

Tool Trial: Video Etherpad

In 2020, CSCCE led a series of drop-in sessions for CSCCE community members to trial a range of online tools to enhance online meetings and events - including working and creating together online. During each “tools trial”, members added notes to this doc to reflect their impressions and ideas about the tool and how it might be useful for community-building.

Disclaimer: Information expressed in this document reflects personal opinions that are not necessarily the views of any organization, including CSCCE. By trialing tools we are not implying endorsement of the tool. As with all online technologies, the tools that we trial may evolve, change, or cease to exist so information in this document may become outdated.

Contributors to this document

Name, organization, role

- Malika Ihle, University of Oxford, Reproducible Research Oxford coordinator
- Katie Pratt, CSCCE
- Emily Lescak, Code for Science and Society
- Camille Santistevan, CSCCE
- Shoaib Sufi, Software Sustainability Institute
- Marty Downs, Long Term Ecological Research Network
- Lou Woodley, CSCCE
- Tanya Brown, The Virtual Brain, Rotman Research Institute at Baycrest, Toronto Canada
- Esther Plomp, TU Delft Faculty of Applied Sciences, Data Steward

General information

- URL: <https://video.etherpad.com/>
- Cost: this is a Free (as in Freedom) and Open Source Software, either hosted for free or for a fee by a community, or hosted on your community server at your cost (i.e. pay someone to manage the server). For this current instance (<https://video.etherpad.com/>): 26LLC is providing the Hosting for free and for three years due to the pandemic.
- Participation limit: possibly depending on the server's capacity and the source code used (we could ask the community of developers here: <https://github.com/ether/etherpad-lite>)
- Resources:
- demo and development: <https://github.com/ether/etherpad-lite>
- list of already hosted etherpad-lite: <https://github.com/ether/etherpad-lite/wiki/Sites-that-run-Etherpad-Lite>

- other etherpad-lite with video embedded: <https://framapad.org/>, see e.g. <https://mensuel.framapad.org/p/cscce-trial-9j3k?lang=en> (for me, the video only worked if on Firefox)
- International availability: I would imagine that if this install on communities's servers, then it cannot be easily censored in specific countries?
- Who here has used this for a virtual event:
- Platform integration (where applicable):

What's this tool for?

E.g. XXX acts as a networking tool that allows up to 50 participants to move freely around a room and start conversations with others. It can be integrated with A and B to allow follow up conversations.

This acts as a collaborative writing tools, that allows simultaneous writing, chatting, video calling, keeping track of authors, commenting, editing. It could be used for community calls (up to what size?) and for resource writing with a group of co-authors.

How easy is this tool to learn to use?

E.g. It took about 5 mins to try out all the various buttons and figure out how to move the tiles around the screen. After that initial learning curve, everything felt very intuitive.

- to install on own server: probably need the help of a professional
- to use from an already hosted version: under 5 minutes to figure out the basics, around 10-15 min to figure out everything (probably less if already used to google doc)?
- quite a basic interfact; limited amount of functionality (not necessarily a bad thing)

Was there anything that wasn't obvious or didn't work so well?

E.g. I couldn't work out how to approach other attendees for about 5 mins and had to ask others for help. I don't think this will be very good for non-technical participants who may get frustrated and leave

- how to disactivate the camera (need to chose that setting)
- Wondering if there is a way to change permission on a user basis (e.g. allow specific individuals ability to edit, but restrict others)
- So weird to see yourself not as a mirror image! Yes! +1
- Needed a moment to figure out how to name yourself. And that there was chat

- You can lock up the chat box by clicking the rectangle
- Few formatting options...not a big deal for working collaboratively, but if you did need to make it look nice it would be hard I suppose
- Can't add images? I don't think? I tried copy/paste since there isn't an insert option and it didn't work.
- Several of us noticed the fans on our computers kicked on
- No option to screenshare
- Is it possible to record video?
- No emojis +1 :(

How might this tool be useful (for community-building)?

E.g. This would be great for an icebreaker activity involving 20 - 50 people - you could sort people into small groups and rotate them into different configurations very easily.

- collaborative writing/editing - easier to see who has contributed what - but it does also result in a technicolour rainbow of text :) (you can turn it off in settings if you want to just see a clean doc) ooooh! thanks.

Things we like

- software and data (content) not owned by for-profit company +1
- video embedded +1 - cool to be able to see video right alongside the doc rather than having video and notes in separate windows. Can imagine this will make facilitating especially easier and you can look up and see who is still working / finished / doing something else.
- awesome version controlling with a time slider and control on when versions are saved. +1
- Great for saving screen real estate. I don't need to have 2 windows open (Zoom and Internet browser)
- Can export as PDF, Word Doc etc. Could be useful for taking snapshots / final products
- Can make comments and suggested edits

Suggested improvements

E.g. I'm concerned about accessibility - the colour contrast isn't great between the boards and the backgrounds. A better colour scheme would help.

- grammar and sentence check
- document outline to navigate through sections +100
- 'suggesting' editing rights (that google docs has) to prevent accidental deletions

- No "Drive" folder functionality like Google i.e. might be hard to organize individual docs.
- Can't add images in the way you can in Google docs +1+1
- adjust panel sizes manually (e.g. if I would prefer less writing area and larger video, I'd like the ability to drag the panel sizes)+1 You can expand the videos a bit
- more functionality; ability to add charts, images (insert image from computer, insert table)
- Only able to hear half of the participants? Feels quite clunky to me :(
- Would be nice to be able to reorder the videos
- no ability to share screen
- revert color erasal - not clear that clicking the eye is a one-way event ie can't revert
- Ability to make tables, insert images/figures
- share link makes everyone editors

Are there other tools that solve the same or similar needs? How do they compare?

- google doc:
- maluses: proprietary, no video, no control of the version controlling, no line numbers without chrome addon
- bonuses: document outline, grammar check, integrated with google drive for storage and easy access
- neutral: chat is saved here when you return to document, it isn't for google docs
-

Additional resources

E.g. links to case studies or how to guides for this platform.

- Let's try some of the formatting stuff here:
- indent
- Heading

