

eTools: Using Pinterest in the Classroom

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Introduction

Many instructors create online bookmarks linked to articles, video clips, research reports, or news stories to share with students enrolled in a particular course. Often these links remain in a folder on the instructor's computer, unshared and forgotten. Pinterest, which is a social media tool many students already use, is one way for instructors to collect and share these links with them in a visually interesting and organized way. In addition, students can contribute to the board when they locate content relevant to the course.

What is "Pinterest"?

Pinterest is a visual bookmarking tool that allows users to (1) "pin" anything on the web, (2) re-pin content from other Pinterest users, (3) "like" and comment on pins, (4) upload new content, (5) share content with their followers, and (6) follow other individuals, brands, or organizations. The platform is functionally similar to a corkboard in that it offers a way for users to visually organize material. Visual content such as images, videos, articles, and infographics are all pin-able. While many people use Pinterest to organize ideas and find inspiration for everyday topics such as recipes, fitness, and travel (categories related to food, drink, and style are overwhelmingly popular), it can easily accommodate scholarly functions as well.

Users curate a set of pins; they then arrange the pins into their own themed boards (e.g., "YouTube clips for teaching," "Business Communication"). As users pin content and create their boards, their "pin feed" will provide personalized results based on their interests. Users can also create "secret" boards that are private and shared only with people they invite.

How can I get Pinterest for use in the classroom?

Go to www.pinterest.com, supply an e-mail address, create a password, and click the "Sign Up" box to register for a free account. Once registered, your account can be optionally linked to your Twitter and Facebook accounts. Pinterest is also available as an app on iOS and Android, which enables access from smartphones and tablets.

Many sites will include a red and white "pin it" button on the content. Clicking this pin add the content directly to a board. A "pin it" button can also be added to the bookmark bar of your browser, enabling you to pin any page you find on the Internet. Clicking the "Browser Button" box on pininterest.com allows you to install the "pin it" button on Chrome, Safari, Firefox, and Internet Explorer browsers.

How can I use Pinterest in the classroom?

Pinterest can be used as a way to engage students and share course content.

More specifically, Pinterest can be used to:

1. *post images, articles, or videos you would like your students to read or enable students to contribute images, articles, or videos.* If your courses rely heavily on

supplementary readings that can be obtained from the Internet, Pinterest can collate these articles together in one place. Throughout the semester, you can share new articles or information as you locate them and students can share articles or images with all the students enrolled in the course. During any scheduled class time, you and your students can easily access these pins through the app or the website. You also can load the class board onto a projected screen to highlight specific aspects of an article or infographic for discussion. Do, however, pay attention to the terms of service. If you plan to create and post original content on Pinterest, consider that Pinterest stores copies of images, not just links. If you do not want other individuals potentially pinning your original content (even though you own it), you may not want to put it online. In most instances, this issue should not arise, but it may be more relevant for a course such as photography.

2. *create community boards for group projects.* Group boards allow anyone who is invited to the board to view and pin to it. To make a board accessible for your student work groups, go to your profile, find the board, and click "edit." In the "Who Can Add Pins?" box, enter each student's email address or Pinterest name and click "Save Changes." Creating a board for each group or group project, and inviting students to contribute to the board enables you to monitor the types of research or ideas your students are conducting or developing; it also easily facilitates the sharing of content that might be helpful to each group (e.g., links, infographics on citation formats).

Student groups can easily keep their Internet research findings and ideas in one central repository that all group members can access. Students can also collect and share ideas for presentation aids such as Powerpoint or Prezi templates, many of which are available for free download. One word of caution, though: Some students may resist using this app. Those students who are not Pinterest users may hesitate to add (yet) another app to keep track of (and sign off on the accompanying terms of service); other students might resist co-opting a personal social media account for academic functions, because it takes the “fun” out of using it. It also is possible that some students may resist the idea of using a platform that they perceive as frivolous for academic purposes.

3. *connect with your students.* If you choose to connect with your students on Pinterest, keep in mind that many students use (or will use) their Pinterest accounts for personal content as well. You have the choice to either follow all the pins each student creates, or you can just follow particular boards. Unless you are interested in being notified about all content your students pin, you may want to follow only those boards relevant to your course, your college or university, or the professional interests (e. g., public relations) you and your students share.

4. *collect ideas and sources for class session and lesson planning.* As instructors, we spend a significant amount of time researching and aggregating information for our courses. Pinterest offers a wealth of ideas from other instructors about instructional pedagogy, student engagement, and classroom management. You can also use

Pinterest to focus on specific course-related topics. For example, searching Pinterest for a topic such as “public speaking anxiety” yields a vast collection of pictures, diagrams, Ted Talks, and tips that might be useful to include in your lessons.

Conclusion

Pinterest is a popular application that can help instructors and students to get ideas and organize visual content for their classes. Whether for the instructor’s own use or for student groups and class projects, Pinterest is one way to bring social media into the classroom with a pedagogical purpose.