

Top Ten Things Teachers Should Know to Better Understand Student Network Behavior and the Web

1. Life exists beyond the “free Web.”

Understand that students should be looking beyond the “free Web” for their materials, to full-text databases, and yes, books. Students (or anyone else) may generally prefer fewer clicks and fewer steps. But if we are to encourage habits of scholarship, we need to move students beyond what is merely convenient to search for the best. Very often this type of search will lead them to the many online subscription services (the premium channels!) that we pay for and make available under “Catalogs and Databases” on the library website. You may want to direct students to start at the Virtual Library because, in many cases, it will save them time.

2. Expect quality; it is out there. Force students to defend their sources, especially those from the “free Web.” Simply ask them to explain how they got to the source and why they chose to cite it. The materials in our subscription services, to varying degrees, come prefiltered for quality. They have already gone through the publishing process and have been approved by a variety of editors and publishers. The free Web, on the other hand, though it has much of value to offer, is an unfiltered, self-publishing medium. Its sources require critical evaluation! Annotations are not asking too much when it comes to free Web sources.

3. Analyze URLs on the free Web when you evaluate a Works Cited page and when you work with students in the lab. *Sites created by free hosting services like Geocities, AOL Members, and Tripod should raise a red flag.* Sites including a “~” are generally created by an individual who may be part of a larger institution, organization, or service. These sites vary greatly in quality. If a site is an .edu, confirm whether it is maintained by a university

department, professor, freshman, or middle school students. Dismiss most K–12 sites as nonscholarly, especially for high school use. Remember, anyone can buy any domain, with the exceptions of .mil and .gov. If a site is an .org, rather than a .com, it is not necessarily superior in content.

4. Beware/aware of shifting windows. When in a lab setting, recognize that students tend to open multiple windows with the intent of hiding some—fantasy sports, chat, games, etc. You can check to see if your students are on task by peeking at the bottom task bar to see which windows are currently open.

5. Discourage personal downloads. Our high-speed network makes it tempting for students to download music, video, games, and application files at school. When downloaded to student folders, these files take up excessive server space. They can slow the network down, compromising its limited bandwidth, especially during busy times of the day. Reserve downloads for academic use.

6. Update your virus definitions weekly. Protect your machine! Viruses are hidden in many types of files. They generally come from downloads and e-mail attachments. You may pick them up from an infected disk. See our network administrator if you need instructions.

7. Check regularly for plagiarism and let your students know that you do. The best preventative measure is to expect an environment valuing academic integrity and to design projects that require original thought and don’t lend themselves to cutting and pasting. To check for plagiarism, you can paste short selections of more unique text, surrounding by quotation marks, into full-text

search engines like Alltheweb.com or Google. Your school might subscribe to a prevention service like turnitin.com.

There is no perfect answer or system. Many “invisible Web” sources and databases won’t be caught by a search engine or check service. You will not catch all offenders, but if your students know how highly you value academic integrity, that you check for suspected plagiarism, and that you know where to check, they will likely be deterred. You can find additional strategies for battling plagiarism at VirtualSalt: Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers (<http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>) and a rather long list of paper mills/cheat sites at <http://www.coastal.edu/library/mills2.htm>.

8. Understand frames. On a Web page, frames may *disguise* where you really are. Frames split your browser into two or more windows. They often load Web pages from another source into a window without revealing the source address. If you are in Google Image Search or Ask Jeeves, or other frame-based

site, you will want to “remove frames” in order to see where your image or text is actually originating. Look for a “Remove Frames” button. Students should be aware of this issue too. We want our students to evaluate the “true source” of their sources. Still confused? See me for a demo.

- 9. Log-off.** Do not leave your account logged on and walk away from your machine! This is like leaving your grade book open, or an upcoming exam in plain view on your desk.
- 10. Have students log-off too.** Students should be concerned about security too! They should never “share” their passwords or leave their files or accounts open. Students are accountable for their passwords and for what is in their folders.

Feel free to contact me for more information,

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Your School Library Media Specialist