

# **eTools: Using Google Document in the Classroom**

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## **Introduction**

Using a traditional Learning Management system can limit the ways that we teach, especially in the online environment. Perhaps one of the most daunting systems is the discussion board. While we strive to create more discussion, students often focus on simply completing the assignment. Using an eTool to supplement the discussion nature of the classroom can help to foster relationships in the online class, an environment where students often feel distant from the classroom setting, as well as bring important skills to the class.

## **What is Google Document?**

Google Document is a part of the Google products located in Google Drive. Google Drive is an interactive, live system for purposes such as storage, file sharing, or collaboration. When two people enter the same area of the drive, they can see what the other user is doing. Multiple users also can use the same item at the same time, allowing for easy collaboration on a specific project. Because it is housed in a cloud-based system, shared files are easily accessible to people across the country and around the world, previous versions of the item are always available, and reversion to a previous draft is simple.

Within Google Drive, you will find many options for collaboration and reporting.

One option is "Document." Google Document, in appearance, looks like a Microsoft Word document. This allows for more familiarity with the overall process. The document has many options to adjust font, color, and size. One major difference between the Google Document and a traditional Microsoft Word document is that the Google Document automatically saves itself.

### **How can I get Google Document for use in the classroom?**

Google Document is completely free when you sign up with a Google account. You receive 15MB worth of storage in Google Drive. You can create a new account at <http://drive.google.com> or you can use a previously created Google account.

Once you have accessed the Google Drive, choose "Create New" and an option will appear that states "Document." When you click on "Document," you will be creating a new Google Document to share with others.

### **How can I use Google Document in the classroom?**

Google Document offers a variety of activities for the classroom environment. These suggestions depend on "sharing" the document with others, which can be easily done by clicking in the "Share" area (in the upper right hand corner) once you are in your Google Document. Because the Google Document is a live document, users can host an entire conversation within the document if both users enter into the document at the same time. The document can also be shared with a variety of users, even without the other users being Google members. You can invite other users to be read-only,

contributors, or editors of the document. You can create multiple documents to share with a wide variety of people.

More specifically, Google Document can be used for:

1. *peer editing*. For each of my speaking and writing intensive courses, I ask students to edit each other's work. In Google Document, many people can add their comments without affecting the original work. Because the student can always revert back to a previous draft, comments left, changes made, and editing suggestions can easily be deleted. I encourage students to leave their comments in a specific color, so that when large groups edit the document, you can identify each person's comments or contributions. This also makes the process much easier to grade as you can immediately see the work each person has contributed to the editing process. In this case, I generally ask students to create a Google Document themselves, while sharing it with other students and me.

2. *group assignments*. Google Document is a wonderful place for a group to work on one document. Because the document is live, multiple people can make changes to the same document, while saving and tracking all of those changes. In fact, due to the live nature of the document, multiple people can make changes to the document at the same time. This also allows for true collaboration, even in an online class. The group can "meet" within the document and make edits and changes together as a group. Again, because the document exists in a cloud, the document can always be reverted to

previous drafts as well. Because Google Document tracks each person's contributions, you can more easily assess the work that each person contributed to the overall document. In this example, I generally create the Google Document myself (with a blank document) and then share with the specific group members (which gives me ownership). However, the group can create their own document and share it with the other group members.

3. *interviewing*. Google Document can be used as a discussion board platform for the class. In my Interviewing and Communication course, students get to know each other (as well as practice their interviewing skills) by performing interviews in a Google Document. They can leave questions for a partner, who then replies to the questions. This process encourages conversation, as the entire conversation is easy to see. It also makes grading simple and fast, as all of the information needed is on one page. For my class, I create the Google Document for each pairing of students, and share the document with the two students working together.

4. *storing shared work*. Because Google Document is a cloud-based system, you can store work that others may want access to over time. As a department, you can share important documents such as assessment information, assignments, and syllabi for classes. Because you control the privacy and sharing options, you decide who can see the documents (and restrict access when needed). It also allows others to access the information when they need it. This is especially helpful if multiple instructors teach

several sections of the same course.

### **Conclusion**

Google Document serves as a fantastic tool for classroom and academic use. Because it is a live document stored on a cloud, it offers much flexibility to sharing, collaborating, and storage. It is also easily accessible to all students and has no cost associated with it. As more classes move to using online tools, Google Document can serve as a way to allow conversations to continue outside of the walls of a traditional classroom.