

THINKING ABOUT TECHNOLOGY: THREE QUESTIONS AND SOME ANSWERS

*"The future is here. It's just not evenly distributed yet."
—William Gibson*

This document has two goals: first, by helping you to think about the possibilities of technology in your teaching and research, it's intended to help you imagine the ways that technology can be not simply useful, but useful *to you*—perhaps in ways you haven't yet imagined; and second, it's meant to help you articulate a goal, something immediate, relevant, and fully achievable with either the skills you have now or with the skills you can acquire with just a little help.

Here are some tenets to consider as you begin this exploration of technology's usefulness in your work:

- *Applied knowledge is stickier than abstract knowledge.* In locating a goal for technology, something you want it to *do* that *matters* to you, you'll be learning technology in a way that will help you retain what you learn. Just attending a seminar on making a webpage isn't very useful, but working towards something you want to accomplish will help what you learn stick with you.
- *Goal-oriented learning is compound learning.* Once you have a goal, and as you work towards it, you won't simply be learning the one or two technologies that will help you achieve that goal; rather, the work you do will help you learn other, ancillary skills that you can carry to future tasks. For example, in learning more about email you'll probably also learn more about the file system and drives on your computers, as well as how to select multiple items with your mouse. So, whatever goal you choose, you can trust that you'll learn even more than you currently imagine simply by nature of the fact that all computer-oriented tasks involve multiple skills and literacies.
- *Knowledge is always collectively available.* Even if you don't want to learn technology, you can still use technology in your teaching. You might, for example, have students use the Web to research topics relevant to a class and report to the class on what they found. Even this application of technology is valuable; even if you decide that technology is not relevant to you work, it is highly probably that it will be relevant to the work students are asked to do both within the institution and in the job marketplace. Providing them an opportunity to practice and extend their own skills with technology is a valid and valuable pedagogical practice.

Ultimately, acquiring skills with technology should be driven not by need but by desire. You don't "need" to do anything with technology, but what do you *want* to do? Similarly, you don't "need" to make a webpage to have skills with technology; there are many ways to start using technology in your teaching and research that take advantage of the technical skills you already have. At the same time, technology should be thought of not as an end but as a means, so in thinking about how you want to use technology, think about what you want to achieve. To help with that, consider these three questions:

Question One: What do you see in your classes that you wish you could change?

Some Possible Answers:	Some Possible Solutions:
I wish my students found this literature more relevant to their lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Find Internet-based analogs to genres or texts you're studying and have students read them to see the ways in which issues from the literature persist in culture.▪ Have students report on the life of Text X on the Web. Ask them to "google" the name of the text ("googling" means doing a web search with the popular search engine Google). What kinds of pages pop up? What's the first result? How does this text live in cyberspace?▪
I wish my students understood the historical period/culture of this literature better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Find websites that provide historical and cultural contexts.
I wish there were a sense of community in my large classes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Use a forum or listerv▪ Use a blog
I wish I were managing emails from my students better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪

Question Two: What do you want to do with technology?

Some Possible Answers:	Some Possible Solutions:
I want to give my grad students an edge in a tight job market	▪
I want to prepare my undergrad students to leave the academy	▪
	▪

Question Three: What do you want tech to do for you?

Some Possible Answers:	Some Possible Solutions:
I want to be unafraid of my computer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Find Internet-based analogs to genres or texts you're studying and have students read them to see the ways in which issues from the literature persist in culture.▪ Have students report on the life of Text X on the Web. Ask them to "google" the name of the text ("googling" means doing a web search with the popular search engine Google). What kinds of pages pop up? What's the first result? How does this text live in cyberspace?▪
I want to handle email	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Find websites that provide historical and cultural contexts.
I want to use tech in my research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Use a forum or listerv▪ Use a blog
I want to make a webpage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪
I want to lead field/participate in field/ e-publish	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪