

eTools: Using MindMeister in the Classroom

Renee Robinson, Saint Xavier University

Introduction

Instructors often seek pedagogical strategies and tools that help learners to better understand course information by knowing how to connect, organize, summarize, and visualize new concepts to which they are exposed in a module or series of topical readings. Additionally, instructors may look for ways to have students demonstrate their comprehension of course materials through independently or collaboratively created deliverables. One tool that allows instructors to meet each of these goals is MindMeister.

What is MindMeister?

MindMeister is an online tool that permits users to work independently or collaboratively, in real time, if desired, to create mind maps of specific content. (A mind map is a visual representation of concepts, ideas, or words related to one central theme or topic.) MindMeister's overall goal is to help users enhance memorization and recollection of material via map creations that organize and structure information, foster collaboration, and exchange information with others. These map creations can be shared via social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) or other websites; MindMeister is also mobile accessible via iOS and Android devices.

How can I get MindMeister for use in the classroom?

To obtain MindMeister, go to <https://www.mindmeister.com/>, access the "Getting Started" tab, and select an account option. MindMeister offers four options: (1) Basic (Free), (2) Personal (\$36.00/6 months), (3) Pro (\$60.00/6 months), and (4) Business (\$90.00/6 months). Once you select an account option, simply provide your name, e-mail address, and a password. Upon selection, MindMeister will send a confirmation e-mail that allows you to activate your account. Once the account is activated, you will be able to access the site to view various video tutorials or to work with different mind mapping templates. Each option has a free 30-day trial and educator discounts are available to both faculty and students; upgrading an account can be done at any point if desired.

There are two things to consider when selecting an account option. First, I would suggest trying the Basic option initially as it provides a user with access to create up to three mind maps and because a user may require more than 30 days to experiment with the product prior to purchasing it. Second, the account type you select influences the output choices. For example, a Basic account allows for online sharing and mind map conversion to a PDF, outline format, or full size .mind document whereas the Pro account also allows Word and PowerPoint exports.

How can I use MindMeister in the classroom?

Because MindMeister is an online mind mapping tool, it can be easily implemented in face-to-face, flipped, hybrid, or online courses. MindMeister fosters

instructor-student and student-student communication about course content resulting in learning comprehension checks and discussions that help students compare and contrast different ways that information can be depicted or interpreted by themselves and their peers.

More specifically, MindMeister can be used as a:

1. *reading comprehension tool*. Instructors often report that students fail to read course materials prior to class. To alleviate this behavior, have students work independently to create a mind map that captures the key ideas of the assigned reading(s). Students can bring a digital or hard copy of the mind map to class for discussion, and then compare and contrast their maps to determine what kinds of information they either have noted or may have overlooked in covering the content. This activity also helps students develop their critical reading and thinking skills. It can also be modified for use as a group activity by utilizing the collaborative feature of MindMeister, thus allowing students to interact about course content outside of class.

2. *content review activity*. Working independently, students can create a mind map that formulates a visual response to an instructor-generated prompt. For example, prior to administering an exam, I often have students create a mind map that depicts all of the concepts presented in a particular unit. This exercise helps students organize the covered material as well as identify how the different topics/subtopics are related to a broader concept.

3. *project planning device*. Whether students are working independently or in small groups to complete a project, they often struggle with time and project management. Part of this challenge extends from an inability to identify or recognize all of the tasks associated with the assigned project. MindMeister helps students organize and plan projects by offering an interactive tool for them to categorize, list, co-create, and collaborate on all aspects of a project. The mind map can then be shared with the instructor as a PDF via e-mail or attachment in the course learning management system, or through the online collaboration feature for feedback about the activities and tasks associated with the project. This use of MindMeister helps students obtain practical experience project planning online while also obtaining more formal training on project and time management by receiving instructor feedback on their planning performance prior to project completion.

4. *research paper planning aid*. When writing a research paper, students often wrestle with identifying a topic to investigate as well as how to connect and organize information about the topic once it is identified. MindMeister can be employed as a brainstorming tool for topic identification. It can also be used to help students' formulate research questions, organize the information located by source type, synthesize literature about the topic, and summarize key findings. The visual representation of this content helps students see the connections between the information they are locating and the kinds of information included in their research. It

also helps students recall the information so they can relate it more easily to various components of their research paper.

5. *instructor planning aid*. Given the role of classroom and program assessment, changing delivery systems, and the need for faculty to articulate the relevancy of their departments, MindMeister assists instructors in creating a course map of the content to be covered in a given period. Instructor mind maps can include course topics by time frame, learning outcomes, resources and texts that support student learning, and ways to measure learning. Mind maps can also consist of the technology to be used in a course to support student learning as well as learner demographic information and brainstorming categories. Mind maps of this nature assist the instructor in visualizing the entire course, ensuring learning outcomes are met, and determining if the pedagogical practices employed in the course are appropriate and reflective of the best practices associated with student learning.

Conclusion

Overall, MindMeister is an effective eTool that encourages instructors and learners to communicate, collaborate, and engage in course content in an organized and structured way that promotes student learning. Additionally, MindMeister engages Millennial students by tapping into their need to build and create artifacts and content, and promotes the incorporation of technology into the classroom in a way that is intentional and easily tied to course content and learning outcomes.