

How to use Blutick? From theory to reality – a teacher's perspective



Q How are you choosing to use Blutick?

A Blutick has been a life-line to me as I to teach mathematics to students from home and also as I consider how my teaching will operate when we return to school either with a mix of remote and face-to-face teaching or entirely face-to-face.

As a teacher who needs to keep track of several classes per day having a ready-made, comprehensive, pedagogically strong resource available is hugely useful. I've used the videos for initial teaching, the intelligent feedback features to give students additional support as they begin learning a new topic and I've been able to help tackle misconceptions by looking at the line by line working of the students.

Q How important is it that you are able to use this type of edtech when you return to normal class teaching?

A As the coordinator of mathematics for students aged 14 to 16, and now appointed Head of Mathematics from September 2020, I have been particularly keen to consider how our students and teachers might use Blutick once students return to schools. People now often refer to the 'new normal' as a way of describing the likely situation of partial school re-opening or of the need to increase planning for potential future school closures should the pandemic increase again. It is also very much the case that students and teachers have been able to see some real benefits of using high quality online learning systems and in my view, there is an opportunity to channel this enthusiasm and get students benefitting from using these systems as part of normal teaching.

Q Why choose Blutick to support classroom-based learning?

A There is so much content available for supporting mathematics teaching online and I am familiar with the difficulties of choosing which platforms to use within a department. Below are three reasons why Blutick provides something unique. ▶



Learners benefit from being encouraged to show their methods.

Some students are great at structuring their work but my experience is that many of them need to be trained to do this well. I have also found that many students approach computer work as a mental mathematics exercise. "I'll answer this question with my brain alone and then type my answer into that box to check it's right." This approach is something that needs challenging and it takes time to get students using their exercise books alongside their devices.

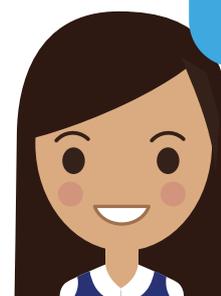
Blutick helps as the emphasis is on step by step working. Students are not encouraged to jump straight to the answer but instead benefit from entering their working line by line. This working doesn't disappear either, you can check during and after the fact just like you would if it was in their exercise books. Of course, written work is important too but, in this regard, Blutick actively helps.

It feels good when the website is on your side.

Sometimes it is difficult to convince students that assessment is a way of helping them to improve. It is easy for a great test score to feel like a supportive boost but it is perhaps more difficult for them to view a poor score in a positive light. Digital assessment has a well-established place in the classroom. When using online platforms in my lessons I have witnessed the joy students feel when they see a page full of ticks and get smiley faces when they submit their answers. These students are drawing confidence from the fact they can get the questions right. This confidence is a key part of being successful in mathematics. The drawback of many of these platforms is that they have very little support for students who are experiencing the opposite because they are struggling.

Blutick addresses this in a number of ways. If a student makes a mistake in their working they get a hint as to what they did wrong. Has the student made a small operational error? If they have they will be told this is what's happened rather than being mystified as to why their final answer has been marked as incorrect. Are they working with a well-known misconception? If so it's likely Blutick will notice and try to help. And if they are really struggling the Building Blocks tool will help them find what piece of prerequisite knowledge they are missing. In my view these features are a hugely useful and highly personalised step up from the more standard video support offered more widely by other products.

Of course, a teacher can provide constructive feedback too, but it is unusual to find this in an online tool. Blutick doesn't replace the teacher here but I have found that it increases the number of students who can get back on the right track independently. This feature also means that any given lesson on Blutick is appropriate for a wider attainment range. ▶



Keep going!
You're doing great!



There is plenty of opportunity to practise

Clearly, students need to develop their ability to solve problems in order to be successful in mathematics. I have been frustrated in the past by the way that some resources sacrifice any opportunity for practice in order to include lots of novel problems or interleaved questions. These are a crucial part of learning mathematics as students need to be able to make connections between topics and apply their understanding of mathematical ideas to tackle unfamiliar questions. Practice has an important part to play in facilitating this. I have taught plenty of students who really struggle with problem solving because they haven't practiced enough in a familiar context. Such practice builds confidence and helps students remember knowledge. Such familiarity also makes it more likely that students will notice similarities between problems.

Blutick provides a good balance in this regard. With most resources there is the capacity to allow students to move on to more difficult material if they become comfortable with a given idea or process. This is true of Blutick too but with other platforms I have found some students run out of examples before they feel ready to move on. These students need a few more familiar examples to build this confidence.

Here Blutick's near-infinite question bank is really useful. If a student has completed lots of questions and still needs a few more of the same type to feel confident they can have as many as they like. Again, the teacher has a big part to play in making sure students are making the right choices, but the questions are there if needed.

I have used digital resources more over the past few months than I would have if I had been in the classroom with my students. It is difficult to know for sure what school will be like over the coming months but whether learning takes place at home, in school or a mixture of the two I am certain that Blutick will help my students succeed. ■

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