



## Conceptual Research and Reflection Project

### Concept #1: Asynchronicity

Asynchronous electronic communication is not the opposite of real-time, synchronous communication: rather it describes forms of communication that appear differently 'located in time' depending on the perspective of the sender and receiver. (Allen, n.d)

Awareness of time of both sending and receiving is imperative for successful asynchronous communication. Our messages and interpretations must bear in mind that the tense of the content has probably changed between composing and reading. Additionally, I would suggest that an understanding of the time pressures and management skills between communicators is of higher importance.

"Having each operation started only after the preceding operation is completed." (Dictionary.com Unabridged, n.d.) When we understand all of the steps involved in email processing, we begin to see how much time difference can develop between a sender and receiver.

The expectation that a conversation can be conducted through email in similar fashion to an oral conversation. This seems rather arrogant for it ignores several important understandings. First, the fact that email, like letters and faxes, go all around the world, means our recipients can be in different time zones. Making bold assumptions of our reader, we could suppose our message will be read within the next business day. Second and more importantly, a reader can spend time analysing the message, comparing it with other messages, and carefully compose a response. My oral conversations frequently have the grammar of a dog's breakfast. Third, we might foolishly be in a rush, but forget that our dialogue is with another person who has a different schedule, priorities, etcetera. Because email transmits instantaneously, is no reason to expect asynchronous communications will be like oral conversations.

Friedman employed the metaphor of a stream to describe the continuous flow of messages into one's inbox. (Friedman, 2007) He goes on to give different perspectives on managing the stream. Gazing upon from a distance could be just glossing over the sender names and subjects. Going for a swim could be actively reading and responding to several emails in a dedicated session. Finally he describes the overwhelmed people who feel they must respond to every message as they haven't learned that you don't need to cognitively process everything said or written. Essentially they haven't learned the difference between synchronous and asynchronous communication.

The education sector on the other hand, is learning this difference and taking on a swing towards learner centred asynchronous instruction and communication. It has been recognised that teaching in the traditional classroom is not synchronised with learning. (Facemyer, 1997) Fortunately Facemyer had a logical approach to distributed learning, leveraging the advantages of asynchronous internet communications. His aim was to decrease the dependence of instruction on time consuming lecture based scenarios. Some examples of asynchronous techniques included :

- video taped presentations to replace lectures, and Internet based multimedia presentations, thus allowing the number of students viewing presentations to multiply, to learn at their pace, and at their personally optimum times
- replace cumbersome administrative elements of class time (passing out papers, handling attendance, addressing questions personally, . . .) with Internet based document distribution and asynchronous bulletin board question-and-answer forums
- replace limited laboratory experiences with Internet based interactive multimedia environments capturing the elements of these learning scenarios with the added convenience of Internet portability, and easy results collation

In hindsight it appears Facemyer has recognised the precursor to institutions who will embrace the shift toward asynchronous learning networks, such as Open Universities

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(534 words)

**Site 1:** Asynchronicity | <http://keywords.oxus.net/archives/2007/04/01/asynchronicity/>

Taiwan based Professor Kerim Friedman is the author of this brief but punchy blog post. He is an assistant professor of indigenous studies at National Dong Hwa University in Hualian, Taiwan. His dissertation titled *"Learning 'Local' Languages: Passive revolution, language markets, and Aborigine education in Taiwan"* explored issues including educational reform. He has also written conference papers on technology, language, culture and education topics and has written several publications on anthropology including *"Welcome to the Blogosphere"*. Although this post concentrates on his recent installation of the Twitter application, there are several intelligent insights into commonly held perspectives on asynchronous communication.

(100 words)

**Site 2:** Asynchronicity : Distributed Learning Communities |

<http://www.wsu.edu/vwsu/direction/DirectPapers/Asynchronicity.html>

This older yet highly relevant paper describes the need for universities to foster a shift from traditional teaching-centric education to more asynchronous learner centred formats. It was written in 1997 by Kevin C. Facemyer, Ph.D., the director of Virtual Washington State University. He has referenced several works of teaching and learning strategies and the changes that can be brought about through digital technologies. The background information is an important primer before his important examples of asynchronous instruction techniques, all under the heading of desynchronisation. The short list of examples shows a very logical approach to distributed learning leveraging the advantages of asynchronous internet communications.

(104 words)

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## Concept #7: Netiquette

Good communication practice on the Internet is not something one 'learns', but something one 'practices' so as to teach others, less familiar than yourself, how it is done. (Allen, n.d)

With the rapid rate of development in communications technology, we are all likely to be a "newbie" on numerous occasions throughout our lives in cyberspace. Avoiding social blunder is just one reason why we need ethical guidelines of etiquette in a foreign culture. In educating each other, one important aspect of network etiquette, or netiquette, is to avoid over-complication. With patience and keeping up best practices, we all increase our netiquette one step at a time.

Some may ask why bother to make an effort in netiquette. Dealing with other cultures is something we are all likely to do at some time. (Flower, 2003) Need for netiquette is based on an anarchical structure of the internet. Whilst no-one is really the boss of communications on the internet, it is the cooperative principles of netiquette that maintains order. As a result, all users of online communication systems, from fundamental email to discussion boards and chat, are responsible for good conduct toward one another.

Failure to observe and actively practise netiquette can have disastrous effects for online communicators. Much like offending locals whilst travelling abroad on a holiday, we don't mean to do so. Naïve travellers blame culture shock. A small effort to show common courtesy and follow a few informal conventions will help us to create friendships rather than enemies. It is somewhat wise and most helpful to minimise our mistakes and help others do the same, while we communicate with more foreign cultures in an online space.

Good online communication ethics initially stem from their traditional off-line counterparts and predecessors, such as letters and faxes. Using all capital letters has always been perceived as shouting or screaming tone. (Hughes, 2007) However several inherent technological differences give rise to new questions of etiquette. Most people aren't using hand-writing to compose messages, typing is a required skill. Awareness of computer spell checkers has raised the bar of acceptable errors.

Email sorting and management filters may be setup with criteria on the sender's address, subject line, even message body keywords. Suddenly we realise that it becomes important to at least write a meaningful subject. Email takes only a few seconds to reach anyone around the world. So how quickly should one respond? Should I quote the original message in my reply? Should I start my reply above or below the quote? All valid questions for our cyberspace behaviour.

Attachments are a clever feature of email messages. Despite this, they often cause more headaches than their weight. In Australia we pay for our internet connection by both speed and download volume, just like the posting of parcels - but in reverse. This backward costing seems bizarre to say the least, but quickly teaches us to be mindful of minimizing size of attachments.

Virus carrying attachments have been discussed in the media and cost organisations and individuals too much downtime to be ignored. We all have anti-virus software installed and scanning incoming and outgoing mail. I always ask others to think of anti-virus as doing the job that customs officials have at the airport.

A final defining factor, we users are human and as such it is in our nature to make mistakes.

Cyberspace may appear as characters onscreen, but it's easy to forget that behind the charade are real live people. (Shea, 1994) When you have questions, check the discussion forums. After finding answers that others may benefit from, share your knowledge as "it makes the world a better place." (Shea, 1994)

(578 words)

**Site 1:** The Core Rules of Netiquette | <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>  
The Core Rules of Netiquette are excerpted from the book *Netiquette* by Virginia Shea.

Dubbed the "network manners guru" by the San Jose Mercury News, Virginia Shea has been a student of human nature all her life. She attended Princeton University and has worked in Silicon Valley since the mid-1980s. (Albion Books, 1996)

As there is no strict agreement of rules for netiquette, the information presented is aptly general and makes no attempt to answer all questions. Comprehensive resources would defeat the ideals of ease of learning, teaching and practising good cyberspace behaviour. This extract resource goes a long way toward achieving it's premise that most people want to make friends, by utilising everyday language and relating to audiences with easy to understand metaphors and explanations. I found this to be an excellent and concise resource with a broad audience in mind.

(103 words)

**Site 2:** Email Etiquette - The OWL at Purdue | <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/636/01/>

This article was written by Stephanie Williams Hughes and published on The OWL at Purdue website. The resource was last edited by Dana Lynn Driscoll on the 18th of July, 2007. I have only been able to locate one other resource by the same author, but in an unrelated field.

Although instant and text/SMS messaging is beginning to supplant email for some groups' primary means of Internet communication, effective and appropriate email etiquette is still important. This resource will help you to become an effective writer and reader/manager of email.

Although many of the ethical dos and don'ts are pointed out for email and discussion groups, the resource does little more than list them. In the way of practice exercises, teaching others, perhaps even learning these principles yourself, I found this to be a rather poor quality and sketchy article. The principles all make sense and I suppose it would be good if you just wanted a quick check list.

(120 words)

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## Concept #10: Automation

Advanced effective internet communicators do not ignore automation, nor use it unthinkingly: they essentially negotiate arrangements with their communications software and review them as necessary. (Allen, n.d)

Reasons to automate email management may be obvious, nevertheless it isn't necessarily easy. Where and how should I make filters? Both care to set up and attention to regularly review our automation processes, are vital. For failure to reassess our automation processes, we may stumble into the possibility of automating too much! Why are many businesses failing to achieve successful email response management? All these are important issues for effective dealing with the ubiquitous modern communication medium.

Thunderbird 2 features many new enhancements to help you better manage your unruly inbox, and stay informed. Thunderbird 2 scales to the most sophisticated organizational needs while making it easy to find what you need. (Mozilla Foundation, 2008)

The widespread proliferation of email accounts is just the beginning of challenges facing current email management. I have a Gmail, a Hotmail, a work, and a personal email account. Fortunately email client applications can handle as many email accounts as any given personal computer users might have.

Most email software has some form of junk mail filtering which jointly requires training and some base rules for determining what is and isn't spam. While trusting a provider's spam filters, such as SpamAssassin, will get you started, most users will need to spend some time adding particular messages to the blacklist.

Next we hit the array of personal semantic arrangements for messages to be dealt with either immediately, or at some later time. This is where saved searches and filtering enter the field. When one needs to locate messages with the same subject or message content repeatedly, a saved search will quickly handle your request. (Mozilla Foundation, 2008) A standard configuration for filtering rules is to move messages to purposed folders.

The ultimate goal of effective email management is to minimise the time we require for it. Mann describes the configuring of good filters as beneficial in two outcomes: reducing our manual processing and cutting down on unnecessary interruptions. (Mann, 2006)

Advanced email users will have already set up sender and subject filters. However, too many filters can result in timely updates and useful messages ending up scattered all over the place. Mann reminds us, "The idea of a filter is not to hide information that you really need, but to ensure that you aren't being interrupted constantly for what amounts to low-level noise." (Mann, 2006)

Depending on what you consider noise, this could probably include: (Mann, 2006)

- blog and LiveJournal comments
- "friend" requests and similar announcements from community sites like My Space or Flickr
- mailing lists and subscribed forum threads
- regular updates like newsletters and office memos
- non-spam store updates, coupons, and sale announcements

Smart filtering is not a fire and forget job. In contrast, it is an ongoing process that we must attend to with regularity in order for our email to remain valuable. So why is it that businesses are prepared to invest in automation softwares that match customer queries to answers from a pre-filled database? (Shorewalker, 2004)

Alas, the problem facing technology managers, who are failing to cost effectively manage email, is three-fold. First, the analysis of email automation solutions is simply hard to do. Second, "culture is now saturated with the artificial intelligence dream - the dream that computers can think like people." (Shorewalker, 2004) Third, email automation software shifts the work, from customer service to database maintenance.

Not only in organising and reading of email, but also in writing email, we should automate our compositions by setting up message templates. This tends to blur our perception of the asynchronous nature of email. Nevertheless it does contribute to your time saving competence.

Effective internet communicators habitually pay attention to their automation processes in order to correspond in a halcyon environment.

(531 words)

**Site 1:** Automation woes widen the email expectations gap | [http://www.shorewalker.com/section7/email\\_expectations.html](http://www.shorewalker.com/section7/email_expectations.html)

This blog post, written by David Shorewalker, was first filed on Tuesday, April 24, 2001 and last modified on Friday, March 05, 2004. Most posts on the Shorewalker.com website started as articles for his fortnightly technology column in Australian newspapers *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. His article uses research to criticise the handling of business email automation systems. According to Shorewalker, most of the software packages aren't effective and technology managers (in business) are blinded by their youth of artificial intelligence dreams. The author mentions the increasing "email expectations gap" whereby organisations are failing to deliver on promises of speedy and effective email responses. The significance of business email automation is important not only for success of businesses themselves, but also because their technology practices often spread to personal usage solutions.

(133 words)

**Site 2:** Inbox Zero: Where filters will and won't help | <http://www.43folders.com/2006/03/13/filters>

On the 13th of March, 2006, Merlin Mann filed this post, part of the *Inbox Zero* series on the *43 Folders* website. *New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, and *The Wall Street Journal* are some of the publications which have featured stories on the *43 Folders* website. Merlin Mann is an independent writer for periodicals such as *WIRED* and *Popular Science*; a public speaker giving productivity talks at Apple, Google, Yahoo!, Adobe, Xerox PARC, and other organisations; and a broadcaster of music and technology vodcasts and podcasts. The post is aimed at personal email users who are tripping themselves in their own filter defining and review methods. Mann also reminds us of our goal of efficiency in managing our email.

(122 words)

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## Concept #17: The impact of text-based real-time chat

Communicating in real-time with text enables a form of 'authoring of the self' that is similar to the processes of face-to-face speech but which is much more amenable to authorial control, experimentation and reflection. Further, text-based communication carries with it the possibility for multiple, differing conversations occurring simultaneously, relying on the ability of the human brain to deal with text much better than speech. (Allen, n.d)

Unlike face-to-face speech communication, real-time text-based chat communications lack

strong contextual clues such as intonation, volume, the surrounding environments – in both geographic and time space – and possibly sense of identities. Real time text chat communications can elude us from details of a person's age, gender, ethnicity, linguistic accents, location and relative time zone, even our very appearance.

In the Chinese QQ chat program users are primarily identified by numbers. Many chat programs, such as Skype, provide a picture representation facility. This can be misleading or confusing as when I contacted a fellow classmate who has a profile photo of a loving male and female couple. After a few text chats, I'd assumed it was the female. At one meeting we decided to use voice. I was stunned to hear a man!

Without an established identity, we are in fact free of much prejudice. This anonymous freedom can give us a confidence to express ourselves in ways that face-to-face speech simply can't. Therefore it is no great wonder that real-time text chat is popular with users who may be concerned about losing face.

The lack of weather data in Iraq complicated forecasting efforts... Chat has proven a vital tool for coordinating weather forecasts... The collaboration enabled by chat enabled them [US military weather services] to develop one general forecast for the entire theater. (Eovito, 2006)

They found chat use provided a more constant and reliable flow of information than other available methods (i.e. phone, email). With chat they were able to provide the best-tailored weather products to units because chat provided access to most units, enabling efficient, multi-person discussions that affected large groups of people. The time sensitivity of some weather products was met with chat, which proved the fastest and most reliable method for their dissemination. (Eovito, 2006)

There are a number of reasons why the human brain is far more able to deal with text than speech. In my own English class, students wrote a few lines from *Romeo and Juliet* to practice in role play. When it was time for action, each trio spoke the same lines. In English at least, the way we say everything is rarely identical upon repeat iterations. Whether a slight shift in intonation, stress, volume, interference noises, or any other factors; the sounds of spontaneous speech are quite the opposite of replaying a studio recording. Yet the written word itself is a recording and when rendered legibly, should be identical when copied. Hence text is easier than speech.

When we are presented with the option of reading a piece of text or hearing it, the written text can be read at the audience's pace, independent of the author. Listening relies on a synchronised listening (and processing) together with the rate of speech, which is often out of our control. We find that "listening requires a great deal more working memory—what used to be called short-term memory—in order to do the semantic processing necessary for understanding." (Powers, 2008) This lack of control and significant extra effort required for audio messages are just some of the factors leading to our reading preference over listening.

Another crucial factor is our ability to listen to only one voice at a time. Utilising the lag time between multiple recipients' responses on real-time text chat can be re-reading what was written earlier – a challenging task to replay real-time voice chat. Other lag time fillers include composing to another user, editing, or even using other programs.

US Central Air Forces Command "found chat use provided a more constant and reliable flow of information than other available methods (i.e. phone, email). With chat they were able to provide the best-tailored weather products to units because chat provided access to most units, enabling efficient, multi-person discussions that affected large groups of people. The time sensitivity of some weather products was met with chat, which proved the fastest and most reliable method for their dissemination." (Eovito, 2006)

Among the top reasons why the military chose to use chat were: (Eovito, 2006)

- speed - of information transfer in real time
- ease - all users in the room can read the chat thread
- efficiency - users can monitor chat while working with other tools

These reasons could be equally applied to civilian users. When speaking on the phone we often are sitting comfortable, perhaps with pen and paper to record notes, but otherwise attentive. We need to focus on the task of listening. I would imagine that most chat users are simultaneously performing some other visual or text tasks whilst text chatting.

(568 words)

**Site 1:** Reading, listening and memory |

<http://readwritenow.wordpress.com/2008/02/19/reading-listening-and-memory/>

The author of this blog is a professor from the USA who has written his own book and co-authored journals in culture, literature and memory topics. This well-researched, in-depth post both avoids verbose technical jargon, and rather well covers the subject of enormous brain workload in aural processing compared with literary. The post goes on to suggest that our short term memory is not getting due exercise through listening. Instead we are (over) exercising our long term memory with an emphasis on reading and becoming absent-minded as a result. I find it incredibly interesting how effortless it is to be literate compared to

aurally competent. This definitely would give cause to a natural preference for text based chat over aural.

(120 words)

**Site 2:** The Impact of Synchronous Text-Based Chat on Military Command and Control |

<http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA463372>

This well organised report was written in June 2006 by Captain Bryan A. Eovito of the US Marine Corps, who studied at the Naval Postgraduate School. His research includes a few appendixes clearly indicating sources, an extensive list of works cited, and one entry of a work referenced but not cited. Eovito succinctly details several use cases for chat, however some applications cannot be easily realised outside their militaristic purposes. Then again, the gaming world is teaming with online multiplayer military and strategy games utilising text-based chat in the same scenarios. Whilst some use cases were quite interesting reading, particularly the collaborative achievements of weather forecasting in the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan, the largest useful part was on pages 13 – 17, the assessment of chat usage over other voice communication methods.

(132 words)

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## Post meta

Posted by Vernon Fowler,

on Friday, August 15th, 2008 5:39 pm,

in Education, Technology

with tags communication • email • NET11

## 2 Responses



*Conceptual Research and Reflection Project* : August 15th, 2008 at 5:57 pm

*blog lowerautoinsurance* said:

[...] Original post by Vernon Fowler [...]



*Sue Massey* said: August 15th, 2008 at 6:01 pm

I found your site on technorati and read a few of your other posts. Keep up the good work. I just added your RSS feed to my Google News Reader. Looking forward to reading more from you down the road!

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