

iLab Manual

Future-proof your classroom – teaching skills 2030

Module 6

Writing skills for the web

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Future-proof your classroom – teaching skills 2030

Welcome to the course Teaching2030!

Technology rapidly changes the way we think, live, learn and lead. Education plays an essential role in this transformation process. Teachers and trainers have to be prepared for new challenges and learning environments in order to guide future generations the best way possible. Based on these considerations, the blended-learning course “Future-proof your classroom – teaching skills 2030”, Teaching2030 for short, addresses teachers, tutors and trainers in higher education institutions providing them with instructional competencies and skills over eight modules. The course comprises a web-based training course (cBook) and an on-site learning space (iLab) and can be accessed without limitations and is free of charge. It is funded by the Erasmus+ Austrian National Agency under Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships.

Lucia and Marko will guide you through the cBook and iLab

The didactical concept of the entire blended-learning course follows the principles of **storytelling**. Storytelling is quite common in company training but has so far not been commonly used in educational courses. It is, however, an essential part of Teaching2030. Throughout the modules, Lucia and Marko, two teachers at a higher education institution, will accompany you through your learning experiences, helping you deal with the new trends and difficulties you might experience in your future teaching. They share stories about their recent successes with their students and their reservations about giving new approaches a try, they provide each other with teaching advice and support, and, last but not least, they help future educators manage the challenges they may face. They are both a constant presence in the cBook and in the iLab, which are closely interlinked.

The **cBook (computerBook)** is a web-based training environment that houses the eight modules of the course, each of which comprises five chapters organised around key topics. The cBook offers you a diverse range of learning material, like information (texts, hot spots, didactic sequences), interactive exercises (drag and drop, multiple choice, memory, surveys, word clouds), reflection tasks, videos and additional materials and links. Each cBook module contains five major tasks entitled “iLab”, indicating that these tasks are better suited for use within the iLab. In addition, the cBook provides reflection tasks, called “iThink”, for discussion in the iLab. Nevertheless, you can also work with the cBook as a stand-alone MOOC.

The **iLab (innovationLab)**, as part of the blended-learning course, is an on-site, open, self-directed learning space, estimated to require two days per module. It can be organized as a training environment under the supervision of a Teaching2030-developer, or without supervision, as a self-directed learning environment for teachers who would like to widen and strengthen their teaching approaches and skills. The iLab is designed to be used flexibly, as it provides additional exercises, tools, materials and links, but it is recommended that the cBook be completed first in order to build a solid basis for the iLab. Each iLab module offers a guide explaining the didactical approach of the entire course and a glossary containing the central items and terms used by the development team.

Give Teaching2030 a try and have fun!

Your development team:

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1. Understanding online text types

The art of writing has changed dramatically with the advent of digital media. While words have not disappeared, they have been transferred from what used to be the most common medium – the book – to the screen, with the written word having turned into an “electronic word” (Lanham 2010). While we still use the written word in print, we now prefer electronic formats such as Word or email to the traditional printed text. Most printed texts are also available in digital format, co-existing with or even replacing their traditional print counterparts.

This shift from page to multimodal screen has significantly changed the status and role of the written word in our culture. While the written word used to enjoy absolute authority and power, it has become much diminished in its power and influence and written texts have lost their status as monuments that cannot be changed. As Sven Birkerts, an American critic who is highly critical of this paradigm shift, points out “the same word, when it appears on the screen, must be received with a sense of its **weightlessness** – the weightlessness of its presentation. The same sign, but not the same” (1994: 155). What Birkerts calls weightlessness, others perceive as “**variability**” (Manovich 2001: 44) and “**flexibility**” (Bolter 2001: 4). Unlike the printed word, the electronic word is not defined by a sense of permanence; it is volatile, unfixed and subject to change as it can be deleted and transferred from one site to another with just one click.

The dynamic nature of the electronic word has also had a significant impact on the role of the author and their relationship with the reader. As Richard Lanham notes, readers are now able to change texts and assume the role of writers, thus being able to participate actively in the process of **generating content** (please refer to Module 5, Chapter 4). As a result, the “fixed, authoritative canonical text simply explodes into the ether” (2001: 31), resulting in the emergence of new text types and genres. The aim of the first Chapter of this Module is to provide an overview of these new texts and to discuss their role in the learning and teaching processes, shedding light on their key features and textual conventions.

1.1. Digital culture as participatory culture

Writing for the web is different from writing for traditional print in that the former is strongly shaped by today’s **participatory digital culture**. Media scholar Henry Jenkins defines participatory culture as “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal

mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices” (2009: xi). In other words, participatory culture integrates users, fans and consumers in the creation of the culture and content. Users are thus no longer regarded as passive recipients of content; in the model of participatory culture, they take an active interest in its dissemination and creation. While forms of participatory culture have already existed prior to the advent of the internet, technological advances have made it remarkably easy for users to produce and distribute their own content, removing barriers like time, money and “top-down” interventions.

Extensive knowledge of programming is thus not necessary to create content. Similarly, in the past, potential authors usually had to rely on a publisher for their work to see the light of day. In the “late age of print”, to borrow Jay David Bolter’s term (2001: 3), anyone can publish anything whenever they want, and anyone can read it. This means that audiences are now increasingly **becoming both producers and consumers of media**, undermining the traditional distinction between author and reader. As Vincent Miller argues in *Understanding Digital Culture*, “with the advent of convergent new media and the plethora of choice in sources for information, as well as the increased capacity for individuals to produce content themselves, this shift away from producer hegemony to audience or consumer power would seem to have accelerated, thus eroding the producer-consumer distinction” (2011: 87).

In this context, media scholar Alex Bruns speaks of “**produsage**” in order to describe the shift from organizations and professionals as producers to the collaborative engagement of online users in shared projects. The term “produsage” is a further development of the “produser” coined by Alvin Toffler, who uses the term to refer to a person combining the roles of producer and consumer. Bruns provides the example of the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, which is created and edited collaboratively by web users.

1.2. Interactive and monoactive online texts

What all these models and approaches have in common is that they emphasize the active role of the user in the process of generating content. Users are thus no longer regarded as passive recipients of text generated by others but active producers collaborating with each other. While the first stage of the World Wide Web, usually referred to as Web 1.0., was all about content presentation and preservation, it was not until the advent of Web 2.0 that online participation started to take shape in the way we know it. The term “Web 2.0” surfaced in the early years of the new millennium, referring to a new evolutionary phase of the internet. This phase would see the development of interactive internet-based communication and collaboration tools allowing users to interact and share data with each other, including blogs, videos, podcasts, wikis and forums. As Hiller Spires and Melissa Bartlett (2012)

summarised, “Web 2.0 tools are social, participatory, collaborative, easy to use, and are facilitative in creating online communities”. Web 2.0 thus meant a shift towards greater user participation and user-generated content, which resulted in the emergence of new genres and communicative practices that were highly interactive and hybrid in nature.

These new textual genres co-exist with texts that are characterised by a much lower degree of interactivity and mutual exchange. While new text types have emerged, older ones have changed and been adapted to the web, co-existing with their print counterparts. This means it has become increasingly difficult to apply traditional genre conventions and standards to digital texts. We therefore had to find a new approach of how to categorize web texts for the purpose of the Teaching2030 project.

Taking the notion of participatory culture as a point of departure, we addressed this issue by distinguishing **interactive texts** that demand greater user participation from **monoactive texts** that do not invite interaction.

- **Interactive texts** are texts that encourage conscious and active involvement on the part of the user, with the latter being both the producer and the consumer of a text. Interactive texts are therefore highly subjective in nature, reflecting users’ personal opinions. Examples of interactive texts would be podcasts, blogs, forum entries and social media posts.
- **Monoactive texts**, on the other hand, are texts that require less active engagement on the part of the user. This means they are often more objective and factual than interactive texts. Examples of such texts include reports, papers and electronic newsletters.

While this distinction is not clear-cut and certainly not free from ambiguity, it is helpful in the context of this project as it allows us to draw general conclusions and make recommendations for how to use these text types in an educational context.

1.3. Teaching digital writing skills

Without doubt, interactive texts such as tweets or forum entries play a great role in today’s youth culture. Young people spend a considerable amount of time “prosuming” digital texts outside of the classroom, composing writing in a variety of formats such as social media posts, instant messages and forum entries. Interestingly, as a recent survey showed, while most young people agree on the importance of “good writing” as being a significant skill for achieving success, they do not regard these forms of e-communication as writing (Lenhart *et al.* 2008). In addition, for most teenagers, there is a distinctive difference between the writing

they do outside of the classroom and the writing they do in the classroom. This means that while today's generation may be **digital natives**, only a few are competent writers possessing the skills to generate and produce efficient online content.



These findings hardly come as a surprise since writing is generally perceived as one of the most difficult academic skills for students to master. As Walters points out, “Writing is the last and perhaps most difficult skill students learn - if they ever do” (1983: 17). For a text to be effective, students need to understand its structure and features, as well as its function and style. While

writing for the web still has a lot in common with “traditional writing”, the former has been strongly shaped by the technological developments of the digital age and thus requires more than traditional literacy. What is more, while digital writing is often deeply collaborative and interactive, students also need to know how to produce texts that are designed for immersive reading such as reports and research papers. This means that students need to be taught various forms of writing, which all require different sets of skills and competences. Knowing how to use monoactive and interactive texts effectively will thus help students enhance their writing skills, which is a major determining factor for success in their professional lives.

Exercise

Since students come across a wide variety of texts in the internet, they need to be aware of their functions and key features. Ask your students to analyse various online texts and to determine their key features and conventions.

Activity: The style of online newspapers

- ✓ Go to an online newspaper of your choice and analyse all the text types you can encounter on the website. Try to find at least two monoactive texts and two interactive ones and identify all the features typical of these texts.
- ✓ Now visit two more online newspapers (similar in quality and target readership) and do the same task again. This time, however, rank the text types according to their frequency of occurrence: Which text types occur most often and why do you think this is the case?

- ✓ Choose a monoactive text and change it into an interactive one. What would you need to change to involve the readers? How can you make the style sound more personal and subjective?

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2. Raising students' awareness for web writing

Education in 2030 will undergo huge changes with generation Z in the classroom. The “real digital natives” will influence economic structures as well as the educational system due to their online behaviour and increased use of technology. Teachers at the tertiary level have to be prepared for this generation, especially when integrating online media in their instruction. They have to be aware of the main differences between web writing and paper writing when it comes to blogs, wikis, e-portfolios and threaded discussions in online forums. As every single person constitutes a public digital identity in online writing, teachers have to know the ropes to take responsibility for their own online performance and those of their students by developing **digital scholarship** (Weller, 2011).

2.1. Characteristics of web writing

Web texts are structured differently to paper-based texts as described in the cBook. They provide characteristics such as linking and embedding functions, the creation of filter bubbles, reinforcing our own worldviews, and the possibility of lowered inhibition thresholds when different information intrudes on our “bubble”. Moreover, emotions prevail as algorithms rank emotional comments higher than fact-based ones (Milborn, 2018, Brodnig, 2018). Teachers must be aware of these processes as they represent role models when working with social media. Everyday language has been intruded on by expressions that even opponents cannot deny if we think of “like, share, pin, post” – active verbs which demand **participation on the web**.

Through this participation, students, teachers and citizens are given the possibility to develop their opinion according to this public discourse, and the web in the very beginning had the democratic potential for this public exchange. However, it turned out that the web also fosters and supports extreme and emotional positions within the filter bubbles. Instead of offering a wide range of ideas and distributing knowledge in a responsible manner, algorithms value profit-oriented emotional and one-sided information. This seems to be contradictory to the idea of the web as democratic media. A democratic process relies on reasoning and arguing and not on emotional and one-sided argumentation.

Higher education institutions have to keep **democratic processes** alive. This spirit is closely linked to the way the academic community expresses its opinions and which language style is adopted. Concerning the writing skills for the web, teachers should therefore be able to distinguish the main differences between web writing and paper writing. The web style of writing, e.g. in blogs, wikis or e-portfolios is much shorter, incorporating graphs and pictures for a quick perception of all the information; the text is sequenced into paragraphs to attract the reader and provide orientation; interactive links are embedded (hypertext style); rhetoric is enriched by stories and personal statements. Argumentation style can be improved through twitter by narrowing a topic down to 75 characters. Messages and statements have to be short and concise not wasting the time of the reader. This style has to be trained and taught to students.

Taking the characteristics of online writing and the possible consequences into account, it is of the utmost importance to create **respectful communication** and a safe learning environment for teachers and students. An appropriate professional approach with fact-based information and clear guidelines for communication and writing for the web is inevitable. The web is a new technology that requires a special **netiquette for online media**. It is essential because no “model for tolerance” (Simansowski, 2016, p. 18) exists so far within this new technology. However, which principles should teachers rely upon? Elisabeth Rock (no year, online 1) suggests four strategies to stay professional on social media:

1. **“Guard your reputation.** It’s important to reiterate this vital point! It may be beneficial to have separate accounts for personal and professional use. Use the many platforms that are available and decide on which ones you have an easier time maintaining a professional tone.
2. **Watch your language.** Take the time to double-check spelling and use proper grammar to build credibility. It pays to edit comments and posts before clicking the share button.
3. **Monitor your privacy.** Learn about privacy settings and set them accordingly. Un-tag yourself from others’ posts if you notice something inappropriate.
4. **Keep work comments positive.** Regardless of the platform you frequent, negative comments about work are simply inappropriate and can harm your professional reputation.”

Managing the online space for democratic processes will be one of the biggest challenges for universities in the 21st century. It is the task of teachers to make sure students know how to produce high-quality and engaging content and how to behave properly on the web.

2.2. Social networking and User Generated Content (UGC)

A huge part of professional reading and writing processes in the future will definitely shift from paper to web, which means **greater collaboration and user activity**, not only between students, but also between teachers and students. We need to rethink online communication and consider web rules, netiquette and the protection of privacy. This includes a critical approach towards information, interpretation and commenting on the web, especially within the increasing fake news debate.

Writing for the web covers mainly two areas of literacy, **digital literacy** with its core aspect of ethical norms and standards, and **information literacy**, meaning “the ability to search, locate, assess and critically evaluate information found on the web and on-shelf in libraries” (online 2). Writing skills are the centre of this consideration as they form the basis for information transfer.

The cBook presents two categories of social media, **interactive and monoactive online text types**. Interactive online texts play an essential role within social networking for personal exchange, monoactive text types provide UGC. Understanding this difference is essential and helps in structuring the teaching process when using social media in class.

Interactive online texts for networking	Monoactive online texts with UGC
Blog: interactive, topic-based, subjective	Website: monoactive, topic-based, objective
Forum: interactive, personal, subjective	E-portfolio: monoactive, personal, objective
Tweet: interactive, personal, subjective	Wiki: monoactive, topic-based, objective
Facebook: interactive, personal, subjective	Newsletter: monoactive, topic-based, objective

Upcoming student generations are more influenced by social media and visual communication than previous generations, sharing and exchanging information in blogs, on YouTube, Google and various networking platforms. They are not that willing to accept information from the “sage on the stage” anymore, as predicted by Alison King in 1993 (online 3) when the web became a presence in households as well as business contexts.

Within teaching, it is the **community of learners** which constitutes the web through the content it creates. It is an active process where teachers have to consider the information the community gives, the shares, likes and comments. Several **Codes of Conduct** have therefore been developed, suggesting ethical norms for the web, such as truth of an

information (fairness, balanced opinions, completeness), accountability (taking responsibility for the results), minimizing harm towards third parties and correct attribution of copyright/intellectual property. (online 4)

Contrary to these positive aspects of online participation and netiquette **filter bubbles and fake news** are a constant matter of discussion; moreover, algorithms prefer emotional comments: Angry and aggressive blog or Facebook posts are more likely to be shared than fact-based information. Consequently, emotions prevail and foster “uncivilized behaviour” and an aggressive language style. The better writing and reading competencies are developed, the easier it is to follow web rules and ethical norms within the web, as critical thinking will increase. Students have to be aware of the fact that writing in the web means writing in public, so they have to take responsibility for the given information. They have to differentiate between information, interpretation and personal comments, both in their own writing as well as in the writing of others within social networking and UGC.

2.3. Implications for teaching on the web

Within the role shift of teachers from traditional broadcasters of knowledge to moderators and coaches, social media foster equal communication between students and teachers where hierarchy is dismissed in favour of exchange and networking. Social media represent new learning spaces – assuming that we use them for the right purposes and do not overestimate their use in teaching.

Teachers as **social media networkers** have to open the following spaces: They have to connect people as social media foster relationships and group work regardless of time and space. They enhance intercultural work throughout the globe and enable the active inclusion of students with reduced mobility. They may support proper blended-learning courses and engage part-time students in a more active way; “Social networks enrich traditional learning environments as they offer a wide range of possibilities for structuring the learning process and connecting students and teachers all over the world.” (online 5). Moreover, social media establish **Communities of Practice (CoPs)** inside and outside class, connecting formal and informal learning.

CoPs are self-organized working teams that build up knowledge on a specific topic that brings students together. A moderator is still required but this role can also be taken on by a student. CoPs are an ideal space for engaging with and sharing topics that are of common interest and for making use of technological resources worldwide. CoPs can easily be linked

with companies, students and employees working together on a specific topic or problem. Due to their flexible time/space dimension, they can bridge the gap between university and business environments by creating a common learning space. Natascha Miljkovic asks the following questions (2019, p. 189) when implementing social media:

- For which reason do I want to apply online media in my teaching?
- Which communication channels will I use for which contents?
- How can I implement social media and online platforms in my teaching?

Story

Lucia: Recently I had a very interesting discussion with my international students on Greta Thunberg and the importance of Fridays for Future. Due to the activity “Open Your Course 4 Climate Crisis” (<https://fridaysforfuture.at/oc4cc>) we moved on by writing short statements arguing the personal opinions. The students were so engaged that we



decided to take pictures of the entire group and to post the statements on the university's Facebook page to raise awareness for the topic in teaching. Students experienced how to phrase short statements in a personal but fact-based manner for the web.

Exercise

Browse through the internet with the query “writing for the web” and search for recommendations on university websites. Most of them provide tips and instructions regarding writing style, netiquette and ethical behaviour. Compare the recommendations with the ones of your university and create a personal list with ten pieces of advice you find most important for you and your students.

Activity: Ask Your Students

- ✓ Ask your students to keep an online diary about their social media usage. They should then write a short report about their online habits and how they use the internet. This is a good way of making them aware of the dangers of filter bubbles.
- ✓ Students could also do some research on the online habits of their friends and peers: They first need to prepare a questionnaire (this could be done in class) before they collect data and analyse their findings. They could also write a short report on this.
- ✓ Ask students to analyse an interactive online text with regard to its emotional content: Ask them to underline all elements that help convey the author's emotions and subjective opinion. They should then rewrite the text, turning it into a more objective text.
- ✓ Do the same task with monoactive online texts: Ask your students to turn a monoactive text of their choice into an interactive one that clearly gives the author's opinion, written in a subjective, but emotionally controlled style.

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3. Promoting and presenting research to non-academics

With the emergence of the internet and social media students, academics and researchers are no longer limited to their institutional policies. What Derek J. de Solla Price characterised in his book of 1963 as the crossover from "little science" to "big science" - collaboration between international teams beyond the institutional framework – has now become the norm (online 1). The increased mobility of students and teachers and the intensive use of social media create communities pursuing objectives together. Science has become a "marketplace of ideas" and academic exchange means both cooperation and competition. Researchers must announce their knowledge and acknowledge that of others. Thus, it is essential that they enhance their **visibility on the web** by shaping their profile regarding their field of research as well as their personal presence.

3.1. Self-branding for researchers

Visibility on the web is essential for several reasons, like promotion and presentation of recent findings, networking with colleagues and self-branding, international project work, performance control and evaluation of scientific work. Whereas earlier it sufficed to publish high-quality work in great volume, these days, elements that traditionally belonged to the realm of economics have become more important, such as advertising, public relations work and branding. In this context the role of researchers has dramatically changed.

Self-branding has become a prerequisite not only for a scientific career but also for job promotion, when students use their Master's theses to move on within the company. In the academic world as well as outside, it is essential to **be recognized** as an expert in the respective field. Miljkovic (2019, p. 183) states that within self-branding a researcher should draw the attention to his/her expertise, to market the "products and services", to promote research results to non-academics and to represent the values alongside research. She suggests (1019, p. 183) the following questions for self-branding:

- How do I want to be perceived by other people?
- Which aspect of my personality do other people like best?
- What is my main "message" for other people?
- Which aspects of my research are interesting to a greater public?
- Which values do I account for and want to promote?

Within this, **networking** as a personal “give-and-take” is an important element of self-branding, whereupon the giving should predominate to foster the network. The building of a network is relatively easy but should be done regularly for generating personal presence. The manner in how a researcher designs and steers their presence on the internet and in other networks has become a subject under the heading **author profiling**. The number of **collaborative tools** that are used for the production and communication of knowledge and research are constantly increasing (compare the suggestions in chapter 3). Even if nobody can predict exactly which of these devices will become established, these innovations are similar in that they all generate presence and visibility.

In the past, the scope of scientific communication was limited to using traditional media. One dealt primarily with colleagues working on a similar topic, or in university circles and encountered peers at publications and conferences. Since then however, global communities have developed and especially when presenting research to non-academics it is inevitable to use these online forms of communication:

Old methods of generating presence	New methods of generating presence
Giving presentations at conferences	Using social media actively
Giving interviews on TV and radio	Writing a science blog
Being active as a reviewer	Using collaborative tools
Publishing books	Uploading videos on YouTube

Scientists do not only discuss issues, theories and methods after the publication, but also during their development. The bigger and more complex the networks are, the more important it is for individuals, groups and institutions to develop **distinct identities**. The narrower the cooperation and the more intensive the communication, the more important it is to have a specific profile in the community. This profile allows scientists to connect and be connected, as described in Module 6, Chapter 3 in the cBook. Miljkovic (2019, p. 187) suggests the following activities in general:

- Answering questions on social media
- Informing oneself about interesting people
- Providing useful tips and recommendations
- Commenting on posts and posting stimulating thoughts
- Connecting people

3.2. Science marketing for the web

The relatively new field of **science marketing**, combining interdisciplinary fields like marketing, communication and business management emerged in the 1990's, not astonishingly with the rise of the web. Scientific results had become public in the sense that people have the right to know what public money is spent for – projects funded by the European Union like Teaching2030 must be made publicly available and with no fees. This is where marketing exactly meets science.

Like in the world of economy, the **"brand"** of a scientist plays an important role for the visibility of their research and success. "Famous scientists remain synonymous with their "products" in this way, for example Peter Drucker and his fundamental management theory or John Maynard Keynes and his (not uncontroversial) financial theory. In this respect, science is always under obligation to society, but it can also be considered from an economic point of view as well" (online 2). Alina Wheeler's four simple questions (2017) also apply to the marketing of scholarly writing and research, as demonstrated in the cBook in Module 6 as well:

1. **Who are you?** The *product* is you and your research. So use an appealing and understandable language with key words and a compelling title.
2. **Who needs to know?** Your *target group* is essential as it determines the selection of your web media tools and your writing style.
3. **Why should they care?** Your research gives an answer to an important question in society or helps solve a problem. Your research gap is thus similar to a USP (*customer value*).
4. **How will they find out?** The *distribution* of your results is essential for promoting the research.

These four questions mirror the **scientific marketing mix**. The **product** provides the core of the scientific activity and without a good product all the efforts of self-branding would be doomed to failure. As publications are the core product of research, a fitting article, e-book, presentation, blog or science video is needed in an appropriate language. For writing on the web, targeting a broader audience means writing in an understandable way by all accounts.

The **place** depends on the product a researcher would like to "deliver". For publications, there are official or unofficial lists of addresses for every discipline that "rank" publications. The most important databases for natural and social sciences are Web of Science (WoS), Web of Social Science (WoSS) or Scopus, in which the journals are accessible. The further journal ratings are as follows; "leading research" (A), "important and renowned research" (B), "recognised research" (C) and "research" (D). Whereas publications are targeted to research colleagues, a science blog is open to the public. Still used to promote scientific topics, language and style are not that strictly bound to scientific rules. Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube channels are also used by scientists, not to promote research, but to comment on recent findings within their scientific field. Twitter is particularly utilized in media-related disciplines or conferences for live-discussions during and after presentations. Social media forms such as Facebook and twitter may not have been developed for scientific functions, although they have been used for this purpose a great deal since their creation.

With the emergence of the web and social media, the possibilities for **promoting** research and supporting self-branding have increased to a huge extent. It is essential for researchers nowadays "to be seen" – according to Taylor & Francis / Authors Services, a few methods for more visibility on the web are:

- Refer to your own research on your Facebook site
- Link to institutes or their websites
- Make your own research available via a blog
- Establish contact with authors whose literature you have used
- Register yourself on professional and scientific networks
- Add publications to your own "library" on CiteUlike
- Assimilate advice on and links to your publication in your email signature
- Invite colleagues to request a "Free Sample Copy"
- File articles in the repository of the institution
- Check Open Access options
- Register at ResearchGate or Academia.edu

With new media, research tends to be more public in the context of discovery and justification, and consequently, communication styles have changed. Academic writing is the significant part, but when presenting research to non-academics this has to be done in an understandable way.

3.3 Writing a science blog

Writing a **blog** can be a useful thing to do – provided time is wisely spent and effort is rewarded. Up to three hours per week will be enough time to write a blog article of one or two pages. The language style of a blog may include oral elements – a science blog, contradictory to a scientific article - always combines scientific contents with personal comments. Professional science



communicators often use entertainment elements like humour, storytelling and metaphors for conveying the contents and students/scientists can be trained to use some of these elements. A science blog must address the reader immediately, so the researcher should be passionate about the topic. It must be **relevant** for the reader who first scans the article before deciding to read it! Pictures tell more than words (see next chapter 4), so visualisation is also a strong means for attracting attention. The structure of a science blog could be like the following:

First paragraph (for arousing interest)

- Select a compelling title
- Write a personal introduction to address the world of the reader
- Arouse interest by bridging the topic with the reader’s experiences

Second paragraph (for a short overview)

- Inform about the most important results of the research and how they can be applied
- Mention the research team and the study (links, keywords!)
- Inform about the methodology in a short and understandable way

Third paragraph (for those who want to read more)

- Mention more detailed results
- Write about the consequences or further research

Regarding the writing style on the web, Chapters 1 and 2 of the cBook and this iLab provide useful tips and recommendations. A blog shows the characteristics of an **interactive, topic-based, but subjective online text type**:

- Write personal comments on why your research is relevant for the public
- Use the linking function to provide related information about your research
- Leave your filter bubble by mentioning diverse arguments to stimulate discussion, but make sure that your blog and arguments are also convincing
- Choose relevant terminology but ensure general understanding
- Use metaphors, examples and graphs to explain more complex issues

Activity: Online Academia

- ✓ Take a look at The Guardian's science blog network and choose a blog you like. Identify five linguistic features that the author uses to communicate their research to the non-academic public.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/jun/06/when-a-dinosaur-fossil-is-gone-its-gone-forever>

- ✓ Take an academic paper of yours and summarise the main findings by using a maximum of 140 characters.
- ✓ Put together a CV to be posted on LinkedIn or Academia.edu. What information should you put in your CV? In what way is a CV posted on one of these social networking sites different from a CV submitted in response to a job ad?
- ✓ Find an educational video that provides high-quality content. What makes these videos excellent in terms of quality? How can we recognise high-quality content?
- ✓ Rewrite a chapter of a paper you wrote, using not more than half a page, and deliver the key message with a short story, an example or a metaphor. Try to include visual elements and use the technique of name dropping.

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4. Using visual elements effectively

The digital age has brought with it not only a shift from print to online; it has also challenged and undermined the verbal dimension of textuality as the dominant mode of expression. As semiotician Gunther Kress argues, “the conceptualization of textuality is changing as images seem to dominate text and as screens overtake paper as the most frequent means of distributing text,” as a result of which “writing [is] becoming subordinated to the logic of the visual” (2003: 5). The traditional hierarchical order between visual and verbal texts is disappearing, with the written word no longer enjoying priority over the visual image. The **cultural shift from words to images** also has major implications for how we read and interpret (online) texts, thus necessitating new forms of teaching and learning. This chapter discusses how to incorporate visual elements in the teaching process and provides recommendations on how to train students to become visually literate.

4.1. The power of visual association

Visuals offer high potential for e-learning. While pictures have been included in learning materials for decades, high-resolution monitors and faster broadband have made it possible to realize the full potential of visual images. Effective visuals do not simply serve decorative purposes; they are of great benefit at all levels and are more than just visually appealing. Joel Levin classified visuals into five instructional functions: decoration; representation (to concretize abstract concepts); organization (to structure information); interpretation (to understand ambiguous content); transformation (to make information more memorable) (2011: 211-217). Taking these categories as a point of departure, we can explain the power of visuals as follows:

Visuals help organise information. Visual elements such as colours, shapes and pictures help organise information and make it appear more logical to the reader. Readers find texts without visual elements more difficult to read and understand than texts that are organised with visual aids. This is particularly the case for online texts because they are non-linear. As Kress states, while “writing [...] is governed by the logic of time and by the logic of sequence and its elements in time, in temporally governed arrangements [...] the organization of image is governed by the logic of space and by the logic of simultaneity of its visual/depicted elements in spatially organized arrangements” (Kress 2003: 1). Visual elements that are non-linear guide their readers through non-linear texts, thereby contributing to the comprehension of multimodal narrative texts.

Visuals train the memory. Research has shown that our brains process visual information much faster than verbal information. This is because our brains are hard-wired for visuals. As art critic John Berger states in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.” The critical role of visualization has also been confirmed by neuroscientific research. A recent study has found that the human brain can correctly identify images seen for as little as 13 milliseconds (Trafton 2014). This explains why visuals are more effective than written text alone and why most learners find it easier to retain information presented in the form of an image or a graph.

Visuals trigger emotions. There is a strong correlation between visuals and emotions. Visual images elicit emotional reactions while the latter are often expressed in visual form. The power of visualisation is also reflected in Paul Ekman’s project “Atlas of Emotions” that was developed to help people understand the nature of what emotions are and how they are triggered. Interestingly, each of the five core emotions is represented in a different colour.

Visuals enhance cognition. Visuals are powerful tools to enhance cognition. They help us see different perspectives of a problem by allowing us to display complex relationships visually. Visuals thus help us arrive at effective solutions more quickly and constructively. This is because visuals are non-linear, unlike verbal text, which superimposes a linear flow of arguments.

Visuals transmit messages faster. Visual elements are effective tools to get across the main message if chosen carefully. They help present complex information efficiently and logically and have thus become indispensable in clear and compelling writing. To borrow an example from Mike Parkinson, author and founder of “Billion Dollar Graphics”, “it is much easier to show a circle than describe it” (2016: 2).

In short, visuals are powerful tools that can improve and enrich the quality of the learning process, provided they are well-selected. As Ruth Clarke and Chopeta Lyons point out (2003), visuals need to serve the instructional goal and teaching purpose to be effective. Apart from that, teachers also need to take into consideration the features of the image itself and the learning environment, i.e. the software and/or platform that is used. “Even the most relevant graphic, if executed poorly or laid out haphazardly, will not enhance learning, but quite possibly will depress it” (Lyons 2003).

4.2. Getting the message across

The rise of the visual in our culture does not mean the end of the written word, on the contrary. What has been emerging is a new type of multimodal narrative, combining words,

images and audio “in a way that’s non-linear, that’s participatory and often game-like, and that’s designed above all to be immersive” (Rose 2011: 3). In fact, it has become commonplace to speak of “multimodal literacy” (Kress & Jewitt 2003), referring to the interplay and interdependence of various textual modes. It is thus essential to consider the text as coherent whole, comprising visual and non-visual elements.

The cBook introduces four types of visuals that students might encounter in an academic context. The four types display different types of word-image relationships that require different types of literacy skills.

Graphs. Charts and graphs play a critical role in today’s visualized world and knowing how to read them has become an important skill. Graphs visualize complex data condensing them into an easy-to-understand format that illustrates the correlation among information. A graph should be clear without any additional explanation needed.

Images. It is difficult if not impossible to find a single answer to the question “What is an image”. When scholar James Elkins posed this question to art theorists and historians, they spent 35 hours discussing it, without arriving at any satisfying conclusion (2011: vii ff.). For our purposes, it is important to keep in mind that the question “What is an image?” is always entangled with another: “What does it mean?” In order to understand the meaning of an image, we need to see beyond its literal representation. Teachers thus need to train their students to ask the right questions. Often, what we do not see is more important than what we do.

Infographics. Infographics, which is an abbreviation for information graphics, are “visual cues to communicate information” (Lankow 2012: 3) and have become increasingly popular to explain complex sets of data. Visually appealing, infographics combine text, illustrations, and images to tell a narrative in a compelling way. They also encourage users to share them via social media platforms and other digital tools. For an infographic to be effective, users need to comprehend both the visual and text-based data and understand how they interact with each other. They also need to understand the sociocultural environment in which the infographic is embedded.

Slides. With the emergence of PowerPoint in 1987, the art of giving presentations was to change forever and it was not long before the presentation software took over to replace overhead projectors and slide carousels. PowerPoint largely owed its success to the fact that users could easily turn into creators, designing compelling slides by combining written text and visual elements. However, in recent years, PowerPoint has come under much criticism. It has become commonplace to rail against the use of slide shows, with critics arguing that PowerPoint fails to promote interactive and student-centred learning. “Death by PowerPoint”

has become a common phrase to refer to the lack of interactivity that is often experienced with slide presentations. However, Microsoft's PowerPoint is still the most widely used presentation software on the market. The activities in the cBook should inspire teachers to reconsider the use of PowerPoint, encouraging them to look into the advantages and disadvantages of the presentation software, as well as to explore presentation software other than PowerPoint.

4.3. Visual content in teaching

As the internet is primarily a visual medium, it has become increasingly important for users to hone their visual literacy skills, i.e., their ability to understand concepts and ideas conveyed through visible elements or pictures, as well as the ability to create visual formats to express ideas. Originally defined as a set of competences “a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences” (Debes 1969: 26), the concept of visual literacy has gradually been expanded to accommodate both social and cognitive skills. What is common to all these definitions is that we need “a variety of lenses to interpret and analyse [the] meaning potentials [of images]” (Serafini 2014: 24).



Teaching how to interpret and create visual text has thus become increasingly important in today's educational environment. Students find themselves in an overwhelmingly visual world saturated with imagery, and educational materials are no exception. This means that, just as young people need instruction in the literacy skills of reading and writing, they also need

instruction in becoming visually literate. For students to become visually literate, they also need to be instructed using critical literacy practices. The latter refers to the ability to read and interpret texts in a reflective manner. This approach is also reflected in the framework by Jon Callow that includes three dimensions: the affective, the compositional and the critical (2005: 13).

- The **affective dimension** considers the role of individuals when they interact with visual images,
- the **compositional dimension** focuses on the composition of an image, identifying its semiotic, structural and contextual elements,
- the **critical dimension** foregrounds sociocultural considerations and emphasises the message inherent in an image.

What several other models have in common is the attempt to offer a systematised approach to interpreting visual and multimodal elements, thus promoting students' visual literacy comprehension skills. They also provide students with the metalanguage necessary to discuss the various dimensions of visual elements and help them understand the wider sociocultural implications of visual images.

Training students to become visually literate poses many challenges for teachers. Firstly, it may well be that teachers feel overwhelmed by the fast-evolving digital world. They might be under the impression that learners today are far more visually literate than their own generation. While this may be true, these learners may often not be aware of their visual literacy because they have not been taught to tap into this skill in the context of academic learning. This is exactly where the teacher comes in, mediating the learning process and allowing students to realise their full potential. In order to do so, teachers need to be aware of and understand the wide variety of types of visual elements students may encounter in an educational environment and know which deserve attention. Secondly, teachers need to teach students how to combine information from various forms of literacy as visual text is often presented alongside narrative text. The skill to navigate between visual and non-visual information is inherent to visual literacy. As Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen point out, "most texts involve a complex interplay of written text, images and other graphic or sound elements, designed as coherent [...] entities by means of layout." (2006: 16ff).

Exercise

Distribute copies of a single photograph to the class without captions. Tell your students to examine the photograph before writing a caption to accompany the photograph. Once students have finished this task, they should compare their captions with each other and discuss how they interpreted the nature of the photograph. The purpose of this activity is to show students how open to interpretation a single visual image can be and to make them aware of how easily its meaning can be changed.

Activity: Visuals tell stories

- ✓ Do some research on visual presentation aids and try to find tools other than PowerPoint. How useful are they? When and how would you use them in class?
- ✓ Create a visual biography that represents your life. Find powerful images online and compile them in a slide show that highlights your past, present, and future.

- ✓ Find “the story” in an infographic of your choice. Tell this story by relying on the data and information given in the infographic.
- ✓ Put together a lesson plan for a session on visual literacy. Think of activities that make students aware of the significance of visual elements.

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5. Writing in a responsible and respectful way

With the advent of social media, the boundaries between public and private sphere are blurred to a huge extent. It is us who have to define these boundaries anew. This is particularly essential for teachers when using social media for instruction. The configuration of public and private profiles may guarantee protection to a certain point, nevertheless one must not forget that writing for the web always means public writing. Teachers are well advised to establish a **netiquette** or code of conduct when exchanging information, arguments and opinions with students and colleagues on social media. Although it should be clear how to communicate on the web, the media is far too new for an immediate adjustment in behaviour.

5.1. Truth and ethics for the web

What is interesting to know is that as early as in the year 1974, sociologist Richard Sennett predicted in his work “The Fall of Public Man” that the public sphere will vanish in favour of psychological and individual self-presentation. He argues that this will result in an “uncivilized” society in which public discourse is based on personal feelings. Social media seem to accelerate this “uncivilized” process when using a “natural” language style in public including aggressive, rude or “uncivilized” phrasing. What seems to be mixed up by social media users is the distinction between the contents and the phrasing. Even if social media are meant to be a sphere for the personal exchange of information, the language style has to be more professional than in private face-to-face communication. Social media are per se created for personal exchange, not claiming true information (Lashoff, 2011, p. 125), but this does not mean to let go of good manners. In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle describes several timeless virtues, where amongst them, courage, prudence, meekness and correctness could serve as ethical norms even for good internet performance.

Courage (Aristotle, Book 3, 9) plays an essential role as it is in the midst between fear and confidence. When communicating on social media, it is essential to correct false information or fake news. Therefore, courage is a precondition when fighting fake news. Users have to have the confidence to contradict false information. Brodnig (2018) suggests some measures to fight fake news and false information. Firstly, she recommends being skeptical of images and checking them via [images.google.com](https://www.images.google.com) or [tineye.com](https://tinEye.com). As visuals are a powerful instrument, she also gives recommendations to use them in reverse to demonstrate the

accuracy of a piece of information or a comment. Moreover, on websites, the “About us” page should always be visited in order to check the reliability of the site. Although sites may look very professional, they can turn out to be a fake.

Prudence (Aristotle, Book 3, 13) in its positive sense can be considered a virtue for its ability to balance desire and to value reasonable behaviour. Prudence could be a leading principle for the communication style on the web. If a person is prudent, he or she reflects on the contents of the information given, on the style and on the consequences when doing so. Asked for ethical norms in diverse codes of conduct for the web, prudence appears in several ways.

Meekness (Aristotle, Book 4, 11) is a virtue related to anger. The one who shows anger at the right time will be praised, a lack of anger will be criticized, as one does not take action where they should: “It is slavish to put up with abuse.” (Aristotle, Book 4, 11). Bitter people are hard to reconcile as they keep their passion for themselves. They have to take revenge to put an end to their anger and if this does not happen they are permanently under pressure (Aristotle, Book 4, 11). This describes perfectly how aggressive behaviour, cyber bullying and shit storms on the web work. Meekness could be a way of showing anger in a productive manner in between aggressiveness and restraint. As angry people click more and emotions are ranked higher by algorithms it is essential according to Brodnig (2018) to mistrust one’s own emotion: If a comment stimulates anger or supports the own worldview to a huge extent, the comment, information or news should be checked, as falsifiers are phrasing news that trigger emotions.

Another important virtue is **correctness** (Aristotle, Book 4, 14). Correctness according to Aristotle is the midst between truth and untruth. If one is conceited, he or she shows attitudes that he or she does not have; the one who negates his or her attitudes becomes ironic. The right way is to be in the midst of ethics, demonstrating attitudes and capabilities without exaggerating or underestimating them. According to this description, correctness on the web would lead to an acceptance of other opinions without defending one’s own opinions as absolute truth or not trusting in one’s own opinions at all. Especially commercial bloggers are interested in this more correct, “civilized” media use for a better reliability and reputation. In addition, teachers have to be a model for their students in this respect. Moreover, when it comes to scientific writing and reasoning on the web, correctness is a precondition.

5.2. Being “civilized” instead of “authentic”

Taking these virtues into account, it is of the utmost importance to create respectful communication and a safe learning environment for teachers and students. An appropriate professional approach with fact-based information and clear guidelines for communication and writing for the web is inevitable. As stated in the introduction, the web is a new technology that requires a special netiquette for social media. It is essential because no “model for tolerance” (Simanowski, 2016, p. 18) exists within this new web technology.

Facts and fake news. Writing for the web always means public writing, regardless if the information given is private or work-related. This includes a critical approach towards information, interpretation and commenting on the web, especially within the increasing debate of fake news. According to Brodnig (2018, p. 111), fake news is problematic for two reasons: Firstly, many people do not realize that they have fallen for fake news; secondly, fake news is likely to be taken for granted if it is repeated many times. Regardless whether the information is true or not, if it is repeated often enough, the brain can easily learn wrong things (Brodnig, 2018, p. 115). This psychological process is called the “illusory truth effect”: So it is of utmost importance to be skeptical and to repeat true information as well. Giving explanations is also an instrument to correct fake news. Confronting others with the opposite view will likely cause a discussion, while giving explanations is less confronting and more clarifying. This does not mean not to engage in an opinion-based discourse, but to respect the inhibition threshold at all accounts.

Emotions and filter bubbles. On a subconscious level we assess information according to our worldview. If the given information suits our points of view, we are likely to accept it to a huge extent regardless of its truth. This process is called “confirmation bias”. Moreover, the confirmation bias tends to create filter bubbles by reinforcing a statement, worldview or argument. Moreover, the algorithms select the information that will be part of the newsfeed, so a unique worldview is created within certain filter bubbles. Emotions play an essential role in this process as angry people click more (Brodnig, 2018, p. 39) and the algorithms rank emotional comments higher than informative ones (Milborn, 2018, Brodnig, 2018). Emotions motivate people to engage in the debate but become problematic when they are targeted towards a certain group of people in the role of scapegoats. So it is essential that each user relies on diverse sources of information before publishing a comment, otherwise filter bubbles create a worldview that only supports the users’ own thoughts and arguments which are then taken for granted.

Netiquette and writing style. As Milborn (2018, p. 120) states, people who insult others on the web do not expect to be confronted with a “real” person, so they tend to be more aggressive when defending their opinions. Also Bauer (2018, p. 82) argues that what we perceive as “authentic” is linked to a natural, personal behaviour that contradicts a cultural one. If private topics become public, identity is always at stake, “Too much of authenticity produces ethic problems in media” (Beck, 2012, p. 65). Moreover, the web stores data years beyond their publishing so one is well advised to think of the risks of abuse of information. The only way to have information permanently removed is through a legal process. The core of social media is to enhance discussion, but from the distance it is easier to become aggressive and threatening. Within this, especially cyber bullying is a serious problem. It is defined as an aggressive intimidating behaviour towards a respective person. The behaviour is not a new virtual phenomenon but on the web it causes more serious damage to the person as cyber bullying becomes public and widespread (Wanhoff, 2011, p. 168). So in this respect web communities have to be aware of the public space by using a civilized language within culturally defined norms.

5.3. The THREE R’s for netiquette

In the cBook we discussed the three R’s of web writing, **respect, responsibility and rights**, highlighting the communication style, filter bubbles and fake news, privacy policies, data protection and legal issues. Within this scope of web performance, several codes of conduct and guidelines exist for this regulation that can be summarized as follows (Kuhn, 2005, online 1): respecting the privacy of others (no publishing of personal data without their agreement), citing sources and respecting ownership rights, using real names and identities, staying friendly (also when the discussion becomes rude), answering questions and asking for patience, accepting feedback and respecting individual emotions, humour and weaknesses. Tim O’Reilly (2007, online 2) votes for the general rule that one should not write anything that he or she won’t say in person. If we have a closer look at these rules, they also apply to the real world, not only the virtual one. Brodnig refers to Natalie Stroud who did a very interesting experiment, changing the “like button” into a “respect button” (Brodnig, 2018, p. 18). As a result, the behaviour of users changed such that people who made diverse statements were perceived more positively – only by changing a single word!

Koh et.al. (2005, online 3) suggest four ethical norms, deriving from a non-representative online survey, like truth of a report (fairness, balanced opinions, completeness), accountability (to take responsibility for the results), minimizing harm towards third parties

and correct attribution of ownership rights including citation. Also Wanhoff (2011, p. 136) states that one has always to consider the consequences when publishing personal information and activities. The EU parliament suggested in 2017 several values that have to be taken into account for IT and robotics, like security, liberty, privacy, dignity and accountability (online 4).

Story



Marko: In my last virtual class, I gave students the task to reflect on their personal importance on the following values deriving from the EU parliament

- Privacy
- Security
- Accountability
- Liberty
- Dignity

The discussion got quite intensive when it came to contradictory arguments regarding privacy versus liberty, the limitations of being held accountable for the information given, internet security and the need for dignity of every human being. They agreed that within everyday use of the internet there is seldom time for reflecting on these crucial issues – as, for example, “accept”-buttons for cookies are easily clicked on. Therefore, we agreed to reflect on our web-use strategies for one month and exchange our findings in the next session.

Exercise

Recent political debates on the web demonstrate a shift from “civilized” language, fact-based debate and political correctness to aggressive and rude opinion-based dialogue by evoking topics or using words that would not have been tolerated ten years before; especially in the area of racism, anti-Semitism and refugee and migrant politics. Browse with your students through websites of right-wing parties and check their blogs for false information and inappropriate wording! If you are working with international student groups, let the students compare the sites in the diverse countries. They should translate the most inappropriate words and analyse the structure of the political “argumentation”!

Activity: Netiquette Diary

- ✓ If you are interested in how students deal with the topic of respect, responsibility and rights, give them the following task:
- ✓ They should write a “netiquette diary” over a period of two weeks. In this diary, they should highlight
 - If they were emotionally involved when reading a comment (positive or negative feelings)
 - If or how often they got angry about a comment or statement
 - If they detected and/or indicated fake news
 - If they felt a comment from a friend was too personal/private
 - If they tended to defend their own filter bubble against others in a quite aggressive way
- ✓ Then initiate a moderated discussion in class on these topics which could be very insightful! Share your results of the discussion in this iLab and develop your own “Code of Conduct” within your iLab group!

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Glossary

Monoactive text: A monoactive online text is a text that encourages less active engagement on the part of the user. The roles of author and user are usually fixed and not interchangeable. Users do not participate in the production and creation of the text. Examples of monoactive texts are company websites and electronic newsletters.

Interactive text: An interactive online text is defined by requiring an extensive involvement of both the reader and the author, with their roles being interchangeable. Users are encouraged to become authors participating in the production of texts. Interactive online texts show a high degree of subjectivity while the writing style is often quite personal. Examples of interactive texts are blogs and tweets.

Hypertext: A hypertext is a text that allows information to be organised in a multi-linear fashion, connecting the various elements through links. Information is arranged in a way that is much more complex than the traditional print medium. Hypertext is the fundamental unit of the WWW.

Filter bubble: Internet activist Eli Pariser introduced the term “filter bubble” in 2011. According to Pariser, users are often surrounded by information that confirms what they believe in. For example, search engines gear their results towards the users’ preferences.

Users are thus less exposed to conflicting and divergent viewpoints and are thus more vulnerable to manipulation and intellectual isolation.

Visual literacy: Visual literacy refers to the skills that are required to understand and make meaning from text communicated in visual formats. It describes the users' ability to navigate our highly visual digital world. The term was coined by John Debes in 1969 and has experienced a great renaissance with the advent of digital technology.

Online disinhibition effect: The online disinhibition effect is the dramatic loosening of social restraints and inhibitions that are normally present in face-to-face interactions. As a result, people behave online in a way they never would in real life. The online disinhibition effect was first described in detail by researcher John Suler (2004). He distinguishes between benign disinhibition and toxic disinhibition: The former refers to behaviour where people tend to disclose more online than compared to offline. The latter refers to cruel and violent behaviour on the internet (e.g. cyberbullying).