

## Geek's Guide to Teaching

So you're not tech savvy? That's okay. We snuck a page from the computer guy's handbook and found this: The nine tricks every teacher really needs to know.

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Taken from <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/geekguide.htm>

### #1: Know how to play and make podcasts.

What makes podcasts a classroom must? The opportunity for anytime, anywhere learning. Teachers can record lectures. Students can podcast a poetry jam, says Amy Wright, acting director of communication and technology at The School at Columbia University in New York. A Spanish teacher at Wright's school, Madeleine Polinsky, regularly podcasts new vocabulary with pictures. Plus, it's easy on your wallet: Subscribing to a podcast is free.

### #2: Know how to blog.

With a blog you can post homework, extend conversations, and keep parents in the loop, says Will Richardson, tech supervisor at Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington, New Jersey, and the man behind a site that advocates the use of blogs in the classroom.

The best first step for would-be teacher bloggers? Reading other classroom blogs (find them here ). Then head here to start your own free journal.

### #3: Know how to send an e-mail to 30 parents.

Make it simpler by creating a distribution list, suggests Jane Lierman, *Instructor* advisor and teacher in Lake Oswego, Oregon. That way you only type "Fifth Grade Families" instead of thirty e-mail addresses every time you want to send off a newsletter. (Don't know how to do this? Check out the "Help" section of your e-mail program-it's easy.)

The unexpected bonus of plugging in with parents? E-mailing creates a paperless record of all your communication, so there's no need to keep track of-and decipher-a bunch of scribbled Post-its.

### #4: Know how to wiki.

You can set up a wiki on any topic kids are studying, says Amy Wright. Both pb wiki and Wikispaces offer free accounts. Clarence Fisher, a middle school teacher in Northern Manitoba, Canada, had his students create a wiki about ancient Egypt. It served as a (more interesting) textbook to their social studies unit.

### #5: Know how to take great photos.

Use a digital camera to collect evidence in science or document History Day speeches, suggests Gigi Carlson, author of *Digital Media in the Classroom*. Capturing those moments enables kids to look later for patterns and deduce conclusions from their work, she adds. Visit The Literacy through Photography Project for specific lesson plans and ideas.

**#6: Know how to find the best Web sites.**

Graded a president report or two where students attributed “Ask not what you can do for your country” to Abraham Lincoln? It's time to teach kids how to tell credible sites from crummy ones.

**#7: Know what all the remote buttons do.**

Or at least the closed-captioning button. Next time you pop in a video, turn on the captions and see comprehension skyrocket. Why? Research shows that technology that's traditionally been used for the deaf or vision-impaired can help *all* kids learn to read.

Elementary teacher Tara Holdsworth of Philadelphia showed the beginning segment of the *Lion King* to third and fifth graders who were working on adding vivid language to their writing. She asked them to write a paragraph to describe the sequence. Then, she showed them the same segment with descriptive video added and asked them to write another paragraph. “They used more adjectives in their writing because they were trying to be concrete. It helped them paint the picture,” says Holdsworth.

**#8: Know how to spend PD hours.**

You don't necessarily have to pay for an online course. Check out Moodle, a free software package for producing Internet-based courses and Web sites. Experts suggest finding courses that are interactive and provide feedback quickly to keep you engaged.

**#9: Know how to call Australia for free.**

Want to hook up with a classroom overseas? Ditch the postage stamps and make a free phone call using Voiceover Internet Protocol (VoIP) and a software program such as Gizmo. It's easy, and if you have a webcam and an application such as Skype or iChat AV, you can also watch each other as you talk.

Arana Shapiro, a colleague of Wright's, uses iChat AV with her seventh-grade students in an after-school television production class. The kids have interviewed other students in Germany and California to learn how schools are different and the same all over the world. “The kids really got into being able to see the faces of the other kids—they really connected,” says Shapiro. And those connections are what this modern age is all about.