DEAR LALLY: I am a new professor at an undergraduate institution. I recently learned that we are required to teach our classes using an iPad and it is “preferred” that only free online resources be used for required readings, although e-books are acceptable. I understand the drive to use technology in teaching because it can cut students’ costs, and I do enjoy the resources available through textbook sites and professional teaching sites. Moreover, clickers and instantaneous feedback apps are part of our teaching methods. These quick assessment tools are better than getting nods from the students for gauging how well the students understand what we are focusing on in class. But I feel a little bit lost. I can learn the technology, but how do I know if I’m making best use of it?

Additionally, my first exam was a disaster! Students were “dropped” from the online secure test site during the test. It was nerve wracking for everyone! For some of the students who were dropped, their work was lost and they had to redo some of the exam. Some were in tears and I felt like crying with them! How can I gain control of this technology?

—Not a Troglodyte

DEAR NOT A TROGLODYTE: Congratulations on your new position! Adopting new modes of teaching requires time, patience, and training. Many campuses have centers to help faculty develop their teaching skills through professional development opportunities. The center will likely offer workshops that help new faculty use the course management software adopted by their institution. To increase student engagement in classes, these centers also offer sessions on active learning, including use of instantaneous feedback devices.

Perhaps you have a colleague who is adept with the software in her classes and could assist incoming faculty like you as they transition to this new system of evidence-based learning. This colleague might be willing to help you develop an e-based learning environment.

As for the test situation, perhaps you could prepare a paper test for backup use until you are confident that the online testing mechanism has been improved. To discourage cheating, you might consider making multiple versions of the same test (yes, there are programs that will do that for you). It would have been unnerving to Labby, as a student, to lose work during a test too. That the exam session went south for some of the students was not your fault, and it is important that the students who were affected be heard. In addition, assure them that this will be noted in your grade book.

Teaching is one of the real joys of being a professor. Yes, things can go wrong, but students taking ownership of their studies is a wonderful thing to behold!

—Labby