

StudentTech Episode #3 - Working Together

This is Catherine Ford and it's time for StudentTech Episode 3 - Working Together.

In today's episode I'll talk about tools to help students work together on class projects online and I'll give you some suggestions for low-cost entertainment for students on a budget.

I've been looking at three free online collaboration tools. The first one was recommended by my Twitter buddy @GoodLaura. It's called Drop.io. This site will allow you to set up a free account, upload your files to a secure area, and then invite others to work on those files with you. While the concept is great, for me the execution needs some work.

I set up a drop - their name for an account - uploaded some files and was quite pleased at how easy it was. However, when I tried to log into my drop a few days later, I couldn't get in. Drop.io has excellent customer service and responded to my Twitter message about trouble right away. The sad part is that they were never able to locate my account.

I blew this off as part user error and part system issue. So, I opened a second drop and made a note of my account info. Now, several days later I'm running into the same issue. I requested my account info and, as of writing this, still have not received the info. At this point I cannot recommend this service, but will keep trying to figure it out and make some suggestions to avoid the login bugs I keep running into. Right now I have to give this tool a grade of C.

The next tool is DabbleBoard. This online whiteboard tool is a fantastic way to meet virtually to discuss projects and share a common drawing or other documents and work collaboratively in private. Users also have the option of making their boards public and share drawings or images with other DabbleBoard users. Anything put on the whiteboard can be shared and saved and when drawing, the whiteboard functionality makes drawing shapes easy. I suggest that anyone interested in this tool watch to tour video (<http://www.dabbleboard.com/tour>). A link can be found in the show notes. While you can sign up for an account, one is not required. I have not encountered the same login issues with DabbleBoard that I did with Drop.io. You will need to make sure that your Flash plugin is up to date, but DabbleBoard works well with Internet Explorer 8 and Chrome. I haven't tested it on any other browsers. I give this tool an A- so far and look forward to using it more in the future.

Now for my favorite of these three tools. Stixy is a file sharing site with an easy and intuitive user interface that resembles a corkboard. You can post documents, photos, and other files and then invite others to collaborate with you. Best of all, you can have different stixy boards for different projects. Again, I didn't have any issues with logging into my account and found the user interface fun and easy to use. I give this tool an A and plan to use it more as I progress in my Dissertation project.

You can find links to each of the tools mentioned here in the show notes on StudentTech.info. That's S-T-U-D-E-N-T-T-E-C-H.I-N-F-O.

Today's show is brought to you by supportive grad student spouses everywhere. I know I couldn't do my work and schooling or this podcast without the loving support of my husband, Mark. He acts as a sounding board, proof reads my papers and encourages me when I get discouraged or frustrated. Do you have a spouse, family member, or significant other that does this type of thing for you? Don't forget to tell them thank you from time-to-time. Thanks Mark! Remember how much I love and appreciate you!

Every student needs some down time to have fun and unwind. Doing so relieves tension, lowers stress levels, and helps to re-focus the mind. I recommend looking around your community for free or low-cost spectator sports. Here in Sacramento, CA my husband, Mark, and I take in several River Cats AAA baseball games every summer. The tickets are cheap and we get to watch a pretty good ball game in a wonderful venue. I always feel relaxed after a game and can attack my work and school assignments with renewed energy. I plan to look for other spectator opportunities this fall and winter.

While your community may not have a AAA baseball team, I'm sure you have Jr. High or High School sports or even Parks and Recreation District leagues. Watching your local kids' teams play is just as relaxing and provides good moral support to the youth of your community.

Special thanks to my Twitter Friends @GoodLaura, @PencilBugs, @SmartWoman, and others. Are you on Twitter? If yes, please look me up. My Twitter name is Catherine_Ford. Send me an @message and I will look you up too!

There are a couple of other ways you can contact me as well. You can send me an email by going to StudentTech.info and clicking on the Contact link on the Jump To... menu and completing the form. If you prefer to contact me via phone please call 916.915.3673 and leave a voicemail message. If you want to avoid long distance charges click on the Google Voice widget in the show notes and Google Voice will call you free of charge. Then you can leave a message. Google Voice does not keep your number recorded.

One last thing: The Student Tech podcast is now available on iTunes. Please subscribe so you don't miss an episode. If you know of other places where I can list this podcast, please let me know. I'm still learning the podcasting ropes and can use any help you care to give to make this podcast better and more useful for you.

Thanks for listening. This is Catherine Ford for Student Tech. If you learned something new today, then it's been a great day!

The music for this podcast is called Achievement unlocked and was composed by George Wood. You can find Mr. Wood's work on PodSafe Audio (<http://www.podsafeaudio.com/>). To find out more about other tools and technology used to create this podcast visit the About page on StudentTech.info.