

## Digital Tools for Teaching

*Here's a collection of digital tools—all free—that can enhance your teaching.*

### “Clicker” Apps

All of these apps allow students to use their cell phones (or other digital devices) as clickers to answer questions in class. They share several characteristics: the instructor opens the account, creates question(s) and then shares a link or password with students so they can answer the questions. Typically, the instructor controls the pace, shows the distribution of answers after each question, and pauses for discussion as students' answers suggest. In each case, the free version is reasonably functional while paid versions offer access to more users or additional features.

**Why bother:** Frequent, low-stakes quizzes are a simple way to give students prompt feedback on their performance. In addition, answering questions about new material enhances learning (the so called “testing effect.”)

**Kahoot** <https://getkahoot.com/>

*Kahoot's* distinctive feature is its game format, featuring music, a leader board, and scoring based on both speed and accuracy. Students can use pseudonyms, making it for effective group review but a little cumbersome to download scores for grading. It offers only multiple-choice and true/false questions.

**Poll Everywhere** <https://www.polleverywhere.com/>

A strength of *Poll Everywhere* is the ability to embed individual questions in a *PowerPoint* or other presentation, making it easy to spread questions throughout a session. In this system, students text their answers. The app supports short-answer questions as well as multiple-choice and true/false items.

**Socrative** <https://socrative.com/>

*Socrative* supports short-answer questions as well as multiple-choice and true/false items. It gives instructors several options for downloading results, including an Excel spreadsheet, making it easy to use for graded quizzes.

### Backchannel Tools

Backchannel communication occurs alongside (or “behind”) the primary class activities. In a classroom, these informal comments and questions differ from clicker quizzes because students typically control the timing of posts as well as the sorts of things they contribute. These backchannel tools work with any digital device; the instructor opens the account and students use it to contribute. Users of the tools mentioned here have posted many creative uses online.

**Why bother:** For most classroom conversations, a fair number of students are observers rather than participants. These tools can entice some additional students to participate.

**Today'sMeet** <https://todaysmeet.com/>

This is the best known of the apps used for backchannel communication in academia; many instructors have encountered it at conferences. The instructor creates a “room” or space where students can contribute comments and questions. Instructors may pose specific questions or simply allow students to contribute as they wish.

**Padlet** [www.padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)

The instructor creates a padlet—imagine a virtual wall or bulletin board—on which student post questions, comments, or small pieces of work. Padlet is distinctive in that it allows instructors and students to post things other than typed text—photos, voice, edited documents, and links.

## **Presentation Software: Alternatives to *PowerPoint***

For presentations, the gorilla in the room is *PowerPoint*. Very often university instructors present material in a *PowerPoint* presentation used to guide lecture and other classroom events. The tools listed below provide ways to create slides with a fresher, cleaner appearance. These tools also store the presentation in the cloud, so while a link may be shared or placed on Blackboard, users must have access to the Internet to view the presentation. Just to repeat, these presentations cannot be printed.

**Why bother:** *PowerPoint* gets lots of criticism. Some say its ubiquity makes it a bore. Others criticize it on aesthetic grounds. The most powerful criticism is cognitive, the charge that *PowerPoint* makes it all too easy to create slides so stuffed with text that they interfere with learning. While it is possible to create effective *PowerPoint* slides (see Kosslyn's *Clear and to the Point* or Reynolds' *PowerPoint Zen* for suggestions), some would argue that the simplest route to more effective slides is using other software.

### ***Sway***

*Sway* is part of the Microsoft's *Office 365* suite of tools. UIW's migration should be complete by April 2017, and in the interim, faculty can access the tool through their private email account. *Sway* users create "cards" which can be grouped in several ways. This tool does a particularly good job of creating media-rich slides and allows users to create media-rich presentations without fussing much with formatting. If you don't like how a set of cards looks, click on the "remix" button until you like what you see.

### ***Thinglink***

*Thinglink* is a more radical departure from *PowerPoint* in both function and appearance. This app makes it easy to create an interactive image. Users import an image and then "tag" it. Each tag is a place where media—audio, video, images, texts or links—can be added.

## **Blackboard**

UIW uses Blackboard as its learning management system and the Instructional Technology Office makes available a vast array of training videos—many for faculty but some for students, too. Check out their resources here: <http://www.uiw.edu/ird/training-tutorials/index.html>