

Best Practices for Teaching with Emerging Technologies
Second Edition
by **Michelle Pacansky-Brock**
Chapter 3: Essentials Toolkit



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For more information, please visit to book's resource site at TeachingWithEmergingTech.com.

Tools are mere enablers. The journey you go on with a tool is what makes it powerful. In the flipped classroom case study shared in the Introduction, I demonstrated how I leveraged online lectures and VoiceThread conversations to transform my students' learning. Again, the tools themselves are not important—it's the *experiences* they create that are critical.

The previous chapter provided you with a framework for evaluating tools prior to using them in your class. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will introduce you to a variety of tools and identify examples of how they can be used. You should keep the evaluation framework in mind as you explore the buffet of tools I will present to you. Some may meet your criteria or spark new ideas for you.

The tools shared in the next three chapters are organized to convey how they can be used to achieve particular goals: to share content; to increase communications with your students; and to create participatory, collaborative learning activities. As you read these next few chapters, you will, undoubtedly, find more uses for them and expand upon the categories I've developed here—that's something to celebrate!

I consider the tools in Chapters 4 and 5 to be “second-tier” tools. They're powerful and important but they work best when added onto an existing “essentials toolkit.” The “essentials toolkit” includes a collection of hardware and software that you will use across the spectrum as you engage and participate in emerging technologies. Without these tools, my



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teaching would crumble.

Disclaimer: technology changes quickly. All descriptions of tools and account characteristics are reflective of services at the time of writing. Please refer to the website of each individual tool for current information.

1. Smartphone

Smartphones are handheld multimedia studios (I often wonder when we'll stop referring to them as phones). As you identify apps you use regularly on your computer (referred to as "web apps"), be cognizant of the fact that these web apps likely are available in the form of mobile apps too. The mobile version of a web app will, generally, be a pared down version with fewer options, but that is not always a bad thing. A simplified interface can mean a friendlier user experience. Having access to tools "on the go" opens a world of possibilities for you and your students. Scavify and Goosechase are apps that enable mobile scavenger hunts complete with customizable challenges and a leaderboard (which, essentially, tracks each participant's scores and shows who the leaders are). The VoiceThread mobile app enables opportunities for recording video comments from anywhere, capturing one's location, as well as one's presence (see Ch 5 for a great Showcase about this strategy!). With the Zoom mobile app, you can participate in live video conversations from anywhere you have a connection. Additionally, a smartphone functions quite well as both a webcam and microphone, as well; although I do not consider it a replacement for either.



Recording a video on your a smartphone and uploading it to YouTube using the YouTube app is a simple and fast way to create, host, and share brief videos of yourself with your



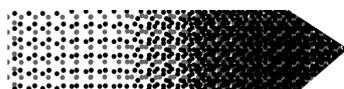
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students. Imagine the impact of recording a brief module introduction video for an art history class in front of a painting in a museum or for an anthropology class in front of the chimpanzee display at a zoo. Handheld video recording can be great, but investing in a small tripod for your phone is a great strategy for composing higher quality recordings.

2. Webcam



A webcam is an essential tool for teaching with technology today. Videos add your social presence to students’ learning experiences and promote a stronger relationship between you and your students, particularly in online classes. A webcam can be used to record microlectures (see “Screencasting” below), personalized announcements (see “YouTube” below and the tip above), and connect with students via synchronous web conferencing and communication tools (Skype, Zoom, Google+ Hangouts, etc.). You may already have a webcam on your computer—so be sure you check into that before you purchase one—but your built-in webcam may not produce high quality results. You may wish to consider upgrading to an external High Def (HD) webcam for improved quality. When shopping for a webcam, I encourage you to peruse the C-Net reviews to identify options that meet your needs. The higher the video output resolution, the better the image quality: Reviews.CNET.com/webcams/.



2 TIPS FOR RECORDING VIDEO



#1 - LIGHTING MATTERS!

The right lighting conditions will transform the quality of the videos you record with your webcam. Many times users don't think about light and that can result in dark images that render your entire face in silhouette. What's the point of using a webcam if you aren't identifiable? A quick way to ensure you produce quality video with your webcam is to do your recordings with a light source in front of you, rather than behind or to the side of you. When light illuminates the front of your face, you'll be rendered beautifully on camera!

Look at the difference lighting makes in Figure 3.1.

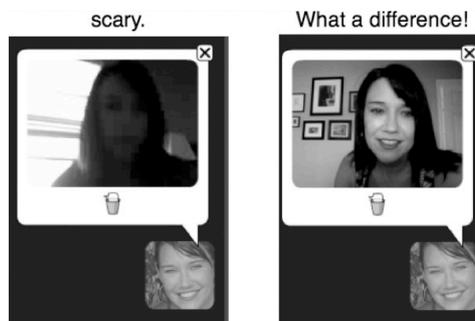


Figure 3.1 Webcam lighting comparison. Used with permission from VoiceThread.

#2 - WHAT'S BEHIND YOU?

When recording a video of yourself, it's easy to get consumed in your own appearance. But don't ever forget to examine the setting that appears behind you in your video. Take time to select a recording location that displays a neat and professional background (put away your dirty laundry or avoid sharing those vacation photos from your cruise on your wall!).

3. Microphone



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A microphone allows you to communicate online with your voice, which may be more appropriate or convenient, at times, than video. Video conveys your physical appearance, including your gestures and facial expressions, and voice focuses on the qualities of your speech. Also, video files are much bigger than audio files. Think about these elements when deciding which output option is the best for your particular use.

Recording a video also requires much more preparation than recording audio. For example, when I use Skype I do not set it to pick up a call automatically with video because I want to be sure my surroundings are appropriate for my audience -and, let's face it, we're not always ready to present ourselves in video! But I can easily use my microphone and engage directly in a voice-based conversation.

When purchasing a microphone, C-NET reviews are a great resource to research your options. I recommend a USB microphone with a headset. This option creates high quality audio recordings and also gives you the option to set your audio output to your headset, allowing you to hear more clearly and filter out background noise: Reviews.CNET.com/microphones/.

4. Screencasting Software



A screencast is a video recording of your computer's screen that is synced to the sound of your voice or video narration. The uses of screencasting in teaching are endless—how-to videos, lectures, an orientation or tour of an online class—they provide quick and effective visual answers to questions, and students can create screencasts to demonstrate their ability to



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perform online tasks or give presentations.

Not long ago, screencasting tools were expensive and using them required quite a bit of training. In short, screencasting was for experts. Well, not anymore. Today, if you do not already have access to a premium screencasting tool (like Camtasia or Screenflow), there are a number of free to low cost tools that can get you on track for creating your own, customized video content.

Screencast-o-matic.com

A free, browser-based tool that gives you direct access to creating a screencast with a single click. The application launches a java applet on your computer that runs the screencast. You click “record,” resize the cross-hairs to fit the size of your recording, select the microphone option you are using, indicate whether or not you want to also record from your webcam, click the record icon, wait for the countdown, and go! When you’re done, click pause or stop, and then you have the option to upload the video to Screencast-o-matic’s server, download it to your own computer (a variety of file options provided) or upload it directly to your YouTube account. The quality of the videos after being uploaded direct to YouTube is impressive. Screencast-o-matic also includes the option to add “call outs” (visual enhancements that draw attention to your mouse clicks and make fine “how-to” details easier to see).

Account Details

Recording is possible without an account. If you create a free account, you’ll be able to record videos up to 15-minutes in length and have access to your recording history. A Pro account includes premium features like editing. Videos recorded with a free account will include a small watermark. Discounted group licensing options are available for groups of



10-2500.

Jing—TechSmith.com/jing

Jing, a tool I use every day, is made by TechSmith, the creators of Camtasia and SnagIt. Jing requires a free download (available for both Mac and PC users) and produces screencasts up to 5-minutes, as well as screenshots (still image captures of your computer screen). You can set the Jing app to launch each time your computer starts and while it is running, a golden sun icon hovers at the top of your screen.

When you need Jing, simply activate it with your mouse, click on the ‘cross hairs’ icon, and drag it across your screen to select the portion you want to capture. When you capture a still image of your screen, you can also annotate on top of the image (call out an area with a colored box, add a line of text, or include an arrow to point out something important). Then you may download the image or video file to your computer *or* upload it directly to your screencast.com account, which is automatically created when you install Jing.

Why is that important? Because in a matter of two minutes, you can create a one-minute video, upload it to the web in a click, and paste a link to the video in an email. And that’s what makes Jing so handy. It is irreplaceable when teaching online. I regularly use Jing to answer “how-to” questions—and I love hearing their excitement when they realize I sent them a personally recorded video to answer their question. Responding to a frustrated or nervous student with video is a great way to calm their nerves and support them through a class. See Chapter 4 for more about Jing.

Account Details

Jing is free.



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5. Online Content Hosting Services(s)

Hosting your content online—“in the cloud”—empowers you to access your content from anywhere, share it easily without emailing large files, and can facilitate virtual collaboration projects. Having a video hosting and a document hosting tool in your toolkit is essential.

YouTube.com—Free Online Video Hosting



A free YouTube account provides you with a free hosting resource for video content *you create* and a personal channel that you can use to curate video playlists around focused topics that can be shared with relevant audiences.

- Each video you upload can be set to Public, Unlisted (which means only those who you share the link with can view it), or Private (you identify the individuals who may view it).
- YouTube limits your videos by length (which, at the time of writing, is 15 minutes for most users).
- I use my YouTube account to host video announcements and screencasts (screen recordings) for my classes. This option enables me to customize the privacy setting of the videos and then embed them in my learning management system or website I am using for teaching (see Chapter 1 for an overview of linking vs. embedding).
- When you “upload” a video you may select one from your hard drive that you’ve already created or you can use your smartphone or tablet to record directly to YouTube if you have the mobile app installed. YouTube no longer supports recording directly from your webcam on your computer.
- The videos you create can be captioned within a matter of minutes, as long as you have a transcript of your video (saved as a .txt file). If you don’t have a transcript, you can edit



the auto-captions generated by YouTube (be sure to edit these before you activate them on your video, as I've found very inappropriate language in auto-captions that was not spoken in the video!).

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