

Creating Tech Handouts

By Lorrie Jackson

WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?

You will learn how to create effective handouts for your next tech lesson.

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

The techtorial applies to any software or hardware.

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

The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard 11e 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](#).

CREATING THE BEST TECH HANDOUTS!

So, you want your students to find five facts about dolphins from two Web sites. Or, perhaps they have measured the distance of the school flagpole's shadow at different times of the day and need to record the data in a spreadsheet. You could tell them what to do and hope they remember all the steps -- and spend valuable time reminding them of the steps -- or you could provide them with effective tech handouts and teach them to work independently.

But aren't we supposed to be moving towards a paperless world? Why bother with paper during a tech lesson? For a number of reasons, including:

- Different learning styles/disabilities: Students learn differently. Although some will remember instructions you give orally, visual learners will need written and illustrated instructions. Those with learning disabilities might need both oral and written reinforcement.
- Consistency and Comprehensiveness: Tell students how to do something and most might get close, but few will cover everything exactly the way you want them to. Files will be saved all over the place. Titles will be right aligned or left aligned -- everywhere but in the center of a Word document as you instructed. Ensure that your expectations will be met by spelling them out on paper.

- Self-direction: Lessons that use technology successfully often involve students working on their own or with a small group. You simply don't have time to walk each student through each step of a project. Clear and effective written instructions keep students on task while you spend your time on other teacher tasks.
- Any age, any content area: Do you teach preschool and think your students can't use paper-based instructions? Here's a [sample](#) used in a kindergarten class. Students were taught to open a Web site, read a story along with aural prompts, rate the story, and then close the browser. No words were needed; the instructions were all provided via screenshots!

So, now are you ready to create and use effective handouts? Let's get started.

BREAKING DOWN THE STEPS

Elementary students, as well as pre-service teachers, often are familiar with the peanut butter and jelly sandwich lesson. The activity is simple: Explain (or write) the steps for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The trick is to keep each step simple, make sure you cover *every* step, and be specific! "Put the peanut butter on the bread" might lead someone to put an unopened jar of peanut butter on top of an unopened loaf of bread.

The same rules apply to creating effective technology handouts: Keep it simple, cover every step, and be specific. Also, be sure to consider the skills, developmental level, and reading level of your students. A high school senior can be told "Open Word" without being told to "double-click the big, blue W." A second grader cannot.

In a 5th or 6th grade class, for example, instead of writing, "Go to the two bookmarked Web sites and find five facts on dolphins," you might want to write the following:

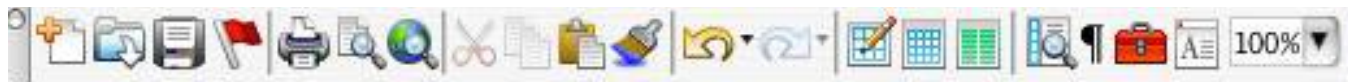
- Open Internet Explorer (double-click the big, blue E on your desktop).
- Click the word Favorites at the top of the screen.
- Click the Dolphin Sites folder and choose "Dolphin Research Center."
- Click "Learn about Marine Mammals" on the left side of the window.
- Click the "Acoustics" link. A new file will open.
- Read the first page of the Acoustics file and write two facts you didn't know about how dolphins make sounds.

WHAT'S A SCREENSHOT?

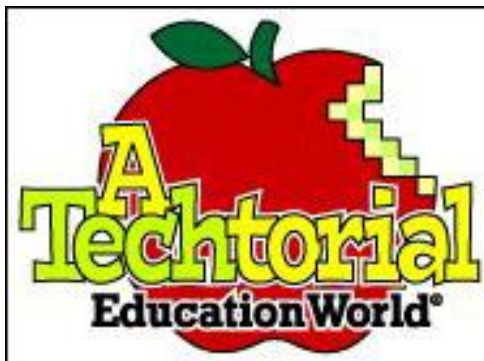
What's a screenshot? A screenshot is a picture of something on your computer screen. You can make a screenshot of almost any feature of any software program, and it can be as small or big as you want. For example, this is part of the Desktop of a Mac:




This is a toolbar in Word:



This is the logo for Education World's Web site:



What good are screenshots when writing instructions for students? Let's say you're trying to get students to right align their names in a Word document. You could write, "On the formatting toolbar, click the icon that looks like five lines aligned to the right."

Or you could write, "Click ." The screenshot is shorter and easier to understand.

CREATING SCREENSHOTS

Creating screenshots is quick and easy too. Freeware and shareware programs are available for all platforms (PC, Mac, Linux). Just go to [Version Tracker](#), select your platform from the drop-down menu, and type "Screenshot" into the search blank. Downloading software takes only a few minutes, then you're ready to take some screenshots. Basically, no matter which platform or software you use, once the software program is open, you simply press two or three keys, and then drag your mouse over the part of the screen you want to capture.

Newer Macs come with screen capturing software already installed. Just press the Shift, Command (Apple), and number 4 keys at the same time. A crosshair will appear where your cursor is. Drag and hold over what you want to capture as a screenshot. Your screenshot will be saved as a PDF on your Desktop.

For whole screen images or even a timed screen (so you can go back and click a few things just before the image is captured), try Grab, a program that comes with OS X and is found in the Utilities folder in the Applications folder. If you don't want a PDF version of the screenshots, SnapClip is a great freeware program that allows you to save these images as JPGs.

PC users can use the Print Screen (PRTSCRN) button on their keyboard. (Depending on your keyboard, you might need to press the Shift or the Alt and Shift keys to capture the screen or a given window.) Pressing that key will save a copy of your screen to your clipboard. Then, open Microsoft Paint (Start>Programs>Accessories) or, for newer versions of Windows, Image Editor (Start>Programs>Office Tools). Click Edit>Paste, and then save your image as a .jpg file. For one-step screenshots, check the freeware and shareware programs available at [Version Tracker](#).

KEEP IT SIMPLE SILLY!

Below are a few final thoughts to consider as you create your tech handouts:

- Consider Accountability: Who will review the student's work? You? If so, when? A peer? If so, how? To ensure that each student does his or her best, explain aloud and in print how the work will be evaluated. Consider using a rubric and share the rubric with students, so they know exactly what will count towards their grade. For non-graded activities, especially in early childhood, place a poster above the classroom computer center and put a sticker next to each student's name as he or she completes an activity. For younger students especially, award stickers to every student

who *attempts* the activity; do not award stickers based on the quality of the work.

- **Keep it Short:** Limit instructions to no more than two pages. If the tech activity lasts more than one day (say research and publication of a Science Fair project), then break each day's activity into a separate handout.
- **Save Your Work:** Put a copy of the handout in a clear plastic page protector and place it near each classroom computer. You might want to stick adhesive clips to the side of each computer monitor, so handouts can be secured when not being used. Consider filing handouts in a 3-ring binder, making it a snap to pull them out for use next year.
- **Watch Your Language:** Remember, it's not important that a student know what word wrap, cell range, or nonlinear PowerPoint presentation means. Use words your students are familiar with to describe the activity. Your content area -- social studies, math, French, and so on -- should be the focus of the activity, not memorizing tech terminology.
- **Checklist:** Consider writing your handout like a checklist, such as "Place an x in the box if you have centered your title." The simple act of penciling an "x" might help students with kinesthetic learning styles or those needing a little more help focusing on a task.

TELL ME MORE!

Where can I find more information?

For an example of a lesson in which classroom teachers might use a tech handout while teaching Language Arts, see [First Grade Writing](#).