



GOOGLE® APPS TO USE IN THE CLASSROOM



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Google Apps to Use in the Classroom

With more educators embracing the use of technology in the classroom, now is the perfect time to integrate online applications with your curriculum. Google is the world leader in aggregating information on the internet, so it comes as no surprise that the company is also at the forefront of innovative technologies that transform the classroom experience for both students and educators. This guide will discuss the various Google Apps that you can use to facilitate communication in the classroom and bring your curriculum to life. From social media platforms to scholarly databases, there is something for every educator to enjoy in the Google Apps family.

Gmail

While most schools offer employees an institutional email address, many teachers are opting to use Gmail as well for the numerous features it offers. Gmail allows sorting between promotional emails, social media notifications, and regular emails. You can even create lists to sort your messages by, making it easy to organize messages from parents, students, and colleagues. Perhaps the greatest advantage of the Gmail platform is its integration the Google Translate software. Whenever you receive or send an email, you have the option to translate that email into almost any language. This makes it possible to communicate with parents who do not speak English, or students for whom English is not their first language.

Another great application of the translation service built into Gmail is for foreign language and ESL teachers. If you want to encourage your students to learn to speak a foreign language while in class, the immersion experience does not have to end once they leave the classroom. Challenge your students to write their emails in the second language and use the translation software as a guide. Not only does Gmail make it possible to communicate with students and parents from around the world, but Google even recommends that teachers use this innovative software to connect their students with other students around the world. Many educators choose to set up a pen pal program between their school and a sister school in another country, providing the opportunity for their students to learn from classrooms around the world.

In addition to its standard features, Gmail also offers a plethora of special applications currently in the beta stages of testing. While these applications have yet to be approved for widespread use across the Gmail platform, many of them can pose great utility in the classroom setting. Gmail is constantly changing and improving not only their user applications but their security as well. With a knowledgeable and responsive team on top of maintaining regular security updates and protecting your information, you can rest assured that your chosen email platform is secure and professional.

Google+

Your Google+ account is another great way to connect with your colleagues inside and outside the classroom. Your Google+ profile is linked to your Gmail account, so you have almost instant access to set up a profile and start networking. Thanks to the new Google+ Circles feature, you can create a network of trusted friends and colleagues with which to share valuable information. Google+ is a great way to network with other professionals in your industry as the platform has a far more professional reputation than other social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. While LinkedIn is often considered the go-to social networking platform for educators, Google+ allows you to maintain a purely professional profile while adding a much more personalized feel to the user interface.

Google Drive

Google Drive is a program that combines some of Google's best and most popular programs under one functional umbrella. Google Drive encompasses Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Slides, all of which make excellent tools for teachers. The program works with Mac and personal computers as well as most major smartphones, giving you plenty of options for synching files on the go. You can also receive regular updates to the software, making it possible to patch any bugs right away. The biggest advantage to using Google Drive for the classroom is that it allows you total control over what you share and with whom.

You can create specific folders to share with your colleagues and others to share with your class. Google Drive even includes a special commenting system that allows others to leave comments on your documents and forms. This can be a great way to interact with students and get them to share their opinions in a format resembling a discussion board. You can monitor each comment and restrict commenting to certain groups. With Google Drive, you have absolute control over the discussion surrounding the material you post, making it possible to create an orderly and educational forum for discussion. The program acts like an online dashboard that you can access from anywhere, synthesizing all the best programs and apps that Google has to offer.

Google Docs

Google Docs is a truly innovative program that makes it possible to create documents to share and edit with your class in real time. The days of shuffling a document back and forth to a colleague through email are over. Thanks to Google Docs, you can upload a document, share the link, and simultaneously add changes no matter where you are in the world. This makes it quick and easy to collaborate with other educators on tests or written curricula even if you can't be in the same physical location. This feature also makes it possible to grade student projects in real time, providing guidance and comments without being in the same room.

As a part of Google Drive, Google Docs allows commenting on any posted document. You can choose to restrict commenting and create documents that only you can see, or to make a document available to other colleagues and students. Google Docs makes it possible to create collaborative projects and receive valuable feedback from anywhere in the world.

Google Forms

Google Forms is an innovative part of the Google Drive program, allowing educators to plan events and create surveys and online assessments for their students. You can use Google Forms to aggregate collected data and create an assessment tool, from a simple online quiz to an elaborate test. Connect your Google forms with your Google spreadsheets, or upload independent forms to use for your classroom. You can make all forms available to your class, teachers, and parents. This is a great way to keep parents informed about the educational process and let them see first-hand what types of tests your students will be taking. You can choose to leave old exams up on your account so students can refer back to the information if needed.

Another great use of Google Forms for teachers is to collect valuable information from students and parents before, during, and after the semester ends. You can create surveys that are only available to people in your class, making it easy to collect personalized assessments that can help you improve the classroom experience. Create surveys for students and parents with ease and compile an invaluable qualitative analysis of student and parent experience over the course of the academic year. While most schools offer end-of-the-year assessment, Google Forms allows you to take the assessment process into your own hands and gather useful information all throughout the school year.

Google Sites

Google Sites makes it simple and easy to create a personalized website for your classroom or program. Whether you want to create a simple page updating parents on the latest schedule changes for band practice or an interactive site that lets students and parents delve deeper into the material you teach in the classroom, Google Sites is the most efficient way to put your classroom online. Some educators even choose to use their Google website to post important classroom information, such as note slides and other visual presentations. The options are virtually limitless since you can upload sound, video, and image files and provide links to outside resources for your class.

Building a website from scratch can be expensive. Even themes and templates that allow you to customize a website off of a pre-built platform can cost hundreds of dollars and require at least novice programming experience. Google Sites takes the guesswork out of creating a website for your class and makes it free and easy to transmit information to the people who need it. Giving parents a regularly updated website to interact with is a great way to keep them involved in their children's educational progress.

Google Calendar

Few professions require a reliable calendar as much as teaching. Google Calendar is loaded with features that can make planning your hectic schedule as a classroom educator a lot easier. From scheduling your day to scheduling the entire academic year, Google Calendar will quickly become your go-to for bringing order to your life and career. You can create multiple calendars, both public and private, making it possible to schedule your personal and professional lives simultaneously. Create calendars for your colleagues to use as well as calendars that can be shared with parents, helping them keep apprised of all upcoming events for the school.

Many schools choose to use Google Calendars to manage work schedules for teachers and other staff. You can send email invitations and synchronize the Google Calendars app with your official school email, if necessary. Any teacher or parent who also uses Gmail can easily join the list of recipients of updates to your Google calendar. You can even set permissions to allow certain users to make changes with your calendar, while others can only view updates and not interact. In addition to keeping track of upcoming holidays and academic events, you can use Google Calendars to get an idea of how many will show up to your next event.

Scheduling parent-teacher conferences and open houses can be a logistical nightmare, and Google Calendars is the best and most current solution. Make your life a little easier by sending out virtual invitations through Google Calendars rather than attempting to notify each parent individually. Parents can even leave an RSVP to certain events, letting you know which events they will and won't be able to make it to. A less common but equally efficient use of the Google Calendars app in the classroom is to use a calendar to schedule tests and makeup days. Simply grant your class access to view your class calendar and they will always know which assignments are due on a certain day and when you plan to test. This can solve problems in the event of illness and you can even send out email notifications if you have to make a last-minute change to a planned event or activity.

Google Groups

Google Groups is by far one of the most exciting tools for educators available on the market. Google Groups allows you to set up a safe, creative space in which to share ideas and strategies with fellow teachers. When you need a place that is secure enough to post sensitive information, such as grades, class notes, and student contact information, Google Groups is ideal. Not only is the platform remarkably secure, but it is equipped with the latest in user-friendly tools and a streamlined interface. The set-up process is quick and easy, making it possible to create an active group almost as soon as you begin using the program. Create separate Google groups for students, parents, and colleagues, or create one large collaborative group where they can all share and communicate together.

Google Groups allows you to have total control over your privacy settings. You can make a group public and free to post on for all Google Groups users, or you can share information only with members of your created group. Unlike message boards and other social networking platforms, Google Groups blends the best of social networking and a streamlined, personalized website. You can set up your Google Group to look however you want and upload the information that is most important to you. Google Groups are a great way to share media, important presentations, and facilitate meaningful discussions between students. The Google Groups program is so powerful that it has the ability to function as an online classroom, making it possible for your students to connect with each other as well as you no matter where they are.

Mailing lists are another great way you can use Google Groups to connect with the right people. In the event that you want to share an email with only the parents and teachers who belong to a certain group and not your entire class or school, you can send an email to all members of that Google group. There is even a private messaging system that allows you to communicate with other Google Groups users on a one-on-one basis. In the event that your schedule simply doesn't line up with that of a busy parent, you can easily use Google Groups to facilitate an online parent-teacher conference. Since you can post information to Google Groups and have total control over which users see each form, Google Groups is also a great platform to post grades and facilitate discussion with your students about their academic progress. From extracurricular activities and parent groups to a discussion of the latest exam, Google Groups is a great way to keep the lines of communication flowing and compartmentalize information so you can always get the information that matters most to the people who need it.

Google Scholar

Access to journal articles and other academic works once required costly subscription fees or lengthy wait times upon request from an academic library. While visiting your local library and requesting a loan is a great way to get access to scholarly works, it makes sense to have an online, high-tech source of high-quality information. The internet is filled with information on virtually every subject known to man, but every educator knows that sifting through the sheer volume of information to find solid, properly-sourced information is a difficult matter. Thanks to Google Scholar, anyone with a Google account can access a plethora of well-researched, scholarly articles within a few seconds.

Google Scholar works similarly to academic search engines used at colleges and universities. While most online databases require the user to log in with a university identification and password, Google Scholar is available to everyone. You can find millions of peer-reviewed journal articles and longer academic works available in the Google Scholar database. The database pulls free-use articles and works from all around the web, aggregating only the best peer-reviewed works. When you conduct a search on a topic, you can rest assured knowing that the results you find will be peer-reviewed and of the highest quality. One of the most commonly cited frustrations among students writing research papers is the difficulty of finding quality sources online. It can take weeks to receive a hard copy of a journal article, but Google Scholar provides instant access to a variety of articles on nearly every topic imaginable.

From applied sciences to philosophy and religion, your students can find all the information they need to write a well-researched paper on any given subject. Simply conduct a normal search as you would if using the Google search engine. Google Scholar allows the use of Boolean search terms, making it easy to search for usage of specific phrases and terms. You can even search the database by author and subject, pulling up the latest articles by the most trusted scholars in their field. You can also conduct a search by date, making it easy for your students to find the most up-to-date and relevant information.

While Google Scholar is a great tool for students looking for quality sources for research projects and presentations, it is an equally powerful tool for educators themselves. It can be difficult to stay up-to-date on the latest research in your chosen field while balancing all the responsibilities and duties of a teacher. Google Scholar puts the information you need at your fingertips, saving you time and money when it comes to combing the pages of the latest scholarly journals, periodicals, and books.

Putting it All Together

Google is known for being the search engine giant, but many educators are beginning to realize that the company has much more to offer when it comes to broadening educational horizons and disseminating valuable information. From scheduling and planning tools that make your day-to-day life as an educator a bit simpler to a trove of academic articles and the latest research, Google is one of the top resources you can use to improve the classroom experience for both you and your students. Gmail is the fastest, most reliable internet service available, making it easy to organize mail and share with colleagues, teachers, and students. Google Drive is a brilliant program that combines some of Google's top apps for educators, making it easy to create and share files instantly. Google+ is an innovative social media platform that blends a personal touch with a highly professional atmosphere and a friendly user interface. Google Groups is the perfect way to connect with coworkers, parents, and students. You can set up multiple groups, choosing what you share with each one, and even send out emails specifically to members of your groups.

Organization is the key to facilitating a functional and fun classroom environment, and these great Google Apps for education give can give you the jumpstart you need. Consider starting out with Gmail and exploring the basic apps within the Google Drive umbrella to get an introduction to Google Apps for teachers. With popular apps that already make life easier for teachers and students around the world and numerous apps currently in development, you can expect plenty of great things to come from Google. Your job as a teacher is to make sure that your students get the information they need to succeed, and Google Apps come alongside you to make that job easier every step of the way.

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