



Digital Promise

Accelerating Innovation in Education

Choosing Technology Tools

Being able to thoughtfully choose the right technology tool for a learning task from the vast array of choices available—digital devices, educational websites, cell phone apps, simulations and games, webinars, MOOCs, project organizers, coding tools, sensors, data analysis tools, and more—can be a significant challenge; using an evaluation strategy to make good technology tool choices is an important tool for increasing one’s learning power.

Key Method

Students use a nine-question approach to determine which digital tools and applications to use in their schoolwork and learning projects (see the Sound Decision-making micro-credential).

Method Components

As students undertake an activity, the educator leads them through a nine-step process to determine which digital tools and applications to use to complete the activity. This can be done individually, in small groups, or in whole-group instruction.

Nine questions to guide the selection of technology tools

Strategies like the following nine-question approach to evaluating digital learning tools and applications will help students choose the right tools to meet their learning challenges:

- What do you really need the learning tool to do? Example activities include:
 - Make a list of the things you need a new learning tool to do for you, both critical needs and nice-to-haves.
 - Note which of these needs are at least partially addressed by tools you already use.
- Is another digital tool or app necessary? Example questions to consider include:
 - Can an existing tool be used in a new way to help with the learning task?
 - Will it take longer to find and learn how to use a tool than to make do with the way you’re handling the learning need now, especially if the tool won’t be used very often?
- What are your friends using? Example activities include:
 - See what your friends are using for the same or similar needs and what they think of it.
 - If your friends are using different tools for the same need, ask them why they chose the tool and what are the best and worst aspects of using it.
 - To identify which of your friends’ recommendations are most relevant to you, think about your own style of learning and the features you most like.
- What are people saying about the tools online? Example activities include:
 - Research reviews and blogs to see what others’ experiences are with the tools being considered.
- Which tools will work on the devices you already own? Example questions to consider include:
 - Will the tool work on the devices you use now, and will it integrate well with the tools you frequently use on your device?
 - If a new device is being considered, will it integrate well with the device or devices you already use?
- Which tool choices are affordable? Example questions to consider include:

- Are they low-cost enough, or can they be acquired at no cost (possibly on a trial basis or with an educational discount)?
- Is it possible to try some of the tool choices on a free download trial basis, on a friend's device, or in a store, to see if they are good choices?
- Which features are most important to you? Example activities include:
 - Decide which features are critical and which are nice to have.
 - If you've narrowed the list down to just a few choices, rank each tool or app against your list of critical and nice-to-have features.
- Does it really help you learn? Example activities include:
 - After using the tool or app for a while, examine your use of it to make sure it really increases your productivity, lets you do things you couldn't do before, helps you collaborate with your classmates or teachers, or makes learning tasks more enjoyable.

Suggested review

- Students discuss how these strategies helped them make better choices in the digital tools and apps they use for learning and identify what additional strategies they have found to be useful in deciding which learning technologies are best for them.

Supporting Research

- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *Teachers Know Best: What Educators Want from Digital Instructional Tools*, 2014, [http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Teachers Know Best_0.pdf](http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Teachers_Know_Best_0.pdf)
- Center for Implementing Technology in Education, *Learning with Computer Games and Simulations*, CITED Research Center, http://www.cited.org/index.aspx?page_id=143
- International Society for Technology in Education, *ISTE Standards: Students* 2014, http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/20-14_ISTE_Standards-S_PDF.pdf

Resources

- Kimberly Tyson, "6 Tips for Choosing Digital Tools to Support 21st Century Student Learning," *Kimberly Tyson*, June 11, 2013, <http://www.learningunlimitedllc.com/2013/06/choosing-digital-tools/>
- Pam Berger and Sally Trexler, *Choosing Web 2.0 Tools for Learning and Teaching in a Digital World* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2003), <http://www.amazon.com/Choosing-Tools-Learning-Teaching-Digital/dp/1591587069>
- KQED, "The MindShift Guide to Digital Games and Learning," *Mind/Shift*, 2014. <http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/series/guide-to-games-and-learning/>
- Common Sense Media, Find Reviews for Learning, *commonsensemedia.org*. <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/learning-ratings/reviews>

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

Following are the items you must submit to earn this micro-credential and the criteria by which they will be evaluated. To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1, 3, and 4 and a "Yes" for Part 2.

Part 1. Overview questions

(200-word limit for each response)

- **Activity Description:** What kind of project activities did you and your students engage in to become more proficient in choosing technology tools? Please describe the learning activities and strategies you used.
 - **Passing:** Activity description is clear with sufficient detail to illustrate what the students did to gain competencies.

- **Activity Evaluation:** How do you know your students increased their proficiency by engaging in the Choosing Technology Tools activities and what evidence did you collect that demonstrates these learning gains?
 - **Passing:** Activity evaluation process and evidence are clear, appropriate, and sufficient to evaluate the competencies.

Part 2. Evidence/artifacts

Please submit work examples from two students (such as links to writing, audio, images, video, and other appropriate media) that demonstrate progress toward the choosing technology tools competency, including such items as evidence of discussions of helpful strategies for choosing technology tools, examples of student analyses of their technology tool choices, samples of student reflections on how they improved their technology tool use decision-making process, and other appropriate artifacts.

"Yes"	"Almost"	"Not Yet"
<p>Student work clearly demonstrates learning from applying the choosing technology tools guidelines through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evidence of discussions on how students normally evaluate the usefulness of technology tools for learning 2. Examples of how the guidelines were used to evaluate a technology tool choice 3. Evidence of improved decision-making in choosing technology tools 4. Individual and group reflections on how evaluating and choosing learning tools can be improved and the lessons learned 	<p>Student work demonstrates learning from applying the choosing technology tools guidelines through some examples of evaluations and analyses, but few examples of discussions and reflections on the value of the strategies, lessons learned, and ideas to improve choosing helpful learning tools</p>	<p>Student work shows some learning from applying the choosing technology tools guidelines, with some examples of the strategies used, but few examples of discussions on effective strategies, and no reflections on lessons learned or ways to improve the tool choosing process</p>

Part 3. Student reflections

For the two students whose work examples were included above, submit student-created reflections on their experience of the choosing technology tools activities. Use the following questions as a guide (200-word limit for each reflection):

- How did the choosing technology tools strategies help you choose better learning tools?
- How did the choosing technology tools activities change your view of the value and usefulness of technology tools for learning?
 - **Passing:** Student reflections clearly indicate how the choosing technology tools activities helped them make better choices in their learning tools and clearly show how the activities changed student views on the value and usefulness of technology learning tools. The reflections are specific and convincing.

Part 4. Teacher reflection

Provide a reflection on what you learned, using the following questions as a guide (200-word limit):

- What was the impact of engaging your students in the choosing technology tools activity?
- How will experiencing these project activities shape your daily teaching practice in the future?

- **Passing:** Teacher reflections clearly indicate how the activity affected both the students and the teacher and clearly state how the experience will affect the teacher's future practice. The reflections are specific and convincing.