

Tip Sheet 9: Gathering Assessment Evidence Through Digital Thoughtbooks

Challenges and Opportunities of Gathering Assessment Evidence Online

Just as in face-to-face classrooms, observations and conversations are an essential element of effective assessment to both guide student learning and to arrive at a valid and reliable grade when evaluating their learning. In fact, online learning may help ensure greater equity in this regard, as shy or quiet students are often not overwhelmed by more vocal students in online learning environments. At the same time, extracting useful evidence of learning from lengthy threaded discussions can be onerous and time consuming for teachers.

A Digital Thoughtbook is a structure that can help to ensure timely and manageable feedback as well as gathering useful evidence through observation and conversation.

Digital Thoughtbooks

What is it? Great thinkers like Leonardo da Vinci, Virginia Woolf, and Frida Kahlo used journals and other media in a lifelong process of creative thinking. Thoughtbooks are an adaptation of these devices for use in a learning environment. A Thoughtbook is best used to allow students to explore a defined inquiry using a similar iterative process. Thoughtbooks are more a collaboration between student and teacher as learning evolves than a strictly personal domain and serve as a catalyst for student-teacher conversations about a student's evolving thinking. A Thoughtbook provides a means to sustain students' critical and creative thinking about a question or task that is the focus of ongoing inquiry.

Thoughtbooks are different from notebooks, which are used to record what students have learned, and from journals, which are used to record students' reactions to what they have learned. They have three defining features.

- **They are a response to genuine inquiries.** Thoughtbooks should be used when students are asked to explore an issue, problem, or project that requires careful reasoning and would benefit from extended reflection and revision. Thoughtbooks are not intended to be places for students to make notes about what others have said or to record answers to an assignment. Rather they are spaces where students can build upon what they might have read, heard, or learned by musing critically and creatively, in words, sketches, or recordings, about their emerging ideas and plans.
- **They are ongoing and iterative.** Thoughtbooks are not one-time assignments. Instead, students are expected to return repeatedly to their Thoughtbooks to revisit and build upon what they previously thought or proposed. The recurring question for students for virtually every Thoughtbook is: "How has what I have just learned informed, altered, or challenged my thinking about the issue, problem, or project that I am inquiring into?"
- **They involve reflective and investigative thinking.** Thoughtbooks have a dual purpose: to encourage students to think back by reviewing, critiquing, and testing what they have already proposed and thought, and also to invite them to "think forward" by imagining, hypothesizing, and extending their ideas and plans.

How might this be helpful for assessment? By monitoring the ideas tested out in Thoughtbooks, teachers are able to observe student learning as it develops and gather evidence of learning while supporting risk taking.

How can this be adapted for online learning? Some useful digital tools that support the use of Thoughtbooks in online learning:

- digital portfolios such as Seesaw or Google Docs
- videos or images captured on smartphones or tablets
- word processors with “track changes” turned on
- mapping apps such as Padlet
- audio recordings of oral presentations, practice with language acquisition, or playing music



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