

VoiceThread.com (2007-09). Subscriptions \$10.00-\$99.00 per year.

**Reviewed by
Steven Ahola**

What is a blog? According to Dictionary.com, a blog is a "shared on-line journal where people can post diary entries about their personal experiences and hobbies." Nowadays there are blogs to suit a person's interests including sports blogs, political blogs, and news blogs. One website—Voicethread.com—offers individuals, businesses, and educational institutions a place to create an online blog. The website describes a 'Voice Thread' as: "...a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, and videos and allows people to leave comments in 5 ways—using voice (with a microphone or phone), text, audio file, or video (via a webcam)."

The cost for a Voice Thread account varies depending on the features. For K-12 educators, there is Ed.VoiceThread. Ed.VoiceThread has a one-time fee of \$10. With this account, students can only participate once they are added by the educator administering the account. It is important to note that students cannot invite other people to join Voice Thread. In terms of privacy, all Voice Threads are private unless the educator or administrator of the account allows them to be made public. The website highlights this issue: "It's never necessary to make a Voice Thread publicly viewable, but we do believe students grow when they share and collaborate with others. The act of publishing content, that can be seen by anyone anywhere, reinforces the idea that student work is unique, valuable, and worthy of the world's attention."

For those teaching in higher education, the cost is \$59.95 per year for an individual Pro account or \$99 per year for the Manager account. The Pro account allows for unlimited Voice Threads. The Manager account receives 1 Pro account and 50 basic accounts. A basic account includes 3 Voice Threads per month.

For ESL educators, Voice Thread could be incorporated into classes in numerous ways. In a writing class, the educator could upload images, documents, or short videos which act as a prompt for writing. This activity could replace a typical journal where students respond to prompts by writing their entries into a notebook. In my ESL writing classes at a community college, my students use Voice Thread to respond to prompts about their own writing, their textbook readings, and current events in the news. My students have commented that they enjoy using Voice Thread because they can improve their typing skills.

In a pronunciation class, an educator could upload a handout featuring pronunciation exercises. The students could complete the exercises orally with the use of a microphone, telephone, or webcam. Ben Papell, cofounder of the website, addresses commenting on Voice Thread: "We've tried to make it fairly universal in access. If you don't have a microphone on your computer, you can use a telephone to comment. If you're in the classroom and don't have either, you can use text if you need to, or webcam commenting" (Papell as quoted in Weir, 2009).

One of the excellent features of Voice Thread is the technical support for educators. For example, there is an extensive FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section and a Forum

section. The topics on these pages range from troubleshooting to connecting with other schools using Voice Thread. Further, there are step-by-step tutorials on creating (uploading, commenting, sharing, and embedding) a Voice Thread and using microphones and the doodling tool. Laila Weir (2009) offers a suggestion for those new to the site: "For educators new to Voice Thread, it's a good idea to experiment a bit before starting with students... Teachers can begin there, commenting on others' threads and creating their own practice threads."

With the technical support and the various ways to start conversations with students, educators should find Voice Thread a welcome addition to their classes. Students should find the new technology interesting and motivating. Let the conversations begin!

References

Blog (n.d.). In *Wordnet*. Retrieved January 12, 2009, from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/blog>.

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Weir, L. (April 17). Voice Threads: Extending the classroom with interactive multimedia albums. *Edutopia*. Retrieved January 12, 2009, from <http://www.edutopia.org/voicethread-interactive-multimedia-albums>.

Reviewer

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