

12 Things Students Should Never Do on Social Media

by Stephanie Buck



The last thing young people want is another set of rules. But these days, social media comes with great responsibility, whether you're just starting high school or finishing up college.

The fact is, irresponsible social media conduct could potentially ruin your education and negatively impact your career, not to mention hurt others in the process. (And we're not just talking kids, either.) But most of those consequences are preventable, often with just a little foresight.

We've pinpointed 12 social media mistakes that students should avoid at all costs, because after all, it's never as simple as "be responsible." And it's never as finite as "don't friend your teacher on Facebook." Social media circumstances are nuanced and vary by situation, school and user.

Please head to the comments below to add your own contributions and advice for young adults on social media.

1. Post Illegal Activities

Granted, high school and college students experiment with many activities and substances. But the second you post a video of last weekend's bong hit or trash-can tipping adventure, you become vulnerable not only for school expulsion but also for criminal prosecution; in other words, consequences that affect the rest of your life. Even if your profile is set to private, a friend can always download and save incriminating photos that he or the authorities can use against you in the future.

Once or twice per year, perform a thorough review of the information and content accessible on your social media profiles. That way, you'll be able to locate and remove that photo of your underage keg stand before you apply for your next job.

2. Bullying

Bullying is one of the most serious problems in schools today. Vicious treatment and hateful words between students often lead to violence, suicide, depression and discrimination among the student body.

When a student turns to social media, blogs or virtually any online space as a forum for hurtful speech, the risks are unmeasurable. Not only does that student face expulsion, but also serious criminal prosecution.

Check your school's policy on bullying. One California high school's student handbook reads, "Harassment on the basis of any protected characteristic is strictly prohibited. This includes any verbal, written (*including any posted material on any computer network*) or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward any individual or his/her relatives, friends or associates because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, marital status, veteran status, citizenship or disability..."

3. Trash Your Teachers

Bullying doesn't just apply to student-to-student interactions. Students who speak poorly of their teachers (or post embarrassing photos of them) run a huge risk, too. After all, your instructors have a right to privacy and respect.

"Posting a negative comment about any teacher at your school is like getting on a microphone to announce that you will be burning down a bridge," says Heather Starr Fiedler, associate professor of multimedia at [Point Park University](#). "You never know which one of your professors will hold the keys to the next great internship or job announcement."

You should even be wary of school or teacher-related posts you think are harmless — you never know whose feelings you've accidentally hurt. Dan Farkas, instructor of strategic communication at [Ohio University](#), describes a scenario gone wrong. "I had several students tweet with excitement when I cancelled a class, ready to have a slightly easier Monday," he says. "What they didn't know was that I cancelled class to take my wife to the emergency room. It still makes my blood boil."

The same goes for institutions or persons of authority in general, not just teachers. High school seniors should be careful not to negatively post about specific colleges or geographical areas — these days, admissions officers thoroughly investigate the social media activity and personalities of applicants. One negative tweet could seal the fate of your college acceptance.

4. Post Objectionable Content From School Computers or Networks

Many schools prohibit all computer activity on campus not directly related to coursework. That almost always includes social media use, especially that which is objectionable (e.g. [profanity](#), harassment, etc.). And don't assume you can get away with a tweet here and a status update there — many schools have implemented systems that track logins and IP addresses. In other words, you're on the clock.

5. Post Confidential Information

This piece of advice goes for every social media user, not just students. But young people are especially vulnerable to online predators and identity thieves.

Let this experience, from communications representative Jennifer Newman Galluzzo, be a warning: “This weekend my niece, who is going into her junior year of high school, posted her class schedule on Facebook. Took a picture of it and threw it right up there because she was so excited to share the info with her friends — complete with her social security number, student ID, address, full name, birthday and all the other personal information. I called her mom and informed her right away and her response was ‘Well, all the kids do that!’ I almost fainted.”

Think about how easy it is to share content on Facebook; if a single person shared that photo to his public profile, that sensitive information would be accessible by anyone, no hacking required. Identity stolen — just like that.

6. Overly Specific Location Check-Ins

Similar to protecting your identity, try not to get too specific with your social check-ins. Although your parents may appreciate the heads-up, posts like these make it easy for predators to locate you. And especially don’t check in on social media when you’re by yourself and/or in a remote location.

Social media analyst Brad Hines advises, “It is usually wise to do little sharing of where you are if you are by yourself, or have left your home by itself.”

7. Lie/Cheat/Plagiarize

Picture this: You convinced your professor to give you an extension on your term paper so you can visit your “sick” grandmother. Only instead, you blow off the paper to attend a Foo Fighters concert — and you post a status update to Facebook, check in on [Foursquare](#) and upload a photo of the performance to [Instagram](#). Don’t be surprised when you return to a big fat F and an academic investigation.

The same goes for lying about professional/academic achievements when applying to a college or an internship. People will investigate. Just as they will investigate your social media for charges of plagiarism or cheating.

8. Threaten Violence

Threatening a person or group of people in any situation is unbelievably serious. Even posting an anonymous, empty threat to an obscure online forum full of strangers will raise red flags. And as soon as authorities have located a threat, they have the right to investigate — and they will.

A student named [Alexander Song](#) posted his intentions to Reddit: to “kill enough people to make it to national news.” Police located the young man and arrested him at school, despite the fact that he carried no weapons.

In other words, social media is not the place to vent your frustrations and violent thoughts. Talk to a school counselor about your concerns.

9. Ignore School-Specific Policies

School policies vary widely, according to religious affiliation, type of school (public vs. private), geographical location, district, gender (co-ed vs. single-gender), etc. Therefore, technology and social media policies are different for nearly every school. Behavior that may fly at one school is reason for expulsion at another.

For example, one Catholic high school's student handbook reads, "When a student is using online social media (of any variety), she must always bear in mind that the material she posts reflects upon the school, our Diocese and the Roman Catholic Church as a whole." That means, posting your opinions about sensitive subjects like abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, divorce or birth control, for example, could jeopardize your standing as a student.

While many types of content posted to social media are protected by free speech, your school may nonetheless find reason to use such opinions toward disciplinary action.

10. Unprofessional Public Profiles



Whether you're a high school student applying to flip burgers at a local diner or a recent college grad looking to land a career, your social media presence needs to reflect responsibility.

"While searching for a job, I made sure to take down any questionable photos from my college days," says recent James Madison University graduate, Christine Borkowski. "I took every red cup I could spot off my Facebook. It may seem a little extreme, but Facebook offers the 'Download' option of each photo." That way, she could save any photo she removed from the social network.

Whether it's a Google search or a social media examination, chances are a company is looking into your history. And sometimes, even a completely private social media profile sets off red flags for employers. In today's age of transparency, a professional (albeit public) profile is the ideal.

"Whenever I evaluate a potential employee, I always take a look at what is publicly visible on their Facebook profile," says Ryan Cohn, vice president of social/digital operations at [What's Next Marketing](#). "On two separate occasions, I have rejected entry level prospects (finishing their senior year of college) for featuring firearms in their profile picture. Both were qualified in terms of experience and otherwise would have been worthy of an interview."

11. Never Rely on Privacy Settings 100%

Although most major social networks update you with privacy improvements, the changes are often too frequent to follow and can get complicated. However diligently you may protect your social media identity, it's best to assume anything you post is fair game — potentially seen by your school, by your parents and by strangers.

“Students should never rely on privacy settings over good judgment,” says Andrew Moravick, social media specialist at [SnapApp](#). “If you don't want something to be seen, don't post it on the Internet.”

12. Post Emotionally

We've all said and done things we regret. It's human nature to react without thinking through the consequences. However, whenever possible, take a moment to imagine how your social media posts affect the feelings, safety and well-being of those around you — even your worst enemies. Posting an angry tweet in the heat of the moment may feel cathartic, but the momentary pleasure you get from writing it isn't worth the potential harm it could create. Take a moment to breathe, think and reboot.

“friends” count without thinking about the consequences of broadcasting every thought to a couple of hundred people. So, “things that can happen with text or photo” can happen exponentially.

What I see, thankfully, is that the group of kids just going into high school seems to have learned the hard lessons Facebook blowback from their older siblings and are being much more cautious about using it. That's a good thing.