



Why Choose a Web Filter  
Built for Learning?





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Using the Internet effectively in schools requires web filtering built specifically for learning environments. Creating a filtering solution that can meet the diverse and unique challenges of teaching with the Internet requires a complete immersion in the education market. Selecting and implementing a web content filter not specifically designed for education can be like “fitting a square peg into a round hole.”

### Fitting a Square Peg into a Round Hole

For a filter to be effective for instruction it must be flexible and support the interactions needed for learning. It must be able to block inappropriate content, yet have the flexibility to allow sites with instructional value. It must provide access to sites that are educational, even if they are not allowed because they are part of a larger group that is being blocked. This ability should be available without intervention from IT or instructional staff. Filters not designed for a learning environment are challenged when faced with this type of scenario. Quality learning sites are blocked and teachers are often frustrated because they cannot get access to Internet content they know to be appropriate for learning.

Below are specific examples of learning scenarios in which a teacher may want access to web content that has value for a particular class and/or lesson.

### Learning Scenarios:

- **Category Blocked: Games**

*Scenario:* An Elementary school teacher is doing a lesson on the importance of infrastructure in civilization and wants to use a game site so that the students can simulate building a city.

*Non-School Filter:* The teacher can't use the site since the Game category is blocked.

*School Filter:* The site is accessible because it is also categorized as an educational site. Although it is a game, it offers instructional content, so it is allowed.

- **Category Blocked: Social Networking**

*Scenario:* For an AP History class, the teacher wants students to interact and role play as an historical character by creating Facebook pages.

*Non-School Filter:* Teachers can't use Facebook because the Social Networking category is blocked.

*School Filter:* Access privileges are given to this AP teacher so that she can create a private Facebook account for this class.





A school solution delivers flexible filtering and is designed from the ground up specifically for education by supporting both IT and educators:

- For IT: Delivering advanced web and mobile filtering with robust Internet security
- For Teachers: Supporting the dynamic interaction between teachers and students
- For Both: Blocking inappropriate content while also supporting instruction

### Best Practices Found in Filters Built for Learning

Filtering in education is mission critical. The administration and professional staff in a school community must trust that the filter they select will keep their students safe. Take this a step further. It must also be able to support learning. This requires the ability to address different scenarios depending upon the level of the student, class, grade, and school. Therefore, before choosing a solution, make sure it's safe and flexible while also able to easily meet many educational goals.

Consider these requirements before selecting a filter for your school:

#### Customization

Teachers, students, and staff have a wide variety of access needs. Also, many schools are now providing staff and students with mobile devices so filtering needs to occur both on and off network. When choosing a filter, make sure it can specifically address the different access needs of a particular population and project, so that it can be easily customized by subject area and class.

- Does the filter offer an unlimited number of profiles to customize filtering for many different requirements?
- Can it setup specific filtering profiles for students and teachers or for different groups?
- Can it enable a school or district to address all the requirements of their Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)?
- If a student abuses the privilege of using the Internet by not acting responsibly, can access for that student be turned off?



### **Empowering Educators**

A filter built for learning minimizes overblocking and enables IT staff to customize access privileges for educators.

- Does the filter provide access to a site that has educational content even if it is also found in a blocked category?
- Can IT staff provide educators with the ability to select previously blocked sites for instructional use while working within the school's Acceptable Use Policy?
- If a site is categorized in a blocked category, can it be accessed because it is also categorized as educational?

### **Collaboration**

For teachers and students to engage in interactive learning, the filter must be flexible and allow collaborative learning.

- Does the filter satisfy both the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the AUP of the school while also allowing educators to select specific content for a lesson, whether that content is a blog, wiki, or any other Web 2.0 application?
- Does the filter allow a specific YouTube™ video without allowing all content in YouTube.com? And, does the filter support YouTube for Schools and its extensive catalogue of educationally appropriate videos? When displaying a video, does it focus students by removing the distracting comments, ads, and suggested videos on the page?

### **Mobile Filtering**

As education transforms with the use of the iPad® and other connected mobile devices, a filter must be able to support this new technology so that learning can continue beyond the boundaries of school walls.

- Does the filter support mobile devices so that learning can continue anytime, anywhere?
- Is the same filtering provided both on and off network, so the AUP is enforced wherever a school-owned device is connected?

### **Safety**

- Is the filter CIPA-compliant?
- Does the filter prevent students from accessing inappropriate sites by using an anonymous proxy site?



The most popular search engines have some variety of “safe search,” in which results are checked for inappropriate content before they are returned to the user. The problem is that most students know how to disable this feature in their web browser.

- Does the filter automatically enforce “safe search” so the user can’t turn it off?
- Does Google Safesearch™ also include Google Images™ when performing a search? When a student uses Google™ search, are the images filtered so that the results contain no inappropriate content?
- Does “safe search” include cached sites? When a student searches, are recently visited sites stored in cache also filtered?

#### **Security**

- Does the filter provide a complete instructional Internet management solution by providing a firewall to offer an extra layer of protection?
- And, can this layer integrate with an existing firewall or operate independently as the primary firewall for your school’s network?
- Does it protect school-owned devices (including mobile devices) from getting to malicious sites such as Phishing, Hacking, Virus and other undesirables before they have a chance to do damage?

In summary, a filter not designed for learning is like trying to “fit a square peg into a round hole.” It will frustrate staff, limit learning, and keep educators from using many valuable websites. Compare it to a web filter built for schools. It’s designed to meet the unique challenges of using the Internet in a variety of learning environments. It balances the needs of both IT and educators. And, it supports using the web for instruction. If the suggested best practices defined above are considered before purchasing a filter, the administrators, IT staff, and educators in a school will have a solution that supports their requirements. And, more importantly, students will become responsible Internet users and get the web-enriched instruction they need to compete in today’s global economy.



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