

Creating Classroom Web Pages

This short course will show you how you can use a Web page as a teaching tool and as a way to share student work and ideas with the outside world. You'll discover how Web pages work, learn about the tools and techniques you can use to make Web page creation easy, and explore integrating the page into your course curriculum. You'll also learn to avoid common issues associated with putting student work and information on the Web.

Why Create a Classroom Web Page? A classroom Web page can accomplish a lot. You can create your page with surprisingly little effort and use it to:

- Keep parents informed about classroom activities
- Confirm homework assignments for students who are out sick or who have conveniently forgotten just what you assigned
- Post reminders for book orders, permission slips, and other important documents; you can even offer downloadable versions of many forms
- Showcase student work and provide links parents can explore with students to reinforce classroom learning
- Solicit parent feedback and help with various school projects
- Give parents an easy way to communicate with you and set up conferences

Different teachers -- particularly at different grade levels -- have individual needs and requirements for their Web pages. Take a look at these pages, all of which were created by teachers for a specific purpose:

["Nashville"](#) by Mrs. Nash's class at Cumberland Elementary School

[Grade 4K Richards Elementary School](#)

[Mrs. McGowan's First Grade](#)

[Mr. C's Web site](#)

As you go through the rest of this course, you'll have a chance to consider what you'd like to include in your own Web page. You might find it handy to keep a pad of paper nearby so that you can take notes and jot down ideas as they come to you.

Web Pages 101

If you're worried that you won't be able to create a Web page, let alone publish it to the Internet, never fear. There are plenty of free, easily found resources that will let you create and publish a page with absolutely no experience whatsoever. If you have something to say, you can get it on the Web with practically no effort -- and at no cost to you or your school.

We'll just take a few moments to review what goes into a basic Web page so that you understand what you can potentially put out into the world.

If you've spent any time online, you've probably noticed that these days, you can do just about anything online. For example, you can schedule appointments, read newsletters, communicate with others, or just find information. So your page could include a calendar of upcoming events, a classroom newsletter, a way for parents to get in touch with you, a list of current and upcoming assignments, and more.

If you can imagine it, there's probably a way to get it on your Web page, so take the time to think about what you want to make available.

What You'll Need to Create Your Page

It can't be stressed enough: You do not need to know anything about programming or HTML to create or publish a Web page. In fact, even if you're not sure what HTML stands for, that's still okay. (If you want to know, HTML stands for HyperText Markup Language, the language Web pages are written in.). You can find everything you need right on the Internet. Most do-it-yourself Web tools are designed to be used by people who don't have any special computer skills. The even better news is that the vast majority of Web tools are completely free.

Let's take a look. For a free, intense, and in-depth tutorial in building Web pages, check out the Web Primer at [W3 Schools.com](http://W3Schools.com).

Tools

Before you delve in and start designing your page, you might want to take a few moments to think about color. Head on over to the colorchemer.com Web site to learn about the ways color can enhance your page and make it easier to view. Conventional wisdom says that Web sites for children -- or child-related topics -- use bright primary and secondary colors such as red, green, yellow, and blue. But if you teach older children -- or if you personally can't stand the thought of another bright and shiny Web page -- don't hesitate to explore other color palettes.

If you can't wait any longer and you really want to start building your page, there are plenty of free WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editors that will help you. If you've used a word processor or desktop publishing software, adapting to a WYSIWYG tool won't be too difficult for you.

For instance, to insert a table, just click Table in the top toolbar, and so on.

Free Online Resources

HTMLArea is a free, customizable Web-based editor that lets you use Internet Explorer 5.5 or better to create amazing pages.

[Lissa's HTML Editor](#) is another free IE tool you can use to create pages. Just dump the text, images, tables, or whatever else you want into the empty box on her page, and click to turn your content into perfectly coded HTML that you can then publish on your Web site.

[Webspawner](#) lets you simply plug in the text you want on your page and generates it for you.

[The Express Page](#) offers an easy way to plug in text and create -- and host -- a free page in just minutes. You can also find template Web sites, such as [Free Web Templates](#), that will let you give your page a more polished and professional look.

Consider a Class Blog

If, despite the earlier encouragement that you can create a Web page for your classroom with relatively little effort, you are still really nervous about this whole Web page idea, here's an idea you should absolutely pursue: Create a class blog.

Blog is short for Web log -- it's an online journal of sorts. It's a place where you can quickly and easily share your thoughts with others -- and get their feedback just as efficiently. Take a quick look at these classroom blogs to see what you can do:

[Room 106](#)

[Taking the Plunge](#)

[Edtech 700](#)

With a blog, you can post messages about what you did in class today, and ask for help with upcoming projects. You can put out as much or as little content as you want to, and as you can see on the blogs referenced above, your Web site archives are easily available. Parents and students can leave you comments on your entries, and you can even offer some or all of your students the ability to post their own entries as well.

You can get a blog up and running in under 10 minutes. Head on over to [Blogger.com](#) for a free blog. You can take a free trial at [Typepad](#) and see how easy it is; plans start at under \$50/year if you like Typepad's features.

A Google search will reveal many other options, as blogging seems to get more popular every day. Many of the free Web site creators will also allow you to host your personal Web site for free. If you use Blogger to create your blog, you get free hosting. At Typepad, the cost of hosting is included in your plan fee (remember, plans start at under \$50/year). Your school probably offers some sort of free Web space for teachers and students. If you can't find any kind of free

service that you want to use, check with your personal Internet Service Provider (ISP) to see if your account comes with free Web space.

If you must pay a hosting company, it is simple to find one that won't charge more than \$5 to \$8 per month. You probably don't need the more robust features offered by hosting sites that charge more.

Planning Your Page

If you haven't already started making notes about what to include on your page, now's the time to sit down with a pad and paper and start brainstorming. You should have a clear picture of the content you want to feature before you start building -- otherwise you'll wind up with a page that looks like you just threw it together. If you take the time to plan it out carefully, it will look much more polished and professional.

Need some ideas to get you started? You might want to include:

- A calendar of classroom and school events
- Contact information so that parents can easily reach you
- A list of the rules and expectations you have for your students
- Current and/or upcoming assignments
- Links to outside Web sites that students and parents might find useful
- Student work samples

It's important to clearly define the role you and your students will play in establishing and maintaining your Web page. Do you want your students to have the ability to make updates to the page on their own? Or do you want to be able to monitor and approve all posted content? Make sure that you take the time to set down your Web page policy in writing. You don't necessarily have to post the policy on the page, but you do want to make sure to clarify it in your own mind.

Getting Started

It's intimidating to stare at a blank page -- or a blank screen. So to kick start your classroom Web page, go ahead and decide where you want to host it, and use one of the resources described in this lesson to write up and publish at least some bare bones content.

Start by introducing yourself and stating the purpose of your page. For example:

"Hi! Welcome to Mrs. Cappel's morning kindergarten class page. I'll use this space to keep you informed about what we're doing and learning in class. If you ever need to reach me you can email me at mrs.capple@ourgreatschool.org. I'm always happy to hear what parents have to say."

"This page is for students in Mr. Messer's Honors Algebra class and their parents. Each day at around 3 p.m., I will post the daily homework assignment so that you can double-check your child's assignment book. I will also post notices of quizzes and tests at least 3 days prior to the event. If your child has difficulty with an assignment, please email me by 8 p.m. so that I can offer help. You can also leave a message on my school voice mail at 555-1212 if you want to schedule extra sessions, discuss your child's progress, or contact me for any other reason."

"This is the official page for Mrs. Johnson's seventh grade class. One student from our class will post a daily journal entry every day to let you know what we have been doing in school. We would like to hear your thoughts on our activities, so please be sure to check in at least once a week! We really value your feedback and comments."

Once you've started -- and raised parent and student expectations -- you'll be motivated to continue and post more information. You don't have to do everything at once -- the dynamic nature of the Web is precisely what makes it so great. The text you put on your page should speak for itself.

Choose a simple font -- and please, stick with two fonts maximum on your page. You can play around with the size of your text to distinguish various sections. But if you have to rely on blinking, bold, or all-capital text, rethink what you're writing.

Images make your Web site interesting.

On a classroom Web site, you might want to share images of work done by your students. To do that, you'll need access to a scanner. Talk to the other teachers at your school -- chances are there's a scanner somewhere in the building. If you've never used a scanner and none of the teachers seem to know how to work it, ask one of the students for help. Offer extra credit, and you'll be sure to find an assistant.

Once your images are scanned, you can save and upload them to your Web site. If your students have done 3D projects, consider investing in a digital camera. You can take snapshots and upload them to your Web page. And if you can snap a few candid pictures of the kids throughout the year, their parents will probably be thrilled!

Ongoing Web Site Maintenance

At least once a month, set aside an hour to review your Web site. Update any necessary information, check your links to make sure the Web sites they lead to are still live and still feature appropriate content, and remove any outdated notices. If you don't make daily updates to your Web site, try to post something new at least once a week so that parents and students will continue to visit and look for relevant information.

Publishing Your Page

When you're ready to put your page out into the world, you'll need to figure out if you're publishing it on a Web site accessible only to parents, students, and teachers in your school, or if you're publishing on the public Internet. If you're using school-sponsored Web space, you may be subject to certain regulations or restrictions. Wherever you publish your page, you will undoubtedly need to confront several legal considerations. Always err on the side of caution. Talk to your principal, and if necessary, consult the school board before you plan your Web page. Make sure your page will conform to any established guidelines.

If you want to include student content or post pictures of your students, get permission from their parents. Send home a simple letter and ask parents to sign and return the form. Show parents some of the Web sites you're trying to emulate so they understand what you're hoping to accomplish. And take the time to explain the potential benefits to parents with concerns. Ultimately, if parents won't give permission for student participation, you may have to rethink your vision for your page. Tell parents that you'll refer to kids by first name only on the Web site (or first name, last initial if you have multiple Jens or Johns in your class). Often, that's enough to reassure parents that their children's privacy will be protected.

Integrating the Web in your Curriculum

Once you've established a Web page and become familiar with the intricacies of the Internet, it's time to start thinking about integrating Web resources into your classroom curriculum. For starters, look at the ideas outlined at [Creating a Curricular Web Page](#) and the [Curriculum Ideas](#) page of cyberbee.com. Then think about ways you can incorporate the page you've created into your own classroom activities.

For example, if you teach younger grades -- kindergarten through fifth grade -- reinforce writing and spelling skills by having students post brief questions on the page for their parents to answer; you can read the responses together. Later, as your students gain confidence and skills, they can write longer descriptions of the work they've completed in class and read their parents' comments on their own.

Older students -- sixth through eighth grade -- might enjoy an Internet scavenger hunt. You can post clues on your page and have your students carry out Web searches based on your instructions. The following Web sites describe how to do this in detail (or just Google "Internet scavenger hunt"):

http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr113.shtml

<http://www.kathimitchell.com/scavenge.html>

<http://www.cdli.ca/CITE/integrationideas.htm>

High school students, of course, most likely use the Web regularly outside of

school. In the classroom, you can encourage them to create some sort of collaborative project on the page -- or to set up a Web site all their own.

Summing Up

Once you begin your classroom Web page, you'll quickly discover how useful it is -- and how many new opportunities it offers for education. Experiment. Ask the students in your class for ideas. Ask their parents what they'd like to see on a classroom Web page. Make them active participants in the project, and you'll all be pleasantly surprised at the new level of cooperation you enjoy!