

eTools: Using Popplet in the Classroom

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Introduction

Most instructors understand that students learn in different ways. Although we commonly talk about visual learners or students with visual intelligence, how often do we place notes online or encourage students to use mind-maps or other graphic organizers to help them learn? Because word mind-maps are awkward and time consuming, this is how Popplet can help.

What is Popplet?

Popplet is a tool that helps you visualize your ideas by easily creating graphic organizers and timelines. It can act as a brainstorming tool, an outlining tool, or as a way for students to summarize their course readings. Unlike Word where multiple clicks are needed to create arrows and boxes, Popplet quickly creates a popple--a textbox--that, with a click of a mouse, lets you resize it, add color, or link it to a new popple. It is easy to embed video files from YouTube, upload photos from a file, or draw in the textbox. Links to Dropbox or Google Drive can be inserted, which makes organizing group projects or papers even easier. Users can also add comments to popples, which makes this e-tool ideal for group projects. These popples can then be organized horizontally or vertically to create a more or less flow chart look.

Students can share the popplet board (i.e., a set of popples on a topic) with each

other and work on it collaboratively by sharing the URL. For evaluation purposes, student names on the popples enable instructors to know who contributed what and the "timewarp" function lets instructors view the stages the popplet went through in its development. The finished popplets can be saved and printed as a JPG or PDF file, which allows students to easily submit popplets to a LMS system or to embed them in presentation software. Popplet also works well with a number of other apps and programs such as presentation software *Explain Everything*, *Skitch* (image annotation program), *Photo Peach* slide show software, and Google Blogger.

How can I get Popplet for use in the classroom?

Getting Popplet is easy. Go to www.popplet.com and click on the "Sign Up!" button in the top right corner; type your name, e-mail address, and password; and agree to the terms of service and privacy policy. Scroll through the slides that introduce the program and then you are ready to use Popplet. (A short instructional video is also available.) When you return to Popplet, you will be able to "Log In." Although a free account lets you develop and save five popplets, for a nominal fee (i.e., \$3.00 a month, \$30.00 for the year), you can have unlimited access. School accounts can be created where up to 50 students can be enrolled for a year for \$2 each.

How can I use Popplet in the classroom?

Popplet lets students and instructors collaborate or work individually across all course assignments and formats. More specifically, Popplet can be used to:

1. *create notes over readings.* Instructors and students can create notes that indicate relationships more thoroughly between ideas than typical linear notes in outline form. Instead of outlining journal articles or chapters, use Popplet. If you teach a course that has multiple readings on a particular topic or multiple readings for a specific class period, a popplet can pull these readings together. Instructors can generate the popplet or assign it to students or to groups of students.

2. *brainstorm ideas.* Popplet lets you and your students, either working together or individually, brainstorm for a paper or group project by sharing the link to the popplet. Potential topics can be listed in a popple, and advantages/disadvantages and references can be linked to each topic.

3. *outline a group presentation, speech, or paper.* Popplet enables you to create an outline on a single sheet of paper in a way that you review it in a glance. Students can use their popplet as an initial outline and then revise their ideas into a traditional formal speech outline. Students (or instructors) can also use the popplet as speaking notes. Group projects or research papers can be organized through Popplet, with links to Dropbox or Google Drive folders included in a popple and supporting documents and notes for each point placed in folders, thus allowing group members easy access to all materials.

4. *establish stages and responsibilities in a group project.* Beyond organizing ideas, Popplet can be used to identify stages in a group project such as research, design, and

development. Popples connected to each stage can explain each task that must be completed, identify the student(s) assigned to the task, and provide deadlines for completing the task. A fully completed popplet can then be submitted to instructors as a plan for the project or as a way for instructors to keep group members on track.

5. *introduce students to one another.* Online classes typically ask students to tell each other a bit about themselves either before the course begins or sometime during the first week of the class. A popplet allows students to introduce themselves by including pictures of their hobbies, homes, and families; it can even include videos or music and can be uploaded as a PDF document or displayed in a face-to-face class.

6. *create a visual diary.* Often classes require a journal or log as part of an assignment. Popplet lets you turn this assignment into a visual journal or log as students can show pictures of their work or themselves working instead of simply writing a paper. Paired with files on Google Drive or Dropbox, this journal can become a portfolio submitted for a particular course or used for professional purposes.

7. *create interactive assignments and syllabi.* Instructors can create assignments that provide students with what they need when they need it. The stages of an assignment such as a literature review, for instance, can be broken into individual popples: topic selection, research, note taking, organizing the body, writing the introduction, or writing research questions. The course syllabus, particularly the schedule of readings and assignments, could be put in Popplet with popples for articles,

assignments, or worksheets.

Conclusion

Popplet is a multipurpose program that lets you reach your visual learners more effectively. As a faculty member, the yearly subscription lets you organize your class notes and create interactive assignments and course syllabi for your students. Because students should find Popplet easy to use, it can assist you in identifying even more ways it can be implemented into your courses.