Create an Adlib Story with Excel
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WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?
You will learn how to create -- or teach students to create -- Adlib stories using Excel.

What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?
The techtorial applies to PCs or Macs with Microsoft Excel. The activity also can be adapted to use with other spreadsheet programs.

Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?
The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard IIIc in particular.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed a set of National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. Standards or Performance Indicators are included for each techtorial to help teachers and administrators improve technology proficiency. For a complete description of the standards indicated, go to NETS for Teachers.

MAKE AN ADLIB STORY USING EXCEL!

What's an Adlib story?
An Adlib story is a story for which a basic skeleton is written, and then additional words are inserted or substituted to personalize the story. See Abducted by Aliens for an example of an online Adlib story.

You can create your own Adlib stories for a fun classroom activity. See A Spooky Adlib Story as an example.

Students in grades 6-8 also can create Adlib stories as an exercise in creativity, storyboarding, and problem solving.

This techtorial provides four easy steps for creating Adlib stories using a spreadsheet program.

STEP ONE: STORYBOARDING

First, type or write a short story to serve as the Adlib "skeleton." You can write a complete story using real or nonsense words to indicate where word substitutions

eventually will be made, or you can leave blank spaces to indicate where words will be inserted. In the lesson A Spooky Adlib Story, letters of the alphabet indicate where words will be inserted.

STEP TWO: FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS

To create the fill-in-the-blank sheet:

Open Microsoft Excel.

Click File>Page Setup>Landscape>OK.

In cell A2, type a prompt for the first word you want the user to enter. Prompts can simply indicate a word form (noun, verb, adjective, pronoun, and so on), or be commands ("Write a color word!") or questions ("What is your favorite color?"). For example, in the story skeleton for "A Spooky Adlib Story," the letter "A" indicates a word that's a sound. An appropriate prompt might be, "What is the silliest sound you've ever heard?"

Hit Enter (or Return).

Type a prompt for the second missing word in cell A3 and then hit Enter.

Continue adding prompts in the cells in column A, until you have provided a prompt for each fill-in-the-blank in the story.

Click in cell B2, and highlight all the cells in column B down to the cell to the right of the last prompt.

Click Format in the Excel toolbar; click Cells in the drop-down menu that appears; and then click the Border tab.

Find the box in which the word(s) Text appear. Click the box in the middle, at the top, and at the bottom. Three horizontal lines should appear. (If a line appears in the wrong place, click again to delete it.)

Click OK.

You now have underlined blanks to the right of each prompt. Click cell B2, click Format>Cells>Border, and then click the line at the top of the "Text" box to delete it.

Click OK.

MAKE IT FIT

To widen the prompt cells, click the line between columns A and B at the top of the spreadsheet. Drag the line to the right until column A is as wide as necessary.

To widen the response cells, click the line between columns B and C at the top of the spreadsheet and drag it right.

The spreadsheet document now should look something like this:

Save your work.

STEP THREE: ADD THE STORY AND FORMULAS

Use the scrollbar at the bottom of the spreadsheet to scroll right to page 2. (If you don't see the line indicating the page break, click View>PageBreakPreview>OK and then click View>Normal.)

Begin typing the story in the first cell on page 2. You'll probably get 1-2 words in each cell. Do NOT resize cells on this page!

When you get to the place at which the first prompt response should appear, hit Tab, and then type =B2 (the location of the cell that contains the blank for the first prompt response). Note that the formula for each prompt response must be in a its own cell, separate from the words -- and even punctuation marks -- in the story.

Hit Enter (or Return) to move to a new cell. Notice the 0 that appears in the cell in which you typed the formula? The 0 tells you that the computer can't find a word to insert in that cell -- which is correct. To be sure you've typed the correct prompt, scroll to page 1, type a word in the first blank, then scroll back and see if the word you typed appears where the 0 was before. If it does, the formula is correct.

Continue typing the story, typing =B3 to indicate the second substitute word, =B4 to indicate the next substitute word, and so on. Don't forget to hit Tab before each prompt response formula, and Enter (or Return) after each prompt response formula. (Remember, if a prompt response formula ends a sentence, you need to insert the period, exclamation mark, or question mark in the cell AFTER the prompt response formula cell, NOT in the same cell.)

When finished, the story should look something like this:

Highlight all the cells on page 2, click the font icon (a letter A with a line under it), and change the font to white. The story should disappear. If you don't see the font icon, click View>Toolbars>Formatting to view it.

Save your work.

Congratulations. You did it!

STEP FOUR: SHOWTIME

Save a copy of the Excel file for students to use. (If students have made their own Adlibs, invite them to swap Excel files or e-mail them to one another.)

Invite students to open the Excel file and type their responses to the prompts on page 1. (Remind them to click the line between letters B and C at the top of the spreadsheet to widen the response column if one of their answers is too long to fit.)

When they are finished entering their responses, have students scroll to page 2, highlight the cells, click the font icon, and change the font to black.

Boo! A story appears!

Next: Learn more!

TELL ME MORE!

Where can I find more information?
For a timely application of this activity, see Silly Speech Maker from Time for Kids.