

Resources, Common Tasks, Tips, and Best Practices

1. Documentation, Training, and Other Resources
2. Starting Up and Shutting Down the Classroom Audiovisual System
3. Using the Built-In Computer in the Podium
4. Manually Locking the Computer When Not in Use for Your Protection
5. Automatic Screensaver Lock after 15 Minutes
6. When You Leave, Never Shutdown or Turn the Off the Computer with the Power Button: Logoff Instead
7. Connecting a Laptop or Netbook to the Audiovisual Presentation System
8. Fast, Easy, Efficient Navigation to Web Pages
9. Checking Your Exchange E-Mail or Calendar in the Classroom
10. Windows Remote Desktop: Using Your Office Computer in the Classroom
11. Accessing Files and Documents in a Smart Classroom; Advice on USB Flash Drives
12. Student Presentations
13. Class-Saving Suggestions

Documentation, Training, and Other Resources

The most common resources include:

1. Instructions posted on or in the vicinity of the podium and instructions provided by your academic department
2. Some departments and colleges provide training for using classroom technology. Check with your department.
3. Instructions posted on the Virtual Tour by selecting a particular classroom and clicking the Help button: <http://wwwnew.towson.edu/classroomtechnology/virtualtour/>
4. Blackboard support:
<http://www.towson.edu/blackboard/>
<http://www.towson.edu/blackboard/upgrade/index.asp> (for the upgrade to Version 9.1)
5. The Office of Technology Services Classroom and Computer Lab Technologies website:
<http://www.towson.edu/adminfinance/OTS/instructionalsupport/classroomtechnology/index.asp>
6. Self-help documents, movies, and training:
<http://www.towson.edu/adminfinance/ots/trainingdoc/>
7. Center for Instructional Advancement and Technology services:
<http://www.towson.edu/adminfinance/ots/ciat/>

Starting Up and Shutting Down the Classroom Audiovisual System

Suggestions to get started:

1. Get familiar with your classroom in advance. Find a time when the room is not in use and try out the system to make sure you're comfortable. This is especially important at the start of the semester—things may have changed since you last used the system.
2. Instructions are usually posted at the podium. If not, check the Virtual Tour's Help button for your particular classroom.
3. Turn the system on as soon as you walk into your classroom. The system can be warming up while you do other things. Getting into this habit can save two or three minutes of class time every time you use the system.
4. Login to the computer. Even if you don't need it right away at the beginning of class, it will be booted up and ready when you need it.
5. If the computer is locked by the previous instructor and the "Switch User" option is available, switch and login. If it isn't available, turn the computer off by pressing and holding the power button for 10 seconds. Then press it again to turn it on. This will let you login.
6. Make a quick check to be sure that any software you need is present. Also verify that your H: and O: drives are available if you plan to use files stored in those locations. Occasionally, the computer configuration may change—especially from semester to semester.

Suggestions at the end of class:

1. Check for any VHS tapes or DVD/CD/Blu-ray disks in the computer or standalone deck.
2. Logoff the computer at the end of class; do not turn the computer off by shutting down. This will prevent it from getting updates and maintenance overnight.
3. After you logoff, make sure it actually completes the process and returns to the logon screen. If not, your information and anything you're logged into could be compromised if someone walks up to the computer while you're still logged in.
4. Turn off the audiovisual system using the instructions provided at the podium, on the Virtual Tour for your classroom, or by your department.
5. Make sure that the projector is fully powered off. If you are the last person in the room for the evening, wait a moment to be sure the fan cycles off—a projector left running overnight can burn out and is costly to replace.
6. Secure the classroom according to your department's procedures.

Using the Built-In Computer in the Podium

Using the built-in computer at the podium is usually the fastest and easiest option, even though most classrooms offer the option to use a laptop. Some points to keep in mind:

1. Never store files or documents on the computer in the classroom. In some classrooms all user data is removed weekly or even daily to keep the computer running smoothly. These systems also take a lot of pounding, so technical support staff often have to erase the hard drive and

return everything to a clean state for maintenance and repair purposes (this is called "reimaging").

2. Use your H: or O: drives to store files needed for class, or store them inside Blackboard in content areas.
3. If you need software that isn't installed on the classroom computer, you will need to work with your department's technology support provider, lab manager, or person responsible for supporting the computer. Make your requests as far in advance as possible and follow any department-specific procedures.
4. You will not be able to install software—including software on a DVD/CD/Blu-ray disk or downloaded from the Web. There are too many things that go wrong when multiple people have rights to configure the computer. This restriction is in everyone's best interest.
5. As a shared computer, you will not be able to obtain permanent Administrator Rights, nor can the staff in the Faculty/Staff Help Center grant temporary rights like they can for office computers.

Manually Locking the Computer When Not in Use for Your Protection

1. A good habit to get into is to "manually" lock the classroom computer whenever you leave the room—whether it's to get a drink of water, use the rest room, talk to someone in the hall, or make a quick trip to the department office. Even if you get detained, the computer—and your identity—will be safe if it is locked.
2. You can lock it by pressing Ctrl + Alt + Delete and selecting "Lock Computer" or by holding down the Windows key and pressing the "L" key.

Automatic Screensaver Lock after 15 Minutes

1. Classroom computers have a screensaver which will lock the computer after about 15 minutes of inactivity. This is a failsafe mechanism that helps protect confidential information in applications you may be using (Blackboard, PeopleSoft) as well as your files and documents. Without it, a person could inadvertently leave the classroom without logging off—and the computer would remain a security risk indefinitely.
2. Never rely on the automatic screensaver lock if you are leaving your classroom. Lock it manually.
3. Finally, at the end of class, always logoff—never leave the computer in a locked condition and walk away. The next instructor will probably have to forcibly power the computer off and restart it which wastes a lot of class time.

When You Leave, Never Shutdown or Turn the Off the Computer with the Power Button: Logoff Instead

1. Never select Shutdown or turn the computer off at the end of class with the power button. Just logoff but leave the computer powered on. Your files and documents will still be secure.
2. This will ensure that preventative maintenance can occur. The Office of Technology Services sends security patches, updates, and fixes to computers using the campus network. We do this

at night so the updates don't slow down the network or cause a computer to reboot at an inopportune time (like during class).

3. You can create problems for yourself and others by not following this procedure. Updates will eventually happen, and if it happens during class time, the computer will slow down to a crawl or may reboot. This disrupts teaching and learning.
4. Computers have power-management software installed that brings them to a sleep or low-power-consumption "green" mode. As long as you don't turn the computer off or shut it down, we can do our maintenance without wasting a lot of electricity.

Connecting a Laptop or Netbook to the Audiovisual Presentation System

Most classroom systems offer the option to connect a laptop or netbook using a VGA cable. However, it may not be the smartest choice for a smart classroom. Unless there is a compelling reason, using a laptop just may prove to be more frustrating, unpredictable, and time consuming than its worth.

Laptops add additional complexity and points of failure. Connecting to the network (wired or wireless) is one of the more common problems and can be caused by security restrictions or the need to change configuration settings. Additionally, screen resolutions and sizes may not be compatible with the projection system.

That said, there are several reasons a laptop may be a better choice than the built-in computer. You will need to be the judge:

1. Access to software that is not installed on the built-in computer.
2. Access to another operating system (e.g., Mac OS or Linux) that is not available on the built-in computer.
3. Ability to demonstrate software in which license restrictions make it impractical or too costly to install additional copies for the built-in computer.
4. Guest speakers who have "pack-and-go" solutions already installed and configured on a laptop.
5. Accommodation for people with disabilities.
6. Emergencies such as when the built-in computer is not working or you can't logon.

Fast, Easy, Efficient Navigation to Web Pages

Many instructors use a number of websites for instruction ranging from Blackboard to content-specific sites. Consider one of these methods so you don't have to type the addresses by brute force each time:

1. Add personal bookmarks in your MyTU portal, <http://mytu.towson.edu> Links you add in MyTU will be available on every computer you use—home, work, classroom, lab, office.
2. Create your own "launch pad" by simply pasting web addresses into a Word document. Then, open the Word document and use it to navigate by pressing Ctrl and clicking on your links.
3. Create the links within Blackboard; your students will be able to access them too if you choose.

4. Set up your bookmarks and favorites in Internet Explorer or Firefox within the Virtual Workspace.
5. Using Windows Remote Desktop, connect to your office computer—and use your full preferred set of browser tools (favorites, toolbars, etc.).
6. Add the links to the browser on the classroom computer—but be forewarned. If your data is removed or if a technical support provider has to reimage the computer for maintenance, repairs, or updates, all your favorites and bookmarks will be lost.

Checking Your Exchange E-Mail or Calendar in the Classroom

The best practice is to use Outlook Web App to check your mail or calendar on a classroom computer: <http://outlook.towson.edu> Never use the installed ("full") version of Outlook, even though you will probably see the icon on the desktop or in Windows Start Button > Programs > Microsoft Office.

The reason is simple: Outlook Web App does not download any of your mail onto the local computer's hard drive like the "full" version that's installed on your office computer. All your mail stays on the Exchange server. This reduces the chance of someone "hacking" your mail; classroom computers are accessible to many, and you don't want your stuff sitting around on its hard drive.

If you need the full version of Outlook, use the Virtual Workspace: <http://vw.towson.edu> which also protects your files and mail from being stored on the local computer's hard drive.

Windows Remote Desktop: Using Your Office Computer in the Classroom with

Fulltime faculty and others with TU-provided Windows office computers can use Windows Remote Desktop to login and use it on the classroom computer just as if they were sitting in their office. It's almost as if you have a very long mouse and keyboard extension cable! Once you're connected, your office's computer screen will be displayed on the classroom computer—either full screen or in a smaller window. You can decide.

Advantages:

1. All software installed on the office computer will be useable "as is" in the classroom. No need to purchase new licenses or install it in multiple locations
2. You can start your programs and have everything open and ready to go when you walk into the classroom.
3. Your desktop layout will have the same icons
4. You will have access to your favorite browser—along with any toolbars, favorites, or bookmarks
5. Any network drives you typically have access to will be there
6. The list of most recently used documents "remembered" in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, or other applications will be available
7. You can use the full version of Outlook—along with any personal folders (.pst files) you attached

Notes and limitations:

1. You need to perform a one-time setup process on your office computer before you can Remote Desktop to it (the instructions are provided on the Remote Desktop website <http://remotedesktop.towson.edu>)
2. If the computer is a shared resource, such as in an adjunct faculty work area, you can't use this solution since it will "knock the other person off the computer" when you login
3. Your office computer must be turned on—you can be logged off or the computer can be locked, but it must be turned on
4. There is no comparable solution for remote access to a Mac office computer at this time; if you need to do this, talk to your departmental technology staff to see if a workaround can be arranged

Accessing Files and Documents in a Smart Classroom; Advice on USB Flash Drives

USB Flash Drives are often used by instructors and students to transport files to and from class. This technology, although convenient, has many weaknesses—especially when there are faster, safer, and more reliable ways to move data back and forth.

Smart Ways to Get to Your Files in a Smart Classroom:

1. Store the files you plan to use in class in Blackboard's Digital Drop Box or an as a submitted assignment. The files will be available anywhere in the world you have access to a web browser. Files are secure, backed up by OTS regularly, and are easy to get to. You don't run the risk of losing, crushing, or forgetting your USB Flash Drive.
2. Use your network file storage, specifically your H: drive. By having the files there, you have the advantage of being able to work with them in many ways and from many locations—at home, in your office, in the classroom, or on the road.
3. E-mail the files you need for class to yourself as attachments. As long as you can get to your e-mail, you can open the attachment in class. This is also good insurance when making presentations at conferences.

Reasons to Avoid a USB Flash Drive:

1. Computers in classrooms and labs take a lot of abuse. USB slots get bent, dirty, and damaged. Inserting your perfectly good USB Flash Drive into a damaged computer slot can ruin your drive and corrupt the data on it.
2. USB Flash Drives are easily damaged in transit. Gigabytes worth of data can be forever lost to crushes, drops, spills, and other encounters.
3. USB Flash Drives are a leading cause of viruses and malware. When you stick your drive into a computer, it can inherit all the evil from all the people who came before you. Then, when you plug it into your office, home, or laptop computer, it can spread. This is very risky behavior.
4. Security is a real concern. A lost, forgotten, or stolen USB Flash Drive can expose exams, student grades, manuscripts, research data, and other confidential material. Sure, you can learn how to

encrypt your drive, but most people don't. Instead, they believe, "It won't happen to me." Eventually, it probably will.

5. Some brands and models of USB Flash Drives will require Administrator Rights to work. Since those rights are usually not provided on a classroom or lab computer, you could be out of luck when trying to use a drive.

A Safe Way to Use a USB Flash Drive:

1. Copy the files that you need for class onto a USB drive using a "trusted" computer (your office, home, or laptop computer—a computer you're reasonable certain is clean and free of viruses and malware). Keep it with you, but only use it in an emergency. Instead, use Blackboard, your H: drive, or rely on e-mailing yourself the files you need.

Student Presentations

Following the tips below will help make student presentations in class run faster and smoother—as well as ensure a secure and safe experience. The key is to avoid USB Flash Drives; see the previous section.

Suggestions:

1. Students can e-mail themselves the document they're going to need, such as a Word or PowerPoint presentation. Then once in class, the student can just open up their student e-mail account in a web browser and the document will be there safe and sound.
2. Students can also put their files into Blackboard's Digital Drop Box; the instructor can open the file for the student and the presentation can proceed.
3. Instructors can also have students submit their presentations as assignments; then once the time comes the instructor can open the file.
4. It takes too much time for an instructor to logoff and then have the student logon again. Using one of the above suggestions will save time and ensure things move smoothly.

Class-Saving Suggestions

Rarely is cancelling class due to audiovisual problems a good solution. As a faculty member, your department chair and dean will expect you to find a way to continue without the technology. Here are some suggestions:

1. Have your students read, work on an assignment, or do some kind of group activity on their own while you work on the computer or audiovisual problem. This will reduce the pressure and tension on you, plus give students something productive to do.
2. Look for instructions posted in the classroom at the podium; most classrooms have something. If they aren't, visit the Virtual Tour if the computer is working. Locate your classroom and find the Help Button. Instructions and troubleshooting tips may be located there.

3. If you can't display particular documents or materials in class due to an audiovisual problem, consider posting them in Blackboard for future reference, or e-mail the materials to the students.
4. For problems with the podium computer, consider asking if there's anyone in the class who is familiar with computers and can take a look at the problem. There usually are a few students with good computer skills but they probably won't offer to help unless you ask.
5. Most classrooms let you plug in a laptop and use it in lieu of the podium computer. If you or a student has a laptop, you could consider substituting it for the podium computer for the duration of the class.
6. Share laptops. You might be able to have students gather in small groups and share their laptops, especially if the size of the class is small and the room layout conducive to moving furniture. As the instructor, you could point them to the websites or documents you would normally show on the classroom presentation system. This works best if you are using a Blackboard course site since you can keep the class focused on particular assignments, content areas, or resources.
7. Contact your department's administrative assistant to see if he or she can find another room. If the office is closed for the evening or weekend, just do your best to find a vacant classroom in the building and relocate.
8. Resort to traditional instructional methods (lecture, group discussion, etc.) along with the blackboard or whiteboard.
9. Be sure to report the problem, then leave a note at the podium so future instructors know about it and that it's been reported.