

Teaching & Technology in Media Studies

“Drowning in a Sea of Technological Potential or Using Online Tools in the Media Classroom: The Struggle is Real.”

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I’ve been teaching in both the hybrid and offline environments for nearly seven years, while still teaching face-to-face classes. Teaching media, especially to non-majors, comes with its unique struggles. The first hump in the classroom is often to convince students that there will be rigor and it won’t just be 90 minutes of watching their favorite shows. They will actually have to read. They will be writing (and yes, structure and punctuation do matter). As many students take television classes because “it will be cool to just watch TV and get credit,” professors already start at the bottom of a long uphill battle. Add to this either (a) teaching in an online forum where students don’t actually have to make eye contact with you or (b) integrating technology and tools the students see as part of their private and informal lives and the challenge has doubled. Now, not only am I asking students to consider a topic they might not think is worthy of serious consideration, but I’m asking them to simultaneously engage with it through platforms they either would prefer to keep private and out of the classroom or ones with which they have developed potentially flippant and uncritical relationships, making critical thinking and formal writing seem unreasonable.

Alongside this challenge of convincing students to engage critically with “their” texts and on “their” technologies and platforms is the added challenge as a professor of wading through an ocean of new online tools. It can be completely overwhelming just to figure out what tools might be useful for a given exercise in a given class. Even if I can find a tool that seems to be perfect, I then run into issues of scale, price, function, multi-user access, and ease of use. Just to get to that point, I have to wade thorough a sea of online options and try to determine the functionality of the tool for the goals of the project and from the perspective of the student. This assumes that I am simultaneously some kind of super-user who can effortlessly learn and evaluate online tools and immediately assess them from various perspectives. (Really, it just means that I spend days trying to replicate the project through different resources, emailing people who might have wanted to do something similar at some point in their careers, and communicating with instructional designers who don’t always understand my project and who are also unfamiliar with the “university-unsupported” tool at hand.) Once I settle on a tool, I then run into the ever-looming problem of how to present it to a class full of students with different entry points regarding media literacy and adaptability. Do I

overwhelm them with course-specific tutorials, or does that just lead them to stop reading/watching anything? I'm not going to lie, the entire process does just make me want to revert back to the "sage on the stage" with a piece of chalk, a stack of bluebooks, and maybe a VCR; that, however, is stinkin' thinkin'.

So, for my portion of the roundtable, what I will ultimately do is spend my time introducing some tools and formats used in both online and face-to-face classes, showing examples of how I used them, what worked, what bombed, and what I might have done to make things better. I'll primarily discuss my recent use of Storify and Voicethread and the presentation format known as the PechaKucha. I'll share some sample assignments, student projects, and self-created tutorials, all the while discussing successes and failures. In the end, I hope that my portion of the roundtable can serve as a jumping off point for the panel and audience to talk about and share tools and struggles with technology. If nothing else, I think it's greatly beneficial for us to talk about these challenges, as I find nothing more frustrating than the isolation I often feel when trying to troubleshoot such technology/pedagogy related issues. Many of us are trying to solve the same problems or embrace the same possibilities; we're all just sitting alone in our own offices banging our heads on our respective desks while doing it.