

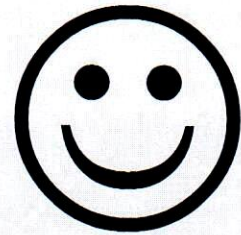
Create the Digital Image You Want

■ **Align your online image with your goals.**

A digital footprint is the reputation you leave online and can include material posted on blogs, and mentions on websites and videos that are uploaded onto sharing sites. Online actions leave a permanent record and remain online, even if you click “delete.” Be thoughtful about what you share online and consider how it would appear to family, friends, colleges, and future employers.

Because many colleges and employers search social media before making admissions and hiring decisions, you might want to use social media as a tool to demonstrate your interests in positive ways. For example, social media allows you to show who you are as a student online by sharing what you think about and what matters to you. This can help as you get closer to graduation and begin considering post-secondary education and career options. Some examples of how you can use social media for academic advancement include:

- ▶ *Commenting on articles in a knowledgeable way; or*
- ▶ *Starting a blog about current events.*



■ **Stand behind your words.**

You should always take responsibility for the content you post in all social media environments. While you may think that using a fake name may prevent posts from becoming part of your footprint, there are still ways to link that information to the person who posted it (for example, through an Internet IP address or other distinguishing information linking posts). Be your best self online – post accurate information and be accountable for what you say.

■ **Families can be helpful partners.**

Share your digital footprint with your parents and consider their suggestions. Get your parents’ input about what information they feel should remain private and what is fine to post publicly. Your parents are responsible for what you do online if you are a minor and may want your passwords and usernames to monitor your social media use. Additionally, because technology is constantly changing, you may know more about social media than your family, so you may also want to show your parents and other family members how to create an online presence themselves.

Post Responsibly – Be Mindful of Your Audience

- **Using social media academically is an extension of your classroom environment.**

When you use social media for academic purposes, such as for a school assignment, treat the platform as a digital extension of your classroom – the same rules apply online as they do at school. For example, if you would not make fun of a classmate in English class, do not do it online either. For school-related social media, do not tag student posts, photos, or videos unless your teacher gives you permission, as this may expose the content to audiences for whom it was not intended.



- **Put your best foot forward.**

People of all ages sometimes act differently on social media than they would “face-to-face,” assuming that, because they are not communicating in person, they are not accountable for their actions. In fact, because of the nature of the digital world, you should be as responsible, if not more, when acting online. Since you never know who will ultimately be reading content online, always assume that anyone might have access. If you do not know who will be reading it, ask yourself if you would be okay with a parent or relative reviewing your content. If not, there might be a better way to get your point across.

- **Pause before you post.**

Once a comment is posted online, you cannot later say, “never mind.” It may seem funny or harmless when you post it, but it could hurt or offend someone. As guidance, take a few extra minutes to think about whether a post will be hurtful or embarrassing or whether it could negatively affect a future opportunity. For example, if you post an aggressive or inflammatory comment online because you felt heated in the moment, this may end up making you a less attractive candidate in some employers’ minds. Because online posts can never be completely deleted, it is important to make sure that each post is something you want to live with.

“If you want to be taken seriously and professionally, you must have an online identity that matches your purpose. If you want respect and credibility online, be deliberate about choosing a profile image, content, and name that represents the “you” you want the world to see.”

Monique Coleman
Actress, Entrepreneur, Philanthropist

Consider the Consequences to Your Online Actions

- **Personal use of social media may have an effect at school.**

While at times, it is easy to tell whether a social media use is school-related or personal, at other times, it may be difficult to distinguish fully between different uses. Sometimes, personal social media use, including off-hours use, may result in disruption at school and the school may need to get involved. This could include disciplinary action such as a parent conference or suspension. It is important to remember that infractions outlined in the Discipline Code prohibiting certain types of communication also apply to electronic communication. To be safe, be in control of what you do online, even if it is during personal time. For example, if your classmate is tagging you in rude Tweets, do not reciprocate in a similar way. Instead, stay positive, do what you know is right, and consider blocking or reporting this person if you feel it is warranted.

- **Protect yourself.**

There are many ways to protect yourself online. For example, only accept friend requests from people you know. You may interact online with people you have never met in person. Use caution, find out as much as you can about the person, and tell a parent if you are considering meeting one of these people face to face. Additionally, while it is important to be yourself online, it is also important to remember not to post too many identifying details (such as where you live or your social security number) because revealing that information can be potentially dangerous or compromise your identity in some way. Do not share passwords with friends and be sure that the computers do not automatically save passwords. Always log off when you have finished using a site – do not just click out of the browser.

- **Adjust your privacy settings appropriately.**

Privacy settings are automatically set by social media providers governing who can see your posts, how information is linked, and what data is available to the public. Each social media platform has different privacy setting defaults and some change those settings without making it obvious to you. As a user of social media, you should determine whether to change the default settings to make access to postings more or less private. For example, if you are creating a personal site to promote a social or political issue, you likely want to make that site open to everyone. However, if you want to discuss a project you are doing in class, it may be better to limit access only to a small group of classmates.

“When I apply for part-time work or internships during college, I make sure employers know to look at my digital footprint, which demonstrates that I have the skill set they want. I ensure my resume contains links to social media sites, which is fantastic for showing what I’m capable of and for giving employers background about me and my work.”

Armond McFadden
Chelsea Vocational High School Alumni