

## Specialist or generalist?

**Level:** Intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

**Group size:** Any, including one-to-one

### Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work students is published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 4/2010. The article is a 'jack-of-all-trades' (someone who is competent in many areas of work) or a 'master of none' (someone who is not competent in any area). The article discusses the importance of being a generalist in business.

The tasks in the student worksheets will encourage the students to use functional language and also to develop and practise their writing skills.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the extension tasks and lesson plans.

### Warmer

Students discuss the meaning of 'jack-of-all-trades' and 'master of none' and give their own answers.

### Key:

1. A 'jack-of-all-trades' is someone who is competent in many areas of work.
2. ... a master of none.
3. students' own answers
4. a generalist

### Key vocabulary

The key vocabulary words are: *jack-of-all-trades*, *master of none*, *generalist*, *specialist*, *hybridizer*, *researcher*, *mundane*, *narrowness*, *lack*, *niche*, *monumental*.

### Key:

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. researcher | 7. mundane    |
| 3. dabble     | 9. narrowness |
| 4. hedonism   | 10. lack      |
| 5. altruism   | 11. niche     |
| 6. monumental |               |

### Teaching and learning strategy: Essential and non-essential business vocabulary

It's human nature to pick up on things that are unusual or out of the ordinary. In class this often means that students will want to write down and learn vocabulary that is 'different' and sticks in their minds. This often results in learners having vocabulary books full of words and terms that are not very useful to them. An example from this article would be that students pick up on *rose hybridizer* as being unusual, exotic and fun but ignore words such as *jack-of-all-trades* and *researcher* which will be of much more use. The challenges for the teachers are: 1. how to overcome this and convince students that some words are going to be more useful to them than others, and 2. how we (and they) can be sure which words are going to be more useful.

The answers can be found in a good learners' dictionary, which would highlight the most commonly used words in English. Once the learners are aware of this, they can look up new words in their dictionary and decide whether the word is one they really should integrate into their active vocabulary or whether it is just fun to know but can happily remain in their passive vocabulary. Macmillan's learners' dictionary uses a red stars system to highlight the 7,500 most commonly used words in English: three red stars indicate the 2,500 most common English words; two red stars indicate very common words; one red star indicates fairly common words.

If we look at the words above (*hybridizer*, *jack-of-all-trades* and *researcher*) and search for them on [www.macmillandictionary.com](http://www.macmillandictionary.com), we discover that *jack-of-all-trades* (as in *jack-of-all-trades*, [jæk əvɔːl ɔːl treɪdɪz]) has three red stars next to it. *Researcher* is derived from *research*, which is a two-star word. *Hybridizer* does not warrant a mention at all in the dictionary – *hybrid* does, but it is a simple black entry with no red stars. So, we can see that although *hybridizer* is probably fun to say, learning the meanings and usage of 'mundane' words such as *jack-of-all-trades* and *researcher* are much more likely to improve the students' level of language. Unless your students are horticulturalists, of course!

### Summary: General information

The article discusses the importance of being a generalist in business. It highlights the benefits of having a broad range of skills and knowledge, and how this can be a competitive advantage in the workplace.

## Specialist or generalist?

**Key:**

1. career coach
2. pianist, medical researcher, teacher, school psychologist, professor, rose hybridizer, college counsellor, career counsellor, actor, director, writer
3. jack-of-all-trades
4. deeper
5. specialists
6. generalists
7. expertise/speciality
8. mundane
9. specialist
10. passionate/good
11. career

**Summary: Specific details**

Put the advantages and disadvantages of being a specialist or a generalist into the table.

**Key:**

(suggested answers)

advantages
1. It is more interesting and challenging.
2. You can become an expert in your field.
3. You can earn more money.
4. You can work in a more stable environment.
5. You can have a better work-life balance.
6. You can have a more meaningful career.

disadvantages
1. It is more difficult to find a job.
2. You may become too narrow in your focus.
3. You may miss out on other opportunities.
4. It requires a lot of discipline.
5. It can be more stressful.

**Discussion**

Students will be required to give feedback to the rest of the class.

notes about their group's discussion. These notes will be helpful in the feedback part of the task.

**Project: Becoming a specialist**

Students will be required to give feedback to the rest of the class.

**Vocabulary record**

Students will be required to give feedback to the rest of the class.

**More on this topic**

the following lesson plans in the Business tasks series on onestopenglish:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/lesson-plans/59913/156899>

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/lesson-plans/59913/156385>



## Specialist or generalist?

### 1 Warmer

Answer the following questions.

- A 'jack-of-all-trades' is ...
  - ... someone who studied a building trade at college.
  - ... another word for apprentice.
  - ... someone who is competent in many areas of work.
- Ü^æäÁc@^Á, !•cÁ]æiæ\*!æ]@Á[-Ác@^Áæicä&|^Ác[Á, }äÁ[ ~ cÁ@[ , Ác@^Á•æ^ä} \*Á&[ }cä} ~ ^•È
- Is there a similar saying in your language?
- Is a 'jack-of-all-trades' a specialist or a generalist?

### 2 Key vocabulary

Scan the article to find the key words that match the definitions. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

- someone who collects facts and ideas to develop new products, services, etc. for their work \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- someone whose job is to give advice and help to people with problems \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- a verb meaning c[Áà^Áä}Ç[|Ç^äÁä}Áæ&cäÇäc ~Á- [ !ÁæÁ•@ [ !cÁcä { ^Áä}ÁæÁ, æ ^Ác@æcÁä•Á} [cÁÇ^! ^Á•^Áä [ ~ • \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
- the practice of only doing things that you enjoy and that give you pleasure \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- a way of thinking or behaving that shows you care about other people and their interests more than you care about yourself \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- incredibly large and important, requiring a huge amount of effort \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- ordinary and not interesting or exciting, especially because of happening too regularly \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- a subject that you study or a type of work that you do \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)
- thinking about and concentrating on only one thing; not being able to see the wider picture \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
- to not have any or enough of something that you need or want \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
- a job or activity that you are good at, are able to specialize in, and that is very suitable for you \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)

## Specialist or generalist?

### Specialist or generalist?

by Marty Nemko

Kvøu" y qtvj" dgeq o kpi" cp" gzrgtv" kp" qpg" Lgnf#  
Marty Nemko says why.

1

Many people find it fun to be a jack-of-all-trades (and master of none). I'm one of them: I've enjoyed being a pianist, medical researcher, teacher, school psychologist, professor, rose hybridizer, college counsellor, career counsellor, actor, director, and writer of everything from columns, to plays, to movies, to proposals for reinventing education.



2

Intelligent people often dabble widely because they can usually progress quite quickly. Unfortunately, it takes a lot longer to go from good to great. As Malcolm Gladwell reported in his book *Outliers*, most extremely successful people go deep for decades. I doubt that the person who will cure cancer will have dabbled at it.

3

So, should we force ourselves to take the time to become a real expert at something? Answering that requires us to look at this key question: to live a good life, where should we be on the continuum between hedonism and productivity/altruism? Can we take the easy route and simply say that it's a matter of personal choice? I don't think so. If everyone just pursued hedonism, most of the time would be spent eating, drinking, having sex, watching movies and so on. Soon, there'd be little food and our sewers would never get repaired. In contrast, if everyone spent maximum time on productivity, we'd have more medical discoveries, better (and less expensive) food and the like.

4

Thus, I invite you (and me, too) to take a look at the areas in which you have some expertise. Is there one you feel you should go deeper into? It doesn't have to be monumental – you could decide to become an expert on pricing widgets. After all, if you price a widget right, more people will buy it and benefit from it, and you make sure the widget company's employees have jobs. Who knows? You may find that going into greater depth gets you passionate about a field, even if it's mundane.

5

I know people who, having become expert at something, turned passionate about such prosaic products as accordion doors! It feels good to become an expert on something. And going deep is likely to help your career. Except at the very top of a field (for example, CEO), society rewards specialists, not generalists.

6

Of course, there's a negative side to going deep: excessive narrowness. We all know technical experts who are locked into lower-level jobs because they lack the leadership skills and organizational ability to move up. They may also lack the interpersonal skills to be good friends, lovers and parents. But it seems wiser to start by becoming an expert in something and then to learn those other skills, rather than to start by dabbling in them all.

7

To be honest, I don't think I have the discipline to give up dilettantism and go deeper into one thing, although I could make a bigger contribution by becoming a true expert on how to career-coach doctors, a niche interest of mine. But how about *you*, dear reader? Is there something *you* want to go deeper into?

**Marty Nemko** is one of America's top career coaches. The author of 'Cool Careers for Dummies', he has been advising clients for more than 20 years. He is based in Oakland, California.

Ncpiwci g' jgnr<"

tqug" j {dtkfk|gt"ó" someone who grows new types of roses from two existing roses

ugygtu"ó the underground tubes and passageways that remove waste water

yf igw"ó a small object or piece of equipment that you do not know the name of

ceeqt flqp" fqtu"ó folding doors that fold in the same way an accordion does

flngvcpvku o "ó" (here) working on something you don't really know much about

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## Specialist or generalist?

### 3 Summary: General information

Complete the summary with information from the article.

The author is a professional (1) \_\_\_\_\_, but he has also dabbled as a  
(2) \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Therefore, he describes himself  
as a (3) \_\_\_\_\_.

However, he says that if you want to be great at something, rather than just good, it is important to go  
(4) \_\_\_\_\_ into it. The people who are extremely successful in their  
(5) \_\_\_\_\_ of work are (6) \_\_\_\_\_ not (7) \_\_\_\_\_.

So, whether the area in which your (8) \_\_\_\_\_ lies is monumental or simply  
(9) \_\_\_\_\_, the author suggests you become a (10) \_\_\_\_\_. It will make you  
feel (11) \_\_\_\_\_ and will help your (12) \_\_\_\_\_.

### 4 Summary: Specific details

What, according to the author of the article, are the advantages and disadvantages connected with being a specialist?

advantages of becoming a specialist	disadvantages of becoming a specialist
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	

## Specialist or generalist?

### 5 Discussion

Do you consider yourself to be a specialist or a generalist?

Do you agree with the author's opinions and the advice he gives in the article?

What other points or comments would you like to make on this subject?

### 6 Project: Becoming a specialist

Do a project on the following topic:

What measures can you take to help you become a specialist in your field of work?

Look at aspects such as further qualifications, professional development, national and international organizations and associations, professional awards, and past and present experts.



## Specialist or generalist?

### Vocabulary record: Specialist or generalist?

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
specialize			
	generalist		
			expertly
		deep	