful as a “way of speeding up learners’ progress towards an effective vocabulary size” (Nation, 2011, p. 533). At the same time, Nation (2011) notes that rote memorization “must be seen as only one part of a well-balanced [vocabulary] learning program” (p. 533). Importantly, while research has shown that using Quizlet for rote memorization of decontextualized vocabulary resulted in greater retention of vocabulary (see, e.g., Dizon, 2016; Sanosi, 2018), there is no evidence that it will lead to increased fluency in a foreign language, as Quizlet claims.

Taken together, second language acquisition research supports the rote memorization approach that Quizlet uses to a certain extent, but students should be aware that rote memorization alone will not help them understand how to use a word correctly in a specific context (e.g., a sentence), let alone become fluent in a language. Thus, it is important that teachers using Quizlet provide students with additional opportunities for vocabulary acquisition, in particular more contextualized opportunities such as semantic mapping, sentence-making, storytelling, and extensive reading.

In addition to making promises to students (i.e., they will get better grades and become more fluent), Quizlet makes specific promises to teachers. For instance, the website claims that it will help teachers empower their students, who in turn will “confidently learn anything, no matter what they are trying to achieve” (Quizlet, 2021). This advertising claim can only be seen as an overstatement. For instance, there is no evidence that rote memorization will result in more fluency, as discussed above. Thus, if a student’s goal is to become fluent in a language, it appears highly unlikely that the student would be able to achieve this goal by using Quizlet alone. Quizlet further claims that it will help teachers “instantly create a more engaged classroom” (Quizlet, 2021), and there is some research that supports this claim (see Wolff, 2016, who found that students found the live “mode” motivating and enjoyable).

As described above, teachers with a Quizlet Teacher account have the option to track their students’ progress. Quizlet clearly states, however, that it is not intended as an assessment tool. Thus, teachers using Quizlet should be aware that while Quizlet can be a useful practice tool for their students, they will have to develop their own assessments.
Finally, because the content on Quizlet is user-generated, teachers and students should not expect flashcards to be error-free. In fact, spelling mistakes are not uncommon on Quizlet. Moreover, teachers and students should use the text-to-speech audio with caution, since the computer voice often sounds unnatural, typically due to incorrect stress placement or the inaccurate pronunciation of individual sounds. Because of these limitations of existing study sets, teachers would be well advised to create their own study sets or customize existing ones. Alternatively, teachers could ask students to create study sets for the class, but teachers may wish to check the accuracy of study sets created by students before sharing them with the class.

**Learner Fit (Design)**

From a learner perspective, Quizlet is likely not only a fun tool for studying vocabulary, but also an incredibly useful tool, since it can help learners retain vocabulary, prepare for tests, and potentially improve their grades. Since Quizlet study sets are user-generated, they are also highly adaptable in terms of content and linguistic level, therefore accounting for individual learner differences and different learning contexts. Moreover, Quizlet accounts for different learner styles by offering a variety of activities (i.e., drills such as “spell” or “test” versus games such as “gravity” or “live”). The flashcards themselves also account for different learner styles and preferences (i.e., translations vs. definitions vs. pictures). For example, learners of German whose native language is not English can adapt existing study sets to use their native language rather than English for the translations of the German terms. Furthermore, Quizlet may work well not only with adolescent and college learners, but also with young children, who can use pictures rather than translations or definitions as well as game-based modes (i.e., “match,” “gravity,” or “live”) rather than “study” modes.

Quizlet is also a useful tool for learners because they receive immediate feedback on their responses. This allows learners to study on their own without the help of a teacher or tutor. However, due to being computer-generated, the feedback is highly inflexible. For example, if learners studying German translate the German word “die Hose” with “pants,” this answer may be marked as correct or incorrect, depending on whether the translation on the flashcard is “the pants” or “pants.” Moreover, if learners use an alternative but correct translation (i.e., “trousers”), the answer will be marked as incorrect if the flashcard in the study set only contains the word “pants.” Because there is often more than one correct translation for a term, this can be incredibly frustrating for students.
Summary

Overall, Quizlet is a useful tool for both teachers and students, and research has shown that using Quizlet can lead to greater vocabulary retention (e.g., Dizon, 2016; Sanosi, 2018). Quizlet is also very adaptable and accounts for different learning styles and preferences. However, both teachers and students should be aware that Quizlet relies on rote memorization of vocabulary, a decontextualizing method which does not automatically enable learners to correctly use the vocabulary in context. While Quizlet’s claim that students who use Quizlet will improve their grades may be true, the claim that Quizlet users will become more fluent is highly questionable.

References


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Reviewer Information

Lieselotte Sippel (PhD, Pennsylvania State University) is a senior lector of German at Yale University. Her research explores various aspects of instructed second language acquisition, including peer interaction, corrective feedback, and the acquisition of L2 grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.