

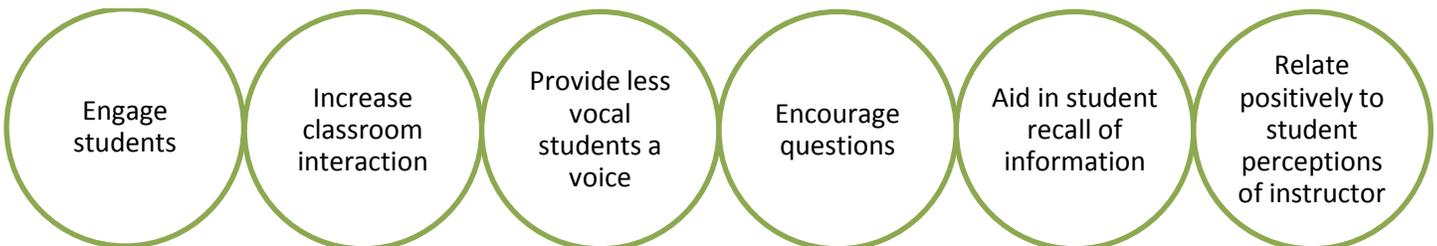
Using Backchannels to Engage Students

What are backchannels?

Backchannels are a real time, online conversation occurring while a live event or activity is taking place. Participants in the backchannel use it to discuss their ideas, ask questions, and provide their thoughts on the activity at hand. The instructor in this video, [Why Use a Backchannel in Your Classroom](#), demonstrates a backchannel in action using the tool Today'sMeet. It's a backchannel on backchannels!

Why incorporate backchannels?

Research shows that use of backchannels can:



(Du et al. 2009; McPherson et al. 2012; Rekimoto et al., 2012; Tyma, 2011; Blessing, Blessing & Fleck, 2012; McArthur & Bostedo-Conway, 2012)

What free tools can I use to implement a backchannel?

1. [Today'sMeet](#)

Instructors create a temporary chat room that can be accessed by a unique web address during the time the chat room is "live". Participants provide a nickname and begin chatting.

2. [Backchannel Chat](#)

Instructors create a temporary chat room that can be accessed by a unique web address or by using a provided code during the time the chat room is "live". Participants can "like" questions or comments in the backchannel. Some resources, such as YouTube videos, will embed within the chat, which aids in sharing resources.

3. [Padlet](#)

Padlet provides a visually appealing "bulletin board" style for backchanneling. Instructors with an account on padlet.com can create a "padlet" and invite participants by providing them with the specific web address. Participants add text and media to the padlet, and messages can be arranged in a stream or in a freeform style.

4. [Google Slides](#) (with Q&A Functionality)

Google Slides is an online presentation builder that allows you to build PowerPoint-style presentations that can be stored and run online (stored on Google Drive). Part of the presentation functionality is a "Q&A" conversation that can be activated. Students access the Q&A room using a unique web address. Conversations are anonymous unless students log in using a Google Account.

5. [Twitter](#)

Twitter is a widely-used social media applications that allows its members to "tweet" messages of 140 characters or less. Twitter allows users to "retweet" and "like" tweets from other users, allowing sharing and amplification opportunities. Twitter uses hashtags (#) as a way to filter tweets related to a specific topic.

How can backchannels be used in my class?

In Class Activities

Activity	Description	Suggested Tools
Concurrent Presentation Backchannel	Allow an open conversation on a topic to flow concurrently with a lecture, presentation or video presented in class. If desired, take breaks within the presentation to address comments and questions in the backchannel.	Today's Meet Backchannel Chat Padlet Twitter Google Slides
Guest Presenter Question Forum	Use a backchannel to collect questions before, during, or after a guest presentation. Use a tool that allows amplification to let students' encourage their classmates questions.	Backchannel Chat Twitter Google Slides
Topic Summaries	Ask individuals or groups to submit summaries of the key points for the day into the backchannel.	Padlet Twitter

Out-of-Class Activities

Activity	Description	Suggested Tools
Classroom Community Backchannel	Set up a backchannel for the class to participate in general discussion and resource sharing throughout the length of the course. Link to news stories and other current events.	Today's Meet Backchannel Chat Twitter Padlet
Classroom Community Backchannel – Focused Topic	Create an ongoing topic related to the course that students can converse on as the weeks go by. This could be related to a specific reading, concept, or large assignment.	Today's Meet Backchannel Chat Twitter Padlet
Report from the Field	Students record their observations while witnessing an event/location related to the class, such as watching a debate on television, visiting a museum, attending a webinar or conducting an experiment.	Padlet Twitter
Reading Groups/Study Groups	Provide a specific hashtag or room for student groups to use. Use the backchannel to enhance group community or to aid in completing group assignments.	Today's Meet Backchannel Chat Twitter Padlet

What are some best practices in incorporating backchannels?

- Take it slow and use when it makes sense.
- Start with a “low stakes” activity.
- Require students to check in with their names.
- Lay ground rules.
- Model appropriate messages.

References

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