

## Web 2.0 Selection Criteria: Save Time Choosing an Appropriate Tool

There is enormous *potential* for Web 2.0 technologies to help your course satisfy the Sloan-C [Five Pillars of Quality Online Education](#). In fact, the appropriate use of the right Web 2.0 tool can ensure better access, strengthen interactions, increase learning, and improve satisfaction (all in a generally cost-effective manner!). However, once you've chosen a particular class of Web 2.0 technology (i.e. content creation tools, communication tools, social networking tools...) making a selection from among several seemingly similar Web 2.0 tools in that class can often be challenging and time-consuming. That's why a checklist is useful. It will save you time by helping you eliminate poor tool choices. Once you've eliminated the poor choices, you will have fewer tools to test and a greater chance of finding that perfect tool to satisfy your course goals and learning objectives.

Of course, the number one criteria on any checklist should be that the tool supports your learning objectives. That being said, there are many other criteria to consider. You can download the full checklist (attached) and use it without reading any further. However, if you're the type of person who prefers to see how a checklist is applied, keep reading to see how I applied this checklist during a search for a specific type of tool.

### Scenario

I decided that student presentations (with peer assessment of those presentations) would satisfy a number of my learning objectives. Since I knew there would be a significant time commitment to create the instructional materials for this new activity, I wanted to make a careful selection. I went to one of my favorite places to find new tools, [Go2Web20](#), and did a search on presentation tools. The results yielded several possible choices including Viddix, MyPlick, AuthorStream, SlideShare, Preezo, PreZentIt, and Spresent. With my list in hand, it was now time to refer to my checklist to begin eliminating tool options to find the best choice for my needs.

#### Criteria 1: Access

Immediately I saw that I should eliminate MyPlick, AuthorStream, and SlideShare because while they allow you to share presentations online, they didn't allow you to create them. I felt that both options were necessary in case I had students who didn't have, or couldn't afford, PowerPoint. Further reading suggested that I should also eliminate Spresent because its future as a free tool was in question. I didn't want to spend a lot of time creating instructions and support documentation for a tool that might not be available next semester. Additionally, it is a flash-based tool which puts its ADA compliance into question (without extra work, that is).

After even more reading, I noted that Preezo required "a modern browser." I know many of my students have computers that are about 4 years old on average so they probably don't have up-to-date browsers. I'm not entirely convinced this would be a problem but, I'll eliminate this tool for now and only come back to it if my other options are unsatisfactory.

Finally, I was also able to eliminate Viddix because the format of its product will probably not meet ADA requirements. Of course, as with Preezo, I'll keep this in mind for further testing if I have time or if the other options don't work out.

#### Criteria 2: Usability

At this point, I haven't even had to try out a new tool yet and I only have one tool left to check against my criteria. This is one of the major benefits of having a well-defined checklist: it saves you time. There's no point in testing tools that don't even seem to meet the accessibility criteria.

A quick test of the tool shows that, from a usability perspective, PreZentIt is fairly simple to use. The account creation process was simple and the interface seems intuitive. Unfortunately, the help section is almost non-existent. However, since the tool seems easy to use and since I'm comfortable providing tech support, I don't feel this is a major concern.

#### Criteria 3: Privacy & Intellectual Property

I'm always cautious when reviewing tools for privacy and IP issues. PreZentIt states that it will not share private data and it doesn't place a claim on any IP rights to data you create or post there. Not all services make this claim, so it is good to read the End User License Agreement and Terms of Use prior to using a tool or making your students use it.

PreZentIt has options to make content totally private (creator's eyes only), totally public (anyone can view) or view/collaborate by invitation. This is a bonus because students can work on their presentations privately and then share them with others only when they're ready.

#### Criteria 4: Workload & Time Management

Because each student has to create an account, I can easily track who has done what. There is also a comment feature which is tied to an account so it will be simple for me to determine who has done a peer assessment. Finally, the presentation can be embedded in the LCMS which will save me time by letting me view all presentations in our course room instead of visiting multiple sites.

#### Criteria 5: Fun Factor

The tool allows for insertion of images and text and has some interesting slide transitions as well. It doesn't have the capability to add sound, but I think that the ability to have discussions around text and image presentations (as opposed to just text-based discussions, for example) does add some fun and creativity to the learning activity.

Overall, I would say that PreZentIt meets the checklist criteria and my stated needs and objectives. Of course, this was just a first pass using some very quick guidelines to eliminate obviously poor choices. Now that I've eliminated all but PreZentIt, I have time to focus and refine my testing to ensure a perfect fit with my learning objectives.

I hope the checklist is helpful to you. It's a fairly generic version that should work in a variety of situations with many different types of tools. However, I would like to mention that, in actual practice, there is more of a feedback loop when using the checklist - initial goals and objectives inform basic choices then, as tool testing begins, some refining of specific requirements usually occurs. For example, in the above situation, I initially excluded three really decent tools simply because I specified that the tool should be a content creation *and* content presentation tool. Normally, I might have reconsidered my requirements or at least applied the checklist to those tools while I was applying it to PreZentIt, just in case I changed my mind about my needs.

### Web 2.0 Technology Selection Criteria

Evaluate your possible tool choices using these criteria to eliminate poor choices quickly. Then, do more extensive testing to find that 'perfect' Web 2.0 technology.

#### Criteria 1: Access

Is the tool accessible by Windows and Mac users?  
 Is the tool / product of tool viewable in a variety of web browsers?  
 Does the tool work well for those with dial-up connections?  
 Does the tool provide options that support ADA compliance?  
 Is the tool free?  
 Will the tool be around for a while?

### Criteria 2: Usability

Do you have to create an account to use the tool?  
 Is the tool easy to use?  
 Does the tool have a robust and easy to use Help section?  
 Does anything have to be downloaded and installed on the computer to use the tool?

### Criteria 3: Privacy & Intellectual Property

Does the tool allow you to restrict access of your work/your students' work?  
 Does the tool protect your personal data (e.g. email address given when account created)?  
 Does the tool allow you / your students to retain sole IP rights to the content you create?  
 Does the tool allow you to determine the copyright status of the content you've created?  
 Can you save a copy of the product to your desktop for archival purposes?

### Criteria 4: Workload & Time Management

Does the tool make it easy to track student work (for grading purposes).  
 Does the tool support private and public commenting (for individual and group feedback)?  
 Does the tool provide for an RSS feed to track work via email or an RSS reader?  
 Is it possible to embed the tool into the LCMS you're using?

### Criteria 5: Fun Factor

Does the tool allow you to be creative during the learning process?  
 Does the tool allow you to demonstrate creativity in the learning product?  
 Does the tool provide opportunities for different types of interaction (visual, verbal, written)?  
 Does the tool increase the perception of connectedness?  
 Does the tool encourage collaboration?

*Feel free to use/distribute this checklist to other educators who may find it helpful.*

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