Conversations on Technology
What failures have you had?

prepared for

The Institute on Learning Technology

part of the

Spring 2001

This conversation also is available from the Learning Through Technology web site, http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/nise/cl1/lt/
Conversations on Technology:
What failures have you had?

Question#4:
"Have you had any failures in using technology from which I could learn?"

Just a few hints: Ask for help if you need it. Don't try to do it overnight.

Yes. Practice always before you use something. Try only what is value added from using technology, that is, if a drawing, a transparency or a Textbook photo is better by all means use it instead.

Everyone has some disasters. Students tend to be tolerant. Always have a Backup plan if the technology fails. Always allow extra time, especially on Exams using technology.

No, I have not had failures, yet. Don't forget to keystroke your instructions before you give them to the students.

Oh yeah! Wolfram once turned off the key served Mathematica® right in the middle of the quarter when labs were due. We don't use Mathematica® anymore. Maple® doesn't like being key served to an Apple® based system and runs slowly and crashes all the time. If more than eight computers try to talk to the same web site (e.g., Devaney's above) simultaneously in a lab based situation, the whole thing slows to a crawl. Hardware breaks regularly, preferably when you are trying to do a demo in front of 150 students. Disaster awaits around every corner, with every update of software. ALWAYS have an alternative at hand in case the system goes down in the middle of class.

Get there early to make sure the equipment is functioning. Putting slide shows on the web may alter them, especially in special effects and sound.
Computers and video equipment often crash.

The biggest frustration I have is that students are slow to adapt to what I expect them to do with technology. It is a barrier to them not a stepping stone to better learning. They need to be constantly reminded of the need to use technology and be given ample examples and exercises to do so. I had one failure, students refused to do the work I assigned and they took the F for the assignment instead of doing it. I know this has happened at another campus. Students will be students and have free will. They must be allowed to fail. However, we must not let them control how we structure the curriculum. Students are more conservative than physical chemists with respect to what they expect to do in a course. I have been all to glad to give up viscosity measurements to replace it with a molecular modeling activity in the p-chem lab.

I also failed when choosing a computer to use in the lab. This was a while ago and I was much less experienced then. I failed in some of my software choices. This too was due to lack of experience. After all experiments fail. We examine why and then move on to the next experiment.

I guess one should not try to bite off more than one can chew. This for sure will lead to failure.

I don't think I have had any failures, but you do learn about what works and what doesn't related to the specifics of what you are trying to deliver.