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GETTING STARTED

I first heard about VoiceThread from the Coordinator of our Center for Excellence in Teaching. I had a problem that needed a solution and it seemed to me that VoiceThread was that answer. I teach an odd little niche subject called Warp Knitting and we don't really have the equipment that I can produce fabric on, so being able to work with images of fabric was perfect for me. If you look at any VoiceThreads I've created you'll see that I take pictures of the fabric through microscopes and then we can have conversations about them. It's just worked beautifully.

DESIGNING LESSONS WITH VOICETHREAD

Traditionally, this course has been taught by sticking students in a class with microscopes and having them look at fabric all day long and it's been a very isolating activity. VoiceThread makes it possible for us to have a conversation about it. Now they can do the analysis and I can give them feedback and provide a summary. They can then use that as an exam review, so this has been a great application.

First, I create the threads by choosing which material they need to work with. After I take the pictures through the microscopes, I manipulate the images in photoshop so they can see the front and the back of the fabric. Then I'll do an introductory lecture and talk them through a couple of the fabrics.

Then I set the threads up so that they have to make comments, usually with around 8 slides. They have to tell me something new and different in at least four of the slides.

I also taught a fundamentals of textiles class and based on how I used VoiceThread in my other class I thought well this is a perfect thing to use for that group too. I record myself doing some mini-lectures and then the students do their analysis. I always assign another student to check their analysis. Then my face-to-face students asked for access to the mini-lectures for my online students. They wanted to use them as exam review.



“I had a problem that needed a solution and it seemed to me that VoiceThread was that answer.”



“VoiceThread is very useful and it really helps you understand concepts.”

– FIT STUDENT

At this point, I’ve used VoiceThread for almost all of the courses I teach at FIT.

ASSESSMENT

My knitting students are required to give me one new piece of information about the fabric. I have a kind of rubric that I’ve built in. If they just say “Yeah, I agree with Steve,” that’s not really bringing anything new to the table. I grade each comment individually and then I calculate the grade.

For my other class, the students have about 5 points that they have to hit when analyzing the fabric. They have to identify different features. The grading is based on how many of the 5 they hit.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

I try to get the students used to using VoiceThread, but honestly, VoiceThread is not that tough to figure out. I have to nag my face-to-



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face students sometimes to get them to talk and not type, but I like to hear them talk. I always talk and I usually webcam with them.

The students in my online class always want to talk instead of type. They really like VoiceThread because they feel like it gives them the intimacy of a face-to-face experience.

My advice would be to start with a little online mini-lecture. Then ask the students to make any kind of comment. Just require them to simply participate. I think of that as

an ice-breaker. If you start them off with a full-blown assignment, then that tends to be intimidating.

I also try to keep the amount of material covered in each VoiceThread fairly tightly controlled. I try to keep them covering a fairly narrow set of concepts. It makes it easier for the students. Then once they get used to VoiceThread we can expand on it and open things up.