

How Can Google Docs Help Foster Productive Collaboration?

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Google Doc Basics

Once you have set up a Google account and created your Google Doc, you should find the layout and functions basically similar to your normal word processing programs. But there are some key differences between Google Docs and Microsoft Word, for example, so the following how-to guides can provide quick and easy tutorials on the basics.

1. Teaching Crib Sheet for Docs

http://static.googleusercontent.com/media/74.125.5.103/en/103/educators/learning_materials/WR_cribsheet.pdf

This overview from Google offers an easy-to-follow overview, with visuals and examples, of how to get started and master the basics.

2. Eight Things Every Teacher Should Be Able to Do with Google Docs

A relatively self-explanatory title! This provides another overview of the basics, including getting started with a Google account and connecting your Docs.

3. Google Docs in the Classroom

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/fostering-student-collaboration>

A brief video from the Teaching Channel that focuses on how to encourage productive collaboration on writing assignments with Google Docs. Although the profiled classroom is at the high school level, the ideas translate well to higher education.

4. Three Quick and Easy Google Docs Ideas for Your Classroom

<http://ditchthattextbook.com/2013/08/29/3-quick-and-easy-google-docs-ideas-for-your-classroom/>

Offers exactly what the title promises. The three suggested ideas are excellent ones; highly recommended reading.

5. 5 Ways to Use Google Docs in the Classroom

<http://gettingsmart.com/2012/12/5-ways-to-use-google-docs-in-the-classroom/>

This article includes information on how to use the forms available in Google docs to produce low-stakes quizzes for your students, and on using the drawing tools available in the application to create visuals such as concept maps.

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Types of Google Docs Assignments

Student Comments

Perhaps the simplest model. Course readings, presentation materials, or instructor-created resources of any kind can be put into a Google Doc prior to class. Students can be assigned to comment on the materials prior to coming to class, as a stand-alone assignment, or as a collaborative assignment in class.

Student Revisions

In this model, the instructor might create a document that students will then have the responsibility for revising in class. So the instructor might create a skeletal version of a lecture presentation as a Google Doc, and then students are assigned to expand or revise it according to course readings.

Student Presentations

Create a presentation topic and an audience (i.e., students are making a pitch to a local business about how to use social media to improve their sales). Put students in groups and assign each group one aspect of the presentation to create. Once they are complete, the class works together with the instructor to standardize formats and create a coherent presentation.

Student Writing

In a similar way, create an assignment which requires a piece of writing in response (i.e, students are collaborating on a campus newspaper article reporting the results of new research in your field). Assign sections to student groups and edit the document together as a class.

Peer Critiques

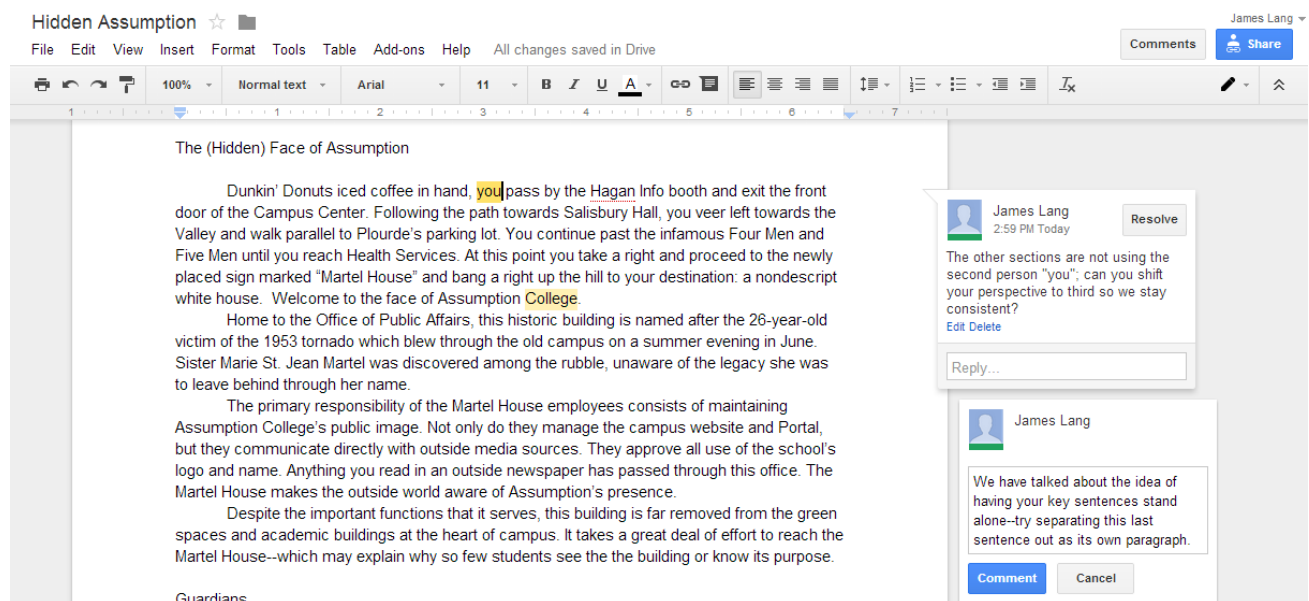
Sample student essays are loaded into Google Docs prior to class. Students are assigned to provide comments on each other's work. Class time can focus on discussing the rationale behind the various comments.

Sample Assignment

I assigned students in my Creative Nonfiction course to co-author an essay about the “hidden places” on our campus. I had contacted the editor of the student newspaper before class about publishing our essay, so the students had a strong incentive to demonstrate our best work. We spent one class period brainstorming the places that we would write about, determining the groups, and allowing the groups to choose their desired location. Their homework for that night was to visit the place they were writing about and take as many notes as possible. During the next class period, they worked together to draft their sections. Our first draft was much too long for the space we had been given in the newspaper, so we spent a final class period together working on their editing and revision skills by cutting it down to size. Much to their delight, the piece was eventually published as a feature in the campus newspaper.

The image below should give you a quick glimpse of the basic features of Google Doc. The first comment, to the right, is one that I have “published” and the students are then able to “resolve” by making the requested correction. The second comment is still open, which means the students won’t see it until I hit “comment.”

Note as well the “Share” button up to the right, which allows me to e-mail links to the document or open it up for access to different audiences.



The screenshot shows a Google Docs interface for a document titled "Hidden Assumption". The document text is as follows:

The (Hidden) Face of Assumption

Dunkin' Donuts iced coffee in hand, you pass by the Hagan Info booth and exit the front door of the Campus Center. Following the path towards Salisbury Hall, you veer left towards the Valley and walk parallel to Plourde's parking lot. You continue past the infamous Four Men and Five Men until you reach Health Services. At this point you take a right and proceed to the newly placed sign marked "Martel House" and bang a right up the hill to your destination: a nondescript white house. Welcome to the face of Assumption College.

Home to the Office of Public Affairs, this historic building is named after the 26-year-old victim of the 1953 tornado which blew through the old campus on a summer evening in June. Sister Marie St. Jean Martel was discovered among the rubble, unaware of the legacy she was to leave behind through her name.

The primary responsibility of the Martel House employees consists of maintaining Assumption College's public image. Not only do they manage the campus website and Portal, but they communicate directly with outside media sources. They approve all use of the school's logo and name. Anything you read in an outside newspaper has passed through this office. The Martel House makes the outside world aware of Assumption's presence.

Despite the important functions that it serves, this building is far removed from the green spaces and academic buildings at the heart of campus. It takes a great deal of effort to reach the Martel House--which may explain why so few students see the the building or know its purpose.

Guardians

On the right side of the document, there are two comments from James Lang:

- Comment 1 (Resolved):** "The other sections are not using the second person 'you': can you shift your perspective to third so we stay consistent?" (2:59 PM Today). A "Resolve" button is visible.
- Comment 2 (Open):** "We have talked about the idea of having your key sentences stand alone--try separating this last sentence out as its own paragraph." (Buttons for "Comment" and "Cancel" are visible).