

A Back-to-School Tech Checklist

By Lorrie Jackson

WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?

You will discover ten technology tasks that can make the new school year smoother and happier.

How will this techtorial help me in the classroom?

Preparing yourself and your classroom technology ahead of time maximizes classroom time later!

What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?

Nothing specifically. Some tips apply to all teachers; others apply to those with technology in their classrooms or at home.

Who will benefit from this techtorial?

All K-12 educators.

How long will the techtorial take?

Most people complete the techtorial in 15 to 25 minutes.

Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?

The techtorial addresses II.c, II.d, VI.c, and VI.d.

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](#), click Standards in the menu bar on the left, and then click the arrow to the right of Standards and Performance Indicators for Teachers.

WHY A BACK-TO-SCHOOL TECH CHECKLIST?

Problem:

During the summer, classrooms get jostled, computers get unplugged, and teachers' brains turn mushy.

Problem:

Staff and policies change, so finding help when you need it later in the school year can be time consuming.

Problem:

New technology at home or in the classroom might make revamping lesson plans necessary.

Solution:

Complete the following checklist to ensure that you, your students, and your technology are ready for the new school year!

TASK 1: CLEAN UP YOUR COMPUTERS!

You clean and straighten your classroom to prepare for the new school year. Why not do the same for your technology?

- Use a soft cloth or paper towel dampened (not dripping!) with water to clean your computer's plastic case.
- Use a paper towel moistened (not dripping!) with a household glass cleaner to wipe the monitor screen. (Do NOT use cleaner on laptops or other LCD screens.)
- Turn the keyboard upside down and shake slightly to remove dirt and debris. You can also purchase a compressed air tool to force out debris.
- Turn the doughnut-shaped plastic piece on the back of each mouse and remove it. Remove the ball and use your fingernail to gently scrape any dirt from the rollers. Wipe the ball clean with a soft cloth and replace it and the doughnut-shaped piece
- Make sure the fan at the back of your desktop computer and the vents on the monitor are clear of papers or other materials that might restrict air flow.
- Plug in all power cords to a surge protector or attach them as directed by your tech staff.
- Make sure your keyboard, mouse, printer cable, and network cable are securely connected.
- Turn on your computer and print a document, surf the Internet, and open any software you regularly use to see whether everything is working correctly
- Take a few minutes to straighten up the files on your Desktop. See next week's techorial on the ABCs of PC Maintenance for more details on file management and cleaning up your hard drive.
- Repeat the above steps with each student computer -- and with your home computer or laptop too!

TASK 2: LOCATE YOUR TECH SUPPORT

- Write down the names of your technical support people -- those who fix your printer, re-image your computer, and reconnect you to the Internet.
- Find out how to contact them when you need them -- a form on the Internet, a phone call, a run to their office.
- Bake them cookies and make them your friends before trouble starts! Just as being proactive and positive helps forge connections with your students' parents, being nice to your beleaguered tech team will pay off when you need help later.
- Write down the names of your technology integration staff: These are computer lab teachers, curriculum specialists, librarians and media specialists, and others who know how to blend technology into your curriculum. Ask them for a few short-and-sweet ideas you can incorporate into your classroom right away.

TASK 3: SCHEDULE AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Check with your principal, team leader, or another administrator to see whether policies or requirements have changed regarding classroom technology use.
- Investigate in-service technology workshops or training sessions, especially those geared to your content area.
- If your school or district does not provide their own tech staff development, check libraries, universities, community centers, or even local computer stores for free classes on hardware and/or software topics.
- Find out whether such workshops will fulfill professional development hours required by your school, accrediting agency, or state-licensing program.
- Check with professional education organizations to learn about local, state, or national conventions with an emphasis on technology.

TASK 4: MAKE SURE TECHNOLOGY IS ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL STUDENTS

- For bilingual students, check into software or Internet sites that offer instruction in both languages.
- Both PCs and Macs have system software that will change the key layout on keyboards or the titles of icons into several languages for students with limited English proficiency.
- Make sure classroom computers are fully accessible to students who have physical disabilities. Take into account lighting, spacing, and additional workspace for assistive technology.
- Many classroom computers are used for both remediation and enrichment. Make available software or Web sites that can be used with minimal supervision.

TASK 5: SCHEDULE ONLINE TIME EACH DAY -- LISTSERVS, E-MAIL, WEB SITES

- Find time to get online daily, either at school or home.
- Locate a Web site such as Education World or one maintained by a professional organization, and browse education news or articles related to technology.
- Join an educators listserv, or subscribe to a computer-help newsletter. For suggestions about listservs and newsletters, go to [A Beginner's Guide to Integrating Technology](#).

TASK 6: IGNORE THE TECH-TRASH TALKERS AND MAKE A 'TEXPERT' YOUR FRIEND

- To become more tech savvy and improve your tech-spirit this year, find a teacher who did great things with technology last year and make friends!
- Try to ignore technology naysayers or at least learn the causes of their problems. Is it really technology that's bugging that teacher -- or is it an administrator, bad coffee, or back-to-school blues?
- Join a mailing list or a message board such as [Talking Tech](#). Then, if you can't find a soul to commiserate or celebrate with at your school, there's always a friendly and supportive teacher somewhere who's willing to cheer you on!

TASK 7: FIND OUT HOW YOUR CLASS CAN BEST ACCESS TECHNOLOGY

- One-computer classroom? Decide when and how you'll use the computer regularly with your students. Don't let your computer remain a \$1,000 eyesore this year.
- Classroom center containing four or more computers? Determine how to structure activities so students can be as self-directed as their ages will allow? Are there new ways to use the center in your curriculum?
- Computer lab? Talk with the lab teacher about concepts or skills you want reinforced. If you do the instruction, beat the crunch by signing up for the lab now!
- Laptop cart? Learn the policy for signing up. If you've never used the cart before, be sure to take some time before school begins to learn how to set up a room full of laptops.
- Individual laptops? Decide now how you'll allow students to use their laptops; talk to other teachers about how they use laptops in their classrooms.

TASK 8: DETERMINE RESOURCES FOR YOUR STUDENTS

- Find out how many of your students have access to computers and the Internet at home. If the percentage of computers in the home is low, investigate community centers, public libraries, or even shopping centers to locate free computer and Internet access. Inform your students and families about those resources.
- Learn what technology is available for students to use at school during free time.
- Get to know the librarians and media specialists at your school. Much of what students do on the computer revolves around research; your library staff probably has, or knows about, some great resources for you and your students.

TASK 9: SET GOALS AND WORK TOWARD THEM

- As you plan for the coming year, think of three things you'd like to do differently with technology this year. Make each goal concrete and attainable based on your skills, your students' skills, and your access to technology. For example, a personal goal might be to learn how to create a basic spreadsheet on the computer by December. A teaching goal might be to locate primary-source documents to supplement your social studies unit.
- Write down your goals and keep them where you'll see them -- at the bottom of a pile of back-to-school memos doesn't count!
- Review goals periodically and revise them as situations change and your skills improve.
- Share goals with friends and family, both for support and for positive peer pressure.

TASK 10: SMILE AND DON'T SWEAT IT!

- Don't take on too much.
- Keep your tech goals finite and your focus on the curriculum.
- Treasure your successes and learn from your failures.
- Share your technology experiences with others.
- As always, enjoy your job, connect with your students, and just TEACH!

What did I learn?

You learned how to prepare for a great year of using technology in your classes!

Where can I find more information?

[Computer Hope](#) explains how to clean your computer and provides free help with computer terminology and questions. The [International Society for Technology in Education](#) provides a list of associations for K-12 educators interested in technology.