eTools: Using Livebinders in the Classroom

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Introduction

As you are undoubtedly aware, traditional education focuses on paper. From the syllabus given at the beginning of the semester to a reflection assignment at the end, students receive handouts, project descriptions, rubrics, and other items to carry and lose as the semester progresses. While Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Blackboard or Canvas may serve as document repositories, these papers are often filed under "weeks" or modules in the LMSs and are not always easy to find. This is where Livebinders emerges as an alternative way to store classroom information.

What is "Livebinders"?

Livebinders is exactly as it sounds—a cloud-based virtual binder where professors and students can store articles, papers, journals, and other material in one place that can easily be shared with others. Each binder has "tabs" for topics and "subtabs" for material that fits under each topic. These binders can be private or public, with the capability for collaboration (or not) in creating and adding to the binders. These binders are updated in real time, which means there is no waiting for the content to be updated.

Instructors can create multiple binders and have control as to who can access the binder. Livebinders can be shared solely with the students enrolled in a course or made public for others to view. They can be e-mailed or they can be embedded into a LMS

system with an embed code. Content can be uploaded as a link to either a document or a spreadsheet, or saved as a pdf file and uploaded as the document itself. Additionally, outside items from such sources as Youtube or Flickr can be embedded into the documents or the binder. The Livebinders website provides tutorials on creating and storing material in binders. According to their website's Terms of Service, all content in the binder is the property of the creator, which means that you retain ownership of the content of your binders.

How can I get Livebinders for use in the classroom?

Access to Livebinders is simple. Go to www.livebinder.com, click on the "education" tab, and sign up for your free account. With this free account, you can create up to 10 binders, with 100 MB of storage and a limit of 5 MB per file. If you need additional storage space, for a fee of $29.95 a year, you can receive 500 MB of storage and a file size upload limit of 25 MB; for a fee of $99.95 a year, you receive 50 GB of storage and a file size upload limit up to 50 MB.

How can I use Livebinders in the classroom?

For the traditional or "flipped" classroom, Livebinders provides a place where students can access course material. Additionally, Livebinders enables students who miss class, for whatever reason, legitimate or not, to remain connected to the course.

More specifically, Livebinders can be used as:

1. *a repository for articles you want students to read.* This app takes the place of

the carefully selected articles professors once chose, had bound, and sold at the bookstore. With Livebinders, student log in and read the articles via the binder. Several tabs can be created to organize the topics or types of readings for your course.

2. *a place to store handouts.* Keeping with the paperless theme, one tab can be used as a place for assignment sheets and rubrics and another tab can be used as a place where students can examine sample assignments. Or, each assignment could have its own tab, with the assignment sheet, rubric, examples, and links to tutorials placed within it.

3. *a place to store and organize presentations.* Students can easily access your Power Point, Keynote, Slideshare, Prezis, and other presentation tools to prepare for class, for reference at a later time, or as an in-class aid. Furthermore, Livebinders is the perfect place to store videotaped lectures and links to video clips.

4. *an electronic portfolio.* As more schools are moving towards paperless tenure-track and promotion portfolios, Livebinders offers a solution for you to create and build your own electronic portfolio. The tabs offer places to store items throughout your career. You can change the links and organize the binder, or create a new binder and supply it with evidence collected in your original binder. Remember, all updates occur in real time.

5. *as student projects.* Students can create their own Livebinders, which can be used as a portfolio of their best work or as a project that includes articles, video clips,

photographs, and reflection, among other items. Livebinders also can be used as a space to load videos of speeches. Students can create their own binders for their videos or a binder can be created for each course, which then can allow students to have access to each other's speeches. Remember, you can set your binder to private and give access only to the people (e.g., your students) who receive your binder's URL. Because Livebinders is collaborative, students can work in pairs or groups using the binder as a repository of material collected for a project or as an overall home for the project itself.

6. *as a department resource.* Your department can create Livebinders for each course taught so that faculty members can share their assignments, activities, and tips with each other. This function may especially be of interest to programs with GTAs who are new to teaching and could use ideas as they begin their teaching careers. Livebinders also can serve as a repository for assessment and accreditation material, with access shared among faculty members.

7. *as an access point to other people's ideas.* Livebinders provides a "search" function, where you can peruse material individuals have posted on a variety of topics. For example, if you are looking for new ideas on how to teach outlining in the Basic course, you can type in the words "speech outline" in the search box and find several live binders that cover this topic in their content.

8. *as a link to conference materials and other presentations.* Rather than taking a pile of papers to distribute at a conference presentation, instead, put your paper, as well

as the rest of your members' papers and materials, into a binder where audience

members can access it later. Although you will need to provide attendees the URL for

easy access, you can shorten it as a bit.ly (go to https://bitly.com/pages/about and paste

your Livebinders link in the box at the top of the page. You will get a shortened link).

Conclusion

Livebinders is a versatile organizational tool for both faculty and students. While

the free version is a bit limited in size and the amount that can be uploaded, it still

provides a place for papers, presentations, and portfolios that can easily be procured by

others in shared or private environments. As institutions continue to become paperless,

Livebinders is a viable solution for faculty and student storage and access.