

eTools: Using Nearpod in the Classroom

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Introduction

Most of us likely use PowerPoint, KeyNote, Prezi, or some other presentation software in our courses. Although PowerPoint provides a method of organizing and presenting course content quickly, efficiently, and effectively, it also poses some limitations, such as preventing interaction and discussion, becoming a monotonous ritual in the course, and potentially facilitating information overload. Thus, a tool is needed to maintain the convenience and familiarity of PowerPoint and address some of these constraints. One tool that can do these things, and more, is Nearpod.

What is “Nearpod?”

Nearpod is a free online tool that allows instructors to build interactive lessons and PowerPoint slides by adding interactive features such as polls, virtual field trips, 3D objects, audio, video, and more. Additionally, Nearpod offers thousands of free or paid modules that educators may use and customize. Once a Nearpod presentation has been created, the instructor is able to share the session with students via a code, which allows all students to view the presentation on any device (e.g., phone, tablet, laptop) and with any browser (e.g., Safari, Chrome, Mozilla). Additionally, students are able to interact with the presentation by entering in written responses, taking polls, manipulating 3D objects, drawing on maps and diagrams, and even collaborating with other students.

Nearpod is often used for its numerous interactive features that can be embedded quickly and easily. In addition, Nearpod may be used when no projector or computer is present in a classroom; as long as you and your students have a device, a PowerPoint or lesson can be displayed throughout the entire class session. Finally, Nearpod was designed to offer instructors a central location for lessons that can be easily shared with other instructors or students via email and learner management systems (e.g., Canvas).

How can I get Nearpod for use in the classroom?

Getting started with Nearpod is simple. Visit www.nearpod.com and create a free account. With the free version, you can create polls, interactive quizzes, open-ended questions, and presentations with audio and video. The class size is up to 30 students with multi-platform availability and access to hundreds of free lessons for download. If you wish to purchase a version that has more features such as more space, virtual field trips, and ability to embed a live Twitter stream within the Nearpod presentation, there are three options: Gold (\$120/year), Platinum (\$345/year), and the School and District edition (price varies). A free account accesses most of the best features of Nearpod.

How can I use Nearpod in the classroom?

Nearpod is an advanced presentation software that allows current PowerPoints to be improved and new ones to be created that are interactive and accessible for both online and traditional course formats.

More specifically, Nearpod can be used as:

1. *a way to improve accessibility of content for students.* For traditional course formats, having the presentation on a personal device can improve accessibility for all students, especially for those who are visually impaired or have difficulty focusing. If Nearpod was used in an online course, then content could be presented in multiple ways, which would allow those who prefer or need to learn via auditory or visual channels to be included.

2. *a method of gaining convenient, anonymous, and immediate feedback.* It can be difficult to know whether our students understand a current concept before moving to the next. Further, social desirability or anxiety may influence whether students ask questions in class when they feel confused. Nearpod can help students to respond to your questions or ask their own in a quick, anonymous, and convenient way.

3. *a unique strategy to assess students on course content and ideas.* Often, we rely on students' past understanding or comprehension of reading material in courses. Instead of using a typical pop quiz on paper to assess understanding, Nearpod can be used to gain insight into student learning in a way that is immediate and potentially less anxiety-inducing for students. This can give the instructor the ability to offer timely feedback as well.

4. *a technique to encourage more participation through visual, written, and vocal forms.* Many students may not feel comfortable with participating by speaking. By using

Nearpod throughout a course session, all students have a voice in discussions by allowing them to provide their anonymous participation in written form. Since this is immediate, instructors can then use their responses in the discussion in real time.

5. *a method to improve richness and interactivity in online courses.* Those of us who teach online may struggle to engage students virtually. By adding interactive elements such as open-ended responses and audio supplements to slide content within the presentation, online courses can maintain their ability to provide content in a clear, immediate, and interactive way (e.g., with Nearpod, additional tools and tasks are not needed for engagement because they are embedded in a single tool).

6. *a way to include students' technological devices in a learning-oriented way.* As we all know, students enjoy using their devices in class. By projecting the lesson or PowerPoint on their devices, they can use them to support their learning rather than distract them. Doing this may help students to feel more engaged in the course.

7. *a strategy to encourage students to take ownership of their learning.* By providing access to a variety of ideas, options, and information, we can support students in directing their own interests, sense-making, and learning. Nearpod allows instructors to add a variety of supplemental resources that can enhance content in an organized, streamlined, and accessible way.

8. *a tool to share content, lectures, and slides in an easier and more streamlined way.* Instead of storing content in multiple files on computers or cloud-sharing tools, all

content can be stored in Nearpod. Sharing consists of copying a link, which allows you to control whether someone can edit, share, or simply view the content.

Conclusion

Nearpod is a powerful and fun presentation tool that substantially enhances the familiar PowerPoint presentation. There are free and upgraded versions that allow anyone to add engaging features and implement them in a variety of course formats. As instructors are increasingly encouraged to present information in a variety of ways, and concerns over improving engagement in online courses continue to rise, Nearpod is a creative solution to address these concerns.