



# Google Docs



## FIVE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GOOGLE DOCS

1. Google Docs consists of documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and forms.
2. You and your students can create documents from scratch or upload existing files.
3. Google Docs provides you with 1 GB of free storage for your files.
4. Collaboration and sharing with Google Docs means you can work whenever with whomever you want.
5. Using forms, you can collect lots of data from students and parents to assist your instruction.



**G**oogle Docs has a simple premise, but its impact is revolutionary. The basic idea is this: Rather than creating documents/spreadsheets on one's local computer and sharing them with others via attachments through e-mail, documents are created online and the files are made available by e-mail invitation. Basically, Google Docs provides an online home for documents where people can share their documents by sharing a secure link to others for collaboration.

What does that mean for you and your students? There's only one copy of each document. It lives on the Internet, and students can access it anytime, from anywhere. Before, projects were constantly being moved around and relabeled. Old versions and the latest version of a file were getting mixed up, and there wasn't a clear location for saving the file. Everyone had his or her own solution for this problem, from jump drives, to e-mailing files, to printing hard copies. Even with all those possibilities, the challenge remained, how can I keep track of the different versions of my files, and how can others work on the project concurrently?

Using Google Docs, there is just one home for your projects. This is a safe and secure way to store them, and you control the files. Old versions and new version are stored together. Collaborators can be added as needed. It's up to you.

### **NETS-S Standard 2 Objective a Communication and Collaboration**

Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others. Students interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media. (ISTE, 2007)

This tool will give students unlimited access to work on their projects. They can work collaboratively with their classmates on group projects, without saving and sending different versions of the project. What does that mean for your classroom workflow? Daily projects like self-starting writing prompts or journals can take place online. Your whole class can brainstorm ideas before class even begins. Projects become more collaborative online, taking less time as part of the actual instruction. Having projects take place as part of homework can actually provide the teacher with more instructional time. Who doesn't want more time?

## ■ GETTING STARTED IN GOOGLE DOCS

Thus far, we've shared some different ideas surrounding the need to collaborate and communicate in today's schools. Now you're ready to begin your journey in Google Docs.

So, how do you get started? You can find Google Docs in two ways:

1. Go to docs.google.com and enter in your Google account username and password (or set up your Google account if you do not already have one).
2. While you're at google.com, click on the Google menu. It's located in the top left corner of the screen. You'll find **Documents** in the *drop-down menu*.

You've made it. Welcome to Google Docs!

### A Few Basics About Google Docs

- All documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and other files are housed in the Library.
- The Library is organized chronologically, with new or recently edited documents displaying at the top of the list.
- All files display in the Library unless they are added to folders.
- Folders display along the left side of the Library.
- Create folders by clicking on the **Create New** button and choosing **Folder**.

### Uploading an Existing Document

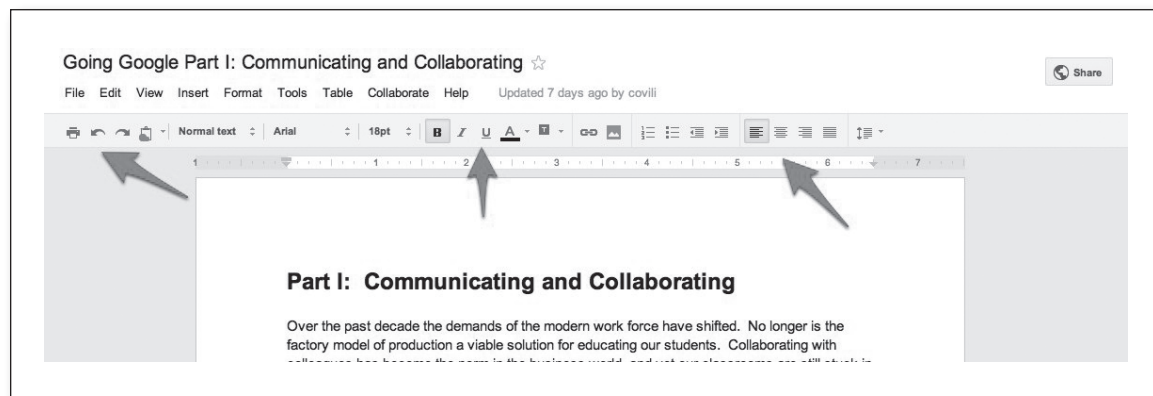
- Create an online version of an existing file by selecting the **Upload** button along the top left of the Library.
- You'll be directed to a dialog window prompting you to browse to your existing file.
- You can upload documents up to 500 *KB*, spreadsheets up to 1 *MB*, and presentations up to 10 MB in size.

## Creating Files in Google Docs

- Create a new file by selecting the **Create New** button.
- You can create several types of files including documents, spreadsheets, presentations, forms, and drawings.
- These options will all be found in a drop-down menu. Choose the right option for your project, and you're on your way.

As we look at the basic tools available to you in Google Docs (see Figure 1.1), you'll find they are very similar to those in Microsoft Word and other word processing programs. All the basic features are present including alignment options, formatting tools, editing controls, and more.

**Figure 1.1** Basic Google Docs Tools



While working on a project, you'll find there's no need to save your work. Google Docs automatically saves your project every time you make a change in your file.

If you would like to work on your project in an offline environment or share it with someone using Microsoft Office, click on the **File** menu and you'll discover a **Download** option to create an offline version of your work.

Most of the getting-started features we've discussed to this point should be fairly familiar to you, as they have similar tools in most standard Microsoft Office programs. Now, let's take a look at some of the features that make Google Docs special. Google Docs makes it possible to do the following:

### *Sharing*

- You can upload files from the entire Microsoft Office suite, or you can create documents from scratch.

### *Accessing*

- Google Docs is available from any computer, as long as you have access to the Internet.

- In addition to the latest draft of a document, Google Docs saves all the previous versions of the project as well.

#### *Storing*

- You can store up to 1 GB of documents for free.
- Files can include items from Microsoft Office, PDF files, images, movies, and more.

#### *Communicating*

- Google Docs provides users with control over who sees and contributes to a project. You can keep it private or share it with the world.

Let's take a closer look at these features and the skills involved.

## ■ SHARING

Google Docs allows students and teachers to create or upload documents and share them with others. As the teacher, this gives you several options and strategies. What about a class brainstorming session that happens live with all 30 students contributing their ideas? We do this in class all the time, with kids shouting out their answers. But what happens to the shy student who's a bit more reserved? Brainstorming in a shared document means that everyone's voice gets heard.

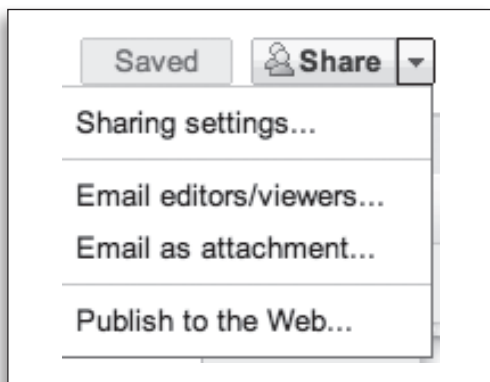
Group research projects are a natural fit for Google Docs. It doesn't matter whether it's a document or a presentation—you can have groups of students collaborate on their projects. Students can work on creating the content, and revision can take place throughout the project. Imagine having your students working together through the writing process. They are the ones learning how to evaluate one another's writing. Google Docs provides the tools to make collaborative projects happen (see Figure 1.2).

To invite another person to a Google Doc, you'll want to click on the **Share** button in the upper right-hand corner of any document, spreadsheet, or presentation. Here, you'll be prompted to add collaborators from your contact list, or simply type in a friend's e-mail address and decide what sort of access you wish to provide him or her. He or she can either work on the document as a collaborator, with full editing rights, or the friend can only be allowed to view the document.

As the teacher, you'll want to have your students invite you to their documents as a collaborator, thus giving you the rights to make comments and view changes made to the project in Google Docs.

As the teacher, another huge benefit of being a collaborator on student projects is the ability to review the

**Figure 1.2** Sharing Documents With Google Docs



revision history of the document. Located under the File menu, **See revision history** allows the instructor to see how the document has changed over time (see Figure 1.3). For group projects, it also details the contributions of each member of the team. What an asset for managing a group!

Olof Andersson, a middle school teacher from the Kvarnbergsskolan School in Sweden, shared his thoughts about working through the process with his students using Google Docs.

Many of my students use Google Docs when they are working in teams, both with essays and presentations. In some point of progress, the students invite me to join them and have a look at and give comments on their work. It helps me, as a teacher, to be able to participate in the process, not just see the final product. (Google, 2011a)

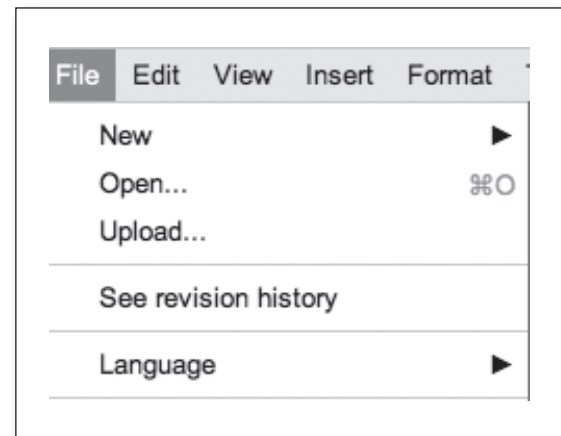
Beyond collaborating on documents, another aspect of sharing in Google Docs is found in presentations. Students can work on PowerPoint-like presentations in Google Docs. Now there's nothing new about creating a presentation, but here's what is: *Kids can share their presentations online with the rest of the class.* Each student signs in to the online presentation and gets involved in an interactive chat room.

Rather than watching a roomful of bored students sitting through each presentation, now you have students present online. The rest of the class contributes their thoughts about the project in the presentation's chat room. Students become active participants, sharing ideas and contributing to a discussion of the topic. Engagement goes up, and everyone gets involved. As you can see in the example in Figure 1.4, students are actively participating in a presentation by making online comments about the content.

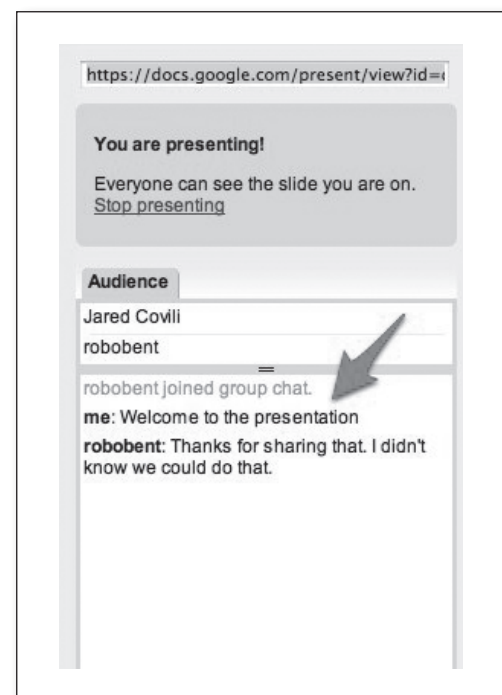
Take the example of Collette Cassinelli (2008), a high school librarian and media teacher from Oregon.

I have found the **REAL POWER** of Google Presentations is when you use the **online presentation format**. Instead of my students sitting passively watching a student's PowerPoint presentation, a presenter publishes their presentation online. In the Computer Lab each student logs into a Google account and accesses the presentation URL. I allow students to participate in the chat during the presentation as long as their

**Figure 1.3** See Revision History



**Figure 1.4** Online Chat Area for Students During Presentation



comments are about the presentation, they type additional information about the content, or ask questions to the presenter. I monitor the chat closely—but I have to say—when I have done this with my students—there is 100% engagement in the presentation and they handle the responsibility of being in the chat room well (it only takes one student to get kicked out and the rest shape up fast!). They love it and it's a great way to get the whole class involved in a presentation. (n.p.)

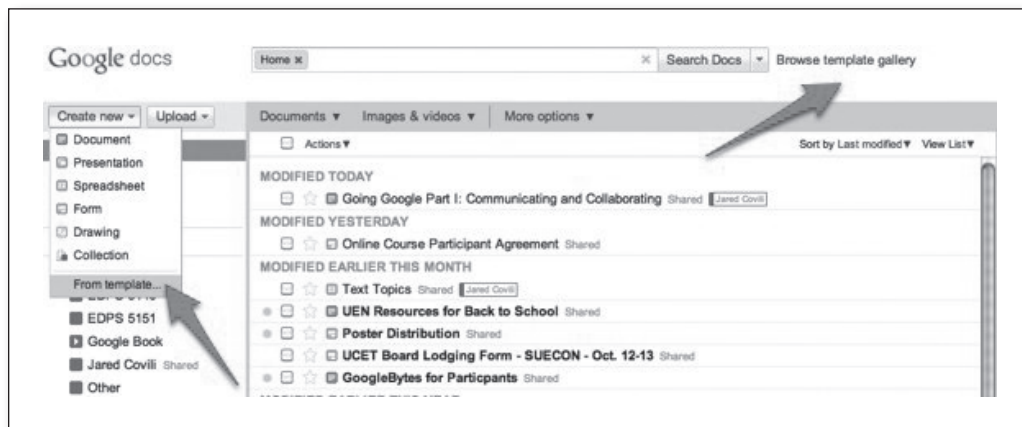
## Using Templates in Google Docs

If there are two things teachers know how to do well, it's borrowing and sharing. We are willing to share lessons and handouts we've made with our colleagues, and we don't mind using their resources either. Most of us are so busy trying to get through with all the demands of teaching that when a good resource presents itself, we're all over it.

Google Docs has a library containing educational documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. The Template Gallery is full of useful resources for teachers and students. Instructors can find everything from grade book programs to attendance summaries for classroom management. There are lesson plan *templates* to assist you in creating future activities. Students can find many types of productivity aids including note-taking templates, science reports, and term paper structures. Think of it as an entire portfolio of free resources, shared by teachers and students for their peers.

To access the template gallery, you'll find a **From Template** option under the **Create New** menu (see Figure 1.5). Your other options are to **Browse Template Gallery** across the top of your Library, or try searching the template gallery using the provided link. If you create a document you'd like to share with the gallery, choose the **Submit a Template** link from the template gallery and it will become available to other users. The Template Gallery is a wonderful place to find and share some of our best ideas.

**Figure 1.5** Finding Templates in Google Docs





## ACCESSING ■

Students are no longer bound to a location when working on a project. If you have Internet access, you can work on a Google Doc. What a great solution for students working on a project from school and at home. They can simply pick up right where they left off because Google Docs has saved a copy of their project, just as they left it! This may not seem like that big a deal to some of your students, but wait until they experience the dreaded “computer crash.” As an example, take the experience Julie Meloni (2009) had with one of her students.

“All your documents are backed up,” I said to them, but this didn’t hit home until one student ran into class one day and said, “Oh my gosh, my computer died in the middle of my essay!” I calmly opened my laptop, logged into my account (as I was a collaborator on the document), and showed the student the essay—saved constantly by Google until her computer crashed. It was at that moment that 24 light bulbs appeared over students’ heads and any lingering resistance to the technology vanished. (n.p.)

As a teacher, your access to students and their work increases dramatically as well. Gone are the days of searching through an endless number of drafts. Once students share their projects with you, you can look through the single copy of the document and find all the changes with one click. What’s more, you can manage all of the work in a paperless environment! Student projects can easily be organized into online folders, so managing documents is a snap.

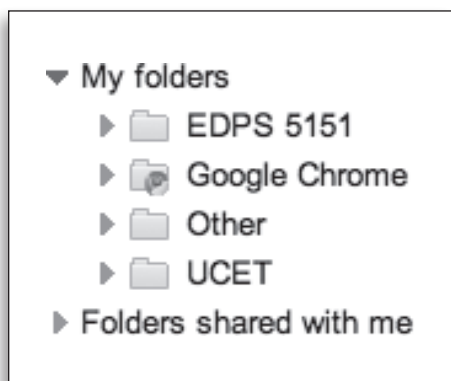
### **Never Buy Software Again!**

Google Docs also makes moot the debate as to which format to have student use to save their documents. It doesn’t matter which software they have on their home computer. Since Google Docs is an online set of tools, you and your students don’t even need to have Microsoft Office. As long as they have the Internet they have access to their files on Google Docs.

Since Google Docs is a free tool, this can be part of a school- or districtwide technology plan. Imagine the savings to our financially challenged schools when they stop buying software and use that money elsewhere. As one teacher commented, “I guess I really don’t need to have Microsoft Word anymore. As long as I have the Internet, I can use Google Docs.”

## STORING ■

Google Docs might just remedy the eternal student declaration, “The dog ate my homework.” No longer will students lose their projects between home and school. Now, all their files will be in one location, easy to access and share. Google provides users with 1 **GB**, or gigabyte, of free online storage, meaning you can probably store every document, spreadsheet, and presentation you own for free!

**Figure 1.6** Use Folders to Manage Files

In addition to being able to store documents, spreadsheets, and presentations, Google Docs also allows users to store other files like PDFs, images, videos, and so forth. This gives you additional options, but remember, the more multimedia files you include, the quicker your storage space gets filled. If you need to increase your storage, Google provides a cheap solution. For \$5 a year, you can expand your storage from 1 GB to 20 GB.

Previously, I mentioned that you can create folders in Google Docs as storage for your files. This is another nice aspect of the program—it can become your personal filing cabinet, online (see Figure 1.6). While this may seem unnecessary as you begin using Google Docs, over time you'll continue to amass more and more files until it can become very overwhelming. Remember, a little file management in

the beginning can save you huge headaches in the long run. Folders are an easy way to store your documents and find them later!

## ■ COMMUNICATING

Google Docs provides you with several ways to communicate with parents and students. We've already explored how you can share documents, spreadsheets, and presentations with individuals, but you can also make files public and share them with everyone else. What a great way to publicize your classroom newsletter or share your disclosure document!

While getting your message out is important, it may be even more vital to get the students' and parents' *opinions*. Remember, students and their parents are your main clients. If you aren't in touch with their desires and needs, you may be setting yourself up for unnecessary challenges. One of my favorite components in Google Docs is the Forms feature, which can be used to get authentic feedback from the people who matter most. As with the other tools in Google Docs, it's easy to share a form—you can either e-mail it out to people or make it public and share the link.

The power isn't so much in the form itself, but in your ability to take the information gained and plan your teaching strategy accordingly. Most kids want their opinions to be heard, but few feel comfortable sharing verbally with the teacher. The Forms function allows individuals to give their input and provides the teacher with an easy way to access the feedback.

### Project Idea: Student Writing Group

As a former Language Arts teacher, I think Google Docs is an incredibly effective solution for student writing groups. Here's why. As our students work through various drafts of a research project, many of us have the students engage in some



type of peer review. This helps the writer get feedback on what's working and what isn't going as well. Peer review also helps the reviewers, as they see some of the mistakes they're making in their own writing as they evaluate another paper.

### Setting Up a Peer-Reviewed Paper

Have the author create the document using the **Create New** button and selecting **Document**. The author of the document needs to "share" the project with the rest of the peer reviewers. Once the author uses the **Share** button, he or she will be prompted for the e-mail addresses of the peer reviewers.

One management strategy I like involves using the **Comments** feature (see Figure 1.7). Found in the Insert menu, Comments provides peer reviewers with an easy spot to make suggestions without deleting any of the original work. If you have more than one peer reviewer, have the students pick a specific font color to use when they make their own comments.

Once the author reviews the comments made by their peers, he or she can take those comments and make future revisions. Using the revision history, the student can compare various versions of the paper and see the progress he or she has made.

To help students work through the revision process together, I would suggest not asking to be added as a collaborator until the students are a good distance into the project. Too often, once the instructor becomes part of the process, the other reviewers tend to defer to the teacher. Refrain from joining the project to begin with, and let the students work through the process.

Using the **Revision History** is a good management strategy for you as the instructor. Once you are added to the document, you can quickly assess the work of each student, not just the author. Because the revision history keeps track of each change on a document, you can see what contributions each reviewer has made. This illustrates to the students that each of their comments is observed and that everyone contributes to the success of a project.

As the time comes for the final draft to be submitted, the nice part for teachers is they already have access to the document. Now it's time to move the file from the Library into a final versions folder. You can create a folder that gets placed along the left side of the Google Docs library. Folders can be set up for different subjects, class periods, or however you want.

Working in student writing groups uses several different elements of sharing, revising, and evaluating. Google Docs provides the structure and the support to help students work through any peer-reviewed project.

#### NETS-S Standard 2 Objective d

Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others. Students contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems. (ISTE, 2007)

**Figure 1.7** Comments Help With Revision



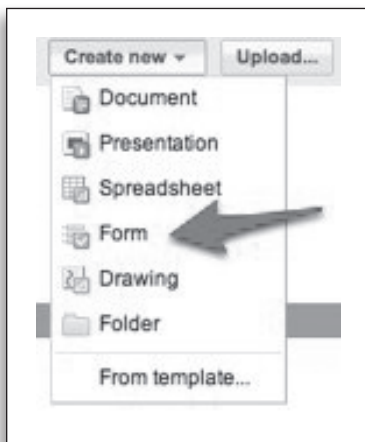
## Project Idea: Creating a Parent Contact Form

### NETS-T Standard 3 Objective b

Teachers collaborate with students, peers, parents, and community members using digital tools and resources to support student success and innovation (ISTE, 2008).

One of the first things a teacher needs from his or her students at the beginning of the school year is contact information for parents or guardians. We want to know whom we can contact, where, when, and how. Sure, the school can provide us with a lot of this information, but much of it is out of date or just incorrect, and it requires us going through the administration to access the data. Creating a Google form is an easy solution to this beginning-of-school-year problem. Here's how to get started (see Figures 1.8 and 1.9).

**Figure 1.8** Creating a New Form



### Creating the Form

- Select **Create New** from the button along the top left side of the Google Doc library and drop down to **Form**.
- As soon as you start a form, you'll find it has a basic structure: name the form, provide instructions, ask questions.
- For our sample project, you'll need to name your form something like "Parent Contact Form."
- Following the title, in the **instructions** field, be sure to provide a basic overview of what information you'd like from parents and how you plan to use that information in the future.
- Next we'll start creating the basic **questions** we need for our form (see Figure 1.9). Note: The default type of question in a Google form is text (see Figure 1.10). Simply put, you want your respondent to enter his or her answers manually. So, we need to

**Figure 1.9** Setting up a Form

 A screenshot of the Google Forms 'Setting up a Form' interface. At the top, there are buttons for '+ Add item', 'Theme: Plain', 'Email this form', 'See responses', 'More actions', and 'Save'. Below these is a text input field for the form title, currently containing 'Untitled form'. Underneath is a larger text area for instructions, with the placeholder text 'You can include any text or info that will help people fill this out.'. Below the instructions is a section for a question. It includes a 'Question Title' field with 'Sample Question 1', a 'Help Text' field, and a 'Question Type' dropdown menu set to 'Text'. Below the question type is a dashed box labeled 'Their answer'. At the bottom of the question setup, there is a 'Done' button and a checkbox labeled 'Make this a required question'.

create basic text questions that will provide us with important contact information about our students' parents. Examples of text questions may include Parent Name, Student Name, or Parent Contact Number. To enter in this data, you'll simply type in the **Question Title** for what you'd like to know. For example, if I'd like to know the parent's name, I'll enter that in the Question Title.

There are a few additional aspects to each question in a form. Google provides a space for clarifying information. This is called **Help Text**. For our form, it probably isn't necessary, but it can be useful to ensure you get the data you need. After Help Text, you'll see a space to choose your **Question Type**. I mentioned that the default style of question is text, but there are several types of questions at your disposal. Currently the list includes Text, Paragraph Text, Multiple Choice, Checkboxes, Choose from a list, Scale, and Grid. Each one of these options can be useful for gathering specific types of data.

The final option in creating a question is whether or not to **require the answer**. This means a form cannot be submitted without a reply to that question (see Figure 1.11). For our example, items like Student Name, Parent Name, and Phone Number or E-mail are essential to the success of our project. These items would definitely be required before someone could hit submit.

### *Adding Additional Questions*

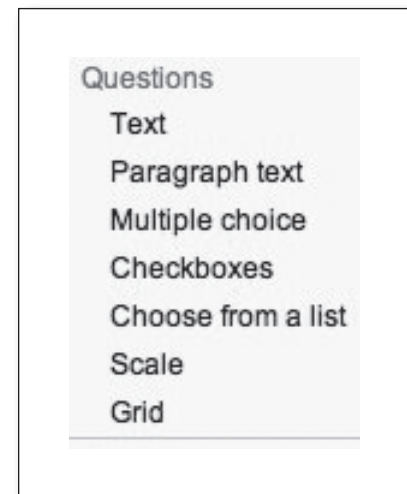
When you first create a form, you'll find that two sample text-style questions automatically populate the fields. If you want to add additional questions, look in the top left corner of the form and you'll find the **Add a Question** button. This is a drop-down menu that allows you to select from the options mentioned previously (i.e., Checkboxes, Scale, etc.).

### *Editing a Question*

Once you've established a field of data, changing it doesn't require starting over. Instead, you just need to do the following (see Figure 1.12):

- On the right side of each question, you'll find three editing buttons. Use the pencil icon to edit a question, an overlapping box icon to copy a question, or a trash can icon to delete the question.
- The pencil icon reopens the question in edit mode. Here you can change the wording of your question, add more options, or even change the style of question.

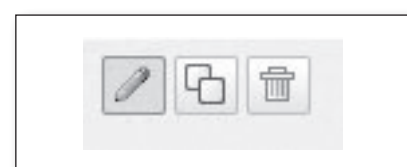
**Figure 1.10** Question Types



**Figure 1.11** Required Questions



**Figure 1.12** Editing a Question



- The overlapping box is useful if you have a series of similarly formatted questions. Simply duplicate the question, and make the minor adjustments you need without retyping the entire field. A great example of this would be during a multiple-choice quiz. Perhaps two or three of the questions have the same options for answers. Rather than retype the five or six answer choices, simply copy and paste the entire entry and adjust the question, leaving the answers intact. This can save quite a bit of time.
- We all have a pretty good idea that clicking on the trash can will delete the selected question. When you're finished with your changes, click on the Done button and you're all set.

### Sharing the Form With Parents

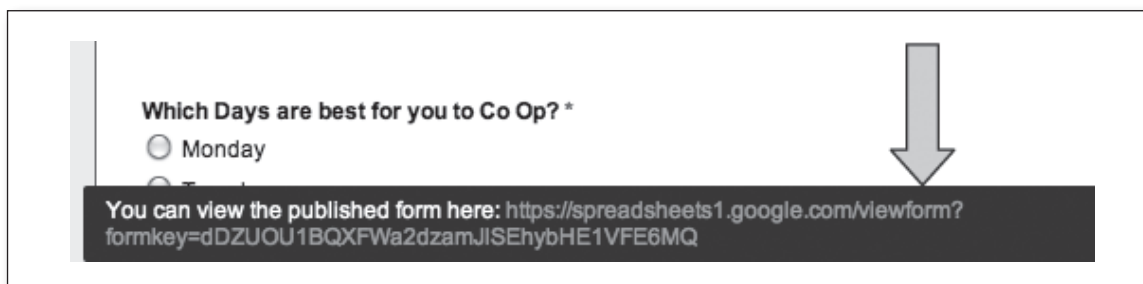
So, you've put the final touches on your form and you're ready to get parents to respond. Now what? You have a couple of different choices.

1. You could use the **Share** button and enter in all the parents' e-mail addresses so you can send the form directly to them. One problem: You need the e-mail addresses, which is why you made the form in the first place. Here's a better choice.
2. At the bottom of every form is a public URL (see Figure 1.13). The **URL** is a site's address on the web. This one is a long, ugly address, but we've got a nice solution to work around that issue. There's a great website from Google found at <http://goo.gl>, which allows you to transform a nasty very long URL like <https://spreadsheets0.google.com/viewform?formkey=dDZKdzlZOXpBYWhFQlcxOFIDRk16QWc6MQ> into an easy-to-use URL, <http://goo.gl/T3DE5y>

Now that you've created a usable address for parents to find the form, your next job is to market it. How do you get this form into the hands of the parents?

- Perhaps you could include the address to your form in your disclosure document, distributed on Back to School Night or during the first week of class.

**Figure 1.13** Public URL for Form

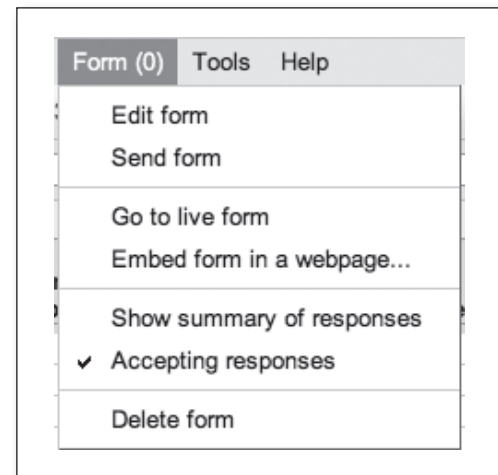


- Another good option is to add the web link to your classroom website (if you don't have a website yet, we'll get to that shortly).

Once the parents start filling out the form, the final question is, where do the answers go? Here's the beauty of Google Docs. When you created the form, Google Docs created a spreadsheet for the answers. When you go back to your Google Docs Library, you'll find there's already a spreadsheet with all of your data fields ready for responses.

If you want to edit the form or use any of its data, click on the Form option in the menus and you'll have a variety of choices (see Figure 1.14). You can end submissions, summarize the data, edit the form, and more. It's a great system, and an easy way to organize the information you need to start the year off right.

**Figure 1.14** Working With a Form



## Project Idea: Creating Online Quizzes

Assessment is such a major part of your classroom. Using Google Docs, you can create a form that will help you uncover student understanding and compile the data in an easy-to-use spreadsheet.

As we've learned about Google Forms, creating an online quiz is as simple as developing a series of questions you want to ask your students. Remember, there are several different types of questions, so you can write the questions to look at many kinds of data. Whether you want to use multiple choice or a paragraph response, it's up to you.

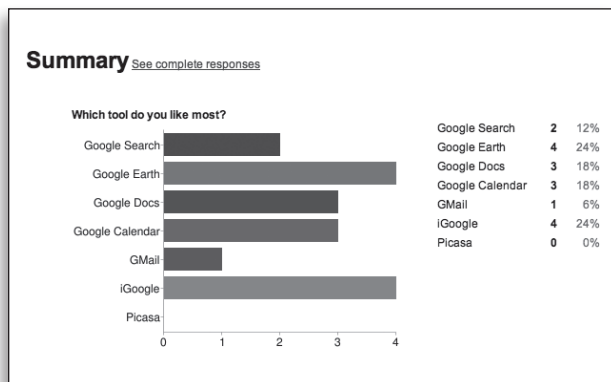
*The key for assessment is being able to use the answers to quickly identify student comprehension or identify teaching areas that need improvement.* Once the quiz is completed, all student responses are submitted into a spreadsheet that allows you to compile the data in many useful ways.

One of the best ways to analyze the data is to create a **Summary of Responses**. With this option, you can view a chart representing the various responses. For a quick formative assessment, this is a lifesaver. Within seconds of the quiz ending, a teacher can see how the class performed as a whole. It's an easy way to view what your students are thinking and determine where you need to spend your instructional time. In the Figure 1.15 example below, you'll see how easy it is to find out what students are thinking and learning.

Another useful option for scoring your quiz is the script called **Flubaroo**. I know it's a funny name, but it works great. Flubaroo is found in the **Insert** menu, under the **script** option. Just type the word "Flubaroo" in the search box, and you'll find it. Once you install the script, you'll find that Flubaroo has an

### NETST Standard 2 Objective d

Teachers provide students with multiple and varied formative and summative assessments aligned with content and technology standards and use resulting data to inform learning and teaching (ISTE, 2008).

**Figure 1.15** See Quick Data With Summary of Responses

option in your text menus across the top of your Google Spreadsheet. Click on this menu option to get started.

Setup is easy, as Flubaroo runs a little wizard to help you install the script. Please note: You have to set up Flubaroo for each new quiz you create. As you run the wizard you'll find that Flubaroo wants to use one of the submissions as the answer key, so you'll either have to take the quiz yourself or use one of the students (provided they get all of the answers correct).

With the answer key established, Flubaroo will quickly score all of the quizzes and provide you with a detailed summary of each student's score. Hint: Be sure to include a question on the

quiz that requires an e-mail address. You can then use the e-mail address to send students their scores. This is an option in the Flubaroo menu.

I've shared some of my favorite projects over the past few pages, but one of the best things about this tool is the ways in which you'll use it. There is more than one right way to encourage students to communicate and collaborate with one another. The most important part of any tool is how it helps you and your students achieve your learning goals.

### MORE IDEAS FOR GOING GOOGLE

#### Other Google Docs Projects

- Creating word searches, flash cards, QR (quick response) code scavenger hunts, and more. Use the Gadgets option under the Insert menu in your Google Spreadsheets. You can search for tons of fun little applications in Gadgets.
- Developing an online writing portfolio for students
- Creating a Choose Your Own Adventure presentation for students.
- Brainstorming a class activity or learning topic using an open spreadsheet.
- Developing a classroom newsletter
- Creating an online checkout list for classroom books.

### TIPS FOR THE GOOGLE CLASSROOM

- Make sure all of your students have Google accounts for smoother sharing. Many students will already have an account, but you'll want to make sure you help those that don't currently have access.
- Google Docs is only one of the tools Google offers for the classroom. Look at how the tool can play a part in your overall teaching strategy.
- Start small by having your students work collaboratively with one other student. Don't try to tackle whole-class projects right at the beginning. Be patient!