



Strategies for Instructors for Laptops in the Classroom

Laptops and other mobile devices can be used to support education; they also have the potential to distract students and hinder learning. Here are some ideas and strategies to consider. As you do, remember our students are adults and we want them to take ownership of their learning.

I. Think about the duty to accommodate; laptop use is frequently part of an accommodation. The *Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate* (Ontario Human Rights Commission) states that individuals with a disability have the right to the accommodation needed to promote their complete participation (4.3.) – which may be a laptop. Moreover, the *Policy* also states that individuals requiring an accommodation have the right to confidentiality (4.3.) As well, for volunteer note takers in any mid- or large-size class it is best practice to call proactively for volunteers on the first day of class. These note takers will typically create the notes on their laptops as the text can be easily converted to match the accommodation requirements.

If you create a laptop rule in your course syllabus, it must make provision for the ability and confidentiality of those whose accommodation includes the use of a laptop. It also must provide for volunteer note takers to take notes on a laptop. (see below Item II-7).

Example syllabus statement: Classroom rule for the use of laptops and other mobile devices –Please stay on task if you choose to use laptops or other mobile devices during class. These tools can be useful to take notes, refer to class readings, or look up important course concepts. However, checking social media, texting or other non-course specific activity distracts from your learning and can ultimately result in receiving a lower grade in this course.

II. When you structure your class time and create guidelines on behavioural expectations, consider the following strategies:

- (1) Think carefully about how learning will occur in your course and how technology does or does not enhance learning within that framework.
- (2) How are learning opportunities structured in your course? Regardless of technology's role in your course it is worth talking to students about how the course activities are structured to enhance their learning. This will put discussions regarding behavioural expectations (technology related and otherwise) in the context of both each student's and their peer's learning.

- (3) Discuss the educational research (see below) as it relates to learning, and your classroom expectations for technology usage and student engagement. Be sure your rule is consistent with the research you discuss. Provide students with the references and consider having your liaison librarian add the references to your course site.
- (4) Inform your students that you expect them to stay 'on task'/engaged during class time. Explain that while you acknowledge that laptops and mobile technologies have many benefits, they can also be distracting and take away from effective learning.
- (5) Talk to students about how using technology for non-course related purposes, like checking Facebook or texting, can negatively impact their own learning and success in the course. Consider sharing one or more articles on this topic with your class.
- (6) Explain to your class how using technology may even negatively affect classmates, as the sound of typing and visuals on screens can be very distracting. Considering sharing the articles listed below on this topic with your class.
- (7) Consider setting up a lap-top free zone in your classroom. This will allow choice (an important motivational factor in learning), but minimize the distraction of laptops for other students; two possibilities are either students on the edges use laptops or left /right separations.

III. Research on Learning and Implementing a Plan for Laptops and Other Mobile Devices.

- (1) Effects on individual learning:

Fried, C. B. (2008). In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning. *Computers & Education*, 50(3), 906-914.

<http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/516432>

Kraushaar, J. M., & Novak, D. C. (2010). Examining the affects of student multitasking with laptops during the lecture. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 21(2), 241.

<http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/512296>

Ravizza, S. M., Hambrick, D. Z., & Fenn, K. M. (2014). Non-academic internet use in the classroom is negatively related to classroom learning regardless of intellectual ability. *Computers & Education*, 78, 109-114.

<http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/516435>

(2) Effects on classmates' learning:

Sana, F., Weston, T., & Cepeda, N. J. (2013). Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers. *Computers & Education*, 62, 24-31.

<http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/516438>

(3) Effects of Using Laptop Zones:

Aguilar-Roca, N. M., Williams, A. E., & O'Dowd, D. K. (2012). The impact of laptop-free zones on student performance and attitudes in large lectures. *Computers & Education*, 59(4), 1300-1308.

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5r163125>

McCreary, J. R. (2009). The laptop-free zone. *Valparaiso University Law Review*, 43.

<http://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1116&context=vulr>

IV. Some Courses Rely on Technology. If you're interested in discussing strategies for integrating laptops or other mobile technologies into your class for activity learning, please contact Educational Technology (Centre for Teaching and Learning): www.uts.utoronto.ca/technology/