A Student's Guide to Personal Publishing

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What is Personal Publishing?

Publishing is the process of producing and publicly distributing information. You can publish a variety of content, including your ideas, experiences, stories, observations, or opinions. Additionally, you can publish the pictures you take, videos you produce, or other forms of art you create. Publishing your work allows you to share your life and obtain feedback from others as well as preserve long-lasting memories for years to come.

Technology has enabled teen authors to readily publish their writings and other creative endeavors. If you have ever written a blog entry, posted a comment or reply on a website, uploaded a video to YouTube, posted a picture to Facebook, or uploaded an audio podcast to a website, you've participated in personal publishing. Online publishing allows for quick and easy feedback from friends, adults, or even experts from around the world. The benefits of this new ability create some risks that you should be aware of. This brochure is designed to help inform and guide you to enjoy personal publishing in a safe, responsible, and productive manner.

Issues to Consider

Audience: Anything you publish could eventually be read and seen by anyone. Even though you may think that only certain people are able to access your information, pictures, or videos published, you may be wrong because we do not have complete control over it once we write, print, send, or post something. You never know who is looking over your friends' shoulders, or if those friends might take the content, spread it around online, or use it against you.

Anonymity: Using a pseudonym (fake name) can attempt to disguise your identity while developing your writing or artistic skills. Technology has made it much easier to appear to publish something anonymously because you can use a screen name, alias, or temporary email address. That said, just about everything that is published can be traced back to a specific person since everything done online has what is called a "digital footprint." This footprint can enable authorities to discover where every piece of information on the Internet came from and who wrote/posted it.

Permanence: What you publish may be seen by others for many years to come. This can be a huge benefit, but it can also be problematic if you publish something inappropriate, embarrassing, or hurtful to others. Think about how you would feel if your parents, future college admissions office, or employer saw what you published?

Copyright: It is wrong to copy, use, or publish anything under your name that you did not personally create without getting permission from the person who did. For example, if you are using someone else's words or pictures, you should give them credit by acknowledging what they wrote or said, or get permission from the person who originally took the picture. This is more than just common courtesy; it is also the law.

Free Speech: Publishing our thoughts or ideas is a form of speech that is often protected by the First Amendment. Having the right to free speech, however, doesn't mean that we can say whatever we want, whenever we want. You can't, for example, publish threats against someone else or ruin their reputation.

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Potential Consequences

Remember that you will be held responsible for any
inappropriate or questionable content that you publish.
Do not send or share any content that may call into question your integrity
or may be misinterpreted as offensive or inappropriate. You could damage your reputation with
your friends or be punished by your parents, and you may also get into trouble with the law.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Would anyone be embarrassed or hurt by what I published?
- Who will be able to see what I published?
- What would my parents or teachers say if they saw what I published?
- How would I feel if the head of my dream job or dream school saw what I published?
- How would I feel if what I published was all over the national news?
- Am I proud of what I published?
- Do I have a clear conscience about what I published?

Guidelines to Publish By

- Assume that everyone will see what you publish. You have little control over who might see what you publish.
- Consider that people might use what you publish to make fun of you or cause you harm. How might your worst enemy use what you published to make life miserable for you?
- Do not publish inappropriate language or gestures. You don't want people to judge you negatively when they see your work.
- Do not publish something that you didn't create. Use your own creativity to publish original content.
- Involve your parents. Show them what you are creating, publishing and posting so they know they can trust that you will use good judgment.

As a leading printer of student-developed content, Jostens is committed to helping students develop journalism skills and understand the value as well as the responsibilities associated with publishing. Jostens is honored to present this expert advice to guide students and support educators and parents. Dr. Justin W. Patchin and Dr. Sameer Hinduja educate teens and adults about the safe and responsible use of the Internet and other communications technologies. Visit www.cyberbullying.us for more information.

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