eTools: Using Webs.com in the Classroom

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Introduction

Bloom's Taxonomy places creation as its highest level of learning. Creation comes in many forms for the communication classroom and having students create a website may offer a fresh way to frame assignments. Our world today presents websites as one of the main channels for sharing and collecting information. Incorporating a group or individual project in communication courses that requires students to build a website through webs.com creates opportunity for high level learning and useful technology skills regardless of the course topic.

What is "webs.com"?

Webs.com is a free online tool that allows users to build customizable websites without coding knowledge. Users can select from free templates that offer options for building a website that include text, images, and videos. The website created looks and feels just as any professional site does, but with a user friendly interface that makes building a webpage as easy and attractive as a slide-based presentation. Users do have the option to pay for their site domain to avoid having "webs.com" in the address, but for the classroom this limitation does not impact the end product.

The webs.com platform makes starting your website easy. Users are directed to follow simple steps to sign up and begin building their website. A gallery of

professionally designed themes is available for free, as well as premium design options.

A site builder tutorial is available for first time users, though the platform is user friendly

and pretty intuitive. Using the basic option, users begin with a three page default

website. Editing options allow for adding additional pages, or updating the starting

page options. Creating a timeline or team biography offers more specialized page

options in the free tool. Once the website is published, it can be accessed from any

internet connection.

How can I get webs.com for the classroom?

Just as the content created is publicly available once posted, the tools offered

through webs.com also can be accessed online. To begin using webs.com, visit the web

address (www.webs.com) and create a log in. The free tool allows users to create a five

page website using basic layouts. For $19.95/year, users have the option to remove the

webs subdomain from the site address, which may be useful when students or faculty

are creating a resume-style personal website. This plan also provides access to a wider

array of tools such as unlimited pages and better mobile phone capability.

How can I use webs.com in the classroom?

Having students create a website offers a creative way for group and individual

projects to incorporate research and critical thinking. It operates on the same principles

that a research paper does, but asks students to act as content creators in the public

domain. A website also offers educators a space to communicate with students or self-manage their professional identity.

More specifically, webs.com can be used as:

1. *a group project tool that engages the real world.* Creating work in the format of our dominant information source allows students to think through presentation and style, important components of successful communication. Additionally, it prepares students for real world situations in workplaces that increasingly value social media and internet experience and knowledge. Because websites are in the public domain, students must think through the broader consequences of the information they share and how it reflects on them. Students work together to create a product that builds on their coursework and may extend their textbook learning to real issues, such as the use of this technology for a class-related activist website or something similar. Finally, as a real time publishing tool, students working from a diversity of locations and times utilize the immediacy of seeing each other's work in the website builder. This can help avoid duplication and other frustrations as transparency across the site promotes accountability for student group members.

2. *a teaching tool suited for technologically diverse work*. Students may choose to film videos or use other non-text forms of communication as part of their

websites. These large files integrate seamlessly into websites, and therefore make sharing them easier and faster. For classes that are media-oriented, this can be a good way to collect visual "data" from students.

3. *an individual project developed over the course of one semester.* Websites offer a tool for group projects, but can also be created on the individual level. Students in profession-oriented classes may create sites that reflect their knowledge on a subject or work experience. A web builder platform may allow for the collection of data over a semester, as a student continues to add to and edit a website. The ability to continually edit a website means that students can revisit their websites as part of a scaffolded, larger semester activity.

4. *an ePortfolio space.* The ePortfolio has become a relatively common part of the communication studies degree, and website builders offer a way for students to support their ePortfolio with information such as their resume/curriculum vida, contact information, and education experiences. In some cases, an online ePortfolio may offer greater flexibility and functionality than one limited to university resources as a longer-term, permanent option.

5. *a communication tool for educators.* Finally, self-made websites offer educators a way to communicate with students. This might be a place to house a complicated assignment, links to course readings, or other tools that

may transition more smoothly from semester to semester than when using a

learning management system.

Conclusion

Webs.com is an easy-to-use online website builder that instructors can

incorporate into their syllabus to allow for creativity and technologically-savvy student

work. As students prepare for the real world, asking them to build a website as part of a

project or for personal promotion leaves them with experience critical to our modern

communication style. For educators, websites may also offer useful tools for connecting

with students or creating consistency across semesters.