

An Eclectic Online Learning Glossary

Scott A. Langhorst, Ph.D.

Asynchronous – [Communication] at a different time. *“The instructor posted the message asynchronously to the discussion board yesterday, and the students responded today.”* [Contrast with “synchronous,” which means “at the same time.”] Many online e-learning courses are asynchronous, because the instructor and students do not need to meet together or communicate at the same time, as in a classroom setting, but can conveniently schedule their own separate time(s) to work and study.

Audio Conferencing – A form of (synchronous) instructor/student interaction and communication using actual telephones and/or the audio components of web conferencing software.

Blackboard (Bb) – A proprietary virtual learning environment platform and learning management system which provides instructors and students with a structured, online “classroom” to deliver academic instruction, instructor/student interactions, and other learning activities. Blackboard is currently one of the leading platforms (approximately 25% market share) for online instruction in American college and universities.

Blog – Short for Web Log. Like an online diary, a Blog is a personal discussion, commentary, and/or information site, usually posted to the web by a single individual. It allows non-technical users to publish information on the web. Blogs may contain text, images, links to other web sites, etc. A “blogger” is someone who publishes a blog on the web.

Browser (Web Browser) – A specific software application that enables access to the World Wide Web, used for retrieving and presenting information from the web, and navigating among various web resources. Examples of web browsers include Internet Explorer (Microsoft), Chrome (Google), Safari (Apple), and Firefox (Mozilla). Some e-learning tools may not work well with specific browsers, or various (older) versions of browsers.

Chat / Chat Room – *Synchronous* text messaging between two, or many individuals, within a chat “box” area inside a social media tool such as Facebook, or in a chat “room” which is a dedicated text messaging area on the web, used by many (often anonymous) users, usually organized by topic or interest.

Cookies - A cookie is a small piece of data sent from a website to an end user’s connected E-Learning device. Cookies may be used to uniquely identify a user and they may be used to track individual preferences and other information about a web user. Cookies were designed to be a reliable mechanism for websites to remember previous browsing activity and page visits. Users may control Cookies through specific browser settings. (e.g., *“Blackboard” uses this technology to provide secure learning experiences, track usage, and manage application performance.*)

Content Management System (CMS) – A computer application (software) that allows for publishing, editing, and modifying educational content on the web. The function of a CMS is to store and organize web files that may be used for education/training purposes.

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Coursera – A for-profit online educational company (originally founded at Stanford University) that hosts Massively Open Online Courses (MOOC's) from 100+ American and international universities. Profits are derived from revenue sources other than student tuition or user fees (i.e., “free” courses) <https://www.coursera.org/>

Diploma Mill – An illegitimate “higher education” institution which claims to provide easy and quick completion of various degrees and diplomas, through credit for non-traditional experiences, through credit by “examination,” for taking simplistic and short (online) courses, and/or for outright purchase of “credits.” Diploma Mills typically charge exorbitant tuition and fees for such services. Diploma Mills are not normally accredited by an official (regional) accrediting agency, but may claim some other form of (false) accreditation to appear legitimate. See the federal Department of Education site at: <http://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills/diploma-mills.html>

Discussion Board / Discussion Forum – An online message area, typically as a component within an e-learning platform such as Blackboard or Moodle, that is open to registered users for the purpose of communicating with the instructor and/or other students. Discussion boards are an *asynchronous* form of communication within an e-learning course, whereby the instructor and students interact, repeatedly, at different times. Discussion boards are often arranged and organized by topics or assignments, and may be a *required* aspect of participation within an e-learning course. Discussions may be graded by the instructor. Within a MOOC, discussion areas are often formed by users themselves and coalesce around communities of interest --- i.e., in the “History of Rock,” a discussion forum about Elvis Presley is very likely.

Distance Learning / Distance Education – A form of academic instruction where the instructor and the student are not in the same place. Distance learning may rely on simple technologies (e.g., books, documents, as in correspondence courses, or broadcast television) or more complex electronic technologies (e.g., computers, electronic media, WWW, the Internet). Distance learning is similar to “e-learning” but does not necessarily imply the use of complex electronic technologies.

Edukatico – A free search portal to find online courses, MOOC's, video lectures, etc.

edX – A not-for-profit online educational consortium (founded by Harvard and MIT) that hosts Massively Open Online Courses (MOOC's) from 50+ schools, nonprofits, corporations, and international organizations. <https://www.edx.org/>

E-Learning – A form of academic instruction which uses electronic media and devices, educational technologies, and information and communication technologies. E-learning may be classroom-based, web-based (online), or may use a virtual learning environment platform such as Blackboard or Moodle to deliver content, instructional activities, and assessments to students.

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Flame / Flaming – Hostile and insulting interactions between and among online users, usually as posts to discussion boards, or emails sent to distributions lists. Flaming may be a deliberate attempt by a user to incite controversy on sensitive topics such as religion, morality, or politics, or may occur because of the miscommunication caused by the lack of social cues available in face-to-face communication. If many people join in the controversy, it may become an online “flame war.” Contrary to the rules of “netiquette.”

Hybrid Course / Blended Learning – An academic course that is a mixture (blended in varying proportions) of classroom-based and online components. Hybrid classes and blended learning are common in today’s colleges and universities, i.e., most colleges and universities use an e-learning tool like Blackboard in many (or all) their *on-campus classes* to provide some portion of the course learning experiences online. Most contemporary college students *expect* to have online components for their college classes.

IM – Instant Messaging. A type of chat (synchronous text messaging) between two individuals.

Informal Learning – Learning without a formal academic curriculum that often occurs outside of educational institutions. Informal learning is learning by experience, observing, doing, trial and error, impromptu, self-directed, natural, and a social and cultural outcome.

Information Literacy - The set of abilities that enable an individual to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. E-learners must know how and what to trust on the Internet and WWW --- to be able to resolve questions about information authenticity, validity, and reliability. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency#ildef>

Internet – A global network of interconnected computer networks that use the “internet protocol” (TCP/IP software) in order to operate together. The Internet preceded the World Wide Web by several decades, and is a greater entity than just the WWW because it supports other information, computer, and communication services.

iTunes University – An Apple application available for Apple devices in which free podcasts (audio, video, and other media) are provided as “courses” by colleges and universities and other educational entities. The current iTunes catalog contains thousands of lectures, videos, books, and other resources. The iTunes University application (software) can be downloaded for free on Apple devices (iPhone, iPod, iPad). <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/itunes-u/id490217893?mt=8>

ISP - Internet Service Provider. Where/how you get personal access to the Internet, e.g., through Cox Communications at www.cox.com

Khan Academy – A non-profit educational organization that provides free online courses for anyone. Especially strong in math and science courses. Online format is typically a number of short (5-12 minutes) content videos and demonstrations organized into “courses.” <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

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Learning Management System (LMS) - A computer application (software) that allows for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of e-learning courses or training programs. The function of an LMS is to create a virtual learning environment for e-learning courses, in which the instructor and student may replicate portions of a classroom experience. Current examples of an LMS include Blackboard and Moodle.

Malware - Malicious software. Any software used to disrupt computer operations, gather sensitive information, or gain access to private computer systems. Other types of malware include “Spyware,” a “Trojan Horse,” and “worms.” All good reasons to have anti-virus and other security software installed, and up-to-date, on your computer.

MOOC – Massively Open Online Course. A special type of web-based, online, e-learning course in which the course typically contains very large numbers of students (e.g., 10,000+), which is open (and free) to anyone who wishes to participate, is offered online via the web, and is a structured body of knowledge typically provided by a reliable higher education entity. MOOC’s are often bundled together by educational consortia or companies such as “Coursera,” “edX,” or “Udacity.”

Moodle – An open source (free) virtual learning environment platform and learning management system which provides instructors and students with a structured, online “classroom” to deliver academic instruction, instructor/student interactions, and other learning activities. Moodle is used extensively (approximately 19% market share) by smaller colleges and universities.

Netiquette – Network etiquette. The “do’s” and “don’ts” of online communication. Rules of the road and good manners for e-learning students. Some basic netiquette rules include:

- 1) *Remember the human - Never forget that the person reading your mail or posting is, indeed, a person, with feelings that can be hurt.*
- 2) *Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life.*
- 4) *Respect other people's time and bandwidth - When appropriate, use private email instead of posting to the group.*
- 5) *Make yourself look good online - Check grammar and spelling before you post.*
- 7) *Help keep flame wars under control - Don't respond to flame-bait.*
- 10) *Be forgiving of other people's mistakes.*

<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>

Online Course – A form of academic instruction in which content and learning activities may be found on the World Wide Web and Internet.

Open Courseware – A web site of educational materials at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), associated with the courses offered by the institution. All MIT course materials are open and available to the public. Other universities (e.g., Tufts University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Michigan) have similar sites and open courseware. <http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>

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OS – Operating System. The software which controls the actions of your computer, tablet, iPad, smart phone, etc. Examples of an OS include “Windows” (Microsoft), iOS (Apple), and Android (Google). Not all kinds of productivity software, or e-learning tools, are compatible with various operating systems --- i.e., some things won’t work together.

Phishing - A surreptitious way of attempting to acquire information such as usernames, passwords, and credit card details by masquerading as a trustworthy entity in any kind of electronic communication, e.g., a phony “Bank of America” email requesting your account number or other sensitive information, etc.

Plug-in - A software component that adds a specific feature to an existing software application, such as a web browser. Examples of web plug-ins include: Flash, QuickTime, and Java. Not all plug-ins will work with specific operating systems, specific web browsers, and/or with specific e-learning tools.

Podcast – Digital media (audio and/or video) available for download via the Internet. Originally associated with audio files downloaded to the iPod, but now more broadly available for other devices and file types.

Social Media / Social Networking – Various forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities of interest and share information, messages, educational content, etc. Social media often supplement e-learning course experiences by creating online venues for student interactions and sharing of user-generated content. Specific social media applications (software) include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Wikipedia.

Synchronous – [Communication] at the same time. *“The instructor and students met together synchronously in the chat room to discuss the assignment.”* [Contrast with “asynchronous,” which means “at a different time.”] Some e-learning courses are synchronous, because the instructor and students use various technologies (e.g., video conferencing, chat, telephones) to meet and communicate at the same time, working together as if in a classroom.

TED Talks - TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less) accessed as streaming videos from the web. TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics — from science to business to global issues — in more than 100 languages.

Telecourses – An academic course of study conducted over television. Prior to the Internet and WWW, telecourses were the primary method of distance learning for many higher education institutions and organizations, either by direct broadcast, via satellite, or through distribution of videotapes for home VCR devices.

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Texting / Text Messaging – Asynchronous (*or* synchronous) short text messages sent between two electronic devices, typically smart phones, slightly different from chat or IM because of the asynchronous *expectations* of the users, and the differences in technology protocols that support the various text communication devices and applications.

Twitter – A social media application (software) that allows for microblogging (short text messaging – limited to 140 characters) between and among registered users on the Twitter network. A message is called a “tweet.” <https://twitter.com/>

Udacity - A for-profit online educational company (originally founded at Stanford University) that hosts Massively Open Online Courses (MOOC’s) relating to programming and technology. Profits are derived from revenue sources other than student tuition or user fees (i.e., “free” courses). <https://www.udacity.com/>

Udemy – A for-profit, pay-per-course educational company that offers online courses across a broad spectrum of categories, in multiple languages. 40,000 million students world-wide, with many business partnerships for employee upskilling. <https://www.udemy.com/>

URL – Uniform Resource Locator. The “address” of a World Wide Web resource or site. In the form of: <http://www.mysite.com> The URL may sometimes begin with <https://> which means the site is secure and the web server you have reached is authentic. The ending of a URL will give some indication of the type of site you are visiting. i.e., .com = commercial, .edu = educational site (college or university), .gov = (federal) government, and .org = organization. Be wary if the URL ending does not match your expectations, e.g., if a “college” or “university” site ends with .com instead of .edu

Video Conferencing – A form of (synchronous) instructor/student interaction and communication using video cameras, microphones, and specific application software (e.g. “Zoom”) for two-way (or multi-cast) broadcasts over the web, using computers.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) – An online presence or platform that attempts to replicate aspects of classroom experiences for students engaged in e-learning courses. A virtual learning environment appears to users as their own personalized learning web space, containing all of the content and learning tools necessary to complete a course.

Virtual University – A higher education organization that provides curricula and courses exclusively online, rather than through traditional “brick and mortar” campuses, e.g., Open University in the United Kingdom.

Web Conferencing – A form of (synchronous) instructor/student interaction and communication using video cameras, microphones, specific application software, and other educational tools for two-way (or multi-cast) broadcasts over the web, using computers as the “screen.” Web conferencing is often a form of enhanced video conferencing, using other educational tools such as “whiteboards” or “chat” to engage students. Web conferencing may, or may not, include a video or audio component.

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Whiteboard – An online tool typically contained within an CMS/LMS or virtual learning environment that allows instructors and students to synchronously interact --- to draw, post images, text, links, etc. on the computer screen that appears as a “whiteboard.” Whiteboards may be “saved” as individual files for future reference in an e-learning course. Similar to physical whiteboards in a classroom, but online.

Wiki – A web application that allows users to write and post content to the web, in collaboration with others. Within a CMS/LMS or virtual learning environment, a wiki may be used as an area to allow a student to write essays or post other content, and then have other students review and edit the post.

Wikipedia – A free online encyclopedia developed and edited by user contributions (i.e., a social media site). Much academic controversy surrounds the use of Wikipedia as a trusted and reliable source of information, especially when used for purposes of formal citations for assignments such as research papers. As an informal learning tool, Wikipedia is a good starting point to begin a broad search for information on a topic, being mindful of the transitory, and sometimes unreliable, nature of the posted information from Wikipedia users. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>

World Wide Web (WWW) – A system of interlinked hypertext documents accessed via the Internet using a web browser (software). WWW is just one of the services that runs on the Internet. The WWW existed prior to the early 1990’s, but did not explode until the creation of a web browser tool (Mosaic - 1993) that allowed users to link to and view the interconnected files with ease. WWW resources are found using a specific URL, or address, to locate them.

YouTube – A social media application and video-sharing website that stores, and plays back, millions of video clips contributed by users. A very good source to supplement informal learning opportunities on any topic, by viewing relevant video clips. For example, after reading a book about President Lyndon Johnson’s transition to power after the Kennedy assassination, you might wish to view the YouTube video clip of his address to a joint session of Congress on 11/27/63. <https://www.youtube.com/>

Zoom – A popular video-conferencing software platform that provides synchronous, classroom-like, audio and video interaction between instructor and students. Features include screen sharing, chat (text messaging), and session recording capability.

(Some portions of the glossary are adapted from information contained in Wikipedia entries - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>)

(Please suggest missing online learning topics or definitions to add to this glossary.)