

Making the most of your interactive whiteboard

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Cover photo: Getting Ready for OLED Technology - A Small Collage of Interactive Wall Applications on Our Smart Boards at the Interactive Interactive Show and Open Houses - Sheridan Interactive Multimedia One Year Post Grad College in Oakville, by Dan Zen
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Introduction

An interactive whiteboard can be a fantastic tool in the classroom.

Unfortunately, it has acquired a bit of a bad reputation because of the way in which it is often used: the teacher simply displaying a PowerPoint, teaching from the front of the class, and not using the interactive features at all.

Spot the difference!

Look at the two photos below, one from the 21st century and the other from probably the 1930s to 1950s. There doesn't appear to be a great deal of difference between the two classrooms!



Photo by Pablo Garcia

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pablog61/>

<https://flic.kr/p/9nE7ZM>

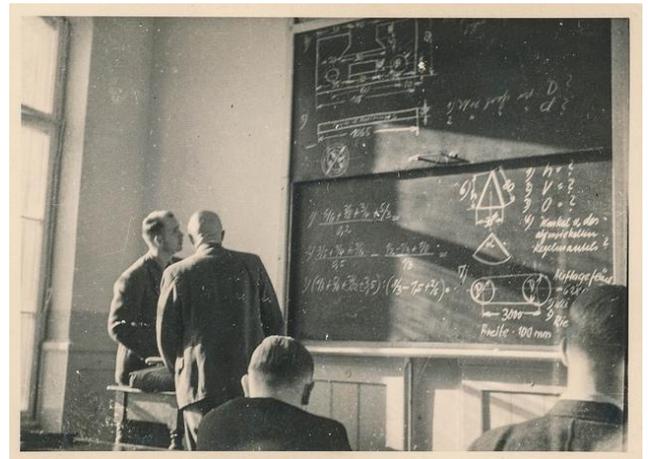


Photo by simple insomnia

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/simpleinsomnia/>

<https://flic.kr/p/hX7jzE>

This is, of course, a little unfair. We can't see what's on the whiteboard shown in the first picture, and in any case there is nothing wrong with teaching from the front. However, the interactive whiteboard allows you to do a lot more than simply show slides, and it is also amenable to having pupils come up and demonstrate what they have done.

This guide is merely a taster of the kinds of things you can do with an interactive

whiteboard. All you need are a willingness to experiment and time to practise.

5 Advantages of an interactive whiteboard over a non-interactive whiteboard

- You can prepare materials in advance and then, in the lesson, easily go back to a screen shown earlier.
- You can record what you are doing at the board, both in video and sound only. That means you can make it possible for pupils to go over the process (or whatever) that you demonstrated, in their own time and as many times as they like. Obviously, there are limits to the feasibility of this when it comes to very young pupils, but you could always upload the recording to the school's learning platform or intranet and allow parents to access it.
- You can do anything on the board that you can do on a computer, such as looking at web pages.
- The most popular boards come with sets of resources such as pictures, backgrounds (such as staves for music lessons),

"gadgets", such as a countdown clock and many more.

- The two most popular boards, Smart and Promethean, each have vibrant online communities in which teachers post resources for other teachers to use – so you don't have to keep reinventing wheels! The main ones are [Promethean Planet](#) and [Smart Exchange](#) for Promethean and Smart boards respectively.

10 Tips for Good practice when going into a new school

- Find out what type of interactive whiteboard you will be using. This will usually be a Smartboard or a Promethean board, but there are others, such as Hitachi. Unfortunately, it is not easy to export a file created on one board to a format that can be used on another one. It's not an insurmountable problem, but (a) you can't rely on the file looking the same on both boards, and (b) it will be illegal to do so unless the school has the requisite licence. Most don't.
- Find out how old it is because the hardware features and software are constantly being updated. For

example, some more modern boards allow different parts of the whiteboard to be used at the same time by different people.

- Find out what software version is being used.
- Find out the licence number if possible.
- If possible, check for yourself in the school.
- Once you know which board is being used, download the software at home. If you know the licence number, you can use the software indefinitely while you are at that school. If not, you should be able to download it for a trial period for now.
- There are resources packs available too, so be sure to download those as well. That way you will have a much greater range of resources at your fingertips.
- Once in your classroom, check that the board is calibrated. That means, that when you click on a particular point on the board, or write on it, the results of your actions appear where you did them, not several inches away!
- Find out how to calibrate the board yourself. It's pretty simple.

- Check whether the board can be moved up and down easily: very useful for enabling children to write on a greater area than just the bottom section.

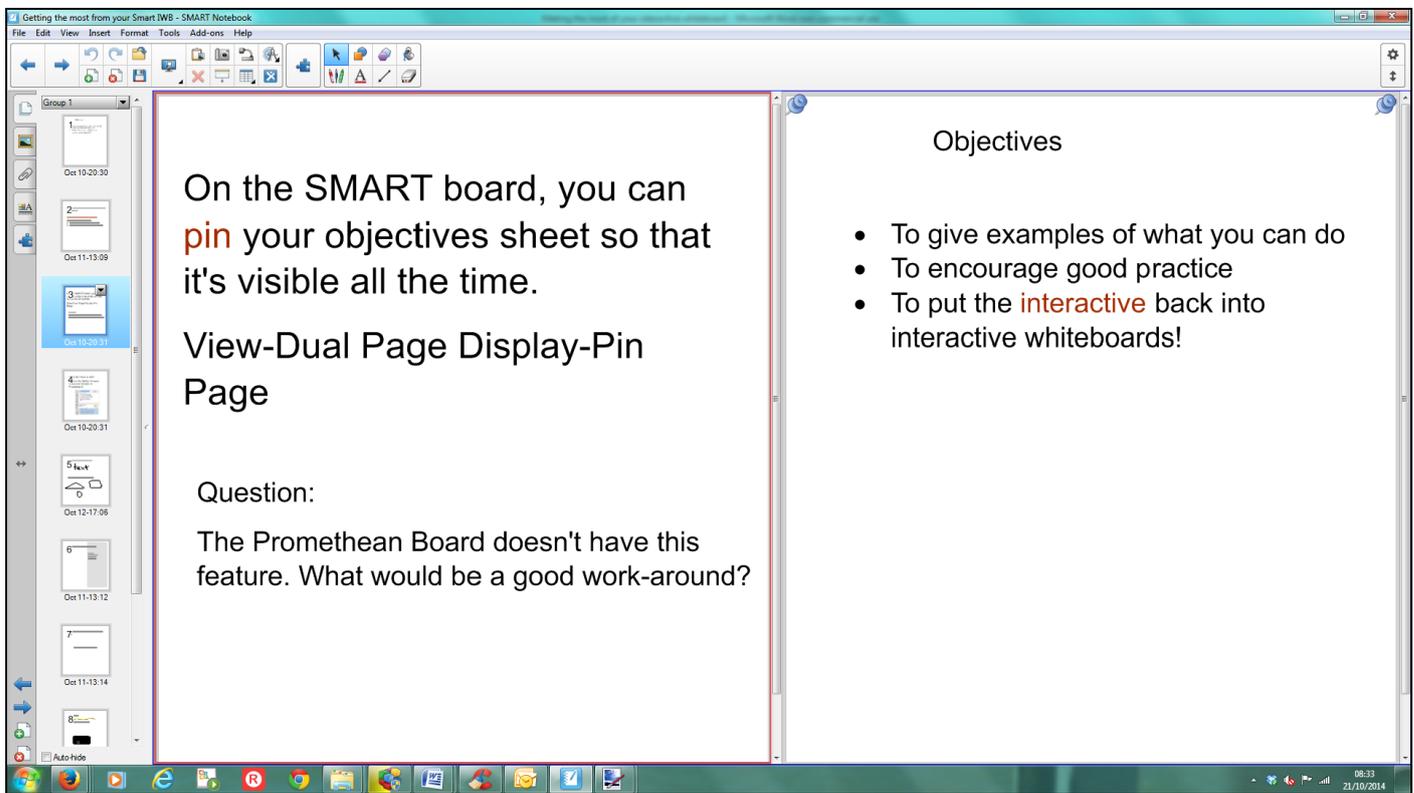
The two main types of board

As stated earlier, the two main types are Smart and Promethean. The main thing you need to know is that you can write on the Smartboard with any object, including a finger. The Promethean board has some of that capability (if it's a fairly up-to-date one), but for the most part uses a special pen. Without the pen, you can't use the board, unless you operate it from a computer in the classroom, which would be limiting to say the least.

8 things to try out

Show objectives

As we all know, it's a good idea to show the lesson objectives so that pupils (and you) can refer to them any time. If you have a modern Smartboard, explore the Pin feature (use the in-built Help). This lets you show the objectives on one half of the board while going through your screens/pages/slides on the other half, as shown in the screenshot below.



If your board does not have this feature, a good workaround is to create another whiteboard file with only the objectives in it, so you can flip between the two as necessary.

Failing that, you can always write on a non-interactive board if one is in the room, or write out the objectives in big lettering and blu-tack it on to the side of the board.

Explore the Resource Browser/Gallery (templates, backgrounds, illustrations, etc)

This is where you will find the backgrounds, gadgets, and pictures mentioned earlier, as well as ready-made test templates and other resources.

Prepare interactive whiteboard pages in advance

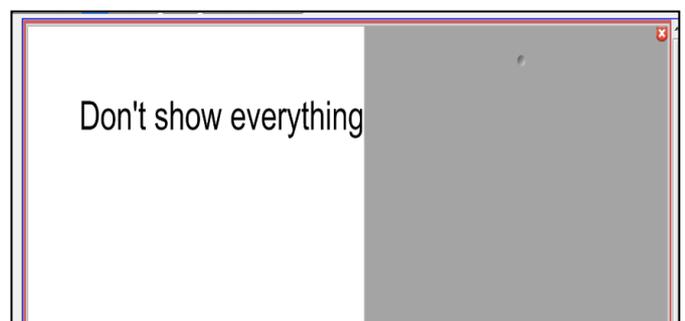
If you do that, you can keep on using them again and again.

Use the Revealer/Screen Shade

Most of the time you want to make the children work for the answer rather than just telling them. Also, sometimes you would rather show a bit of the screen at a time so that the pupils focus on what you are talking about instead of racing ahead and looking at the rest of the screen.

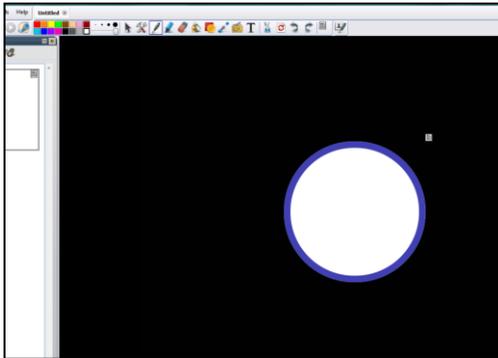
Investigate the Revealer tool for this.

Here's an example of what it might look like:



Use the Spotlight

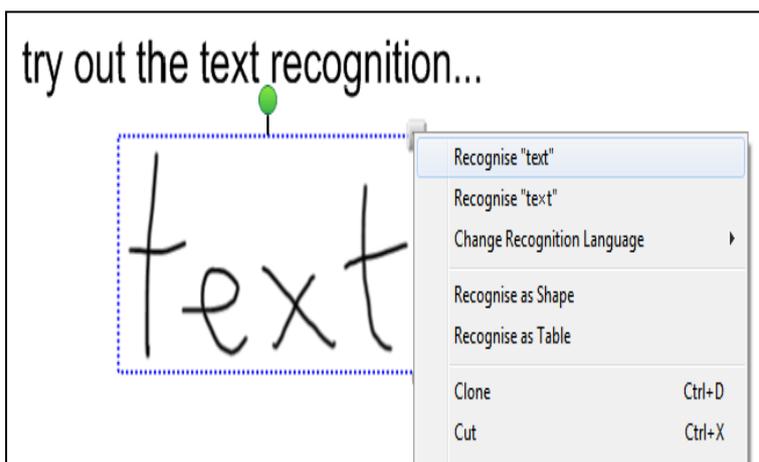
In the true tradition of 'show don't tell', I'll **show** you what this looks like and you can work the rest out for yourself!



Try the text recognition tool

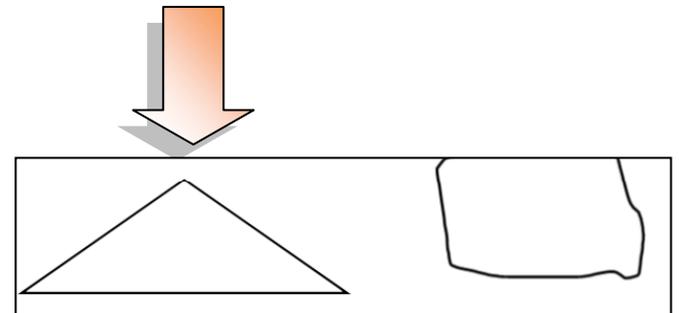
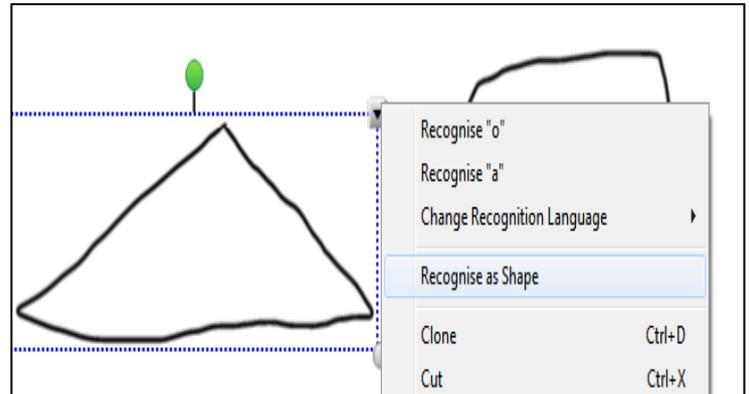
If a pupil, or you, writes on the board with a pen tool, you can make it look neater by converting it to text. The screenshot below shows you how to do this.

Basically, you click on the frame containing the writing, then click on the arrow in the top right hand corner to see what options are available. One of them, as you can see, is to turn the writing into text.



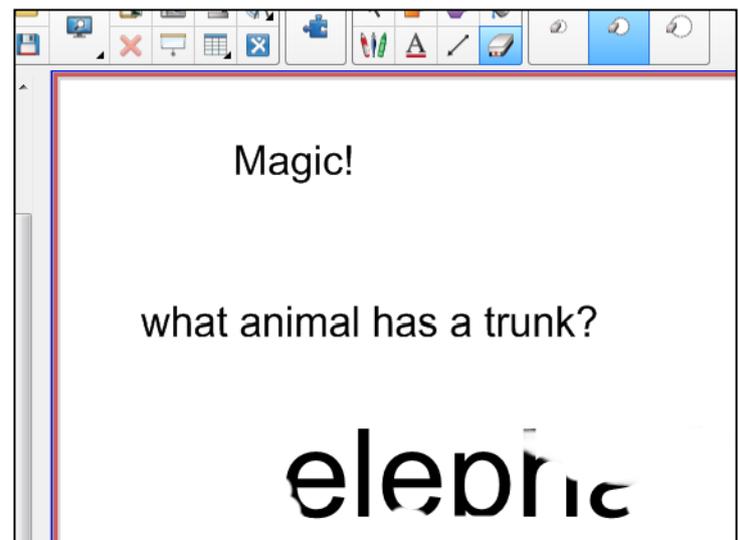
Try the shape recognition tool

This works in a similar way to the text recognition option. Draw a shape freehand, and then convert it into a shape:



Use magic!

Ask the class a question and then reveal the answer by using the eraser. Here's how it looks:



Here's how you do it:

1. Type in the question.
2. Type in the answer somewhere on the screen.
3. Write over the answer using a thick pen (in the pen tools) of the same colour as the background – which is usually white, of course.
4. To reveal the answer, erase the pen with the eraser tool, revealing the text underneath!ⁱ

What else can you think of?

Start exploring!

3 Ways of getting the pupils involved

- Create opportunities for them to use the board, in small groups.
- If you have dual-touch whiteboards then pairs of pupils can work together.
- If collaborating at the board itself is difficult for several pupils at once, put the pupils into groups and then assign roles to each person within the group. For example one person can do some research on the web using their computer/laptop/tablet, while another works on the board itself.

Finding out more

Your first port of call should be Danny Nicholson's [Whiteboard Blog](#). It has loads of tips, resources, reviews and ideas.

Try searching for videos in YouTube. You will often come across proprietary ones made by Smart or Promethean. They can be useful both for demonstrating what you can do with the board you actually use, and also to give you an idea of generic possibilities applicable to **all** boards.

Finally...

This short guide has hardly even begun to enumerate all the possibilities available through using an interactive whiteboard. Hopefully, it has whetted your appetite to find out even more about what you can do!

About Terry Freedman



[ICT in Education](#)

(<http://www.ictineducation.org>) – for new content nearly every weekday.

[Digital Education newsletter](#)

(<http://www.ictineducation.org/newsletter>) – for great guest articles, reviews and think pieces – and excellent quality free stuff for teachers.

[@terryfreedman](#)

(<http://twitter.com/terryfreedman>)

ⁱ My thanks to Danny Nicholson, publisher of the Whiteboard blog, for this great tip.