

eTools: Using Poll Everywhere in the Classroom

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Introduction

Technology's proliferation throughout classrooms leads, at times, to distracted students and disgruntled instructors. Teachers often steer away from technology in hopes of maintaining students' attention; students, on the other hand, value technology as a classroom device for its interactive and "fun" qualities. Finding a balance between these two is difficult, but it can be made easier through interactive, digital tools such as Poll Everywhere.

What is Poll Everywhere?

Poll Everywhere is an online response system offering real-time question and answer "polls." Instructors can ask multiple choice, rank-order, or open-ended questions, engage students through a word cloud or Q & A, or have students complete a survey with progress tracked on screen. Poll Everywhere links seamlessly to PowerPoint, Keynote, or Google Slides (after an account is created). Students can answer all questions from a computer or, for most questions, their cellular device, without needing to download or log into an app. The answers appear as they are sent in, creating on-the-spot discussion or demonstration of student learning. Poll Everywhere will save the results from the class session for teachers to analyze later, or it can be reset to use in multiple class sessions.

How can I get Poll Everywhere?

Use of the basic features of Poll Everywhere is included with the free account. (Visit www.polleverywhere.com to create an account.) Instructors in higher education can choose among four plans: a free account, a student-pay account, an instructor-pay account, and an institution-pay account.

The free account provides instructors with all the necessary tools, including real-time polling, connections to PowerPoint, etc., and multiple question types as detailed previously. With the free account, polls are limited to 40 responses, so this option is ideal for instructors with smaller courses, although larger sections can be placed in groups with one response per group, up to 40 group/responses.

The student-pay account places the financial responsibility on the students; the final price for students is \$14. In addition to the free account features, the student-pay account allows students to choose a username (taking away the anonymity if desired), turns the polls into quizzes, and allows more team competition and collaboration. The number of responses allowed is based on the class size. The instructor-pay account, at a cost of \$349 per semester, utilizes several of the same features as the student-pay account and has a max response capacity of 400.

The institution-pay account, with a cost that varies and is negotiated, integrates into a Learning Management System, allows customizable keywords, promotes sharing of polls between professors, and sets up an institutional account manager for technical

support.

How can I use it?

Poll Everywhere is great in a variety of classrooms, encouraging students to utilize their distracting technologies for a specific, learning-centric purpose. This tool fosters formative assessment in the classroom in ways that are both engaging and enjoyable. Even without the accounts requiring payment, teachers can utilize several features of this tool to increase classroom interactivity.

More specifically, Poll Everywhere can be used as:

1. *a quick comprehension check.* During class discussions, students tend to zone out. Periodic comprehension questions built directly into the lecture keep students focused and attentive during class. Questions which assess students immediately following content exposure increase understanding; these same polls can be used in multiple lectures to ensure retention. These formative checks for learning also inform instructors about content students are struggling with in real-time, encouraging instructors to recover material when it will have the most long-term benefits for students.

2. *a review for summative assessments.* Keeping with the idea of a comprehension check, helping students retain information for large midterm tests or comprehensive exams can pose a challenge for instructors: students just do not remember. Using Poll Everywhere in the classroom for periodic review questions will allow students to gauge what material is most important. Additionally, the questions can be written as the exam

questions would be, thus providing students a preview of the exam. Poll Everywhere can also be made more assessment-friendly with the pay accounts (e.g., student, instructor, or institution) where polls can show answers and be graded. Students will then invest time into knowing the answer in the short term and, hopefully, the long term.

3. *a discussion starter.* Asking discussion questions in the classroom is a natural part of instruction, and having students who answer seconds after the question is posed is a part of procedure. Using Poll Everywhere – and specifically, the Word Wall – allows all students to voice their opinion equally and watch as the results populate. Students watch as their answer joins with their peers' responses, blending them into the class collective voice. Multiple choice questions can serve a similar purpose; an instructor can see how many students believe X or Y, and then use this information to branch off into a discussion. This activity may allow normally reserved students to feel less hesitation in answering a question.

4. *an encouragement for even the shyest to contribute.* Because students do not need an account to engage, PollEverywhere allows anonymous answering, encouraging even the quiet or reserved students to participate. Students who value an opportunity to consider their answer before offering it will gravitate toward Poll Everywhere. Additionally, the anonymous nature of this tool promotes risk-taking. When students are more willing to answer a question, even if their answer is wrong, they are participating in the learning process more actively. Increasing mediated participation

can potentially increase students verbal participation; once a student feels important and part of the group, participation will only increase.

5. *a guide for pedagogical revision.* Many times during a class, something taught by an instructor will fall flat; students just won't get it. Unfortunately, instructors do not always know this until the final assessment. Poll Everywhere, if implemented in ways detailed above, can remedy this by offering numbers indicating student learning. When instructors can see 30% are or are not getting some topic, they can go back and reteach more effectively. Poll Everywhere could serve as an entrance or exit ticket tool, collecting student responses with the goal of changing instructional strategies as needed.

Conclusion

Poll Everywhere connects students' current uses of technology with instructors' needs for in-class assessment and feedback. When students know they are responsible for the material immediately or must participate actively in class, learning and retention increase. Thanks to its easily to integrate interface and fast-response rates, Poll Everywhere provides an avenue for everyone in class to participate and have a voice.