Copyright Issues

One major thing before publishing any media is to check that it properly follows copyright laws. When possible, make sure that you have explicit permission to use media that is not yours. In some cases, it is impossible or impractical to obtain permission to use certain materials; if this happens to you, follow the guidelines of the Doctrine of Fair Use to help determine if or how to use the material. Here are some other general rules to stick to when making materials for public distribution:

- Don't use just any picture off of the internet! — Just because something is on the internet does not make it yours to use; putting the website where you found an image on the bottom-right corner does not cut it either. The easiest way to avoid copyright issues with images is to use those in the Public Domain. Another way is to use images with a Creative Commons license. Here are some websites that will be your best friend in this endeavor:

    - Wikimedia Commons
    - U.S. Government Photos and Images
    - Library of Congress
    - Flickr Creative Commons

- Buying music doesn't mean you own it — Many recent, high-profile lawsuits made it clear that you can't illegally obtain or distribute music. Included in that illegal distribution is using any part of a copyrighted song, even for non-commercial purposes, without permission and/or paying hefty royalty fees. The myth that using 30 seconds or less of a song is allowed is just that — a myth. Your best bet, like with images, is to use music in the public domain or to find royalty-free music and sound effects. Most sound and movie editing software, including those mentioned in the above sections, come with their own royalty-free clips for your worry-free use. Many websites also have a free collection for education/non-profit purposes. Here are a few to get you started:

    - Royalty-Free Music
    - SoundBible
    - Free Music Archive