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Padlet: Closing the Student Feedback Loop

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Most teachers would agree that student feedback is one of the keys to successful teaching. Getting student feedback is relatively easy for librarians who teach semester-long information literacy courses, because they have the freedom to incorporate more time-intensive forms of assessment like discussion groups. Librarians who only get to spend one or two hours with a class usually don't have the same luxury. Instead, they have to gather and analyze feedback as quickly and efficiently as possible. Fortunately, there are a growing number of online tools that enable them to do just that.

Some of these online tools, like Poll Everywhere (<http://www.polleverywhere.com>), give librarians the ability to administer quick surveys designed to test student comprehension. Others, like Twitter and even Facebook, have been used to gather more collaborative feedback from groups. However, many of these options have weaknesses that have to be taken into consideration. For example, online polling sites are great for gathering answers to specific questions, but those questions frequently have to be created ahead of time. Many sites also require students to create accounts, which can derail a lesson. Fortunately, there is an easy way to avoid many of these weaknesses and still gather meaningful feedback from students in a tool called Padlet.

What is Padlet? According to its creators, Padlet “works like an online sheet of paper where people can put any content (e.g. images, videos, documents, text) anywhere on the page, together with anyone, from any device.” In other words, it's like an online wall where people can post sticky notes that contain text, files, or images that they want to share. Other people can read these sticky notes and post their own notes as well. Since everything happens in real time, everyone viewing the wall can see what is going on instantaneously. In addition, people can use Padlet without having to sign in, which eliminates the headaches associated with creating and managing accounts. It's free to use and works on most computers, tablets, and smartphones.

To start a Padlet wall, simply go to <http://padlet.com> and click on the yellow “Build a Wall” button in the center of the screen. You can start adding content immediately by double clicking anywhere on your wall and typing. Alternatively, you can drag just about any file from your computer onto your wall and it will upload and appear in seconds. If you'd like to customize your wall, click the gear icon on the right hand side of the screen, and select the option you want to change. You can do things like add a title and description to your wall, change the background image, adjust privacy and access settings, and even create a custom URL that you can share with others. Creating an account gives you the ability to save your walls for future use as well.

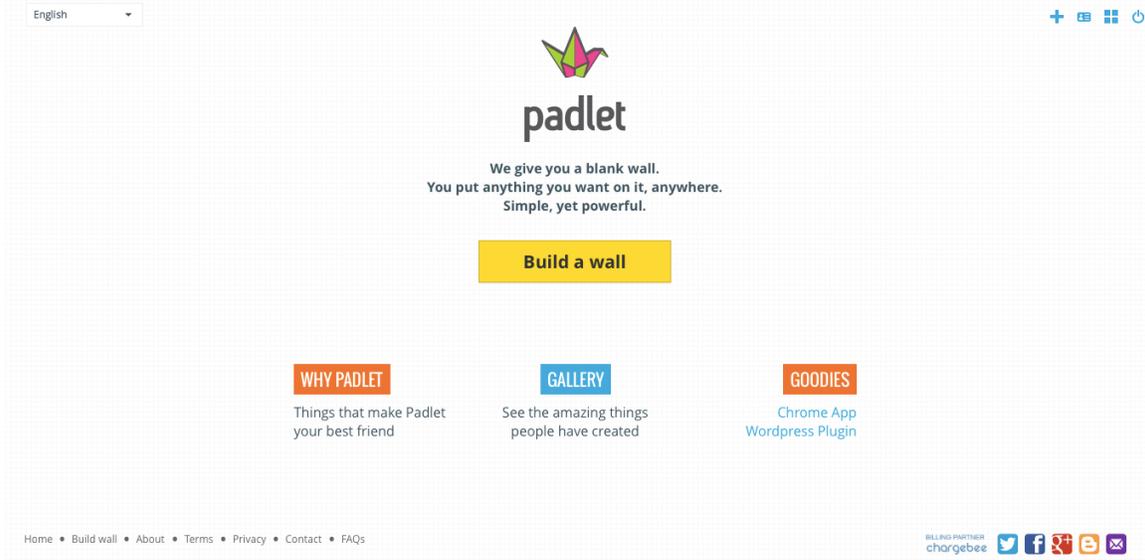
At this point you may be thinking, “Padlet sounds great, but how can I actually use it to gather feedback from my students?” Here are a few ideas from my own information literacy classes that have worked well with groups that range from 12 to 82 students:

- An icebreaker exercise where students answer the question, “Where do you go when you need to find information for a research project?” Their answers give me a sense of how much experience they have using library databases and provide a context for my discussion about why they are being encouraged to use them.
- An online white board where groups brainstorm keywords for a research question. By posting them in Padlet, I can easily see which groups might be having a difficult time coming up with effective keywords.
- An online citation puzzle, where groups had to assemble a correct APA citation for a specific format. We review these together as a class and work through any questions that arise.

These are just three basic examples. There are lots of librarians out there who are using Padlet in much more creative ways. A quick Google search for “padlet” and “information literacy” is a good way to find some excellent examples.

Padlet does have a few weaknesses. You can use Padlet to give your students quizzes, but it can’t automatically tabulate the answers like Poll Everywhere can. This limits Padlet’s effectiveness as a quick quizzing tool. It’s also easy to lose track of notes when viewing them on a screen, because people tend to post all of their notes in the small section of wall that is visible on their monitor even though the wall space is effectively unlimited. Fortunately, Padlet gives you the ability to switch from this freeform option to a more blog-like one called “Stream,” which somewhat addresses this problem. It would also be nice if there were a set of drawing tools available so that people could, for example, circle or highlight something in a post that they want to emphasize.

Even when taking these minor issues into consideration, Padlet remains a very flexible, easy to use, tool that librarians can quickly incorporate into just about any information literacy class. More importantly, students seem to enjoy Padlet and quickly learn how to use it. As a result, they tend to be more engaged in the lesson and seem to retain more of the material being presented. For librarians who only get one or two chances to work with a class, both of these outcomes are crucial to their success.



Padlet Homepage



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