

Google Drive

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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Trying new online tools in the classroom can be a stressful experience. Just when you think you have all your bases covered and students ready to do the activity, something goes wrong with the technology. When I decided to try Google Docs (now called Google Drive) with my students, I was glad when I chose a small group. We tell our students that they need to learn from their mistakes, and that I definitely did! This fall, I presented a session on how to use Google Drive in the classroom to a group of teachers at our convention. It was a culmination of all the mistakes I had made and what I have learned.

Google Drive is a free online program that can be used to do a multitude of projects. You can create documents, presentations, spreadsheets, online forms and drawings. Everything is stored online so with an Internet connection, you can access them. The sharing options allow you to collaborate with others on these projects without having to email back and forth. Several people can be working on the same project synchronously. This makes Google Drive the perfect tool to use with student projects, staff groups, professional learning communities, or for personal use. Google Drive eliminates the need to carry around a flash drive. No more excuses for students that *"It is on the computer at home"*, *"I forgot my flash drive"* or my personal favourite; *"My computer crashed and I cannot do it"*. Students can use their iPod, smartphone or iPad; they can work on Google Drive projects at home, school, Starbucks, or even grandma's house!

The first step was ensuring that all my students could access Google Drive. It should have been as simple as signing up for Google accounts. Google Docs was not overly compatible with Internet Explorer, and now Google Drive needs to be downloaded so ensure you contact your IT department if you do not have access to make changes to your school computers. My students were in Grade 8, old enough to fill in their own information to apply for a Google account. For students younger than Grade 6, I created some general accounts for our school to use. It was important to stress to my students that this account be used only for education purposes. They may have their own personal email, but its purpose is distinct from the school account. Therefore, when it came to choosing a username, it had to be a combination using their name, rather than a nickname that I had to write down in order to identify. I wanted students to be able to use these accounts beyond my classroom, and trusted their privacy, so I did not

keep track of passwords, which was another lesson learned. I trusted that the students would remember their password; however forgotten passwords caused students to create new accounts. So now passwords are recorded, but it is stressed to the students that it will only be used if and *when* they forget it.

The sharing option in Google Drive is key for classroom collaboration. We are all connected with our Gmail accounts and the students “share” their projects with me, and with those they are collaborating with. This way I can easily give feedback, clarify thinking, assist with technical difficulties and monitor progress. I can do this from anywhere – not just in the computer lab while they are working on it. As we move towards new models of assessment this option became imperative. When it came time for the students to present their projects, I had already provided formative feedback needed to ensure that they were presenting a worthy project. The students liked that working in groups did not require being in the same room to complete their project.

Google Drive also allows my teacher-librarian group to abandon bringing paper agendas to monthly meetings. The minutes are documented in real time on an online agenda and automatically saved in our collection.

With Google Drive it is easy to import documents, PowerPoints, or spreadsheets from Microsoft Office into your collection, and to export if needed. The look and feel is similar to Microsoft Office, a format most are familiar with. Your creations can be published, printed and embedded easily into websites.

Google Docs/ Drive has become an integral tool in not only my teaching, but also my personal and professional life, which makes it worth promoting as a great tool for others to use. My students enjoy using it, and started asking their other teachers if they complete projects with Google Docs / Drive. Anything that gets Middle Years students excited about learning and doing their work is worth its weight in gold!

To learn about Google Docs/Drive, watch my presentation from the PAATA Teachers Convention in the fall: https://docs.google.com/present/view?id=dcq9kdn8_114fr95m8dh.



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