

THE USE OF TASK-BASED ACTIVITIES: AN EXAMPLE FROM ESP FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

Denisa Šulovská

ABSTRACT

English for Specific Purposes at the tertiary level now places strong emphasis on meaningful interaction supported by authentic materials and real-life professional contexts. This is reflected in the growing adoption of task-based, project-based, and scenario-based approaches. Unlike traditional form-focused instruction, these activities require students to use language purposefully within professional or disciplinary contexts, thereby integrating language development with the cultivation of transferable competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative communication. The design of such materials is not without its difficulties: it demands sustained investment of time and – crucially – a level of familiarity with the target discipline that most language teachers cannot be expected to possess. This tension between pedagogical expertise and subject-matter knowledge is a recurring concern in the ESP literature and motivates the present study. This paper explores the role of task-based activities in the ESP classroom, focusing specifically on a scenario-based activity designed for archaeology students. It examines students' perceptions of the activity and discusses the implications of incorporating similar tasks into ESP instruction.

KEYWORDS

scenarios, task-based activities, archaeology, soft skills, professional skills, ESP

1 Introduction

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the tertiary level is characterised by an increasing emphasis on meaningful interaction – often based on authentic materials and real-life professional situations. This is reflected in the adoption of task-based, project-based, and scenario-based activities, where students complete goal-oriented tasks that mirror real-world language use within academic and professional contexts relating to their field of study. These activities not only enhance language proficiency but also the

development of soft skills, such as empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving, active listening, time management and many other, and various practical competencies essential for professional success. Meaningful student interaction along with the integration of mediation have thus become central to contemporary ESP instruction.

The activities can be incorporated into lessons in various forms, and can include academic presentations, portfolios, job-related interviews, as well as role plays, scenarios, simulations directly connected with the students' discipline and are often designed by the teacher with the aim of targeting the needs of a particular group of learners. This can sometimes pose a significant problem as designing teaching materials is time consuming and requires more than a passing knowledge of the specialised field.

The study adopts a combined teacher–student perspective, evaluating both the design process and learner responses. Specifically, it addresses three questions: (1) How was the scenario-based task conceptualised and constructed? (2) How did students perceive and engage with the activity? (3) What are the broader implications for ESP practitioners seeking to develop discipline-specific materials?

2 Review of literature

Addressing the needs for authentic tasks and meaningful interaction in the ESP classroom, teachers have started to incorporate various activities that foster learner autonomy, collaborative skills and soft skills including critical thinking, all of which are qualities essential for professional communication. Such activities also support the development of disciplinary literacy (Mariotti, 2024) and can be used to develop both language proficiency and critical thinking. Angelini (2021) emphasises the benefits of task-based activities, especially simulations, which offer immersive, experiential learning opportunities.

Experiential learning as defined by Kolb (2014) is a particular form of learning from life experience. Specially designed experiential classroom activities can add the experience component into classroom instruction and mimic real-world professional or academic situations, allowing learners to engage in authentic tasks that mirror professional challenges, with the added bonus of using English. It could be argued that exposure to real-world scenarios is crucial to achieve desirable learning outcomes (Ananta et al., 2025).

Dragomir et al. (2019) highlight the potential of task and problem-based activities in developing students' abilities to deal with realistic issues. Trying to solve them makes students employ team-oriented strategies and effective communication, which encourages collaborating, critical thinking and creative problem-solving, preparing students for real-life environments and the

challenges of their profession. Empirical studies seem to support the effectiveness of this form of instruction. A study by Angelini and García-Carbonell (2021) demonstrated that university engineering students significantly improved their oral English skills through web-based and classroom simulations. Task-based activities tend to promote collaborative learning, reduce anxiety, and enhance learner motivation (for example, Qudsiana et al., 2025; Chovancová, 2024; Ošmjanski, 2024; Syafitri et al., 2025; Kasper & Youn, 2018), making them a powerful tool in ESP instruction fostering deeper engagement and practical skills development. The nature of the tasks encourages students to interact and collaborate with each other in order to solve the task, employing problem solving skills and often accessing their prior knowledge, or encouraging them to do some research individually.

Most ESP teachers are fairly accustomed to designing some teaching materials. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that, with a few exceptions, they typically lack expertise in the field of study of their students. Nevertheless, Ananta et al. (2025) emphasize the need for authentic activities and real-world scenarios which can often be missing from textbooks. Similarly, Zaman (2024) underlines the importance of developing materials tailored to the learners' specific needs but admits that in ESP it is riddled with challenges. For an ESP teacher with not much experience in the discipline itself, designing and executing such activities may pose a significant problem. For this reason, it may be helpful for the teacher to collaborate with or seek advice from specialists in their field, perhaps members of other departments at their institution (Marriott, 2024). It must be emphasised that the role of the teacher as a materials developer is crucial as commercially available textbooks often do not match the needs of a particular group of ESP learners. This involves selecting or creating texts and tasks that mirror real-world professional discourse.

Various authors have described specific activities they employ in their ESP classrooms, mostly at institutions of tertiary education. Baybakova and Hasko (2020) suggest activities that can be used regardless of the discipline - such as conducting a meeting according to an agenda, negotiations related to the students' professional field, job interview, mini-conference, professionally-oriented discussions and various disputes. Structured debates in the ESP classroom are described by Ellederová (2022), while Salayová (2023) describes the use of fantasy role plays in higher education. Other authors concentrate on describing activities aimed at a particular discipline in higher education. Dragomir et al. (2019) share their experience with using various problem-based scenarios within Military English classes. Chovancová (2024) focuses on the use of a simulation in ESP for students of law, describing scenarios relying heavily on mediation as a skill, such as explaining legal terms to a lay person (a client /lawyer meeting) and legal argumentation and negotiation. In ESP for medicine or nursing various role plays, scenarios and simulations can centre around

doctor-patient communication in a simulated medical centre (Kováč, 2024). Elsewhere, we describe simulated negotiations in ESP for political scientists (Šulovská, 2023). Another, and obviously favourite activity, is a simulated student conference, which is described by many ESP teachers (for example, Slovákova & Kováč, 2025; Eliašová, 2017; Lacíková Serdulová, 2017). This activity simulates a real-world professional context, while enhancing practical communication skills of students and deepening their understanding of course material. Colloquiums are another suitable activity (Slovákova & Kováč, 2025).

As can be seen, the task-based activities in an ESP classroom can be quite diverse. What is important to note is that while some of them are universal and suit learners of diverse disciplines, others are meticulously tailored to reflect particular professional situations.

3 Objective and methodology

At the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, ESP courses are offered to students of diverse disciplines such as psychology, journalism, political science, sociology, marketing communication, etc. Courses are tailored in content to suit these disciplines with emphasis on achieving the right balance between all four communicative competencies (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). This is in accordance with the principles outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which highlight the importance of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence along with mediation (Council of Europe, 2018). The content of the courses draws on both skill-based and topic-based syllabus different for each discipline and is therefore grounded in ESP course design principles, which emphasise needs analysis, authenticity, and relevance to learners' professional contexts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Therefore task-based activities have to be carefully designed to suit the needs of the discipline and can be quite diverse. For example, students of political science may hold a parliamentary debate to modify a bill, students of marketing communication try to address a crisis communication situation within a company and art history students curate an exhibition. This means the courses align with task-based language teaching, organised around task-oriented activities that promote meaningful language use (Ellis, 2003, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007).

In this article we aim to describe one specific multi-step activity designed for students of archaeology, as literature on this specific branch of ESP is scarce. It integrates practice of terminology with reading, writing and mediation, reflecting current approaches to language learning that emphasise the integration of skills in context. Mediation, in particular, is understood as a key component of communicative competence, involving the ability to process and

convey meaning across texts and participants (Council of Europe, 2018). The activity itself may serve as an inspiration for other ESP teachers wanting to develop similarly structured materials.

4 Sample task-based activity – ESP for archaeology

Archaeology relies heavily on highly specialised terminology which students need to master in order to stay up to date with research developments and communicate within the field. However, a well-balanced ESP course for archaeology extends beyond the mere acquisition of extensive vocabulary. The course syllabus draws on a topic-based approach, partially aligning with material taught in archaeology courses for first- and second-year students.

The task-based activity described here connects the use of terminology with a real-life scenario requiring the practice of all four communicative competencies (reception, production, interaction, and mediation). It is the final step in a series of tasks developed to suit a particular topic within the field of archaeology – the description of human remains in archaeological context. Each of the steps of the activity described below builds on the previous one, from controlled practice of terminology to increasingly authentic communicative tasks that mirror a real-life professional situation.

Step 1 – introduction / practice of terminology relating to the description of human skeletal remains.

Step 2 – reading, analysing and writing an archaeological report, with detailed descriptions utilising terminology for appropriate description of skeletal remains.

Step 3 – explaining the findings from prepared archaeological reports to “a layperson”. This step places strong emphasis on mediation, acknowledging the conventions of using Latin-based vs. English-based terminology within the field.

Step 4 – role play scenario. Students take on specific roles to decide what to do with found human remains.

The scenario, as described here, is thus the final activity in a sequence of smaller, carefully planned tasks, which include mastering terminology, reading and writing an archaeological report and some familiarity with mediation. The activity is enhanced by the real-life quality of the scenario, reflecting a situation that archaeologists may encounter during their professional work, increasing student motivation and the level of engagement.

Before role division, students are given a brief summary card (see Figure 1 below) with some details from one of the archaeological reports from Step 2 as well as information regarding the task.

Archaeologists have uncovered a well-preserved human skeleton at the Zelené pole site, Trench B, dated to around 1,000 years ago (early medieval period).

- The skeletal remains belong to an adult male, estimated to be between 40 and 50 years old at the time of death. His height, approximately 1.80 metres, places him above the average for the period. The bone morphology shows clear signs of long-term manual labour: joint wear and stress markers indicate that he regularly engaged in physically demanding activities throughout his adult life. The observed tooth wear is consistent with a nutritious and relatively non-abrasive diet, one that would have been accessible to only a small portion of the population during this period. Despite this, the burial site yielded no grave goods.
- What also distinguishes this individual is the unusual trauma observed on the femur. The nature, placement and healing pattern of this injury suggest it was not the result of ordinary labour-related accidents. Instead, it points to a violent encounter, such as a landholder who defended his property or a warrior who sustained injury in close combat.
- Historians suggest this figure could be linked to Mongol raids. Local historical records (chronicles and church documents, as well as legends) mention a named figure – a hero who founded and later defended the village almost 1,000 years ago and who sustained – and survived – a serious leg injury in one of the battles. Some claim this could be him. If confirmed, the site could become nationally significant. A national newspaper has picked up the story, increasing pressure on the excavation team.
- The discovery site is close to the modern-day village of Zelené pole, where ruins of a chapel and a cemetery dating from the same period still exist.
- A decision will need to be made on what should be done with the remains.

Figure 1: Role play scenario summary

The roles in the scenario include representatives of the excavation team and local community, museum curator, local priest and national heritage official. Students who share the same assigned role are grouped together and jointly prepare for the task. Working as a team enables them to draw not only on their English-language skills and subject-specific knowledge (such as the interpretation of evidence, ethical considerations in handling human remains, burial rites, aspects of collections management and exhibition design, particularly the storing and displaying of sensitive materials like human remains, impact

on tourism and their understanding of heritage legislation and the Funeral Services Act in Slovakia), but also on their mediation skills. It also develops soft skills such as critical thinking, empathy, collaboration and problem-solving and supports peer learning, as students exchange ideas and explain concepts and facts to one another. The social dimension of this and similar scenarios not only fosters students' success in language learning (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020), but also contributes to student well-being (Mercer, 2022).

Subsequently, students are re-divided into groups with each student in the group representing a different role and hold a discussion on what to do with the remains. The preparation process gives even shy students confidence to participate more confidently. The activity always elicits a lively debate as students discuss the possible solutions to this real-life (although considerably simplified) problem. Inevitably, the outcomes of each group will vary which encourages a lively debate as each solution is assessed for plausibility in real life.

A brief class reflection activity follows, encompassing five areas: linguistic and communicative competence, affective dimension, professional and soft skills. Students follow a teacher prepared checklist and comment only on what they noticed (did not) go well during the course of the activity (Figure 2).

Linguistic competence	key vocabulary and expressions grammar accuracy level of formality pronunciation
Communicative competence	turn-taking polite language clarification and checking for understanding adapting language re-phrasing and clarification when needed
Affective dimension	confidence due to thorough preparation focus and involvement managing conflicts and disagreements encouraging others reducing tension
Professional skills	clear agenda, time-keeping, turn-taking professional tone clear statement of goals summarising main points participation in a realistic outcome building on knowledge from other courses
Soft skills	working well within a group respecting others

	helping to solve problems or conflicts taking initiative to move the conversation forward keeping the group focused on task
Final reflection	What is the one thing you learned?

Figure 2: Debriefing checklist (from Šulovská, 2025)

Following this brief class reflection, students are then asked to silently reflect on their own participation and to write down and submit answers to the following questions:

- Do you feel the activity mirrors your possible future professional context?
- What is the one thing you did well?
- What is the one thing you learned from this activity?
- What do you feel you need to improve in / find out in order to participate more fully?
- Was the activity enjoyable?

Ten 2nd year undergraduate students (4 male, 6 female) in total participated in both the scenario and in the survey described here (similar number of students participates every academic year). While the number of participating students may seem relatively low, and consequently does not render itself easily to statistical analysis, it does reflect the number of archaeology students in any given year at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University. Their level of English is usually around B2–B2+ and they are offered four semesters of English for specific purposes aimed at increasing their English language competence within their field of study.

Student answers in the individual reflection are posted anonymously on a Padlet board. The anonymous answers are visible to all participants and encourage self-reflection. As not everyone is naturally capable of assessing what they learned, both brief reflections can help students realise the skills practiced in the activity, the connection to their discipline, as well as their own possible areas of improvement. The choice of Padlet, rather than a dedicated survey application, is deliberate – it allows students to see and engage with their colleagues' responses in real time. Unlike traditional survey tools, where the results are typically visible only to the researcher, Padlet creates an interactive space where students can compare their perspectives and draw inspiration from each other's experience.

5 Findings

Due to the relatively small number of participants the responses in the survey may seem anecdotal. Nevertheless, the responses provide valuable feedback not only on the activity itself but also on students' learning needs and their perceptions of their own progress.

From the Padlet posts and brief class discussions we identified a number of shared themes. The friendly atmosphere and the element of fun the activity brings seem to encourage student engagement (All students rated the activity as enjoyable / highly enjoyable). Students also critically assess where they could improve, commenting most on their need to gain confidence in speaking activities and on their need to actively engage the use of appropriate terminology. It is important to highlight that while all students usually praise the real-

life feel and connection to their discipline (see Figure 3 below), some participants also comment on the fact that it helps them better understand some professional situations. In other words, the reflection enables students to review their individual achievements, consider their language needs along with the professional skills they need to develop.

For the teacher as a materials developer, brief surveys such as the one described above provide valuable feedback. They enable the teacher to evaluate the effectiveness of created materials and activities through classroom feedback and assessment of student performance. In accordance with learner-centred pedagogy the teacher can thus revise tasks to better support communicative competence of the students, as well as focus on enhancing their soft and professional skills.

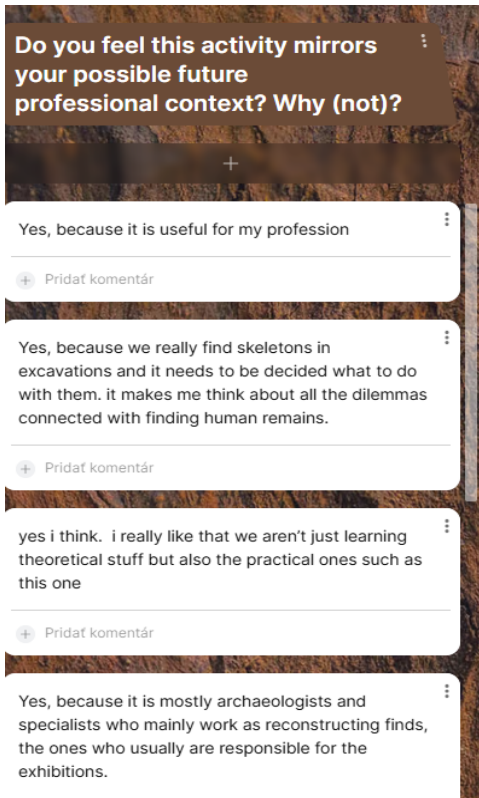


Figure 3: Sample student responses to Question 1

6 Discussion

Admittedly, creating realistic tasks can be challenging and requires considerable preparation time. Deciding what professional situations students may encounter, i.e., identifying authentic goals and conflicts, may prove difficult without the help of specialists, although in future this may be aided by the use of generative AI tools.

Decisions will also need to be made regarding the execution of the scenario, such as timing or the design and use of supplementary materials. It is important to stress that at least some time should be allocated to reflection after the task itself as this can help learners to relate their experience to skills practiced in the activity (Crookall, 2023; Medel, Cemeli, & Ortiz, 2015). It is with this in mind that we take time for both class and individual reflection after scenarios such as this one.

It must be said that in classroom scenarios and other task-based activities there is a very real risk of oversimplification. Real-life professional tasks can be much more complex than classroom simulations and not only due to time constraints. While we may speculate how sophisticated an activity needs to be in the context of ESP, the crucial point is finding a balance between what can comfortably be done in the classroom while remaining authentic enough for the given discipline. Ultimately, the challenge lies in designing tasks that remain realistic enough and develop English language skills along with professional and soft skills.

7 Conclusion

To conclude, task-based activities, such as the scenario described above, connect language use with professional practice and develop both linguistic and professional competence. If thoroughly prepared to suit the needs of a particular discipline, they bring in authenticity into the classroom as learners engage with situations that mirror their future professional contexts. In addition to this, the use of language is practiced in action, with focus not only on vocabulary, but also mediation and negotiation and engaging various other, non-linguistic skills. The immersion in real-life situations encourages learners to use critical and creative thinking to address and solve problems and, in activities with pre-assigned roles, encourages the development of empathy. The collaborative aspect is another advantage. Last, but not least, students usually find task-based activities enjoyable, which has a direct effect on their motivation and participation. Reflection upon the completion of the activity allows students to assess their own performance and learn from each other. Thus, a well-prepared task-based activity has a great potential to develop a range of

skills students will need on the job market and contributes to the value of ESP instruction.

REFERENCES

- Ananta, B. D. B., Sholahuddin, M. F. T., Khotib, D. A., & Farah, R. R. (2025). Need analysis of English for specific purposes (ESP) in psychology: Identifying linguistic demands for academic and professional success. *English Learning Innovation*, 6(1), 108–123. <https://doi.org/10.22219/englie.v6i1.37743>
- Arifah, Q. N., Fauziati, E., & Prastiwi, Y. (2025). Enhancing students' communicative competence through classroom tasks in hospitality training. *Dinasti International Journal of Education Management and Social Science*, 6(2), 1568–1582. <https://doi.org/10.38035/dijemss.v6i2.3916>
- Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing courses in English for specific purposes*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2–27). Longman.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.1.1>
- Chovancová, B. (2024). Training legal skills in the ESP classroom: Mediation activities and student self-reflection. *Hermes – Journal of Language and Communication in Business*, 64, 137–148.
- Council of Europe. (2018). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>
- Crookall, D. (2023). Debriefing: A practical guide. In L. M. Angelini & R. Rut Muñoz (Eds.), *Simulation for participatory education: Virtual exchange and collaboration worldwide*.
- Dragomir, I.-A., Niculescu, B.-O., & Obilișteanu, G. (2019). Problem-based strategies for teaching military English. *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization*, 25(2), 240–244. <https://doi.org/10.2478/kbo-2019-0088>
- Duchatelet, D., Jossberger, H., & Rausch, A. (2022). Assessment and evaluation of simulation-based learning in higher education and professional training: An introduction. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 75, 101210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2022.101210>

- Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: Sorting out the misunderstandings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19(3), 221–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2009.00231.x>
- Ellederová, E. (2022). Strukurované debaty v hodinách odborného anglického jazyka: Realizace řečových aktů a modifikace výpovědní síly studenty informačních technologií. *CASALC Review*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.5817/CASALC2022-2-6>
- Eliašová, V. (2017). K niektorým otázkam prípravy študentov na záverečnú skúšku z OJP = Some aspects of preparing students for ESP final exams. In *Philologica: Lingua academica 5*. Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (1984). Developing your own classroom teaching material. *English Teaching Forum*, 22(3), 39–41.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kasper, G., & Youn, S. J. (2018). Transforming instruction to activity: Roleplay in language assessment. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 9(4), 589–616. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0020>
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Pearson Education.
- Lacíková Serdulová, M. (2017). Študentské prezentácie ako účinný nástroj rozvoja komunikačných jazykových kompetencií = Students' presentations as an effective tool for the development of communication language competences. In *Philologica: Lingua academica 5* (pp. 53–68). Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave.
- Medel, N., Cemeli, J., & Ortíz, L. (2015). Exploring communicative interactions in debriefing sessions with nursing students: A qualitative study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191, 2116–2120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.589>
- Ošmjanski, V. V. (2024). Project-based learning in English for specific purposes: Affective outcomes. *Nasleđe*, 59, 83–96. <https://doi.org/10.46793/NasKg2459.0830>
- Salayová, A. (2023). Creativity in teaching and learning: Fantasy role play activities in higher education. *CASALC Review*, 13(1), 53–59.
- Syafitri, W., Artika, F. S., Rahman, M., & Triannisa, C. A. (2025). Bridging classrooms and careers: Exploring students' perspectives on English for specific purposes instruction. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 17(2).

- Šulovská, D. (2023). Simulated negotiations as a teaching tool in the ESP classroom. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 11(3), 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jolace-2023-0023>
- Šulovská, D. (2025). The role of debriefing in enhancing ESP classroom scenario-based activities. *CASALC Review*, 15(1), 4–19. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CASALC2025-2-1>
- Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Zaman, M. A. U. (2024). Challenges in English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching materials: A systematic review for modern learning environments. *International Journal of Arts and Social Science*, 1(1), 8–18.

AUTHOR

Mgr. Denisa Šulovská, PhD. is an Assistant Professor in the Section of Professional Language Training at the Department of British and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. She successfully served as the principal investigator of the Slovak Ministry of Education KEGA project 023UK-4/2014. Her research primarily focuses on the effectiveness of teaching English for Specific Purposes and on the design of specialised foreign-language courses in tertiary education.

Univerzita Komenského
Filozofická fakulta
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Gondova 2
SK-814 99 Bratislava
E-mail: denisa.sulovska@uniba.sk