



PR IN ACTION

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Controlling comments on Facebook

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If you've ever had a pit in your stomach while checking notifications on your school Facebook page, then you've probably dealt with negative, problematic and/or annoying comments.

Learning to manage comments on social media is critical to maintaining decorum and building trust. There are general guidelines for managing your social presence among a variety of social media channels, and there are Facebook-specific tips for this widely used platform.

Facebook is the most popular social media engagement platform worldwide, with 2.5 billion active users. It is the go-to for many school districts.

School communities want to hear about school programs and activities, which creates an easy-to-build following. Facebook users include:

- 71% of American adults
- 63% of men and 75% of women
- 51% of American teens
- 74% of high-income earners
- 74% of Facebook users log in daily.
- 52% of American adults get news from Facebook

<https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-statistics>

Moderating your Facebook comments

Let's get this out of the way: You CANNOT disable all comments on Facebook.

We get asked this question from school leaders and communicators all the time — "How do I turn off Facebook comments?" The answer is that it is impossible. Instagram allows you to turn off comments on a post-by-post basis, and YouTube allows comments to be switched off for the entire channel. But that's simply not possible on Facebook.

So let's dive into what IS possible. Your options are outlined below. Keep in mind that you should always consult with your district's legal counsel before enacting policies that include the more extreme options, especially if you are a public school.

1. **Post commenting guidelines on your Facebook page**

An easy way to do this is with a Facebook Note. Go into your Settings and add the “Notes” tab under “Templates and Tabs” if it isn’t already enabled. Next, go back to the main page and click the “Notes” tab. Start a new note and input text.

You can then “pin” this note to the top of your Facebook page, so anyone visiting your feed will see it first. Having these guidelines in place gives you some structure and a visible policy when it comes to monitoring, hiding and even deleting comments that appear on your page.

Another option for posting commenting guidelines is to publish them on your school website and mention that web location on a periodic basis. The downside is that the guidelines won’t be readily accessible to anyone who just visits you on Facebook.

2. **Set your page’s profanity filter to “strong”**

Go into your settings and look under “general.” You’ll see a setting for a profanity filter that you can set to “strong.”

What happens if someone uses a word that Facebook deems profane? The entire comment will be automatically hidden. As the page manager, you can still see the comment, but it will be grayed out, or you will see three dots. Most people who visit your page will not be able to see the comment either. *However, the person who made the comment and anyone they are friends with can still see the comment.*

3. **Block vulgar words**

We have a vulgar word list that you can copy-and-paste or upload as a .CSV file under Settings < Page Moderation. It’s a pretty extensive list, and we share it with clients in our membership group. *See subscription information: <https://bit.ly/3d0esmC>.*

What happens if someone uses a word that appears on this list? The entire comment will be automatically hidden. As the page manager, you can still see the comment, but it will be grayed out, or you will see three dots. Most people who visit your page will not be able to see the comment, either. However, the person who made the comment and anyone they are friends with can still see the comment.

Note that some comments will be unintentionally hidden, such as when a person’s name is Richard and their Facebook name is the common nickname for Richard. You can easily unhide that comment, if that happens, as the page manager.

4. **Manually hide problematic comments**

If a comment goes against your commenting guidelines, a page manager can manually hide it. This also hides all replies to that comment. Only page managers can hide/unhide comments.

What happens? As the page manager, you can still see the comment, but it will be grayed out, or you will see three dots. Most people who visit your page will not be able to see the comment either. However, the person who made the comment and anyone they are friends with can still see the comment. *See this guide for more tips:* <https://bit.ly/3nk3opu>.

5. **Delete problematic comments**

As the page manager, you also have the option to delete a comment. We recommend consulting with your legal counsel before enacting a policy that includes deleting comments. We also recommend taking a screenshot of the comment before you delete it.

What happens? The comment is gone from your page — no one can see it, including the page manager. There is no record of the comment on Facebook. The person who made the comment is not notified; however, if they revisit the post, they will not see their comment.

6. **Ban problematic commenters**

As the page manager, you can also choose to ban someone from your page completely. The commenter could be a spam bot, but it could also be a real, live person, so this should be a last resort action. We recommend consulting with your legal counsel before enacting a policy that includes banning users. We also recommend taking screenshots of their comment(s) before you ban them.

What happens? That Facebook user will not be able to see your page or interact with it. They could still find and interact with your page if they go under a different Facebook profile or create a new profile, however.

7. **Block all common words on your Facebook page**

Instead of only blocking vulgar words, as outlined in #3, you could also block all common words under Settings > Page Moderation. This includes words such as “the,” “they,” “at,” etc. This allows you to approve comments before posting publicly.

What happens? If someone uses a word that appears on this list, the entire comment will be automatically hidden. As the page manager, you can still see the comment, but it will be grayed out, or you will see three dots. You can choose to manually unhide comments that are acceptable. Most people who visit your page will not be able to see the comment, either. *However, the person who made the comment and anyone they are friends with can still see the comment.*

Options 4-7 are pretty extreme, aren't they? Here are a few things you could try before taking these more drastic steps:

- **Take the conversation offline**

The majority of negative or problematic comments are coming from concerned parents. You — or a school administrator — have the ability to contact that person by picking up the phone and having a human-to-human conversation about what's going on. This is the best way to diffuse a difficult situation and minimize the negative comments they are making on your school Facebook page.

- **Minimize the chances of out-of-control comments**

You can't stop people from commenting, but you can minimize the chances that they'll use your page to complain. If you have to convey important information that is potentially controversial, directly communicate with families via robocall, text, or email — and post on your website — instead of putting detailed information on Facebook. You can also [follow the advice of this blog](#), in which the Facebook post simply directs people to check their email or the website.

As a company, #SocialSchool4EDU believes that comments are an important part of effective school social media. Blocking all comments will severely reduce your ability to engage your community with all the wonderful things happening in your learning environment. And 99% of the comments are positive and supportive.

But that means we also have to take the good with the bad.

The best piece of advice we can provide is this: *Don't take it personally*. Every Facebook commenter is a real, live person with real, human concerns. When they use your page to vent or complain, they are doing it out of frustration but also out of love for their kids. You might not agree with them, and they might not be "right." Try to approach every interaction with compassion, and make sure you have the support of your administration when it comes to taking some of the steps we've outlined here.

Contributed by Andrea Gribble. Andrea's passion is helping schools recognize their daily awesomeness and sharing that story with the world. She's built a team that celebrates hundreds of schools across the country! #SocialSchool4EDU provides full social media management, personally coaches social media teams and individuals, and offers a vibrant online community that provides ongoing professional development for school social media champions.