Whether you’re looking for an online rubric builder, an online gradebook, or free software to help you write comments for report cards, this chapter has plenty to offer.

ClassNotesOnline.com provides an easy way to create your own class Web page, without any special expertise. Engrade and GradeConnect serve as fully featured online gradebooks and class management programs. In Resources for Teachers, find templates and forms for classroom organization and management, along with tips on effective parenting and home-school relations.

Teachers Report Assistant consists of both a Web site and free, downloadable software containing thousands of report card comments and partial automation of the process of report compilation.
To streamline the process of constructing and using rubrics, ThinkingGear walks visitors through an easy template that makes a matrix and produces a self-totaled score, after you decide and enter the performance assessment numerical values.

Finally, Thinkport, from Maryland Public Television, comprises a feature-rich suite of tools for managing your work consisting of a personal calendar; class Web site builder; lesson plan, project, and student activity builders; and an archive for storing and sharing digital resources—kind of like a virtual personal organizer and briefcase rolled into one.
ClassNotesOnline.com
www.classnotesonline.com

SITE DESCRIPTION: Easily create your own full-featured class Web page here, for free. Create pages for as many or as few classes as you like and choose from 12 optional home page services. Everything is template-driven, so all steps are simply point, fill in the blank, and click; no knowledge of code is needed. Information may be protected or public, as you choose.

Students and parents can easily find your page by searching by state, city, and school, or by simply typing in your name. Sample teacher pages are provided to get newcomers started. ClassNotesOnline.com is supported by advertising primarily from, as of this writing, colleges and insurance companies.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: This is a menu of the custom services you may choose to include, or not, on your class Web page:

- The Class Syllabus
- Class Supplies
- A Classroom Information Page
- A Calendar of Events
- Classroom News
- Classroom Photos
- Useful Classroom Links
- Class Notes—what you choose to include to facilitate review, practice, or enrichment
- Class Files—what you choose for students to download, up to 5 MB
- Homework Assignments
- Gradebook—an individualized ID code for students and parents, if desired
- Guestbook—for posting messages
Engrade
www.engrade.com

SITE DESCRIPTION: The Engrade Web site is a very easy-to-use online gradebook and attendance system that is free. K–12 teachers can create their own account and post grades, assignments, attendance, and upcoming homework online. You can even set the program to automatically e-mail notices to parents when you mark students absent from your class. Your school may register so that your attendance and final grades are available for administrative purposes.

Everything is online, so Engrade is available from any computer with an Internet connection. Your account is password protected. Students and parents may access their information with ID numbers that you assign. Of course, these may be the same ID numbers your school uses, or different ones, if you choose.

All teacher activity is just fill-in-the-blank; no knowledge of code is needed. Engrade contains some relatively unobtrusive advertising.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: Here’s how Engrade describes its features:

- Gradebook Automatically calculates grades, with custom grading scales and weighted assignments.
- Attendance Book Records attendance and can automatically e-mail parents of absentees.
- Homework Calendar Teachers may post assignments for parents and students to see.
- Student Reports Password protected, real-time access to grades, attendance, and homework, for students and/or parents.
GradeConnect
www.gradeconnect.com

SITE DESCRIPTION: GradeConnect’s robust feature set offers teachers a great deal of functionality. Not only does it contain a very customizable gradebook, but GradeConnect also functions as a course management system, providing pages for announcements, assignments, a calendar, annotated hot links to chosen Web sites, and a mini-database to manage assignment of textbooks to students.

While designed primarily for middle and high school teachers, GradeConnect provides support (and special instructions) for elementary teachers, too. The site has its own user’s manual, and functions may be easily modified and edited. You’ll also find daily updates of education news and breaking news from NASA, along with a box you can customize for your local weather. While it’s free, GradeConnect contains a significant amount of advertising.

Students or parents may have private entry to their ID protected information on the site. You assign the codes. Students, or their parents, can register in the system, freeing you from a lot of clerical work. GradeConnect has been recognized by organizations such as the New York Times, USA Today, and the National Education Association.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: One of GradeConnect’s great features is its ability to send mass e-mails to students or their parents. First you enter e-mail addresses into your personal (and private) database. Then you can select students, or their parents, by name from a list and send your own bulk e-mails (and individualized ones too, of course). It’s possible to send a copy to yourself, as well. Send progress reports, failure warnings, congratulations, happy-grams, or even a mini-newsletter.

GradeConnect’s grading function is very customizable and can compute grades automatically. In addition, grades can be exported into Excel for offline work, and users can even print out a blank spreadsheet for entering data by hand.
Resources for Teachers

http://classroom.jc-schools.net/guidance/teachers.html

**SITE DESCRIPTION:** The folks in the Jefferson County Schools in Dandridge, Tennessee, have given all teachers a big helping hand by publishing this collection of templates, forms, and annotated Web links dealing with classroom organization and management, as well as parenting. It focuses primarily on K–8.

More than 30 forms and templates appear that can be printed out for teacher use, sent home to parents, or used with students. Another dozen-plus Web sites offer strategies, techniques, and guidelines for running an orderly and effective classroom while promoting good communication between home and school. The materials are gathered from all over the Web.

Additional aids appear for guidance counselors, and there’s even a collection of clip art for use in newsletters and flyers.

**HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS:** Some of the topics of the forms and templates include

- ABC Observation Form (Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence)
- 20 Ways to Foster Values in Children
- Primary Student Behavior Self-Analysis
- Good News Report
- Helping Your Child Become Better Organized

Some of the Web sites described include

- You Can Handle Them All
- Good Behavior Charts
- Parent Conference
Teachers Report Assistant
www.rayslearning.com/comment.htm

SITE DESCRIPTION: Writing student reports can be one of a teacher’s most daunting tasks, especially if you deal with large numbers of them. Teachers Report Assistant to the rescue!

Not only does this page give access to thousands of teacher-developed and -tested comments in nearly all subjects from K–12, but it also contains a free software package users may download that automates much of the actual writing and formatting.

This site was developed in the United Kingdom. Close inspection of the comments reveals how similar the educational system in that country is to the United States’. In fact, the many comments of praise on the site from teachers in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada show how much teachers and classrooms have in common around the world.

FYI, the UK educational system groups students by what are called Key Stages. Key Stage 1 corresponds to U.S. kindergarten and Grade 1; Key Stage 2 to Grades 2, 3, 4, and 5; Key Stage 3 to Grades 6, 7, and 8; Key Stage 4 to Grades 9 and 10; and Key Stage 5 to Grades 11 and 12.


HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: To locate the Teachers Report Assistant software for downloading, click on Teachers Report Assistant at the top of the page.

For a step-by-step tutorial on how to merge the comments for your class into your report card template, be sure to check out Idiot’s Guide to Mail Merge of Reports. You’ll find it on the Teachers Report Assistant download page in the left column, about three-fourths of the way down the page.
ThinkingGear
www.thinkinggear.com/tools/

SITE DESCRIPTION: Here's a nifty tool for constructing rubrics. With a user-friendly interface and very clean graphics, ThinkingGear makes it easy for teachers to custom create their own self-scoring rubrics that can be stored online in MyGear.

Users can click on Tools, then Rubric Machine, and then Build an Instructional Rubric to be guided through a six-step process leading to creation of one's own rubric. Clicking on Put Rubrics into Practice takes you through a brief tutorial that gives practical advice on how to make rubrics work for you and your students.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: A unique feature of this rubric builder is its self-scoring capability. Once you construct your rubric, it's a snap to make just a few mouse clicks and generate a score. The tutorial mentioned above addresses how to use rubrics for instruction as well as assessment, the classroom conditions under which they work particularly well, the limitations of rubrics and when they might not be the best tool to use, and how rubrics can help teachers and students to identify what counts most in a unit or project.

Before planning to use this tool extensively, readers might want to check RubiStar at www.4teachers.org, described in 4Teachers in chapter 1. While RubiStar is not self-scoring like ThinkingGear, and does not permit online storage for more than a year, it does offer numerous templates for simplicity and speed in rubric design, along with a sizable archive of rubrics that ThinkingGear does not. And because of the lack of self-scoring, RubiStar rubrics are downloadable, while ThinkingGear's are not. These varied features of the two tools may appeal to different users for different reasons. Pick the one that suits you best.
Thinkport
www.thinkport.org

SITE DESCRIPTION: Thinkport presents a very useful suite of online tools for busy teachers. These include a personal calendar, class Web site builder, member directory, instant messaging, lesson plan builder, student activity builder, project builder, timeline maker, online text annotation tool, and idea box for storing and sharing digital resources. The site also includes a rich collection of online video clips, an archive of selected Web links in 10 curriculum areas, and a bank of teacher-written student activities, lesson plans, and projects.

Thinkport was developed by Maryland Public Television and Johns Hopkins University, and designed for Maryland teachers. Any teacher may register and use the resources for free. Because the site is based in Maryland, the standards and some of the resources (such as virtual field trips) are focused locally; however, the tools are quite generic and applicable across nearly any teaching situation.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: It’s easy to build a classroom Web site on Thinkport. The whole process is point, type, and click, and you have the opportunity to customize your site by grade level, subject, and what functions you wish to build in. The lesson builder, student activity builder, and project builder operate very much the same way. Each tool consists of templates that you build out by making choices and adding text. Items constructed on Thinkport can be made as publicly accessible or private as you like. Items you make, along with items you gather from the Net, can be stored in My Idea Box for easy retrieval later, or for sharing with colleagues.

The access to free, downloadable video clips makes for a very nice feature, particularly if you teach in a location that doesn’t have access to a service like Discovery Education unitedstreaming video.

Teachers will also find a rich assortment of fee-based professional development courses under Course Enrollment in the Think Career tab found in the toolbar near the top of the page.
The online community spaces in this chapter afford educators the opportunity to manage courses, conduct projects and mentoring, and participate in or lead discussions and groups. They utilize the social networking capabilities of the Web to make it simple to build shared knowledge in a collaborative manner or host a more traditionally organized course.

Elgg.net combines the capabilities of social networking (think MySpace), tagging (enabling like-minded individuals to form communities), and blogs and wikis in which people can work together to create knowledge.

For purposes of professional development, Nicenet offers great capabilities for online meetings and project work, as well as facilitated online courses. Because Nicenet is print only, it works great for folks who have only dial-up connections.

Tapped In gives users a virtual office from which they may plan and conduct projects and manage courses, mentor other educators, and participate in or lead discussions and groups.
Elgg.net

http://elgg.net

SITE DESCRIPTION: Elgg incorporates many of the newest Web features to create a most impressive space (or landscape, as they call it) for educators and learners to collaborate. “It includes tools for online journals (blogs), an e-portfolio in which...[people] can store and showcase their work in a range of formats, and software to support resource tagging and social networks.”

Elgg combines the capabilities of social networking (think MySpace and Friendster, without the undesirable aspects), tagging (enabling like-minded individuals to form communities), and blogs and wikis in which people can work together to create knowledge.

Clearly, Elgg’s greatest use is as a tool for socially constructed learning. As one Elgg user commented, “It seems to strike a nice balance between complexity and ease of use. It’s complex enough to be useful. Simple enough not to be scary.”

Users may join for free and use Elgg’s capabilities online. In addition, the software can be downloaded and hosted on your own server. Elgg has recently joined forces with the open source online course management tool known as Moodle (http://moodle.org). This should create even more terrific functionality in the months to come.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: Here’s a wonderful space to host a study group, planning team, or curriculum committee. You can make it as private as you want and link up endless resources as well as threaded discussions, all in your own time and at your own convenience. It should cut down greatly on the need for face-to-face meetings, saving travel time and focusing conversation when you do get together on topics that benefit most from in-person dialogue.

Elgg is relatively new. As more educators join and identify their interests, the user base will provide a wonderful resource for knowledge and experience.
Nicenet
www.nicenet.org

SITE DESCRIPTION: Founded in the mid-1990s, Nicenet is probably the oldest free online course management site. Signup takes about 90 seconds, there’s no advertising, and everything works fine. Users will find no bells and whistles here, everything is words only—no pictures, audio, or video can be inserted.

Users can create any number of classes they wish and grant access to others they choose. Nicenet provides a personal messaging space that allows members of the class to communicate solely with one another (think IM) and also a conferencing space to post threaded discussions. Class members can post links they wish to share as well as documents. Document posting enables students to submit papers and teachers to place readings online. Teachers may also post a week-at-a-glance schedule.

Another interesting space for collaboration, named KEEPtoolkit, can be found at www.cfkeep.org. Produced by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, it offers a variety of ways to organize, display, and reflect upon learning materials, as well as share ideas.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: For those beginning with online course management, Nicenet is a terrific place to start.

For purposes of professional development, the site also offers great capabilities for both online meetings and project work, as well as facilitated online courses.

Because Nicenet is print only, it works great for folks who have only dial-up connections.
Tapped In
http://tappedin.org

SITE DESCRIPTION: Teachers will find Tapped In a very hospitable place to collaborate with colleagues and students. The site provides each registrant with a virtual office from which to plan and conduct projects and manage courses, mentor other educators, and participate in or lead discussions and groups.

This is mainly accomplished through live chats and private messaging, with a threaded discussion board in every office. Transcripts of every conversation are e-mailed to participants for later access, and files and URLs can be stored for reference as well.

Tapped In users can access daily training events and discussions and can also access live online help. Numerous education organizations host virtual buildings in Tapped In where teachers may find additional specialized support services and discussions.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR TEACHERS: Like the other communities in this chapter, users of Tapped In will find the spot quite a hospitable location from which to conduct a working group or a class. Tapped In users have the added advantages of finding colleagues who share similar interests and participating in a wide variety of online classes and discussion groups.