

Game-Changing Tools & Tips from SRL Educators

Sourced from educators from our [Tools Days](#) spirit week theme, Fall 2023.

APPS + PROGRAMS

- [Canva](#)
 - “One thing that you can do with Canva for broadcasting is graphics for newscast, or finding backgrounds for greenscreen (and its background removing tool kind of eliminates the need for greenscreen in editing, too)”
-*Jen Chaffman*
 - “I have used it for creating movie posters, editing collages” -*Cynthia Booker*
 - “I use it a ton for quick layouts, graphics, and intros/outros” -*Elaine Edwards*
 - NOTE: FREE Canva Pro Account for Educators:
<https://www.canva.com/education/>
- [YouMeScript](#)
 - “Great tool that we use for screenplay writing. It is really amazing because it is free, saves to students’ Google Drive, and most importantly, it formats the script for them. It tells them where the action, scene heading, dialogue etc. should go” -*Kev Blanco*
- [ZaCue](#)
 - “a free, user-friendly teleprompter website that works on any browser on any device. Simply copy and paste your text in and you’re good to go!” -*Kev Blanco*
- Adobe Express
 - “I have students make websites super easily that can serve as portfolios for student work.
 - “I love Premiere Pro for editing...Creative Cloud frustrates me (AND my students) a lot, but I’m not sure what the alternative to CC is.” -*Jen Chaffman*
- [Adobe Podcast Audio Ai app](#)
 - “to run VO through to make it sound clearer” -*Elaine Edwards*
- [Vocaroo.com](#) to record audio on a chromebook
 - “This site creates a link to the audio or students can download the audio to edit later” -*Magdalena Pantaleon*

EQUIPMENT + SUPPLIES

- [A light stick](#)
 - “Changed the way students set up little shots for their photography. They could easily travel around with them and get the lighting they wanted quickly.” -*Justin Horback*
- Rode Go mics
 - “When these came out a few years ago, they removed a lot of my audio issues as they are way too easy to use.” -*Michael Kaufman*
- [DJI's](#)
 - “total game changer especially for two anchors. Now if I can just get them to ‘care about the square’” -*Karin McKemy*
- [Mic Set](#)
- [Wireless mic system](#)
- The RodeCaster
 - “opened up my class to radio and podcasting. An area I was sorely lacking. Everything is always video/film/video-centric. But just wait until you put kids behind a microphone and when they put the headphones on for the first time. It’s hilarious and amazing and inspiring” -*Mike Conrad*
- “iPads, Canva, and [FilmicPro](#). Those three things completely changed the trajectory of my program at different times, in different ways. The iPads are so versatile and can be used for photo, video, music, podcasts, drawing, animation, screenwriting, and more. The accessibility and translation features were HUGE game changers! -*Tara Bordeaux*
- DJI OM gimbals
 - “For my intro students, DJI OM gimbals are a great, engaging storytelling tool and quick to learn. For my advanced students, our new anchor desk makes them feel so legit and I love witnessing that. A student designed the logo, my fiancé installed Dracasts in the ceiling, and people stop by regularly to check it out.” Ashley Porter
 - “gimbal stabilizers for smartphones + cell phone microphones have helped us tremendously for on-the-go reporting! We bought a couple of these last year and plan to purchase more. They have higher end versions if you have the money! DJI Osmo Mobile SE Intelligent Gimbal, 3-Axis Phone Gimbal, Portable and Foldable, Android and iPhone Gimbal with ShotGuides, Smartphone Gimbal with ActiveTrack 6.0, Vlogging Stabilizer <https://a.co/d/6uAOuh>” -*Morgan Bricker*
- [A Beng](#) that syncs with my Google Drive

- SD Cards > USB Portion Adapters
 - “I got 10 SD cards to USB portion adapters. Now my students upload their materials to the cloud without me being responsible to remember to upload 20 different projects on my prep. It's been a game changer” -*Rachel Storm*
- “Tripod, Tripod, Tripod! I cannot say it enough Tripod” -*Leah Aiwohi*

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE CLASSROOM

“I started this thing on Mondays at the start of each class: we “look for the positive” and ask three students to volunteer and tell us all 3 positive things, big or small, that happened over the weekend. I usually go first to break the ice.

It started off slow, but has picked up pace and participation, so much so that when I skipped it one time, students interrupted my lecture to ask if we were going to do it.

It's really helped with student connections in my first level classes -*Mike Bartoszek*

- [Picker Wheel](#)
 - Aka the “Wheel of Doom” instead of using popsicle sticks as equity sticks -*June Pangan*

CLASSROOM WORKFLOW

- [Trello](#), [Slack](#) + Canva:
 - “For our workflow, using Trello has been a game changer. For communication, Slack has been very useful. And for infographics and social media posts, Canva is amazing” -*Adriana Chavira*
- [Pear Deck](#)
 - “I actually modified one of the StoryMaker lesson presentations and made it a Pear Deck. I like using it for student engagement—even the quieter kids who don't usually volunteer to share were typing their ideas about questions that might have led to specific sound bites.” *Adison Godfrey*
- [Video Converter](#)
 - When students need to convert video from YouTube, this is one of the few they can use. Others are blocked” -*Cynthia Booker*

- [Padlet](#)
 - “Padlet is my bff! We use it for everything, storytelling, brainstorming, evergreen items, feedback, pitches, leads, you name it!” -Heather Jancoski

LEARNING RESOURCES

- “Instructional resource (besides all the SRL tools and materials): [The News Literacy Project](#) has excellent resources for teaching news literacy, including their Checkology platform, which I use as independent study in my J1 class.” -*Morgan Bricker*
- [Kahoot](#)
 - a game-based learning platform

2025 UPDATE (DRAFT)

“One more game changer has been Envato Elements. One stop for all titles transitions templates and royalty free music &SFX. Soooooo worth it!”-Michael Kaufman

Storyboard Stickies

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10237973716742003&set=p.10237973716742003&type=3> I have not purchased them yet but for next year I’m excited to cover the walls with visual planning!-Mike Conrad

I’d say multiple AI tools - ChatGPT, MagicSchool AI, Adobe Firefly, AI apps in Canva, Gemini, are a few.

But my favorite “new” tool - the DJI OSMO Pocket 3 Creator Combo. That combined with the DJI Mic 2, is such a game changer for portable storytelling! -Tara B.

Notebook LM is wild. It can turn a handout or any document into a podcast. It is an interesting way to introduce an topic or assignment. The downside is the podcast style speaks to adults. It doesn’t resonate as much with the kids. But it is a cool tool. Just depends on how you use it. I will link the podcast it created from a Film Challenge handout/assignment I gave my kids.-James Flanagan

(https://notebooklm.google.com/notebook/8acb7173-0ad2-44b5-9c22-ca26f7024ccb/audio?fbclid=IwY2xjawKaLOhleHRuA2FibQIxMABicmlkETFTZnp2bXV4bnRDUzdVZkxaAR5oDdfW7WYt5eIFZgkMKkK9hbxBktgWP8Ux1LreXXhkMvTtg8_bsqkTu6JMUA_aem_VATPDFgbQ9WbUJ22eeO9XA&original_referer=https:%2F%2FI.facebook.com%23&pli=1)

I've really leaned into Canva for a lot, especially making last minute news announcement and quick b-roll.

Also, love DJI osmo phone gimbals.- Elaine

The biggest cinematic game changer for my students was 50mm fixed lenses. Hallway shots now look beautiful with a very shallow depth of field where before they just looked like ugly hallways.-Michael Kaufman

Mimicking the others to say that Canva is really great. We also use Adobe Express but I feel like it's clunkier than Canva. The little phone mics have been great. They're cheap, kids love using them and they just plug in to the phone and go. And finally, we got two Canon mirrorless r50's this year and LOVE them so much. And we've mostly used the 50mm lens as well-Jen Chaffman

Hands down the best mics on the market for what we teach are the DJI mics. I always had issues with background noise with the Rode mics. DJI is top of the game at the moment.-AJ Chambers

Of course, I always use RØDE Microphones for their durability and StoryMaker which helped students move from "I have an idea" to "I have a story."-Sequoah

Padlet and Canva are both winning tools for me!-Anita

For me I have a wireless mic for iPhones that is awesome.-Mindy Pavone

We definitely rely on our DJI gimbals and mics so students can use their cell phones for accessible, mobile storytelling. Without those, we'd be stuck with very old equipment with footage that takes longer to edit/publish.-Morgan Bricker

Canva has definitely been my tool of the year.

Cleaning up and standardizing all of my production forms for students.-Mike Bartozek

Padlet is the best for organizing webs and working together at the same time on pitches, leads, and even setting up the teleprompter. It is seriously our right hand in the studio production. I even pay for it, yes, I need it that bad!-Heather Putnam

-Alicia Canington Babb

Y'all, narrowing this down felt like choosing a favorite child. But here we go... this year has been a game-changer thanks to a dream team of tools:

JEA Curriculum: My go-to for structure, skill-building, and keeping us aligned with real-world journalism.

MagicSchool AI + ChatGPT: Used responsibly (and creatively!), these tools helped me and my students brainstorm, outline, write tighter, and think critically about ethical media use.

Canva + ClearTouch: Watching students literally build yearbook pages together in real-time while collaborating on our big screen? Chef's kiss.

And the MVP? Our Frankenstein's monster of a tripod: it holds the iPad, mic, light, camera and laptop. It's basically a portable broadcast studio. We call it The Beast.

All of these tools brought structure to the chaos and made student-led storytelling not just possible, but powerful.

YoLo Pro has been an incredible tool that has expanded our production capabilities. We are liberated from the locked down studio. The ability to Live Stream, record and Live Switch multiple cameras with a device smaller than an iPad has been a real game-changer.-Phil Scardilli