

# Crabby's back-to-school roundup



Crabby Office Lady

This week's column is a compilation of all the education-based columns I've written in the past so that you teachers, administrators, and parents can look forward to school with even more gusto than usual. Read about how some innovative teachers use Office in their classrooms, and check out some back-to-school tips for you parents, too.

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When I was a kid — old enough to pick out my own clothes yet young enough not to have to pay for them — I remember back-to-school time with a mixed sense of excitement, urgency, and effervescent hope. *This* would be *my* year, the year when the popular kids would finally see the real, cool me. All I needed was the perfect notebook, the pens that made my swirly-girlie handwriting look its best, and the "I'm too cool to care" look I cultivated all summer long (along with the perfect baby oil-fueled tan that I and my sun-damaged shoulders would come to regret years later).

Did I even think about my teachers when September rolled around? I did not. Did I consider the plans they'd been hatching and syllabi they'd been perfecting months before I'd had my last day at summer camp? I did not. (And why I didn't is unclear; my own father was a teacher.)

Well, times have changed. I'm now a mother myself, and although back-to-school time is still filled with a sense of urgency and excitement, there's nothing "mixed" about it. I'm quite relieved to have my daughter tucked safely away in the confines — I mean *halls* — of public school.

I also think a lot more about the people who are partly responsible for making sure that my young daughter learns to read, develops an appreciation for numbers (if not math class itself), and is inspired to continue with her love of learning.

During the past several years, I've written about various teachers and the methods they use to encourage their young charges to learn all they can. Let's revisit some of those columns and pull out a few of the most useful tips.

## Crabby introduces you to innovative teachers

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This was a very fun column to write. It was the first time I went "out in the field" and actually sat in on some classes at Olivia Park Elementary in Mukilteo, Washington.

- I first visited Mary Kate Olson's kindergarten classroom and observed how she and her kids kept track of what the kids did (and said) during their first year at school. The kindergartners created "art folios" in PowerPoint to document their work and

their progress, and then each kid got to take home his or her folio at the end of the year. A very ingenious way to use PowerPoint for the very young, I'd say.

- The first grade teacher, Jessica Evavold, demonstrated how she and her students used PowerPoint to work in teams and create presentations about the animals they were studying. This project was a hands-on approach to learning a variety of skills: teamwork, research, transferring notes on paper to the computer, and presenting. The skills these 6- and 7-year-olds learned are things they will carry with them their entire lives.

After Olivia Park Elementary, I headed on over to Alice V. Hedden Elementary School in Edgewood, Washington.

- The third graders, bravely (and strangely serenely) led by teacher Elaine Smith, were becoming expert book reporters. They not only had to read and understand the books they were reading, but they also had to know (and use) Word and PowerPoint to present their findings. These 8- and 9-year-olds were more adept than some computer-using adults I know at dealing with importing, printing, formatting, using the spell and grammar checker, and just about any other skill that one needs to get by in Word and PowerPoint. It was inspiring, I tell you.
- After Elaine's class, I headed over to Ladd Wolfe's fourth graders, who were busily creating PowerPoint "biography reports" that they planned to present to a live audience. These fourth graders were experts at PowerPoint by now (especially if they'd already passed through Miss Smith's third grade class). These reports made use of backgrounds, clip art, animations, and even sound. And, perhaps more impressive to me, these kids knew how to "storyboard" their ideas for their reports before they even got to the presentation stage. They learned the value of mockups and templates — two crucial aspects to giving a successful presentation.

My last school visit for this column was Mount Si High School in Snoqualmie, Washington.

- Maggie Lucking, the American Lit teacher for juniors and seniors, showed me how her students were creating "eFolios," Web-based portfolios that documented the kids' best work during their time in high school, as well as their self-evaluations of the work they did. These eFolios made use of Word, Publisher, and Excel. It's one thing to tell a university recruiter that, yes, you know these programs; it's quite another to be able to point this person to your end-of-year project that shows off just exactly what you can do.
- Joe Dockery was the school's in-house computer expert. He taught video production, digital imaging, animation foundations, and animation production. The kids in Joe's class learned about the newest trends in animation, video production, and imaging, and while you may not think those have much to do with Office, you are wrong, my pessimistic little friend. All of their plans and notes were written in Word; the teacher handouts and brochures were created in Publisher; and the special project Joe's students did, the filming (and distributing) of the yearly kindergarten concert on DVD at the local elementary school, needed DVD covers for the parents, created in (what else) Publisher.
- My last stop at Mount Si High was Dr. Gayle Smith's AP (Advanced Placement) class for calculus. I won't beat around the bush here: I was scared. These sorts of math-oriented smarty-pants kids scared me while I was in high school, and they scare me now. I had no idea what to expect. I certainly didn't expect entertaining, insightful, and well-organized PowerPoint presentations that coincided with the year-end AP exam. These kids were amazing; what they knew and how they presented it made it seem (almost) understandable to those of us not well-versed in calculus, this branch of mathematics involving derivatives and integrals. In fact, through one of these presentations (and the kid is probably getting her Ph.D. at some Ivy League school by now), I learned (and retained) that calculus is simply (simply!) the study of how things change. Huh — who'da thunk?

Read more about how these magnificent teachers and students put Office to good use in the classroom.

[Crabby introduces you to innovative teachers](#)

# Crabby's tips for elementary school teachers

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Some of my fondest memories are from elementary school. This was before the issues of hair styles, body fat, and trying to be noticed by the opposite sex became such an integral part of my life (that would be junior high — a blur). As well, one of my fondest memories from writing the innovative teachers column was meeting Elaine Smith, the third grade teacher at Olivia Park. I decided to tap Elaine again to see what was going on two years after I'd first visited her.

- Elaine is now creating and using forms to deal with her communication to her students' parents and caregivers. On the school's Web site, she posts the forms that the parents can then download, fill out, and send back to school.
- Although the school district has its own vast database, Elaine decided she needed to strip it down to its essentials and then work it so that she had the information that she *knew* she needed (names of her students, addresses, phone numbers, and so on), not what the district *thought* she needed. So, with the Excel workbook that Elaine created, she could utilize the mail merge function in Excel and Word and send out the communications she needed to ... all addressed, and with labels and envelopes to boot.
- When it came time for the newly minted third graders to start their new year, it was also time to let their parents know what was going on. Elaine created a stunning presentation to give a glimpse to the families about how third grade was going to be. She included the curriculum, photos from last year, and other information that they needed to get excited for the new school year.

Read more about how Elaine Smith uses a variety of Office (and other Microsoft) programs to ensure that her third graders are among the best in the country.

[Crabby's tips for elementary school teachers](#)

# Crabby's tips for middle school teachers

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And now on to the dreaded middle school. Had I had a teacher like Ron Lamb, and had I been in a school that offered such unique curriculum, I may not have ended up as scarred — not to mention bitter — as I am now (but that is another column for another day and on another Web site ... using a pseudonym).

Ron is a teacher in the CHOICE Program at Nevin Platte Middle School in Boulder, Colorado (my old stomping grounds). The classes in the CHOICE program are multi-age and multi-grade, there are lots of related field trips, kids get individualized instruction, and they learn leadership and team-building skills. (This sounds nothing like what I did at my middle school, which was in such a dangerous part of town that you never, *ever* missed the bus. Personalized instruction from a teacher dedicated to making you a better person? No, my junior high teachers were there, at the end of the day, simply to ensure we made it on the bus in one piece.)

- Ron used PowerPoint to create his lessons (using one of our templates).
- He created simple slide shows to present vocabulary words from the different books his eighth grade language arts seminar students read. Ron's theory was that the kids would have a better understanding of the words (and therefore the story) if they could see the words in context.
- In Ron's geography class, he had his students create a PowerPoint presentation that had slides of images from families all over the world, with text about their demographics beneath the photos.

- As Ron put it, "I can get by in Word for just about anything." Although Ron was using Word for letters, flyers, and even a newsletter, Crabby showed him the light, and he now composes all of that stuff in Publisher. (See? I do have sway, even if Ron was an old college buddy of whom I possess some good blackmailable — if somewhat grainy — photos.)
- And finally, Ron and his students use Excel as a database. He and his team of other teachers can keep track of the students, their classes, their performance, their home info, and so on.

Read more about Ron, how he uses Office in his classroom, and the CHOICE program at Nevin Platte Middle School.

[Crabby's tips for middle school teachers](#)

## Crabby's tips for high school teachers

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I can't imagine what it's like to be a high school teacher. This is one of those sorts of jobs for which you must truly have a calling.

Karen Grace, probably one of those sorts of teachers that kids will remember, is an AP American History teacher at Roosevelt High School in Seattle, Washington. Last year Karen's class teamed up with the AP Chemistry class to create an integrated and original project. (Hmmm — history and chemistry. Hmmm.)

"Hmmm" indeed. Karen's class and the AP Chem class created a series of unbelievable PowerPoint presentations on such topics as "the neurobiology of addiction" and "the social and political aspects of substances and substance abuse."

- One group looked at crack cocaine versus freebase cocaine, and then they looked at the social implications of both of these drugs — law enforcement, different uses by different social classes, drug policies, trafficking, and so on. A little chemistry, a bit of history, and you have quite the presentation here.
- Karen also uses Outlook to communicate with parents through e-mail.
- Read the entire column on Karen to find out about [Hands for a Bridge](#), a cultural program that builds and connects learning communities in Seattle, South Africa, and Serbia. Learn how Karen used Office templates such as auction fundraiser signs, pledge forms, and travel photo logs to make this trip a dream come true for her students and their counterparts in South Africa and Serbia.

[Crabby's tips for high school teachers](#)

## Crabby's back-to-school tips for parents

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Your first teacher is your parent ... although most parents are happy to share the responsibility with the professionals. However, getting your kid ready for school is also a challenge. There are the school supplies, the lunches, the after-school activities, the sports teams, the carpools ... It's basically a job in and of itself. In my back-to-school tips for parents column, I offered up some of our most useful (as well as popular) templates to help you get and stay organized. Some examples are the following:

- [Academic year calendars](#)
- [PTA minutes](#)

If you want the full list, you'll have to read the column ...

## Some of our newest education-based templates

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Since I wrote those education-based columns in 2004 and 2006, we have added some new templates for teachers, students, and parents. Here are just a few of them.

- [Back-to-school presentation](#)
- [Student's semester notebook \(OneNote\)](#)
- [Seasonal newsletter](#)
- [Student Weekly Progress Reports for Parents](#)
- [Weekly appointment sheet](#)

As you can imagine, there are many, many more templates and resources on Office Online for you parents, teachers, and even students. I do realize that August has just started, but when you start seeing the back-to-school clothing commercials on TV, you know it's time to start thinking about the new year, when all will be fresh, and you will be cooler, more popular than you were last year ...

## Me, in high school: This is for you, Mr. Doug F. of TJ

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I rarely (if ever) use this column as a forum for personal correspondence, but I must make an exception. A few months ago I was featured in our local newspaper. The reporter called and asked if she could interview me. So we talked a bit about this column, my book, and all of that. People I hadn't heard of in *years* came crawling out of the woodwork. (Good thing I was in the "Features" section of the paper and not the "Crime" section, right?) Apparently, an old high school teacher of mine — a creative writing teacher, no less — read the story, came to the Office Online Web site, read a column, and then at the bottom gave some feedback to let me know he'd read the article.

If you're reading this, Mr. Doug F., of *course* I remember you. Your creative writing class was a defining moment (or series of moments) in my life, one of the reasons I went into writing in the first place. So here I am telling you that. Now leave some more feedback with your contact info so we can talk about old times and megaphones — I still have my silver one. (The rest of you can just ponder that last bit — this is between me and Mr. F., and you wouldn't believe the truth of it even if I told you.)

## About the author

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[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Was this information helpful?** tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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