


## iPod: Friend or Foe of the Classroom?

iPods are showing up in classrooms, but not in the way one would think. This past fall, Duke University gave all of its freshman iPods in order to foster creative thinking regarding the uses of technology in education (Ronald 46). Drexel University is going to follow suit this coming fall by giving iPods to incoming freshman enrolled in the School of Education (Read). What could possibly come of students using an iPod in the classroom? In this paper, I will examine this trend more closely.

### Current Use

The iPod is the hottest thing going in music players. Sales of the iPod made up almost half of all MP3 music players in 2004 (Sharpe). They are small, portable, and their capacity to hold music is unrivaled. They are used mostly to play music, but their ability to play music goes well beyond dropping a CD in a player and pressing the play button. iPods allow their users to download MP3 music files from the Internet or upload their own CDs to the hard drive of the iPod and look for a song by artist, genre, and album or just alphabetically. Indecisive users can enable the shuffle feature and allow the iPod itself to “choose” what song to play and in what order. The additional capabilities are astounding; current models include calendars, clocks, to-do lists, and recording functions.




## History

The iPod was not a new concept when Apple Computers originally released it. Previous companies had released hard drive-based music players, but Apple introduced theirs to include their usual Apple charm and style. Theirs was smaller, easier to use, and more eye-appealing. Like all things Apple, every aspect of the design of the iPod was to make the user experience a better one (MLAazine). The Apple touch has paid off. Not only are iPods the most popular MP3 music players, but they are now teaming with college administrations to get the iPods on campus and in the classroom.

## Advantages

As of yet, there is no official information about the benefits on iPods in the classroom; however, introducing the technology and watching how students and professors use it can only remedy this. There *are* speculative advantages that come with the presentation of iPods to students. Auditory learners would reap numerous benefits by using the iPod: replays of class lectures, additional language lessons for language classes, music distributed by teachers, and e-books would enhance scheduled class lectures and notes taken during those lectures (Roach 46). E-texts would allow students to listen to the textbook as opposed to reading the text or listen while they read along in the book. Students may prefer to download orientation and campus information so they could listen to it as opposed to looking it up in a college catalog.

However, the benefits are not just limited to auditory learners. Students who miss class can download the missed lecture and listen to it on their own time. Journalism students can use them to record interviews as opposed to taking notes. Professors can record and upload lectures for students to use as pre-test study aids. Students can record study-group sessions. Time that might otherwise be wasted, such as the time riding back and forth to campus on the bus, could be




productive; students can listen to class lectures, music, and campus information. Drexel requires that education majors spend one semester at an off-campus job. These students will be required to record and upload sessions that will be available for download to communicate with the administrators and peers from whom they are separated. And vice versa: these same students will be able to download campus updates and memos from their administrators and peers, which will help them feel less separated (Read).

While discussing the advantages of the use of iPods in the classroom, let us not forget its original intent: the playing of music. As presented at the 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, research exists that states listening to music can enhance spatial reasoning performance. Spatial intelligence is “the ability to perceive the visual world accurately, to form mental images of physical objects, and to recognize variations of objects” and researchers believe that such abilities are necessary for higher brain function (Educational CyberPlayground). iPods, when used for their original purpose, can enhance students’ success in the classroom by increasing their spatial intelligence.

#### Disadvantages

iPods offer many advantages to anyone who uses them, but whether or not iPods deserve an official place in the classroom is up for debate. Is Apple just an über-marketing machine? By giving all students iPods and getting them hooked on Macs—the computer most closely associated with the use of iPods—Apple could be creating generations of Mac-loyal computer users. What *about* the iPod’s original intent as a music player? Students could very easily delete their orientation information and class lectures and load them up with what some would consider controversial artists such as Eminem or 50 Cent. How beneficial is that to their learning?



When asked, some professors—and even students—are able to quickly list other disadvantages to the use of iPods in classrooms. Absences in classes may increase if students know they can just download any lectures they miss. Digital-copyright issues are also brought to the forefront of the discussion. Students most likely end up with illegally acquired music on their iPods; professors themselves worry if they are in the right in giving out copies of music for classes (Read). And the convenience the iPod offers may be *too* convenient; as one professor at Duke puts it, "...there's a virtue in being inconvenienced, in having to go to the library and dig through things, and I don't want to lose that" (Read).

Apple Computers has made itself out to be the darling of education since working with schools to get iPods in the hands of students. However, schools must be willing, and financially able, to purchase and endorse the use of the iPods. That having been said, iPods are a relatively inexpensive way to introduce high-level technology without buying laptops for every student or requiring that students purchase one themselves (Read).

#### Recommendations for Use in the Classroom

Although its disadvantages are numerous, its advantages are equally as abundant. Students, teachers, and administrators can all benefit. As previously mentioned, students can use them to listen to school-related information such as campus updates, orientation information, and campus radio programs. If a class is missed, lectures can be downloaded and listened to outside of class. E-books and -texts can accompany class lectures and notes. iPods can be used to record information, as well, allowing students to record and share interviews, study-group sessions, and off-campus gatherings. Teachers can use them by providing class lectures to assist in pre-test study sessions or to let students who missed class a chance to catch up on missed material. Administrators can use them by providing information so students can be kept up-to-date on

campus goings-on. They can also use them to communicate with students that may be off-campus for various reasons.

These iPod programs are targeted, right now, at higher education institutions, but they could be incorporated into elementary classrooms. If teachers record themselves reading books—both basals and trade books—students could listen to the recording as they read along in the text. This would be beneficial to all students, but especially struggling readers who are working on their fluency. Music teachers could set them up with music that students are studying in class; students could check them out to take them home to study the music. Spanish classes are prevalent in Florida grade schools; students could take iPods home, preloaded with Spanish practice sessions, to work on their language skills. ESOL students could use them, preloaded with English practice sessions, to assist them in practicing their English skills. With the number of functions they have available, the uses of the iPod are only limited by teachers' imaginations.

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