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New Tools for Composition: Or, a Technophobe Explores New Media

By Lori Ostergaard

The truly odd thing about my appointment as Technology Liaison for the Meadow Brook Writing Project is that I tend to be a bit of a technology skeptic, even a technophobe. More often than not, the technology I use in my classes fails me. Links I've used for years disappear the very day I plan to show them to students, projector bulbs explode in the middle of presentations, websites crash, and software misbehaves in ways I never could have anticipated.

I don't feel all that confident about my performance in the classroom under the best of circumstances, so having to rely on unreliable technology just makes me that much more insecure. Indeed, whenever I incorporate new technology into my writing classes, I'm reminded of those rope bridge scenes in the old Tarzan movies. It isn't until Jane's in the middle of the bridge that she realizes what a horrible mistake she's made. The bridge creaks and sways, and Jane's shoe falls into the river of hungry crocodiles below, but by that point, it's already too late to turn back. This is more or less the kind of anxiety I experience on any given day in my computer classroom.

Still, I know that engaging students' multiple intelligences in my writing classes helps them to make better sense of the course material. And I know they need to get experience composing with multiple media and communicating in wholly new rhetorical contexts. So I'm always on the lookout for easy, free, and fully-online tools that my students can use to compose texts with new media.

The list of tools below fits my easy-free-and-fully-online criteria perfectly: these sites provide students with the means to create incredible movies, construct dramatic digital stories, compose compelling cartoons, and build instructional timelines. With these tools students need only a reliable internet connection and some creativity to produce new media masterpieces. In short, this stuff is so easy, even I can do it. And crocodiles be damned!



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I found these tools at <http://cogdogroo.wikispaces.com/StoryTools>. This site catalogs and reviews over 50 different tools for creating digital stories, and with that many potential resources for writing teachers, it's well-worth an extended visit on a rainy Saturday afternoon.

Here's just a small collection of my favorites from this site:



A Timeline Generator--allows you and your students to create the timeline, inserting important dates/events, including pictures and video in the descriptive links to those dates. I'm toying with using this tool to compose my course schedule next semester. But this would be a great tool for narrative projects as well. Example: **Batman**



A Comic Generator--this one is almost too easy and addictive! Have students compose arguments as comics. Just try it...no examples necessary here.



Another Comic Generator--this one uses photos and text bubbles.



Animated Movie Editor--also remarkably easy to use. If you can write a script (for one or two people), you can create a professional looking movie, including characters, settings, camera angles, movement, and expression-- a fun way to have students bring their narrative papers to life. Example: **Let me out.**

□ **Animoto**--have students sign up for an account and make 30-second video arguments using their own images and animoto's music and mixing services. This site produces big results, and they offer educator passes that will allow your students to make longer videos and use the extra services for a full semester.

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