

Ten Steps to Creating a Classroom Website

by

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1. Create a vision or objective for your website: What is the ultimate purpose behind why you are using a website? Is it to display student work? Is it to connect with parents? Setting a purpose behind the vision of your website will help you focus your information and motivate you to keep your website updated.

My vision is to create a website that is user-friendly for the students, as well as their parents. I wanted lots of links and activities that the students could actually learn how to get to, rather than a page of "useful links" that students aren't provided opportunities to navigate through.

2. Training is essential: My district provided training for all the new teachers when I was hired five years ago. This helped give teachers the time to "play around" with the site and figure it out. However, this two hour training was not enough. I had to spend time exploring the website, so I could figure out how to use it the most efficient way possible.

Developing a website is just like getting any new gadget. When you get a new smart phone or computer, you devote time to figure out what it's about. Do not neglect the potential of your website by not devoting time to it. Once you figure out how the program works, it doesn't take much to keep it updated. That brings me to Step Number 3:

3. Update your website: There is nothing more frustrating than when you go to a webpage and see the "site under construction" sign. Additionally, it is almost as disappointing when you go to a teacher's page and realize it hasn't been updated since 2006.

If you have given yourself time to explore the program and the site design, it will be very easy to update your website. I have a "Homework" tab where I post the weekly assignments for my students. I'll admit that it takes some time to scan all of your documents or to transfer your worksheets from Word to PDF, but it is worth it. The first time I had a student who was absent Monday come in Tuesday with all her homework complete (because she went to the website) was enough motivation for me to keep on updating.

4. Teach your students how to use your website: Just saying "Go to my website" isn't enough. Take time in class to actually go over accessing your website.

Every time we do something in class that is accessed on my website, I go over how to even get to my website on the projector in class. For example, if we are going to do a chapter review activity, I show the students (or have them tell me) how to download the game from my website. Sure, it would be easier to just open up "My Documents" to view the game, but I make it a point to model for my students how to use my website.

5. Value your Website: Let the students see you using your website and updating it. Make a big deal about when students do access the website at home. Provide extra credit for the student who uses the 'Contact Page' to send you a message via the website. When the students see you use and "sell" the website, they will be more likely to access it on their own.

I provide time for my students to use my website in the school day. For example, we may go to the computer lab to go to a program on the mummification process. Afterwards, I'll allow students to go to any of the sites that they can access from my website. By providing time for students to access my site, they are seeing that it is worthwhile to do on their own at home. This is also important because it allows the students who do not have internet access at home to have time on my site. I've had multiple students tell me that they "played this game on my website" or parents email me about a question they've had regarding the homework on the homework page.

6. Accommodate your students: In Southern Illinois, and many other regions, I hear that not all students have internet access or computers at home. It seems as if some of the veteran teachers in my district are using this as an excuse to not use the classroom website. While this is true, it doesn't mean we should leave the students who do have access behind. Use your website as an enhancement to your curriculum, not a mandatory assignment. Provide opportunities for students to use your website and the computer during the school day. This way, you are making your website available for everyone to use, and providing motivation for those students with the capabilities to further delve into the site.

7. Maintain your website weekly. I sometimes hear, "I don't have time to do a website." I say, "You don't have time NOT to." I'll admit that it is a time commitment to learn how to manage your site. However, once you invest in your site, it is easy to keep updated. It takes me about 10 minutes on a Friday to update my site for the next week. But, then my lesson plans are also done. Thus, I don't view it as taking up any extra time, minus the initial learning of the program.

8. Be adaptable and positive: What happens when it doesn't work? As with any sort of technology, sometimes the internet, the host site, or link doesn't work. What makes a great teacher is the one who can adapt to this situation. There are going to be interruptions in our curriculum, and we just

need to be willing to be innovative and have a fall-back solution. It is like saying "I'm not going to show a movie today, because the power might go out." Or, "I'm not going to take the students to the library, because the book they might want might be checked out." We shouldn't let the excuses hinder us from moving forward. Embrace technology, embrace the possibility that it may fail, and you will succeed.

9. Don't be afraid of technology: Even the most technologically adept people, like me, get stuck in a rut when it comes to learning something new. My website is great, but it is not the best out there. I know that there are programs out there that may be better. However, I know how to use my website, and I use it consistently. My goal this year (with the help of time and my student teacher) is to peruse other site options, like edmodo, to see if there is a better, more current way to communicate with parents and students. I want to treat my website and technology as I do the rest of my teaching. For example, my English textbook is great, but I know there is a better way to communicate that information to my students rather than reading it from a book. I go the extra step by creating PowerPoints (and now, ActiveInspire flipcharts) to help my students understand the information.

10. Stay current: As an educator, I don't want to accept the status quo. Our students are living in a fast-paced, 4G world. If we don't try to meet them where they are, minimally, then we are doing them a huge disservice. It would be as if teachers of the past refused to embrace the power of email, the computer, or the ink pen. Take the time to learn about how to create a classroom website and other forms of technology so that you can better your teaching skills by bettering the skills of your students.

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Everybody who is anybody was taught how to be somebody by a teacher.