Streamlining Student Internet Access
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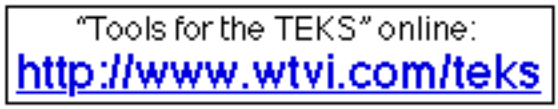
A brief examination of the new Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for technology will quickly convince you that their requirements for student computer skills are formidable. Unlike the previous Essential Elements, the TEKS require students to access and use electronic information on the internet. This article will focus on ways teachers can set up individual student computers for internet access which:

1. Immediately presents instructionally related websites
2. Minimizes wasted internet time
3. Is relatively easy for teachers to update

The techniques described in this article will work with Netscape Navigator on either a Macintosh or Windows computer. You can access the TEKS and other resources relevant to this column on our website: http://www.wtvi.com/teks.



The TEKS for technology are divided into four major strands: foundations, information acquisition, work in solving problems, and communication. The second strand, information acquisition, covers many of the ways students are required to access online information. In each grade level, teachers need to develop customized interfaces which students can use when accessing the internet. By streamlining internet access in one of the ways discussed here, students will waste less time on the internet and have more instructional time-on-task at the computer.

METHOD #1: CUSTOMIZED BOOKMARK LIST

The first way to customize a student computer for internet access is to create a set of "bookmarks." A bookmark is simply a saved internet address (also called a URL: Uniform Resource Locator). When you are browsing the web and find an instructionally appropriate site that you want students to use later, you should:

1. Select the "Bookmarks" menu at the top of the screen. (In Netscape 4.01, the Bookmarks menu is represented by a green icon of an actual bookmark.)
2. Choose "Add Bookmark."

If you click on the Bookmarks menu again, you will notice that the title of the website you just "bookmarked" appears at the bottom of the pop up menu.

Once you have collected a number of bookmarked websites, you need to categorize them. To begin, think of several categories which include the different websites you have saved. For example, these might include:

- Search Engines
- Social Studies sites
- Science sites
- Math sites

To create these "category folders" and move your bookmarks into the appropriate folder(s):

1. From the "Windows" menu at the top of the screen, select "Bookmarks." (Refer to Table A1 for Netscape Navigator 4.01)
2. A window showing all your saved bookmarks will appear. Notice that all the bookmarks are in a single folder, called something like "My Bookmarks." They appear in the order in which you saved them.
3. Click on one of the saved bookmarks you want to categorize.
4. From the "Items" menu at the top of the screen, select "Insert Folder." (In Netscape 4.01, from the "File" menu select "New Folder.")
5. Enter a name for the folder. (Example: Search Engines)
6. Click "OK" to create the folder.

You have now created a "category folder" within the folder which contains all your bookmarks. To move a saved bookmark into a category folder, drag and drop it onto the appropriate folder. You can change the order of your bookmark folders the same way, by dragging and dropping them within the bookmarks window. You can also rename bookmarks using the "Item" menu at the top of the screen. (The "File" menu in version 4.01)

Next, close the "Bookmarks" window. When you select the "Bookmarks" menu again at the top of the screen in Netscape, you will see your category folder listed with a small arrow to the right. When you select that category folder (ie "Search Engines"), another pop up menu will appear revealing the contents of the folder. You can then select your bookmark to make the browser find and display the website. Bookmark files can easily become large and unwieldy. By following these steps, however, you can thoughtfully categorize websites for easier student use.

Once you have developed a set of student bookmarks on one computer, you can to transfer them to other student computers. To do this:

1. Insert a floppy disk into your computer.
2. In Netscape, close all browser windows so you can just see the toolbar at the top.
3. From the "Windows" menu, select "Bookmarks." (See Table A1 for Netscape 4.01)
4. Drag the folder icon at the top of your bookmarks window (called something like "My Bookmarks") to your disk, and it will be copied like a regular folder.
5. Repeat this process on a new student computer except reverse the process: Drag the bookmark folder from the disk window into Netscape's Bookmark window.

This method will display all your saved bookmarks under the "Bookmarks" menu at the top of the Netscape toolbar.

METHOD #2: A BOOKMARK FILE HOMEPAGE

Creating a set of customized bookmarks is an excellent technique to streamline student internet access, but it requires students to regularly select the "Bookmarks" menu at the top of the screen. Students may be tempted to add their own bookmarks if they regularly access this menu. You can avoid this temptation and make student access to specified websites even easier by saving your bookmark list as a file, and setting that file up as your browser's "homepage." To save your bookmark list as a file:

1. From the "Windows" menu at the top of Netscape's screen, choose "Bookmarks." (See Table A1 for Netscape 4.01)
2. From the "File" menu, choose "Save As..."
3. Specify which folder on your computer you want the bookmark file saved in. It is convenient to use the Netscape folder for this purpose. You should also specify a filename.
4. Click "OK" to create a bookmark file.

Table A1 : The "Bookmarks" Window in Netscape 4.01	
Mac OS	Windows OS
The "Communicator" menu in the Macintosh version is a Lighthouse icon at the top of the screen, located next to the "Bookmark" icon.	From the "Communicator" menu at the top of the screen, select "Bookmarks." Then select "Edit Bookmarks" to display the bookmarks window.
Click on the "Communicator" icon and select "Bookmarks" to display the bookmarks window.	Alternatively, hold down the control key and press "B" to display the bookmarks window.
Alternatively, hold down the command key and press "B" to display the bookmarks window.	After the bookmarks window is open, point the mouse to a bookmark and click the RIGHT mouse button to display a window including various bookmark commands.

You have just created a file which will display all of your bookmarks within your created categories on a webpage in the browser window. To display your bookmark file in the browser:

1. From the "File" menu, select "Open File." (In Netscape 4.01, from the "File" menu select "Open." Then select "Page in Navigator.")
2. Your saved bookmark file will now be displayed in the web browser. Each of your saved bookmarks appears as an underlined hyperlink. The title of each category folder is displayed above the bookmarks it contains.

Next, you need to copy and paste the location of your bookmark file into Netscape's General Preferences settings. The file's address is in the Location window near the top of the screen. (It is titled "Netsite" in version 4.01 for Macintosh.) Copy this entire location just like you copy text from a webpage. (Reference my last article, "Web Browser Skills for Research," for help with copying and pasting.)

Next, paste this location into Netscape's defined "homepage" setting:

1. From Netscape's "Options" menu, select "General Preferences." (In Netscape 4.01, from the "Edit" menu select "Preferences.")
2. Select "General Preferences." (In Netscape 4.01, select "Navigator.")
3. At the bottom of the window, click the mouse into the entry field for "homepage location." Paste your bookmark file location here.
4. Close your preferences window.

Once this setting has been made, Netscape will automatically display your saved bookmark file when it launches or whenever a user clicks on the "Home"

button on the Netscape toolbar at the top of the screen. When students are surfing the web, all they must do to return to your bookmark list is click on "Home" in the toolbar.

The same bookmark file can be copied onto as many student computers as needed. Follow these same steps to define the file as Netscape's "homepage" for each student workstation. With this method students do not need to use the bookmarks menu to link to a website. They can simply click on hyperlinks in the browser window instead.

A disadvantage to this method is that when new bookmarks are added, the process must be repeated. A new bookmark file must be created and defined as the homepage. If you use the same name for the bookmark file, you can at least avoid having to reset the homepage preference filename. You may want to create a general set of bookmarks using methods #1 and #2, and then use method #3 to share websites for special projects with students.

METHOD #3: FOLDERS ON THE DESKTOP CONTAINING BOOKMARKS

When students are working on a special internet project, teachers need a convenient way to quickly disseminate bookmarked websites. Creating a folder with individual bookmarks inside is a good solution.

In Netscape:

1. From the "Windows" menu select "Bookmarks." (See Table A1 for Netscape 4.01)
2. Locate the bookmarks you want to share with students. Select more than one bookmark at the same time by holding down the shift key as you click on them.
3. Drag and drop one of the selected bookmarks to the desktop. On a Macintosh, all the selected bookmarks should be copied onto the desktop at the same time. On a Windows computer, you must drag each bookmark individually to the desktop.
4. Create a new folder and move your copied bookmarks into it.

You can then share this folder of bookmarks with students over a network or via floppy disk. Teachers can create a series of folders containing different bookmarks with this method. When students open up a folder, each bookmark will appear as a separate file. Double clicking on a bookmark will automatically launch Netscape and bring up the bookmarked website in the browser window.

METHOD #4: USING A HYPERSTUDIO STACK

Teachers as well as students can create HyperStudio stacks which serve as "homepages" for internet access. This option is especially attractive for educators already familiar with HyperStudio. A HyperStudio stack can be created with buttons which automatically launch Netscape and display specific websites. To do this:

1. Create a new stack in HyperStudio.
2. Place text and graphics on the first card as desired.
3. Each "link" will be defined by the New Button Action (NBA) called "NetPage." Create a new button and select the NetPage NBA.
4. Enter the complete URL of the website you want the card to link to. (Example: http://www.cnn.com)
5. After creating all your links in this way, save your stack. Have students launch the stack whenever they access the internet.

Even if you do not have HyperStudio on every computer at your school, you can create the "homepage" stack and view it on each computer using the freely distributable "HyperStudio Player," included with the program. If you do not see NetPage in your list of NBAs in HyperStudio, check if it is stored in the "NBAs & Extras" folder included with the HyperStudio program.

METHOD #5: A CUSTOMIZED WEBPAGE

The most elegant way to customize student access to the internet is to create your own homepage in HTML: the programming language of the world-wide web. There are a variety of webpage authoring tools which can help you do this. Like a saved bookmark file, an HTML file you create can be copied onto each student computer and accessed with Netscape. It does NOT have to be "uploaded" and viewed "live" on the internet. For further assistance in learning to develop webpages for schools, visit "Writing Webpages with Wesley" at http://www.wtvi.com/html.

I have created an example of a customized webpage which you may examine and even use with your own students. It is located at: http://www.wtvi.com/teks/kidlinks.html. If you want Netscape to always display this or another webpage at startup, simply insert its URL in Netscape's General Preferences as described in Method #2 for a Bookmark File.

In addition to using one or more of these methods to streamline student internet access, teachers should also increase the size of Netscape's browser screen for optimal use. For Netscape versions prior to 4.0:

1. From the "Preferences" menu select "General Preferences."

2. Choose to view the toolbar as "text." Close the preferences window.
3. From the Preferences menu, de-select the "Show Directory Buttons" option.
4. From the Preferences menu, de-select the "Show Location" option.

By making these changes, you can substantially increase the area of Netscape's browser window. Students can view more information at once and will not be distracted by the location window and directory buttons. If you are using one of the bookmark or homepage methods described in this article, these Netscape browser options are not needed for student internet use.

I hope these suggestions help you use the internet more efficiently in your classroom. There are many other ways to streamline student access to the internet, however. Please email me other successful classroom techniques you have used relating to technology, as well as any questions you have relating to technology and the TEKS which I can share or address in future columns. See you online!

Addition to last issue's column: Another way you can obtain textual information from a webpage is to email its contents to yourself. From the file menu in Netscape, select "Mail Document" and enter your email address. Make sure you setup your mail preferences first. This technique is especially handy when you're online away from home without a disk!

Wesley Fryer is an elementary educator and internet consultant in Lubbock, Texas. He welcomes your questions and comments about this article or about classroom technology integration in general!

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