Play by the Rules

Max lost his computer privileges because he gave his personal password to a friend. Do you think this was fair? Think about how a community might function if there were no rules? What would it be like to live in a community where anyone could do anything he or she wanted, regardless of the problems this might cause to anyone else? Why do groups of people create rules? Is it okay to break a rule if you know that you will not be caught and punished?

Your school’s Internet use policy has rules about how you can use the Internet at school. The policy contains two kinds of rules. Some rules are about safe and responsible online behavior. Other rules are about activities that are not appropriate when you use the Internet at school. These rules may or may not be important when you use the Internet at home or at a public location offering Internet access.

**Rules for Safe and Responsible Online Behavior**

Some of the rules in your school’s Internet use policy are important because they will help you learn to use the Internet in a safe and responsible way. It is important to follow these rules whenever you use the Internet—at school or at home or at some other place where Internet access is provided. If you break these rules, you could hurt someone else or yourself.
established by your public library or community technology center. Depending on the rules set by your parents and the public access service, activities like playing games and shopping may be acceptable on a general-purpose Internet system.

The Real World Test can help you figure out whether certain activities using the Internet are appropriate when you are at school. Think of a real-world activity that is similar to the activity you want to do on the Internet. Then ask yourself, "Would it be okay to do this in the school library?" Here are some examples:

- **Is it okay to do your homework in the library?** Yes. The most important reason that your school provides Internet access is to support your schoolwork.

- **Is it okay to play video games in the library?** Probably not, unless you are playing an educational game. Playing games on the Internet is generally not okay in school. Your school may approve some educational games that are online.

- **Is it okay to read a newspaper or to look up information on a subject that you are**

### Rules for School Use of the Internet

Rules for school use define activities that are not appropriate in a school setting. The school Internet system is a specific-purpose Internet service. It was established for the specific purpose of supporting your education. Your school’s Internet system is not to be used for playing games, shopping, or other activities that are not educational. It is not that these activities are wrong or harmful. They simply are not appropriate activities in a school setting. For example, kicking a soccer ball on a soccer field is perfectly okay, but kicking a soccer ball in your English class would not be okay.

A specific-purpose Internet system is different from a general-purpose Internet system. There are two basic kinds of general-purpose Internet systems. One is an Internet service provider that you access through your home computer. The other is a public access service
not currently studying in class when you are in the library? Yes. It is okay for you to do research about things you are interested in. You do not have to restrict your research to your current schoolwork. Using the Internet to learn about an interesting topic is an important part of becoming a lifelong learner.

- Is it okay to shop for a present for your mother in the library? Probably not. Shopping online is not an educational activity.

- Is it okay to look up information about possible college or career opportunities when you are in the library? Of course it is. The same kinds of activities are okay on the Internet.

Some schools have established places and times, such as an open lab before and after school, when students can use the school Internet system for general-purpose activities. If you are using the school Internet system during an open-lab time, the rules for the kinds of activities that are appropriate may be different from the rules for your activities during school hours. It is important to remember that you must always follow the rules for safe and responsible online behavior.

When you get a job with a company, organization, or government agency, it will be important to remember the difference between a specific-purpose Internet system and a general-purpose Internet system. Internet systems established by companies, organizations, and government agencies are also specific-purpose Internet systems. As an employee, you will be required to restrict your use to those activities that support the business, organization, or agency. Having the self-control to use a specific-purpose Internet system only for its specific purpose is an important skill for success.