



*A Union of Professionals*

# SCHOOL TIPS

## Students and Technology





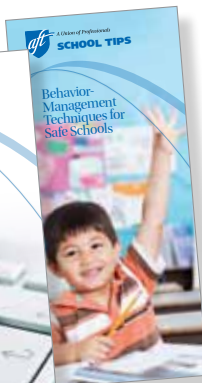
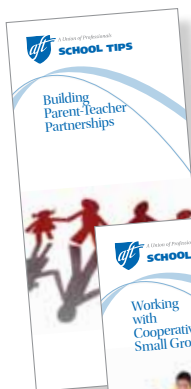
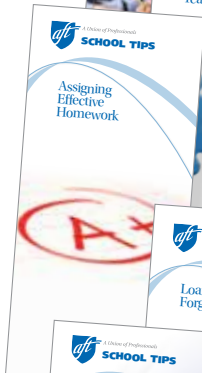
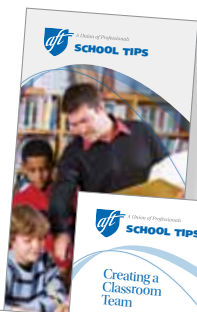
# SCHOOL TIPS

Each new school year brings high hopes, great expectations and challenges for both new and seasoned educators. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has developed a series called **SCHOOL TIPS** to help educators and school staff start the year off right and anticipate the year ahead.

**SCHOOL TIPS** is developed with you, the educator, in mind. The tips in this collection are taken from real experiences and are part of the AFT TEACH professional development program.

The AFT is a leader in providing educators and school staff the resources they need to help them succeed. Visit

AFT's website for more resources at [www.aft.org/TEACH](http://www.aft.org/TEACH) today.



Modern technology and the Internet have opened the door to a plethora of new learning opportunities that can enrich students' classroom experience. It's now easier to research, communicate and study, thanks to these advances in technology.

There are, however, problems and dangers associated with new technology. As a teacher, you need to remain up to date on the pitfalls as well as the benefits of these advances. Encourage administrators to employ in-service professional development on this topic and to research individually both the costs and benefits of the new tools that are available to students and teachers alike. Then, encourage your colleagues, administrators and union representatives to work together to develop a schoolwide cyberbullying policy.

## **Teaching Online Safety to Students**

As social networking and online communications become increasingly popular, lessons in online safety become increasingly important. These lessons should be taught as part of the curriculum, and students should be assessed on their knowledge of online safety before they are given assignments requiring online access.

1. Instruct students that they should never, under any circumstances, give out personal information, including their name, address or phone number in any type of chat room, video chat website or on any social networking site.
2. Encourage students not to correspond with anyone they have not met in person.
3. Emphasize that students should never meet in person anyone they have met online without the permission of their parents.
4. Stress that students should tell their parents if anything they see on the Internet makes them uncomfortable.

5. Make sure students know that some people online may not be who they say they are. There is no way of knowing if somebody who claims to be an 11-year-old boy actually is one.
6. Explain to students the benefits of making their social networking profiles private.
7. Be sure students know that their screen names should not include personal information. Do not use birthdays, hometowns, etc.
8. Tell students that once they post information online, they cannot take it back. Even if they delete their information, it still exists on older versions of the site on other computers.
9. Caution students that if they want to post photos of themselves on social networking sites, they should limit access to “friends only” and make sure the photos are appropriate and will not cause embarrassment to themselves or others. Every photo that’s posted can easily become public property, so students need to act accordingly.
10. Encourage parents to monitor their children’s Internet activities and to educate themselves on the dangers of the Internet. A good resource to start with is **www.OnGuardOnline.gov**, which provides practical tips on how to stay safe while surfing the Internet.



## Teaching about Cyberbullying

Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is not done face-to-face. Because cyberbullies do their dirty work online or through technological tools like e-mail, instant messaging or social networking sites, it can happen at any time, at school, at home or elsewhere—so it's difficult for adults to monitor. Victims are often left wondering who the perpetrator is and feel more vulnerable because there can be any number of witnesses. Studies show that 40 to 50 percent of students may be victims of cyberbullying, but they also may be reluctant to alert adults for fear their computer or phone privileges will be taken away.

It's important to teach your students about cyberbullying. Some may think that because it's done on the Internet, there can't be any repercussions at school.



Other students may not realize what they are doing could even be considered cyberbullying—while they think they’re just having fun at a classmate’s expense, they could be doing psychological damage. Nearly three-quarters of students who cyberbully do not bully people in person, meaning that technology can empower students to lash out at others or interact online in ways that are demeaning or depersonalizing. Cyberbullying includes but is not limited to:

- Spreading rumors by e-mail, text message or social networking;
- Using cell phone cameras to take pictures or videos of a student without his or her permission;
- Online harassment;
- Impersonating a classmate online, including setting up a fake social networking profile;
- Setting up a social networking “fan page” or group to make fun of a classmate, or being a member of a fan page or group that makes fun of a student; and/or
- Simply knowing about online bullying and not reporting it can be punishable, in some cases, depending on your school’s bullying policy.

Students need to learn that their interactions online can have real-world repercussions. Let your students know that anything they say or do online can be traced back to them by teachers, administrators, college admissions offices and future employers. They should know that severe online offenses can be punishable by law. Work with your students to develop a contract for ethical online behavior and have each of them sign the pledge. Recent news accounts have detailed the tragic outcomes that can stem from cyberbullying. You may want to share some of these stories with your students so they understand that the consequences of cyberbullying can be very serious. One organization that is raising awareness about teen suicide as a result of cyberbullying is [www.makeadifferenceforkids.org](http://www.makeadifferenceforkids.org).

## How to recognize cyberbullying

Victims of cyberbullying may appear to be angry, frustrated or upset after using the computer. They may be anxious or jumpy if they get a text message, or uneasy about going outdoors or to activities outside the classroom such as lunch or P.E. They may stop interacting with their classmates. When you assign homework that requires using a computer, or ask students to conduct Internet research during class, victims of cyberbullying may not want to participate. You also may notice an uptick in absences or a general unwillingness to be in school.

Cyberbullies may act suspiciously when others are around while they're online, or close or minimize documents they're working on if a teacher or other adult walks by. Cyberbullies may avoid talking about what they're doing on the Internet or with their cell phones, and may be unreasonably upset when their privileges are restricted. If a student acts irrationally or uncharacteristically when using computers or other devices, it may be time to talk to the student or to the child's parents.

## What to do if you find that a student is being bullied online

Interventions to stop cyberbullying require a school-wide response involving teachers, administrators and support staff. The single best thing you can do is create a supportive and caring environment, and then intervene when problems arise. Cyberbullies need to know that there are adults who will not tolerate their behavior; and victims need to know that their school is full of adults who will defend, protect and support them.

- Urge victims not to respond to cyberbullies or provoke them. If the bullying is being done in a chat room or on social media, tell the victim (despite

the temptation to read what is being written) to block the bully or stop visiting the website.

- Try to print out or save evidence of the bullying behavior for documentation purposes.
- Contact student support staff such as a school counselor.
- Assure the victim that he or she is not in trouble. Far less than half of all cyberbullying victims do not report that they are being bullied because they are afraid an adult will take away their privileges.
- For more minor forms of cyberbullying, such as teasing, work with the perpetrator to help him understand why his behavior is wrong. Suggest creative punishments, such as making signs to be posted near computer stations or giving a presentation on ethical online behavior to the class or to younger children.
- It's important to talk to parents and work with them to stop cyberbullying. This kind of bullying often is being done from students' home computers, but the parents may be unaware it's happening, or feel that they don't know enough about technology to effectively monitor their child's online behavior and talk about it. Teachers can play an important role both in alerting parents to the existence of cyberbullying and talking with them about the steps they can take to make sure their child isn't being hurt or hurting others.





## Using the Internet in your classroom

The Internet has become indispensable to society and to education. Resources available online can increase learning and bring a richness to classroom discussions. “Going to the library” probably doesn’t mean cracking open a musty set of encyclopedias anymore—it means logging onto a computer and navigating to Google.

Today’s students are “digital natives,” who most likely don’t remember what things were like before the Internet; they haven’t known life without it! Still, no matter what subjects you teach, it’s important to make sure your students learn how to use the Internet

properly for research. Colleges and employers expect graduates to know how to find information on the Internet as well as to discern between what is accurate and what is not. Here are a few tips to help students conduct research online:

- Students must always try to find the author of any information they use that's taken from the Internet. In some cases, such as on a general information page, the author may be the organization hosting the website. Students also need to find the date the information was posted or written to make sure it's still current.
- Teach students how to determine whether a website is objective, whether it's opinion or whether it has a certain bias. Always ask who hosts the website and what the aim is— whether to persuade, inform or sell. Ask who the intended audience of the website is. Children? College students? Shoppers? Policymakers? Professionals? People with certain political views?
- Students should always be wary of taking information from blogs on free services such as Wordpress or Blogger or from the “comments” section under articles on websites, even reputable ones. Bloggers or commenters may be well-informed, but sometimes they're no more knowledgeable than your students are.
- Just because a URL ends in “.edu” (which identifies it as the website of a school or college) doesn't mean that the information on it is trustworthy. Oftentimes, students at these schools have access to their own Web space and may use it to post their own papers or projects for other classes. Your students should learn to recognize the difference between a professor's page and a student's computer science project.
- Don't practice “dotcomming”! This is when students type the information they think they need into a Web browser, simply adding “.com” to the end of it. The information gleaned from this kind of

broad search often isn't reliable. (See [www.vice-presidents.com](http://www.vice-presidents.com) for an example.) Students should learn how to use a search engine effectively.

Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) and Google Books (<http://books.google.com>) are great free resources to search for information.

- Students also should be taught to be skeptical of “content farms.” These are websites that hire writers to compose short articles based on what people are searching for. “Content farms” are more concerned about getting people to visit their websites than they are about the accuracy of the articles there, and are often not reliable sources of information.
- Wikipedia can be OK as a starting point, but not as a definitive source of information. It's a “wiki,” a site on which anybody can edit articles. Some of the information may be wrong, and the people editing articles may have their own biases or motivations for editing. That said, Wikipedia can be useful for getting general information, and many of the pages do include citations and links to reputable sources.

As important as it is for students to develop good research skills, it's equally important to learn how to tell if your students are plagiarizing information from the Internet. The seemingly limitless amount of online information can tempt some students to claim content as their own when it isn't. Students may think they can “get away with it,” believing the chances are slim that someone will find the website from which they took the information. Be sure to tell your students that you know how to find sources just as well as they do. A quick and easy way to check if you suspect a student of plagiarizing part of a paper is to put the sentence inside quotation marks and type it into a search engine. It will search the Web for that specific sentence. Many websites also offer free “plagiarism checkers,” which allow you to paste in passages from a student's paper to see if the student has “lifted” it without proper attribution. Another



easy way to tell if a student has plagiarized from the Internet is if the typeface in some paragraphs is different from others, or if the background is slightly discolored. When a student copies and pastes text directly from a website, the formatting of the website often will be retained.

Sometimes a student will plagiarize someone's ideas without intending to. Many colleges consider these to be serious infractions that are easily avoided with more attention and care. It's best to let students know early on that they can't use someone else's ideas without attribution, even if they are not identical word for word, and even if they are taken from a blog or someone's personal website. Unfortunately, this type of plagiarism can be hard to detect.

Attributing information incorrectly is also considered "academic dishonesty." Students should be taught how to properly cite the information they find on the Internet. Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>) is a great resource to help students learn how to make proper citations; and they can access it from home as well as from school.

# Five Great Reasons to Join a Union of Professionals

## The American Federation of Teachers:

**1 Supports you in the classroom.** Effective learning only takes place when high-quality teachers, with the support of other competent professionals, have the materials and assistance needed to accomplish the task. Your union is a strong advocate for quality classroom materials that are aligned to the standards of achievement we expect our students to meet. We also insist that state and district assessments for measuring student progress are aligned with these standards and that the assessments be used appropriately to support student learning.

**2 Helps you prepare.** No matter how well prepared you may have been before entering the classroom, there is always room for improvement. Ongoing professional development that meets you at your point of need is vital for continued growth as an educator. The AFT and its affiliates deliver some of the finest professional development programs available; and in situations where ours are not available, we advocate and broker for you to receive the best training possible.

**3 Stands up for you.** Whether the discussion is taking place in the White House, in the halls of Congress, on the floor of your statehouse, in colleges of education or in your local editorial pages, you can be sure that union representatives are weighing in assertively, ensuring that the collective voice of educators comes through clearly and effectively.

**4 Advocates for your profession.** No one enters the teaching profession without a strong desire to help children reach their potential. Yet, at times the realities of life make this calling difficult to stick with. Adequate salaries and benefits are essential in order to keep the best teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff in our public schools. Working conditions such as manageable class sizes, adequate teaching materials, and discipline policies that support teaching and enhance student learning are important factors in ensuring that the best teachers remain in the classroom.

**5 Keeps you informed.** *American Educator* is one of the most highly respected journals available to keep you informed on current thinking in public education by some of the most capable thinkers and doers in the field. *American Teacher* will keep you on top of the challenges and successes of your colleagues across the country. And a host of optional publications, as well as a comprehensive website that will assist you in addressing the particular needs of your school and classroom, provide the balance of a professional literature package that is second to none.



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