



# ORCHESTRA

## Interactive Notebooks in the School Orchestra

by Dan Mollick

### What is an Interactive Notebook?

An Interactive Notebook is a digital document created and customized by a teacher which students can engage and interact with throughout a unit of study. After attending the AVID Summer Institute, I learned that this digital tool could be used to check student understanding, provide enrichment, and monitor student progress. At first, I thought this was just another app or another service to subscribe to, but I soon discovered that I already had access to this tool! The purpose of this article is to show the value of this tool, show you how to get started, how you might use it in your classroom, and provide real world examples.

One of the most common digital tools used to create an Interactive Notebook is Google Slides. In a nutshell, the teacher can create a Google Slides template and students can use the template to interact with and practice learning concepts. Students can then personalize and turn their notebook into the teacher. It can be used as a teaching tool, evidence of learning, reflection, and/or a student portfolio.

I would like to pause and share that I'm quite skeptical about using more digital tools in education. Cal Newport, author of *Digital Minimalism*, encourages people to "focus online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value..." (28). Several years ago, as more and more technology began to be used in education, I seriously began to question its use in my classroom. I realized the value of doing something entirely non-digital or "analog" had incredible benefits for both myself and my students as it fostered more authentic human relationships. Analog human interaction through music making is one of the most powerful things we do as orchestra teachers. In fact, participation in orchestra requires no wifi connection to make music together! I'm definitely not a Luddite but I do see value in continually reflecting on how we are using digital tools in the classroom.

Intentionality is at the core of select-

ing digital tools for use in the classroom. Questions to consider before using a digital tool: What is the purpose of the digital tool? Does it align with the values in my classroom? Is there an analog version (e.g. paper) that is better?

The global pandemic forced me to figure out new solutions during this challenging time for teaching and learning as the traditional orchestra class was uprooted. Up until early November, my school was using a hybrid model of learning, where some students were online (synching into the live rehearsal) while other students were in person. I began to encounter challenges with this new way of teaching: sound quality issues, the inability to see student technique up close, students' discomfort with putting on their cameras, difficulty teaching certain concepts, and the unsustainability of the number of online assessments I was giving. The Interactive Notebook became a perfect fit to overcome some of these hurdles. It provided the opportunity to assess students through up-close photos, while allowing students to link videos to excerpts of their playing and work asynchronously at their own pace.

### How to Get Started

The first step in creating an Interactive Notebook is to think about what concepts, objectives, or essential questions you would like for students to demonstrate such as:

- What do I want my students to understand about left hand/arm technique, right hand/arm technique, and posture? In what ways can they demonstrate this?
- What technical or musical concepts do I want students to understand about our current repertoire?
- How can I provide quality, asynchronous instruction in music theory, music history, and listening?
- What critical thinking skills, enrichment or extension activities can I provide to students that relate to what we are doing in class?
- How can I connect what we are learn-

ing in orchestra class to other subject areas and/or real life?

After thinking about these questions, take some time to sketch out your ideas on paper. Then, open a blank Google Slides document and create a slide in the Notebook for each topic you would like to cover. Think of each slide as a "page" in a notebook. Consider keeping it simple at first. There is no limit to what you can create, but the important thing is to make each notebook page interactive: include videos, short articles, or pictures. In addition, include space for the students to respond by adding clear instructions and outlined or colored text boxes.

After you have created your Interactive Notebook, simply share the link within your Learning Management System: Schoology, Canvas, Google Classroom, etc. Students will be able to make a copy of the Interactive Notebook and complete pages as you assign them. I assign pages as independent asynchronous work so that students can work at their own pace. If you want to add pages later, simply create a separate Google Slides document and ask the students to copy and paste the slide into their Interactive Notebook.

### Examples of Interactive Notebook Pages

With a simple internet search, you will find countless examples of Interactive Notebooks. Most examples are from non-musical subject areas but they can provide a framework and inspiration for creating something for orchestra class. Here are some examples of pages I created in the Interactive Notebook for my orchestra classes:

- *Get to Know You* - A way for students to share something about themselves. This page can be shared with the class. Example: 7<sup>th</sup> grade students were learning about the "hero" and "heart" themes in sonata form. I included a question, "Who represents the hero theme in *Sonata Vivant* for you and why?" Students also had the option of pasting a picture of their hero on this page.

- *Evidence of Technique* - Students provide photo evidence of themselves demonstrating a specific technique. Example: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade students took pictures of themselves demonstrating the four left hand finger patterns (violin/viola), extensions (cello), and use of half position (bass)
- *Music Theory* - Provide an embedded YouTube video of a music theory lesson and have students practice concepts and/or respond to questions. Example: 6<sup>th</sup> Grade students watched a review video on how to read music for their clef. They completed a [musictheory.net](http://musictheory.net) exercise and pasted a screencast of their results into the notebook.
- *Music History/Listening* - Provide an embedded YouTube video of a piece of music and a short article about the composer. Example: I modified the Perpich Center for the Arts lesson about Florence Price for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. After reading a short article about her life and watching the orchestral performance of *Cane Breaks*, students completed reflection questions.
- *Creativity* - Anything that allows students to stretch beyond the classroom and touch on other subject areas. Two examples based on repertoire: 1) *Frog in a Tree* by Mark Williams - students researched a frog using the MN DNR website and answered questions such

as, “How big is the frog?”, “What does it eat?”, and “Where does it live?” 2) *Gargoyles* by Doug Spata - students were asked to find a picture of a gargoyle and write a story about it.

- *Reflection* - Reflect on the unit of study and a place to provide feedback to the teacher. If you give feedback to students in an online gradebook, this is a perfect spot for them to copy/paste that feedback and reflect on it.

### Conclusion

The beauty of the Interactive Notebook is that it has lowered my teacher workload while increasing student engagement. It cut down on the number of assignments I was grading and allowed me to assign one or two “pages” (slides) at a time as asynchronous work throughout the unit. Managing just one continuous assignment is much easier than juggling 10-15 assignments completed by over 200 students! I found that students were more engaged as they could personalize their notebook by changing the theme and backgrounds of the slides. I could check on their progress anytime, both in-person and online. Students were able to share their work in online breakout rooms with their peers. My favorite feature was the ability to customize the notebook to be in line with what we were working on in class.

### Quick Tips for Interactive Notebooks:

1. Look for examples online.

2. Sketch out ideas using an analog method (on paper)
3. Open a Google Slides document. Start simple and barebones. Remember each slide is one “page” in the Interactive Notebook.
4. Think about how many weeks you might have the notebook last. For me, I have about 12-15 slides/activities and it lasts about 4-6 weeks with varying levels of activities.
5. Provide clear directions and create color text boxes for student responses.
6. Add extra instructions/tips/tricks on the margins of the slides.
7. Think about what slides might be useful in a small group discussion or as a contribution to a larger class project.

Examples of Interactive Notebooks I have created are below. For clickable links scan the QR codes or send me an email. I’d love to hear your feedback. Have you tried using Interactive Notebooks in your class? What other ideas might you have? Please email [daniel.mollick@edinaschools.org](mailto:daniel.mollick@edinaschools.org).

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#### Beginning of Year Notebook

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1wxb2DgxeMBr8m2XBA7CB-7EZ0AAX84Sib6ajj7ms-GU/edit?usp=sharing>



#### 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Notebook

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1T8Z8bqIayIMCGkCD-Rr46TZ2cAJFRWjSOuFFxcXJLu8/edit?usp=sharing>



#### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Notebook

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1c-B5d-46U9JLDm059g3-cxIM9psWhZb1A8GIvwwGYE4/edit?usp=sharing>



#### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Notebook

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jY0i5zX2KJATI4IELuvrRcsxZ6Ub-C-UGbSbH-8NpK4/edit?usp=sharing>

