

“Google docs: Who knew?”

Stacey Mosher, Teacher, Chinook Winds Adventist Academy, Calgary, AB

In spite of all the technology we have today, flash drives, email, etc., I still hear these annoying phrases quite often from my students: “I left my homework at home” or “I couldn’t get my printer to work.” This does not need to be the reality any more. If you use the Internet at all, you’ve heard of a little company called GOOGLE. But you may not be aware that Google is far more than a search engine. It has a great suite of programs that are all interconnected and perfect for today’s teachers and students. The Google suite includes word-processing (like WORD), presentations (like PowerPoint), spreadsheet (like EXCEL), as well as a forms and drawing application. This suite of tools is also linked to Gmail and a very nice calendar that mimics the one in Outlook. A great place to start is with Google docs.

As teachers, we want students to be able to collaborate with one another on homework or various other assignments. With Google docs, students can work on the same project at the same time in real time. “When Alice makes changes to the document, spreadsheet, presentation, or drawing, Meredith can see them in real time and respond to them immediately. Both of them work on the same document, so there’s no need to go back and forth, comparing and consolidating individual files.”¹ This ability is especially usefully when partners live far from each other. Along with collaboration, students and teachers can also share uploaded files with one another. The nice thing with Google docs is that you can choose to limit the people that you share with (i.e., to students in a class) or open the files to the public.

I often find that students have a hard time organizing their work and keeping track of where homework is. The home page of docs is easy to organize and can be sorted in different ways. Folders can be made for separate classes or projects or by the type of document. And anything created in Google docs does not count towards storage maximums. Though there are limitations, you can store a lot. For keeping up with work, the newer iPhones and Android cell phones allow users access to Google.

I have really only looked at the documents section of Google which is just one of the great tools available to teachers and students. In today’s fast-paced, high-tech, no-time-for-homework culture, Google docs is a great way to get students to work together even when they cannot physically be together. And unlike Facebook, MySpace or Twitter, Google docs provides a workspace that is separate from all of the social distractions that come along with social networking sites. Google docs is a fantastic place for students to work both independently and collaboratively.

¹ <http://docs.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=44677>