

# **Benefits and Challenges of Online Learning Communities**

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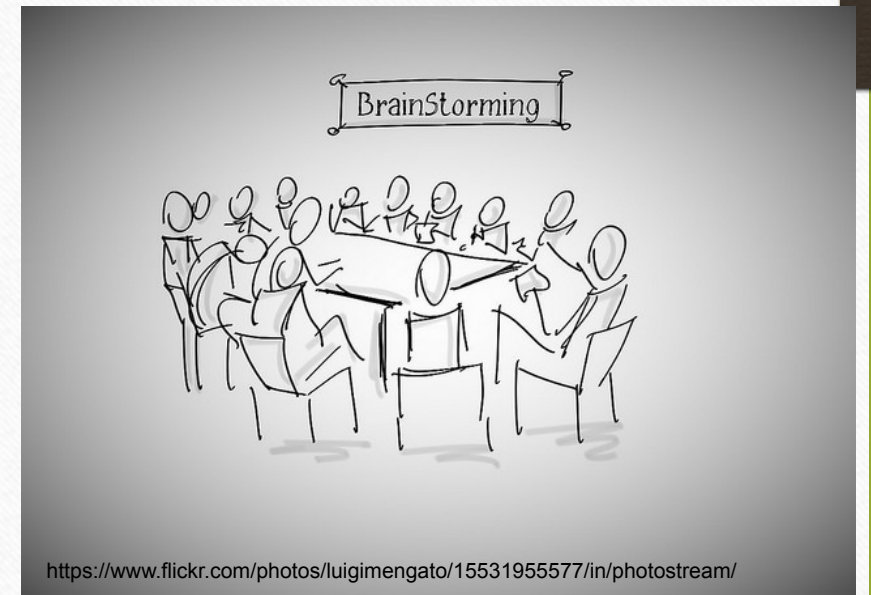
# The Good, Bad and the Ugly...

## Let's talk about it.

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**In your Break Out Rooms Please Discuss:**

- 5 Benefits of Online Learning Communities  
And
- 5 Challenges of Online Learning Communities





*Locate the tools selection to the right of the class list. Using the 'pen' place a check mark next to your top two benefits of online learning communities. If your answer isn't there, please use the text tool to add to the list.*

Personalized Learning

Barrier-Free Learning

Cost Savings

Convenience

Technology

Professional Development



*Locate the tools selection to the right of the class list. Using the 'pen' place a check mark next to your top two challenges of online learning communities. If your answer isn't there, please use the text tool to add to the list.*

Technical Issues

Effective Communication

Presence

Misrepresented Information

Learning Curve of new programs

Netiquette

Privacy Concerns

Time Management



# **Benefits and Challenges of Online Learning Communities**

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## **PART I BENEFITS OF ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES**



# A statement to think about...

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*“One reason why there is so much discussion around online learning is that there are many purported benefits and uses of online learning. Some of the most important ones are: its effectiveness in educating students, its use as professional development, its cost-effectiveness to combat the rising cost of postsecondary education, credit equivalency at the postsecondary level, and the possibility of providing a world class education to anyone with a broadband connection” (Bartley & Golek, 2004; De la Varre, Keane, & Irvin, 2011; Gratton-Lavoie & Stanley, 2009; Koller & Ng, 2014; Lorenzetti, 2013).*



# Academic Benefits

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- Studies generally show no significant difference as of yet in terms of learning outcomes when biases such as learner selection are accounted for (<http://www.nosignificantdifference.org/>). However some academic benefits associated with online learning communities are:

Personalized Learning and,  
Barrier-Free Learning

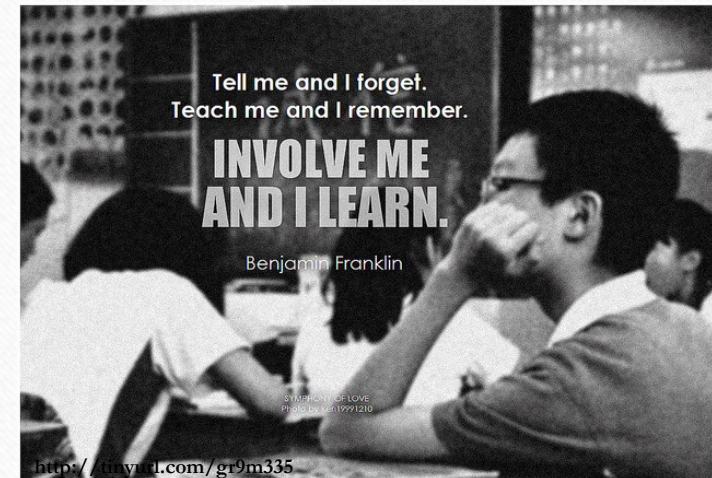




# Benefits of Personalized Learning

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- More opportunity for self-paced, deeper learning.
- Instructors are accessible for 1-on-1 help via online communication.



*“Success in an online course often depends on how connected a student feels to his [or her] instructor and fellow students” (Snyder, 2013).*



# Benefits of Barrier-Free Learning

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- Interaction with students from all over the world provides a wider variety of knowledge.
- Easier to participate in discussions for those who find public speaking difficult

*“Last but not least, there is the hope that online learning will be able to provide a world class education to anyone, anywhere, and anytime as long as they have access to the Internet. A number of websites and companies—Khan Academy, Udacity, edX, and Coursera are some of the most prominent ones—are built on this premise, and many well-respected scholars and entrepreneurs have high hopes and expectations for online learning, particularly for massive open online courses” (Bowen, 2013; Fisher, 2012; Koller & Ng, 2012; Lewin, 2012; Selingo, 2013).*



# Real World Benefits

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Academic benefits aside, there are several real-world benefits to online learning communities.

Cost Savings

Convenience

Technology

Professional Development



# Cost Savings

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## For Students:

- Limited to no travel costs.
- No need to relocate and arrange boarding.

## For Schools:

- Ability to enroll more students (no physical classroom size restrictions and less use/maintenance of physical classrooms).



# Convenience

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- Asynchronous education has a flexible schedule to meet the needs of diverse learners from different situations.
- Accessible from anywhere there is an Internet connection (good for those who may need to study on the move).
- Study possibilities for working professionals.

*“Many state institutions are unable to accommodate all those who want to take classes on campus, escalating the demand for online learning” (Snyder, 2013).*



# Technology

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- Exposes students to a variety of current technologies and software.
- Increases digital literacy.
- Gamification of learning.

*“As online learning grows, more and more aspects of “gamification,” the use of game mechanics and virtual achievements in non-game contexts to engage users, are being added to the virtual environment to increase task engagement and decrease attrition” (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011; Huotari & Hamari, 2012; Kapp, 2012).*



# Professional Development

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- Online learning communities effectively create professional networks through course communications whereas many face-to-face connections end at the end of the course.
- Can study without having to take time off / leave from work

*Lifelong learning must now be a part of everyone's career plans. In today's job market, taking online courses help workers remain competitive and they don't need to take time off from their jobs to do this (Snyder, 2013).*



# Commercial Break

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Please click the link posted in the group chat to be redirected to the video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTgYHHKs0Zw>



# **Benefits and Challenges of Online Learning Communities**

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## **PART II CHALLENGES OF ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES**



# Is This Your Online World?



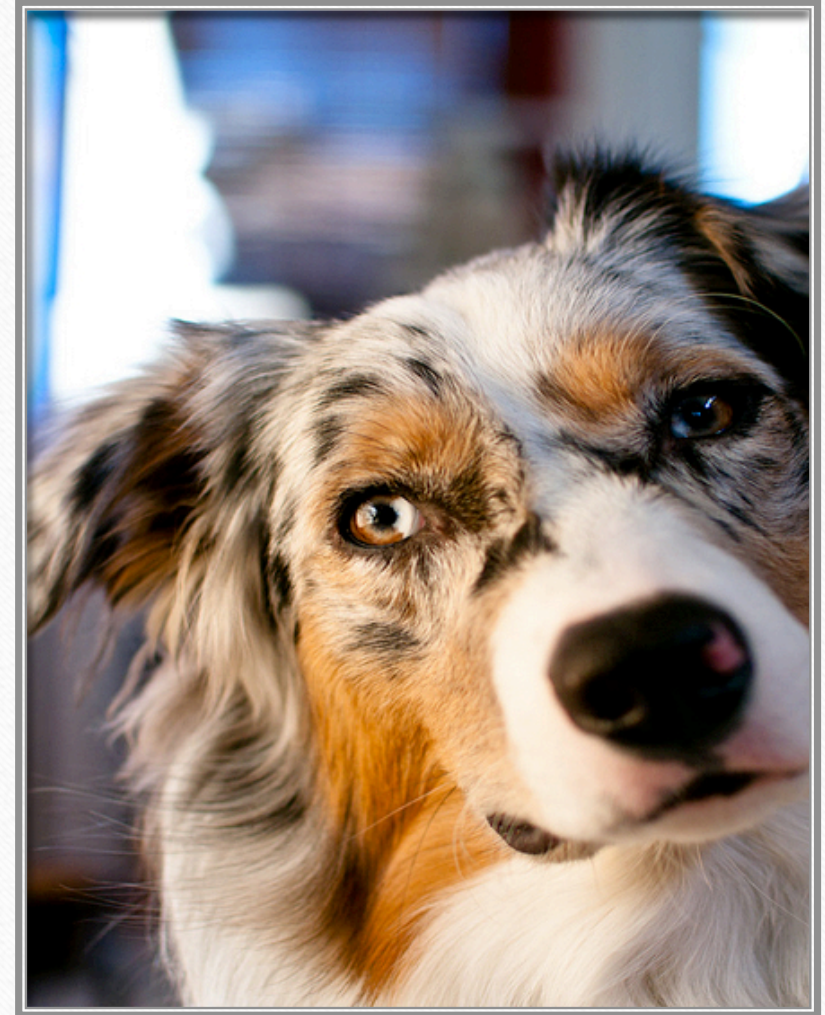
Frustration





## What do you Think?

Hands up! Who will share a personal experience or can think of a challenge in regard to online learning communities?





## Two of the main challenges are lack of community and technological issues (Mahrenholz, 2010)

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### Technical Difficulties

75% of the students who participated in the study referenced the challenge of technical problems (Mahrenholz, 2010).

A total of 35% or more of student e-learners left the course before submitting the first assignment according to the United Kingdom Open University (Simpson, 2004).

### Community...less?

71% of the participants expressed that a **lack of community** was a major challenge in taking online courses (Mahrenholz, 2010)



# Technical Issues

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- Some students have little experience with the technology and you spend time teaching this rather than the subject content (Finely, 2000).
- Technological Challenges: Some students may be technophobic and have problems accessing and utilizing the programs and resources necessary for online learning (Distance Learning College Guide, 2010).
- Students need the necessary online and technical skills to participate in online and virtual learning programs and discussion forums. They also need to access and exchange information in order to fully participate (Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2004).



# Technical Issues continued...

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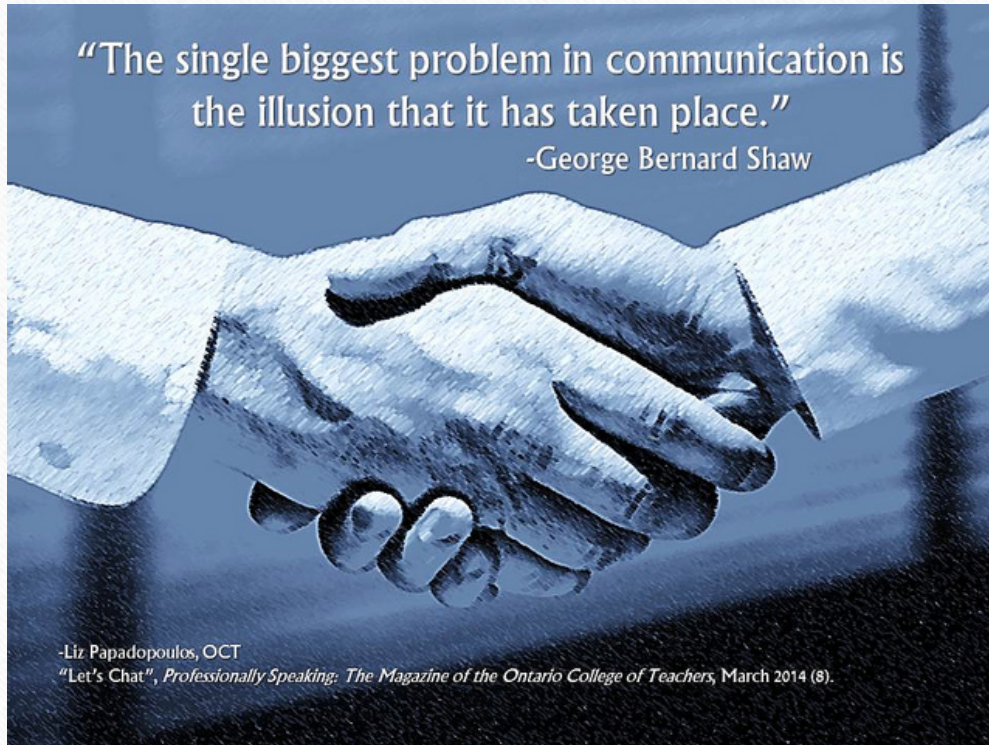
- Practice with the technology you plan to use. Do what we are doing right now! And, as Randy Labonte said, “know your technology.”
- Betts (2009) states, ongoing professional development provides faculty with opportunities to develop new skills, augment instructional methods, and utilize innovative tools for reaching out to and connecting with students through effective communication.



# Communication

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

-George Bernard Shaw



-Liz Papadopoulos, OCT

“Let's Chat”, *Professionally Speaking: The Magazine of the Ontario College of Teachers*, March 2014 (8).

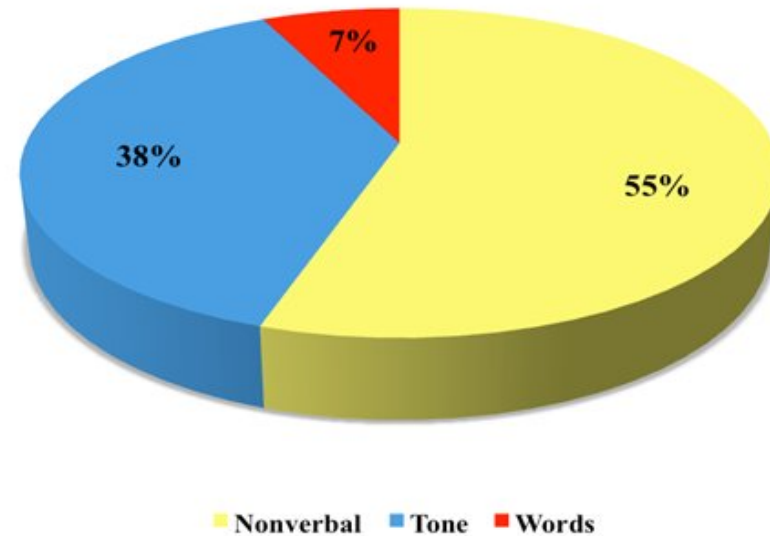
Distance Learning College Guide, 2010 states:

- Given the lack of face-to-face interaction between student and teacher a student will often have to wait for feedback.
- Students miss out on the experience of verbal interaction with teachers and other students.
- Students can feel isolated because they are often working on their own and are not in a classroom setting.



# How Do People Communicate?

- Betts (2009) states, “understanding how verbal, non verbal, vocal, and non vocal communication affect communication in face-to-face and online environments is critical to program development, course design, and instruction.”



*Figure 1. Mehrabian's Breakdown of Face-to-Face Communication*

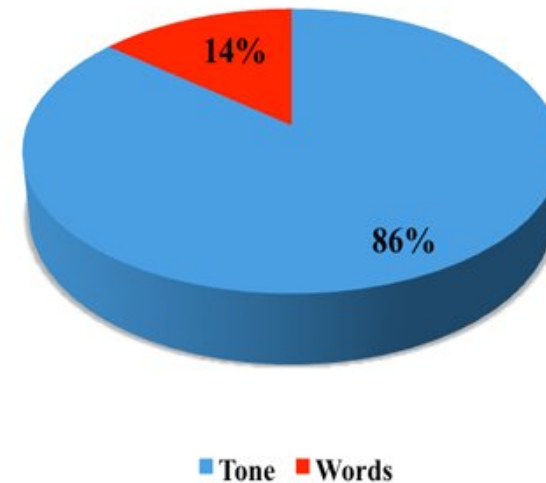


# What is Effective Communication?

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- “Effective communication is important to online, blended, and face-to-face education. Therefore, administrators need to develop training and professional development that builds upon communication theory and provides faculty with skills and strategies for being effective online communicators. ... The recommendations include training, setting the tone, and diversifying communication strategies” (Betts, 2009).

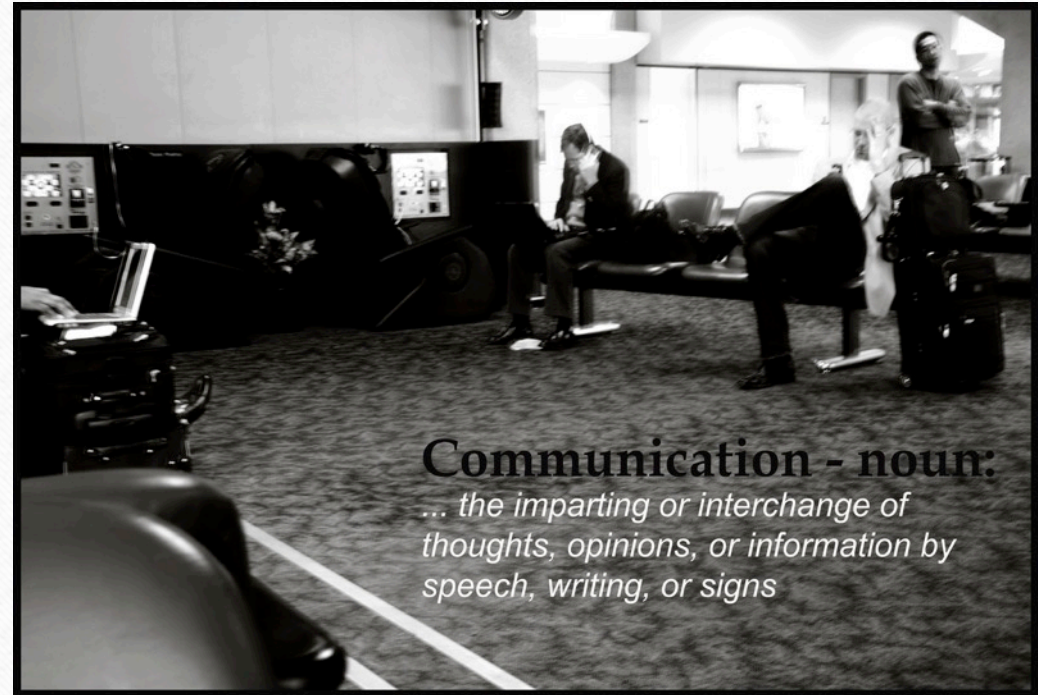
Figure 2. Breakdown of Telephone/Mobile Phone/VoIP Communication





Watch, listen and read your own recorded lessons to find patterns and ways to improve your communication with students.

- We, as teachers, “need to become aware of our own communication style relating to tone so we can build upon communication strengths and improve communication weaknesses through training and development” (Betts, 2009).





# Diversify Communication Strategies

- Betts (2009) states, “it is recommended that online instruction integrate a mixture of communication strategies throughout” the course or unit of study. For example, text, email, synchronous classroom meetings, Skype, asynchronous google + communities, youtube videos,...etc





# Dr. Finley's (2000) Communication Do's and Don'ts for Instructors

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- Personalize the environment
- Encourage introductions – introduce yourself
- Use names when addressing responses to students – comment on personal things they have mentioned
- Use an informal writing style but model correct grammar and spelling (otherwise you will get unreadable garbage) – be aware that students cannot see your nonverbal behavior – avoid sarcasm
- Refer to good comments made by other students
- Be visible in the classroom - you can do this without dominating but students like to know that the instructor is there
- Establish clear guidelines for participation in conferences areas – give appropriate weight in the grading scheme to participation – conferences/discussions move online courses beyond “correspondence” courses – emphasize that what happens in the classroom is private





# Presence

- Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) argued that deep and meaningful learning results if three forms of presence play a role in education: "**cognitive presence**," which ensures a certain level of depth in the educational process; "**social presence**"; and, in a formal educational environment, "**teacher presence**."





# Understanding Media and Representing Information

- The onus is on the learners themselves to make these judgments, to validate information and knowledge, and to find knowledgeable others who can help them. The complete absence of democracy, fairness, and egalitarian values on the Web. We learned that the topology of the Web prevents us from seeing anything but a mere handful of the billion documents out there. (Barabasi, 2003, p. 56)

**News?** **Health?**

**Wealth?** **Privacy?**

**Be Careful What You Type Here!!!!**

I'm way beyond the news cycle, trends, and info-overload.

Nine months ago when I had a new knee put in I stopped googling about health issues and found it totally liberating.

When the brain surgeon mentioned Parkinsons I blanked it out. I refuse to submit to the tissue of lies on the google page. Even when it's not a sales pitch disguised as information, what is true for one google person is strictly true only for them. I consulted a few friendly docs who totally dismissed the Parkinsons comment...I got that good news after making them a cocktail (and no co-pay).

I've stopped living in the future (and shed my fears)

I've stopped living in the past (and stepped away the cloth of sadness)

I'm now pretty damn happy with all that is left:  
trusting docs I sense who care about me  
trusting in their training and best guesses  
and  
experiencing the present more fully



# Other Challenges of Online Communication

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## Cognitive Overload

Students new to online learning are essentially learning in a new way. Therefore, based on a lifetime memory that does not correspond to the new methods of learning...the student can become very anxious and lose confidence, which, in turn, can cause the student to drop out of the course Mahrenholz (2010).

- Finley, (2000) discusses several such challenges including;
- Misconceptions by students about the rigor of online courses
- **NETIQUETTE**
- Privacy concerns.
- Excessive time spent responding to emails, texts, on LMS etc.
- Students who expect you to be available 24/7.
- Course and time management.







# Solutions

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Solutions are very diverse due to the enormous array of case to case issues that may arise that create challenges in online communication.

Hands up and please take the mic to share a challenge you have faced and how you were able to reach a solution.



# References

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- Snyder, T. (2013, January 30). The Benefits of Online Learning. Retrieved January 16, 2016, from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-snyder/the-benefits-of-online-le b 2573991.html>



# Assignment 1: Due Sunday, January 24th

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Review the following readings:

- The Benefits of Online Learning - Tom Snyder  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-snyder/the-benefits-of-online-le\\_b\\_2573991.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-snyder/the-benefits-of-online-le_b_2573991.html)
- Seven Problems of Online Group Learning (and Their Solutions)  
- Roberts, T. S., & McInnerney, J. M. .  
[http://www.ifets.info/journals/10\\_4/22.pdf](http://www.ifets.info/journals/10_4/22.pdf)

Upon completion, please tweet 3 words that you connect with benefits of online communication (Ex. word1 word2 word3 #benefits503). And,

3 words that you connect with challenges of online communication (Ex. Word1 word2 word3 #challenges503).



# Assignment 2: Due Monday January 25th

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We will assign you a partner. With your partner, review the collective list of online communication resources from Seminar 1, located in Google+ OLTD503. Find one that neither of you have used before and sign up for your resource of choice. Confirm a time to “meet” your partner and play hang man. Take a turn each at being the puzzle maker and the solver.

Reflect on this experience around any benefits and/or challenges you had accessing/enrolling/using this new tool (150-200 words). Please post this to your blog and copy a link back to the Google+ community with #benefitschallenges.



# Assignment 3 Due Wednesday January 27th

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By Tuesday January 26th– a benefits wordle and a challenges wordle will be on each of our blogs for you to view. We will email you a link to our blog.

Please take a look at the wordle(s) and comment on our blog with a personal reflection of a benefit or a problem you have experienced and how your view of this benefit or problem has changed since beginning OLT.D.