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Ask a Tech Teacher

38 Tech Ed Articles That Will Turn Your Classroom Around

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Foreword

Technology is changing faster than any other class your students attend. What used to be training in keyboarding and a few software programs now includes hundreds of Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, Facebook, Google Plus, Wordle, Tagxedo, Voki, YouTube and more. And they change every year. Part of a tech teacher's challenge is simply keeping up.

These thirty-eight articles cover the most oft-requested topics from Ask A Tech Teacher®. They are quick overviews of what you need to know to be on top of today's technology education. Culled from the hundreds of articles written for the ezines, newspapers, and columns Ms. Murray contributes to, these were the top. They're so important, they're included in the six-volume K-5 technology curriculum for tech teachers called *[32 Lessons Every Child Can Accomplish in Technology](#)* and the two-volume toolkit for K-8 classroom teachers called *[55 Technology Projects to Integrate Technology into the Digital Classroom](#)*.

A note from Jacqui Murray: I know you'll enjoy this collection. Please join the conversation. [Follow my blog](#) and [follow me](#) on Twitter

Use your proof of purchase to receive a discount on the K-5 Technology Curriculum or the Middle School Toolkit at the [publisher's website](#).

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About the Author

Jacqui Murray has been teaching K-8 technology for fifteen years. She's the editor of a technology curriculum for K-fifth grade and creator of two technology training books for middle school. She is webmaster for five blogs, an Amazon Vine Voice book reviewer, a columnist for Examiner.com, on the Editorial Review Board for ISTE's Journal for Computing Teachers, and an Innovate My School tech expert. She is also the author of Building a Midshipman, the story of her daughter's journey from high school to United States Naval Academy midshipman. Contact Jacqui at her writing office or her tech lab, Ask a Tech Teacher.



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How Every Student Can Excel at Technology

Excelling at technology is a simple mix of confidence and knowledge. You know that formula—10% knowledge, 90% sweat. Technology is the same. The child who knows the basics will always come across as knowing the answers.

Here are the five articles that will get you there (the link takes you to [Ask a Tech Teacher's](#) blog):

- Solve the [most common computer problems](#). There aren't that many. Most of them start with "Is {some part of} the computer on?"
- [Use keyboard shortcuts](#). They're easier to remember than menus and make the user look clever
- [Know the right words](#) for what you're talking about. This list includes just enough vocabulary to sound proficient without overdoing it. Think of the last techie guy who helped you with your computer problem. If he used computer jargon, you had confidence in his ability. If he used too much, you didn't feel like you could talk to him
- [Be a decent keyboarder](#). Nothing spells competence like knowing your way around the keyboard. That equates with speed and accuracy. A couple of months over the summer will give you this, and you'll reap the benefits the rest of your life
- Know the basics of the most common programs (like [MS Word](#)). Take the time to learn enough that you're comfortable. It won't take long before you realize the basics are always the same. Once you know them in one program, they make sense in the others. That makes learning programs without a teacher easy.

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3 Ways Twitter Makes You a Better Writer

It's not just [Blogs and Wikis that make students better writers](#)—Twitter does, too. Here are three quick reasons:

You learn to be concise.

Twitter gives you only 140 characters to get the entire message across. Wordiness doesn't work. At first blush, that seems impossible. It's not, though. It challenges you to know the right word for every situation. People with a big vocabulary are at an advantage because they don't use collections of little words to say what they mean; they jump right to it. All those hints your English teacher gave you—picture nouns and action verbs, get rid of adverbs and adjectives—take on new meaning to the Twitter aficionado.



You learn to be focused

With only 140 characters, you can't get off topic. Tweeple like that trait in writers. They like to hear your main topic, not your meanderings. Use the right words, people get it. Consider that the average reader gives a story seven seconds before moving on. OK, yes, that's more than 140 characters, but not much.

Writing short messages helps you perfect the art of “headlining”

Fiction writers call this the title. Bloggers and journalists call it the headline. It has to be cogent and pithy enough to grab the audience and keep them reading. That's a tweet.

Tweets need to be written knowing that tweeple can @reply

Yes. This is the world of social networks where people will read what you say and comment. That's a good thing. It's feedback and builds an online community, be it for socializing or business. Develop a thick skin and take comments with a grain of salt and two grains of aspirin.

Tweet me at [#askatechteacher](#) with your thoughts.

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Everything I Need to Know, I Learned From My Computer

Life is hard, but lessons are all around us. The trick is to take your lessons where you can find them. In my case, as a technology teacher, it's from computers. Here are four lessons I learned from my computer. I don't know how I could survive without them.

Lesson One: Know when your RAM is full

RAM is Random Access Memory. In the computer world, it controls how much you can work on at any given moment. If you exceed your computer's RAM, it gives you a warning.



Humans have a mental workspace—like a desktop—that controls how much they can keep in their thoughts before it is shuffled off to long- and short-term memory. For people with eidetic memories, it's very large. For most of us, size is controlled by:

- *how complicated the subject is*
- *how many numbers there are*
- *how many specific facts there are*

I know my limits and I don't feel bad about grabbing a pencil to take notes or asking someone to slow the heck down. You shouldn't either. Figure out the limits of your RAM and accept it. Don't be afraid to say, *My RAM is full!* That's what computers do.

Lesson Two: You Can't Go Faster Than Your Processor Speed

Every tech buyer wants a computer with the fastest possible processor speed. That means it will plow through work really fast and we as the owner get more done in less time—until the sparkling fresh computer gets older and isn't as fast as the new versions coming up.

Your personal processing speed is what it is. You can only think through problems and consider issues as fast as you do. No amount of wishing you were eidetic or lusting after those with a photographic memory will change your circumstances. Accept yourself for what you are. Revel in it. Own it. Enjoy your strong points and work around the weak ones.

Here's something you may not know. No one is perfect and everyone has weaknesses. Successful people re-form arguments and situations to accommodate their strengths and ignore their weaknesses. You can too. Who cares what your processing speed is if your hard drive is to die for?

Lesson Three: Take Shortcuts When You Can

Don't you love keyboard shortcuts? Instead of mouse clicking through all those steps to get something done, a quick ***Ctrl+I*** italicizes, or ***Ctrl+S*** saves. So much more efficient.

Life is like that. You can do it the long way or the short way. Learn from someone else's experience. Don't feel you must reinvent the wheel. You're not capitulating if you take the road more traveled.

- *Learn from your mistakes as well as other peoples*
- *Accept advice from people you trust.*
- *Don't feel you have to go it alone. There are lots of friends and family, and sometimes new friends, who will help you get things right.*
- *Go with your strengths. They have been honed by use. Your weaknesses, well, you never quite know how they'll work out.*

Having said all that, sometimes these shortcuts don't work. At that point, try something else. One feature I love about Windows is it has multiple solutions to every problem—drop down menu, mousing, shortkeys, usually a few of each. Incorporate that into your life. If one solution doesn't work for you, try another.

Now, go get 'em!

PS—Here's a list of my favorite [keyboard shortcuts](#). I can't do without them.

Lesson Four: Be Patient When You're Hourgassing

Everyone who has used a computer understands the annoying, time-wasting hourglass. You're trying to perform magic on a deadline and the computer screen pops up with an hourglass that lazily pours sand ... for. Ever. You think it'll continue until Harvard wins the Super Bowl

The computer moves on when it's ready, with complete disregard for your frustration.

There's a lesson here. Life includes predictable, spontaneous hourgassing. Patience is the key. We teach our children patience is a virtue, but we don't embrace it as our own. Anger won't get rid of the hourglass and stress won't make it go faster. Sit down, relax, check your email if it takes too long.

["All human wisdom is summed up in two words – wait and hope"](#) (Alexandre Dumas)

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Ten Best Keyboarding Hints You'll Ever See

These came directly from the classroom. I tested them on 400 students for a year. Hands down, these are the most common mistakes students make that prevent them from excelling at keyboarding. Besides good tips, you might find this is a different way of saying things, for those multi-disciplinary students:

1. Tuck your elbows against the sides of your body. This keeps your hands in the right spot—home row
2. Use your thumb for the space bar. That leaves your hands on home row
3. Curl fingers over home row—they're cat paws, not dog paws
4. Use inside fingers for inside keys, outside fingers for outside keys
5. Use the finger closest to the key you need. Sounds simple, but this isn't what usually happens with beginners.
6. Keep your pointers anchored to f and j
7. Play your keyboard like you do a piano (or violin, or guitar, or recorder). You'd never use your pointer for all keys
8. Fingers move, not your hands. Hands stay anchored to the f and j keys
9. Add a barrier between the sides of the keyboards. I fashioned one from cover stock. That'll remind students to stay on the correct side of the keyboard
10. Don't use caps lock for capitals! Use shift.



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