

eTools: Using Canva in the Classroom

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Introduction

In today's hyper digital world, students are drawn to tools that help them visualize and understand key learning concepts. A well-designed infographic or social media post can quickly and effectively communicate very complex information. Canva is a tool that allows educators and students to easily create professional quality visuals, including infographics, social media content, and web-based messaging.

What is Canva?

Canva is a free graphic design tool website that allows users to create professional quality graphics using a very intuitive, simple interface. Featuring a drag-and-drop format, the tool provides templates for social media platforms, websites, and print distribution. Additionally, Canva allows users to access over a million photographs, graphics, fonts, and design elements. By combining these features within the program, users can use their creativity to develop professional quality messaging. Designs can then be distributed via different online, social media and print channels. In addition to using the website interface, users can also access Canva via a free mobile app.

Within the classroom, Canva can be used to get students' creativity flowing and allow them to design professional quality graphics with little to no knowledge of the platform. This means instructors could assign a lab, provide a brief tutorial of the

platform, and let students get to work. Professional graphic designers and website designers use Canva to create cohesive, creative designs that clearly communicate key messages to their audiences. Therefore, having students learn how to use this tool may give them a competitive advantage in the job market.

How can I get Canva for use in the classroom?

Canva is available for free at www.canva.com. First time users will need to create a login and establish a password by filling out a simple form. After logging in for the first time, you will be taken to the workspace where you can select from preset templates or make your own designs. Over 50,000 different template options are available including: infographics, business cards, social media graphics, flyers, website banners and many more.

Once you have created an account, Canva will save your designs and allow you to share them with up to 50 users. This means instructors could use Canva as group projects or an individual assignment or lab activity. Canva also provides many tutorials and examples of different design options to help you get started. The two featured sections, "Learn to Design" and "Get Design Inspiration", help new and returning users draw inspiration and overcome creative challenges. The "Learn to Design" section offers over 30 different tutorials ranging from a beginner's challenge to consistent branding to enhancing photos. Each tutorial takes users step-by-step through the material and provides exercises to test new skills. The "Get Design Inspiration" section allows users to

share their own designs as an inspiration for others. The design stream features a wide variety of designs utilizing many different templates.

How can I use Canva in the classroom?

There are many effective ways to use Canva in the classroom to build creativity, reinforce key concepts, breakdown and synthesis complicated ideas, or spice up presentations. Because it is so easy to learn and use, instructors could incorporate exercises designs to enhance student's creativity. Educators could also reinforce key concepts by asking students to review material and then visually represent the information they have learned. Students could further be tasked with synthesizing complicated concepts into easily understood visuals. Below are just a few ideas to get you started:

- 1. Social Media:** Given the proliferation of social media in both personal and professional capacities, communication students need to understand how to effectively create messaging on diverse social media platforms. Canva is a great tool to integrate into a social media messaging assignment. Students could learn best practices for each platform and then design a communication campaign utilizing that knowledge. Additionally, instructors could utilize social media channels as part of their classroom experience and implement a social media post assignment to help students master these critical skills.

- 2. Infographics:** Research shows that infographics help students quickly comprehend and retain complex information. Instructors could utilize Canva to create infographics highlighting key aspects of complicated learning outcomes. Instructors could also flip this concept and ask students to tackle a particularly complex subject matter by creating an infographic that would help their colleagues understand the material. For example, students might be asked to create an infographic featuring the best practices for posting on each major social media platform.
- 3. Personal branding exercises:** Developing one's personal brand is a necessary step to stand out in the job market. Canva is a great tool to help students identify the most important elements of their personal brand, determine key messaging, and design a look and feel that embodies those brand characteristics. To help students accomplish this task, Canva features a specific area called "Your Brand" that allows users to establish brand colors, fonts, logos and uploaded fonts. Students could use this area to record key aspects of their brand for future use across different channels. Instructors could demonstrate how to do this across print, online and social media platforms and then task students with an important challenge to define and design banners for each social media platform that are representative of their own personal brand.

4. Website design: The process of determining how an organization should communicate to their key publics online is a great learning experience for students. Instructors could utilize Canva to have students design a website for a specific organization. Through identifying different audience segments, personas, navigation, and messaging, students must think deeply about their end users, understand how and why they would visit the website, and anticipate potential issues an intuitive design might solve. Thinking through the brand elements, messaging, organizational voice, and navigation would be a helpful exercise for students who plan to pursue a career in communication, public relations, journalism, advertising, marketing, and social media.

Conclusion

Canva is an intuitive tool that allows educators to transition material into easily digestible visual content. In addition to using Canva to share new learning concepts with students, communication educators can also leverage this platform to help students learn how to design visually appealing and effective online messaging.