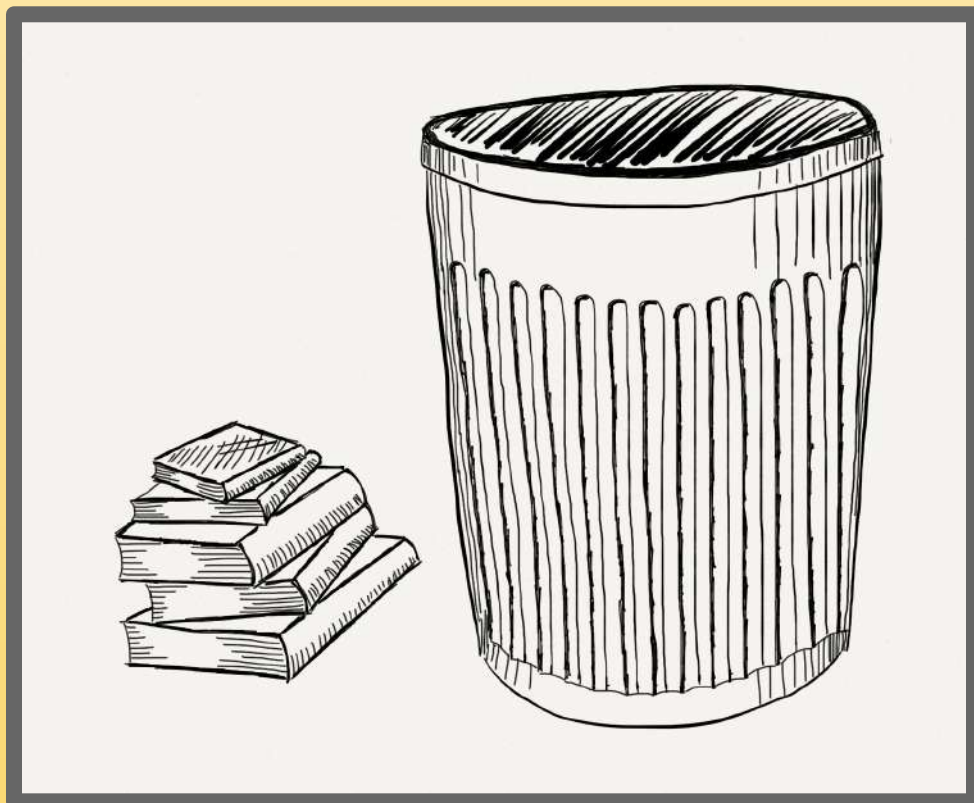


# 101 Practical Ways to

## DITCH THAT TEXTBOOK

2.0



A

**DITCH THAT TEXTBOOK**

TECHNOLOGY. CREATIVITY. INNOVATION.

Guide

By Matt Miller (@jmattmiller)

# Your one-stop shop for textbook ditching.

If you're like me, you're CONSTANTLY on the look-out for a great new idea for teaching. The plug-and-play ideas are the best ... something quick that you can apply to class tomorrow.

If that's music to your ears, you're in the right place.

Before you are more than 100 of the best ideas I've gathered in hundreds of blog posts in more than five years. 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.**

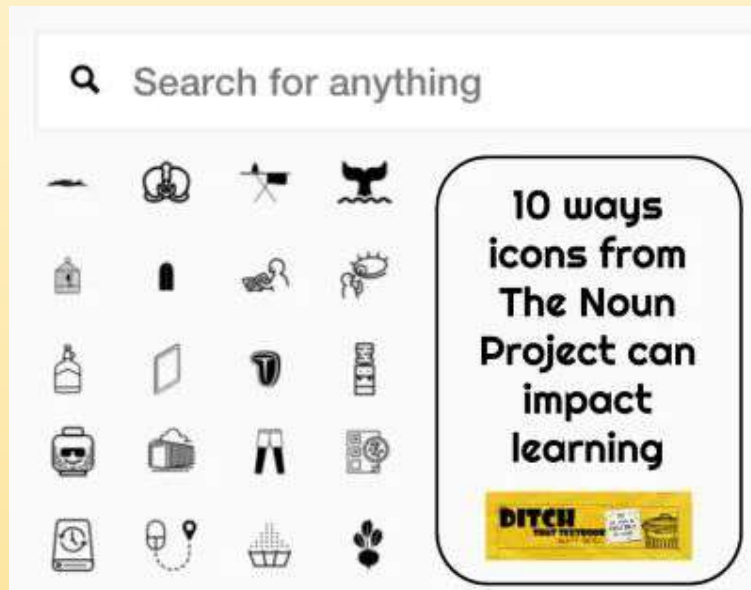
If you're stumped or have questions about anything in this book, **feel free to contact me at [matt@DitchThatTextbook.com](mailto:matt@DitchThatTextbook.com) or on Twitter at [@jmattmiller](https://twitter.com/jmattmiller).** If I don't know the answer, I know lots of people who might!

*Matt*

Ditching your  
textbook can be  
quite a process.

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

# 1. Use icons from The Noun Project to add a layer of visual learning.



Images are powerful and brain friendly. [Adding visuals to instruction and to products of learning can help learning stick long-term.](#)

**2.** Add royalty-free photos with Unsplash add-on for Google Slides. Students can illustrate presentations they do for class with Unsplash photos. (So can teachers!) [Unsplash photos can illustrate stories students write slide by slide in Google Slides.](#)

**4.** Do brain-friendly visual notetaking. Our classes are often filled with words, but our brains do their thinking in pictures. [Convert words to images to make it memorable.](#)

**3.** Save yourself (and your students) time with voice typing. We can talk more than three times faster than we can type. [With dictation tools at our disposal, we can get done with emails and document creation much faster.](#)

**5.** Get on Twitter! Getting connected professionally on Twitter was the single most important, most powerful thing I ever did as an educator. [Here are 50 people and #hashtags you must check out on Twitter.](#)



6.

Create instructional videos. Record short videos for your students that they can watch later ([or at home with parents when they're struggling to complete an assignment](#)).

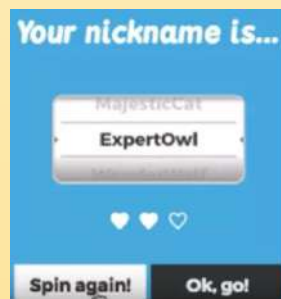
8.

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!



7.

Avoid naughty nicknames in Kahoot! with the [name generator](#). Let Kahoot! pick your students' nicknames for them. [Here are four other things you might not know about Kahoot!](#)



9.

[Tweet for someone](#). What would happen if a character tweeted about an event in the story? [Use this Google Slides template.](#)



## 10. Use picture books to teach about digital citizenship.



Teaching digital citizenship in a meaningful way can be daunting. Using picture books can illustrate important concepts beautifully. [Here are some suggestions.](#)

- 11.** Bring Family Feud to class or professional development. Grab some data or gather some with a survey. [Then turn it into a fun Family Feud experience.](#) It'll supercharge a class or a staff meeting!



- 15.** Check out the [Google Teacher Tribe Podcast](#). Stay up to date with all things in GSuite and Google tools to [better use Google in the classroom.](#)



- 16.** Listen to [StartEdUp](#) podcast: Better prepare students for a start-up, entrepreneur-driven world by listening to this [new podcast that Challenges Teachers' mindsets and equip them to Prepare students for the future.](#)



- 17.** Try our genius hour in your class! [Listen up to professional innovator teacher Don Wettrick in how to make genius hour work in your class.](#)



- 18.** Create BookSnaps of what you're reading. In BookSnaps, students find a passage from a book they're reading that resonates with them. They snap a picture of it and annotate on it, underlining and adding text reflections and including fun things like emojis and Bitmojis. Check out [#booksnaps](#).

- 12.** Use paper and digital tools. Our digital stuff is searchable. We can create and collaborate with digital. But paper is a viable option, too. They can both co-exist. [Find your best blend of using paper and being digital in the classroom.](#)

- 13.** Find quality content online. You don't always have to create it! Find content at [TED Talks](#), [SAS Pathways](#), [Khan Academy](#) and [NBC Learn](#).

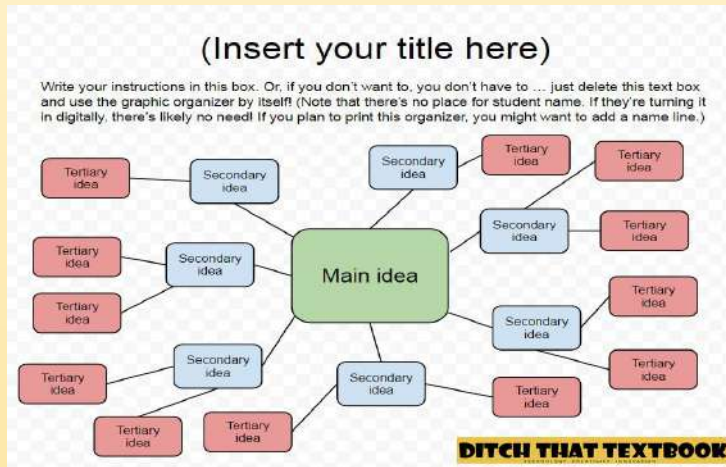


- 14.** Add images to Google Slides automatically with DriveSlides. [Make creating presentations with images super easy.](#) It does all the photo uploading, adding and sizing for you.





# 19. 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 more than 15 pre-made graphic organizers at this blog post.](#)

**20.** 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 \(working in service of something bigger than themselves\).](#)

**22.** 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.](#)



**21.** Make an e-book from survey data. Gather ideas with a Google Forms survey and turn it into an e-book in a few steps. [Make a book of class journal entries, favorite summer activities or lab results.](#)

**23.** Harness the power of retrieval. Imagine student retention improving, of less need for re-teaching [if we encourage it as a study strategy to students.](#)



**24.**

Try creative alternatives to research reports and papers. I think it's time that we turn research reports and papers on their heads. [Let the students create a final product that is relevant and they are excited to share.](#)

**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



**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.** **Create and share visual stories using [Sutori](#).** Student-centered learning is at the heart of Sutori, a tool that lets students and teachers create scrolling, [timeline-style multimedia webpages they call "stories"](#).

**30.** [Dig into fascinating writing prompts.](#) Need some new ideas to get students thinking — and then writing? [Write About](#) has a treasure trove of creative, thought-provoking writing prompts at [www.writeabout.com/ideas](http://www.writeabout.com/ideas).

**29.** **Write emoji poetry or an emoji response.** Brevity is an important skill in writing. [Instead of encouraging students to write to a minimum number of words, let's try constraining them to fewer words](#) — and turn them into emojis!

**31.** **Provide lightning-quick feedback students can REALLY use.** Students crave feedback, but it has to be timely to matter. [Here are some strategies for feedback students will WANT to read.](#)

**32.** Go beyond review with the Blind Kahoot! Use it as a way to teach. [It's a way of leading students down a path of curiosity, understanding and reinforcement to learn a new concept.](#)



**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.** Create a parent portal. This is an easy way to keep parents in the loop with what's happening in the classroom. [Create a website with all the info parents want.](#) Make sure to update it regularly to give them a reason to keep coming back!

**35.** [Get parents on board with your big changes.](#) What would it look like if we had them as advocates at home, cheering their children's progress and supporting our shared academic goals for their kid?

**36.** Discuss an article digitally with Hypothes.is. [Hypothes.is](#) lets us share an article with students and [start a digital discussion there with digital highlights and sticky notes.](#)

**38.** Try "hyper-annotating" documents. Students can mark up documents. But how can we transform that activity into something bigger? [Hyper-annotation ... learn all about it!](#)

**37.** Raid the supply closet. The things you may have laying around the classroom may be the keys to unlocking some [exciting, engaging learning activities.](#) Check out this [e-book](#) for 22 pages of creative uses for common classroom items.

**39.** Leveling activities — [By using Google Classroom's new differentiation and grouping feature, you can differentiate an activity by creating two, three or four versions of it.](#) Assign to groups as needed.





# 40.

Make slide presentations **interactive with Pear Deck**. Get students engaged in new material by adding hands-on slides they can interact with. [Here are 20 ways to use Pear Deck.](#)



# 44.

Do a shared mind map **brainstorm with AWWApp**. Students can interact in a shared whiteboard in AWWApp ([awwapp.com](http://awwapp.com)). [This is a really easy, collaborative way for students to sketch out and share their ideas.](#)

# 41.

Use the [Shutterstock add-on](#). It is a great photo editor with some nice tools that don't exist in [Google Slides including adding instagram-like filters and emojis.](#)

# 45.

**Be a maverick teacher!** Safe teaching is risky teaching. Risky is letting kids breeze by with a lot of activity that doesn't actually produce any learning. That's risky. [We need the teacher who will reject the status quo if it isn't producing results.](#)

# 42.

Turn statistics into a visual aid — Using Google MyMaps, you can add statistics to the description and color code the stats to [visualize the data.](#)

# 46.

**Make Lessons Hands on!** So many of us are tactile learners. We don't want to be told how it's done. [We want to do it.](#) It's like that for adults *and* for kids.

# 43.

[Add a "C" to refresh old activities.](#) Take your current activity as it is. Find one of the four C's -- creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking. Find a way to add it to your activity. You may be surprised at the new spin it puts on an activity you've done for a long time.

# 47.

**Create comic strips out of new content.** Students can use images, speech bubbles and more [to create fun, engaging comic strips to demonstrate learning.](#)



**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!

**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.



**50.** Timeline projects. Timelines give students a great visual understanding of how events happened over time. There's a reason they've been a staple in the classroom for a while. [Increase depth of knowledge with a twist on the traditional.](#)



**51.** Assign challenges instead of math homework. [Students can do powerful learning outside of class. But how do we keep it from being "traditional homework"? The answer may be challenges and puzzles.](#) Check out John Stevens's website [tabletalkmath.com](http://tabletalkmath.com) for more ideas.



**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.](#)

**53.** Create media-rich, interactive maps for deeper learning on Google MyMaps. Google MyMaps lets students create maps with custom-pinned location. [The magic, though, is in what you put in those pins.](#)

**54.** Ask a character/historic figure a question. What if students could ask someone they're studying a question? [Students could ask one question with one answer from the character/historic figure, or they could do a back-and-forth with several photos.](#)

**55.** Use TodaysMeet. [TodaysMeet is an easy-to-use, versatile digital tool. It can enhance discussions, provide a place for ideas and more.](#)

**TodaysMeet**

# Websites: A home for your stuff

**56.** Create project websites, not just projects. Do more than share with the class. By using [a Google Site](#), [students can showcase their hard work to a larger audience — anyone they share the link with to their website](#).

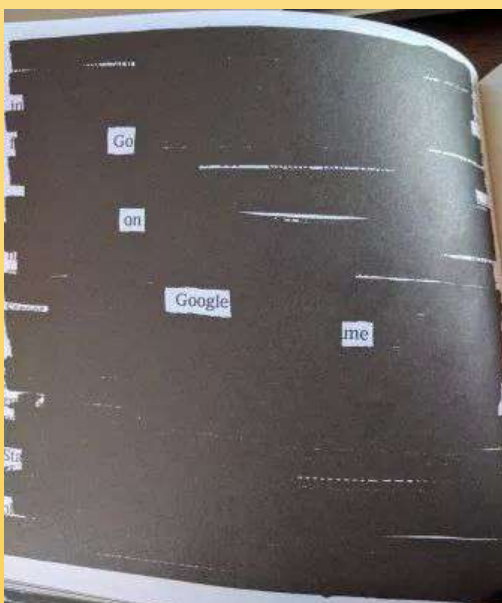
**57.** Embedded Quizlet flashcards. I'm a huge fan of [Quizlet](#), an online flashcard site. Quickly create a set of Quizlet flashcards. Embed an interactive version of it on your site. [Students can flip through their terms without having to leave your site](#).

**58.** Screencast sub lesson plans. If you've ever left lesson plans for substitute teachers, you've probably felt the frustration of students not following your instructions specifically as you described them. [Make sub plans crystal clear with a screencast video](#).

**59.** Create a video course/repository website. [Consider creating a website with lots of embedded videos that cover the topics students may need a refresher on](#). If they need a reminder, you can easily say, "Go watch that quick video on the website."

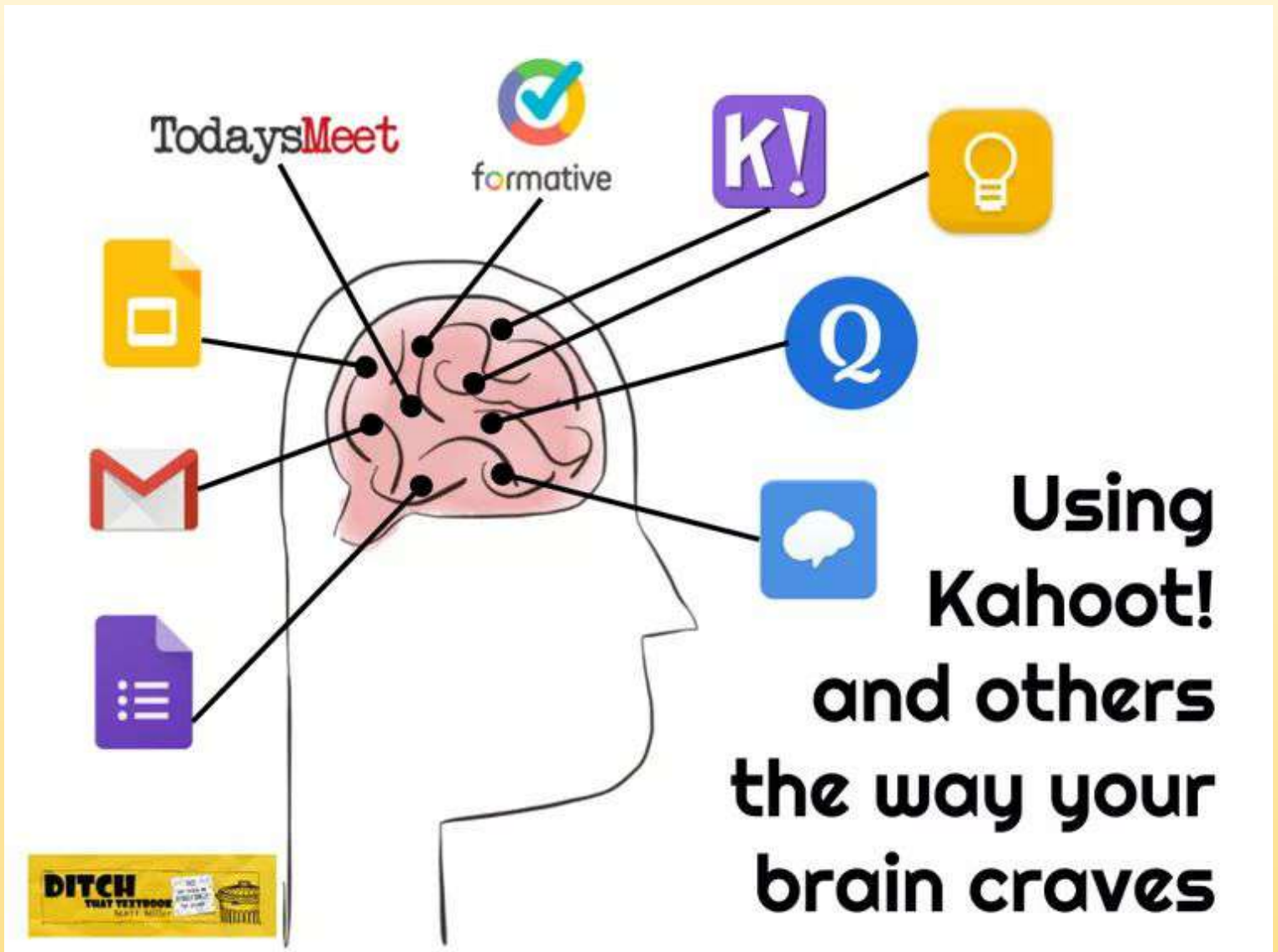
Flickr / Yamil Gonzales

**60.** Write blackout poetry. Have the students take a picture or screenshot of an article. [Paste that image into Google Drawings/Slides and blackout everything except the words chosen for the poem](#).



**61.** Add speech bubbles to a historic photo. [Add a new twist to a lesson by letting students speak — or think — for the characters](#).





- 62.** **Use digital flashcards efficiently.** When students use digital flashcard tools like Quizlet (or regular index card flashcards), they often drop cards out of their decks too quickly. They think they have memorized them. [Research shows gains when they practice them all three times before dropping any from the deck.](#)
- 63.** **Spaced practice is strong practice.** Spacing out repeated encounters with material over time produces superior long-term learning. [Creating reminders with Google Calendar, Boomerang or Remind can bring material back to students' minds at predetermined times,](#) creating the spaced practice the brain desires.
- 64.** **Improve recall with brain dumps.** For long-term memory, brain research encourages this: 1. Paus your lesson, lecture or activity. 2. Ask students to write down everything they can remember. 3. Continue your lesson, lecture and activity. [Do this digitally with Google Docs or Google Keep, on paper, or on a sketching app like the Paper app by FiftyThree.](#)



# Connect your class digitally

**65.** **Mystery Skype.** [This activity is the gateway to so much more. Pair up with another class and ask yes/no questions to guess where in the world that class is.](#)

**66.** **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.](#)

**67.** **Presenting to both groups.** If students do presentations, why limit their audience to just your class? [Connect with another class and present to each other.](#) Ask for comments, questions, praise and/or constructive feedback.

**68.** **Take a virtual field trip.** Virtual field trips let you take students all over the world to unique experiences they wouldn't get otherwise.

**69.** **Collaborative art/writing** – It's amazing what students and classes can create together. Have one start a story or a work of art and pass it to the other class virtually. Let the other class add to it and pass it back. [Once they're finished, they will have created something both will take pride in!](#)

**70.** **Try author chats.** [If you've read a book and the author is alive, why not reach out to see if he/she wants to Skype with your class?](#) Many children's authors thrive on talking to the kids that read their books!





# 71.

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.](#)



# 75.

Exploring the Explore tool. [The Explore tool in Google can reduce the time you and your students lose doing mundane tasks.](#) It will find info and images as well as a great design for slide presentations. That means more time for learning!

# 72.

Let students share their voice to reflect digitally. [Learning is limited when students can't put it in the big picture. Let students reflect.](#) One of my favorite digital tools to empower students to do that is [Flipgrid](#).



# 76.

[Draw with your finger \(or a computer touchpad\).](#) Having students draw what's in their brains — or how they understand a concept — can be a quick and easy way to get them on track for the day. [Formative](#) makes this easy AND digital with its "Show Your Work" questions.

# 73.

Rotating activities with Google Classroom— If you have stations or a set of activities groups of students will do over a period of days or weeks, [keep assignments simple by assigning just the activity each group is working on.](#)

# 77.

Reduce your reliance on homework. Focus on improving the time you have in class together with your students instead of assigning more/better homework. [Here are some strategies for reducing your reliance on homework.](#)

# 74.

Remix your old lessons! Consider building lessons that utilize technology [through this framework.](#) It may give you the inspiration to teach a lesson you've done for years in a different way.

# 78.

DITCH. Different. Innovative. Tech-Laden. Creative. Hands on. [Looking for the secret sauce that helps you create wildly engaging lessons? The five parts of this framework have helped me.](#)





**79.** Creating eye-popping infographics with Google Drawings. They're eye-catching. They summarize information succinctly. [They're very visual, whether you're viewing on a page or a printed version hung on a wall. They're easy to share.](#)

**82.** Write Google-infused research papers. Use this workflow to streamline writing a research paper. [Thanks to Google and several of its tools, you do that academic work more effectively and efficiently](#)

**80.** Shared slide presentations. [Google Slides do not have to be used just to do presentations in front of the class!](#) Use a shared Google slide presentation to start class off with a question. Each student has their own slide to respond.

**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.](#)

**81.** Google's buried treasure. With all the Google tools out there, it's easy for some to slip through the cracks. [Here are some lesser-known Google tools that can have an impact.](#)

**84.** Keep: Digital sticky notes. Google Keep is like a bulletin board you can keep with you wherever you go. [It's perfect for organizing ideas or quickly jotting down inspiration.](#)

**85.** Creating moveable digital activities with Google Drawings + Slides. Moveable activity boards. Virtual manipulatives. Digital interactive activities. [Whatever they're called, Google Slides and Google Drawings were made for creating them](#)

**89.** [5 minutes of inspiration every school day: The Ditch That Textbook Podcast.](#) Listen to this podcast to get some new ideas or a jump-start to your day. The episodes are quick for your commute to or from school!



**86.** Give the old poster project a new twist. Create them in Google Drawings instead. [You can add clickable links to these posters. Link to video, audio, images and interactive websites to make your poster an interactive, multimedia one.](#)

**90.** Make sure you get the right data in Google Forms. [Data validation can be your best friend when using Google Forms.](#) It makes sure the data entered in the Google Forms survey is the type you need, and if it's not, it displays an error message.

**87.** Get inspiration in unlikely places. Sometimes, new ideas for a lesson can be right in front of you ... or you need some new scenery to generate ideas. [I used a trip to Dallas to generate some new classroom ideas and came up with a bunch!](#)

**91.** Pin important locations in an area being studied. Studying a certain location? Before digging into your content, have students do some preliminary Internet research and [create a Google MyMap with their findings.](#) They'll be better prepared for your unit of study!

**88.** Put new learning in motion! [Google Slides \(or PowerPoint or any presentation slide tool\) can be turned into a simple stop-motion animation tool.](#) They're fun for students to create and share with others!

**92.** Create animated GIFs. [These fun, moving images are all over social media.](#) They're short and can capture an idea in an instant. [Google Photos](#) will create an animated GIF automatically for students.

# Catch the Flipgrid Fever!

Flipgrid is a classroom video platform. Teachers ask a question or create a prompt. Then, students can respond to it with a short video clip that they shoot on their devices. Teachers and students all over the world are finding innovative ways to give students a voice with this tool.



**93.** 30 second book talk challenge. [Have your students share about their favorite book in 30 seconds or less.](#) Check out this [example](#).

**94.** Put a spin on student of the week. Have each student record a video sharing why that student of the week is special. [Students will enjoy watching video messages from their classmates sharing why they are a valued member of their classroom community.](#)

**95.** Exit tickets get a makeover. Post the question "What did you learn today?" or better yet ask your students ["What did you create today?" for the students to answer before leaving class.](#)

**96.** Debate a topic! [Add a Flipgrid to the share section](#) of this "[Great Debate](#)" HyperDoc by [Rayna Freedman](#) to get your students debating.

**97.** Reading response goes digital. After your class reads an article, chapter or book have them respond to a question about their reading. [Take the conversation further by having students comment on each other's responses.](#)

**98.** Show what you know! [Choice and voice are so important for getting students to share their knowledge with us.](#) What better way to do that then to add Flipgrid as an option in a [Show What You Know BINGO board?](#)

# Creating with video

Flickr / Kevin Dooley

**99.** 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.](#)

**100.** Create Netflix-style learning with screencast. [When students have created screencast videos and they look back through their work, it's like Netflix for learning!](#)

**101.** Use a time-lapse video. [Time-lapse and slow motion videos give a unique perspective into motion.](#) Use a free app like [Hyperlapse](#) and [Lapse It](#) to create time-lapse videos or a slow-motion app like [Slow Motion Video FX](#).

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## Looking for more ideas?



Check out the Ditch That Textbook blog! Head over to [DitchThatTextbook.com](http://DitchThatTextbook.com) to browse articles, search for specific topics or check out the different pages available. You'll find new articles about a wide variety of topics related to creativity, technology and innovation.



# About the author

Matt Miller is an author, speaker and blogger from West Central Indiana. He believes in making teaching relevant to students and their future through technology, creativity and innovation. He's a Google Certified Innovator and a 10+ year classroom veteran. Matt created and writes at the [Ditch That Textbook](https://DitchThatTextbook.com) 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](https://DitchThatTextbook.com/conferences) for more info or e-mail Matt at [matt@DitchThatTextbook.com](mailto:matt@DitchThatTextbook.com) to discuss pricing and availability.