What makes a good flipchart?

Activstudio offers huge creative potential, making it tempting to think that a good flipchart is one with lots of bells and whistles, with fantastic photos and fabulous features. It's easy to heap lots of images, sounds, videos and impressive techniques into a flipchart, thinking that the result will automatically work in the classroom. No - or at least not necessarily. Good teaching and effective learning must come first when creating a good flipchart. Read on for some ideas on what makes a good flipchart.

Adapted by Simon Green, from an original idea and text by Anne Gould and Geoff Gould of the United Church Schools Trust.

If an apparently amazing flipchart has not helped the students to learn an intended topic, then it is not a good flipchart. Similarly, limited use of colors and a few simple techniques can lead to a fantastic flipchart if it helps students to increase their knowledge.

An effective flipchart will always have learning as its focus. It will be of a length appropriate to its purpose, which could mean that it has one or 50 pages. flipcharts will usually, also, contain a number of elements, such as a background, images and text. Some form of interactivity will also be included, to make good use of interactive whiteboard technology.

Don't forget that a good flipchart can be used many times, by many people. It is worth preparing well.

Here are some questions to ask when creating flipcharts:

Is the purpose of the flipchart clear?
The flipchart will be more useful if its purpose is clear. Are there learning objectives? How are these displayed?

Is information balanced with interactivity?
A good flipchart makes the most of the opportunity to get students involved in the lesson. It doesn't, however, lose its focus on what the student is learning.

Does the page design work?
Remember that what looks good on a computer screen may not be effective on an interactive whiteboard. Is there too much or too little color? Is the page too busy or too boring? Does the design get in the way of the topic being taught?

It's easy to pile many impressive images onto a page when perhaps one of those impressive images, on its own, would have greater effect.

How will the flipchart engage and interest the pupils?
A range of tools are available so you can vary how the lesson is used. Does the flipchart use spotlights, the Reveal tool, dice, tickertapes and rulers to help engage students?

Will the activities help the pace of the lesson?
You can break up lessons by clicking on a link to a website. You can link to documents in other programs or open an activity in another software package.

Also: make the most of the chance to have many pages in a flipchart. You could use a page to insert a quick joke, a ten-second puzzle, a film clip or a music clip, to focus your students' attention after a lengthier exercise.

Have you remembered the final touches?
Don't forget that final look to check that the design makes sense and that there are no spelling mistakes. Remember to lock the necessary images, text and lines into place so that, when using the flipchart, you don't accidentally move objects.

Page Notes are another essential final touch. Why spend time creating an effective flipchart and then make it difficult to reuse?

Will the technology help or hinder the learning process?
Flipcharts should always be used to help the learning process. If you can't remember where you saved your flipchart and spend the first 20 minutes of the lesson searching for it, perhaps it's time to organize your Resource Library. Creating a simple folder structure for your classes in the Resource Library could save time.

Are the teaching and learning instructions clear in the Page Notes?
If you want to share your flipcharts with other people, and if you want to remember what the flipchart is about, make sure that the instructions and the lesson notes are clear. The Page Notes tool is ideal for creating a complete set of notes, including further ideas, for your flipchart.

Are you interested in the flipchart?
If you don't find the flipchart interesting, no one else will! Make the most of the opportunity to create a range of tasks, using colors, images, videos and sounds.

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How can the flipchart be improved?
Flipcharts can evolve even after the lesson has been taught. If you find a better image or a better exercise, you can replace pages in your flipchart and keep improving it over time.