

Welcome to “ITS Technology Tips,” where we bring you some useful information about the technology here at Loyola and effective ways to use the technology. Remember to visit the weekly [Tech Tips Blog](#) for the latest tips and the [Technology Tips Archive](#), to find all Tech Tips in PDF format, categorized for easy access.

Google Docs: A Free, Collaborative, Online Word-Processor

I didn't have to use Microsoft Word, Works, WordPerfect, or any other word processing program to write this tech tip. I didn't have to email this tech tip back and forth to my poor co-worker so he could fix the hundreds of typos. I wrote this entire document within my Internet browser using **Google Docs**, an online word processor that enables you to create documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. Google Docs is truly a fabulous tool. It allows you to compose and edit documents with multiple users online in real-time. You can store documents online for free, publish them in multiple formats and access them anywhere and any time you can connect to the Internet. Take note that Google Docs is not currently a Loyola supported software, which means that those using it should expect that there may not be a resident expert with Google Docs and additionally, we don't have backups and integration of Google Docs with other Loyola systems.

How to Sign Up

Signing up for Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>) is very easy – and very free! If you have a Gmail account, you can login without even signing up for a Google Docs account. If you don't have Gmail, you just need to enter an e-mail address and password to sign up. You'll have to reply to a confirmation e-mail, but that's about as complicated as the process gets.

The Interface

Once you login, you'll have the option to create a new document, spreadsheet, or presentation or upload a file from your computer. If you choose to upload a file, note that Google Docs accepts popular file formats, including DOC, XLS, ODT, ODS, RTF, CSV, and PPT. Google Docs provides a familiar interface that resembles Microsoft Office. Google Docs certainly does not have the hundreds of features that Office possesses. For example, you won't have a huge library of fonts or complex formatting options, but it has enough features to satisfy basic word processing needs. Google Docs will allow you to create tables, insert images, make bulleted lists, and spell-check.

Collaborative Features

The coolest thing about Google Docs is the collaborative features. It allows users to collaborate on documents, which is not possible in Microsoft Office. Multiple people can actually edit the same document at the same time, as long as you give them permission to do so. Google Docs does a nice job of keeping track of who makes what changes – if you don't like the changes your co-worker has made to a document, you can roll it back to a previous version. You save a lot of time and heartache using a tool like Google Docs. You avoid playing tag, passing documents from colleague to colleague for edits and revisions and comments and suggestions. Editing documents on a shared drive is also recommended at Loyola. However, keep in mind that Word doesn't let multiple users make changes to a document at the same time – you'll get the “this document is locked - read-only” message if you try. When you use a shared drive to collaborate on documents, changes will need to be made by one user at a time.

Online Files

Another great feature about Google Docs is its portability. It allows you to store all of your files online, so you don't have to worry about having your documents available on your computer, your memory stick, or on a disk. You can access your document anywhere you have an Internet connection. If your personal computer crashes, your Google Docs documents will be safe and sound on the Google servers. And it is doubtful Google will be going out of business anytime soon. Google Docs is also very flexible and compatible. You can take the file you've worked on and save it in multiple formats. You can publish it as a web page or to a blog, but you can also save it as .html, .rtf, a Word document, OpenOffice file, and as a .pdf! You simply download your file to your desktop. Wow!

How to Use Google Docs

Tools like Google Docs have the potential of altering the way we work and learn, but sometimes, it's hard to think of ways to get started with new tools like this. Here are some ways you might use Google Docs in your life – can you think of other ways?

Google Docs at Work

- Team reports
- Meeting minutes
- Department budgets
- Grant proposals
- To do lists

Google Docs at School

- Class Presentations
- Collaborative writing projects
- Peer editing
- Group bibliographies

Google Docs at Home

- Collaborative to do lists
- Holiday gift lists – have all of your relatives put what gifts they would like on one document
- Family newsletter
- Family calendar
- Sharing “favorites” – lists of movies, books, recommendations with friends and family

Other Tools

<http://www.writeboard.com/>

Writeboard is a free collaborative word processor that is similar to Google Docs. Documents can only be exported as text files. The company also makes a collaborative to do list and project planning.

<http://www.ajax13.com/en/ajaxwrite/>

AjaxWrite write is a free, web-based word processor that works in Firefox. It doesn't have the collaborative features of Writeboard and Google Docs.

That's our technology tip for this week. If you have found the information helpful, please drop us a line at Training@luc.edu . If you'd like to go back to our archive of technology tips, please visit us on the Web at <http://www.luc.edu/its/techtips.shtml>.