COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY

Office of Distance Education

VoiceThread Best Practices: Humanize Your Online Class

Overview

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

About VoiceThread

VoiceThread has been integrated to D2L as an External Learning Tool. The tool can be used in on-ground or online learning environments to support a large variety of learning activities, from content presentation, to critiques and discussions, and to 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 student-centered constructivist learning process in an engaging and fun way.

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Best practices for Pedagogical Integration
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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. [Click here](#) for the instructions of converting PowerPoint slides into a video.
2. To keep PowerPoint slides' format (e.g. fonts), save the slides as PDF or Graphics before uploading to VoiceThread.

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.
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. Comments on a slide are usually displayed in the chronological order. Reordering the comments based on the relevancy of their contents usually makes the discussion or conversation easier to follow.
6. Make sure the environment is quiet while recording long comments, especially a lecture. It is recommended to use a headset while recording audio.

7. Check **Enable Comment Moderation** on **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.

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. Direct the student who has visual impairment and need accommodation to switch to VoiceThread Universal from his or her account. For more information, check this page.
2. Closed captions for each slide can be provided by the creator for students who have a hearing impairment. For how to add caption, check this page.

Best Practices for Pedagogical Integration

1. Prior to using VoiceThread, direct students to the resources of 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 contents rather than the technical aspects of VoiceThread. VoiceThread guide for students can be found through the following link: http://docs.voicethread.com/category/web-application/viewing-web-application/
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 expectation 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. 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 Doodling function to increase teaching presence and keep students engaged.
8. Provide feedback for student work, such as an essay, by using audio or video comments with Doodling feature. This will humanize the instructor's feedback and also improve the efficiency of feedback.

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. This is not an exhaustive list. More lesson ideas and examples of its applications can be found in the Browse page within a VoiceThread account.

Student Use:
Generally speaking, there are three types of activities for students to use VoiceThread: Viewing, Commenting/Discussion/Debates, and Creating. Some examples might be:

- Icebreaker: Self-Introduction at the beginning of a semester
- Present research topics in groups or individually

- Debate and discuss controversial issues
- Share real life examples for some topic/theory/principles
- 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. Some activities might be:

- 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 check the following links.

http://blog.voicethread.com/webinars-all/
http://blog.voicethread.com/
http://ed.voicethread.com/about/library/