

VoiceThread

Amy Brusini, Instructional Technology Specialist, CER

What this is

The Innovative Instructor is a forum of published articles (www.cer.jhu.edu/ii) and a blog (ii.library.jhu.edu) related to teaching excellence at Johns Hopkins

About the CER

The Center for Educational Resources partners with faculty and graduate students to extend instructional impact by connecting innovative teaching strategies and instructional technologies

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- www.cer.jhu.edu/ii or email
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Forum categories

Pedagogy Forum

Hopkins professors share successful strategies for teaching excellence

Technology Forum

Information about emerging technologies, who is using them, and why you should know

Best Practice Forum

"How To" workshops on using technologies and applying innovative instructional methods

What it is

VoiceThread is web-based presentation software that allows users to create and share interactive multimedia slideshows. VoiceThread presentations are used to showcase audio, video, images, and documents while allowing users to comment on them in a variety of different ways. The result is a digital conversation that can be easily shared with individuals, groups, and/or embedded into different websites, including Blackboard, the course management system used here at Homewood.

Who is using it

Originally developed at the University of North Carolina, VoiceThread offers individual and group licenses to many higher education institutions; at Johns Hopkins, the Schools of Nursing and Public Health have been using the tool for several years. IT@JH recently obtained a university-wide license for all members of the Hopkins community; instructors and students from all JHU schools now have the ability to access VoiceThread free of charge.



Why it matters

In both face-to-face and online environments, instructors often search for ways to make their classes more interactive. VoiceThread offers one way to achieve this goal. By allowing participants to interact directly with visual media, VoiceThread provides an alternative to traditional text-based communication tools, such as online discussion boards and blogs. The flexibility and ease with which VoiceThread allows participants to contribute to online conversations encourages communication and collaboration among class members, leading to a richer experience overall.

voicethread

How it can be used

At JHU and other institutions, instructors and students are using VoiceThread in creative ways. Comments can be made on any type of content using a microphone, a webcam, uploading a pre-recorded audio file, using the telephone, or by simply typing text. There is also a 'doodle' tool which can be used to annotate presentations with drawings while leaving a comment.

Here are some examples of how this tool is being used:

Assessment

- **Peer assessment** – Students can use VoiceThread to share assignments (papers, images, audio, video clips, etc.) with their peers for comments and critique.
- **Foreign language assessment** – VoiceThread is especially useful to foreign language instructors who would like to hear their students speak. For example, instructors can create a presentation (upload an audio recording, image, video clip, etc.) and have students translate, describe, or narrate.

Instruction

- **Online lecture tool** – Instructors can use VoiceThread to create online lectures for fully online classes or as a supplement to face-to-face classes.
- **Review Session** – Students can use VoiceThread to record a content review session in preparation for a test or exam.
- **Facilitate Discussions** – Students can present a topic and then facilitate a class discussion in VoiceThread about the topic.

Presentation

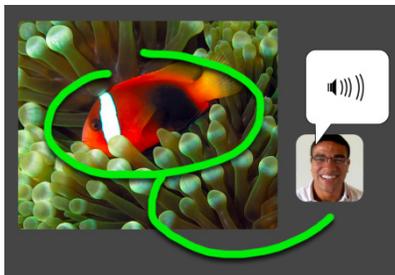
- **Student presentation tool** – Students can use VoiceThread to create individual or group presentations on any number of topics, which can then be shared with the class. An added advantage - students can watch and comment on each others' presentations outside of class, freeing up valuable class time.
- **Digital storytelling** – In groups or independently, students can use VoiceThread to create interactive digital stories using various media artifacts (audio, images, etc.).

Sharing

- **Student Introductions** – Especially helpful in a fully online environment, students and instructors can use VoiceThread to introduce themselves and build a learning community.
- **Brainstorming session** – Students and instructors can use VoiceThread to brainstorm ideas for project topics, group presentation strategies, etc.

Where it is going

Since it was first released in 2007, the popularity of VoiceThread has grown steadily, especially among educators interested in taking advantage of its collaborative and interactive nature. Last year, the company introduced a mobile version (free for JHU account holders) that has so far generated positive responses. One new feature still in development is a voice-to-text conversion tool to expand accessibility.



How to get started

JHU instructors and students can go to <http://jhu.voicethread.com>, login with their JHED IDs and passwords, and immediately begin creating a VoiceThread. Once created, instructors can easily share their VoiceThread presentations in Blackboard; each presentation contains an 'Embed' link that is used to cut and paste the presentation code into a content editor in Blackboard. The embedded VoiceThread is then displayed inside a Blackboard content area and is accessible by all students in the course.

All users are automatically set up with a 'Basic' account that allows for the creation of 50 VoiceThreads and up to 2GB of storage. Instructors can request to be upgraded to a 'Pro' account that allows for the creation of an unlimited number of VoiceThreads, 10GB of storage space, and the ability to create and manage groups. Send an email to cerweb@jhu.edu to request 'Pro' access as well as to learn more about manual and automatic group creation.

Additional Resources

- VoiceThread Overview: <https://www.voicethread.com/about/features>
- VoiceThread 'How-To' Basics: <https://www.voicethread.com/support/howto/Basics>
- More information about VoiceThread at Homewood: <http://cer.jhu.edu/resources.html#voicethread>

Author's Background

*Amy Brusini, Instructional Technology Specialist
Center for Educational Resources, JHU*



Amy Brusini works at the Center for Educational Resources (CER), a teaching and learning center for Homewood faculty. Amy provides support and training for Homewood faculty on Blackboard, the university's current course management system, as well as instructional design support. Amy has a Master's Degree in Education from Johns Hopkins University.