

# **Top Resources for Blended Learning**

Preparing to Develop and Teach  
Online and Blended Courses

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Many teachers want their students to make more use of technology between classes or instead of some classes to accelerate and deepen their learning. Few courses take place without technology – even if it's just for sending assignments or dealing with queries.

This is a quick guide to some resources that you might want to use to support a blended course.

- **Zite**

For those students with an Apple smartphone or iPad, Android devices or Windows 7 enabled devices, Zite is an amazing application. It is a self-generating personalized magazine.

As an instructor, you advise students which topics to enter into Zite's "customize" feature – you can suggest as many as you like and these should cover the key themes and ideas of your course. If you are teaching about ecology, for example, you can suggest topics like biodiversity, climate change, water, science etc. Students enter these (and others they are interested in). Each time the student opens Zite, it finds the most recent material available on the web and delivers it direct to the students' device.

The student browses each topic and explores in more depth articles that interest them. If they found an article helpful, they tell Zite to find more like this or if it was unhelpful, less. They can also e-mail the link to themselves or others, post the link on their Facebook page or send it to others via Twitter. The article can also be stored to read later (Zite doesn't store articles, it refreshes at each use).

- **Schoology**

Facebook is not ideal for classroom connectivity and learning and most students don't want to "mess" their Facebook postings with postings connected to their class or learning. This software enables Facebook-like engagement between classes to occur in an environment that teachers like and is user friendly. This is also an LMS platform and comes with several "plug in" apps.

See the video at <https://www.schoology.com/home.php> (don't be put off by the focus on K-12).

- **Evernote**

Evernote is a complete information management system that many students can't do without. This free tool allows students to take notes in many formats, including voice and handwritten, and stores them on your devices or in the cloud.

Evernote has excellent apps for all mobile devices, and users with an account can sync information across all devices instantaneously. Students keep all their research information in Evernote, and can make these public for their instructor and others to view. Evernote also has "clipping" plug-ins for browsers that make capturing information very easy.

- **Blogs**

Google's blog platform (blogger) provides the opportunity for collaborative blogging. It takes just 5-10 minutes to set up a blog, give permission for anyone in the class (or just some) to post to the blog and

create an interesting space for a class to share ideas, insights, and new material in a general way. WordPress – another blog platform - also enables this.

- **Twitter**

Students make a lot of use of Twitter. Don't get involved in the question: why? Work out how this can be used.

You can set up an entire class to follow you on Twitter and use it to post ideas, information, news and links to new material so that they have this instantly. Twitter can be a great tool for “backchanneling” during lectures or research projects, allowing students to ask questions that many people can answer (one instructor has his students create accounts they use for academic purposes – part of building a positive digital footprint!). You can also provide students with a list of people they should follow (provide their Twitter hashtag) so that they can crowd-source ideas with leaders and others with an interest in the course content.

- **Wiggio**

Wiggio lets you share and manage files, manage a group calendar, poll your group, post links, set up conference calls (including voice, webcam, shared whiteboard space, and screen sharing), chat online, send out mass text messages, and send voice or e-mail messages to the entire group.

Wiggio has a lot of features that are similar to Google Groups but some additional features that truly make it a “holy buckets of love” experience. Everything is in one place, handy and easy to use!

- **Diigo**

If you have ever been frustrated that your web page bookmarks from one computer aren't available on another, Diigo is a solution. At its most basic, Diigo allows you to access all of your bookmarks from anywhere on the web.

There are a variety of toolbars and shortcuts to make this process seamless. Other great features include the ability to tag, highlight, and annotate web pages that you bookmark. Your notes appear when you re-visit those pages and can be aggregated by visiting your list on Diigo's website.

Perhaps the most powerful features are those that support collaboration and sharing. Your bookmarks and lists can be made public or shared with a defined group. Group members are notified when new sites are added to a list and comments can be read by others that visit the page. Diigo also has numerous groups you may join, making it another great tool to grow your personal learning network.

- **Google Drive**

Google Drive “a place where you can create, share, collaborate, and keep all of your stuff. You can upload and access all of your files, including videos, photos, Google Docs, PDF's and beyond.” (<http://googleblog.blogspot.ca/2012/04/introducing-google-drive-yes-really.html>)

Google Docs is built into Google Drive making it perfect for creating and collaborating in real time on documents, spreadsheets and presentations. You can add and reply to comments and receive notifications when other people comment on shared items. You can get started with 5GB of storage for

free. An alternative for storage and sharing of documents is dropbox – just file documents in a dropbox folder and everyone who has access to the folder gets the documents instantly.

- **TodaysMeet**

**TodaysMeet** is a great tool for creating “backchannels” during class meetings or as a chat room for students to use asynchronously. No accounts or sign-up is necessary. Name your room, choose how long you’d like it available, then send the link to whomever you’d like to have access. It’s also great for public note-taking, brainstorming and sharing ideas.

- **Wikispaces**

With this application, you can create a wiki to permit your class to co-create and edit documents together. Free to use and secure, teams within your class or the whole class can create documents, edit them and make them available to others.