

eTools: Using PowToon in the Classroom

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Introduction

Communication messages are sent and received every day in university classrooms across the country. Often times, the traditional modes of sending messages involve face-to-face standardized lectures, PowerPoint, Prezi, or some type of video. While these types of channels are functional, they are not always effective given how students differ in their learning styles. These differences are one reason why instructors should consider using PowToon, which is an alternative way to deliver relevant course information.

What is PowToon?

PowToon is an eTool that creates animated videos for personal, educational, or business/professional use. It is a free, web-based (with options to upgrade), user-friendly software that creates presentations via three simple and easy steps: writing a script, recording a voiceover, and adding visuals. Novice users can select one of five looks (i.e., ModernEdge, Whiteboard, Infographic, Cartoon, Corporate) and can choose to edit templates that already have been created, whereas experienced tech users may choose to design their own storyboard and video rather than use a template. (Tutorials and access to live chats are available to aid in the creation and production of these videos.) For a fee, content also can be created by a PowToonist. Once completed, these

animation videos can be exported and shared on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, or e-mail.

How can I get PowToon for use in the classroom?

Go to www.powtoon.com, click on the "sign up" tab, and create your free account. With this account, you can create your own PowToon video by searching the User Gallery for templates (e.g., syllabus, welcome video) that can be modified easily. You can add up to 30 students on your account or you can have your students create their own accounts. While the standard free plan includes 100Mb, basic image quality, 100Mb of storage and video of up to five minutes, three additional plans are available. The pro plan is \$19 a month and includes 2 GB of storage and up to 15 minutes per video; the business plan is \$39 per month and includes 10 GB of storage, full HD quality and resolution, and up to 60 minutes of HD or full HD of 8 minutes per video; and the team plan is \$46 per month, which includes 10 GB per seat storage, full HD quality, and up to 60 minutes HD or full HD 8 minutes per video.

How can I use PowToon in the classroom?

PowToon can be used by instructors and students to:

1. *create introductory videos for a course.* Before the start of the semester, instructors can create a short video to introduce both themselves and the course (e.g., syllabus statements, classroom policies) to their students. Instructors have the option to export this video and post it to the course management system, e-mail it to the

students, or show it on the first day of the course. Similarly, instructors can create a PowToon for their students on how to use PowToon (or any other how to topic). Truly, a training video could occur for any course that requires instructions to be given.

2. *preview a guest speaker.* Posting a video about a guest speaker can be useful for students. Understanding who the speaker is, the speaker's background, and the purpose for the course visit allows students to plan ahead and prepare for the speaker ahead of time. Likewise, students could be tasked with creating and sending a thank you video to the guest speaker.

3. *introduce or conclude lesson plans/subjects.* Introducing a new subject area of the course in order to highlight its relevance can be a quick way to gain the attention and interest of students so that they are excited about their upcoming learning. When concluding a particular course unit, a review is always helpful. A PowToon can not only serve as a review to the end of a unit, but also can serve as a study aid for an upcoming exam.

4. *create examples of course assignments/projects.* Depending on the course, an animated video can demonstrate to students the essential components of an upcoming assignment (e.g., a review, speech, presentation, infomercial, commercial, debate). Items to include on this course assignment/project video can include its learning objectives, needed course materials, sections/parts, and due dates.

5. *promote a department event or new course.* If your department is hosting a

particular event, a PowToon could be created and released to help advertise the upcoming event. If a new course is being offered in a department, a video could be created and sent to prospective students to gauge their interest.

Conclusion

PowToon is a simple and easy to use tool for both instructors and students alike. This animation tool provides instructors and students with a fun and creative way to send messages in an engaging format.