Using your Android tablet device to make a real difference in your teaching

SESSION 2

Apps and content for teaching and learning

CLASS NOTES

basic education

Department:
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Course content

Using your Android tablet device to make a real difference in your teaching

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Session 2: Apps and content for teaching and learning

Class Notes

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Important information

1. You can download and print the Class Notes for personal use, but you may not share them.

2. Once you have watched all the videos and completed all the quizzes, reflections, tasks and assessments successfully, you can download your certificate and print it.

3. If you wish to earn SACE Professional Development (PD) points for this session, you must complete all the online assessments in the session successfully. Our system will notify us of your success, and we will send the points allocation request to the South African Council for Educators (SACE).

4. Remember that devices and apps are updated all the time. The device specifications and features that you see here might differ slightly from those of the device you are using. The app features and icons that you see here might also differ slightly from the app in which you are working.

Contents

Outcomes and content

Outcomes of the session

By the end of the session, you will:

- understand what an app is
- be able to navigate the Google Play Store
- know how to download, install, and delete apps
- understand the differences between widgets and apps
- choose an office productivity suite that fits your needs

Content of the session

This session will focus on:

- Apps: what they are, how to download, install and delete
- Google Play Store
- Widgets: what they are, how to download, install and delete
- Productivity Suites: what they are and how they compare

Overview

Welcome to Session 2 of **Using your Android tablet device to make a real difference in your teaching**. In this session – **Apps and content for teaching and learning** – you will learn more about apps on your tablet device, and how they can be used for improved teaching and learning.

We will cover three key areas during this session.

1. Understanding apps, where we will look at what apps are, how to use the Google Play store to find apps, how to install and uninstall apps, and what criteria to use when choosing an app.
2. Understanding widgets, where you will learn what widgets are and how to work with them.
3. Improving productivity with apps, where we will explore different productivity suites, with a focus on Google Workspace for Android tablet devices.

There are regular tasks and quizzes just to check that you are developing the knowledge needed to move on.

Understanding apps

What are apps?

An app (which is short for application), is a program used for a specific purpose on a computer, tablet or smartphone. Your tablet is just an expensive piece of hardware with an Operating System (OS) and software that allows you to do everything you can with the device. Apps make all the work you will do on your device possible.

All tablets come with a set of apps that the manufacturer pre-loaded onto the device. No matter the device, you are likely to find the following apps on your tablet.

- Camera
- Clock
- Gallery/Photos
- Calendar
- Notes
- An app store
- Mail
- Files Folder

These are the apps that the manufacturer believes you will need immediately to benefit from your tablet. It is up to you to get more apps according to your interests and needs.

Where to find apps

App stores are digital marketplaces where you can discover, download, and update apps. Depending on your smartphone, you might be familiar with app stores like the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, the Microsoft Store, or the Huawei AppGallery. The same app stores are available for tablet devices.

You can only download and use an app that matches your OS. Large companies, for example, Microsoft or Google, may make an app that is available on all the OSs.

Let's make an example of WhatsApp. This app is a popular cross-platform app that can be used on all OSs. So, you could use the app on any device, for example, Android, Windows, or Apple. But, if you bought the app in the Google Play Store, you will not be able to use it on a Windows device or an Apple device, because the Google Play Store is only for Android devices.

If you wanted to use the app on a Windows device, you would have to get it from the Microsoft Store, and if you wanted to use it on an Apple device, you would have to get it from the Apple App Store, and so on. In a nutshell – you **must** use the app store that is related to your device's OS.

The apps on your tablet are written by developers. These are highly skilled people who write the code needed for apps to be created. Keep in mind that most educational apps are written by developers who may have no background as teachers. They will often just have an educator as an adviser. Why is this important? It means that when you select an app, even if it is in the education part of the app store, it may not be educationally sound. You are the expert, and you should examine the app carefully to see if it does what it promises in a way that will be beneficial to you and/or your learners.

Types of apps

There are different apps available in the app stores for the various OSs.

- **Free apps:** These apps are free, but are often supported by advertising.
- **Freemium apps:** These are apps that allow you to do certain things, and prevent you from doing other things in the app until you pay for the app. You can choose to buy the advanced features or keep using the app with limited features.
- **Trial and buy apps:** These are apps that allow you to use all the features in an app at no cost for a limited time. After that, you lose access to the app unless you pay for it. This is a useful way to see if the app is worth using before you pay for it.
- **Paid for apps:** The app has a set price that you pay when you download it. You buy the app outright. The downside to this is that you have to rely on the developer's description of the app and any reviews that the app may have received.
- **Subscription apps:** You will be charged each month by your app store for the app. If you stop paying, you will not be able to use the app.

App updates

From time to time, the developers will make a change to an app so that it's easier to use, add a function or change the design of the app. When they do this, you'll receive a notification that there is an update available for the app.

Updates make apps better, safer and more user-friendly, and you should always make sure that your apps are up to date. This is one reason why paying for an app is a good idea. It means that the developers have money continually so they can afford to update the app.

You will need data to download and install app updates. If possible, use a WiFi service rather than Mobile Data when you do updates.

Task

If you have experience with using apps, answer these questions.

- What is your favourite app? Why is this so?
- From which app store have you downloaded apps before?

If you are new to apps, answer these questions.

- Based on your tablet device, which app store will you be using to download apps?
- What sort of app do you think will make a difference in your teaching? (Think of anything at all – even if it may not exist, yet!)

The Google Play Store

The Google Play Store is an online marketplace where developers post their Android apps for you to download.

You can find and use the Google Play Store

1. Look for the Google Play Store Icon in the App Drawer or on your Home Screen.
2. The Landing Page gives you several options when you launch the Google Play Store App.
3. You can search in the top Search Bar for an app, a game or a book by name or keyword.
4. You can see apps that have been identified as being useful to you, as well as apps that are featured by Google. You will also see the top charts of apps that have been downloaded most often.
5. You can see the various categories of apps that are available.

You can learn more about an app

When you tap on an app in the Google Play Store, it will open the App Page. Here, you will find these features.

- An Install Button.
- Information about the developer.
- Information about the cost of the app: Is it free, freemium with adverts, subscription only, or available at a once-off price?
- The review score for the app: This is based on the scores (between 1 [bad] and 5 [excellent]) that other users who have reviewed the app gave it.
- App size.
- Age rating.
- How many people have downloaded the app?
- Screenshots of the app.
- About this App: This feature provides further information about the app.
- App category.
- Data use information.
- Reviews.

You can buy an app

1. Go to the Google Play Store.
2. Select the app you wish to purchase.
3. Tap on the price (which is shown in place of the Install Button).
4. On the pop-up message requesting that you add a payment method to your Google Account, tap Add Credit or Debit Card.
5. Follow the steps to add your information.
6. Click install.

Task

- Go to the Google Play Store on your device.
- Start exploring educational apps for the subjects you teach.
- Make a list of five apps you may want to install.

Installing and uninstalling apps

You can install an app

1. Find the app you want to install on the Google Play Store.
2. Tap Install. (If necessary, add payment details if the app has a cost.)
3. Open the App Drawer by swiping up.
4. Find the app.
5. Tap to open.

You can move an app to the Home Screen

1. Tap and long hold on the App Icon.
2. Tap Add to Home.
3. Note that it may open on the second Home Screen. If so, tap, hold, and drag to the left to move the icon to the primary Home Screen.

You can uninstall an app

1. Swipe up for the App Drawer.
2. Tap and long hold on the app you want to uninstall.
3. Select Uninstall.
4. Confirm by tapping OK.
5. Or, an alternative to uninstalling an app on the tablet is to go to the Google Play Store, find the app, and then uninstall it from there.

Task
• In the previous task, you had to make a list of five apps you might want to install.
• Install two of the apps.
• Explore the apps.
• Move the app you like most to your device's Home Screen.
• Uninstall the other app.

How to choose an app

At the end of 2023, there were more than 3 700 000 apps in the Google Play Store. Some of them are wonderful, but others may not be useful for you. Carefully consider each app you are interested in to make sure that you do not waste your time or money by installing an app that is of no use to you.

1. Define educational objectives

Before exploring the app market, define your educational objectives clearly. Understand the specific skills or concepts you want your learners to grasp. Whether it's reinforcing Math skills, improving literacy, fostering creativity, or promoting critical thinking, a clear understanding of your goals will serve as a compass in your app selection journey.

2. Check OS compatibility

Always check the OS compatibility of any app that you want to use. Remember, Android apps work on Android devices, Windows apps work on Windows devices, etc. Sometimes, apps can only work on the latest version of an OS. This can be problematic if you have an older device, because such older tablets may not always be able to update to the latest version of an OS. Before you download an app, check the app store information or the developer's website for details on compatibility with the OS version of your device.

3. Pedagogical alignment

Check that your selected app aligns with sound pedagogical principles. An effective educational app should complement your teaching methods rather than replace them. Seek apps that encourage active learning, collaboration, and critical thinking. Consider whether the app provides opportunities for differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of your learners.

4. Age appropriateness

Consider the age and developmental stage of your learners. Educational apps are designed with specific age groups in mind, and selecting an age-appropriate app ensures that the content is relevant and engaging. Look for apps that provide a challenge without overwhelming or frustrating the learners.

5. User-friendly interface

The user interface of an app refers to what an app looks like on-screen (including the app icons, and menus) and how the app works. On a tablet, the interface should work well for a touchscreen device with limited keyboard capabilities. Because the display space on a tablet or smartphone is much smaller than a computer's, the icons and menus should be compact but clear. Although the space is limited, the click-points must be big enough to be selected with a finger on the touchscreen.

The layout and commands of the app should be similar to that of the OS. Apps for Android devices should therefore echo how the Android OS works, Apps for Windows devices should echo the Windows OS, etc. This makes using an app 'intuitive' because the user is already familiar with how their OS works.

A user-friendly interface is paramount, especially for younger learners. Choose intuitive apps, with clear instructions. You – or your learners – should not have to spend a lot of time figuring out how to use an app. A well-designed interface enhances the overall user experience and allows learners to focus on the educational content rather than on struggling with the app's navigation.

6. Content quality

Assess the quality of the educational content in the app. Is it accurate, up-to-date, and aligned with educational outcomes? Remember, you may not always be able to find an app that matches your exact curriculum, but you do need to be covering the same concepts and information.

Ensure that the app offers a depth of content that goes beyond simple rote memorisation and that it encourages deeper understanding and the application of knowledge.

7. Interactivity and engagement

One of the strengths of educational apps is their ability to engage learners actively.

Look for apps that incorporate interactive elements, such as quizzes, simulations, and multimedia. Engagement is key to sustaining learner interest and fostering a positive learning experience.

8. Assessment and progress tracking

Evaluate whether the app provides tools for assessing learner progress.

A good educational app should offer features that allow you to track individual learner performance, identify areas of strength and weakness, and adapt instruction accordingly. This data-driven approach enables personalised learning experiences.

There will be times when a lot of manual intervention is going to be required from you unless the app has a report export feature that allows learners to email you, their progress. If not, you will need to go from learner to learner to check progress.

9. Accessibility and inclusivity

Ensure that the chosen app is accessible to all learners, including those with diverse learning needs. Look for features such as adjustable font sizes, audio support, and language options. Remember that some tablets have accessibility functions, and you may be able to combine these with an app for a better experience. An inclusive app accommodates a range of learning abilities.

10. Updates and support

Select apps that receive regular updates and offer reliable support. This ensures that you have access to the latest features, security patches, and assistance when needed.

11. Context

The app must be suitable for your context. Remember that, although something may be contextually unsuitable for younger learners, with mediation it might be usable by older learners. Rely on your experience to guide you.

The language that is used in the app needs to be appropriate to your context so the learners can work by themselves rather than constantly asking for an explanation of the app instructions.

12. Ask the learners

Do not forget to ask the learners if they have come across an app that they have found useful. Learners spend a great deal of time on devices, and they may well have discovered a gem that you can share with your other learners.

Reflection

- Make notes in your PD Journal.
- What do you think of these 12 ideas for choosing apps?
- Do you think there should be anything else added? If so, what?

Understanding widgets

What is a widget?

Widgets are interactive elements or mini-apps that give quick access to information or perform specific functions without requiring the user to open a full app. Widgets are displayed on the device's Home Screen and offer real-time updates and interactivity.

Widgets come in various forms and serve many purposes. Common examples include weather widgets, calendar widgets, and news widgets. However, the real power of widgets lies in their adaptability, allowing users to personalise their devices and streamline access to essential information.

Widgets and the internet

It is important to remember that for most widgets to work properly, they must be able to connect to the internet. If the widget is not connected to the internet, the information that will be shown will be out-of-date since it will be the information the widget had available the last time the device was connected to the internet. Fortunately, the amount of data that most widgets require is very small.

Getting widgets

Many apps that you download will come with a widget as well. Another source of widgets is the Google Play Store. Android tablet devices usually have some pre-loaded widgets from the manufacturer that you need to install.

You can install a pre-loaded widget

1. Long press on your Home Screen.
2. On the pop-up menu, tap Widgets.
3. Search the widgets on your tablet, or select from the Widgets Menu.
4. Tap on your selected widget.
5. Tap install.

Working with widgets

Customise and make your screen personal

Take advantage of the tablet's Home Screen by arranging widgets in a way that suits your needs. Group related widgets together and prioritise those you use most frequently. Using widgets to customise your Home Screen makes your tablet more personal, and, therefore, more useful.

Explore

Explore a variety of widgets to discover what works best for you. Whether it's a to-do list widget, a timer, or a language translation tool, experimenting with different options can help you find the most efficient tools for your needs.

Keep up-to-date

Remember to keep an eye out for out-of-date information if your tablet has been off for a while. Make sure that your tablet is connected to the internet to update the information provided by your widgets.

Types of widgets

- **Calendar widgets:** These widgets allow you to view your schedule, upcoming events, and deadlines at a glance. They're excellent tools for time management and organisation.
- **Weather widgets:** These widgets can bring real-world context into lessons. It can help learners to engage with and understand weather patterns and geography. Add more cities than your current location to the weather widget and allow learners to see what is happening weather-wise in another hemisphere.
- **Note-taking widgets:** These widgets make it easy to capture quick ideas, jot down reminders, or create to-do lists directly from your Home Screen. It will help you to stay on top of tasks and assignments and to track your to-do list or task progress, helping you manage your workload effectively.
- **News widgets:** These widgets are another way to bring real-world context into lessons.
- **Widgets for communication and collaboration:** These widgets can facilitate communication among teachers, learners, and parents. It provides real-time updates on messages, making it easier to stay connected and address concerns promptly.

You can change the settings of a widget

1. Long press on the widget.
2. In the pop-up menu, select Settings.
3. Change the settings according to your needs.
4. Tap Save.

You can stack widgets

A widget stack is several widgets that are stored together as if they were in a folder. This is useful if you want a neat, uncluttered Home Screen.

1. Long press on a widget.
2. In the pop-up menu, select Create Stack.
3. Add other widgets.

You can uninstall a widget

1. Long press on the widget.
2. In the pop-up menu, tap Remove.
3. The widget will be removed. You can always go back to the widgets page to reinstall it if you wish to use it again later.

Task

- Find two widgets you would like to have on your tablet.
- Install them on your device.

Improving productivity with apps

Types of productivity suites and their uses

Teachers have to deal with heaps of administration, including lesson preparation, preparing mark sheets, and other tasks. Productivity suites are the answer to doing this work efficiently. A productivity suite will include the following apps.

Word processing apps

Word processing is the creation and editing of text, using a word processor, on any device. When we edit text, we change the way it's worded or correct any spelling or grammar errors we might have made. Word processing apps are useful for creating documents like notices, circulars, letters, reports, class notes and assessments.

After you create a word processing document, you can share it with others in different ways. You can email it to someone else or you can share the document with someone. The people you share it with can then add their text and even make comments on your document. This is called collaboration and it's very useful for teachers.

Spreadsheet apps

Spreadsheets are documents we use to place information, or data, into tables so that it's easier to analyse. In most cases, the data contains many numbers. Spreadsheet apps can be used to create and edit data on a spreadsheet. You can use spreadsheets to create marksheets in which you calculate marks, averages, and percentages. You can also use these apps to analyse results and present graphs.

You can share and collaborate on a spreadsheet in the same way you would in a word processing document.

Presentation apps

We have become familiar with people presenting information to us on a screen using presentation software like PowerPoint or Google Slides. A well-constructed presentation can be an excellent learning experience for learners. This is especially true if the presentation has interactive elements in it.

Email apps

Email has become a critical part of productivity suites. Emails are important for communicating information and keeping in touch with others. It is also used for collaborating on documents, spreadsheets, presentations, etc.

Choosing a productivity suite

There are several productivity suites you may wish to put on your device.

Google Workspace

Google Workspace is the first productivity suite that comes to mind when we think of Android tablets because Google was so instrumental in spreading its use as one of the early developers of the system.

Google Workspace consists of the following productivity apps:

- Docs is the word processing app.
- Sheets is the spreadsheet processing app.
- Slides is the presentation app.
- Gmail is the email app.
- Google Drive is the online cloud storage app.

There are some other apps in the suite, but these are the key ones of which you need to be aware. You can learn how to use each of these apps in our **Google Workspace Course**.

Microsoft Office

Many people automatically think of Word, Excel and PowerPoint when it comes to productivity suites, and Microsoft's Office 365 can be used on an Android tablet even though they are Microsoft products.

Office 365 consists of the following productivity apps:

- Word is the word processing app.
- Excel is the spreadsheet app.
- PowerPoint is the presentation app.
- Outlook is the email and Calendar app.
- OneDrive is the online cloud storage app.

There are some other apps within the suite, but these are the key ones that you need to be aware of. You can learn how to use each of these apps in our **Microsoft 365 Course**.

WPS Office

The WPS Office Suite also has word processing, presentation, and spreadsheet capabilities, but all these functionalities are built into one app, rather than being the stand-alone apps we have seen with Google and Microsoft.

WPS Office is a free productivity suite that does everything that the apps in Google's Workspace and Microsoft's Office can do. What is more, you can open a Microsoft document in WPS Office, so you are always able to share documents with colleagues.

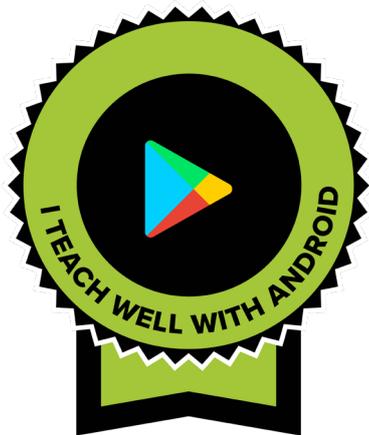## Choosing the right productivity suite for yourself

As you have seen, there are significant similarities among these three major productivity suites. Consider the following factors.

- **Cost:** Google and WPS are free to use, although they each have a paid option that you are very unlikely to need. Microsoft's apps require a subscription if you are to get close to the functionality of the other two options.

- **Size of the software:** If your tablet device does not have a great deal of storage, you may want to opt for the smallest download. At 293 megabytes, WPS is much smaller than Google's apps and less than a third of the size of Microsoft's apps. Microsoft does offer an all-in-one app like WPS does, called Microsoft 365 which is 689 megabytes in size.

- **Interface:** The interface refers to the look and feel of the app. Download them all and see which one that makes you feel most comfortable. Microsoft is probably the most common and may be comfortable for most people, but Google is not far behind. WPS office might be less familiar, but when you try it out, you may like the way it works.

- **Cloud storage:** Cloud storage is often needed with tablet devices because the hard drives are not very big. Google offers 15 gigabytes free; Microsoft offers five gigabytes free, but with a subscription, this goes up to one terabyte, and WPS Office offers one gigabyte free. You will learn more about cloud storage in Session 4 of this course (**What is the cloud?**).

- **Updates and support:** All three of the options provide regular updates and good support.

- If you are considering any of the other productivity suites you can find in the Google Play Store, use these criteria to evaluate the apps.
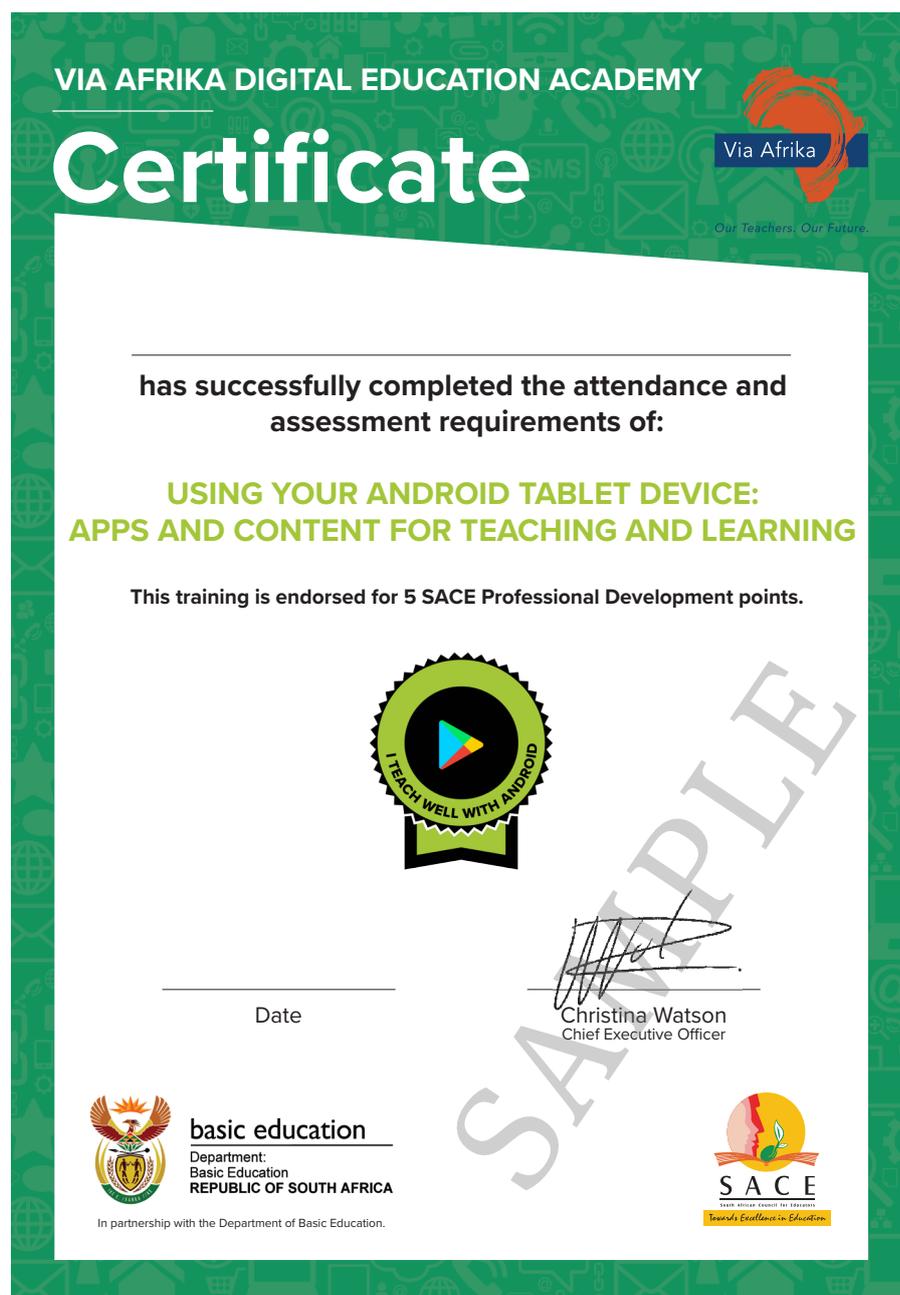
Task

- Which of the productivity suites appeals to you most? Why is this so?
- Download your chosen productivity suite to your tablet.

About the Final Assessment

At the end of this training session, you will be asked to complete the Final Assessment.

If you complete the Final Assessment successfully, you will qualify for your virtual badge and certificate. You can see a sample here.

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Certificate

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**USING YOUR ANDROID TABLET DEVICE:
APPS AND CONTENT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING**

This training is endorsed for 5 SACE Professional Development points.

SAMPLE

_____
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Christina Watson
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Final Assessment

Indicate the ONE correct response for each question.

1	What is the purpose of an app store?
a	To manufacture apps.
b	To discover, download, and update apps.
c	To sell tablets.
2	How do some developers earn money from free apps?
a	By selling the app.
b	Through in-app purchases.
c	By displaying advertisements.
3	What is the purpose of Play Pass in the Google Play Store?
a	To pay for individual apps.
b	To access many apps with a monthly subscription.
c	To get free apps without advertisements.
4	Why might users choose to pay for an app rather than use a free version?
a	To avoid updates.
b	To see advertisements.
c	To access advanced features.
5	Why is it important to check the Operating System compatibility of an app?
a	To ensure the app aligns with sound pedagogical principles.
b	To save money and time.
c	To avoid issues related to device and Operating System compatibility.
6	What is the primary purpose of a calendar widget?
a	Playing games.
b	Viewing schedules and upcoming events.
c	Checking the weather.

Indicate the ONE correct response for each question.

7	How can you access widgets on your tablet's Home Screen?
a	Swipe up.
b	Long press on the Home Screen.
c	Double-tap on the screen.

8	What does a news widget bring into lessons?
a	Virtual reality.
b	Real-world context.
c	Gaming elements.

9	How do you remove a widget from the Home Screen?
a	Tap on it.
b	Long press and select Remove.
c	Shake the tablet.

10	Which of the following is **not** a key app in Google Workspace?
a	Docs
b	Sheets
c	Excel

11	What is the maximum free cloud storage offered by Microsoft without a subscription?
a	5 Gigabytes.
b	15 Gigabytes.
c	1 Gigabyte.

12	What is the approximate size of Microsoft 365, the all-in-one app for Microsoft's productivity suite?
a	293 Megabytes.
b	689 Megabytes.
c	1 Terabyte.

Final Assessment (continued)

Indicate the ONE correct response for each question.

13	Which factor is **not** mentioned as a consideration when choosing a productivity suite?
a	The colour scheme.
b	The cost.
c	Cloud storage.
14	Which productivity suite is the first to come to mind for Android tablets because of its involvement with the development of the Operating System?
a	WPS Office Suite.
b	Google Workspace.
c	Microsoft Office 365.
15	Which productivity suites are described as having all their capabilities built into one app?
a	Microsoft Office 365 and WPS Office Suite.
b	WPS Office Suite and Google Workspace.
c	Google Workspace and Microsoft Office 365.

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