Details

Tips for Using Templates with Students with Eve Heaton - 307
In this episode, I chat with Educational Technology Coach Eve Heaton about using templates with students to save time and focus on teaching and learning. You'll also hear actionable tips for designing flexible, easy-to-adapt, and inclusive templates for all students. If you want to streamline your workflow and open the door to creativity in the classroom, this episode is for you!

Link to live show notes:

https://classtechtips.com/2025/02/18/using-templates-with-students-307/
*Using Templates With Students

Introduction

Hello there, and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech podcast. My name is Monica Burns, and I am so glad you're here to join me today. If you want to make the most of education technology, AKA EdTech, you are in the right place. My goal has always been to help make EdTech easier and give you ideas to try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year.

Every Tuesday on the Easy EdTech podcast, you'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, my work with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Get ready for solo episodes where I share some quick tips, stories, and interviews full of practical ideas and stories from new guests each month. If we mention something you'd like to check out, make sure to click the link. You'll find it in the episode description or the summary area where you're listening to this podcast, or you can find every episode and all of the resources we mention by going to classtechtips.com/podcast or by going to classtechtips.com and just clicking on the Easy EdTech Podcast button at the top of the page.

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Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: "Tips for Using Templates with Students with Eve Heaton." I saw Eve sharing on social media about some great use cases for templates – a topic I love to talk about. So I invited her to join me for the podcast today to share some strategies and ideas for educators. Let's jump into the conversation.

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast Eve. I am so excited to chat with you today about tips for using templates with students. So before we get into all of that, would love for you to share a bit with listeners about your role in education. What is your day-to-day look like?

Eve Heaton:

Okay. So I'm an educational technology coach with the Beaufort County School districts, and that's in South Carolina. And I work with a team of seven technology coaches, serving 33 schools with over 21,000 students. We work on a dispatch model, which means we go where their requests rather being assigned to specific schools. So the requests may be for one-to-one assistance, school-wide training, grade level support, co-planning, co-teaching, supporting our school-based techs working with our new teachers and just anything you can imagine. And it's kind of nice because you get to experience and assist outside of being assigned to one school or cluster.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And I bet just, you know, as you're talking there, I can imagine that model must be, you know, very different than going someplace where maybe someone's like hesitant to work with you or isn't sure that this is the right use of their time for the day, but instead is probably excited to see you because they have, you know, a problem they're working through or they're just enthusiastic right. About the topic they've asked you to come to. So that's, that's awesome and thanks for sharing that model. 'cause I don't think that it's as, as widespread, right. Particularly for coaching and support and just pushing in or, you know, helping someone, you know, problem solve, you know, throughout their day. So one thing that caught my attention with your work right, is this idea of making things a bit easier for educators, which aligns so much with, you know, my mission with the blog and the podcast. So when I reached out to you, you know, it was really under this umbrella of templates. And today we're talking about templates. Something I love when we schedule this podcast, I used a template of four, making sure we could get a date on the calendar, right. And a follow up template of an

email. So I'm big on templates. So what exactly is a template and why are templates such a valuable tool for educators and students?

Eve Heaton:

All right. Well, for templates, they're like a pre-designed format or structure that is a starting point for creating things like documents, like you said, presentations, projects, or other types of content. And it can include like placeholders for text, images and other elements, which allows users to fill in their own content within a consistent framework. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And for me, templates, well, all the educators that I work with and most educators who use templates, it's such a valuable time saving tool. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So instead of starting from scratch or building something from scratch you that just basically streamlines the planning and execution of a project where the focus is more off formatting and more on the teaching and the learning.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And you know, when I use templates, you know, I always think like there's still ways to personalize it. There's still ways to make it perfect for this one situation. It doesn't have to be like a completely canned response Right. Or something impersonal. But if I can save some time right, I can then have the energy Right. To personalize something as opposed. Absolutely. Opposed to just like doing a brain dump in an email or using, you know, a graphic organizer that's missing some pieces because I'm in a rush Right. As I'm prepping for, you know, working with the group. So I love that you, you emphasize that piece and there might be things that listeners use that fall into that template category that they wouldn't call it either, right? Like an email, you know, or something. So appreciate that. As we're, you know, as we're unpacking what it means to design templates, what are some key considerations when designing templates to make sure that they really are going to be easy to use for students?

Eve Heaton:

Oh, absolutely. When I'm designing a template, I usually think of the educational content. What do I want the students to put in this template? So that helps me to design it. So for example, if I need them to include a picture, I need to give them a space for a picture. If is the text going to be a paragraph or is it gonna be split up in boxes? So once I sort of have that in my head, I can start designing my template to match what I want the outcome to be.

Monica Burns:

I love leading with the outcome there, you know, especially if it's something that you are, you know, you're designing with one particular group in mind and maybe you're going to revisit that so, you know, with students, right? That's one thing, right. You might know the group and I'm sure with you bouncing around to lots of different places. Right. How do you think about designing templates when you might not know the group as well or, or maybe something other teachers might use?

Eve Heaton:

The first thing I always consider is making it editable or being able to modify it because something that might work in my head may not work for a teacher, but elements of it might work. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So I do run into this like frequently, like with like Teachers Pay Teachers, I often get templates off that, that I wish that I could modify just slightly for my group. And it's often difficult. So to me that's one of the main things. Make sure it's editable.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And I, I always think about like how my, maybe like my brain works a certain way, right? Like I think in tables as opposed to bullet points, right? Like, or I like things organized in one way or another. And so that might not resonate with everyone else, right. And having some different formats. Maybe they want lines to fill in as opposed to an empty box or empty space, or they wanna put in a sentence starter for students to differentiate that. So, you know, that's the kind of thing that I think is helpful for someone who might make something that's collaborative or for a team Right. That they're gonna share. So, you know, speaking of modifications, how do you modify templates for students with different learning needs or accommodations?

Eve Heaton:

Well, like you said sometimes it says easy as like putting in a sentence starter. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Or it could be to reduce the criteria or like enlarge the font. But the biggest thing that I always say when you're modifying a template is to keep the style the same, visually the same mm-hmm <affirmative>. So if you're going to put it out on a hallway or you're walking around in a classroom, it feels like everybody's on the same project. Mm-Hmm

Monica Burns:

<Affirmative>. That's such a great tip because you don't want someone to feel like their thing is different or just for them and maybe a way that doesn't help build their confidence right. Around what they're doing. So I love that idea that we're keeping things looking right, very visually at the same so that everyone knows that they're working together, right? Even if their supports or their scaffolds right in that template might be, you know, just a little bit different and, you know, that's something that might seem small on the surface, but could make a big difference for a student to feel included, you know, within, within a group. Now some educators might worry that templates limit creativity. I know creativity is something you and I think about a lot but how can templates actually support and enhance student creativity? Do you have any strategies for making sure that there's some flexibility within a structured template?

Eve Heaton:

Absolutely. the structure, usually they can change the font, they can change the color. They have free reign on the images they choose or their video elements or their sound elements. And I mean, I do like to think as templates as basically opening the door to creativity. Hmm. Versus, you know, stifling their creativity. Because sometimes if you have a ask a student to create something from scratch, they get overwhelmed and then they quit the process and we don't want that. So we basically want them to try and continue on their own. So basically those templates act as foundational knowledge for creating in the future.

Monica Burns:

I love that idea of opening the door to creativity because I don't know about you. Alright. But you probably have also been in a situation where you look at a blank page and you just like have that maybe not a full panic, but a where do I even start? Right? Absolutely. Or like that's gonna carve out, you know, how many minutes to just get over that hump to say, how do I want this organized? How do I want this to look? Well, if I can get a little bit of support with that, particularly, right. If we're bringing students into a space where we're leaning more into the content, like that's the part that's the most important for us, right? If we can give them some structure and make sure that they know that it's, you know, safe for them to change the font colors, <laugh> to change, you know, the font itself to maybe move an element from one side of the page to the other, right? Like sometimes we make the assumption that they're going to do that, but they also need that reminder that it's okay. Like this is here for you to make your own in whatever way. Right. That, that looks for your group. So do you have any favorite tools or platforms for creating and sharing templates with students?

Eve Heaton:

Yeah, there's actually quite a lot out there, but I have been leaning towards Adobe Express mm-hmm <affirmative>. Which is such a phenomenal tool primarily because it is free for all educators, so there's no cost. So that always gets two thumbs up for me mm-hmm <affirmative>. And it's, we are able to roster it through our Class Link or Clever or so all of our students and all of our teachers in our district have a single sign on for that platform. And it has every kind of creativity tool you could want. So graphics, videos, web pages, animations, it's very easy to use. It has a lot of educational templates so I don't have to start from scratch, which is wonderful. And they're searchable by grade. They're searchable by subject. And those templates are easy to push out into classrooms because they have a classroom feature where you literally could just push it out to the students and you get to see what they're working on at the same time.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And just, I'm a super fan of all things Adobe too, right. Done some work with their team and just love all, all of that. And I've been really impressed with the ease of their, you know, rem mixable templates. Just this opportunity to maybe find a template that's pre-made and then you can just send it off to a group or, you know, when I, I find myself probably a little bit more, maybe 70 30, a little bit more in this category and I'm gonna take that template, make a couple changes to it, and then Right. Take that next step Right. Of sending it out to a group. So yeah, I love the ease with that. Even, you know, book creators got a whole bunch of templates built in and just yesterday I was working with the group of educators in Alabama and we were looking at Padlet and some of their templates too.

Monica Burns:

So sometimes tools that we don't always think of as having templates might be a little sneaky, right. They might not lead with that, right. As the thing that they are are sharing is best about their tool or resource. But it might just be there, you know, if you poke around a little bit within a favorite tool, you might see some templates that are, are ready to run with and ready to use. So, you know, we talked about making our lives, making teachers, making educators lives a bit easier, right. With using templates, how can teachers save time by reusing and adapting templates across different lessons or even different school years? Do you have any advice for organizing templates to make sure they're easy to find in the next unit or the next season?

Eve Heaton:

Yeah, so for me, I, if I'm making a template from scratch, I always feel like that upfront work will save you a lot of time in the future. So I can reuse those templates year after year. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And a lot of the programs, so I know Adobe Express, I just spoke about offers you the ability to save your work into folders.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. Mm-hmm

Eve Heaton:

<Affirmative>. Which makes things so much easier to find. Some programs don't have that ability. So I've, in the past I've copied the link to the template Yeah. And put it in my lesson plan or my curriculum maps so they follow me year after year.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. That's such a great idea. Right. So first trying to lean into what the tool has. Some of them have folders or some of them have like really easy search terms. So as long as you name something <laugh>, well you can find it later. Right. Or maybe having your, you know, your it in your lesson plans. Right. Again, some sort of system you have to make it easy to search. You know, one thing that I've shared with groups that are kind of easier said than done when things are busy, like you almost need to have that like, hard time on the calendar or like this commitment that it's always going to be, you know, the first 10 minutes of a faculty meeting or team meeting every month is just to say, let's like dump all of our favorite stuff from this month right. In this document.

Monica Burns:

And maybe it's just for you, right? Maybe it's for your team, right. Coming together to say like, let's put, you know, some Taylor Swift and 10 minutes on the clock and let's just like put all, like, let someone choose different music every month, maybe, you know but then put all of our links into a document and make it really easy to find everything next October or next February or next April. So I love that idea of leaning into folders like you said Eve, right? Or having that, you know, connection to your favorite lesson plan. So, you know, if there's someone listening who's trying this out, maybe for the first time, like they've come across templates in a favorite tool and they don't know exactly what to do, or they love the idea of this for saving time, you know, what's one tip you'd give to a teacher who's new to using templates with students?

Eve Heaton:

I always say try it out first because that not only gives you an exemplar to show students, which is always a good thing. Hmm. And it allows you to sort of troubleshoot or sort of guess where the hiccups might come in when you roll this out to students. The second tip, I know you only said one, but my second tip, <laugh>

Monica Burns:

For it. Uhhuh <affirmative>

Eve Heaton:

If the program allows it, so I know I was talking about Adobe, but it allows you to duplicate the page. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So I give students page one, but I, on page two I have the same template. So if a student accidentally deletes something and they've gone too far ahead to undo, I could pop over to page two, copy the element that they've accidentally deleted and put it back in the first the page they're working on. And that is save a lot. Yeah.

Monica Burns:

That's such a great troubleshooting tip. I feel like I've done it where I've given like two pages, but one is the exemplar, right? Like, so they've got that right there, but I love having like two blank versions. So if they are moving things around, if they are changing a whole bunch of colors, <laugh>, and then things get like lost in the layering of content, they know exactly where to go. So that's such a great idea. And I think for someone who is trying this for the first time, like you were talking about, you know, and maybe they're building their own confidence, right? And rolling out a creative activity with a group that can definitely help with any potential, you know, classroom management issues too, of like the oh no, or I can't find this, or where is it? So that's fantastic. Well, where can people connect with you? Where can they learn more about your work and just follow along with the things that you're sharing?

Eve Heaton:

Yeah, I'm actually most social media channel. So my hashtag is, or my handle is @atechcoachlife. So that's where I can be reached TikTok Instagram X.

Monica Burns:

Perfect. Yeah, that's perfect. And so for anyone listening right now who's on the go you can do the mental bookmark to find Eve there and I'll put links out so that you can follow along and make sure that you are learning all sorts of new tips for, for making things a little bit easier this school year. Thank you so much for your time today, Eve.

Eve Heaton:

Thank you. <Silence>.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode...

Templates save educators time by providing a consistent structure.

Design templates with editable elements to make sure they are flexible for different classroom needs.

Templates act as a foundation for creativity by reducing overwhelm and encouraging students to explore content and design freely.

Many tools offer free, searchable, and remixable templates.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode including all of the ways to connect with Eve Heaton on classtechtips.com/podcast and finding today's episode #307!

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Outro

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- [Adobe Express for Education](#) (Free creation tools)
- [Book Creator](#) (Ebook creation tool)
- [Padlet](#) (Online discussion tool)
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