Podcast Transcript

In the Classroom 25
A List of Tools for Instructional Technologists

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for taking the time to listen to my podcast. I appreciate that you've come and joined me today, and all the other weeks that I've been doing this. I know you could be doing other things, but the fact that you're hanging out with me, I really appreciate it. This week, I'm going to talk about some of the tools that I use to be more productive as an instructional technologist. I have built up a collection of tools, and I'm going to share those with you. I use those tools to do everything from my writing, to do instructional design development. These are my go-to Tools. These are tools that I use on a very frequent basis, and I just want to tell you a little bit about them.

But one thing I need to tell you is, I have put together a resource page that I'm going to share in the show notes. Some of those resources, I am an affiliate partner. I do this because I love the tool. I love what the company stands for and how it has helped me, so I want to share them. But full disclosure, if you happen to buy that tool, which you should do your full research before you do that, if you happen to buy the tool through my link, I will get some compensation back for that. Because basically, I'm advertising for them, but that aside, these tools have helped me do my job a lot better, so I just want to share them with you.

Let's get started. First of all, one of the things I do is, I do this idea of working out loud. I do this through blogs, and through web hosting and websites. Through school, where I work at school, the website is hosted through the school. However, for what I do on my personal time or what I do as part of my side hustle, I have to host my websites. The hosting platform that I use is called Bluehost. Bluehost allows me to put up my websites, and I use a tool called WordPress in order to do that, but also with Bluehost that I have been getting great support. It also has a database where I could do some database development, and do some more dynamic things.

I use the Bluehost, the web hosting to support Moodle, which is an open source learning management system. I put that on there, but primarily, I put WordPress. WordPress is my next tool. WordPress, that allows me to host websites that are professional looking, but most importantly, they're dynamic. The fact that I can put up web pages or blogs, and share these things out loud. These thoughts that I have, these ideas, any tools, any recommendations, I put on to WordPress. Now WordPress, you can extend it by adding plugins, and with those plugins, gives you additional capabilities.

WordPress comes in two basic flavors. One is wordpress.com, which allows you to go through the company and host through the company, but it's a little more restrictive. That's why I've moved to the wordpress.org, which means I load WordPress onto my web servers and I have a lot more control. But if you're just getting started out on blogging, I would definitely recommend wordpress.com. It's a great way to get started. It's one of the most popular platforms out there for creating websites and hosting.

Moving on, so video. Video is an important piece in what I do. Video allows me to show others different ways of doing things. Sometimes you just can't write it out clear enough, and by putting a video in, people can see it right away and just get the idea. When I'm creating typical standalone instructional videos, Camtasia is the tool of choice that I use for creating video. It allows me to bring in a variety of different assets. I can do voiceovers, I can do it in connection with PowerPoints, if I'm narrating a PowerPoint deck.

A lot of power in Camtasia, I can bring in other video. I can use B-roll as part of my video. Then I can output it, and output it in different formats so that I could use it on Facebook, or YouTube, or Twitter, Instagram, what have you. That's my go-to tool for creating videos. I have another tool that I use when I do live video, and it's called Wirecast. What I found out is that on Facebook Live and YouTube Live, it's really hard to share your desktop and do screencast, but with Wirecast, it allows me to do that.

It allows me to do a lot of different things, I could do picture-in-picture. I can bring in other people in multiple cameras. Really powerful tool. That's why I like Wirecast. As far as the hardware goes, I have a Logitech 920, which is my webcam. With this webcam, it allows me to do everything I need to do. I could certainly go more high-end, but a Logitech 920 has been the workhorse webcam for my **[unintelligible 00:05:18]** deeds. We have been handing those out to our faculty at the community college I work at, to do things like video conferencing, and also to create their own videos, so that's one of my tools of choice.

I use also an iPad to capture video and sometimes I also use it to do live. If I'm at a conference, I will usually, at the end of the day, do a live recap session. With this live recap session, I usually capture with an iPad, and I do that with another tool called iOgrapher. iOgrapher is basically a media case that you can pop in your iPad, but also mount microphones, and lights, and a variety of other things and put it onto a tripod, so that way it's stable. I can plug in my lapel mic, and then I can just give a presentation. That has worked out really well. Those are some tools that I use, so the iPad and the iOgrapher.

One quick down and dirty tool that I use for capturing videos is Vidyard's Govideo. This is a Chrome browser extension that you just click on the button and you can do a quick screen cast, or you can just capture your webcam. I use it to basically help people in a time of need. The video, I can plug it right into an email, which is really nice and send that email out. It's just a quick down and dirty video. I have the capability of exporting it and then uploading it to YouTube and things like that, but I don't normally do that. But just reaching out, saying hello to people with a video, I've gotten a lot of positive responses with that.

If I'm hosting a video, YouTube's the place where I host it. I have the capability of hosting it as public, or I have also the capability of doing it as unlisted. In most cases, I do it as public. I let people see what I'm doing and I share. I have no problem with that. Then I can just use the videos, other places. As I mentioned, using web Wirecast, that I also do YouTube live videos. Just a great way of sharing things, that I can basically broadcast, do a webinar and I usually do it on YouTube Live.

For my scanning needs. I have two tools. One is called ScanSnap. This is just a power horse-type scanner that I can pop in 60 pages and it will scan it front and back in less than a minute. I used this when I was moving from Wyoming to New York. Basically, I've scanned about

five recycling containers full of documents, and it just lightened the load greatly, as I was making my move to New York. I use it all the time. I digitize all my documents, I just pop them into that scanner, and away they go.

This other tool is a new tool that I've picked up recently. It's called a Scanmarker. Basically, it's like a highlighter, that I can go into a book, and I can highlight the text and it will capture it to whatever word processor that I'm using, and capture that text nice and neatly. I use it primarily, after I read a book, to capture the notes that I want to keep, rather than typing them in, I use this tool Scanmarker. I'm very happy with it, how it's performed so far, but I'm just getting started with it.

For a computer, I have a Chromebook. Chromebook less than $300. It connects to the internet and most of my content is in the cloud, and so it only made sense that I went with a Chromebook. It's virtually indestructible, virtually. The nice thing is, if someone happens to steal it, I don't lose a lot of money in it. All I have to do is buy another Chromebook, login and I'm ready to go. This is my workhorse when I'm on the go, and I get in there. Because I use, like I said, everything in the cloud, I can work anywhere.

Audio. Right now I'm creating a podcast, so my tool of choice is Audacity. Audacity is a free open source audio tool, basically, so it has a lot of power. There's a lot of things that I can do with it, but it's really, really simple to use. Once you get the basics down, then I'm just pounded out to audio. To do this, I have, right in front of me, my snowball microphone. It's not white, you would think it would be white, but it's black. I have a black snowball microphone. And in the mail this weekend, I received basically a mount and a pop filter.

I put this right now right in front of my face. So far, I'm extremely pleased with what I'm getting out of this right away, and I've been really happy with it. I've got a blue mom and a pop filter, and my snowball microphone. For my podcast, I am hosting them on a podcasting service called Libsyn. With Libsyn, basically I upload my site, they stream it. It's like YouTube for podcasting. That you can put this out there, you can stream these and that way, it's not taking up bandwidth on my webserver. That the webserver is great for doing what it does, but it's not designed to stream content.

Going out and using a service like Libsyn is great. With Libsyn, I can link out to iTunes, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Play all these different sites that are pushing out podcasts and it's working quite well. Plus, I can go back and see the metrics of it. Right now I'm about to knock on the door of 400 downloads. I'm pretty excited I'm probably going to shout for joy when I hit my thousand. Which it looks like it's coming pretty quick.

Moving on to graphic design. I basically cannot draw a straight line with a ruler, and so I need tools that can help me look good in the public. One of the tools that really helps me is called Canva. Canva allows me to create professional looking images without having to be a graphic designer. Basically, graphic designers have gone out and created these templates that I can just pop things in and so far, it's serving me quite well. With this you can create images, they have templates for all your social media needs. You can also build posters, you can also put a custom sizes in.

Creating those posters that you would typically see at a conference, you could very well do that in Canva and create something really amazing. It's important that we get this imagery right. If we look back to episodes four and five, I talked about multimedia literacy and video literacy that we underutilize the power of imagery in our classrooms. Canva's a great tool to help you do that.

In order to get the right images for that I use two tools. One is called Pixels, and the other one is called Unsplash. Basically, there's imagery that is under a Creative Commons license or free, they make it available for free. So far it's been very good to me as far as finding the right images to use in the imagery slide decks and other things to just make it more visually engaging and make it more memorable. Those are two tools, Pixels and Unsplash. There's many others out there, but those are my go to ones.

As far as storage goes, two tools that I use. One is Dropbox. I had started using Dropbox a really long time ago, and I basically uploaded my files. Unfortunately, the Community college I'm at doesn't allow me to use Dropbox. The other tool that I use, and I've been using it more and more, and it's becoming my go-to tool is Google Drive. With Google Drive I can upload all kinds of different files. One of the really powerful things about Google Drive is the fact that you can convert them into a Google document. That becomes very collaborative, and I'll talk about that in a second. Those are my two tools for that.

As far as productivity goes, my project management tool of choice is Asana. Asana, I can have multiple team mates in Asana. We craft out projects with tasks and subtasks, and I can assign those tasks to different individuals. I can also put due dates in, and then it's just a matter of checking things off. Also, it's a place where I go put ideas, so collecting ideas for blog posts and podcasts episodes, and videos I want to create. I have lists in Asana that I can keep track of those things. As well as our massive want to do one day project list. That is all listed in there.

As I mentioned before, Google is one of my workhorses and all the Google apps that are out there, I rely on them daily. I'm constantly in Google; I'm constantly creating new documents, spreadsheets, everything like that. That's where I'm also putting new slide decks, because they're open in nature. It makes it easy to share, but also I can collaborate with others. When I talk about collaborate, I mean collaborate in real time that you can see them typing as you are typing in the same document. That is really important to me.

I have a little tool on my desktop for just keeping me on task. It's called Marinara. It is a Chrome extension, and it's based on the Pomodoro method. If you're not familiar with the Pomodoro method, this is a task focus tool. You start the timer, you basically have 25 minutes that you're focused on that task and you're supposed to remove all other distractions. When the timer stops, you have five minutes to go rest and recoup before you jump into another 25 minutes session.

Now, I have changed mine to 42 minutes based on some advice, I don't even know where I got it, but also with my five minute breaks. Then after a while, I get a longer break, 15 minutes. But one of the things I do is I challenge myself to see how many Pomodoros that I can do in a day. It keeps me on task.

Another great tool is IFTT, and this is my automation tool. When I found out a long time ago, if you do something like three or four times, it's time to start automating it. An IFTT allows me to automate these different tasks. For example, if I want to track on Twitter, the proceeds of a conference, I can follow a hashtag on Twitter, but if I want to capture them to a spreadsheet immediately that becomes too arduous. It's not a task I'm going to follow through. It's not a task that is easy to do.

IFTT allows me to connect a spreadsheet to Twitter, and I can search for that hashtag, and it will automatically collect all these. It's great for research. We use it for our spreadsheets that we have forums where we're collecting information on request. That somebody wants to merge a course or copy a course, something, that they fill out our form. Once a new record gets added to that Google form to that spreadsheet, IFTT will then send it to another tool that we use called Slack, and let us know that we have something to do. Keeps us on task that way we don't have to go check out multiple spreadsheets, all of it comes to one place and we can go start looking there.

Another powerful tool that helps me out a lot is called Phrase Express. It's basically a text expander, and with this text expander you can create a little short code. It's like autocorrect and then it'll kick out all this tech. I use it for email templates, I use it for my signature blocks. Anything that I find I'm repeating myself, then I will go into Phrase Express, add all that information in there and put a little code that I type the code, and that information will pop out. It saves just amazing amount of time and naturally, like if you're using it for emails, you'll get a template with this email, care email response, but you can go back in and update it with other information. That text expander is really important to me.

Google Play. Very simply, I don't get a lot of work done if I don't have some music playing in the background. That's why I have Google Play. Notepad++ is a text editor, that Word processors will go ahead and add all this extra code into them. With Notepad++, you can strip out all that code, you can clean things up. Also, if you're doing any web work, sometimes you need to look at the code to get it right because other systems add all this bloat. Those are my tools for cleaning up that type of information.

For analytics, naturally, if you're doing any work with the web, it's great to be tapped into Google Analytics. It lets you know if you're being successful in anything. If you're not doing that, I'd certainly recommend that. Google Data Studio. This is one of the new tools that I came across. It basically makes your data look good. You can plug in a spreadsheet, connect to a spreadsheet and build out these reports that will aggregate, synthesize and present your data in just a better way. Google Data Studio is really a power tool.

My writing tools. I have been using a program called Scrivener, and this is now becoming very rapidly my go-to tool for any major writing that I do. It started when I wrote a book, I used Scrivener to help build out the book and organize my thoughts. Now I've been using it to write these podcast episodes and collecting my ideas for podcasts. I have started to use it to write newsletters, and I

keep finding more and more reasons to use Scrivener. One of the real powerful pieces to it is the fact that you can put independent ideas and then just move those ideas around. From that point in time, then you can kick it out into formats that you can just clean things up.

Grammarly. Grammarly is a tool that I don't know how I got this far without it. Apparently, I haven't been doing that well because I've been going back to my blog post that I wrote back in 2011 and I realized that there was a lot of grammatical errors and spelling errors that I thought I caught, but apparently I didn't, and Grammarly will help you sort that all out. I just started paying for Grammarly, so I found out that it also has a running Thesaurus in it. I just double click on a word and it gives me options, and this is almost magical as I was writing the other day on how that all works.

Another writing tool is called the Hemingway Editor. Basically, you drop your text into the Hemingway Editor and it will help you simplify your writing. Because I've been writing academically, my writing is actually very complex in some cases, to the point where it's not helping with understanding. The Hemingway app, it'll help you look for passive phrasing, it'll help you look for adverbs that you could probably get rid of. It'll let you know if you have sentences that are just too complex and you may want to break them down. That's a really powerful tool.

Zotero. Zotero is my bibliographical citation tool. Everything that I'm reading on a professional basis, I plug into Zotero and with Zotero, I collect all that citation information. In addition, I can start adding notes, and so things that I think that are important in an article or a book, I can add to Zotero. That's where that scan marker comes into play. I can scan things and I can pop them into Zotero. In addition, I can add tags and this is where it really becomes powerful. With those tags, I can see associations between other notes.

I have a huge library and with that library, it can break down into collections. If I'm writing an article on something, I can build a collection around that article. And typically, I'll look at a tag see what articles are associated with that tag and I may add them to a collection. They always stay in the main library but I can find these great associations. My collection tools, Diigo happens to be my number one collection tool. As I'm out screen through the web and finding all these wonderful articles, I don't want to lose these articles, I don't want-- if I'm doing this research, I know how easy it is, I can jump from article to article and suddenly, "There was an article three, articles back" and I have no idea what the name is anymore.

Well, with Diigo, it's a tool that is on your Chrome browser and you click on it, and you can tag it, use some taxonomy that you've created to identify what that article is about and it will save it away to Diigo. I have probably close to 20,000 links in there. The nice thing about Diigo is anywhere in the world I go, I log into Diigo and there is all my links. I have these references that if somebody is asking me something about--

Evernote, which is the next tool I'll talk about, I can click on Evernote and send them one tag and it will list all the tags or all the articles that I thought were important at the time related to that topic. A really great tool, especially for instructional technology because you constantly see great ideas and you just collect these ideas. Evernote is my digital brain. I said I did a lot of scanning so all these important documents, I scanned actually to Evernote, and it could be anything from course evaluations to the combination to a padlock that I would have in Evernote.

I've used it to keep track of parking spots, especially when I'm out for a while like, "Where the heck did I park?" To clothing sizes, I don't remember what clothing sizes I have, so I put

it into Evernote and I pull it up. It could be something what kind of spark plug goes into my lawnmower and I have that information saved in Evernote. It also has notes that I've taken at conferences, it has every bit of school work that I've done while in college, and that's all in Evernote.

Bitly, Bitly is just simply a tool that will shorten the URL. When you happen to be working with Google, Google hands out these URLs that are about 80 characters long and with Bitly, you can shorten them and make them just is a little more understandable. My communication tools, my number one communication tool is Zoom. With zoom, I can have one-on-one meetings, I can connect with multiple people and part of that is I could share my screen.

So if I wanted to show a PowerPoint presentation, I can certainly do that. It also has a whiteboard that I can tap into and it has a chat feature for the members in the presentation so they can share ideas or ask questions without necessarily coming into the conference itself. A very powerful tool, we're using it at our community college more and more, and faculty are finding that this is a great way to have meetings.

Skype is my other communication tool. With Skype, I connect with all my contacts and chat with them. It's basically, I can chat with them on video, on phone or even just through text messaging. I use this extensively when I was in the Civil Air Patrol and that we would have meetings, and the primary tool that we use was Slack-- I mean Skype, sorry about that.

Slack. Slack is our team communication tool. With Slack, we just keep people abreast of what's going on. The nice thing about Slack is you have these channels, so you can talk around a specific topic. And when somebody new comes into the conversation, they have all the back messages that are part of that channel. Unlike email that, if you're communicating with three people by email and you've sent email messages back and forth, and suddenly you add a fourth, they have no idea the conversation previously. Slack can help with that. It basically simplifies some things that you can send messages in Slack, you don't have to put together this elaborate email to do it, it goes very quickly.

My learning tools, LinkedIn Learning, which was lynda.com. That's one of my learning tools. Basically, it's these courses I can take that helped me get up to speed on a specific piece of software and do it very rapidly. The videos are usually only a couple minutes long and are very clear and straightforward, and I can just consume these-- I've taken, I don't know how many different courses on LinkedIn Learning, but they've always helped me advance my knowledge.

PocketCasts is my podcast listening tool. I use PocketCasts and I have, I don't know about 20 different podcasts that I'm listening to and it will automatically pull down each episode and then I can go ahead and listen to it. It's just a great way that I consume podcasts. Feedly is a tool where-- if I'm following a lot of different people on blogs and I want to make sure that I stay abreast of what they're sharing, I could go individually to each of those different blogs but they may or may not have released content. If they didn't release it, then that's a waste of my time.

With Feedly, instead, it brings all those different blogs into one place, and so I can very rapidly look through the different articles, see what I like and want to read, and I can read

those articles, and I can group them around different clusters and topics. I'm interested in gamification, for example, so all the folks that are talking about that, I can pull those together. For instructional design, that's another one. Social media, marketing, that's another one so Feedly is my choice for that.

Finally, the last tool that I want to share is TweetDeck. Tweet Deck is where I manage my multiple Twitter accounts and I can use it to send out information to other accounts, but basically, it's focused on Twitter. The nice thing about it is I can also set up these columns where information will come based on search criteria. I can set up a search query pulling information, and then from there, I shared on out and so a really powerful tool. It helps me organize that whole Twitter thing.

Well, that's my collection of tools and apps. Those are my go-to tools and hopefully, you found something new that you can potentially use in what you're doing. These are the things that I keep my life running, whether it's at home, work or play. What kind of tools are you using? I'd love to hear, go ahead and add it in the comments. I'd certainly love to hear about those things. Before I let you go, let me tell you about my book.