

# NT<sup>2</sup>

## Notes to Teachers about Technology

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# SAVE YOUR SANITY!

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*Regardless of how you feel about technology, you need to set policies about its use in your course before your students drive you crazy.*

There was a time, I remember, when I would get excited hearing the phrase “You’ve got mail!”—but that seems like a long time ago. These days, instead, I dread looking at my inbox because I know that most of what I’ll find there will be spam or viruses and the rest increasingly requires more and more of my time and attention.

That might sound like your relationship to email, too, but it’s also possible that you don’t use email at all. For some, it’s impersonal. For others, computers in general aren’t worth the time they take to learn how to use. But no matter how you feel about technology, computers, and email, you’re walking into a classroom filled with students who will bring their own expectations about these issues.

You can expect, for example, that students will email you to ask for extensions on their papers. They might also email you rough drafts for your comments or try to turn in final drafts electronically. You’ll find emails sent late at night and in the wee hours of the morning, all with a tone suggesting an expectation of a speedy reply. These emails, of course, are born of frustration, but being assaulted by them at all hours of the day or night can be frustrating for you, too.

### You need to set policies about email at the start of the semester.

What these policies might be is entirely your decision, but here are some questions to guide you:

1. When will you be checking email?

On my syllabus, I let students know I only check email while I’m in the office. You, too, might want to specify when you’ll check email and/or how often (once a day, morning and evening, etc.). If you don’t use email, make that clear and provide students with alternate, preferred methods of contacting you.

2. What email will you be checking?

I strongly recommend having separate emails for friends/family/colleagues and students. I have work email and I have home email, and ne’er the two do meet. You can create an email account to use for your class through Rutgers’ RCI system (<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu>), or you can sign up for an account with a free email service such as Hotmail (<http://www.hotmail.com>) or Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>). If you have AOL, you’re allowed up to seven screen names—consider making one just for teaching. This way, you can check the email you want to check (from friends and family) without having to deal with emails from students.

This will also keep you from being sucked in. Some of us just can't resist answering an email or helping a student in need. That's commendable, but if you're helping students 24/7, you're going to burn out, and that helps *no one*.

3. What is and is not acceptable through email?

I don't accept papers through email without prior permission. If a student is going to miss class because of a religious holiday, for example, I'll let her or him email the paper to me, but even then I'll want a printed copy when he or she returns to class. Then again, if you have a long commute, you might *prefer* receiving late papers by email rather than trekking into Rutgers to pick up something in your box. As for drafts, I let students know that I'll look at partial drafts, but I also let them know that if they want full comments they need to make an appointment to see me. Finally, I specify what file formats I can accept (Word or Rich Text Format only) to guarantee that I'll be able to open the files I do receive.

Setting clear boundaries around email will help keep you sane. It can also help students be more responsible (by actually coming to class with the paper) and help them start learning professional email behavior (by teaching them that emailing an instructor is not the same as emailing their friends).

As you work on your syllabus, then, I hope you'll give some thought to these email issues, and hope you'll consider articulating an email policy.

— Barclay