

ONLINE LEARNING: BLENDED LEARNING

Online learning takes many forms, and perhaps one of the most accessible and easiest to incorporate into classroom practice is blended learning. Blended learning can be the best of both worlds as it allows face-to-face interaction and access to online resources to help students understand material presented in class.

Fully online classes can suffer from students feeling isolated and unmotivated by a lack of a community of learners. Blended learning helps to reduce this issue by giving the students classroom time with a teacher and learner whether physical or through synchronous online video sessions. This helps to create what Garrison and Kanuka (2004) call a *community of inquiry*. A community of inquiry gives students the structure they need to process the enormous amount of content they can find online. In these communities students are able to reflect on material they find online and incorporate what they learn from these materials into classroom materials, providing a form of scaffolding. The goal of blended learning is to encourage students to link life experiences to what they have learned, ask questions, and develop self-motivation to become independent learners.

TOOLS FOR BLENDED LEARNING

Creating a blended classroom takes planning and preparation, but with the right tools, opportunities for student inquiry are plentiful. The tools listed below are great ways to add a blended learning component to your class. After each set of tools, suggestions are made for how to use these tools in a specific activity. These activities are just a few suggestions, so be sure to share your ideas with us on the new [American English for Educators Facebook](#) page!

Online Storage Tools:

[Google Drive](#) – Google Drive allows for the online storing of a variety of documents and media. Unlike the other storage options listed below, Google Drive allows files to be opened by multiple users simultaneously. This allows for opportunities to engage in collaborative writing exercises by working on the same document from separate computers.

[Dropbox](#) – Dropbox is an online file hosting service. You can create a folder with the name of a specific class and share the folder with students of that particular class. Your students can then add homework and assignments to the folder, which are automatically updated as changes are made.

[Box](#) – Box has much the same functionality as Dropbox but has more limited features. Folders can be created and shared, allowing students to upload class materials to a shared space. While Box does support individual user accounts, its primary focus is large organizations, so much of its services are focused on universities or businesses.

Activities Using Online Storage Tools

Grammar Grab

The goal of this activity is to get students aware of the language and grammar used in the world around them while providing in-class support to understand its use. Using the cameras on their cell phones, students take pictures of signs, posters, or advertisements that feature English. Students can then

upload these images to your preferred online storage tool. Then before class, you can then look through the images and choose the most interesting ones to discuss in class. As a warm-up at the beginning of class, show an image, and with the class investigate the grammar and how it is being used. More advanced students can look for signs, posters, or advertisements in the community that feature incorrect or misused English.

For example:



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In this sign items are banned and students may expect modals of prohibition such as “You must not smoke here”. However, the signs use gerunds. The students can then work together to hypothesize why it is correct to use a gerund in this situation. The goal of this activity is for students to work as a community of inquiry and notice grammar and how it is used in everyday life. By bringing in images the students have taken, you can get students to develop an awareness of how English is used in daily life and empower them to be active participants in their own learning.

Online Peer Review

Having students read and peer edit or review each other’s writing helps both writer and reader. However, students can often be reluctant to provide feedback that they consider critical in a face-to-face classroom setting. Classroom peer review sessions can be moved online to give students more anonymity when doing peer editing and review activities.

Have students complete class-writing assignments and upload them to an online storage tool. You can then make copies of the students writing assignment. In these copies, remove the student’s names and other personal information. Then, assign each student a new paper to review and edit.

Engagement Tools/Polling Software

[Nearpod](#) – Nearpod allows you to create PowerPoint-style presentations that can be shared to each student’s own device. Students visit the webpage and input a unique code you provide and can then watch your presentation. A great benefit of this software is that, by using their own devices, students are able to interact with your presentation through a variety of activities such as exploring maps, answering questions, or watching videos.

[Poll Everywhere](#) – Poll Everywhere enables you to create polls that students can answer via the Poll Everywhere website or by text message. As students respond, their answers are displayed in real time via a central screen such as the classroom projection screen. Poll Everywhere has recently added a PowerPoint add-on that allows for polls to be inserted into any PowerPoint presentation.

[Plickers](#) – Plickers works through the use of printed QR codes that you give to students. During class, you can ask multiple-choice questions which students answer by holding up the cards with the correct symbol. You can then scan the classroom via a smartphone app. The app reads the QR code each student is holding to determine each student’s answer and then reports the results.

[Kahoot](#) – Kahoot takes the multiple-choice test and turns it into a classroom activity. Teachers create multiple-choice questions prior to class. In class, students can use a computer or smartphone to log into the game. On their screens, students see four answer choices, and they choose the best answer to the question that is displayed on the teacher’s screen.. After each question, the teacher’s screen will display the results including the number of correct and incorrect answers.

Activities Using Engagement Software/Polling Tools

Engagement tools and polling software can be a great alternative to paper-based quizzes to gauge student understanding of material. With these tools, you can pose questions to your class. Students can then answer as a class, in small groups/pairs, or individually. A benefit of using these types of online tools is that they allow students to determine their own understanding of the material instead of comparing themselves with the rest of the class. Students are able to track their own answer to each question. After each question, the answer is displayed on the screen for all the students to see. The ratio of student answers to each possible question is also displayed, allowing the class to see the correct answer and which answer was most commonly selected. When using this type of software, be sure to allocate time to analyze the students’ answers as a whole class exercise. This can provide both you and the students insight into which material they are finding the most challenging or which material they have mastered.

Multiple Choice Tests

Multiple-choice tests are used for assessment of individual students but can also be used as a collaborative activity and allow for more immediate feedback on results. Using one of the tools above, try giving students a multiple-choice test. After each question, take time to evaluate the students’ answers. If most of the class got the question wrong, stop and review the material by engaging in class discussions or small activities around that specific question. This gives students the opportunity to understand what mistakes they made and why. For the teacher, it provides an overview of how many students understand the material, what material is understood, and where more practice needs to be focused.

Class Question Bank

Polling software can be used in class to let students ask questions anonymously. Stopping for individual questions in large classes can be time consuming. Also, weaker students may be reluctant to ask questions on material they do not understand. Polling software can be used to allow students to ask questions as they occur, but the questions are recorded and saved to a question bank. At the end of the class or at the start of the next class, the questions that have been posted to the question bank can be reviewed and answered.

Reference



Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The internet and higher education*, 7(2), 95-105.