Seven Tips for Students Writing With a Computer

by Mark Binder

I've been using computers as a writer for more than three and a half decades. Here are seven quick tips to help you prevent crashes and always turn in your best work. Follow these, to improve your writing, get better grades, and have less stress!

Transmit JOY!

1. **When you begin, give project a memorable name and save.**
   Save your work it in a folder called "School Projects" and inside another folder named by subject or teacher.
   BONUS: Use cloud-synching, like Dropbox or Google Drive or iCloud. Ask your parents or teacher for help. This will give you a backup and access to the file in other locations. If you forget to bring in the paper, you can get it at school.

2) **Save often!**
   Save every time you pause. Make it a habit. Even though your program may "auto save", sudden power failures or your sister or dog tripping over a power cord might wipe out what you've done.
   BONUS: Use keyboard commands. Mac use Command-S, Windows & Chrome use Control-S

3) **Get it ALL done.**
   Keep writing and working on your project until you finish the first draft. Don't stop and start. If you need to do more research, get to it and then get back to writing. Don't wait until the last minute!
   The most foolish way to get a worse grade or lose credit on a project is to turn it in late or incomplete.

4) **Print it out when you are done (after saving, of course).**
   I DON'T recommend making revisions, especially initial revisions, on the screen. Computer papers look perfect when you print them. They're not. Spellcheck makes mistakes. So did you. You can't see them on the screen. If you don't have a printer at home, print it at school or at the library. You can use Dropbox or google or email or a thumb drive to get the file to the printer.

5) **Read your printed paper out loud to someone.**
   I call this the scribble draft. When you do this, have a pen or pencil and take notes about spelling mistakes, sentences that don't make sense, places that are unclear or where you need to add or cut.
   • When you read out loud, you're forced to look at every word. If you just skim or read on a screen, you're likely to skip and miss mistakes.
   • You can hear what you've written and learn quickly where things don't make sense.
   • You can get feedback from your listener. Avoid getting opinions from listeners—except your teacher. Instead get specifics. Don't ask your listener, "Did you like it?"
   • Do ask them, "Did it make sense? Were you interested? Were you confused? What was missing?"
   • While you're reading out loud, scribble all over the paper. Circle parts that don't make sense. Write question-marks when you're unsure. Fix punctuation. Write notes in the margin for adds or changes.
   • Cross out words and sentences and paragraphs that are redundant. (Don't repeat like this!)

6) **Now revise on the computer.**
   Put the changes back into the computer. Run a spell check now. Save. Print. Read it aloud again.
   The best way to make anything better is through revision. Re-vision means to see something again.

7) **Turn your work in on time!**
   Save your final draft. Print it out. Turn it in by the deadline. Or (gasp!) early.
   BONUS: When your teacher returns the paper, if there are errors, listen to what he or she has to say, and try to learn from the mistakes you've made.

Even if you're a genius, not everything you write will be brilliant the first time. However, if you follow these rules, you're sure to stress less and learn more.

Mark Binder is the award-winning author of dozens of works including "Cinderella Spinderella", "The Bed Time Story Book Series", and "It Ate My Sister." His books, ebooks and audio recordings are available on Amazon, iBooks, Google Play, and iTunes. Learn more on… Twitter: @transmitjoy • Tumblr: transmitjoy.tumblr.com • facebook.com/transmitjoy • web: transmitjoy.com