

Using Technology in the Elementary Classroom

By Marilyn Western

Hot Tips for Some Cool Summer Work

Tired of lying in the sun at the beach? Got the garden looking pretty good? Looking for a summer technology project? Choose any one of the following suggestions and prepare for your fall class! PS – Keep this list for next summer!

1. Organize your documents. Create files for each month of the year. In each month's file, create new files for units that you cover during that month, lesson plans, newsletters, notes home, rubrics, etc. Besides the months of the year, you can also add files named Permission Slips, Sub plans, Pictures, etc. Now move all your documents to the correct file so you never lose track of them again! While you're at it, you might also want to weed out old or duplicate documents. Just click once to select and hit the Delete key. If you get carried away and delete something you really want to save, Edit and Undo can be your best friend.

2. Organize your bookmarks/favorites. Create files for each subject area. In each subject file, create new files for specific units – for example, in the Science folder, create a folder for Rainforests, Magnets, and the Human Body. If you're really organized, you can also create folders in each of the themes – one for teacher links and another for student links. Now all you have to do is to fill them!

In *Netscape*, click on Bookmarks, Edit Bookmarks, File and New Folder. To put a bookmark into the file, go to the page you want to save, click Bookmarks, File Bookmarks, and then on the correct folder.

In *Internet Explorer*, click on Favorites, Organize, and Create Folder. To file a favorite, go to the page you want to save, click Favorites, Add Favorite, and Add In.

3. Create an All About the Teacher brochure. Impress parents with your stellar qualities and let them know their child is in the best of hands for the upcoming school year. Use Word or AppleWorks to create a brochure: landscape view, .5" margins all around, two columns (no line). Sketch out what you want to put in your brochure – a cover page featuring your name, school, and class. Inside first page with information you want to give parents about you – personal information to make you more approachable (two daughters who have gone through the XYZ school system) as well as professional (working member of the Science Task Force). Third page might contain an easy to read summary of your curriculum and/or things to look forward to this year (field trip to Mackinac Island at the end of our Colonial unit). The fourth page might contain suggestions for parents on how to be involved in their child's education (check for homework each night). Have this ready for your first Parent Open House or to include with your first newsletter of the year.

4. Create a Welcome to our Classroom slideshow. Play around with Kid Pix or PowerPoint and put together a slideshow to present on the first day of school. Include pictures of last year's highlights for students to look forward to, let them know what they'll be studying this year, and remember to feature some of the fun things that your class will do. If you already have something like this set up, take a few hours to put some pizzazz into your slideshow: add some music or insert a short movie clip, insert a link to your class or school website, add a scanned newsletter, place your school mascot icon on each slide, etc. Remember to save some digital graphics this school year (photos, movies, to prepare for next year's slideshow).

5. Set up a newsletter template Take one of these hot afternoons and use some of your artistic skills (or a Wizard) to put together your first newsletter for this school year. Save as a template if that is an option with your software or you can use this first newsletter as a template for following newsletters – just Save your original as Sept1, then resave and name as Sept2. Any changes you now make will be saved as your second newsletter of the year. In October, open Sept1 and immediately save as Oct1, then make your changes. Since you have time this summer, create an impressive header for your newsletter – include a catchy title, put in your name, your school phone number, your email address, you class/school website and some clipart or a digital picture. This is information that will be in each newsletter and won't have to be re-worked each week. Set up the font styles and sizes, decide if you want 1, 2, or 3 columns, practice adding digital pictures, learn how to put a border around an article. Use your software's Help section to guide you along. It may even give you ideas of things you didn't know you could do.

6. Create a database of your class books. You know you've talked about doing this for years – take the time this summer to actually do it! Use the Help section of your software to guide you along. Name your fields Title, Author, Illustrator, Theme, Genre, Location (where you can find the book) and anything else that might be of interest. Later, you can sort for all the Jan Brett books, or list all your mysteries, or collect all the books about food. Once you have this set up, remember to add any new purchases to the database!

7. Create a hotlist for September. (For Netscape directions, go to <http://www.edzone.net/~mwestern/hotlistNets.html>. For Internet Explorer directions, go to <http://www.edzone.net/~mwestern/hotlistNets.html>) Select some really neat places for your students to go during the first month of school. You might want to have a link to a video cam at a zoo to watch an elephant or a shark tank or even a street corner in a city so they can collect data on number of vehicles during specific hours of the day and compare to a local intersection (great for introducing or reviewing graphing). You can find some interesting videocams at <http://kids.discovery.com/cams/cams.html/> or <http://www.earthcamforkids.com/> Add several interactive websites that match your September themes like Fun Brain <http://www.funbrain.com/> or Fun School <http://www.funschool.com/>. Check the weather at <http://www.wunderground.com/> or explore a word of the day at <http://www.WordCentral.com/>

8. Create class lists. Set up tables to create classlists to keep record of skill mastery, homework checkoff, writing skills, permission slips turned in, Writing Workshop skills, math facts learned, even to check off that you've taken everyone's picture on the first day of school! If you work to set up the tables this summer, then all you have to do is to insert student names and you're off and running! Suggestion: when putting in student names, make one set with names in alphabetical order by last name (the office likes that format) and another set with names in order by their first name (classroom volunteers appreciate that!). You can set up lists for each Reading group, and another set for your Math groups, and other whole class lists. The sky is the limit once you know how to create a table!

In Word or AppleWorks, click on Table, then Insert Table. Choose the number of columns and rows (you can always add or delete them later) and remember to save!

From talking with classroom teachers, I've found that teachers who use technology for themselves more often than not seem to use technology with their students. Use your down time this summer to explore, play, and go for it!

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