



# Digital Excellence Impact Case Studies

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Adobe Spark: An Opportunity for  
Assessment

*by Dr Mark Butler*

Planning  
Your  
Module



Introducing  
Your Module  
to Students



Structuring  
Your  
Content



Design,  
Collaboration  
and  
Construction  
of Knowledge



Formative:  
Putting Your  
Learning into  
Application



Designing Your  
Summative  
Assessment



Concluding  
Your  
Module





### Dr Mark Butler

Senior Lecture and  
MSc Course Leader for  
Crime Intelligence and  
Data Analytics.  
m.butler@tees.ac.uk

## A Little Bit About Assessments

Anyone involved in teaching knows that assessments can be painful and even spoil a learning experience. That said, I'm sure we would agree with Rolim and Isaias (2019) that it is "an integral part of the learning process". The skill (and its not an easy one), is to select the appropriate tool, and if it works... has the potential to offer creativity and flexibility! They sum it up when they write "for technology to result in an improvement of assessment, strategies must be implemented in teaching to capture student interest, making studies more interesting and classes more interactive". Again easier said than done; they comment that teachers need to "stay current because technology innovates at a high rate." These are honest accounts recognising that both tutors and students need to continuously update their skill sets in creative assessment tools.

## Technical Debt and Failure

I propose there are potentially two reasons why these are challenges and they are arguably linked! (I'm sure there are more). The first kind is technical debt; a trade off in our learning by doing something or making decisions because the decisions are easier to make or because we are more familiar with the approach. This is in comparison to investing in knowledge and skill that might take longer to acquire than the task does to complete but the new knowledge acquired is likely to make future repeated processes better in many different ways. These are not trivial matters to think about, Jones et al. (2021) makes us acutely aware of my second point that focussing on wellbeing must go beyond the office of 'Student Services'.

Jones et al. appreciate that assessments must be challenging, Quality Assurance in all its guises demand it (Helen King (2019), pp 9-21 provides a superb historical account on this point). Jones et al. are firm in that universities could work harder to help students develop the "skills needed to meet assessment challenges". To assist in reducing "high stakes...heightened consciousness and anxiety of failure". Their example points to an observation of theirs that there is largely no complaint by students in needing to sit an exam but when asked to do a podcast, well... many of you can imagine!

## Adobe as a tool for digital story telling

Our partnership with Adobe offers some interesting solutions, for example Adobe Spark is a simple to build webpage that can have new users creating beautiful web content in less than 10 minutes. The outputs have a professional edge allowing authors to communicate a diverse range of narratives from stories, reports, blogs, branding and more. I think the use of templates gives Spark its real power, the array of images to grab from the inbuilt repository, help present photographs to accompany text. Clever use of icons aids in the selection of what that text might be used for or how you want it to look. The layout can be split, to break up the page into a series of panes, these can then glide, offering a smooth transition from one topic to the next. My initial findings when teaching Adobe Spark to my students was, that users will not have to hunt for the tools they want, just select what is presented and really spend your time focusing on the message you want to say; the presentation to a large degree will sort itself out.

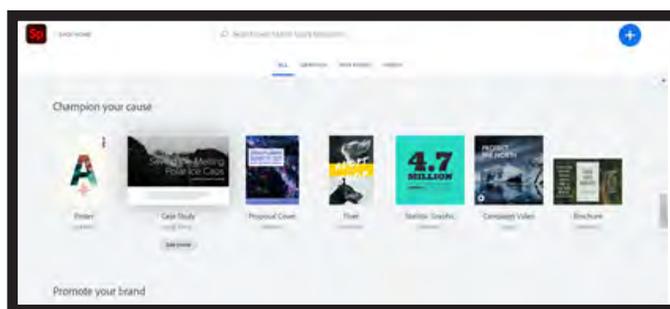


Fig. 1 Adobe Spark Template selection



Fig. 2 Adobe Spark layout and text options

I teach a module to level 3 students called Big Data, it has 15 different pathways on it. It is not an out of the box module by any means and much thought and reflection needs to be done to offer engagement to all those students. Each year I tell students for their assessment they need to find some open source data and create a data story or report using the tools and knowledge they have learnt. I provide lots of potential data links, everything from sporting injuries to crime analysis. I show a range of different apps that can be used to create a story but still, the vast majority of submissions are those with a .docx or .pptx extension. Now some of the PowerPoints are fresh looking, so I shouldn't complain but as a marker I find myself more engaged with those submissions that have been created with an app, Google Sites or MS Sway. This year I offered the opportunity for students to complete their data story via Adobe Spark. Austen, Pickering, and Judge, (2021) provide an excellent example of using it in their own case study. My students showed me work far superior to what I expected. One student even grafted in other applications like Tableau a data analysis tool, allowing the reader to jump off the main page, explore data before returning back to the story. The process felt more connected than many applications I have used. My advice would be to give it a go, in less than 10 minutes you will be making content that you could show others with confidence.

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Fig 3. Student example: typical slide layout



Fig 4. Student example, data story

## References

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