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## Notes to Teachers about Technology

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# CLASSPAGE, SHMASHPAGE.

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*What's a classpage good for? And why does the Writing Program require all teachers to have one?*



It's called the SwissChamp XLT, and it's *the* Swiss army knife of Swiss army knives. The XLT has over 50 features—not just the usual large and small knife blades but also a pharmaceutical spatula, a pruning blade, a parcel carrier, a wrench set, and a ballpoint pen. It's a powerful tool. When you're holding one, you feel like MacGyver: if captured, you'd pick the lock on your handcuffs with the reamer, fashion a dummy of yourself out of dirt, spit, and hairballs using the chisel and fine screwdriver, dig beneath the dungeon wall with the large blade and hook disgorger, and then use the

wood saw to carve a canoe out of a fallen tree, securing your escape to safety.

Yeah, the SwissChamp XLT is quite a tool. But I don't own one, because I'd never use it as anything other than a letter opener.

In asking all instructors to make a classpage, the Writing Program has, on some level, given us all a SwissChamp XLT. The Classpage System is (as techies might say) *robust*, capable of doing a lot of things with relative ease and a high degree of system stability. That makes it a great tool—no question. The problem is *great tools are only great if they help us*. Otherwise, they're just letter openers.

I'm not here to talk about how to use the Classpage System. For one thing, there are already a number of tutorials on the system's features and for another, none of that makes sense if you don't have reasons to use it. So instead I'd like to share with you some of the reasons why I think this system is useful.

1. Students lose things.

I always used to make extra copies of my syllabus and assignments because students would invariably lose theirs. I'd have to carry around this big file of Xeroxes and even then I'd sometimes run out of this or that handout and would need to find some way to get it to a desperate student. The Classpage System lets me post copies of my assignments (I do this after I've handed the assignment out in class, so my students won't think they can skip class) as well as all my basic info like office hours, contact information, and office location. Now when students complain about having lost an assignment, they can go to the Web and find it.

2. Students forget things.

With the reminder feature and the class mailing list, you can post or send out reminders to your class: “don’t forget to bring three copies of your draft”; “don’t forget we’re in the computer classroom next class”; “don’t forget to bring the handbook.” You can look and see who’s on the class mailing list to make sure all your students have signed up, and then every time you post anything to the classpage, you have the option of having the system notify students that the page has changed. *[Here’s a tip: join the class mailing list yourself. That way you know the emails and reminders are being sent out by the system.]*

3. People need to reach you.

A true tale of two students: just recently I got an email from a student who had changed Expos sections during add/drop. He was trying to find out what assignment was due next class, but when he found his instructor’s classpage there was no contact info, so the student contacted me instead. About a week later, I got an email from a student moving into my section. Using the Web, he was able not only to get in touch with me but also to catch up on the work he had missed. Needless to say, the moral of this story is that students will need to reach you and the classpage is a great way to make sure that happens. And students aren’t the only ones who will use this information. When I need to contact an instructor, the classpage is the first place I look. If nothing else, then, we want the Classpage System to function as a departmental directory. It doesn’t matter if you have *just* an email address or *just* your office phone number or *just* your office hours and location so long as you have some way of being reached.

We’ve tried to make the system easy to access and easy to use, but if you’re having any problems see me or any Writing Program Director. We’re more than happy to guide you through the basics of the Classpage System. It might not end up being the SwissChamp XLT for you, but maybe it’ll become more than a letter opener.

— Barclay