

TECHNOLOGY TIPS

THE HIGH SCHOOL
OF
COMMERCE

Doing Research-Is it reliable if it's on the 'net?



Hyper Text Transfer Protocol

This is the time of the year when most of us start to assign the student dreaded "Research Paper". Of course, there are some of us that dread working on these papers too, although for vastly different reasons than the kids. One of these is the actual instruction time it takes to show our students what "research" really is.

As an English teacher for many years, I always found that it wasn't actually showing them "how" to look for information that corroborates a thesis they have, but it was more along the lines of showing them "what" to look for and "why" they need to.

In years past, there was a fairly standard method for research; go to the library, gather the materials, and site the sources using the MLA (Modern Language Association) citation method. That was it. Now however, those rules

are out the window with the advent of the Internet and all the possibilities that it brings to our present day scholars.

So, what do we do? The first thing is to make sure that our students are very aware of what it is they are being asked to do. It's the whole standards based planning thing here folks. Very clear expectations spelled out in detail are the most important thing for the students to have. Too many times I've seen teachers give assignments that aren't very well defined (from both the technical "what's it supposed to look like" position and the "I don't know what you want me to do" POV) so many students just slap together stuff that doesn't fit anyone's definition of what a well written, word-processed, and well laid out (illustrations and other graphics included) research paper should be.

Aside from actually telling students that you want a specific number of words, pages, references, graphics, and any other number of requirements that you point out absolutely have to be in the paper they submit to you, the most important thing you have to do is show them what it

means to determine the validity of the sources they use.

Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Go for the "name brand"!** Highly respected and recognizable names lend credence to determining validity. Quoting a Harvard prof's thesis is probably a bit more likely to impress than Scott Doe from Wahoo, Nebraska (yes, it's a real place).
2. **Repetition is good.** Find several sources that say exactly the same thing about your topic. If the NY Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post have all written the same thing about the same topic "consider the source". They're respected and they're saying the same thing.
3. **Does the source have common sense attached to it?** Is the source making reasonable claims/assertions? Can the source be understood clearly from its point of view?

In any case, it all boils down to what you think works best with your student's experience and skill level. However you work it, the best advice is still found in #3. Use common sense and you'll never go all that far wrong.



MP3's-If you can't beat 'em, join 'em

We're having a helluva time with electronic devices these days aren't we? You could say that it's somewhat akin to being in a heavy-weight championship fight and throwing your best punches while your opponent stands there and smiles indulgently as you flail your arms. I don't know about you, but I'm getting a bit sick of "flailing" my arms.

Since it's unlikely that we'll ever be rid of these devices any time soon, if ever at all, we should consider the possibility of actually using them for an educationally specific purpose.

Many of the books read in ELA, Social Studies, and many in Foreign Languages have been created in an easy to download MP3 format. Now I can hear you thinking, "What's he talking about now? Has he gone 'round the twist"?

Actually, no. The point I'm trying to make is that much of what we have to do from an educational standpoint now comes in a digital form (whether audio, video, or text). Considering the fact that many of the students (and some staff too) have iPods or other MP3/video players/readers. Why shouldn't we let kids use this to their advantage?



I know, it comes down to understanding the nature of the beast. It's not really that difficult a concept. The kids listen to music all day long (just like we did/do) and they "zone out". Picture them listening to Cervantes in Spanish or the recordings of Einstein discussing the math behind the Theory of Relativity. Of course they might just be listening to unabridged versions of Dante's "Inferno" and think it's really just a new Marilyn Manson concept album.

Using MassOne in your classes (part 1)

"A positive attitude may not solve all your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort."

Herm Albright
(1876 - 1944)

This is the first in a series of ongoing articles I'll be writing for you here at the HSofC about using the online resources of MassOne, the DOE's online resource portal. Since the inception of the VES (Virtual Education Space) platform here in Massachusetts in the late 1990's, the DOE here has been trying to implement a free platform that teachers and students in the Commonwealth could use as a place for sharing and learning on the Internet.

Although it was plagued by a number of problems with connectivity early on, the folks

that have been working there since its inception have done an outstanding job of making things work a good deal better than they did in the past. Additionally, they are continuously refining and upgrading the systems as they serve the needs of teachers and students across the state.

Some of the things that are new and improved with MassOne:

- Getting a teachers account is easier than ever before.
- Getting student accounts is as easy as a point and click in most cases.

- Teacher resources include not only content standards and state/district outcomes, but shared lesson plans as well.
- 100 mb of storage for each account.
- Improved surveys and forums
- Coming soon-Moodle platform for on-line coursework

Please contact me to get an account if you don't have one

In our next issue, we'll talk about using MassOne's features more specifically.

Planning for technology in your classroom

There's excellent news on the technology front here at the good ol' HSofC. We're starting to use it more effectively and with a good deal more consistency. How do I know?

The teachers who use the laptop carts have been talking to me about some of the lessons they've been using and it seems (from my professional POV) that these lessons are getting more in depth and sophisticated. In addition, the carts and LCD projectors are being used on a daily basis (not just by the same folks either). Kudos folks!!!

I guess it's time to take things to the next level in terms of our use of the available resources here Commerce. What I mean is planning for its use in more than cursory ways and making it integral to the lesson. While the initial uses of computers are generally things like; typing papers, researching web sites, and printing off information found on the web, integrating and embedding technology in lessons takes a good deal of planning to make it happen.

A good example of what might be an exciting lesson to teach was the creation of a simulation in a presentation. A project of

this type could take place in any content area with any goal or standard in mind. For instance, taking apart the Globe Theater in pictures (gifs, jpg's, or bitmaps) and then reassembling them in a PowerPoint presentation with specific timings on certain slides could show the construction methods and requirements of Elizabethan/Jacobean England.



Another example of an excellent use of simulations might be the use of image maps and hyperlinks in PowerPoint presentations. The uses of such images would be outstanding in let's say, a Spanish 3 classroom. How?

Each of the areas of a world map that shows where, because of the influence of the Spanish colonial period, the Spanish language has flourished. Depend-

ing on the nature of the assignment, different areas of the image map could be linked to video, pictures, music and all sorts of open response questions (in both Spanish and English) for students to grill each other with. Additionally, although it would probably be a good idea to have the teacher model the types of things that could be done, this would be an excellent way to bring project based learning into classes that might see little use of technology we have at the moment.

PowerPoint isn't the only tool we have at our disposal either. Nor are simulations the only sort of project that could be created. For instance, in a Drama class where the purpose is to give the impression of the creation of an acting company, someone is going to have to direct and "block out" scenes for rehearsals. Another use of technology in drama might be the "track changes" feature of MS Word in the technique known as "scene cutting".

In the next issue we'll actually get into some of the things that can be done in Science, Math and Social Studies.

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

Aristotle

Greek critic, philosopher, physicist, & zoologist (384 BC - 322 BC)

Using technology without losing your mind

Last time (issue #14), we were talking about the use of the technology here in the building and I believe that I was quoted as having stated categorically that the best thing that could happen to many of the machines in the building is “for them to die”.

Now I know that’s not a particularly nice thing to say, but sometimes it’s necessary. These machines have outlived their usefulness in many cases. However, since they are still with us and are still gasping out breath as it were, we can use them along with the laptop carts and the various computer labs to integrate technology into our lessons as much as is possible.

Looking into what we can do, as opposed to what we can’t, many of the tasks have to be considered on the basis of software and the ability of the machine to run it without crashing. If, for instance, all you want to do is have students look up references on the web and have them write notes, then any of the desktop machines in either the classes or in any of the labs

(including the library) should do just fine. Internet use doesn’t require all that much memory or processor power. On the other hand, if you want students to create presentations and simulations (as discussed in the “Planning for technology...” article on page 2), it would be a far better idea to use the laptops in your classroom. They have more memory and better processor speed to power the program. Using them, there’s less likelihood that the computer will “lock-up” or crash.

All this leads me to my next point. If the above is true, won’t most people try to get the laptop carts more often so that they can avoid having to deal with some of the issues I just mentioned?

Absolutely.

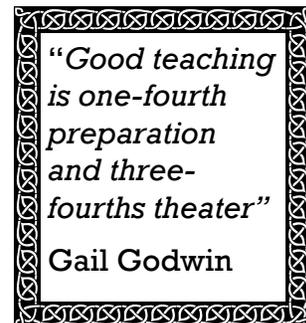
However, the fact remains that we have to learn to share as much as possible and plan for the availability of the carts. We currently have four carts for general use, each with 16 laptops (there are a couple missing due to attrition) and a printer. There are also 2 other

laptop carts housed in the A building with 16 laptops per cart as well. These are specifically for Science classes as they were purchased with grant money for that purpose.

Recognizing that we can’t have folks requesting carts for weeks on end, my best advice is to plan for the use of the carts judiciously and when you can, schedule time to use computer labs to complete the more cursory tasks you would use computers for in them.

O.K.. What are cursory tasks? Those are the sorts of things like: search the web, use a word processor (generally MS Word), write/send/view e-mail, create basic spreadsheets, and create small and basic presentations that use graphics.

In the next installment we’ll talk about the hardware we have available and how we can use it to our best advantage.



And so gentle readers...

Well...well...well... We’ve made it through the first round of MCAS testing this spring without too many casualties at all (unless you count sanity of course) and the warmer weather is trying to break through the stranglehold of winter to bathe us all in sunshine and the scent of lilacs. It’s the time of year when we look toward the rapidly approaching summer vacation with longing and fear.

Fear you say? How could anybody “fear” summer vacation coming? For those of us who may recognize that while the fruit cake from La Fiorentina is absolutely delightful going down, it’s just as dreadful staying on with that extra helping of fettuccini alfredo and that wonderfully warm crostini bread with gobs of softened butter.

It’s this time of year that I recog-

nize (very acutely I might add) how much I really need to figure a way for a generally happy-go-lucky individual like myself to shed the winter coat and get back to being happy as all get out to be outside in the warm sunshine without scaring the wildlife in most of Hampden county away simply by wearing a pair of shorts.

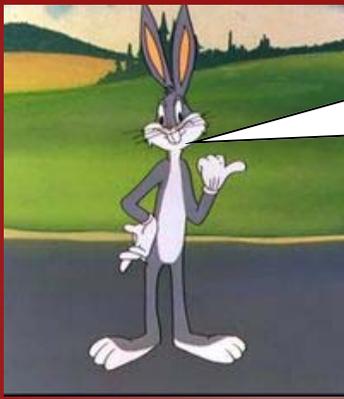
Oh I’m aware that having a six foot fence around my backyard and pool was welcomed by my neighbors with gratification that almost seemed obscene (the 90 year old neighbors down the street offering to help the installation crew pour the concrete footings for the posts did seem a bit much). However, when even I start having visions of being on the deck of a whaling schooner with a harpoon in my hand, a peg leg, and a gravelly voice that sounds like a cross between Lurch from the “Addams Family” and Shrek saying

“Arghhh... me hearty’s. There he be. The white whale” after only seeing myself in the mirror as I brush my teeth, I can freely admit it’s time to get moving and actually do something about it.

Once again, what does this have to do with technology here at the High School of Commerce? Absolutely nothing. But you might have chuckled a bit and relaxed for just a minute before you go back to thinking about how you can integrate this and modify that by modeling the instructional practicals of this by striving toward being adequately progressed about whatever.

It’s Spring, enjoy

Ed Musiak



Eh...What's up doc?
It's "Life lessons in comics"



FUNKY WINKERBEAN
by TOM BARTUK

THIRTY-THREE YEARS AGO CONGRESS ENACTED THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT... WHICH MANDATED THE PROTECTION OF ANIMALS, INSECTS AND PLANTS THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION.

RECENTLY, INCREASING EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE BY THE WHITE HOUSE, CONGRESS AND INDUSTRY... TO LIMIT THE SCOPE OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT. WHICH MEANS THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MORE THAN THREE DECADES... THE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST HAS MADE THE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST.

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ONE THING I'LL SAY ABOUT HAGAR... HE'S AWAY ON BUSINESS MUCH OF THE TIME... BUT WHEN HE'S HOME, HE SPENDS A LOT OF TIME PLAYING WITH OUR SON!

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IN RETROSPECT, I GUESS I KNEW THAT MY HAIR MIGHT LOOK A LITTLE UNUSUAL IF I LET PIERCE CUT IT. BUT GUYS DON'T WASTE A LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT CONSEQUENCES, MOM. WE'RE INTO ACTION!

...ACTION WITH A DASH OF REGRET.

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I DON'T THINK I'M GOING TO BE ABLE TO STAND THESE NEXT FEW DAYS!

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