

TEACHING WITH TABLETS

*How do I integrate tablets
with effective instruction?*

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Hankey Brownlow Education

About the Authors



Nancy Frey is a professor of educational leadership at San Diego State University and a teacher leader at San Diego's Health Sciences High & Middle College. Her research interests include reading and literacy, assessment, intervention, and curriculum design, and she has published many articles and books on literacy and instruction. She can be reached at nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu.



Doug Fisher is a professor of educational leadership at San Diego State University and a teacher leader at Health Sciences High & Middle College. He has published numerous books and articles on instruction and improving student achievement. He can be reached at dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu.



Alex Gonzalez is the technology coordinator at Health Sciences High & Middle College. In his approach to the use of technology in the classroom, Alex emphasizes forward thinking, convenience, security, and application. He can be reached at agonzalez@hshmc.org.

the necessary guidance—you can prepare your students to become more resourceful technology users and producers as they further their learning in the content areas.

Practical Considerations of Teaching with Tablets

Agreeing that a tablet is a great tool should not automatically result in the purchase of a cartful. It's essential to think about what you want to achieve with tablets, what you are going to need to teach well with tablets, and how you are going to go about it on a practical basis. Anyone who sets out to improve learning through an infusion of technology must be prepared to deal with four factors: instructional alignment and apps, technical support, infrastructure requirements, and ongoing professional development.

Instructional Considerations: Alignment and Apps

A tool's educational value depends on how well it complements your school's or your personal instructional model and teaching practices. Begin by asking the following questions:

- How compatible are tablets with the content of my course?
- How compatible are tablets with my teaching approach?

- In what ways might tablets disrupt my teaching approach?

To answer these questions, outline the standards and topics of the course and then consider what functions to utilize in your classroom (Frey, Fisher, & Gonzalez, 2010):

- Searching for information
- Listening for and viewing information
- Storing information
- Communicating information
- Collaborating with peers
- Producing information
- Presenting information
- Sharing information
- Networking with other learners beyond the classroom

Once you have paired content and tablet functionality, you'll be able to create classroom procedures that are more clearly aligned to your instructional purposes. You'll also be able to select the best apps for the job.

The development of apps for tablets is accelerating, and it is nearly impossible to weed through all of the new items produced each week. Even tools such as Google Apps for Education (www.google.com/enterprise/apps/education) and the education apps sorted in the iTunes App Store are little more than lists.

We have found that the EdTechTeacher website has a useful screening tool for examining apps (<http://edtechteacher.org/index.php/teaching-technology/>

mobile-technology-apps/ipad-as). Users first specify the desired app function—how they want students to use the tablet (For example, I want my students to... annotate course readings/improve their organization/respond to questions, polls, and assessments.) Each function is linked to a list of apps that includes a brief description of each, along with price, ease of use, and a rating. For example, apps for promoting collaboration include Subtext, a free synchronous app that allows teachers to populate a reading with questions. As students read and discuss, they add their answers and insights via the interface on their tablets. The teacher is able to monitor the comments generated in these text-based, small-group discussions in real time, even when he or she is not physically present with the group. EdTechTeacher rates this app as “medium” in terms of difficulty.

Finding an app that will allow your students to perform the identified function is an important aspect of the selection process. However, an equally important consideration is the degree to which an app will help your students meet the lesson’s learning goals. Effective teachers always factor student needs into any instructional decision. For this reason, web-based review sites from teacher-contributors are invaluable. One stellar example is I Education Apps Review (www.iear.org), where an online community of educators share their respective takes on educational apps. This site includes student reviews as well.

Several review sites overlay Bloom’s taxonomy with app reviews. Edutopia focuses specifically on apps used in K–5 education (www.edutopia.org/pad-apps-elementary-