



## VoiceThread Best Practices

VoiceThread is a web-based tool that allows asynchronous and ongoing digital communication among participants using text, audio, and/or video.

VoiceThread has been integrated to D2L as an **External Learning Tool**. The tool can be used in face-to-face, hybrid, or online learning environments to support a variety of learning activities, including content presentation, critiques and discussions, and assessment. The multi-modality features of VoiceThread accommodate diverse learning styles and increase social presence. It is an easy-to-use tool and has been used to support the learning process in an engaging and fun way, but there may be other tools that better meet your use case. Be sure to check out the section of this guide: [Considerations before Deciding to Use VoiceThread](#).

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## Tutorial Video(s)

### [Tutorials for VoiceThread](#)

VoiceThread also frequently offers free, interactive training webinars. To register or view past webinar recordings, visit [VoiceThread's workshops web page](#).

## Best Practices for Using VoiceThread

### Creating

1. To keep the **animation** on existing **PowerPoint** slides while uploading them to VoiceThread, save them as a **video**. Refer to [instructions for converting PowerPoint slides into a video](#) to learn how to do this.
2. To keep **PowerPoint** slides' **format** (e.g. fonts), save the slides as a **PDF** or an **image** file before uploading to VoiceThread. (VoiceThread recommends using image files vs document files.)
3. For more details on acceptable **file types and sizes**, check out [VoiceThread's troubleshooting guide on file types](#).

## Commenting

1. Complete editing all the slides **before** recording any audio or video comments on them since the comments in the form of audio or videos **cannot** be edited once completed. The only way to change it is to record it again. Prepare a transcript for long comments if needed.
2. While recording comments on multiple slides, make sure to **uncheck Automatically Advance to the next slide** in **Playback Options** in order to leave enough time for narrating on each slide and advance to the next slide manually.
3. Use different **identities** for different commenting purposes. For example, use “instructor” identity for recording lectures, use “feedback” identity to provide feedback to students. Comments can be easily sorted out based on their identities. Check out [VoiceThread’s guide on using identities](#).
4. Mention the **name** of the student while providing comments to a particular student to make sure the message is received by the right person.
5. Make sure the environment is **quiet** while recording long comments, especially a lecture. It is recommended to use a **headset** while recording audio.
6. Check **Enable Comment Moderation** on the **Playback Options** page when participants’ comments are **private** or might be sensitive. Comments will be hidden from all participants unless the creator decides to reveal them. This feature is also useful when the VoiceThread is used as an **assessment** tool. Refer to [VoiceThread’s Enable Comment Moderation guide](#).

## Sharing a VoiceThread

Make **copies** of a VoiceThread to be used in different sections of the same course. It is recommended to name the copies with course name + section number. By doing this, students’ comments from different sections will not be mixed together. This is helpful when the instructor hopes to grade students’ comments and enter their grades in different sections.

## Accessibility

1. VoiceThread offers a [variety of options for interaction](#) and supports [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#).
2. Direct students with **visual impairments** (who use screen readers) who need accommodations to switch to [VoiceThread Universal](#) from their accounts.
3. Creators (instructors or students) can provide **closed captions** for students with hearing impairments. Creators can [add closed captions](#) for each slide. Creators have the option to upload a caption file (.dfxp, .srt, .sami, .scc, or .sbv) or request

captions from VoiceThread. These machine captions may take up to 4 days to load and will need to be edited for accuracy. Refer to the [Adding Captions to VoiceThread](#) guide for more directions.

## Best Practices for Pedagogical Integration

1. Prior to using VoiceThread, direct students to the **resources** on how to use VoiceThread. Create a VoiceThread for students to practice using it. Gradually increase the complications of VoiceThread application throughout the course learning in order to make sure students are able to focus on learning the content rather than the technical aspects of VoiceThread. Provide [VoiceThread guides](#) for students. Depending on how you are using VoiceThread, direct students to our guides: [Commenting on a VoiceThread](#) and [Completing a Graded Assignment](#).
2. Review **netiquette** guidelines with students. Create a safe, friendly, encouraging learning community for all the students.
3. It is highly recommended that the instructor's **expectations and directions** for a particular VoiceThread activity are explicitly communicated at the beginning of the VoiceThread. Communicate by **both text and audio/video** so the students can find the information related to the VoiceThread activity in one place and minimize the possibility of misunderstanding.
4. Provide a few **quality examples** of comments or VoiceThread presentations created by other students to demonstrate and clarify expectations for participation.
5. Keep a VoiceThread presentation/lecture **under 20 minutes**. VoiceThread recommends breaking up instructor comments to about **1 minute** or so per slide. It is recommended to insert a slide of short quizzes or open-ended questions during the lecture to keep students engaged and thinking.
6. Consider narrating with a **webcam**. Webcam narration adds human presence and helps to create a learning community in an online course. Encourage students to use webcams for commenting, too.
7. Use the **Doodling** function to increase teaching presence and keep students engaged. Check out [VoiceThread's Doodling guide](#).
8. Provide **feedback** for student work, such as an essay, by using audio or video comments with the Doodling feature. This will humanize the instructor's feedback and also improve the efficiency of feedback.

## Considerations before Deciding to Use VoiceThread

**Long discussions:** VoiceThread can be a great, engaging option for discussions, especially with a smaller group. VoiceThreads used for discussions can become very long, especially if you have a large class. Consider limiting comment time – this can be enabled when you set up a comment assignment. Consider using D2L’s Discussion tool with Video Note as another option.

**Voiceover for slides:** VoiceThread gives you the option to record slides with audio, video, and/or text comments. If you want to set up a watch or comment assignment, you may decide that this is a great option for delivering content to your students. You don’t have to set up an assignment for students to view/interact with your slides though. Consider using Panopto or Zoom if you don’t need students to comment.

**Watch assignments:** You may think that setting up a watch assignment is an option to enforce participation. Please note that in order for a student to submit a watch assignment, s/he has to watch 100% of every slide and comment.

**Captioning:** If you’re primarily using VoiceThread for content, you probably have time to wait for the captions. However, since it takes 4 days for captions to load, consider the use of other tools if students need access to captions quickly during more interactive activities, such as in discussions. Use D2L’s Discussion tool with Video Note as a more accessible option.

## Ideas for VoiceThread Activities

VoiceThread is a **media sharing** and **discussion** platform and has been used in many ways to enhance student-student interaction, student-instructor interaction and student-content interaction in online courses. The following are some examples of VoiceThread applications in online courses; however, this is not an exhaustive list.

### Student Use

Generally speaking, there are three types of activities for students to use VoiceThread: **Viewing, Commenting/Discussion/Debates**, and **Creating**. Examples include:

- Icebreakers: self-introductions at the beginning of a semester
- Research presentations: research topics in groups or individually
- Debates: debate and discuss controversial issues
- Examples: share real life examples for some topic/theory/principles
- Evaluation: document and share the process of an activity for instructor or peer evaluation
- Digital storytelling
- Brainstorming

- Practice foreign languages

## Teacher Use

Using VoiceThread, an instructor can create and share **interactive lectures**, facilitate student **discussion**, and **assess student learning**. Example activities include:

- Create a course tour
- Create lectures and presentations
- Provide audio/video feedback for student work
- Facilitate discussion and conversation around topics
- Assess student learning by asking them to answer questions, interpret graphics (data), etc.

For more resources and ideas of integrating VoiceThread into teaching, please refer to the following links:

- [VoiceThread Workshops](#)
- [VoiceThread Higher Education Library](#)