Google Groups *in the Classroom*

Get the tool: http://groups.google.com

What is it?

Google Groups is a free, online service that helps groups of people easily share information and communicate effectively. Groups are public or private places where members share files, post ideas, and conduct discussions either on the web or via email. All emails sent to the group are archived for future reference and are easily searchable, either privately or publicly.

Why use it?

Students can use Google Groups to:

- Extend class discussions online.
- Share ideas, store documents, and organize web resources as they work on a team project.
- Create a private group for school clubs or sports teams to share the latest news, announcements, and pictures.

Teachers can use Google Groups to:

- Make class handouts, reading materials, assignments, and web links available to students and their parents. (A Google Group could even be used to manage an online class!)
- Send email announcements to parents.
- Centralize resources and communication for grade levels, departments, or professional learning communities.

Instructional Ideas

Elementary. Set up a parent-child book club using Google Groups. Students and parents read the book together at home and then respond to the discussion questions you post to the group.

Middle School. Create an online study group. Each day assign one student to post class notes as a new page in the Group. Then ask students to respond to reflection questions in the discussion area. Use the "Rate this Post" feature for participation grades or peer review.

High School. As part of a career-exploration project, have students join a publicly available Group related to their field of interest. After reading through the discussion archives, have each student post appropriate career questions to the group.

Expert Tip

By default, new members do not automatically receive emails sent to the group. As soon as you join a Google Group, manually edit your "membership preferences" to make sure you receive email messages from other members.
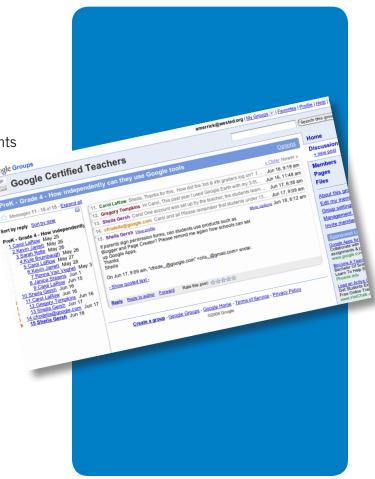
Google Groups in Action

Project: Digital Debate
Subject: English Language Arts

Use Google Groups to help students develop arguments for persuasive essays and speeches. The teacher creates a different discussion thread for each topic being debated in class, such as illegal immigration or the death penalty. Students post their opinions on assigned topics and include at least two links to web resources (news articles, video clips, etc.) that support their arguments. Each student is asked to respond to three other student messages with their own arguments (and links!) for or against the issue. Once completed, students have a wide variety of opinions and resources to draw from before writing a persuasive essay or giving a formal presentation.

Additional Resources

More on Facilitating Online Group Discussion
Using online groups to enhance face-to-face classes
http://tinyurl.com/3qmrxu

Learn to moderate an online discussion
http://www.edutech.ch/vista/docs/HOWTOs/VIS058E_ForumGuidesProf.php

Build an online professional learning community
http://www.nsdc.org/standards/learningcommunities.cfm

Complementary Tools

- Gmail
- Google Sites
- iGoogle

http://www.google.com/educators