TESOL Connections
Keeping English language professionals connected

4 Digital Tools for Active Learning
by Holly D. Gray and Sharon Alayne Widmayer

An important component of language teaching has always been interactivity, and now with so many of us teaching remotely or in hybrid situations, adding interactivity and engagement to virtual classrooms has become a necessity. What are some of the digital tools available to get students actively involved in learning in your class?

1. Pear Deck

One tool that makes distance learning more fun and engaging is Pear Deck. Pear Deck is an add-on for Google slides that allows for interactivity. Using this tool, you can see in real time what each student is doing on their Pear Deck screen.

What You Can Do
- Include multiple-choice questions or polls and text responses.
- Embed other websites directly in your Pear Deck presentation.
- During the teacher-paced lessons, you control which slide the class is on, and each student interacts with their own screen.
- Choose to anonymously display individual students' work to the class, share the results of polls, or show where everyone has dragged tokens.

Premium Version ($)
- Enable students to draw on slides and click and drag icons or tokens around the screen.
- Students can write using the pencil tool or type using the text typing tool, and, because you can turn an existing Google slide into a drawing activity, you can make online graphic organizers. The drawing tool can also be used for exercises such as highlighting and annotating texts.
- Utilize the student-paced mode, to which you can add audio. The same slide deck can be set to play teacher-paced during class and then student-paced for students who missed the live session. Set Pear Deck to save all student work at the end of sessions.

- Create individualized "Takeaways" for each student in your class, which are PDF files of the presentation and students' responses. Google classroom users can have these take-aways automatically posted in their Google classroom as Google docs.

Additional Features

The PearDeck site also has a Flashcard Factory feature that you can use to have kids work in groups to create flashcards. There is a variety of built-in templates and activities that you can add to your presentations. These activities are helpfully divided into areas such as "Littles" (K–2), social-emotional learning, and critical thinking. It is also divided by subject area.

2. Ed Puzzle

Ed Puzzle is a great way to make preexisting videos interactive, accessible, and assessable for language learning.

What You Can Do

- Search for video clips on YouTube, Khan Academy, National Geographic, or other open-access sites.
- Once you have found a clip, cut the clip and have the video pause to add interactive questions or explanatory notes.
- Make questions either open-ended or computer-scored multiple choice.
- Require mandatory viewing, which prohibits students from skipping right to the questions.
- Find and use clips and questions created by other educators.

Additional Features

- In "Classic" mode, set up classes in EdPuzzle to get access to data on how students scored on the video multiple-choice questions. Students need their own accounts.
- In "Open" mode, students just have to enter a class code to join.
- In "Live" mode, students view a video on a classroom projector, and then their devices display the questions embedded in the video for them to answer.

EdPuzzles are particularly useful for flipped classrooms. Students can watch videos about new concepts and answer basic comprehension questions before class, and then during class time students can discuss videos or practice concepts introduced through them.

3. Quizizz

Quizizz is an easy-to-use tool for creating interactive quiz games that tap into students' competitive nature. The charming avatars and themes are kid friendly, but adult students also enjoy pitting their skills against their classmates, either live or asynchronously. Quizizz integrates into Google Classroom, but teachers can also copy and paste a link for students to follow into whichever delivery system they use. If teachers are busy or looking for inspiration, there are thousands of quizzes that others have shared on a wide range of subjects.

What You Can Do

- Create multiple-choice, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, poll, and checkbox questions.
- Use mathematical equations in questions and answers.
- Align to standards.
- Add images to both questions and answers.
- Play live or assign as homework.
- Design interactive slide decks.
- Copy entire quizzes or teleport individual questions from thousands of public exercises.

Premium Version ($)

- Embed audio or video in the questions.
- Provide feedback in text or media form.
- Unlock additional themes and custom standards.
- Remove ads.

Where Quizizz really stands apart from other quiz creators is its meme-creator tool. You can upload you own pictures and create personalized memes for correct and incorrect answers…and let your students get in on the fun by creating their own to share. Even though you and your students may not be in the same room, you can share a sense of community by seeing customized memes after each answer.

4. Flipgrid

If you are looking for more ways to build community—both within your classes and beyond—you should check out Flipgrid. This free video discussion tool allows teachers to assign a topic and select a recording duration, and students record response videos ranging from 15 seconds to 10 minutes in length.

What You Can Do

- Record or upload a video to start the conversation.
- Elicit responses from students and view them privately or share them as a class.
- Moderate all videos before sharing to check for content.
- Require students to sign a video release form.
- Create mixtapes of student responses to share.
- Connect with teachers and classes around the world with GridPals.

Additional Features

With Flipgrid, you have ability to create and edit short videos that can be integrated into Google Classroom or Canvas or downloaded in mp4 format to use anywhere. This free tool is surprisingly powerful and easy to use. You can produce any combination of video clips, screen recordings, pictures, and boards. Use the effects tools to draw or write on the boards, overlay pictures, add frames and emojis, and employ fun filters. Closed captioning is provided and can be edited.

Conclusion

Used mindfully, these tools can add a great deal of interactivity and fun to your classes, whether face-to-face or online, while helping you monitor and assess student progress. Keep your students active and engaged; try one out today!

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Holly D. Gray is an associate professor in the English Department at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland, and she has been teaching ESL in a higher education setting for more than 25 years. One of her many passions is finding effective ways to use technology in the classroom.

Sharon Alayne Widmayer, PhD, has been teaching English learners for more than 25 years. She currently teaches algebra in the International Academy at TC Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia and is the principal owner of Del Ray Learning Solutions in Alexandria, Virginia.