eTools: Using VoiceThread in the Classroom

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Introduction

As an online instructor, I have struggled with how to adapt my lectures, discussions, and the interactions that occur in a face-to-face class to the online format. And as my teaching responsibilities have shifted to online instruction over the years, I have searched for instructional resources that could help me present the course content and facilitate asynchronous discussions. One such resource is VoiceThread.

What is VoiceThread?

Used in online, hybrid, or web-enhanced communication courses, instructors can use VoiceThread to present course content and facilitate asynchronous discussions. In VoiceThread, users create content by posting voiceover, web cam video, or text to a slide. (If users do not have a microphone, VoiceThread can be set up for an additional fee.) These slides can also contain videos, pictures, PowerPoint slide text, or images. Each user also uploads a picture or icon, which enables each post to be visible and heard when either the picture or icon is clicked. [For an explanation on how to use VoiceThread in a hybrid course, see Pecot-Heber (2012) or to learn how to facilitate student contributions to VoiceThread, see Ferriter (2011).]

How can I get VoiceThread for use in the classroom?

Go to https://voicethread.com and purchase either a single Higher Education

Single Instructor License or Site License. Higher Education Instructors may purchase a license for $99.00 per year.

How can I use VoiceThread in the classroom?

VoiceThread provides a variety of options for presenting course content and engaging students through asynchronous discussion. More specifically, VoiceThread can be used as:

1. *a tool for presenting course content.* Most recently, I used VoiceThread to present the content for each chapter in a 10 week online interpersonal communication summer course. For each chapter, this included PowerPoint slides (e.g., definitions of course concepts, theories, discussion questions, personal examples, explanations of course content, and pictures), my voiceover, web cam video, and text comments in VoiceThread. I embedded the VoiceThread into the content module for the course.

2. *a discussion forum.* Embedding VoiceThread into the discussion in a course management system (CMS) allows students to review your comments about the course content and participate in an asynchronous discussion. Students can post in VoiceThread by typing text, posting an audio recording, or posting a video. When using VoiceThread as a discussion forum, expectations for the number of postings and the minimum amount of content for each posting (e.g., posting should be at least two minutes in length or contain at least 30-35 words) should be clearly stated and shared with your students. Moreover, consider that the content of each posting can (a) answer

one of the discussion questions listed in the VoiceThread, (b) pose a question for other students enrolled in the course, (c) provide an example of a course concept that is illustrated in the VoiceThread, (d) identify an observation of a concept from the assigned chapter reading, or (e) contain a comment that illustrates student understanding of a course concept.

3. *a tool to review discussion content that can be used for reflection papers.* After students post in VoiceThread, they can review all the postings and complete a written reflection paper by identifying the themes they compiled from their review. For each theme, students can be asked to explain the topics the class discussed, identify the examples the class provided, or summarize the key points from the discussion. Students also can examine the themes for recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984).

4. *a way for students to create their own individual VoiceThread.* Students can work individually to create a VoiceThread on a course chapter, concept, or theory. The VoiceThread could be presented individually in class or posted in the CMS to enable classmates to respond to the content.

5. *a way to enable students to work in small groups so they can collectively create a VoiceThread.* This approach allows students to work collaboratively in a small group in order to identify content for each slide and present using the web cam and/or voiceover feature. Reflection papers can focus on the process of creating the VoiceThread in a small group by linking the process to specific course concepts and theories.

Conclusion

VoiceThread is an effective instructional tool for online, hybrid, or web-enhanced communication courses. This tool offers an opportunity for students to interact and discuss course content, and can serve as an alternative to the asynchronous discussions that occur in a CMS.

References

Ferriter, W. M. (2011). Good teaching trumps good tools. *Educational Leadership, 68*(5), 84-85.

Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70*, 274-287. doi: 10.1080/00335638409383697

Pecot-Hebert, L. (2012). To hybrid or not to hybrid, that is the question! Incorporating VoiceThread technology into a traditional communication course. *Communication Teacher, 26*, 129-134. doi:10.1080/17404622.2011.650703