

10 Student-Tested Chrome Extensions

Some students add more extensions than others, and every child has a different combination of extensions attached to their account to suit their individual learning needs. It takes a little while for students to become comfortable using their extensions, and we typically take some time to experiment and become familiar with the tools.

These are my students' Top 10 favorite and most-used extensions throughout the school year.

10 CHROME EXTENSIONS THAT STUDENTS WILL REALLY USE

Google Dictionary (free): Sometimes articles in content area classes can be challenging, especially when students are faced with unknown words. While they could open a new tab and run a search for these words, this extension offers a much easier alternative that doesn't disrupt a student's workflow. The student can double-click on any word in a text to see a small pop-up window with a definition, and they can hear the pronunciation of the word.

The student can also launch a complete Google search for the word from the pop-up—increasing their understanding by seeing the word in a variety of contexts

Dualless (free): Dualless is a productivity extension that's a perennial favorite of my students. It allows a user to split their screen so they can work in two tabs simultaneously. For example, if a student needs to watch a video review of a lesson, they can open and view it in one tab while taking notes in Google Docs at the same time.

Dualless is very easy to use, and students can set the relative sizes of the two sides—they aren't stuck with a 50-50 split. They have a choice of splitting the screen either horizontally or vertically.

Grammarly for Chrome (free, offers some premium options): My students use the free version of this popular grammar checker every year. When they're typing anywhere in Chrome, a small, green icon appears and Grammarly begins to check the grammar and spelling of their work. If there's an error, it is underlined in red, and the student can see the type of error they made and correct it.

Voiceln Voice Typing (free): A lot of my students are fans of voice typing, and this extension is our go-to support in the classroom. It works anywhere in Chrome—the student just places their cursor where they want to begin typing, activates the extension, and starts to talk. When they finish speaking, the extension drops the text at the cursor. Students can either dictate the punctuation or add it later. The extension works with over 120 languages.

Noisli (free): Many of my students enjoy listening to music when they're working, but for some it's a distraction. Noisli is perfect for those students. They can experiment with listening to ambient sounds like rain, a forest setting, or a café to see what helps them feel productive. Students can add multiple sounds to the same track, and they can set up specific combinations for different independent activities, like Writer's Workshop or taking an assessment.

Auto Highlight (free): Auto Highlight is a great tool for students who need some support with reading. When activated, the extension searches through the text and highlights one or two important sentences. The student can use the extension two additional times on a single webpage, but only one or two sentences will be added each time. This limitation guides students to think about how to use the tool wisely—they can't just highlight every sentence.

This tool is beneficial for longer, content-specific texts—not all of my students use it, but it has helped the ones who do improve their focus and comprehension.

AlphaText (free): An all-in-one accessibility extension, AlphaText provides a variety of options for students to customize their browser. They can adjust the background color of their screen, as well as the text color, font size, and font type, for optimal viewing. One of my students' favorite tools within this extension is the ability to

adjust the line spacing, switching from single to 1.5 or double line spacing, which can make an article easier to read.

Mercury Reader (free): Formerly known as Readability, Mercury Reader allows students to hide distracting features in online articles—it removes ads, comment sections, and any other content that is irrelevant to the article, while keeping useful features like photographs and other images. This tool also has accessibility features, including the ability to change text size and the font and to select a light or dark background.

Diigo (free, with premium options): There are a lot of digital sticky notes and highlighting tools out there, but my students really enjoy Diigo. Students are required to create an account in order to save their work. When a student selects a section of a text, they can highlight it, add a sticky note with comments, and search the web for additional information. All comments and highlights a student makes are collected and stored within their Diigo account, and if a student returns to a page they've annotated, the highlights and comments remain. It's a good way to collect information needed to complete a task, and students can share their comments and highlights with their classmates when they're working on a group project.

Visor (free): In transitioning from print to digital texts, many of my middle school students search for a virtual alternative to using a bookmark to track as they read. Visor gives them that ability. It allows the student to focus on one line of text at a time, while darkening the rest of the page. This tool assists students who struggle with line or word skipping and losing their place when reading.

The important factor when adding Chrome extensions to a student's account is to add only the ones they truly need. Adding too many can slow the browser down, and there's no point to adding a tool that the student won't use and doesn't need. I try to limit my students to five tools that they will find really support their learning in the classroom