

5 EdTech Tools to Try in 2017

by [Heather Gaddis](#)

There are so many educational technology tools that it can be impossible to separate the useful ones from those that are less effective. Here is a list of five tools that I have used in the past year and recommend for language teachers to try this year. Some are focused on particular content areas, such as vocabulary, and others can be adapted to a variety of teaching contexts and approaches.

1. Nearpod

[Nearpod](#) is a platform for delivering interactive presentations. It can be used in the homework mode or the live mode, which allows the teacher great flexibility and control over the pace of the class. Students use a code to log into a presentation controlled by the teacher. For example, when the teacher advances to a new slide, the students' devices will also advance to the next slide. Slides can contain content, such as a website, text, or a video; and activities, such as multiple-choice questions, open questions, and others. Embedding content, such as websites and videos, allows students to access the information without leaving the presentation. The homework mode can be used for classes where students are working at their own pace and also for flipping your class. You could set a presentation as homework and then use the reports feature to view how students responded to the different questions and content.

There are a wide variety of question types you can insert, allowing for students to express themselves in a variety of ways and also for all students to participate. For example, the Draw It! Question allows students to respond to a question or sentence by drawing or adding to an image you have uploaded. This can be used to assess students' understanding of a grammar or vocabulary item.

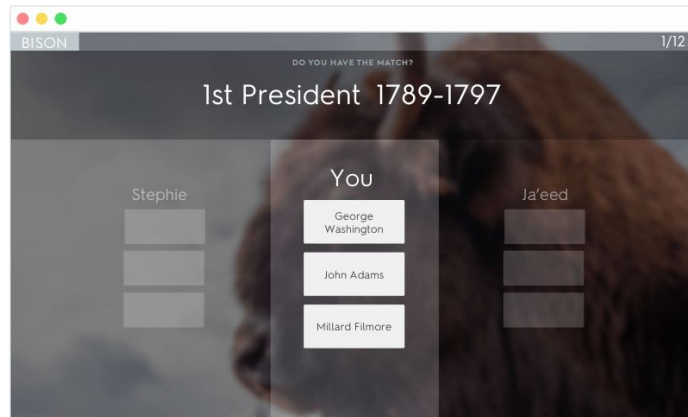
See a sample Nearpod lesson called "[Super Digital Citizenship](#)."

2. Quizlet Live

You may know Quizlet as a website for reviewing vocabulary using virtual flashcards. Last year, Quizlet came out with an interactive vocabulary review game, [Quizlet Live](#), that allows students to interact with each other while they interact with their device.

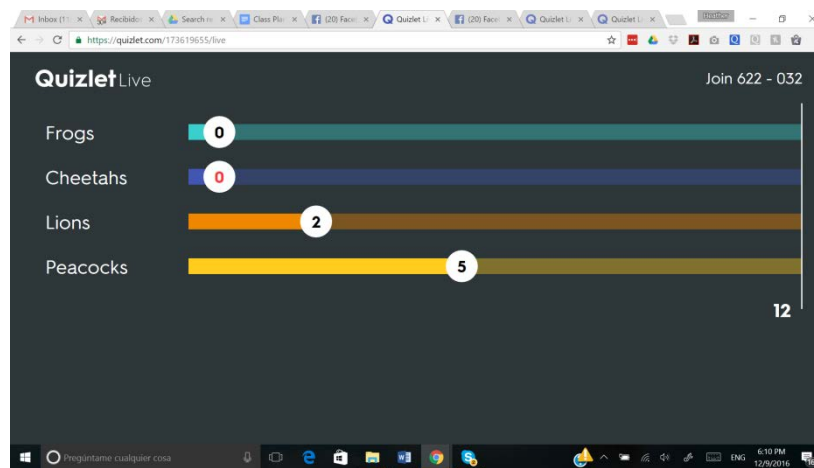
In Quizlet Live, the teacher logs in and picks a list, and then clicks on the Quizlet Live button to start the process. A six-digit code will be provided. Students need to go to [quizlet.live](#) on their phone, tablet, or computer and enter the code. They do not need an account to play the game. Once all students are in, the teacher creates the game and students are put into groups by the site. Once students are seated together by groups, the teacher launches the game.

On students' screen, a word will appear with several definition options. Within each group, members see the same word, though the definitions for each student will differ:



(Image courtesy of Quizlet)

Students have to work with their group members to see who in their group has the correct answer. The group member with the right answer selects it, and then another term appears. If a team gets a question incorrect, then they have to start from the beginning. The teacher can watch the progress on his or her screen and encourage teams:



I have played this game with adult English language learners, and it takes them one or two rounds to get the dynamic, but then they love it. They forget that they are interacting with a technological device and focus on talking and working with their peers.

3. G Suite for Education

Google's educational offerings are becoming better and better all the time. Many of the applications you may already use, such as Forms, have added functions so that they can be used with students. For example, with Google Forms, which is a common way of making surveys, under configurations, you can turn a form into an evaluation or quiz. You can indicate the correct answers to questions as well as assign point values. When students take the quiz, you can then see their results individually or have them put into a spreadsheet.

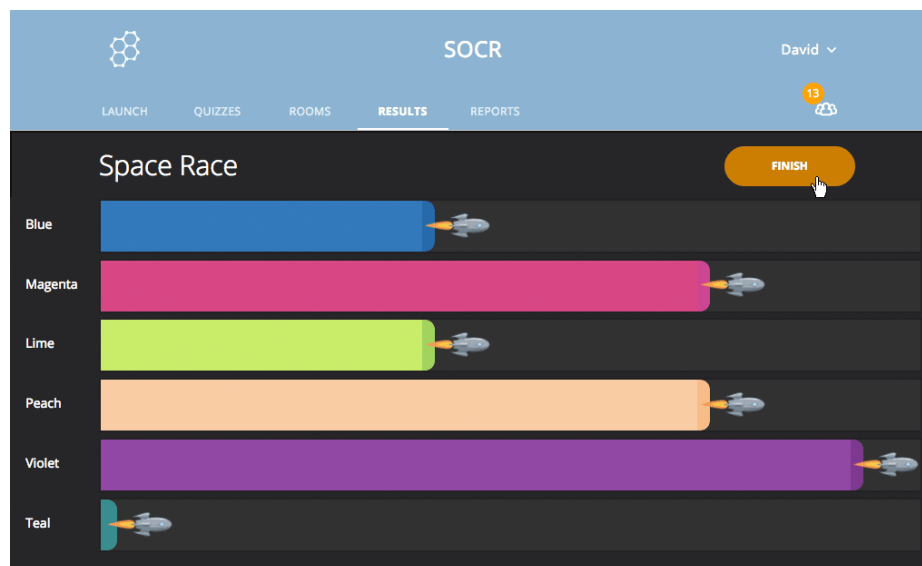
One Google application that is directly aimed at education is Google Classroom. Google Classroom has some of the functions of other learning management systems, but it is linked to

the rest of the Google family, including Drive and Calendar, which makes it something of an educational toolkit powerhouse. You can assign students activities and homework that include videos, images, and Google documents. For example, students could write collaboratively and then turn in their work through Google Classroom.

4. Socrative

[Socrative](#) is a platform from which you can launch quizzes, space races, and exit tickets. It can be used as a website or application that students download and install on their device. Like Quizlet, students do not need an account, but teachers do. Once students and teachers go through the easy setup, Socrative can be used to carry out traditional summative assessment or quick diagnostic assessments. For quizzes, there are a number of configurations to make the quiz fit the purpose for the evaluation. For example, you can have feedback delayed or provided immediately after answering the question, or the pace can be student or teacher controlled.

Space races repurpose quiz questions as a competition between students. I have used the space race activity in class as a way to introduce students to a topic as well as to get an idea of their background knowledge.



In English language classes, it is a great way to spark interest in the lesson topic. Finally, I have seen teachers use the polling feature on Socrative to get student feedback or opinions on a topic, which can be done anonymously.

5. Screencast-o-matic

For teachers looking to flip their classrooms and make their own videos, [Screencast-o-matic](#) is a great option for the recording and editing of videos. As with many web-based services, there is a free version and a paid version. In this case, the paid version allows for longer videos and more editing capabilities, such as adding audio and slowing down footage.

Once you download the plugin, all you need to do is log into your account to start recording. I have used Screencast-o-matic to record narrated PowerPoint presentations as well as tutorials. The ability to narrate a process while I am showing it on the screen is very helpful for users, especially those who may have trouble relying solely on spoken instructions, which may be the case for many English language learners.

In addition to being easy to use, I picked these five technology tools because of their flexibility. They can be used for a variety of levels and contexts. I encourage you to pick one or two and experiment with them in your classes this year to learn how you can adapt these excellent tech tools to your particular teaching context.

Heather Gaddis is the coordinator of educational technology at a private K–12 school in Queretaro where she helps teachers integrate technology into their teaching. She also has been involved in English teaching in Mexico since 2009, with experience as an English coordinator, Cambridge oral examiner, materials writer, and teacher trainer.