Best Practices for WebTools

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Hello, my name is Jennifer Smith, and I am the manager of Instructional Design services at the Center for Instructional Technology and Training.

Objectives

- Outline best practices for technology use
- Choose appropriate technology to support course assignments and activities

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When you complete this module, you should be able to outline the best practices for using technology in your online course, and to choose the appropriate technology to support your course assignments and activities.

Technology is one of the more interesting features of teaching online and the most frightening. The most carefully planned presentation, assignment or assessment can go awry in spite of your best efforts. Planning and preparation can take some of the fear out of using technology.

Pedagogy before Technology

- Limit number of tools
- Consider learning curve
- Introduce tool early

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When I do workshops, I find that most faculty are interested in learning about the various "cool tools." And you might wonder why we have waited until so late in the faculty institute to talk about the thing that interests faculty the most. The reason is because sometimes people hear about something that sounds terrific and they want to put it in their course, whether it really fits or not.

So first of all, use as few tools as possible, and be certain that each tool is important in helping your students reach the learning objectives.

Consider how much time it will take students to learn how to use the tool. If you are introducing a new tool and only give the class a week to learn the tool and do a large assignment, it had better be very easy to use. In fact, a better idea is to introduce the tool a few weeks earlier on a low-stakes assignment. This can greatly reduce student frustration—and the e-mail in your in-box.

Instructions

- Clear, easy to read
- Video tutorials (lynda.com)
- List requirements in syllabus

4. Create Slides for Your Subtopic

1. Find your group's presentation:
   - Go to the link posted by your group's volunteer on the Midterm GROUP discussion board.(If no one has created a presentation, you can do that now.)
   - The link will take you to your group's page where you may create your slides. View the following tutorials through the links in the menu to your left:
2. Create your slides and citations. Use the tutorials lited below to help you:
   - "GoogleDocs Add Text" illustrates how to insert text into your slide (2:53).
   - "GoogleDocs Images" covers how to upload images from your computer or the Internet (2:56).
   - "GoogleDocs Citations" explains how to cite your sources using EasyBib and the Speaker Notes (2:07).
   - "GoogleDocs Backup" covers how to save the presentation to your computer (1:04).
   - "GoogleDocs Video" shows how to insert video from YouTube (1:28). NOTE: At present, public videos on YouTube are the only ones compatible for embedding into Google Docs. If you wish to use a different video, simply add a link to that video.
3. Keep your presentation short (3 - 6 slides.)
4. **REMEMBER**: add your slides **AFTER** the title slides; cite the sources of your information in **SPEAKER NOTES**, put your **NAME** and **UF USERNAME** on each of your slides.
   - You may choose the citation style you prefer.

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Clearly explain how to use the technology step-by-step. Many webtools have tutorials available and you can provide links to those. And don't forget about Lynda.com as a possible resource for tutorials. You may want to create your own video tutorials that show exactly how to do the assignment. You can do this with the free UF-provided Camtasia Relay software (we'll talk about this in the next presentation).

Be sure that if the tool you are using requires a purchase, such as a webcam or headset microphone, that the information is listed in your syllabus and indicate that the equipment is required. Some types of scholarships and financial aid will not pay for things that are recommended or optional.

UF Standards and Markers of Excellence

- Navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient.
- Technology tools and media support the learning objectives of the course.

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The UF Standards and Markers of Excellence provide some suggestions for technology use in your course. They recommend that the navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient. Avoid making your students have to "hunt" for a link to an external tool or the directions on how to use it.

And as I mentioned earlier, it's very important to use technology and media that support the learning objectives of your course.

UF Standards and Markers of Excellence

- The technology in the course is readily accessible and available to students.
- The tools and media are compatible with prevailing standards and formats.

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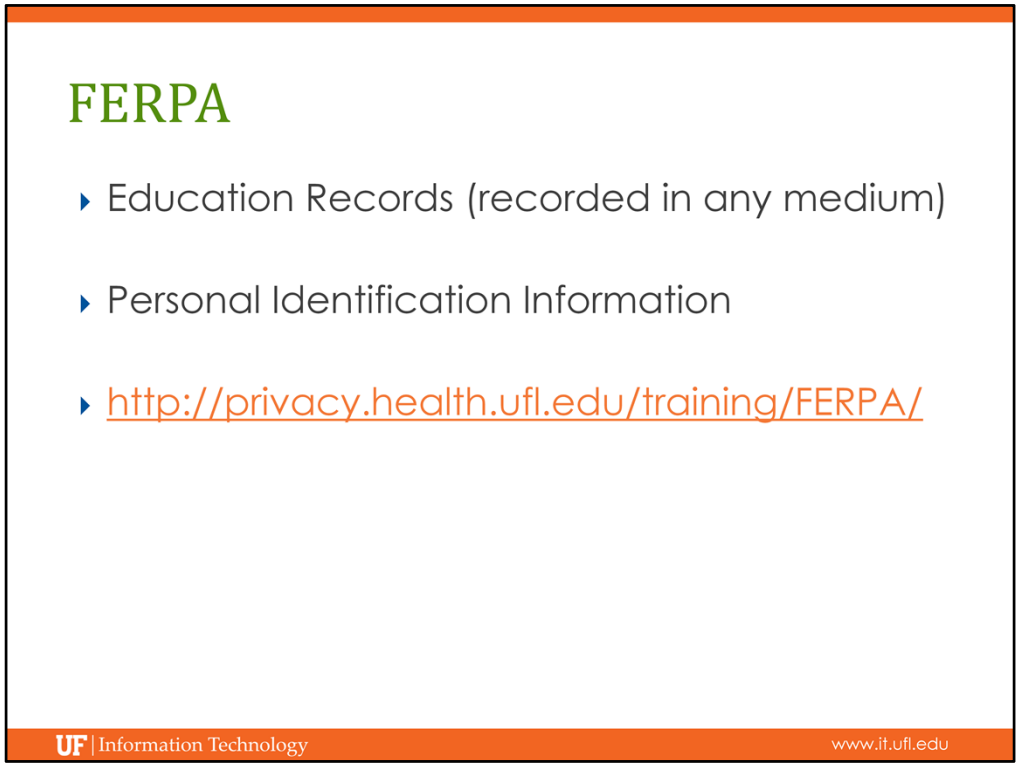
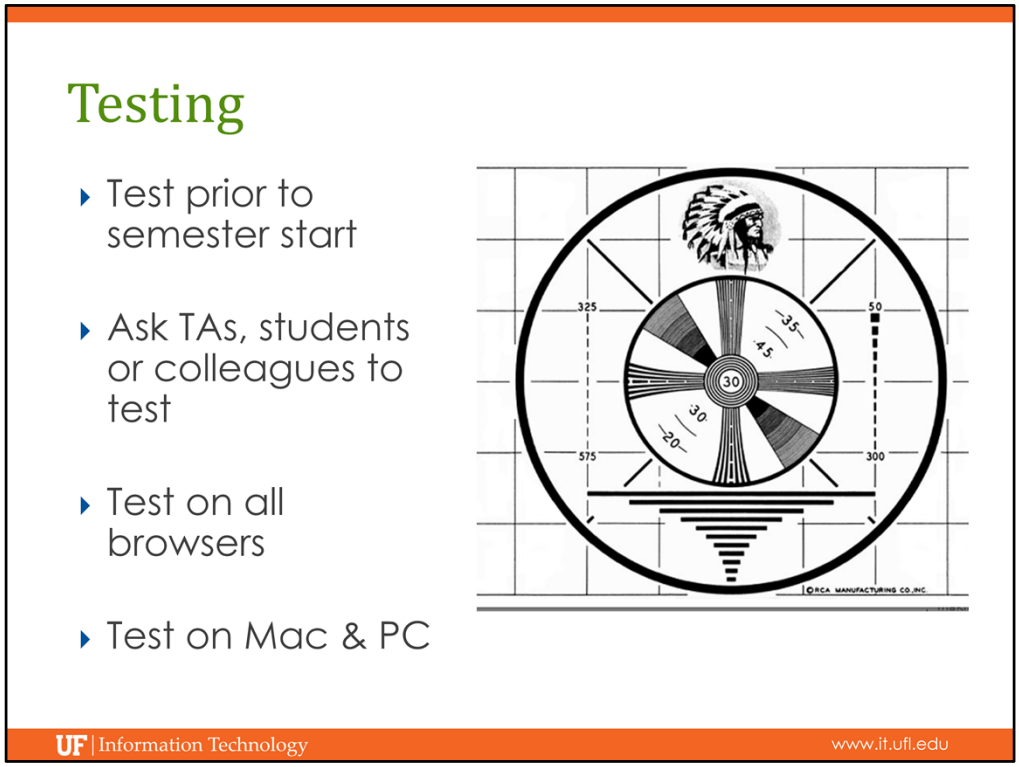
Make sure that students can access the technology easily. For example, if your students will be using online library resources, make certain that they have the information on how to access the library through VPN or the library's proxy server.

Be sure that the tools and media you are using are appropriate for today's standards and formats. If you are not sure about this, contact your instructional designer or technical support. CITT can assist you with this as well.



As you determine how you will use webtools in your course, keep FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and the Florida statutes regarding personal identification information in mind. These statutes protect student privacy. If you have not already done so, review the special FERPA training for faculty that has been developed by the UF Privacy office. It is available through my.ufl.edu. Details can be found on the UF privacy office website at http://privacy.health.ufl.edu/training/FERPA.



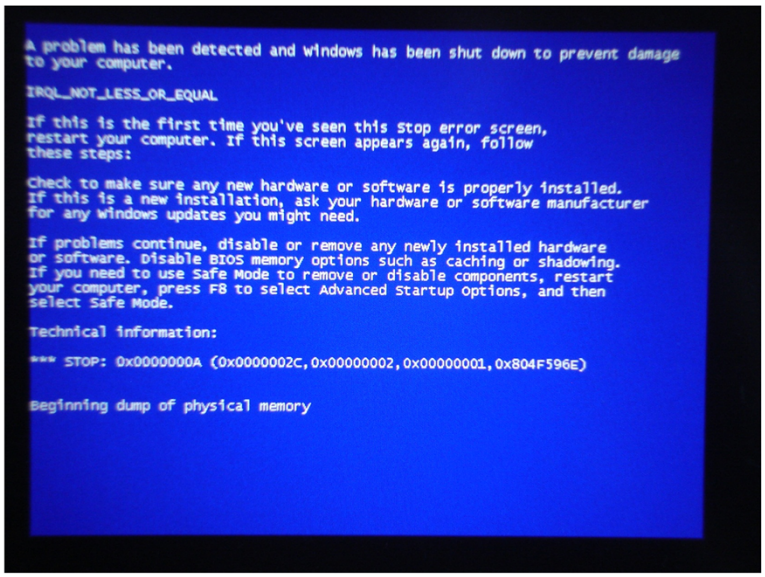
This probably goes without saying, but it's critical that you test any tools that you plan to use prior to the start of the semester. If you delay your testing until after the semester starts, it may be difficult to switch to a different tool if you run into problems.

I strongly urge you to prevail upon your TAs, colleagues or students to help you test the tools you wish to use. Consider offering some extra credit points to students for help in testing.

Be sure to test the technology on the 3 major browsers: Internet Explorer, Firefox and Chrome. Make note of any problems so that you can include that information in your instructions.

Finally, it is wise to test the tool on both a Mac and a PC. The CITT faculty lab at 2215 Turlington hall has both types of computers available.

Something WILL go wrong



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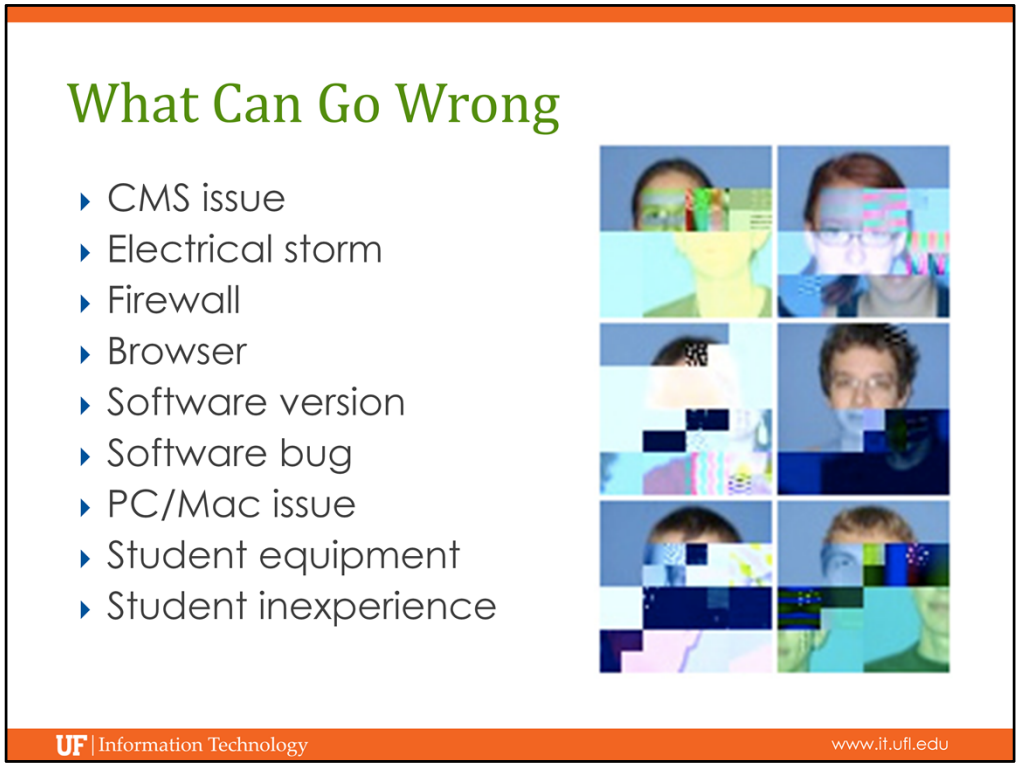
One of the first things to come to terms with, is that something WILL most likely go wrong.



Some of the things that typically go wrong are: issues with the course management system, an electrical storm can shut down you or your students, a firewall can keep your student from downloading and installing a piece of software, browser issues are very common, problems with different software versions and software bugs happen all of the time, and so do challenges involved with going between pc and Mac users. And finally, sometimes students don't have the equipment or the experience they need to work with some types of technology.

UF Standards & Markers of Excellence

Provisions are in place to allow for potential failures of technology, and are clearly expressed to the students.

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The UF Standards and Markers of Excellence recommend that you provide for the potential failure of technology and that you provide clear information to students on what they are supposed to do.

When Something Goes Wrong

- Contact the Help Desk
- Request ticket number
- Announcement
- Encourage early submission of work (interim deadlines)

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So what's a busy faculty member to do? First of all, tell your students what to do in the event of technology failure. If it is a problem that involves the centrally supported course management system, they should contact the Help Desk immediately.

If the issue has affected the student's ability to complete an assignment or quiz, be sure to tell them to request a ticket number. That way, you can check with the Help Desk to verify the legitimacy of the issue.

In the event of a system-wide failure that will affect the entire class, make an announcement as to what will be done to solve the problem. If you will be giving them additional time, or re-setting the quiz, or just giving everyone an extra point, let them know as soon as possible.

Finally, always encourage your students to do their work early. Interim deadlines can push students to get started on the project. This can help a great deal if they have trouble learning how to use the tool.

Now that we have covered the best practices for using technology in a course, it's full speed ahead to the next presentation where we will discuss some of the most common tools.

Photo Credit

- Slide 3: PeskyMonkey. *Computer Panic*. Digital image. *IStockphoto.com*. 3 Oct. 2009. Web. 21 Dec. 2012.
- Slide 5: Brandman, Rusti. *Midterm Project*. DAN2100. University of Florida. 2009. Web.
- Slide 9: Jer. *Indian Head Test Pattern at 16:9*. Digital image. *Nyquil.org*. 13 May 2007. Web. 21 Dec. 2012.
- Slide 10: Pursehouse, David. *Blue Screen of Death "STOP: 0x0000000A"* Digital image. *Flickr*. 4 Sept. 2008. Web. 21 Dec. 2012.

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- Slide 13: Nair, Sudhir. *Don't Panic: Second Draft*. Digital image. *Flickr*. 21 May 2009. Web. 21 Dec. 2012.
- Slide 14: Flaivoloka. *Tunnel* 2. Digital image. *Stock.xchng*. 7 July 2008. Web. 21 Dec. 2012.

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