

# Managing Wireless in the Classroom: Guidelines for Instructors

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The rapid growth of wireless-enabled classrooms and mobile technologies poses unique challenges and opportunities for student learning and engagement. Reflecting on the role that wireless will play—or not play—in your classroom is important to effectively managing a wireless enabled classroom environment.

## Options for managing wireless in the classroom

- 1) **Do not allow wireless technology**—(Effectively bans laptops, smart phones, tablets, mp3 players, etc.)
- 2) **Adopt a “hybrid” policy:**
  - a. Allow wireless technology only at certain times—either on certain days or at certain points of class. You may wish to use a “lids up” or “lids down” signal.  
--OR--
  - b. Create “wireless” and/ or “no wireless” zones: Allow students who wish to use laptops and tablets to sit in a designated “wireless” section of the classroom to decrease distractions to the other students.
- 3) **Integrate wireless technology into the learning experience**

## Suggestions for making a wireless agreement with your students:

No matter which option you adopt, you may find it helpful to:

- **Clearly communicate your wireless choice to your students**
  - ❖ Include a statement in your syllabus that clarifies: (a) how wireless may or not be used in your classroom, (b) your expectations concerning wireless, (c) any punishments for violations (e.g. loss of participation points), and (d) your reasons for your choice
  - ❖ Discuss your wireless choice with your students
- **Discuss technology etiquette.**
  - ❖ Help students differentiate between respectful/professional and disrespectful/unprofessional uses of wireless in the class.
  - ❖ Respectful uses might include completing class work requiring computers; searching for class related items; taking notes on instructor PowerPoints; correspondence with other students for collaborative work; texting or tweeting as requested by instructor. Disrespectful uses may include any activity not related to class (e.g. texting, skyping, emailing, facebook, tweeting, surfing the internet, downloading materials, etc.)

- **Consider exceptions to your policy.**
  - ❖ Students with disabilities may have special needs requiring access to technological aids. You may wish to allow your class to have greater electronic usage to avoid singling out individual students.

### Example of wireless policy:

*Mobile Communications Policy:* You are welcome to use a laptop computer in class to take notes, if you wish. Mobile devices should have the ringer turned off and be placed in pockets or backpacks. You may not make or receive phone calls, surf the web, email, send or receive text messages, or otherwise use your mobile communications devices for non-classroom use during class. Such practices are both disrespectful and distracting to other students. Please note: violating this policy may be detrimental to your class participation grade. In addition, for exams you will not be permitted to use your laptop or mobile device as a calculator, so you should ensure that you have a simple, non-networked calculator for your use on exams.<sup>1</sup>

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### Strategies for using wireless technology to promote active learning and student engagement:

- ❖ Provide opportunities for students (working individually or in small groups) to access on-line databases, search engines, and relevant websites to research topics in class
  - ❖ Use wireless response systems (“clickers”) or Twitter to assess student learning
  - ❖ Use collaborative programs (e.g. Google documents) during class for students to share notes, ideas, questions and solutions
  - ❖ Incorporate social networking components like wikis, blogs, and message boards into discussions.
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### Other resources:

- ❖ The Searle Center for Teaching Excellence has a series of links dedicated to technology in the classroom (<http://www.northwestern.edu/searle/resources/teaching-strategies-and-materials.html#tab6>). The Searle Center, in collaboration with Academic and Research Technologies and the University Library, also offers workshops on enhancing teaching with technology.
- ❖ Vanderbilt University’s Center for Teaching has excellent [suggestions for developing a policy](http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-guides/technology/wireless/) and further information (<http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-guides/technology/wireless/>)

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<sup>1</sup> This policy is adapted from a syllabus statement created by L.Lynne Kiesling, Department of Economics, with her permission