

# VoiceThread: A multimedia platform for engaging students in hybrid and online courses

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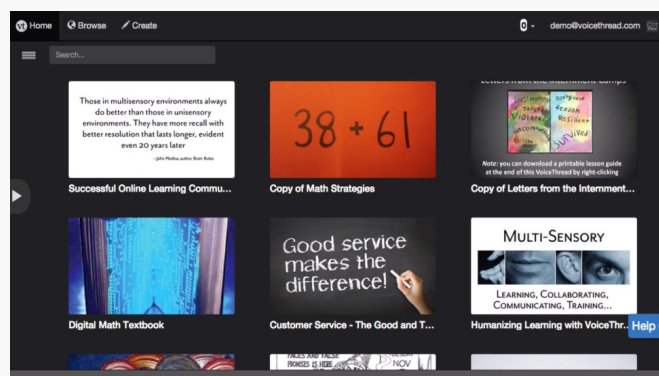
by **Mariam Daoud and Sherri Parkins, the Teaching & Learning Centre**

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You may have used discussion boards in My.Seneca for promoting student engagement in reflecting on topics and/or for sharing ideas and thoughts. When you are teaching in hybrid/fully online mode, you may feel it is not suitable when you have multimedia elements (audio/videos). For example, you may want to initiate a text/audio/visual discussion around the multimedia. You might want to grade your students simply for watching a multimedia file from start to finish. Perhaps you wish to have your students present their work as if they are in the classroom... Is there a tool in My.Seneca that has all these features? The answer is Yes: VoiceThread!

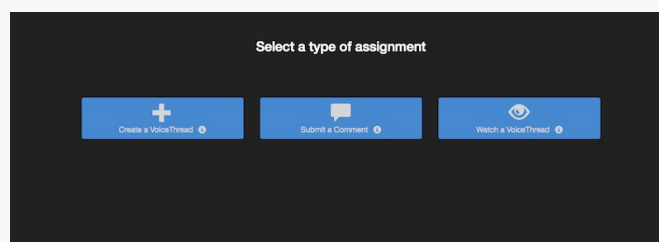
## How Can VoiceThread be Used?

VoiceThread can be used as a platform for hosting the course content (course view) when the instructor opts for differentiation in the learning modes such as audio/video in addition to text-based lectures (.ppt, .pdf, etc.). Differentiation in learning modes respects two of the principles of Universal Design for Learning: multiple means of representation and multiple means of engagement. Here is a presentation on the [Universal Design for Learning Features of VoiceThread](#) if you are interested in learning more. Students benefit from having access to different types of media to teach them content and to engage them in concepts being taught. You can allow students to comment on the audio/video files and you can track the number of views as well.



Another useful way of utilizing VoiceThread is to create a graded assignment for students to complete. There are three types of assignments that can be created under VoiceThread:

- **Create a VoiceThread:** This option is the best when you want students to present their work with voice over. Students can upload a PowerPoint presentation and add an audio note on each slide. The instructor can then comment on each slide with audio/video/text notes or even with a file upload. VoiceThread's ability to allow for comments in multiple modes, including voice, promotes the Universal Design of Learning (UDL) principle of multiple means of action and expression. This respects the diversity in student learning and their ability to use multiple modes of expression and action to demonstrate competency.
- **Submit a Comment:** This option is suitable for creating a multimedia discussion forum. The instructor posts a video or audio and students have to submit a comment on it. Comments can be added in text/audio/video or file uploads. Can you see how UDL is reflected in this feature?
- **Watch a VoiceThread:** This option is very helpful when teaching in online mode and you want to make sure the students have gone through the materials. You can set up a VoiceThread and grade the students for watching it start to finish. Having the VoiceThread Closed Captioned (CC) means that students who benefit from that feature will have access. **VoiceThread's CC** allows easy CCing to be added to any video content. Most people think of students with hearing loss when they consider CC, but research shows that CC can support many types of students including English Language Learners (ELL) (Morris, Frechette, Dukes, Stowell, Topping, Brodosi, 2016).



VoiceThread has features that not only consider the principles of Universal Design for Learning in its features but also addresses the unique needs of persons with disabilities. Their **VT Universal** supports users with visual disabilities with a stripped-down interface that emphasizes content and eliminates inconsequential extras. The ability to navigate the interface with the use of keystrokes as apposed to mouse clicks also makes the user interface more accessible. Another more inclusive approach that VoiceThread has adopted is their mobile App. The App allows students the flexibility of accessing content on their mobile devices.

Give VoiceThread a try as you consider the courses you will be teaching next semester! You

will find VoiceThread on My.Seneca when you add content to a course under Build Content > VoiceThread. Connect with the [Teaching & Learning Centre](#) if you have questions!

VoiceThread has [workshops](#) throughout January 2020 to help you get started and explore the tool. You can also access the archived recordings of their [previous workshops](#) on the VoiceThread website.

## References

Closed Captioning Matters: Examining the Value of Closed Captions for All Students, Karla Kmetz Morris, Casey Frechette, Lyman Dukes, Nicole Stowell, Nicole Emert Topping, David Brodosi, (2016). *Journal of Postsecondary Education & Disability*, 29(3), 231-238.

View the [December 2019 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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