

## SCENARIO

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Your state has begun to explore the idea of replacing textbooks with portable laptop computers for all students. Since your school district is one of the most technologically advanced in the state, it is likely to be one of the first to experiment with this idea. Needless to say, the proposal is controversial, and few politicians are going to back it without gathering a lot of information and garnering a lot of support. So far, as a beginning fifth-grade teacher, you are unsure about where you stand on the issue. You haven't had much time yet to explore it in depth, but from what you've heard, both sides have made some interesting points.

Your principal is an avid supporter of instructional technology and more knowledgeable in this field than most school administrators. Today, he asked you to serve on a districtwide committee to examine this proposal and its implications. Most districts are setting up such committees, which will report on up the line to the state capital. You have been asked because your principal wants both experienced and beginning teachers on the committee (and you are definitely early in your career!). He has told you that your job is to keep an open mind, to not be too bound by tradition, and to examine the evidence as objectively as possible.

The first meeting of the committee is next week. You tried to explain to the principal that you really didn't know much about it, but he seemed unconcerned. He suggested some basic readings, and he said that your job was to provide the perspective of a beginning teacher and to think about how you might take advantage of this change in your classroom. This won't be easy. You will need to think about both the curriculum and the applications of technology. The principal suggests that you start by gathering information to understand the pros and cons. The decision won't be made for some time, so you need to do some work.

First, your job is to put together all of the pros and cons you can think of for the proposal: Should we use the textbook budget to buy computers instead? What software will be needed? What will we gain by doing this? What will we lose?

Your second job is to decide which side of the issue you stand on and write a brief for that position. (A "brief" is lawyer lingo for a document that lays out the facts in a case and makes the best argument for your side.) In this brief, make the best case you can for your point of view. You should also anticipate the major arguments on the other side and try to refute them.

## ISSUES INQUIRY

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1. Do you feel that the “laptops for textbooks” proposal has any merit? Why or why not? What are the key issues in this debate?
2. Describe several ways in which electronic text materials differ from printed text materials. Discuss the degree to which these features may (or may not) be instructionally advantageous.
3. Electronic text might be provided to schools in several ways. Compact discs could be distributed. The material could be made available online. Perhaps a combination of approaches might be most appropriate. Discuss how you feel digital information might most effectively be delivered to schools.
4. One very dynamic use of student laptops might be online. Discuss some of the potential instructional benefits of the World Wide Web. As a teacher, would you consider having students use Web materials instead of their textbooks or only as a supplement to their textbooks?
5. If each pupil had a portable “digital assistant” to use in school, how significantly would this change the educational experience? How radically might this equipment change the ways students learn, the ways teachers teach, and the way the curriculum is structured?