

## Ning Guidelines

### Purpose for Ning in the Classroom:

To properly benefit from a classroom Ning, it is important for all users to understand why Ning has been made available for classroom use. While a Ning is a social network, Ning has not been opened up to student use to provide them with regular social networking capabilities. Students have access to social networking via Facebook, MySpace, and other websites; they are not in need of another social network. Instead, Ning has been opened up to provide a tool for communication and instruction that harnesses the engaging power of social networking.

Why is this difference important to emphasize? If a teacher's classroom Ning is used for social networking purposes, then the teacher will need to spend an appropriate amount of time policing the network to make sure that students are using it properly. This is not time well spent.

Here is an example of the difference. If a teacher chooses to have Photos as a feature of his classroom Ning, then the teacher must choose "Approve photos before they appear" as detailed in section 4 below. If students use the Ning as they do normal social networking sites, they will begin posting their favorite pictures of themselves, their friends, their families, and their interests. The teacher will now spend many hours approving photos. Instead, the teacher should communicate with the students that the Ning is not for normal social networking purposes. The student should realize that the teacher will only be approving photos that are directly related to the content of the site. Students should be informed that they will be wasting their time if they try to add photos, videos, blogs, etc. that have nothing to do with the content. Those items should be posted on the students' normal social networking sites. A teacher could even go so far as to inform students that the teacher might stop using the engaging Ning platform if students cause him to spend too much time going through non-content-related material.

**To maximize the effectiveness of Ning and to provide a safe and secure online environment, please adhere to the following guidelines when making a Ning for use in your classroom and with your students:**

#### 1. Acceptable Use Policy

- Please review the school system's acceptable use policy with your students prior to having them join your Ning.
- Make sure your students are aware that our school system has changed its practices to make this technology available to them. They need to use it wisely and not make decisions that could lead to this technology being blocked.
- Make sure that students understand that operating within your classroom Ning is similar to operating within your classroom. They should expect disciplinary consequences for rude or inappropriate behavior or comments.
- Encourage your students to let you know if someone leaves rude or inappropriate comments on their wall.

#### 2. Advertisements

- We do not want advertisements on classroom Nings.
- Ning has said that they will remove the advertisements from classroom sites.
- To remove advertisements:
  - At the very bottom right of your Ning, click on the "Help".
  - At the bottom of the Help page, under "Contact Us", click on "Send us your question".
  - You will probably be asked to login and to provide your url.
  - On the next page, request in the "Describe your question" field that advertisements be removed from your site. Explain that this is a site that will only be used in your classroom and that its members will be minors. They would also like a specific age range.
  - Click "Send".

#### 3. Restricted Membership

- It is recommended that you attempt to get all your students and parents to join your Ning as that will make it a very effective communication tool.
- If you make your Ning private then you will have to send email invitations to everyone. This is probably not practical. A public but restricted Ning would work best.

- For safety reasons we want to restrict membership only to those people that you have approved. Also, we do not want non-members to be able view anything more than the first page. To do this:
  - Click on “Manage” tab at the top of the Ning.
  - Click on “Network Privacy” icon under “Your Members” section
  - Choose “Public”
  - Under “Public” choose “Just the Main Page”
  - Near the bottom of the page, check the box next to “Approve new members before they can join”

#### 4. Feature Controls

- Feature Controls give you great control on your Ning environment and will make it less likely that inappropriate material will get posted.
- Click on “Manage” tab at the top of the Ning.
- Click on “Feature Controls” icon under “Your Members” section.
- Now you should:
  - Check the box next to “Approve blog posts before they appear”. This will prevent students from posting blogs with negative content.
  - Uncheck the box next to “Allow members to create groups”. If you use groups you will want to be the one that creates them so that you can control them.
  - Check the box next to “Approve photos before they appear”. This will prevent students from posting inappropriate pictures.
  - Uncheck the box next to “Allow members to add Apps to their My Page”. You do not want your students adding applications to their page as some application will not be appropriate for school use.
  - Check the box next to “Approve videos before they appear”. This will prevent students from posting inappropriate videos.

#### 5. Manage Forum Discussion

- A Forum Discussion is a place where questions can be posted and discussion can ensue. You will probably not want students to post their own discussions at any time. However, at times you will want them to start discussions. Therefore, you will change settings on this from time to time. To control this feature:
  - Click on “Manage” tab at the top of the Ning
  - Click on “Discussion Forum” icon under the “Your Network” section
  - Check or uncheck the radio button next to “Only administrators can start discussion in this category”.
  - You can then check or uncheck the box next to “Allow members to reply”

#### 6. Controlling Chat

- You will not want chat to be available all the time.
- You will want chat at certain times. For example, you might want to tell your students that you will be available on chat from 6:00-7:00 tonight to answer questions about the test. To control this:
  - Click on “Manage” tab at the top of the Ning
  - Click on the “Features” icon under the “Your Network” section.
  - You can have chat or not have chat by simply dragging “Chat” on to your page or dragging it off and putting it in the box that says “Drag Here to Remove Feature”.
  - You can also control where chat will be on your page based on where you place it.

#### 7. Communicating Expectations

- It is a good practice to create a new tab that goes to a new page that has expectations for use of your classroom Ning. This new tab and page could be called something like “Read 1<sup>st</sup>” or “Ning Rules”. To do this:
  - Click on “Manage” tab at the top of the Ning.
  - Click on “Tab Manager” under the “Your Network” section.
  - In the upper left, click on “Add New Tab”.
  - Note that a new tab has been added to the list of tabs on the left-hand side of the page. You may click on the new tab and drag it to a new location in the order if you want to.

- On the right-hand side under Tab Information you can give your tab a name, decide if it opens in a new window or not (probably not necessary), and decide if it opens in an existing url (probably not for this) or in a new page (probably for this).
  - Click "Save Tab Settings".
- Click on your new tab at the top of your Ning.
- A new page will open up. By clicking on "Edit" you can now type in all your expectations, procedures, rules, etc.
- Make sure that the check box next to "Allow Comments" is unchecked as this is not a page for comments but instead a one-way information page.

## **8. Communicating with Parents**

- It is best practice to communicate with parents of your students regarding your classroom Ning.
- Please invite them to join the Ning. This will greatly improve communication between school and home.
- Please explain to parents the precautions you have taken to make the Ning a safe online community:
  - All members must first be approved by the teacher
  - Non-members can only access the main page
  - Students who abuse this online community will be removed