

Tech Snacks: Using Cellphones Productively

Smartphones can be powerful productivity tools, and usage among college students is approaching 100%. But they can also be major distractions if used inappropriately. How can we use smartphones inside — and outside — the classroom in ways that enhance learning?

Remind

Classroom messaging app www.remind.com is easy to sign up for and use. This is an easy way for instructors to communicate with the entire class or individual students, and students can communicate back. Since this an app, neither students nor instructors need to share their phone numbers to receive messages. If students don't want to download the app, they'll receive the messages as a text from an anonymous phone number.



Once you create an account using your name and email address, Remind will allow you to create up to 10 classrooms and 150 students per class. Once you create a classroom, Remind generates instructions on how to join the group, which can be printed for students.

Suggested activities: Use Remind as a classroom “backchannel” where students can ask and answer questions and collaborate on group projects. You can also send students discussion prompts prior to class, remind them to bring specific materials, etc.

Classroom sharing using Google Docs

Using a combination of Google Docs and student smartphones you can quickly and effortlessly enable students to share pictures (or text) instantly with the class. This method is free and doesn't require students to install any apps or create any accounts.



Simply create a Google Doc, and change the sharing settings to “anyone with the link can edit.” Share the document link with students via Brightspace, email, or as a QR code. Students simply need to visit the document via their phones, and they can add text, images, or pictures taken by their camera. They don't even need to log into a Google account to participate! This can be done during class or before the class meets.

Suggested activities:

Have students find and share images and then elaborate on them as they are displayed at the front of the class. This is a good way to share and discuss visual examples of a concept (e.g., screenshots of advertising or media literacy principles); objects that students photographed outside of class (e.g., biology specimens); or diagrams/images that students drew on paper (e.g., electrical flow diagrams; verb conjugation charts).

Google Street View and Virtual Tour

360° panoramic photo tours once required specialized equipment and a big investment of time and money. But now you can make one in just a few minutes using your smartphone and an app from Google! Google Street View [google.com/streetview](https://www.google.com/streetview) is an app that lets you take a 360° photo or photosphere, geotag the location, and share it with other viewers. The photosphere is then attached to Google Maps and is searchable by location.



Once you've added a 360° image to Street View, or found one created by someone else, you can use Google Virtual Tour Creator arvr.google.com/tourcreator to add annotations and points of interest. The tours that are created don't alter the original photosphere but instead create a separate copy that is stored at a different location. When the virtual tour is created, the site will store the tour at poly.google.com and generate a link that can be shared.

Suggested activities: This is a fun way to provide a realistic classroom/lab orientation, engage students with geography-specific content, or assess student understanding of a place/environment by having them create the annotations. Jason created a quick demonstration tour at the following link: <https://poly.google.com/view/cKUg-fpvgE3>

Manage phone use with this simple trick!

This simple technique comes from Louise Katz of Columbia State Community College.¹ Are students in your classroom consistently distracted by their phones? Do you want to be more flexible than enforcing a total ban?

At the beginning of each class period, simply offer a very small amount of extra credit (for example, 1 point per class period in a 1,000 point gradebook) to students that voluntarily silence their phones and put them on a table at the front of the class. This gives students a small incentive to put their phones out of reach, but allows flexibility if a student feels they need to have their phone on them because of work, family, etc. According to Katz' experience, nearly all students surrendered their phones during most class periods, but many students said they appreciated being given a choice.

¹ Katz, L., *APA Committee on Associate Baccalaureate Education 2014 Awards*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/undergrad/ptacc/no-mobile-phones.pdf>