

A Teacher's Guide to Using Facebook



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Bernadette Rego (2009)



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Introduction

Welcome to the Teacher's Guide to using Facebook! As educators, social networking can carry tremendous potential benefits in one's professional development as well as staying in touch with friends, family, and colleagues. Facebook is one of many social networking tools available which is considered popular due to its versatility in what can be shared-everything from installing and creating fun applications (e.g. movie quizzes) to posting photos of your recent family reunion.

However, as educators we also have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online holds no exceptions. As you may have already heard, there have been instances reported by media in the past of teachers demonstrating professional misconduct while engaging in inappropriate dialogue about their schools and their students, posting pictures and videos of themselves engaged in inappropriate activity, and the likes. Some feel that being online shields them from having their personal lives exposed. On the contrary, how we establish our online identity can carry far greater repercussions than we could ever have imagined.

It is, nonetheless, reassuring to know that there are ways of protecting ourselves from being exposed while online. This guide is intended to help you set up a profile using Facebook which best suits your personal and professional lives. This guide was written to educate you on ways of establishing your profiles which uphold your professional image.



Profile Choices on Facebook

When setting up your profile on Facebook, you have the following options to choose from:

- 1) not listing your profile
- 2) creating a profile strictly for classroom/professional use
- 3) creating a general profile with filtering (for family, friends, colleagues, and students)
- 4) creating a public profile (accessible to everyone)

I will go into further detail about each profile option shortly. I would highly recommend you take into account that if you are going to use your Facebook to interact with students, that you be familiar with Facebook's policies around the minimum legal age which one must be to have a Facebook account. *At the time of writing this publication, one has to be at least 13 years or older to establish a Facebook profile.*¹ Facebook also states the following at the time of publication about its policy around users of age 13 to 18:

*"We recommend that minors 13 years of age or older ask their parents for permission before sending any information about themselves to anyone over the Internet."*²

Thus, if you are teaching children in this age range, I would strongly advise you ask for signed parental consent prior to dealing with your students on Facebook.

For further information about Facebook policies please visit <http://www.facebook.com/policy.php>

1 Facebook Policy terms: <http://www.facebook.com/policy.php>

2 Facebook Policy terms: <http://www.facebook.com/policy.php>

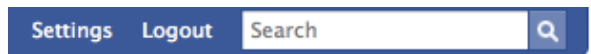


I. Not Listing Your Profile

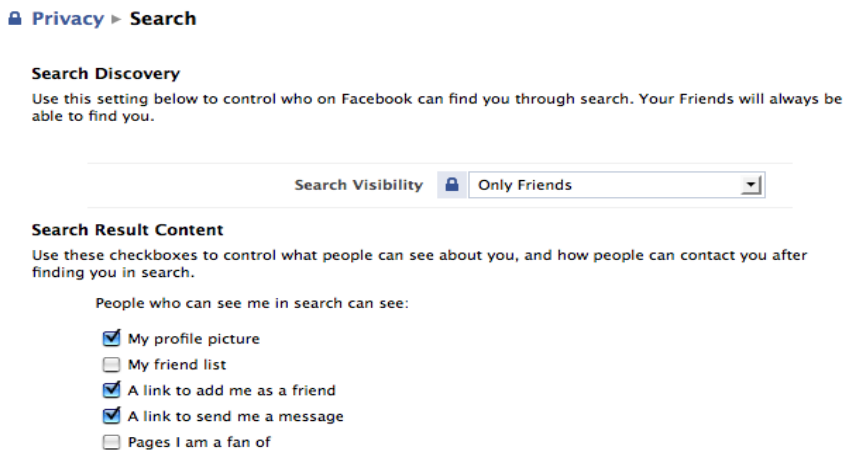
For maximum control you could set up your profile so that it is not listed. In this case, if someone were to search for your profile by your name, they would not see it there, appearing as if you were not on Facebook. This is sometimes a desirable option for teachers who do not wish to deal with the unpleasantness of declining a student's "friend" request.

Even if you already have created a profile on Facebook which is listed, you can still change it to be unlisted by taking the following steps:

1. select "settings" near the top right hand corner of your Facebook page (next to the "search" bar)



2. select "privacy settings" which you will find in the "settings" drop-down menu.
3. Select "search" under the "privacy settings"; this will take you to the following page:



As you can see, I've selected "only friends" to view me in their search under "Search Visibility". Notice that under the description for "Search Discovery" Facebook states:

*"Your friends will always be able to find you."*³

Facebook is referring to friends you have added to be able to view your profile.

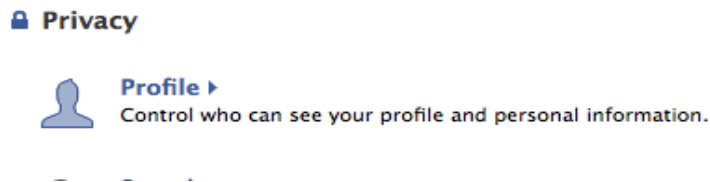
³ sourcewww.facebook.com



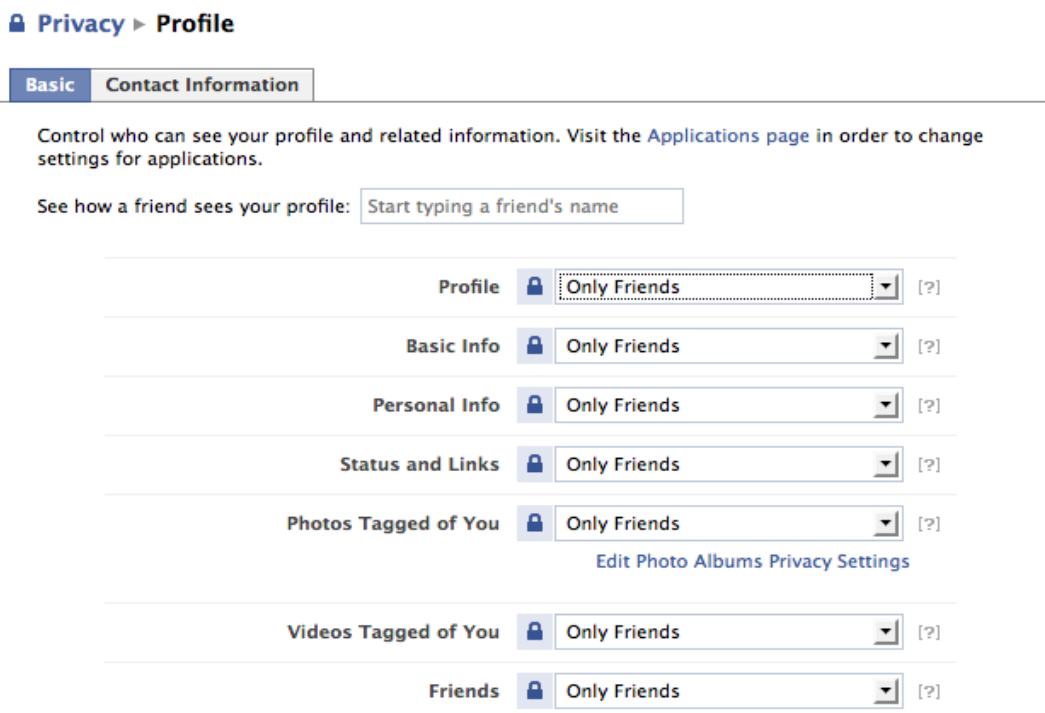
- Remember to “save changes” by selecting this option near the bottom of the page as shown below:

People in college networks
 People in high school networks
 People in company networks
 People in regional networks
 People with no networks

- Select “Privacy” near the top left-hand side of this page (the word is highlighted in blue) and it will take you back to the Privacy Menu. Select “Profile” under the Privacy options:



- Under the “Profile” setting, select “only friends” to be able to view all the options on this menu as shown below:



Remember to save your changes by selecting the “Save changes” button at the bottom of the page.

You have now successfully unlisted your profile from search results people obtain.



ii. Creating a Profile Strictly for Classroom/Professional Use

If you would like to keep your personal profile reserved only for family and friends but still wish to use Facebook with your students and/or colleagues (provided they are at least 13 and you have parental consent), you can set up a separate profile for this purpose.

1. You need to ensure you are first signed out from Facebook; once you are signed out, go to www.facebook.com and sign up under the name you wish to use for your professional profile:

Please note that you will need to use a different e-mail from that which you signed up any other Facebook profile with. Thus you would need to create another e-mail account if this is the case.

2. Once you have filled out all the required information, you can go into your “settings” to adjust your profile and account information to your specifications. If you want your students to be able to add you as a “friend”, you will need to have your profile listed on search results. Thus you will need the search visibility settings enabled for everyone to view you. If you wish to have your profile unlisted from search results, you will need to add your students as friends instead.
3. For your profile picture, please ensure that it upholds your professional image. The guideline to follow in selecting an image is to consider this question:

Does my picture reflect how my students see me during school hours?

Thus, your attire, demeanor, and the setting in which your photo was taken should reflect what your school district policies state.

Word of Caution:

Any correspondence you engage in on your professional profile should reflect what is acceptable within your school district policies. As a general guideline, please ensure that you maintain a professional tone in all comments posted, all e-mails sent, and all material

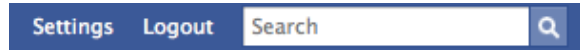
(including photographs) shared on your profile. If you are posting photos of students, please ensure you have parental consent to a) have students photographed and to b) have them posted on your Facebook profile.



iii. Creating a General Profile with Filtering

If you wish to keep one profile for everyone from family members to students, you can filter content on your page so that it is not necessarily privy to everyone's viewing. This is ideal if you wish to ensure, for instance, students only see school-related information; this also applies if you only want family/friends to see your personal information.

1. select "settings" near the top right hand corner of your Facebook page (next to the "search" bar)



2. select "privacy settings" which you will find in the "settings" drop-down menu.
3. The following are the options you can change or customize under your "privacy settings" with some detailed explanation of each.
 - a. Profile
-this control allows you to choose who can see your profile page.
 - b. Basic Info
-this control allows you to choose who can see your basic information once on your profile page (i.e. Gender, Birthday, Hometown, Political and Religious Views, and Relationship Status). Unless you are comfortable with discussing your political or religious views with students, I would suggest you keep this information private by customizing who sees it. I will discuss this in greater detail in the next section.
 - c. Personal Info
-this allows you to control who can view your personal information upon arriving at your profile page (e.g. Interests, Activities, Favorites (music, movies, etc.) and your About Me section)
 - d. Status and Links
-this allows you to control who sees any links you share or your status updates.
 - e. Photos tagged of you
-this control allows you to determine who can view any photos that have you tagged or identified in them. This also applies to photos you have tagged of friends. This could include photos from anyone's Facebook profile.

Please keep in mind that if you have friends on Facebook who have taken photos of you that you do not wish for students to see, you should adjust this control to not allow students to see any photos tagged of you.

f. Videos tagged of you

-just as with the above description, this control allows you to also determine who can view any videos that either you have tagged of friends or that friends have tagged of you.

Again, please keep in mind that if there would be any possibility of having been recorded on video doing or saying anything that might not be appropriate for your student audience, you should adjust this control so that they cannot view videos being tagged either by you or of you.

g. Friends

-this allows you to control who can see your list of friends. Please be mindful that some of your friends or family members may have public profiles which allow your students to have a more detailed look at their online identities. If you happen to have a “friend” or “friends” that post inappropriate content on their Facebook profiles, or you simply don't want your students to acquire more information about the friends on your list, I would suggest you customize this control so that your students are not able to view your list of friends.

h. Wall posts

This control allows you to determine who can view any comments posted on your “wall” on Facebook. If you have friends that might use coarse language or post any other material deemed inappropriate for your student audience, I would highly recommend you either warn friends not to post such content on your wall or customize this control so that your students are unable to read these posts.

i. Education Info

This allows you to control who can view any information pertaining to your educational work on your profile.

j. Work Info

This allows you to control who can view any information pertaining to your previous work experiences on your profile.



Filtering Options

The following are the options from which you can choose in controlling who can see parts of your profile:

a) Everyone

-this includes Facebook members that are not your “friends”.

b) Friends of friends

-this only refers to Facebook members that are friends of your “friends”.

c) Only friends

-this refers to those who you have added as your “friends”

d) Customize

-this option allows more control over who, from those you have added as “friends”, can view your profile. The following are your options:



you can choose to have one of the following when customizing your control options:

1) Everyone

2) Friends of Friends

3) Only Friends

4) Except these People

-this option allows you to type in the names of friends or name of a friend list that you are **not** allowing to view the contents of a certain part of your profile. For example, if you want everyone except your students to view your basic information, you can add the names of your students under this option or create a student list and type in the name of the list.

Make sure to select “Okay” after you've made your customization. Please also remember to “Save Changes” after you've adjusted all your control options.



iv. Creating a Public Profile

You also have the option of creating a profile on Facebook where everyone can view its contents. Having said that, you can still adjust the control options to limit what everyone can see. You may want to have a public profile for students from your past to be able to re-connect with you with greater certainty that it is you and not someone else. You might feel you have nothing to hide from the general public, thus why have restricted access to your profile page?

Again, I have mentioned in previous parts of this guide the importance of upholding a professional image as a teacher, not only to your students but to the general public. What you might deem as harmless actions on your part (e.g. posting a joking remark on a teacher friend's wall calling him a loser) may be blown out of proportion by others. It is better to be safe than sorry.



To Add or Not to Add: A Cautionary Note About Facebook Applications

If you are already using Facebook, you might be familiar with some of the applications offered such as one that allows you to send virtual gifts or manage and share your photos. Some of the applications can be seemingly harmless but to a student or parent, it might be perceived differently. For example, if you have been invited by a colleague to play a “slot machine” game on Facebook, you might accept the invitation; this would require you install the Slot Machine App. on your profile. If you have not filtered this application thinking “it’s just a game” you might find a parent calling and questioning you about why you are modeling gambling practices to your students.

You are able to filter what applications (if any) your students can view on your profile.

To filter your applications so that only colleagues, friends, and family can view them:

1. select “settings” near the top right-hand corner of the page (next to the “Search” bar)
2. select “Application settings” from the drop-down menu
3. for each application you wish to filter, select “Edit Settings”
4. under the “Profile” tab in the menu that appears, select “Privacy” and “customize”; there you will be able to select “Except these People” where you can add your student names individually or add the student list (assuming you have already created one) instead.
5. Remember to select “Okay” to save your changes.

I would discourage any application installations that do not uphold your professional image. Please consult with your school district or Teacher College standards for further guidance. As a general rule of thumb, I would suggest you avoid being associated with any activity that your students, their parents, or administration may deem questionable. For example, if you are discouraged from giving gifts to your students in the classroom, you would certainly not be sending them virtual gifts on Facebook. Although you might have the best intentions, such an act could be misconstrued by others. Remember to always uphold your professional image, especially when you are online.



Joining Groups on Facebook

There are several groups on Facebook worthy of joining; this can be a way of networking with other education professionals or to meet others that share your interests on non-education based topics. Just as I've said before, though, please keep in mind that you have a professional image to uphold.

As a teacher, you want to present yourself as someone who is respectful and acts as a responsible adult role model. You are also presenting this image to your students' parents, your colleagues, pre-service teachers, administrators, and the general public. Please keep these groups of individuals in mind before you click the "Join" button on any Group page.

If you are joining groups using a Classroom/Professional Facebook page, please join groups that reflect the Teaching profession within that profile. For your personal profile, feel free to join non-education based groups. If you feel uncomfortable with having students, parents, or other members of your school community viewing your affiliations, you can filter them as well!

1. select "settings" near the top right-hand corner of the page (next to the "Search" bar)
2. select "Application settings" from the drop-down menu
3. under the "Groups" tab in the menu that appears, select "Privacy" and "customize"; there you will be able to select "Except these People" where you can add names of individuals you don't intend to share your group affiliations with or add a list name (assuming you have already created one) instead.
4. Remember to select "Okay" to save your changes.



Establishing a Personal Learning Network (PLN) on Facebook

Facebook can also serve as a powerful tool in building your online Personal Learning Network (PLN). A PLN is comprised of a group of individuals with whom you share similar learning interests (in your case, an interest in education). Individuals contribute useful resources, questions, and reflect upon issues that pertain to their professional development needs.

The following are some suggestions I'd like to offer in helping you “grow” a PLN:

1. join professional groups comprised of other teachers to keep updated on news and issues relating to the education field.
2. add individual educators who are on Facebook as “friends” so that you may stay in closer contact. Please keep in mind that some educators may be using their profiles for family and friends only. It might be best you first ask this individual whether they have a Facebook profile for collaborating with other professionals.
3. Perhaps your Teachers Association is already on Facebook. If so, you might want to join the group and find opportunities to collaborate with other colleagues and discuss issues relating to your subject area or grade.
4. Create a group for teachers in your school where you can stay connected outside of work hours and share stories or suggestions with one another. Please keep in mind that you want to keep all interactions professional! Discussing a student on a Facebook group should be with the most respectful language possible and without naming the student(s). If you do create a group, I would suggest you create a list with some ground rules around good etiquette while engaging in discussions. You can have the list displayed on the profile page for all members to see.
5. If you read good education-related blogs, watch for any Facebook links on their sites. You may want to add them as “friends” to gain more insight on their education-based views.
6. Watch for feeds from other teachers on your Facebook for groups they've joined. You may want to take a closer look at them if they are related to the teaching profession.
7. You may want to look at which groups your colleagues on your Facebook have joined. You can do so by selecting the “Info” tab on their profile. There you should find the names of Groups they've joined (provided they haven't filtered them). If they sound education-related, you can click on their links to take you to the groups in question.
8. Join a specialty group if you are a teacher specializing in a certain subject area (e.g. French). You might want to join a group relating to your specialty even if it is not comprised of teachers. For example, if you are teaching French, you might want to



join a group of individuals who want to practice their French-speaking skills while learning more about French-speaking cultures around the world.

9. Always remember to contribute something as often as you can to any Personal Learning Network/ group you join. It is important to reciprocate others' assistance to keep the learning community strong and growing in its knowledge.
10. If you are using a Professional Facebook profile, you can share useful links and messages relating to education directly from your page. Use the "status" bar as a place to post information about articles you are reading, conferences you are attending (especially online ones), share links to websites and any other useful resources that can aid other colleagues professionally.



Establishing Professional Boundaries with Students

Students should understand that it is important they keep a respectful tone in their interactions with you on Facebook. Just as you would expect they respect your boundaries within the classroom, they need to honor the boundaries you establish online.

1. If you are allowing students to e-mail you via Facebook, ensure that you express what times you will be returning messages online. Thus if you do not wish to respond to e-mails on the weekend, you should inform your students of this.
2. Address students directly about any inappropriate language or material posted on your Facebook page. Remove such postings from your Facebook immediately.
3. If you intend to use any of the Facebook applications with students, please ensure that it relates to your role as their teacher. Avoid invitations to install applications that would not reflect a teacher-student relationship.
4. If you are uncomfortable with sharing any of your personal information with students (e.g. photos), do not succumb to doing so if students ask.
5. If you are going to “chat” with students online, ensure you set up “office hours” so that you are at will to end the conversation when the time is up. You may also want to set time limits on how long you speak with each student.

As a general rule, keep in mind that the manner in which you interact with students must reflect that of your role as a teacher.



The Implications of Having Access to Student Information on Facebook

If you do interact with your students on Facebook, you are going to be privy to information that they have used to construct their online identities. You now will likely have significantly more knowledge of your student than would otherwise be available to you strictly in the school setting. The following are some implications that you should be aware of:

1. You will be able to see your student's profile picture and any other pictures they have posted on their profile page.
2. You will see who their "friends" are online if they have not filtered it to prevent you from seeing their friend list.
3. You will see comments posted on their wall
4. You will see comments they post on others' walls
5. You will see their status updates
6. You will see their information which could tell you everything from their date of birth to their hobbies and interests.
7. You will see what applications they install

The above implications I've outlined should serve as a reminder that you will need to be aware of any information that students make public knowledge which could be cause for alarm. Just as you would have the duty to report knowledge of a student at school that is concerning, you also must comply with that duty if interacting with students on Facebook. For example, if your 16 year old student is posting threatening comments on someone's wall or is posting obscene photos, it is your duty to inform the school of this.

Please inform your students that they need to be aware of information they post. In doing so, you are educating your students on how to develop a better understanding of good netiquette and how to establish a respectable online identity.



Dealing with Colleagues on Facebook

Interacting with colleagues online can be a great way to stay connected and get to know them better. Often, I have found colleagues being so occupied by their teaching duties that they are unable to make time to meet with other colleagues in the staff room. Having time to engage with them outside of school hours can be a great source of stress-release. However, As I've mentioned earlier in this guide, we must maintain professional conduct when interacting with colleagues online. Our conversations must be reflective of those which we would have in the school hallway in the presence of students, staff, and administration.

Understandably, there are times when we feel the need to vent our frustrations arising either from our professional or personal lives. Please be aware, though, that if you are needing to have such conversations, they should be done in privacy with colleagues. To post comments on a colleague's wall that could now potentially become public knowledge could have dire consequences. For example, if you are expressing your frustrations in relation to another colleague or student's parent on a colleague's page, that information could easily be relayed to the unintended party. Thus, it is best to keep those conversations limited to face-to-face contact.

Even sending an e-mail to a colleague is not suggested as it could be printed or forwarded and made public knowledge. Remember that anything you express in writing is now out there. Unless you feel very comfortable and trusting of a colleague, you should not send any correspondence that could impact your professional image.

Along the same lines, please refrain from engaging in unprofessional conversations initiated by colleagues online. If a colleague has posted something on your wall that is inappropriate, delete it from your page and express to him or her your discomfort with such material on your profile. In doing so you are doing both yourself and your colleague a favor. If they have e-mailed you about something that you feel is not appropriate to discuss, address them by stating you are uncomfortable with engaging in this discussion.



Author's Final Note

I hope you have found this guide to be comprehensive in helping you establish a respectable Facebook profile. Please keep in mind that as much as one needs to be aware of how one establishes an online identity, one should also enjoy the process and the benefits of interacting in this medium.

Social networking sites such as Facebook carry great potential in collaborating with students, colleagues, and establishing a Personal Learning Network. As you would in face-to-face settings, it is important to be professional in one's demeanor and while engaged in any interactions with others. We are typically as teachers held to a higher standard than the general public.

Please be aware that Facebook's policies and settings may change over time. The contents within this guide best reflect the conditions and features of Facebook at the time of its publication. Furthermore, this guide was independently written by me thus was not endorsed by Facebook.

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