



Creating class Web sites

by Kathy Schrock

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- FEATURE: Kathy Schrock's Tech Quest



Though it takes some time to create a class Web site and keep it updated, the benefits of doing so are endless. The latest statistics show that 72 percent of American homes have access to the Internet, so having a class Web site is the perfect way to encourage home-school communication, extend learning beyond the classroom, and show the world what your class is doing. Plus, with the easy-to-use templates that many hosting sites offer, you can create, post, and update a site in very little time -- without even knowing HTML, the computer language used to write Web pages!

Step 1: Get permission and guidelines



Before you start, check with your school about guidelines or templates for classroom Web sites. Some districts have regulations about whether or not you can post photos of students, what content is appropriate, and even what the layout should be. See samples of guidelines for school and classroom Web pages at Plano (Texas) Suggested Web Page Guidelines (<http://k-12.pisd.edu/guide/schools/webpages/>),

Step 2: Determine audience and purpose

Next, think about your site's main audience and reasons why people will visit it. For example, parents may log on to view samples of their children's work and send you e-mail messages. Students may depend on it to gather their daily homework assignments or visit educational sites relating to class studies. Community members may access it to learn about school events. If your site has the potential for

Bellingham (Washington) Designing School Home Pages

(<http://www.bham.wednet.edu/homepage.htm>).

To obtain proper permissions for using student work, names, and pictures on your site, you may want to create a permission form for parents and students to sign. See the one used by the Bellingham Schools

(<http://www.bham.wednet.edu/copyrule.htm>)

for an example.


multiple audiences, consider designing it with separate sections for each one.



Kathy Schrock is a retired technology director and the creator of *Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators*.

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 Untitled note

 Find a notebook

 Add tag

 Add comments

Version 6.0.6: c128369/1.0.1.250

 Web Clipper tutorial

 Options



Step 3: Find a host

School and district Web servers Many larger districts house their own Web servers and provide server space for teachers to post classroom Web pages. Since there can be a lot of technical support needed to create and maintain complex Web pages, design your site so that you can make and update it yourself, rather than depending on your school's technology coordinator. Several Web sites provide instructions and templates for you to use. (See "Free Web-page hosting sites" below.)



Subscription Internet service providers

Many Internet service providers, such as MSN and Earthlink, allot their subscribers Web server space to house a personal Web site. The amount of file space allocated is usually five or ten megabytes, which is sufficient for most classroom sites. Often, the provider offers telephone or Web-based technical support to help you move the Web pages from your local computer to a Web server so that they will be available on the Internet. (This moving process is called FTP or file transfer protocol.) However, they do not offer design ideas or help you with the creation of the Web page. Make sure to read the fine print carefully since some Internet service providers will charge you if the site is heavily visited. These extra charges could easily be incurred if you have 25 students visiting your site daily.

Free Web-page hosting sites

There are many free hosting sites on the Internet. Most include advertising in order to be able to offer the free service, so be aware of this when

Step 4: Design your site

Before you design your site, look at various class Web pages. Take note of the layout, graphics, colors, and ease of navigation to gather ideas for your own site. Be sure not to include too many graphics, colors, and fonts, as they will take longer to load and will distract your viewers. Some teachers add a new page for each topic so the site is a yearlong journal of classroom activities. Others remove previous information before adding new resources to keep the site size small. Once you have decided what to include, use a graphic organizer to help you design a site that's easy to navigate.



Step 5: Spread the word



Ask your school's Web coordinator to add a link to your class's site on the school's or district's site. Also, include the URL on your classroom newsletters and all correspondence with parents. You may also want to send e-mail reminders to parents each time you update your site. And, if your district allows it, make your site your classroom computer's homepage so that it will automatically appear on your screen when

you sign onto the Internet.



Step 6: Keep it updated

Web pages are great tools, but they need to be updated regularly. When you design your site, consider how often you will be able to update the material, and then create it accordingly. Try to work on the pages at least every other week to provide visitors with current information, replace dead links, and, more importantly, give a reason to re-visit your site. Rest assured, parents, students, and community members will appreciate your efforts!

Resources

<http://www.oswego.org/staff/cchamber/webdesign/edwebdesign.htm>
Explore various types of educational Web sites you can create.

www.smplanet.com/webpage/webpage.html

Visit this site for a guide to creating your own Web page.

www.siec.k12.in.us/~west/online/index.html

Gather tips for developing school Web pages.

choosing one of them.

If you are mostly interested in posting homework assignments, try YourHomework (<http://yourhomework.com/>). It also offers you an e-mail account, a calendar where you can post special events, and teacher-selected educational Web sites to help students with their assignments.

If you want to create an online photographic portfolio of classroom events and student work, try an online "photo album" site, such as Ofoto (<http://www.ofoto.com/>). You can easily move photos from your computer to their site to create online "albums" that can only be viewed by people to whom you e-mail the link to the album. This could help quell some concerns about using student pictures on the Internet, but discuss this with your technology committee before you start.

Several places on the Web host free personal Web sites, such as Geocities (<http://www.geocities.com/>). There are also sites designed specifically for schools. One of the easiest is the Learning Network's "My School Online" (<http://myschoolonline.com/>). Once registered, a teacher can choose from easy-to-use design templates, which include a welcome page, calendar, and student showcase. In addition, teachers can link to an online grade book and receive a free e-mail account. Also check out Bigchalk

(<http://schools.bigchalk.com/>), McGraw-Hill Learning Network (<http://www.mhln.com/>), and Scholastic's "Class Homepage Builder" (<http://homepage.scholastic.com/>) for templates for building class Web sites.

http://www.education-world.com/a_tech/tech008.shtml

Learn about how Web sites link home and school.

MEETING THE STANDARDS

This month's Tech Quest addresses ISTE standard V.D: Use technology to communicate and collaborate with peers, parents, and community to nurture student learning.