

Educate with E-Mail: Part One

By Lorrie Jackson

WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?

You will learn how in-school e-mail can help students learn.

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

The techtorial can be used with any computer with Internet access.

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

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

E-MAIL CAN BE EDUCATIONAL

Most educators are aware of the value of e-mail for communicating with friends and family, but did you know that e-mail can have educational benefits as well? E-mail can

- provide immediate feedback to students and to teachers.
- extend classroom discussions beyond a single classroom or class time.
- motivate students to participate more fully in classroom discussions.

This techtorial focuses on using e-mail within your own classroom and school -- not outside the school. A companion techtorial focuses on off-campus e-mails: using e-mail for collaborative activities with other schools, for e-mailing experts, and for e-mailing between school and home.

Why start with e-mailing only within the school? In-school e-mail

- gives students and teachers an opportunity to become familiar -- and comfortable -- with using e-mail in the classroom.
- provides a higher level of safety for students.
- offers an alternative for younger students, who might not be ready (or allowed) to venture technologically beyond their own classrooms.

WHAT'S YOUR E-MAIL SKILL LEVEL

What's your own e-mail skill level? Before using e-mail with students, you'll want to have some experience using it yourself. If you're an e-mail beginner, you'll need to

Establish an e-mail account: Most districts provide individual e-mail accounts for teachers; check with your school or district technology coordinator to find out if yours does. If your school does not provide e-mail accounts for teachers, but you prefer to not use your personal account, you can obtain a free account through [Yahoo Mail](#) or [Gmail](#). Both those email services are Web-based, meaning you can send and receive mail from any computer with Internet access. That can be an advantage over e-mail accounts provided by your Internet Service Provider (AOL, a local phone or cable company, etc.).

Learn and practice basic e-mail skills: To teach with e-mail, you'll need to know how to

- send and receive e-mail.
- read and save attached files.
- attach files to an outgoing message (not available with some Yahoo accounts).
- save incoming and outgoing e-mails.

You'll also need to know your [Netiquette](#): what is appropriate to write and/or send in an e-mail message. Simple things like typing in all caps, not signing e-mails, or replying to a group rather than to the original sender are faux pas that can annoy recipients!

If you'd like help learning the above skills, take a look at [Harness E-Mail](#). If you're using a school-based e-mail account or another school-owned program, consult your peers or school or district tech staff for technical pointers and instructional materials. If you're using Yahoo or Gmail, log on to your e-mail account and click Help whenever you get to something you don't understand.

Don't be afraid to ask students for help as well. Helping you will empower them and possibly dispel *your* belief that you must know more than your students to successfully teach with technology!

GETTING STARTED WITH E-MAIL

Don't even think about using e-mail with students until you:

- Investigate your school's or district's policies for e-mail use.

- Decide what e-mail program students will be using.
- Find out how accounts are set up (if students will be using a school or district program) and learn whether accounts can be kept internal temporarily (meaning students can only e-mail students/teachers at their own school).
- Explore Oracle's Think.com (if students will be using an online e-mail service). Think.com provides a safe environment where students can display their work and e-mail one another and their teachers. Students can only e-mail one another or other Think.com schools, making this a very safe choice for elementary classrooms. The site also offers tutorials and friendly help staff to ensure you understand how it works. (Note: As a Web-based program, Think.com is available anywhere there's an Internet connection, allowing students to connect from school, home, the library, and more!)
- Find out if parental permission is required for the service or e-mail program you'll be using -- or by your school or district.
- Let parents know how students will be using e-mail, how you will ensure that no inappropriate material is sent or received, and how you expect students to benefit from classroom e-mail use.
- Get signed permission from parents, if necessary.
- Set up student accounts.

EASY E-MAIL ACTIVITIES

Before beginning your e-mail activities, give students a chance to play with the technology by e-mailing one another safe, social messages. A definite "let's get silly" phase usually occurs when introducing new technology (witness the overabundance of sounds and transitions in students' first PowerPoints!), so make sure to devote an entire class period to just playing with the technology -- sending school-appropriate, but not necessarily educational, e-mails. That opportunity should satisfy their curiosity about the technology, and give you a chance to discover bugs and/or skill issues before using the e-mail for educational purposes. You'll be surprised at how fast students pick up skills and learn the program's features. They even might discover features you didn't know about!

Below you will find several simple activities for getting students started with e-mail. The activities can be used to teach students to use e-mail or to encourage students to practice e-mail use. All can be adapted for individual or group use, and completed in the classroom, in a school computer lab, or (depending on your e-mail program) from home.

- Following a lesson or lecture, ask students to e-mail you the top three things they learned. (You might be surprised!)
- Assign a note taker to each lesson or lecture. Have the note taker attach his or her

notes to an e-mail and send the e-mail to you. Forward those notes to all students and have each student e-mail to you a summary of the notes or a question that arose from reading the notes.

- Each day, ask one student to find a Web site related to a topic they're studying. Have that student e-mail the link to you along with an explanation of why the site is relevant. After you have approved the link, have the student e-mail the URL to the rest of the class.
- Assign elementary students one section of a textbook chapter and ask them to e-mail a summary of their section to one another.
- Encourage students to interview one another, students in other classrooms, or teachers via e-mail, and then e-mail the questions and answers back to you.

E-MAIL TIPS AND TRICKS

Remember to start small when introducing e-mail activities. Give yourself and your students time to learn, fail, regroup, and succeed.

Students often get so excited about e-mail that they e-mail one another at inappropriate times -- during lectures and tests, for example. Decide beforehand how you will control such e-mailing. Some schools have wireless networks that can be disconnected by the teacher. Check the Start bar (Windows) or the Dock (Apple) as you move around the room to see who's hiding (minimizing) their e-mail program. Determine how you will discipline rule-breakers and be sure to spell out the discipline policy before beginning e-mail use.

Some simple activities you can use to encourage e-mail use among students who have mastered the basics include:

- E-mail students a pop quiz of five questions. Have them complete the quiz and e-mail the answers to you.
- Take an e-mail survey of student reactions to a particular lesson, activity, or event.
- At the beginning of a class, ask students to e-mail to you a brief statement describing what happened during the previous class.
- E-mail homework assignments to absent students -- or ask another student to do it for you.
- Use Think.com's group feature, or your school's e-mail conferences, bulletin board, or chat features to create supervised online discussion groups on relevant class topics.

Note: Most of the activities in this techtorial also can be completed in one-

computer classrooms. Simply post the assignment on the chalkboard or bulletin board, and have one student at a time complete the assignment. You can establish an assigned rotation or have each student tag another student when he or she finishes the assignment.

TELL ME MORE!

Where can I find more information about using e-mail in the classroom?

For more information on teaching with e-mail, see [Email in the Classroom](#). And don't forget to check the second installment in this series: Using E-Mail for Off-Campus Connections.