

## Tips for Using Common Technology Tools in Teaching

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Teaching and learning technology can be both challenging and engaging for teachers and students. While technologies make it easier for teachers to create learning opportunities, provide prompt feedback, and improve student engagement with content materials, they also pose challenges. Following are some practical guidelines I have discovered, mostly through a process of trial and error, using technology in teaching. They may help you manage technology-supported teaching more effectively, avoiding some of the common pitfalls.

### **Overhead, PowerPoint and Other Presentation Software Programs**

1. Use fonts 24 points or larger for the text.
2. Use dark type and light background for the overhead and/or slide.
3. Avoid USING ALL CAPS. (The normal use of upper and lowercase characters is easier to read.)
4. Use Italics or colour rather than underline to emphasize a point. (Underline makes some characters difficult to read.)
5. Limit seven words per line and eight lines per overhead and/or slide.
6. Distribute a copy of the overheads and/or slides to students ahead of time if possible.
7. Keep the room lights on and avoid showing slides in a dark room for more than 15 minutes. (Dark rooms can make students drowsy.)
8. Have a backup plan in case of a power outage or equipment failure.

### **Electronic Mail**

1. Establish rules for using e-mail for class communication, for example: keep specific subject lines, establish convention for naming message titles and sub-titles, clarify wait time for the instructor's response, and ask students to use consistent attachment formats.
2. Keep a copy of important correspondence yourself.
3. Do not assume that your students will keep all the messages you send.

### **Teaching with the Web: Course Web Pages**

1. Allow plenty of lead-time for planning the course and designing course web pages.
2. Be sure that the course web pages are functional.
3. well-prepared for your presentation, for example: check the classroom set up, verify links especially the external links, check the room lighting to see if it is suitable for both viewing the projected screen and taking notes, arrange for a technical support staff to be in your classroom at the start of class to help with the setup if necessary, always know whom to call for help if technical problems occur.
4. Emphasize the need for filtering and interpreting information on the Web when encouraging students to use on-line resources.
5. Remind students that only a smaller fraction of the whole archive of knowledge is available on the Web.

## **Student Web Pages (Project Web Pages)**

1. Define specific goals for student web pages and/or projects.
2. Provide detailed guidelines for student web pages and/or projects.
3. Set clear expectations and standards for assessing student web pages and/or projects.
4. Make student web pages and/or projects an integral part of student learning experience in the course.
5. Arrange technology training for students if necessary.
6. Encourage group sharing and reviewing.

## **Web-based Course Management Systems**

1. Identify what features in a course management system you will use and why you will use them.
2. Start with a few features if you are the first time or novice user of the course management system.
3. Consider how to organize and present course materials effectively through the use of a web-based course management system.
4. Prepare students for the use of the course management system and arrange student training if necessary.

So there you have it. As you endeavor to add a technology rich environment to your own classroom, remember to have fun. The more you use computers, the less intimidating they will become. There's little likelihood that you'll break your computer merely by using it, so don't worry. Take it easy, take it slow, and forgive, don't forget. You'll make lots of mistakes in the beginning, everybody does. Don't blame yourself or get discouraged and try to learn from any mistakes that you do make. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "Fear always springs from ignorance." The same can be said today about computers and technology. So get in there and get your own feet wet.