

THE INNOVATORS GUIDE

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BRINGING DIGITAL STORYTELLING INTO THE CLASSROOM

Top tips from Jane Van Galen, professor in Educational Studies at UW Bothell

1 Consider taking a short course in digital storytelling

In addition to workshops she offers with UW colleagues, Van Galen periodically co-teaches three-day workshops at UW Bothell with the StoryCenter, a pioneer in digital storytelling, based in Berkeley, CA. These workshops are open to faculty and staff from all three campuses as well as community members. [Email Van Galen](#) for upcoming course information.

2 Don't sweat the technical details too much

Many of today's students are digitally savvy, with access to all kinds of multimedia tools. In one of Van Galen's recent classes, students used as many as eight different video-editing tools. "Some of my students used their cellphones to edit their videos. They know how to work with the basics of these tools, so you don't have to spend much valuable classroom time showing them how to work a video-editing program."

"Video editing software is increasingly more intuitive and easier to use. I only spend 20 minutes or so demonstrating a couple of different tools," says Van Galen, who occasionally helps students troubleshoot technical problems and provides links to online tutorials and help forums.

3 Images are important but pay attention to sound

"Students are often surprised how important sound is," Van Galen says. It evokes emotion and helps viewers understand subtle points. "Music creates ambiance; music supports the tenor of the story."

4 Risk letting go

"As an instructor, I cannot control every step of the process or the final product. I can't expect my students to have a final draft in the first two weeks. I always tell in-

structors that producing digital stories is non-linear, fluid and often ambiguous, nothing like an academic paper."

5 Teach students to attribute materials

Creating new digital content is an ideal opportunity to teach the importance of crediting the work of others, including the value and importance of attributing copyrighted material. "There's no such thing as a 'Google' image. It belongs to someone," she says. That also applies to music, even when it is available royalty-free. UW has its own [website explaining copyright](#) and how to properly cite copyrighted materials.

6 Students control who sees their stories

"You must deal with your students' stories with sensitivity," Van Galen says. While students are expected to share their work in class with fellow students, they decide whether anyone else gets to see the videos. Posting their own videos on the web is always optional.

7 Finally, storytelling is everything

Van Galen spends a lot of classroom time talking about the arc of a story and what makes a powerful narrative. First, she gets students comfortable with switching from an academic to a narrative voice; talking in the first person using "I" and "me" is acceptable. And she helps them think deeply about visual metaphors. "What can the visuals do for the understanding of the story?" Van Galen asks students. These discussions lead to talking about the little things that make up a whole story.

[Learn more about Van Galen's use of digital storytelling](#)