CHAPTER 10

Electronically Mediated Interpersonal Communication

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define and explain Electronically Mediated Communication (EMC).
- Relate the role of and problems related to cell phones as tools of interpersonal communication.
- Explain why the success of communicating via the Internet is knowing how to be a competent communicator as well as knowing how the technology operates.
- Clarify how individuals can use the Internet to nourish existing relationships.
- List and explain the positive and negative aspects of Internet and texting use.
- Define and explain sexting.
- Define and explain cyber and texting addiction.
- Explain the concepts of flaming.
- Describe how to protect against cyber stalking.
- Relate the positive and negative aspects of social networking tools.
- Explain the relationship of blogging to interpersonal communication.

Sabina smiled as her roommate entered their apartment. “I’m really glad you’re here, Trish. Jose just left and I have a problem. He came over with a great idea about our wedding, but I don’t know if it’s okay.” Trish smiled at her and said, “What’s the dilemma this time?” Sabina sighed, knowing Trish was right. Ever since she and Jose had set their wedding date, life had become a series of problems about the ceremony, the honeymoon, and trying to make both sets of parents happy. “Since we are both so into computers, Jose thought it would be great to send the wedding invitations and thank-you notes online and set up a web page with links to the places we’re listed for gifts. What do you think?” Trish paused for a second. “I’m not sure. You know what a stickler your mom is for doing things absolutely right.” Sabina laughed, “You’re right. If everything isn’t done by the rules, she’ll have a fit. I did check my wedding books, but they didn’t have anything on using the Internet for announcements and thank-you notes.” “Wait, I know where to look,” Trish said suddenly.
“Remember in our computer class when we went over unusual sites and someone mentioned that one about manners and we all laughed? Well, for some strange reason I wrote it in my notes. Let me get it. But, just so you know, I don’t care what the experts say, I think it’s a great idea, and so will most of our friends. You could send out the invitations on Evite. Your parents and friends probably won’t like it. I know my parents would have a fit. I guess it’s a generational thing.”

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Interested in finding out about the answer to Sabina and Jose’s question, or do you have an Internet dos and don’ts question of your own? If so, do Activity 10.1.

ACTIVITY 10.1
Internet Dos and Don’ts

The Internet site Trish was referring to in the dialogue at the beginning of the chapter was www.mywedding.com. Find the answer to Sabrina and Jose’s question regarding on-line invitations and wedding gift lists.

Electronically Mediated Communication

Electronically mediated communication (EMC) has become pervasive in personal, academic, and business contexts and continues to grow in importance and types of techniques. EMC includes such technology as blogs, cell phones, computer-conferencing, discussion boards, electronic mail, instant messages, photo-sharing communities, social networks (e.g., texting, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter), videologs, and voice-over IP technology, such as Skyping and YouTube.

Electronic communications are considered interpersonal communication because of the sense of relationship and the connection they create. They may coincide with or substitute for face-to-face and other interpersonal forms of communication.

Although EMC is made possible through an electronic vehicle, in reality it is about intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, not just about computers, cell phones, and other technology. The success of communicating via electronics is not only knowing how the technology operates but knowing how to be a competent communicator. The technology doesn’t communicate. You communicate as you use the technology. In fact, a number of technology projects fail because the human dimension is poorly managed.

To those of you under age twenty-five, the statement that EMC is important and continues to grow may seem ridiculous. You might be asking, “What’s the big deal? I’ve always had e-mail and a cell available.” Yes, but do you realize that only in the last decade have these become popular and many of those older than you find all of this technology to be mind-boggling as a means of interpersonal communication? With that
understanding, let’s examine the channels of EMC so you enhance your knowledge of how to use them as meaningful tools for effective interpersonal communication.

Cell Phones

Cell phones, Blackberries, camera phones, and similar devices have changed the way people communicate interpersonally. Whether you want to check on a loved one or conduct work while on vacation, cell phones make interpersonal communication easily accessible. Cell phone connections are often characterized by more frequent, shorter, and perhaps less personal interactions than face-to-face interactions. However, there are minuses. Missing are the visual cues that give communicators emotional content in interpersonal messages. Instead, you have to depend on the words and the sound of a voice to communicate emotion and meaning, which can be a challenge to interpret during a cell phone echo or static laden connection.

The instantaneous nature of e-communications means you can easily and quickly connect to anyone you need. But the bad news is that you can be connected in too many directions at once! Business executives may be on their phones orchestrating deals while they’re vacationing on the beach. Parents may be chatting with friends instead of talking with their kids while driving the car. People having dinner at a restaurant can and do talk on their cells to those outside of the restaurant instead of interacting with their dining companions.

Cells can be and are distracting. When the phone rings (or vibrates), the caller often takes precedence over anything else the individual may be doing. You may be in the middle of a personal conversation, a work meeting, or even driving, when your cell phone suddenly interrupts you. Of course, talking and texting while driving can cause accidents because it impairs your concentration.

Listening alone causes the brain activation associated with other tasks to go down by a lot. It seems very clear that driving while being engaged in a phone conversation seems very dangerous.1 In fact, some states (e.g., Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey) and municipalities (e.g., District of Columbia and Brooklyn, Ohio) have outlawed the use of handheld cells while driving.2

Rules of etiquette for the use of cell phones include:3

- **If you are engaged in face-to-face communication, keep talking and ignore your phone.** Turn off your phone when the conversation is crucial—such as during a meeting, while in class, while listening to a friend talk about something important, or during a job interview—so you aren’t interrupted by the ring or vibrate noise. If you must take a call while engaged with someone else, excuse yourself before answering the phone.
- **Remove yourself from others so you can speak privately.** There is a reason why cell phones are banned from such places as art museums, libraries, and hospitals: cell phone conversations disturb others because they pull bystanders into conversations they don’t want to be part of and invade otherwise private and quiet settings.
• Avoid using the speaker phone as the noise can be disruptive and outsiders often don’t want to know the phone user’s business.

• Tell others in advance if you are waiting for an important call—for example, “my sister is ready to deliver her baby”—so they understand why a phone call may be more important than the communication at hand.

• Remember, any time you answer a phone call during a conversation with another person, you are saying “you’re not as important to me as the person on the phone.” You risk the other person’s attaching negative meanings to your behavior, perceiving you as rude, and losing his/her train of thought. Be certain your phone call is worth jeopardizing your current conversation.

• Use voice-mail and caller ID so you can bypass unnecessary calls.

• Be sure your phone is turned off when you go to a class, library, meeting, conference, speech, interview, worship service, concert, film, recital, stage play, ballet, or court session.

A college freshman was both shocked and mortified when, during his very first college class, his cell phone went off. He answered and said, “Hi mom.” His instructor walked back to the student’s desk, motioned for the phone, took it and said, “This is Professor XX. Your son is in my Psychology class at this very minute. He was told during orientation that phones were to be turned off during classes. He signed an acknowledgement pledge that if his phone was used, it would be taken and donated to the local abused women’s cell phone collection drive. On behalf of an abused woman, I’d like to thank both you and your son for the generous contribution. Bye, mom.”

• Avoid personal calls at the office.

• If you must use someone else’s cell phone, minimize the amount of time you use their service minutes.

• If you have a bad connection, hang up and find a better place to make the call instead of trying to talk over the static.

• Avoid discussing personal matters if you are in a public space (e.g., retail store, college cafeteria).

• Follow the rules about wireless phone use in hospitals and on airplanes so you won’t interfere with sensitive electronic equipment.

**Interpersonal Uses of the Internet**

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Interested in finding out how you use the Internet in relationship to intrapersonal and interpersonal communication? If so, do Activity 10.2.

The Internet offers the user many interpersonal options. A psychologist states, “You can flirt, you can have an affair, you can even consummate the relationship in some way. While on the Internet the person has a sense of belonging, a sense of identity.” You know that someone is listening, you are getting attention. You can send and receive information, you can agree and disagree with others. You can take time off from your everyday stress, relax, and gain pleasure by twittering a friend, blogging about your favorite topic, or getting into a chat room concerning an interest or hobby.
ACTIVITY 10.2
My Use of the Internet

Listed are common reasons for and specific ways in which people use the Internet for intrapersonal and interpersonal means. Place a check mark next to each statement or activity which indicates a reason you have used the Internet.

___to gain pleasure
___to relax
___to escape from everyday concerns
___to maintain contact with friends and family
___to make long-distance relationships feel closer
___to meet new people
___to create and sustain new relationships
___to indulge in fantasies
___to cover up for a lack of interpersonal skills
___to find information (e.g., look up a phone number or address, research symptoms of a disease)
___to interact with someone you haven’t seen for a while
___to escape for a short time into a fantasy world by becoming someone other than who I really am
___to take academic courses
___to look for employment
___to conduct business
___to contact an instructor
___to participate in a support group
___to participate in a chat room
___to conduct E-commerce
___to investigate product information (e.g., autos, appliances)
___to find out entertainment information (e.g., sports, movies, concerts or theater schedules)
___to flirt
___to find a sexual partner
___to participate in sex talk
___to do homework
___to do academic research
___to make travel arrangements (e.g., plane or hotel reservations)

What did you learn about your Internet usage from doing this activity?
Many individuals use the Internet to nourish existing relationships. They can maintain contact with friends and family, make long-distance relationships feel closer, meet people, keep up with day-to-day activities of loved ones at a distance, create and sustain new relationships, and even indulge in fantasies.

Some people use e-mail to cover up for their lack of interpersonal skills. Those who are introverted may not be able to use the face-to-face method for satisfying their need for social interaction and may, instead, choose a substitute method such as online communication.

On the Internet, people can have power without responsibility. They feel they are protected and have nothing to lose. An anonymous hate post, a blog entry that spreads a rumor, an embarrassing photo posted to an Internet site are all examples of how people use interpersonal power without responsibility on the Internet. The shy can become bold. People can be vindictive with little fear of being identified.

The recipient of negative communications can’t punish, fire, or divorce the writer. Consequences for inappropriate e-communications seldom carry the same repercussions as ones encountered face-to-face. The risks of online insensitivity are low compared to face-to-face circumstances. The communicator cannot see the hurt expression in the eyes or the anger of a reddening face online as in face-to-face circumstances. If a moderator banishes an individual from an e-mail discussion group, for example, the person can simply join another group or use a new e-mail address to subscribe again to the group. On the other hand, be aware that there are laws against defamation, slander, and stalking.

A study on e-mail states that “e-mail offers users chances to develop positive attitudes but can also offer some undesirable behaviors.” 5 What are the positive and negative behaviors and consequences?

**POSITIVE ASPECTS OF INTERNET USE**

If you are an Internet user and are asked to identify the positive aspects of using e-mail, instant mail, and chat rooms, what would you answer?

**LEARNING EXPERIENCE:** Interested in identifying what you perceive to be the positive aspects of using the Internet? If so, do Activity 10.3.

As already indicated, people list such factors as receiving pleasure, relaxation, and escape as positive reasons for using the Internet. People advance their careers through online education or conduct school research online. People use **e-commerce**—online business interaction—to look for a job, buy goods they want, gamble online, shape public images of their employers, and more. The rich variety and ease of access to the Internet makes information available to people as never before. Online stock-market trading, for example, enables any consumer to access information previously only available to stock brokers.

The Internet offers enormous flexibility. People can deal with e-communications when they have time to do so. E-mails—for example—can be ignored until a person has a chance to read and respond.
An early scholar in mediated communication who systematically studied how people use personal computers suggested that the computer serves as the “second self,” engaging the individual in intrapersonal communication and self-exploration available in no other way. Blogging, Facebook, and other social network tools are media for self-expression.

E-mail is quick and inexpensive. The average person can open e-mail, type a message, and send it faster than they can place a phone call or walk down the hall to talk to a coworker. The problem is that e-mails are less personal, and because they lack nonverbal communication, have more room for misinterpretation than face-to-face or phone communication.

Some people communicate better in writing than orally. They can write and rewrite, choose their words carefully, and not risk mistakes common in the spontaneity of oral communication.

Historically, most employers applauded workers who spent their work day engaged in such business related activities as reading reports, writing letters, sending faxes, and making contacts. Today, while the same kind of work is being conducted through computer mediated communication, employers may wonder if an employee is playing games, gabbing with friends, or surfing the Net instead of working.

### ACTIVITY 10.3
Positive Aspects of Using the Internet

You have been asked to present your views on the positive aspects of using the Internet. Before reading the section of this chapter entitled, “Positive Aspects of Internet Use,” make a list of at least five specific ideas you would mention, and be able to explain why each of these is beneficial.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

...
The collegiate environment opens many positives. Today students supplement their face-to-face classes with online course environments such as Blackboard, use discussion boards to talk with peers, conduct online database research of high quality, check for plagiarism through Turnitin, and continue discussions that they started during class. "Seventy to 80% of US university faculty report using electronic messages to communicate with students and colleagues." Sometimes out of fear of negative face-to-face reactions, or cultural patterns which restrict a student from speaking directly to an authority figure, or out of shyness, students don't approach professors. For example, some Asian students have been brought up to avoid losing face, so they will not admit that they don't know information, nor cause others to lose face, as by asking questions of authority figures who may not know the answers. These students often are more comfortable asking for information online.

Online communities—discussion boards, online work groups, course environments, social networking—can create a sense of connection between people which is similar to group or team communication. Some people have turned to chat rooms to supplement their psychological needs. Support groups can aid a person to interact with individuals who have similar problems or issues. People in remote areas can find others who can be of assistance. For example, an isolated gay youth, a woman with breast cancer, a couple who has lost children, can find interactive voices on the Net.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF INTERNET USE

In spite of all the positive aspects of the Internet, it has its negative aspects and, therefore, its detractors.

Most people will use the Internet with discretion and experience few if any problems. In fact, research has shown that ninety percent of people get online, do what they need to do, and then get off. It's the other 10 percent that are problem users. There is evidence that an individual can feel socially isolated by becoming so engrossed in Internet activities that their Internet activities interfere with their personal and employment responsibilities and relationships. Even back in 1997, before the Internet use explosion, 13 percent of college students indicated that their computer use interfered with personal functioning.

Some Internet users indicate they have become overwhelmed by the number of e-mails they receive daily. As one businessperson states, “E-mail was a fantastic invention but now, even without spam, it's a nightmare to deal with.” Some feel guilty about not being able to answer e-mails immediately, and if they do spend the time to answer, they may find themselves behind in studies or work. One trend is to declare e-mail bankruptcy, which is to delete all e-mails not answered within a specific period of time, such as twenty-four hours. Another approach to e-mail overload is to pledge not to go into it for a day or two. Intel Corporation is running “zero-E-mail Fridays,” in which no company employee is to send or open an e-mail on Fridays. E-mail-free Fridays already are the norm at cell carrier U.S. Cellular and at order-processing company PBD Worldwide Fulfillment Services. This avoids e-mail twitching, reading every new e-mail as it arrives.
Cyber Addiction

Whether it’s called computer addiction, impulse control disorder, Internet addictive disorder, or the most commonly used term, cyber addiction, it is considered the major negative aspect of Internet usage. It is classified as an addiction since it fits into the Psychological Addiction Cycle, which is need leads to use which leads to trouble which leads to repeating the action to satisfy the need.

“In the case of the cyber addict, there is a need to escape from the real world due to angst, boredom or depression. The use is to create the world “I” want which allows the needed escape. The trouble that results centers on the time spent which causes missed work or classes, or being constantly tired. The trouble leads to deeper need, so the cycle is repeated.”

A person who lies about Internet use, won’t admit to how much time he or she is spending online, constantly “works” on the computer instead of interacting with others, and/or neglects job or school tasks in order to spend inordinate time on the computer, is in trouble. Such a person is being controlled by the computer instead of controlling the computer.

A cyber addict is controlled by the computer, rather than he controlling the computer.
Obsessive Internet use has caused lost jobs, academic problems, marital problems, mounting debts, broken trust, being caught in lies, and cover-ups.\textsuperscript{20}

Excessive computer users tend to be those who have one or more of the feelings of loneliness, isolation, boredom, depression, anger, or frustration. One study indicated that “about 71 percent were diagnosed as suffering from bipolar disorder, commonly called manic depression.”\textsuperscript{21}

The causes of excessive computer usage are typically short-term and understandable. When a student goes away to college, there is a need to connect with family and friends. When a person gets away from the office for a few days, escalating problems at work may need a little attention in order for the employee to feel relaxed. Or, a shy person may find that making contacts on the Internet can lead to initial personal contacts, thus allowing him to overcome the first fear of introductions and open the possibility of meeting someone later, with whom he is familiar and has established some intimacy.

Cyber addiction might signify a strong psychological need for attention. This need could include satisfying a desire to be popular by setting up situations where a person’s e-mail or cell phone is constantly bombarded with incoming messages and texts. This excessive communication gives people an illusion of being well liked and getting lots of attention from cyber “friends.” Perhaps what they really want to show is that they are indispensable because others can’t survive without them. By constantly checking the cell phone for messages and texts, or the computer for e-mails and twitters, they also are attempting to give the illusion to others that the receiver is well liked and constantly in demand.

The Internet can also be a means for those who suffer from sexual addiction and pedophilia to live their fantasies or make illicit contacts.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Interested in finding out if you are cyber addicted? If so, do Activity 10.4.

Even if you are not a computer addict, you may still be overusing electronics. If so, what are some ways to move away from overuse?

- Have an e-communication-free day a week.
- Limit your time or hours when you use e-communication, such as no e-communication after 9 P.M.
- Use a timer to limit your time.
- If you have online access on your phone, leave your cell phone in the car or give it to someone else to hold so that you can’t use it to go online.

You might ask yourself what is the bottom line when it comes to communication. “Of what value is sending or receiving this message? Will anyone’s life be lost, a calamity avoided, or vital information not be passed on if I don’t text or answer the phone or e-mail?”

If you are unable to do any of these on your own, you may want to join a support group for cyber addicts or seek psychological counseling. Despite the irony, even joining one of the many online support groups for cyber addicts may be a way to begin
ACTIVITY 10.4
Are You a Possible Cyber Addict?

Directions: How many of these describe your tendencies regarding the use of the Internet or texting? Circle every answer that applies to you.

1. Given a choice I would generally choose to go onto the Internet or text than go to a social event.
2. Often, I stay on the Internet or text for longer periods of time than I intend.
3. I have repeated, unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back on, or stop engaging in the use of the Internet or texting.
4. I am restless or irritable when attempting to limit or stop engaging in the use of the Internet or texting.
5. Using the Internet or texting is a way of escaping from problems or relieving feelings such as helplessness, guilt, anxiety, or depression.
6. Returning to the Internet or text in search of a more intense or higher-risk experience.
7. Lying to friends, family members, therapists, or others to conceal your involvement on the Internet or texting.
8. Committing illegal or unethical acts online (e.g., downloading pornography, gambling, hacking, or creating a computer virus or exchanging test or homework answers).
9. Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of online or texting behavior.
10. Incurring significant financial consequences as a result of engaging in online behavior (bidding for items on e-Bay), or text messaging overcharges.
11. While attending classes, I am constantly playing with my cell phone, even if it is off, wondering what text messages I am missing or wanting to text someone.
12. E-bullying, such as spreading gossip, uploading inappropriate pictures of others, flaming.

Scoring guide: “Yes” to three or more of these indicates problematic online or texting behavior.

What did you learn about your Internet and texting behavior from doing this exercise?

Source: Adapted from a workshop presented by Carnes, P. (2004, February 27). The criteria of problematic online sexual behavior. Cleveland, OH: Free Clinic.
changing. A growing number of psychologists and counselors have become specialists in cyber addiction.

**Negative Social Impact**

E-mails lack nonverbal cues. E-communication lacks any subliminal information—facial movement, clothing, appearance, body language, even handwriting. Without normal face-to-face feedback, attachments form quickly. Online, people often move from casual chat to intimacy with startling speed. Much care is needed to avoid disappointment later. What you read in online and what you see face-to-face may be two different things.22 “People experiment with their identity on-line or in texting, both deliberately and unconsciously. It’s not uncommon for someone with an introverted personality to be bolder on-line, or for people to be more playful than they normally would be face-to-face.”23 The idea that a person has a real self and a second self (the online persona) often becomes confused in e-communication.24 Because of this, people who are naive or trusting often get hurt and disappointed.

Internet users may deal with ideas from a wide array of people, and that may challenge their belief systems and threaten the values by which they live. Individuals may also find it difficult to tolerate the intrapersonal conflict they experience from being exposed to ideas that are not familiar, asked to evaluate long-held beliefs, or are challenged to defend their ideas or values.

The amount of face-to-face interpersonal communication can be depleted as people spend more and more of their time on the Internet or texting. It’s often easier to bang out a message online than make physical contact, and spend the same amount of time looking into another individual’s face, listening to his or her concerns, and showing concern.

**Flaming**

Flaming, e-mail or text aggression, happens when people send hostile, insulting, or intimidating messages online or via phone.

Because there is no direct personal contact online, some people feel they can get away with verbally abusing others. There are few consequences for the abuser. Interestingly, the person who has been victimized in face-to-face communication may become a flamer. They may feel powerful in being able to flame, to get away with what they wouldn’t do face-to-face. Be aware that there are laws regarding the use of flaming. Threatening someone, spreading ill-truths, and stalking are all against the law and can be punishable with fines and/or jail.

**Sexting**

“Sexting is the sending of nude, semi-nude, or erotic pictures or video via cell phone.”25 It garnered a significant amount of attention following the 2008 suicide of an eighteen-year old girl after her former boyfriend circulated nude pictures of her. After suffering humiliation and abuse from her classmates, she contacted law enforce-
ment for aid. She received no help and, subsequently, committed suicide. This revelation resulted in an increased number of cases sent to law enforcement and district attorneys, resulting in legal convictions for child pornography and other crimes against those who circulated pictures and other materials.26

While often perceived to be an activity of teens, a recent study found that 73.5 percent of those ages twenty to twenty-six sexted, while 66 percent of the general population participated in the activity. Many of the sexters were unaware that they were even participating in the act. Few realize that sending or forwarding revealing nude or suggestive pictures (of themselves or others) and certain stories that contain pornographic information could be considered sexting, depending on the legal jurisdiction in which you reside. That includes taking and sending pictures of those in locker rooms or at social gatherings.

Legal actions include a case in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, in January 2009, when six teens were charged with child pornography after three girls sent sexually explicit photographs to male classmates.27

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, a teenage boy was indicted on felony obscenity charges, when he allegedly sent a photo of his genitals to several female classmates.28 Another boy was charged with child pornography in a similar case.29 Two southwest Ohio teenagers were charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor, a first-degree misdemeanor, for sending or possessing nude photos on their cell phones of two fifteen-year-old classmates.30

What appears to some as “just fun” can turn out to have severe consequences. Besides the legal fines and school expulsions, in some cases those prosecuted were listed as sex offenders,31 meaning that they are classified the same as pedophiles, rapists, and child molesters. This is often a lifelong identification.

Before sending out pictures on the Internet, ask yourself whether the materials can get you into trouble that could result in fines, jail sentences, a ruined reputation, or being considered a legal pervert for the rest of your life.

**Cyber Bullying**

**Cyber bullying**—also known as digital harassment—is mistreatment that takes place using an electronic medium.32

Cyber bullying is considered worse than the regular schoolyard kind because it knows no bounds of time, space or geography. A bullied child used to be able to go home to escape. Now, bullying can happen when a child is in his or her own bedroom.33 Sometimes cyber bullying is more malicious, vindictive, and brutal than face-to-face bullying “because the cyber bullies can often hide their true identities.”34 As one person against sneaky, online confrontation explained, “I’d rather be slapped in the face than stabbed in the back.” The bully can use false identifications and, since they can’t be identified, they don’t have to prove their insinuations. “They are immune from the tears of the bullied and removed from feeling empathy for them.”35

There have been cases of cyber bullying in which camera phones have been used to take compromising pictures of individuals, head shots have been attached to the bodies of other people to create pornography, and malicious gossip has been spread with no
ability to counter the stories. For example, “A heavy set boy, hot and sweaty after his gym class, was getting dressed in what he thought was the privacy of the school’s locker room. One of his classmates took a picture of him with a cell phone camera. Within seconds, the picture was flying to the cell phones of the boy’s schoolmates through instant-messaging. By the time he was dressed and in his next class, he was the laughing stock of the school.”

Some municipalities have made online harassment a crime. A thirteen-year old girl in Missouri read disturbing posts on the Internet after she broke up with her boyfriend. The girl thought her boyfriend said “she was a bad person and the world would be better without her.” The girl committed suicide. The “boy,” in fact, had been created by the mother of a neighbor girl who had had a falling out with the girl. An FBI investigation followed. The community became outraged when the e-mailing mother received no legal penalty because there were no laws forbidding cyber harassment. They pressured the legislature to pass such regulation with stiff penalties. In California the Megan Meier Cyber Bullying Prevention Act is an effort to impose regulations on the Internet.

How prevalent is cyber bullying? In 2005, nine percent of children ages ten to seventeen said they were abused by “cyber bullies.” According to a report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is an increasing trend for college students to be bullied. A study indicates that over 60 percent of students had been cyber-bullied sometime in their academic career.

How can you stop from being cyber bullied or being part of a cyber bullying attack?

- Refuse to pass along cyber bullying messages.
- Block communication from cyber bullies.
- Report cyber bullying to the proper authorities.
- Never post or share your personal information online (this includes your full name, address, telephone number, school name, credit card number, or Social Security number) or your friends’ personal information.
- Never share your Internet passwords with anyone.
- Never meet anyone face-to-face whom you only know online unless it is in a public place and you think you are totally safe.

**Cyber Stalking**

Another negative aspect of the Internet and cell phones is that people may use them for devious means. Cases of rapes, teen runaways, invasion of privacy, harassment, and stalking, which had their basis in e-mail, instant messages, and texting, have been reported. Students have sent bomb threats to schools and universities, and hate mail to teachers and professors thinking that they can get away with these acts because they don’t use their real identity. There have been instances of cyber stalking. **Cyber stalking** centers on following and harassing both males and females. In many cases, the cyber stalker and the victim had a prior relationship, and the cyber stalking begins when the victim attempts to break off the relationship. However, there also have been
instances of cyber stalking by strangers. “Given the enormous amount of personal information available through the Internet, a cyber stalker can easily locate private information about a potential victim with a few mouse clicks or key strokes.”

In order to protect yourself from stalking, you might want to follow these suggestions:

- Create a gender neutral e-mail name, not one about your interests or your gender.
- Remove all gender and personal information from your user profile.
- Make your e-mail signature dull, businesslike, and gender neutral.
- Check your e-mail headers, which may be sending information without your knowledge.
- “If you find yourself being victimized, the classic advice is to ignore the stalker. Even responding to their E-mail to say, ‘Leave me alone,’ just encourages them. Remember, those of us who are playing with a full deck don’t send anonymous and threatening cyber threats. Your best bet is to hope that your cyber stalker will get bored by your lack of response.”

**Diminishment of Writing Skills**

Writing skills can be diminished by using e-mail to correspond, as devotees may exhibit bad writing habits including:

- Dashing off notes without stopping to think about what you’re writing or to whom you’re writing causing little audience analysis and poor grammatical constructions.
- Using e-lingo and e-bbreviations—computer or texting shorthand and Internet nonverbal indicators—without concern for whether or not the receiver understands the argot. One of the authors of this book received so many essays with texting e-lingo that he finally had to put a notice in his syllabus that “All assignments must be written or keyboarded in Standard American English. Any use of e-lingo will cause a deduction to your grade.”

**DEVELOPING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE**

The development of personal relationships is a pivotal issue in the larger debate about human relations in cyberspace. On one side are those who view online relationships as shallow, impersonal, and often hostile. The other side argues that computer-mediated communication liberates interpersonal relations from the confines of physical locality and thus creates opportunities for new, but genuine, personal relationships and communities.

For some people, online relationships are crucial to their well-being. You may know someone who found love or marriage online. For lonely teens, for instance, an online relationship is a place to turn in times of need. Parents of children with disabilities may find support from other parents through an online group. Colleagues may develop relationships online. There are all kinds of acquaintanceship,
friendship, emotional support, and even love relationships that develop online, just as there are face-to-face.

Remember, when searching personal advertisements or entering chat rooms, that people may lie because they think they cannot be discovered. They may switch data about their sex, age, locations, and personal appearance. How are you to know? You can’t see them! You may not be able to tell whether or not someone is lying, but if the person’s posts are longer than normal, use more sense-based words (about taste, smell, touch, sight, sound), and more other-oriented pronouns, those differences may be a tip that the person is lying. Although liars may communicate differently, you probably cannot tell.

Some people talk about both their face-to-face and electronic relationships as their “real” friends. Although the relationships may be different, both are real, but may serve different purposes. Relational research shows that, even though there are exceptions, associations maintained over long distances do not generally provide the kind of support and reciprocity that typically contribute to a sense of psychological security and happiness. Think about it. Why is your best friend your best friend? Probably because he or she is there for you when you need him or her. That person was there to pat you on the shoulder, bring you medicine when you needed it, and acted as a support system. On the other hand, best friends can use e-interactions to enhance a relationship by providing contact between face-to-face meetings.

That person on the Internet, many miles away, isn’t immediately with you. Before you break any present-tense relationships, move, fly thousands of miles to meet that “perfect” Cybernet person, heed the advice of a couple who met and “dated” for almost two years on the Internet and who actually decided to get married: “Despite the fact that we had been in steady communication—exploring each other’s likes and dislikes and becoming intimate enough to marry—when we finally met face-to-face, we had a lot more exploring and adjusting to do.” This was from a success story couple. Though there have been successful Internet relationships developed, most Internet relationships don’t wind up this happily.

BEING A BETTER INTERPERSONAL ONLINE COMMUNICATOR

Electronic-mediated interpersonal communication is here to stay. Your desk or laptop computer and/or cell phone is ready and waiting. How can you be a competent interpersonal cyber communicator?

- Be aware that you may not get a response to your messages. Many people receive a large volume of mail, may delete days’ worth of messages, select “no mail,” or be selective about responding when busy. You may have to repeat your message or alter your channel of communication and use the telephone or FAX or snail mail (yes, there are people who still use that method of communication) to make sure the message has arrived and is answered.

- Be aware that some users become irritated with comments that encourage continued e-mails or texts back needlessly. Watch for cues that allow you to know that a cor-
An effective on-line communicator realizes that s/he may not get an immediate response to a sent twitter, text, or email.

- Be considerate. If you do not have time to answer the message immediately, a short response that you will deal with the matter within a set period of time is often appreciated. If you are going to be gone for a period of time, you might want to let people in your address book know, so they don’t expect immediate responses.
- Be aware that there is no such thing as a private electronic conversation. Many businesses, for example, use an electronic window, a device which allows managers to monitor e-mail. If you don’t want others to know the sites you are visiting or the content of your personal messages, don’t use your business computer or a home computer to which others have access.
- Be aware that software is available that can enable your employer, service provider, a disgruntled colleague, or the legal system to use your computer mediated communication against you. Programs are available that can break the password of any account. In addition, sources such as spymastertools.com lists hundreds of devices to use to aid in finding you, tracking you, and revealing what and to whom you are communicating.
- An attachment can contain a virus. Be careful of what messages you open. Be aware of the latest computer bugs and their message titles.
• Remember, your computer provides “cookies” to most Internet sites so that companies, law enforcement, and stalkers can track back to you and/or your computer or cell. You may want to use a program that removes tracking from your computer such as Ad-Aware or Spybot. Do not assume you are anonymous and protected on the Internet or cell. Revelations that the Bush administration’s post–September 11 surveillance efforts went beyond the widely publicized warrantless wiretapping program, and encompassed secretive activities that created “unprecedented” spying powers, illustrates how pervasive is the ability to spy on the citizenry.

• Be aware that if you are using a university or company computer or e-mail system, the organization owns your e-mails, and e-mail messages that are encoded by their computers are being kept on their Internet provider. A rule of good sense should be, “don’t say anything on the Internet that you would be ashamed for your family, boss, or best friend to read.”

• Be aware that harassment charges can be lodged regarding e-mail and twittering. For example, if you send a private e-mail to a friend which contains gender-centered jokes, or you send racist humor to another person, you can be charged with harassment. Be careful about quickly sending out copies of those “funny jokes” you receive without considering the consequences. Be conscious of what sexual, religious, racial, gender, and sexual-orientation harassment is, and that you can be legally libel for both same- and other-sex harassment. “Two black employees brought a $60 million racial discrimination case against a US investment bank after racist jokes were allegedly circulated on its E-mail system.”

• Be aware that you can’t take e-mail back. Once it is sent, it is sent. Also remember that the receiver might forward the message to other people without your permission. Take your time. If you are angry or upset, don’t pound your feelings out on the keyboard. If you do consider whether you want to delete the message once you have vented your frustrations. Stop and think if that’s really what you will want to say tomorrow.

• Be aware that most educational institutions and businesses prohibit chain letters, jokes, and politically oriented e-mails.

• Be aware that voyeurs can use electronic devices to record your private moments, then rebroadcast your photos and videos on the Internet. Ask yourself, when sending photos and videos, whether you are willing for others to view them.

• Before you flame, you might want to consider extinguishing the message. You are liable for the abusive, aggressive, or deliberately antisocial e-mail you send.

• Remember that on the Internet there is no intonation, affect, or facial expression, as e-mails and twitters offer only bare words. To make your e-mail more expressive, pretend you are writing a novel. Include in the information necessary descriptive information so your receiver can picture what you are talking about and know the feelings being expressed.

• Be aware that there are those who manipulate. As with any type of good listening, ask whether what’s being said is reasonable, if it makes sense, if the sender is taking responsibility for what is said, and if are there facts and examples that lead you to the conclusion or solution being proposed.
As a sender and receiver of EMC, be a wise and responsible consumer and communicator.

**Blogging**

“A **blog** is a Website with dated entries, usually by a single author, often accompanied by links to other blogs. Think of a blog as one person’s public diary or suggestion list.” 51

Blog is short for “Weblog.” Though many students are using social networking sites that act like blogs, the personal Internet blog is still a viable way of sharing information. One web blogger’s service has a section called “Blogger Comments” which allows readers of your site from all over the world to give feedback on what you share on your blog. 52 You can choose whether or not you want to allow comments on a post-by-post basis and you can delete anything you don’t like. The same service has another section entitled, “Group blogs,” which they indicate “can be excellent communication tools for small teams, families, or other groups.” 53 A special type of blog is a photo-sharing community. Understandably, an individual’s self-expression and relationships online are determined by the type of photos shared. 54 In fact, blogging may have positive effects on a person’s feelings of well-being because of the good feelings associated with self-disclosure. 55

Blogging has found its way into the corporate world. When a work team uses blogging, they can exchange information and provide information to other people in the company. Blogging in business can increase accountability because the project is organized, documented, and visible to others. 56

Teachers, professors, schools, colleges, and universities are using blogs to communicate with students, archive student work, learn with far-flung collaborators, and manage the knowledge that members of the school community create. 57

Academic interpersonal blogging opportunities include starting conversations about academic topics, using portals to post and exchange assignments, fielding questions, and opening doors for interactions between students and professors from the same or different institutions, majors, and classes. 58

As with any interpersonal means of communication, there are certain guidelines that can help you to be competent. In blogging these include: 59

- Once you have sent a blog in cyberspace you cannot retrieve it. Do not write anything that you don’t want the entire global population to know.
- Normally, do not include your address or phone number. Harassment, stalking, and death have resulted from the wrong information in the wrong hands.
- Remember that the laws related to defamation of character and slander are in effect on the Internet.
- It is usually wise to protect the privacy of others by using fictitious names of people, places, schools, and businesses.
- Though blogging is usually considered an informal act, clear idea development, correct grammar, clarity of structure, appropriate language, and correct spelling should be considered a requirement.
• The concepts of ethical communication should be followed.
• Writing something in haste, especially when you have strong emotional feelings, can result in your saying things that you might not want in public view.
• Blogs are generally forever. Do you want this information “out there” in five, ten, or twenty years? People have been compromised and blackmailed by things they have said in the past which they regret having said when looked at with a present-day eye.
• Use encrypted e-mail so that undesirable people cannot easily trace you.
• For security purposes, avoid giving out your social security number.
• Be aware that prospective employers often do a web search to find out about you, so don’t put anything on your blog that might give them reason to question your honesty or integrity.

There are several sites that may be particularly useful to those who are bloggers or who wish to join the blogging ranks, including blogger.com, which is a free service, and has a three-step format that takes less than thirty minutes to follow. Another site is Bloglines.com.

Social Networking

If you are a typical college student you spend much time on social networking sites, talking online in such communities as Facebook.com, MySpace.com, and/or Twitter.com. These sites allow you to interact with others from down the hall, across the campus, or around the world.

FACEBOOK

Facebook has become so common among students that a frequent comment on some college campuses is, “Facebook me,” much as older generations said, “Call me.” In fact, the verb facebooking,60 is now in many standard dictionaries, which means to communicate with someone via Facebook.

Research shows that “nearly 80% of students on college campuses visit facebook.com on a daily basis.”61 Because the restriction of having to be a college student has been lifted, it is expanding quickly, and high school students and businesses have invaded the space. Consider these statistics about Facebook:62

1 billion photos are uploaded to the site each month.
10 million videos are uploaded each month.
120 million users log on to Facebook at least once each day.
250 million are active users.
30 million users update their statuses at least once each day.
5 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day (worldwide).
The fastest growing demographic is people thirty-five-years old and older.
Two-thirds of Facebook users are outside of college. Facebook ranks as the most viewed site on the Internet. More females aged seventeen to twenty-five (69 percent) visit the site than males (56 percent).

There are both positive and negative aspects to the use of Facebook.

**Positive Aspects of Facebook**

There are many positive aspects to using Facebook. They include:

- People who are shy can create a positive self-image by meeting other people.
- People can create social networks.
- People can reconnect with people they used to know and stay in touch with family, friends, and colleagues.
- Surveys and event listings can be accomplished easily.
- Subscribers can advertise.
- Regional, local, and individual parties and events can be announced.
- People can create a “web-portal” that is easier than designing a webpage.

**Negative Aspects of Facebook**

Like most social networking services, people’s personal information is visible to many people, including potential stalkers, salespeople, and harassers. For example, the week before the 2007 Ohio state high school football championship game, fans of one of the finalists began a poke campaign against the quarterback of their opponents, with the intent of psychologically rattling him.

Other negatives include:

- **Facebook addiction** can be obsessive behavior just like other cyber addiction. “Social networking junkies count the minutes to their next profile fix, checking their computers or cell phones multiple times per day to see how many shout-outs, virtual drinks or new friends they’ve acquired.”

  Other negatives include:

  - **Facebook addiction**

  - Identification with certain interest groups, inappropriate behavior, and sexually explicit content or photos may lead to negative evaluations by prospective employers, school authorities, or law enforcement. For example:

    - Pictures from Facebook were used to cite violators of the university alcohol policy at North Carolina State University. Charges included underage drinking and violations of the dormitory alcohol policy, specifically students holding open bottles of alcoholic beverages in the dorm hallway.

    - Four students at Northern Kentucky University were fined for posting pictures of a drinking party on Facebook. The pictures, taken in one of NKU’s dormitories, proved that the students were in violation of the university’s dry campus policy. The students each received a $50 fine, one year of probation on campus, and were forced to attend a class about the dangers of binge drinking.
A sophomore was expelled from Fisher College in Boston for comments about a campus police officer made on Facebook. The comments were judged to be in violation of the college’s code of conduct.69

At Syracuse University, four students were placed on disciplinary probation after creating a group entitled “Clearly [instructor’s first name] doesn’t know what she’s doing ever.” The group featured derogatory and personal attacks aimed at the instructor.70

A person can find others who back similar bizarre or dangerous inclinations. For example, a Pennsylvania high school student found an ally in Finland who shared information on how to plot and carry out a school attack. The sharing between the teenage outcasts was discovered when the computer of the Finish teenager who killed eight people and himself in a school rampage was analyzed and communication between the two boys was revealed. A search of his home and computer determined that the Pennsylvania youth was planning to carry through a similar violent act.71

Profile and other information can be used to blackmail members. “In 2007, Miss New Jersey Universe posted to her Facebook profile several pictures of herself partying. They were later mailed anonymously to the pageant’s executive board, in an alleged smear campaign.”72 An attempt to embarrass 2008 Republican Presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani took place when it was made public that his daughter had “joined a Facebook group supporting Barak Obama.”73

Users can become more concerned about the quantity of interpersonal relationships than the quality of their relationships. The average Facebook user has 120 friends.74 Obviously, if a person maintained that many close personal friendships, there would be no time to do anything else.

MY SPACE, TWITTER, YOUTUBE

Other social networks are available to Internet and cell phone users, including My Space, Twitter and YouTube.

MySpace accounts for 4.92 percent of all Internet visits and is an important part of the social network.75 Since MySpace is used more by junior and senior high school students than Facebook, most college students will have “outgrown” its use.

Twitter is a more direct communication social networking service than Facebook or My Space, as specific sources are selected for message receipt. As their advertisements state, its purpose is “the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?”76

Actually a form of microblogging, Twitter enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s subscribers who are known as followers.

Be aware that Twitter collects your personal identity information and shares it with third parties. This means that your identity is not yours, but can be sold and shared. Also be aware that Twitter has displayed a number of security breaches.
**YouTube** is a video sharing system where users can upload, view, and share video clips. Created in 2005, it was purchased by Google in 2006. Some 100 million videos are available in YouTube, with more than one hundred thousand new videos being uploaded each day. Today, viral videos have become a popular way of spreading ideas, information, and entertainment. Viral videos spread like a cold virus, from person to person, as people tell each other about favorite videos. There are millions of videos available on YouTube, the most popular of which have been seen by 50 million or more viewers.

The warning “rules” about personal dangers regarding Facebook apply equally to MySpace and Twitter. The possibility for problems exists and caution must be taken.

**PROTECTING YOURSELF ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

There are strategies you can use to protect yourself in social networking sites. You need to use common sense and understand nature of the venue.

*Only post information you want everyone to know.* If you don’t want your mother to be your friend on Facebook because of what she will see, then you may have a problem.

*Choose your privacy options carefully.* Don’t assume that because you are honest, all of those who can access your account will also be good citizens. Use privacy options to restrict who can access your account. Keep private information such as phone numbers, address, your schedule, social plans, and social security numbers to yourself. This will eliminate identity fraud and thwart those who might be interested in stalking you. Unfortunately, “41% of users divulge personal information.” Are you one of them?

*If you need to hide from a violent ex-partner or a vindictive ex-friend then you will want to stay off social networking sites.* Since 2007 anyone who searches the Internet on Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft will have access to Facebook members’ names and photos. The move was made to “make it an even more lucrative advertising vehicle.” If you are a Facebook user, you are the product that is being advertised!

*You can Google yourself to check on what information is out there.* Google yourself to see how your name or identity is used. Subscribe to www.pubsub.com or a similar service to keep track of your name and identity on the web.

*Assume that once information is on the Internet—an e-mail is sent, a message posted, a photo uploaded—it can be accessed by anyone indefinitely.*

*Delete inappropriate photos, information, and posts from discussion boards, webpages, and social networking sites months before you hunt for a job.* Because materials are typically available for some time after deleted, you will need to start changing content well in advance.

*Use security software to block unwanted hacking into your computer.* Be aware that Sophos Web Appliances, for example, can be used to control access to websites like Facebook. It also can be used to block malicious phishing (“an attempt to criminally and fraudulently acquire sensitive information, such as usernames, passwords, and credit card details, by masquerading as a trustworthy entity in an electronic...
(communication”) and virus-infected webpages. Using spyware can help keep unwelcome visitors out of your computer’s information.

Some organizations are taking a direct attack on Facebook. The Ohio Education Association, the state’s largest teachers’ union, sent teachers a memo discouraging them from using MySpace and Facebook. “The union worries that students will create ‘imposter’ sites, pose as adults and engage in conversations with teachers, or use online communication to make allegations against educators. Teachers who make inappropriate postings on Web sites risk losing their licenses or facing other punishment.”

LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Interested in finding out about your Facebook awareness? If so, do Activity 10.5.

**ACTIVITY 10.5**

**Facebook Awareness**

Circle whether you believe each of these statements is T( rue) or F(alse).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>You should be cautious of friend requests.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>You should adjust your privacy settings to match your level of comfort, and review them often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>You should be cautious about posting and sharing personal information, especially information that could be used to identify you or locate you offline, such as your address or telephone number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>You should report users and content that violate the Facebook Terms of Use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>You should block and report anyone that sends you unwanted or inappropriate communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>You should not post your phone number on Facebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Facebook’s user interface, the result of its fundamentally collegiate, video gamer sensibility, is not designed to be an effective business tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Facebook developers often spring new features on users without warning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Facebook phishing (scamming) is a reality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the statements are True. If you answered False to any statement, you need a refresher course on Facebook awareness.

**Text Messaging**

Text messaging, or Short Message Service (SMS) is communication of very short messages via cell phones. Estimates are that ninety-five percent of sixteen- to twenty-
four-year olds use text messaging regularly, and teenagers send nearly one hundred texts per day.86

Because texting is immediate and spontaneous, it can be an easy and fast way to connect. Texting allows users to quickly send a short message to someone without the necessity of dialing a phone, waiting for a response, and then talking for an unlimited amount of time. Texting allows people who are not near computers or need privacy to send a quick message. Because texting is silent and discreet, you can text without anyone knowing it and not disturb anyone. Unlike using the Internet, you are not bombarded with messages from strangers. The only people who can text you are those who have your cell number.

Texting has become an important medium of interpersonal communication. Informing people of safety issues and locating someone are all positive aspects of text messaging. Many campuses have set up a texting system for emergency notification. Businesses may encourage employees to keep in touch via texting while traveling. In addition, texting is often used in fun and playful communication.

Texting can cause problems when people are supposed to be focused on something else (when driving, in a meeting, at a family dinner, or in class).

Texting can divert focus. Research indicates that in one recent year text messaging contributed to nearly one thousand vehicle crashes involving sixteen- and seventeen-year-old drivers.87 The same report indicated that:

- Almost 50 percent of all drivers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four are texting while driving.
- One-fifth of experienced adult drivers in the United States send text messages while driving.
- Over 60 percent of American teens admit to risky driving, and nearly half of those that admit to risky driving also admit to text messaging behind the wheel.
- Over one-third of all young drivers, ages twenty-four and under, are texting on the road.

Laws against driving and texting have been passed in some states and cities.88

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapists has warned that the “increase in Text messaging may contribute to a rise in repetitive strain injuries (RSI) which is pain and swelling of the tendons at the base of the thumb and wrist.”89 An effect of RSI is the inability to hold a pen or pencil, which can have severe effects on academic work and future job success.

Texting may be causing a general deterioration of writing skills in other communications. Academically, students may lose their ability to correctly spell words, use correct grammar, and develop a complete thought with a back-up idea. Teachers have found that some students have actually started to turn in assignments in texting format and language. For example, a professor at Syracuse University cites an example of a student who left him this note: “hi prof how are u culd u tell me my sm grade—tim[.]”90

There may be a temptation to use texting for cheating in academic settings. Since students can text an outside of class accomplice to look up materials while taking
exams, many academic institutions are forbidding students to bring or activate phones during classes.

*Texting can be addictive.* There are students who are so obsessed with their text messages that they have been determined to have *texting addiction*.91 They must check their phones constantly, thus not listening attentively in class, not eating properly because of the need to be available for quickly answering messages, and losing sleep because of the need to be instant and present so that you don’t miss a message.92 It is estimated that the average teen sends twenty-three hundred text messages a month.93 This type of constant texting has the disadvantages of being distracting, preventing teens from having adequate time to think through ideas, problems, and actions. Further, research suggests that texting can make people overly dependent on others because they text friends when trying to make even minor decisions.94 “Research shows that there has been a big rise in the number of behavioral addictions, and many involve Texting.”95

**Key Terms**

Electronically Mediated Communication (EMC)  
e-commerce  
e-mail bankruptcy  
e-mail twitching  
cyber addiction  
flaming  
sexting  
cyber bullying  
cyber stalking  
e-lingo  
e-bbreviations  
blog  
social networking  
Facebook addiction  
phishing  
text messaging  
texting addiction

**Competencies Check-Up**

Interested in finding out what you learned in this chapter and how you use the information? If so, take this competencies check-up.

Directions: Indicate the extent that each statement applies to you:

1—Never  2—Seldom  3—Sometimes  4—Often  5—Usually

___ 1. I recognize the values and limitations of electronically mediated communication and adapt my mediated communication accordingly.

___ 2. I use the Internet in positive ways, such as to gain pleasure, to relax, and to escape from everyday concerns.

___ 3. If I use the Internet, I use it to nourish my existing relationships.

___ 4. I recognize the close connection between electronically mediated communication and development of the self and interpersonal communication.

___ 5. I use electronically mediated communication in positive ways (such as to create community, to create or enhance effective relationships).
6. I am not obsessive about my electronically mediated communicating. I do not allow the computer or texting or Facebook or twittering to substitute for quality relationships, give me a way to hide from face-to-face relationships, or interfere with the relationships I already have.

7. I do not engage in abusive electronically mediated communication by flaming, cyber bullying, cyber stalking.

8. I avoid computer argot and use appropriate and quality writing.

9. I use communication, such as blogs and Facebook for positive purposes, such as knowledge sharing, communication, self-expression, learning, gaining self-awareness, self-marketing, campaigning for social reform, community building, experience tracking, and storytelling.

10. I am careful about the information and opinions I reveal online, and recognize that I cannot retrieve that information.

11. Where appropriate, I use online security measures, including encrypted e-mails and digital credentials.

12. I respond promptly to important e-mails and keep the content of my e-mails brief, appropriate.

13. I am aware that there is no such thing as a private e-mail conversation.

14. I am aware that software is available that can enable an employer, service provider, or a disgruntled colleague, or the legal system to use my electronically mediated communication against me.

15. I don’t say anything on the Internet that I would be ashamed for my family, boss, or best friend to read.

Scoring: A total of 45 suggests that you have basic competencies in your computer mediated communication. Even a score over 60, however, suggests you may need to improve in some areas.

I-Can Plan!

Revisit test items in the Competencies Check-Up with a score of less than 5 and create a plan for strengthening your communication skills. Pay particular attention to any items with a score of less than 3 because these areas may need considerable skill improvement. Only you can motivate yourself to become a more effective communicator in group contexts. Motivate yourself to develop and implement a concrete plan. In addition, pledge not to text while driving.

Activities

1. Develop a list of rules for yourself to ensure appropriate self-disclosure online. You can think of the nature of self-disclosure in face-to-face contexts and the unwritten rules in that context, and use the same good judgment online.
2. Here are some topics and questions that you might want to probe. Your instructor will tell you the format for processing your inquiry.
   a. Is it better to convey bad news via the computer rather than on the telephone or face-to-face?
   b. How can one convey nonverbals on the Internet?
   c. What are at least ten guidelines regarding writing style on the Internet?
   d. How does computer-mediated interpersonal communication vary in the workplace from two-way direct communication?
   e. What is the role of computer-mediated interpersonal communication for the college student?
   f. What is the effect of psychological distancing on interpersonal communication?
   g. What are some personal guidelines, beyond those discussed in the text, regarding cyber addiction?
   h. What is an Internet relay chat?
   i. Define and explain the virtual community.
   j. What is the role of information overload on the Internet?
   k. Compare and contrast electronic and traditional mail.
   l. What is computer phobia?
   m. What are techno prisoners?