

# Teaching in a Tech-ing Classroom

## By Lorrie Jackson

### WHY A TECHTORIAL?

#### What will I learn today?

You will learn guidelines for managing your classroom when students are involved in technology-related activities.

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

The techtorial applies to any whole-class computer activity.

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

The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard IIIa and IIIc in particular.

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](#).

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### WHY IS TEACHING TECH DIFFERENT?

Many teachers assume that the classroom management strategies they employ during traditional lessons will transfer easily to technology-based lessons. That is rarely true.

The computer lab is *not* like a regular classroom. Students participating in computer-related lessons and activities are involved in more

- exploration: Students must experiment -- with different computer tools, with different keywords and search terms, and with different ways to solve problems.
- collaboration: Students must help one another, because teachers cannot possibly be at every computer every second.
- movement: Printers jam, students need disks, and friends need help, so more movement is necessary.

In addition, most students approach computer activities and lessons with high spirits. Attempting to tame that excitement by demanding silence and assigning very focused work dampens student enthusiasm.

To make management even more difficult, most computer activities require teachers to provide frequent direction, explanation, and individual support, which slows down instructional time.

When you guide students in their next computer-enriched project, be ready for a bit more noise, interaction, and activity. In tech classrooms, it's wise to remember that a little *creative anarchy* can be a good thing -- as long as you control it.

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## PREPARATION

If you're a classroom teacher working with students in a computer lab, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- If computer lab staff is present in the lab, determine what their roles are and what your role will be. Who will lead the lessons? Can you ask for teaching assistance or only for tech support problems?
  - Check with lab staff about computer lab rules and procedures and share those rules with students.
  - Announce and implement additional rules of your own, if necessary.
  - Channel excess student energy by pointing out that lab use is a privilege and that misbehavior will result in the loss of that privilege. Most students relish their time on computers, so moving a poorly behaved student to a table without computers, even if just for a few minutes, often is punishment enough.
  - If students' skill levels and experience vary, partner tech-experts with tech-beginners for activities and lessons. Student mentors should demonstrate extra tech knowledge *and* strong interpersonal skills. Sometimes the most tech-savvy students have a hard time helping others simply because the subject comes so easily to them!
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## TECH RULES

No rules in your lab? The following rules will make computer time run more smoothly:

- **Ask 3, Then Me:** This rule encourages kids to collaborate to answer questions and solve problems, while freeing you up to deal with the major crises. (Best for students in grade 2 and above.)
- **Hands Behind Your Back:** Kids love helping, but helping without grabbing the mouse and doing it themselves is difficult for children (and for adults). Teach students to talk a classmate through a problem without touching the classmate's keyboard or mouse.

- **Signal for Help:** Students who are waiting for help with their hands raised *aren't* working; they're wasting valuable lab time. Have students place an easily recognizable or brightly colored object on top of their computers if they need help. A tongue depressor Velcro®-ed to the side of the monitor, a colorful paper cup, or a folded piece of construction paper works well.
  - **Pay Attention:** Make sure everyone listens to instructions by preventing students from typing or playing with the mouse while you talk. Have students put both hands on their heads (Make instructions brief!), turn their chairs around so the backs touch the computer table, flip over their mouses so they can "rest," or turn off their monitors (*just* the monitor, not the entire computer).
  - **Save Often:** Blink the lights (perhaps at 5-10 minute intervals) to stop the class and have everyone save their work at once. Remind students specifically where they are to save their work (disk? network folder? computer desktop?).
  - **No Internet Use Without Permission:** Even with a filter, students can be off-task at inappropriate or non-academic sites, so carefully monitor Internet use.
  - **Don't Touch the System:** No software should be downloaded or installed, and no settings should be changed, without permission. This rule is especially important for middle and high school students.
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## TECH MANAGEMENT

### Set Up

The seating arrangement in the computer lab can make it easier or harder to manage your class. Favorable seating arrangements for different grade levels include:

- *Grades K-2:* Arrange students in rows, if possible. Peer contact should be limited, and you should be able to see every student.
- *Grades 3-6:* Encourage collaboration with a more flexible room arrangement. Assign partners, or allow students to sit with a friend. (Be ready to change the seating of students who are off task.)
- *Grades 7-12:* Allow very informal seating arrangements and encourage group work. Consider grouping four students at each computer and having them work together to solve complex problems or accomplish tasks.

Be alert for students who pick out-of-the-way computers; they might be planning some off-task activities!

### Maintenance

Get students involved in classroom management too. Make your most tech-

savvy students "technical managers," responsible for troubleshooting during class time. Those students can help with such tasks as

- fixing paper jams and loading extra paper into printers;
- guiding fellow students through specific tech tasks;
- helping download software; or
- other advanced tasks you feel they're up to.

Make less tech-savvy students "end-of-class managers." (Students love the power and prestige of this position.) End-of-class managers make sure each computer area is clean and all programs are closed at the end of class. They check each student's workstation to make sure

- the tracking ball, if any, is in the mouse;
- the mouse is on the mouse pad and the mouse pad is straight;
- all papers, pencils, and other items are put away or thrown away;
- the keyboard is straight and in the proper position;
- software programs are shut down; and
- nothing new has been added to the desktop.

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## BEHAVIOR ISSUES

The best way to deal with behavior problems is to stop them before they start. To prevent behavior problems from arising during computer-based activities:

- Give students clear and specific instructions. "Surf the Internet for information about \_\_\_\_\_" isn't good enough. A better, more defined task might be: "Go to [Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com) and find the definition of a hero. At [Biography.com](http://Biography.com), look up information about a specific hero. List four reasons why that person is a hero."
- DON'T SIT DOWN! Computer use requires more hands-on and eyes-open monitoring by teachers. Walk around or find a spot where you can see all the monitors at once.
- Praise loudly and often. ("I see Sonia is on the right page and working hard. Oh, I see James is there now too.")
- If you have the necessary hardware and software, project your computer screen onto a TV, projector screen, or other computers, and demonstrate to students exactly what you want them to do.
- Write on a chalkboard the steps of the activity and then read them aloud. Have students repeat the steps aloud as well.
- Be alert for students who click or type when they're supposed to be listening.
- Be especially aware of students with special needs. You might be surprised by their technology abilities or by the kinds of difficulties they

encounter. Some might need printed instructions; others might need you to give them only one step to accomplish before going on to the next step. Modify tasks and expected behaviors as necessary.

- Remind students often of the task and time remaining. Computers can turn even serious students into distracted slackers.

If, in spite of your best efforts, behavior issues do arise, deal with them quickly. Don't give them a chance to escalate. Warn disruptive students and get them back on task immediately. Move chatty students to another seat -- or to a seat close to you. Follow your regular discipline plan for students who continue to misbehave after a warning. As a last resort, provide students who repeatedly break rules or are off task with written work to complete during computer time. Students love using the computer, so withholding computer use is a great motivator.

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### **TELL ME MORE!**

#### **Where can I find more information?**

Check out [Classroom Rules Prevent Problems](#), and [Managing Technology: Tips From the Experts](#) from the EducationWorld archives.