

Thursday, February 4, 2010

## VoiceThread

By Lori Ostergaard

The annual meeting of the National Writing Project was abuzz with talk of VoiceThread. Now, for me, the joy of attending the annual meeting every year is discovering, once again, that I simply know nothing about teaching with technology. Every year I board the plane back to Michigan with a meeting program filled with notes, ideas, and links. Every year I find some new resource or tool that I can't imagine ever having lived without.

This year the word "VoiceThread" was scribbled all over my program, and I couldn't wait to get home to play and figure out how this new technology could help me with my online and partially-online courses.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. VoiceThread is an online presentation and discussion tool that makes it possible to present tutorials, assignment descriptions, and even works in progress. You begin with a free basic account, watch a few **VoiceThread tutorials** to get the hang of the site, and then begin creating your first VoiceThread.



The VoiceThread Home Page: Signing Up is Easy!

The first VoiceThread I created was for my fully-online graduate class in Teaching Writing with New Media. I wanted to create a really basic introduction to the course and to the different places where students could find course resources and activities. I also wanted a place for my students to provide audio or written comments introducing themselves to the rest of the class.

So I took a few screenshots of my course website and our class Moodle, uploaded those to VoiceThread (so easy to do), put them in the order I wanted students to see them, and began commenting. With VoiceThread I could speak my description of each page into my computer's built-in microphone, underline items of interest on the images (for example, emphasize where students could find their first online class forum), and save that audio comment before moving on to comment on the next slide.



When I had every slide sounding the way I wanted, I simply entered my students' email addresses and VoiceThread sent them a link to my VoiceThread. I could have also simply copied the link and emailed it to my students myself, but I was still learning my way around the site at this point.

My students received an email invitation that included my picture, and once they clicked on the picture, they were brought to my VoiceThread, which began playing for them immediately. On the last slide I described how students could insert their own audio or written comments, and they set to work introducing themselves to the class.

Students Introduce Themselves to their Peers in this VoiceThread for an Online Class

I love an easy interface, and VoiceThread has one of the easiest I've found, but it's just as exciting to use as it is easy to use. Teachers at NWP presented on the VoiceThreads their students wrote, combining images with their spoken stories, and receiving comments on those stories from their grandparents in other states, their parents, and their classmates. If you'd like your students to take an initial and easy foray into the world of digital storytelling, VoiceThread would be an ideal way to do it. And because it allows readers/listeners/viewers to leave comments, it's a tool that can provide students with real audiences for their texts.

### SUMMARY

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