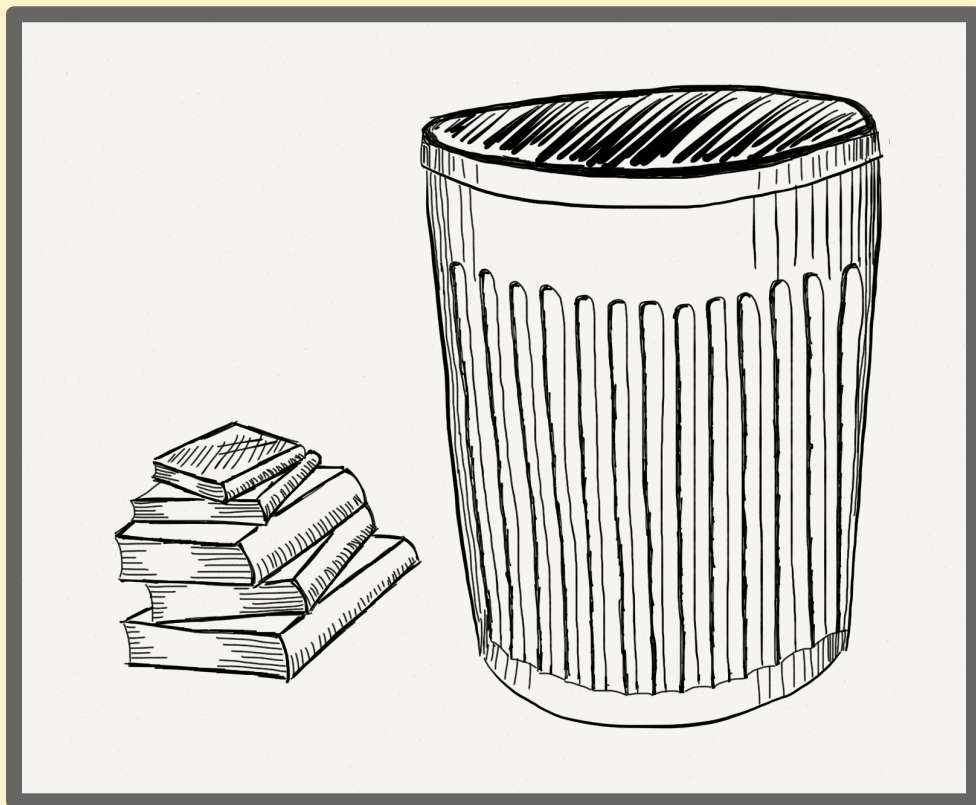# 101 Practical Ways to

DITCH THAT TEXTBOOK

A **DITCH THAT TEXTBOOK** Guide

TECHNOLOGY. CREATIVITY. INNOVATION.

By Matt Miller (@jmattmiller)

Your one-stop shop for textbook ditching.

Some of us have a million great teaching ideas and ways that we want to change education. Others are starving for great ideas and search frantically for them.

If either is you, you've come to the right place.

Before you are more than 100 of the best ideas I've gathered in more than 200 blog posts in more than two years time. **I focused on finding the ones that can be implemented into the classroom quickest** ... hence the "practical ways" title.

Each entry in this ebook includes a quick explanation of a textbook-ditching idea. **Click the blue link to see a blog post with further explanation and other ideas.**
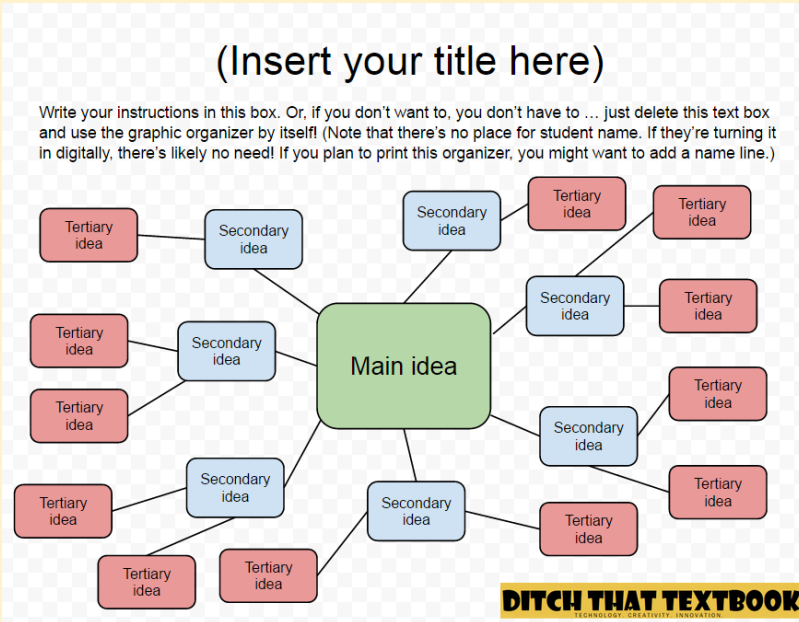
If you're stumped or have questions about anything in this book, **feel free to contact me at** matt@DitchThatTextbook.com **or on Twitter at** @jmattmiller. If I don't know the answer, I know lots of people who might!

Matt

Ditching your textbook can be quite a process.

Here, you'll find ideas you can implement right away, saving you time.

1. Use Google Drawings to make interactive graphic organizers.

Create Venn diagrams, fishbone diagrams and more. Students can edit them to add all the necessary details and turn them in. Find 15 pre-made graphic organizers at this blog post.

2.
Give students opportunities to create visual notes instead of traditional ones. Many students process visual ideas better than text-based ones. Embrace that by encouraging visual notetaking, either on paper or with an app like Paper by FiftyThree.

4.
Create a quick blog with a Google presentation. Create a Google presentation and share it with students. Then, give each student a slide to write on and let other students (in your class and beyond!) comment. It's an instant, easy blog!

3.
Share a Google presentation with another class in another part of the state, country or world. Share weather and photos of surroundings with another class. Then, share reactions to that content from the other class for extra engagement.

5.
Create photo slideshows with YouTube using YouTube's "Upload" button. Making YouTube videos doesn't always mean recording with a camera and waiting forever for uploads. Create slideshows with photos and music to make student-created or teacher-created videos.

6. **Make a long video into lots of shorter, more digestable ones.** Use YouTube Creator Studio to cut videos into short clips and link them together with clickable links. Often, students are more likely to watch short videos. Use that to your advantage!

8. **Connect current events topics to your content area.** Google Trends shows trending search topics, YouTube searches and more. Plus, you can see what trended every year back to 2004.

7. **Make your classes accessible any time by video.** Start a Google Hangout on Air and record your instruction. When finished, the video will be uploaded to YouTube.

9. **Measure weather with your phone.** If you or your students have an Android device, download the barometer app from Physics Toolbox on the Google Play store and check out local readings. Share them with another class in your state, country or beyond.

10. Track a word's usage over time with Ngram Viewer.

Enter keywords to have their usage tracked in books over more than two centuries. See how history has shaped the written word and vice versa.

11. Measure what is "really loud" and "really soft." A sound meter in Physics Toolbox can give a measurement of how loud a sound really is, which sometimes doesn't correlate with how loud we think it is. Comparing loudness with how loud we think it is can show how perceptions color how we see the world.

12. Create Twitter lab reports. If school policy allows it, students can use Twitter to share observations from science labs (among other things in other classes) with photos and text. When they're done, they can go back through their tweets and reflect on their observations.
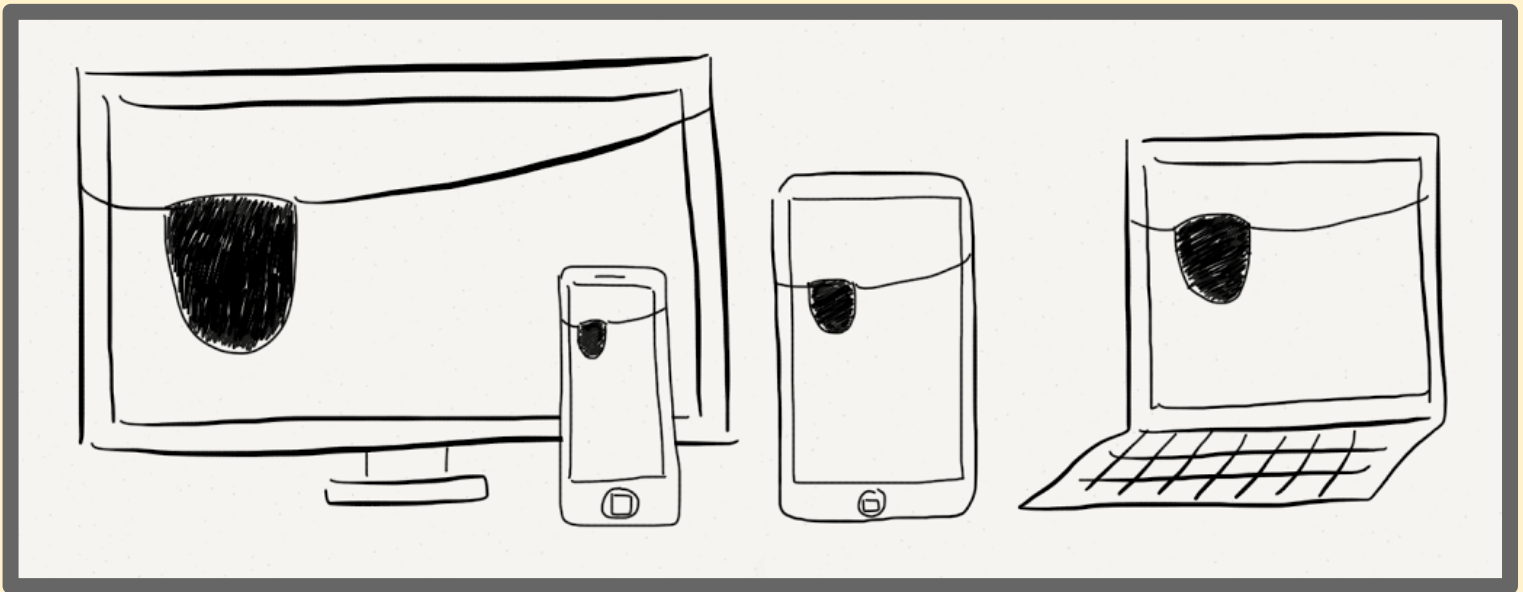
13. Make school a game. Often we reward students with points for their grades. What if students gathered experience points like on a video game and moved up a class leader board? Points and badges can be as rewarding as grades.

14. Host the "Ultimate Bedroom Makeover." Students answer questions in class to earn points. They spend their points on a predetermined catalog of items for their imaginary bedroom of their dreams. Team with the best bedroom wins. (See blog post for more details.)

15. Turn research papers into infographics. Sites like Piktochart give students great tools to create infographics. Instead of a research paper, why not gather that information into a more visual product?

16. Give posters some movement. Instead of creating a static poster that hangs on the wall, sites like Piktochart can embed videos into a digital poster. Instead of telling about a subject or showing pictures, show content with video.

17. Incorporate images into *everything*. The picture superiority effect states that even your worst images -- stick figures and all -- have greater impact than your greatest text-based presentations. Draw, photograph and capture more often!

18. Catalog your ideas visually. Use visual notetaking (aka *sketchnoting*) or give students the option to use it and you'll see a drastic improvement in retention of ideas in some of them.

Teach AND 'Tech' Like a PIRATE

19. **Use an animated board message.** In the book "Teach Like a PIRATE," author Dave Burgess says a message written on the board for students to see as they come in can get them hooked into class before it starts. Think of the power of an animated board message created with a tool like PowToon!

20. **Sound effects can bring any story, lecture, explanation or narration to life.** AudioMicro has hundreds of thousands of sound effects that can be played from the website on command. Imagine assigning a different sound effect to each student and having them play that sound effect when you say a certain word or phrase.

21. **Bring vocabulary terms to life with human mannequins.** Using the "People Props Hook" from "Teach Like a PIRATE," position students to illustrate vocabulary terms (or have students position each other).

22. **Use the "Mime Hook" with Gone Google Story Builder.** Using silence or written messages is what the Mime Hook is all about. Gone Google Story Builder allows users to create a video that looks like people are typing messages to each other in a Google document.

23. **Engage students with a mystery bag.** Place an object relevant to the day's class in a bag. Then, build interest in the unknown by talking about it without actually showing students what's in the bag. You'll have them on the edge of their seats!

24. **Leave the classroom.** The safari hook in "Teach Like a PIRATE" challenges teachers to find the best place in the building -- or beyond! -- to host a lesson. Sometimes, it only takes walking out the door to create student interest.

Padlet lets you …
-- Create walls with notes
-- Share your walls with others
-- Upload files and images
-- Snap photos from the camera in your device

After you're done …
-- Share a link to your Padlet
-- Ask others to add to it
-- Embed it in your class website

Here's a link to a video!

Chris Adams
How To Not Be Overwhelmed...
Expertise

DITCH THAT TEXTBOOK

Move Padlet notes around …
… to arrange them exactly as you want!

Oh yeah …
Padlet is free.

Using Padlet in class

25.
Document field trips. Add pictures of trips to a Padlet wall using the camera on your device — or on student devices. If you have access to wi-fi or cellular data, upload those photos on the fly. Give parents the link before leaving and they'll be able to see updates instantly during the day!

26.
Help students get acquainted. Students can create an introductory Padlet at the beginning of the school year showing things about themselves. They could revisit it at the end of the year to see if it's changed.

27.
Create a living webquest with Padlet. Static webquests aren't much fun. Letting students add their own links and questions can add engagement and personalization. Create a board on Padlet where students can add the content they choose.

28.
Use Padlet to gather videos to share in class. Students can help you gather relevant videos on a subject. Add videos to notes in Padlet and you'll have a class-created video gallery.

30.
Catalog your ideas visually. Use visual notetaking (aka *sketchnoting*) or give students the option to use it and you'll see a drastic improvement in retention of ideas in some of them.

29.
Manage class digitally with Google Classroom. Create assignments and announcements. Grade and return student work and add comments. It makes managing Google Apps a cinch!

31.
Don't give up on handwriting. As I go more digital, it's hard to live by this research: writing by hand has great cognitive benefits that typing on a keyboard doesn't. Ditch the technology from time to time and let them use a pencil!
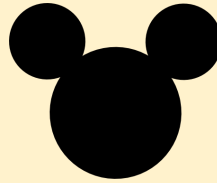
32. **Make reading comprehension a game.** [Use Kahoot!, a game show-style review website, to quiz students about what they remember from something they've read.](#)

33. **Let students create Kahoot! games for higher-order thinking.** To write solid questions and answers, students must understand their content. [Let them write Kahoot! review games as an assignment.](#)

34. **Add the little details.** Hide a small QR code somewhere on an assignment that takes students to a fun video that puts a fun or humorous twist on the topic of the day. [Add little, unexpected details to students' day.](#)

35. **Bring students alive with augmented reality at "Meet the Teacher" night.** [Hang photos of students on the wall and use Aurasma to superimpose videos of students introducing themselves.](#) (Great idea via [Erin Klein](#))

36. **Produce for a large audience.** These days, you only need a blog or social media account to reach the audiences only newspapers and TV could dream of before. [An authentic audience is motivation for students to do their best.](#)

38. **Emphasize task over tool.** It's not about the technology; it's about the learning. Technology isn't a learning outcome. [Good teachers use technology to accomplish their teaching goals, not the other way around.](#)

37. **Personalize everything.** We want to see ourselves in everything we engage in. [Make instant connections with students by making sure they can see themselves in what they're learning and creating.](#)

39. **Go where the students are.** Students have digital tools that make them feel comfortable. [If you can figure out what they are, you may gain access to those students in ways you can't otherwise.](#)
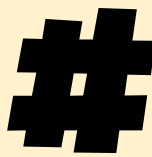
40. Analyze student writing in a snap. Copy student writing into Hemingway App (hemingwayapp. com) and it analyzes grade level, paragraph/sentence/word/character count, hard-to-read sentences and more.

41. Connect with your students and parents via text message. Remind (formerly Remind 101) lets teachers send text messages while keeping everyone's contact information private. Send deadlines, reminders, extra credit questions, links and more!

42. Join Twitter. What?!? You're not on Twitter yet?!? It's only the best place to get new ideas, find other teachers, discover new philosophies and practices, and more. There are communities on Twitter for educators just like you. Jump in and start tweeting!

43. Listen to podcasts. Podcasts are a treasure trove of great ideas for teachers. Plenty of education-related podcasts (and those on different topics) can stimulate the mind and lead to great learning opportunities.

44. Follow conferences from afar. OK, you're on Twitter now. This gives you a virtual ticket to thought-provoking education conferences all over the world. Many conferences utilize a hashtag to help attendees share ideas and resources. Check them out from the comfort of your own computer!

45. Participate in Twitter chats. These regular virtual meetings of passionate educators are a great place to find interesting conversation, links and ideas to employ on Monday. Join the conversation, and don't forget to include the chat hashtag in your tweets!

46. Become a Google Apps for Education Ninja. This program was developed to help students and educators improve their skills using powerful Google Products like Drive, Gmail, Search and more. It tracks your progress, and you can earn belts!

47. Check out Google Plus. Looking for ideas to help you ditch your textbooks? Educator communities are all over the place on Google Plus. Create a Google/Gmail account and you instantly have access to Google Plus. Converse, share ideas and find resources.

Google greatness

51. **Create bibliographies in a blink.** EasyBib, an add-on in Google Apps, creates bibliography pages for you in MLA, APA and Chicago style.

48. **Make photos interactive with annotation in Google Drawings.** Add arrows, notes, circles and more to tag photos and make them learning experiences. Bring the photo into a blank Google Drawing and then start tagging it!

52. **Make rockin' presentations.** Slide presentations don't have to be dull. Mind maps, Creative Commons images, screenshots, collaboration and more can bring them to life and get viewers engaged.

49. **Engage in a cultural exchange.** Pair up with a classroom in a different country. Share ideas and ask questions via video chat (Skype, Google Hangout, FaceTime). Write and engage with shared Google Documents. Broader world views will result.

53. **Gather student opinion with a poll.** Google Forms, Poll Everywhere and Mentimeter all provide opportunities for students to weigh in on a topic.

50. **Ditch textbooks for online docs.** Not a fan of how your textbook teaches something? Create your own document using Google Docs and share it with students. They'll get the idea just as you intended it.

54. **Grade online quizzes instantly with Flubaroo.** Quizzes created in Google Forms can be graded automatically with this add-on. Add it to a spreadsheet with student responses and watch Flubaroo create a grade report for you.

55. **Motivate differently.** Intrinsic motivation is powerful. Students are at their best when given autonomy (directing themselves), mastery (getting better at something that matters) and purpose (working in service of something bigger than themselves).

56. **Try something new.** If you don't understand every detail about a new digital tool or an innovative activity, don't worry. Inaction is crippling. Action is empowering. Jump in and start.

Websites: A home for your stuff

57. **Create a class website.** I created a free Weebly website to hold links, photos, videos and more. It has become my digital, changeable textbook. It was easy to set up, and lots of useful tools can be added to it.

58. **Provide news they can use.** An RSS feed is a stream of new content from a particular website. Add one to your website with RSSinclude, and students will be up to date on the latest news.

59. **Make a virtual art gallery.** Collect art -- student-created or artist-created -- and gather it in a Google Slides presentation. Embed that presentation on a class website for everyone to see.

60. **Add online flashcards.** Tons of flashcard websites exist, but I always go back to Quizlet. I can create a flashcard set for my students and embed it in my website. Students can flip through cards right on the site.

61. **Leave doubt-free sub plans.** When you can't be in class, your voice still can be. Create a screencast using Screencast-O-Matic or Screenr and embed the video in your class website. You'll show exactly what students need.

62. **Organize favorite sites.** Typing every URL into student browsers isn't necessary when all links are saved in a link organizer like Symabloo. Include one on your class website and spend less time waiting on students to transition to a new site.

Flickr / Yamil Gonzales

63. **Track behavior and gather data using ClassDojo.** ClassDojo helps teachers track their students' behavior by logging points for positive and negative actions. Teachers can send reports home to parents, too.

64. **Create a QR code scavenger hunt.** Print QR codes to post around your classroom or school using this QR code scavenger hunt tool. Then turn students loose to find them and follow their trail!

The global classroom

65. **Connect classes digitally.** [Use the sharing features in many sites such as Google Apps to work together and share with people anywhere](#) -- near your own location, within your own country or anywhere in the world.

66. **Record video messages using** [**Skype**](#) or [**YouTube**](#). Sometimes, real-time communication isn't possible because of time zone differences. [Record videos to share with others anywhere at any time.](#)

67. **Share photos and messages socially with** [**Edmodo**](#). Students are comfortable with social media sites. [Edmodo lets them engage in their work socially and in a way that mimics sites like Facebook and Twitter.](#)

68. **Comment on the day's news together with Diigo.** [This social bookmarking site lets students post comments on articles they find on the Internet.](#) They can also respond to each other's comments like a conversation.

69. **Make it visual with an** [**Animoto**](#)/[**Voicethread**](#) **presentation.** [Use these highly interactive presentations to engage students.](#) They can leave voice comments for each other and hear global partners' voices online.

70. **Create a weather/environment lab.** [Science classes can connect with another class and gather data about the weather or environment around them.](#) Log it all in a Google Sheet with a page for each location.

71. **Write publicly.** Blogs can give students a great audience -- even a global one. Let them share their ideas outside the four walls of the classroom and interact with others in comments.

72. **Teach brevity with Twitter.** The 140-character limit of Twitter forces us to sum up our ideas succinctly. Students can engage in collaborative writing with other students anywhere and tell stories, exchange viewpoints or share data.

73. **Use animated GIFs.** They're all over social media ... those pictures that move but aren't exactly digital video. They're great for illustrating vocabulary, creating time lapse videos of changes in plants and more.

74. **Offer homework help.** Backchannel sites like TodaysMeet and Backchannel Chat can be great places for students and teachers to meet outside school hours to provide support.

75. **Create engaging practice activities.** ClassTools hosts a wide array of video games that help student practice with new content and get repetitions.

76. **Make intriguing kickstart activities.** Start class with a bang. Display a great Creative Commons photo from Flickr to start a conversation.

77. Find quality content online. You don't always have to create it! Find content at TED Talks, SAS Pathways, Khan Academy and NBC Learn.

78. **Offer college-level learning.** Several universities offer some of their classes for free online. Check out free Stanford engineering courses, UC Berkeley courses and MIT courses.

79. **Share notes.** In partner work, it's bound to happen: someone will be absent, and that person will have all the notes. Have students share a document on Google and they'll both always have access.

80. **Rethink rough drafts.** Teachers can use the comments feature in Google Docs to make rough drafts a process. Follow students' progress and guide them as they write with comments.

81. **Interactive whiteboard.** Create a Google Drawing and share it with students, giving them permission to edit. Display it on a projector screen, and let students add text, images, etc. to it. Everyone sees everything!

82. **Create timelines.** Students create a Google Drawing and draw a timeline. They can add text, images and links to content on the web, making the timeline interactive.

83. **Create "Choose Your Own Adventure" stories.** Remember those stories where you pick what the characters in the book do, then turn to a specific page to see what happens? Students can create them using Google Forms. Click here to see how.
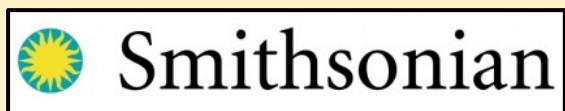
84. **Invite guest speakers.** Hearing a guest doesn't require a field trip or travel expenses. Find someone to speak to your class and invite him/her to use Google Hangouts or Skype so students can see and hear him/her.

85. **Learn languages online at your pace.** Duolingo teaches students a foreign language through quick, progressive questions. It tracks progress, too. Think Rosetta Stone for free!

86. **View virtual exhibitions from the Smithsonian Institution.** The Smithsonian gathers great exhibitions in its museums. If you can't make it in person, the next best thing is one of its media-rich virtual exhibitions.

Smithsonian

87. **Learn about Darfur.** Give students a clear picture of what residents of Darfur refugee camps go through with this online game. It can also connect players with opportunities to help the situation in real life.

Darfur is Dying

88. **Learn about blood typing.** The Blood Typing Game helps students see how blood types are figured and how the components of blood are important in transfusions. It's very visual and engaging!

The Blood Typing Game

89. **Record whiteboard animations.** Those videos with a hand furiously illustrating on a whiteboard aren't that hard to create. Turn students loose and let them create these fun videos as a project.

90. **Record screencast promotional videos.** Slide presentations still work well. Combine them with screencasting apps and you add another dimension. Use these videos to deliver information or persuade.

91. **Let students write for a public audience.** Creating publicly-accessible blogs let students write for an audience bigger than just the teacher. That access often inspires them to do their best work.

92. **Tell beautiful visual stories with Storybird.** Students can tell creative stories using Storybird's original artwork. The stories look like digital storybooks and can be shared.

Creating with audio

93. **Record it instead of writing it.** Audio-gathering tools like AudioBoom and Google Voice let students do their work with their voices instead of a pencil. Audio recordings can be downloaded and shared.

94. **Create audio interviews.** Using AudioBoom or Google Voice, students can interview each other or any other "guest" for an audio program. Guests could include family, representatives of the community and more.

95. **Speak for a character.** Studying characters in literature and history shows students their personality and tendencies. Students can record what a particular character would probably think about a number of topics.

96. **Predict the future.** Audio tools can let students record what they believe will happen next in class content, in a story or in the real world.

97. **Describe how you solved it.** When students get stuck and the teacher can't seem to help, sometimes peer explanations can provide the "aha!" moment. Use audio tools to let students explain how they solved a problem.

98. **Read poetry.** Poetry comes to life when it's read dynamically. Let students experience that first-hand with audio tools like AudioBoom and Google Voice.

Creating with video

99. **Make a video tour.** If students visit somewhere -- a field trip, on vacation, etc. -- they can share their learning experience with a video project. Video slide shows using Animoto are the next best thing!

100. **Create a personal narrative.** Students can tell about themselves or a character or a historical person. Record video clips. Add a voiceover to tell the story. Use music to set the mood.

101. **Highlight a cause.** When students find out about problems in the world and decide to act, the result is more than learning -- it's change for the better. Help them harness their video skills to make change.

Looking for more ideas?

Check out the Ditch That Textbook blog! Head over to DitchThatTextbook.com to browse articles, search for specific topics or check out the different pages available. Ditch That Textbook is a treasure trove of ideas. Start searching now!

About the author

Matt Miller is a high school Spanish teacher from West Central Indiana. He incorporates meaningful technology to transform and redefine learning. He's a Google Certified Teacher that's been infusing meaningful technology for more than 10 years. Matt created and writes at the Ditch That Textbook blog, which promotes less reliance on the textbook with an emphasis on creative teaching.

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Hire Matt to present

Matt is an experienced professional development speaker. He has presented at dozens of conferences, schools and school districts to thousands of educators. His wide range of topics span Google Apps, intentional tech use, blogging, global connections and beyond. His participants appreciate his practical, hands-on approach and his perspective as a practicing teacher.

Matt can present at your school, district or event. He can provide full-day professional development, keynote speeches and concurrent conference sessions.

See DitchThatTextbook.com/conferences for more info or e-mail Matt at matt@DitchThatTextbook.com to discuss pricing and availability.