

Twas the night before Winter Break, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a - hey, wait - *what are you doing?*
Stop that!

Please, I'm begging you; stop what you are doing right this very minute. I know you have the best of intentions, but you're choosing instant *gratification* over long-lasting *education*. As your friendly neighborhood teacher-turned-educational-technology-specialist, I have to urge you to *stop*. I promise that you and your children will thank me in the long run!



[Who doesn't remember this classic home movie?](#)

For me, this is more than just an example of wholesome viral content that the whole family can enjoy; it is an accurate representation of my childhood. I, too, received a Nintendo 64 for Christmas. My reaction was a little more muted externally (because excitement is not one of the two emotions that I depict when I'm among polite company), but I assure you that inside I was bursting at the seams in more or less the same way that the kids in the video were when they unwrapped their state-of-the-art video game console.

The gifts have changed (I wholeheartedly advise *against* buying your children a Nintendo 64 in 2018), but the excitement has yet to fade. Kids the world over line their holiday wish lists with all kinds of electronic gadgets, from Chromebooks to PlayStations and everything in between. Understandably, parents aim to please their young ones by granting these wishes, which is great! I will never argue against putting devices in the hands of children, and I'm not going to start now. I am, however, going to argue against something *else* that has turned into a common practice this time of year.

Do not open your kids' technology and set it up for them.



That means you, Mark! Put that cable down!

Technology has evolved to the point that there are very few devices available you can open, power on, and immediately use. Laptops have always been this way, but this is still relatively new territory for more recreational electronics. People are - generally speaking - not fans of this development; kids, in particular, *hate* it. The last thing they want to do over Winter Break is wait for an Xbox One to slowly download the latest firmware so they can play Fortnite (which will also probably need to be updated to *its* latest version...). [As such, many parents seek to circumvent this holiday crisis by just doing it for them.](#) They sneak out to the store, buy whatever state-of-the-art technology it is that their kids can't live without, and then open it and sand away all the unpleasantness. Firmware updates? Done. Software installation? Done. Network configuration? It was hard to track down the sheet of paper where CenturyLink laid out the hieroglyphic WPA2 password in plain text...but, it has been done. It has all been done! And I have a problem with this.

The setup process for any device is a fundamental **educational** experience. Plugging in the HDMI cable for that slick new video game system? That teaches children how the audio and video signals travel from their device to the television. Configuring the network settings? That teaches children how to securely access a network and use it to reach out to the Internet. Downloading firmware? That teaches children that their devices are constantly evolving, and that updating both hardware and software is paramount in maintaining their equipment (it also teaches extreme patience, which I've been told is a virtue). These may all seem like common sense items that don't have much value, but these are the small items that help children truly *grasp* their technology. How do I know? Well, it's what got me in the position I'm in today.



"Wow! Firmware updates are so much fun!" - Your child, internally

When I was very young, my parents did set up my technology for me, and that made sense (**it isn't exactly considered a best practice to let a six-year-old near an electrical outlet, so it's possible that this editorial doesn't totally apply to you**). Once I got a little bit older, though, things changed. For my 10th birthday, I got the gift to end all gifts: A Nintendo Gamecube. All of my friends got one for Christmas, and I was the only person in the neighborhood still whiling away his hours with a Nintendo 64. You better believe I was overjoyed to unwrap a Gamecube of my very own on my birthday, but before I could do anything with it I had to go mano a mano with the back of the entertainment center. I had to learn the hard way that magical pixies didn't carry my entertainment from each device to the screen in front of me; no, actually, three cables - one yellow, one red, and one white - did the heavy lifting. At some point, I plugged the yellow cable into the hole for the white cable and found out that each of those cables carried a different signal (one for video and two for audio). These were small things, yes, but these small things put me on the long road to technological independence. These small things ultimately put me here, and they are an undeniable catalyst for the IT certification that now hangs above my desk.

I don't have kids, but I was a kid not too long ago; I totally understand the idea of creating that magical holiday "moment" for children. It feels like it was just yesterday that my parents bought my brother and I GameBoy Advances for Christmas, which we were able to promptly open and play while our relatives were still unwrapping their goods. It wasn't yesterday, though; it was 15 years ago, and a lot has changed in that time. Technology may take a long time to set up now, but that doesn't mean that it takes a long time to start paying dividends. I honestly believe that if you make your children set up their own gifts this Winter Break (**with supervision for the purposes of safety, of course**), they, too, will start on the long road to technological independence. In this day and age, that is the most priceless gift you can possibly give.

Note: Though you totally shouldn't set up technology for your appropriately-aged children before they open it, you *should* sit with them through the process and then configure the parental controls for the device before it gets used. The level of control this will give you varies from device to device, but some control is better than no control when it comes to your child's access to digital content.