5th Edition

Critical Thinking and Writing in Nursing

Bob Price

LM Learning Matters

Contents

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ABOUT THE SERIES EDITORS

DR MOOI STANDING is an Independent Nursing Consultant (UK and International) and is responsible for the core knowledge, adult nursing and personal and professional learning skills titles. She is an experienced NMC Quality Assurance Reviewer of educational programmes and Professional Regulator Panellist on the NMC Practice Committee. Mooi is also Board member of Special Olympics Malaysia, enabling people with intellectual disabilities to participate in sports and athletics nationally and internationally.

DR SANDRA WALKER is a Clinical Academic in Mental Health working between Southern Health Trust and the University of Southampton and responsible for the mental health nursing titles. She is a Qualified Mental Health Nurse with a wide range of clinical experience spanning more than 25 years.

Chapter 7 — Making use of electronic media

Chapter aims

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- summarise the ways in which electronic media communication influences critical thinking;
- identify the ways in which electronic media might enhance the quality of your learning;
- explore personal interests regarding the use of electronic media in support of learning;
- identify ways in which tutors provide feedback on assignments and how this could be used;
- prepare appropriate contributions to electronic forums associated with your course of studies.

Introduction

There are excellent reasons for some of your studies to be completed using electronic media. Here are just a few:

- Recorded lectures and skill demonstrations can be run online, enabling you to pause and rerun video clips so that you can check over the points made. It

is efficient for a university to use recorded lectures, freeing up more time for lecturers to run seminars or study groups with you and for staff to complete research.

- Interactive study online (e.g. wikis, electronic classrooms) acquaints you with technology. A significant amount of technology is now shaping healthcare (e.g. the use of Skype or Zoom for clinical consultation). Technology is transforming what it means to be a healthcare consumer (Marx and Padmanabhan, 2020).

- Electronic resources significantly increase your access to knowledge, both within the library and through websites, and beyond (Shakeel and Bhatti, 2018). However, you will need to be discriminating in what you read and what you deduce from different media.

- Electronic media offers the possibility of podcasts, short elements of audio teaching (Blum, 2018). While you may consume these, studying what a lecturer argues, you might also learn to make them yourself. A good deal of patient teaching, for example, could be designed in the form of podcasts (e.g. coping with diet and diabetes).

- An electronic facility such as Skype enables you to network with other nurses in your chosen field, including those working overseas. Networking increases your fund of valuable information (Dickson et al., 2016).

- Your study notes, portfolio, and course or placement reports can be stored electronically using a cloud facility. At its simplest, this means carrying around less bulky notebooks and folders.

- During a period of pandemic, or indeed other illness or personal incapacity, you can sustain portions of your study, keeping up to date with the lectures and discussions presented online.

Activity 7.1   Critical enquiry

Conduct a brief enquiry now to explore how technology aids skills instruction. Visit YouTube (**www.youtube.com**) and type in the search 'clinical skills demonstration'. You will discover a number of skill demonstrations on offer. Review two or three of the videos available and assess what this media adds to a clinical skills demonstration. Are there any cautionary points to note?

Some brief thoughts are given at the end of the chapter.

Electronic media is not a perfect platform for all learning. Nursing is a very interpersonal profession, and we need to engage with people face to face and in real time (Conroy, 2018). Electronic media struggles to simulate the conditions of healthcare practice. Face-to-face role play, for instance, is arguably better than electronic discussion. Interacting online with study group peers, either in a forum or using a wiki, is a different psychological

experience. In a classroom, the words you share in a discussion are said and gone. In an interactive online discussion, they are often typed in or audio-recorded, which can leave you feeling a little more exposed to scrutiny by others: 'I wish I hadn't said that!'

Activity 7.2   Reflection

Pause now to reflect on how you view technology learning and healthcare. If we divide electronic resources into those that deliver information (e.g. library texts, recorded lectures) and those that require interaction on your part (e.g. an electronic forum), which seems the more exciting or useful, and which seems the more challenging?

My answers to this activity are given at the end of the chapter.

In this chapter, we examine what is involved in learning using different electronic media, and I make suggestions about how you can derive benefit from them. To illustrate critical thinking and reflection in action, I refer to two case studies. The first of these is the handling of emailed assignment feedback. The second relates to electronic forums and concerns the development of arguments around best nursing practice.

Email

Your use of electronic media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) in the past may have been linked to things such as social networking and text messaging. Nurses vary widely in their electronic media experience, and some may feel less electronic media 'savvy' than others (Ahmad et al., 2018). Upon joining a nursing course, though, it is likely that you will be linked to a course web page within the university, and you will have an email account set up for you so that you can communicate with your tutor, the library and study group colleagues. Email extends the campus in significant ways. Through email, you may receive a 'study group message' from your tutor.

Just as there is etiquette associated with the use of electronic forums ('netiquette'), so there is one associated with the use of email for educational purposes. Beyond the usual caution that to type in CAPITALS is rude (it equates to shouting), there are other, equally important rules associated with what is and is not to be discussed using email. For example, you may discuss a draft piece of coursework with your tutor by email, but to do so with a study buddy is to risk censure. This is because of university rules concerning academic collusion and the need to ensure that work is not plagiarised.

Wikis

You may not have encountered a wiki before, but it can be described simply as an electronic space where individuals make contributions that add to the understanding of a subject (Trocky and Buckley, 2016). Individuals type their entry to the wiki in a text box, check what they have written, and then post it to the wiki space on the course web page. The purpose of a wiki is to add layers of information – extra interpretations of what has been posted as the subject of the wiki. So, for example, a tutor might ask you to build a collective explanation of 'rehabilitation'. In this way, as each student adds a small contribution, an extended definition of the concept emerges. The wiki remains online as a reference resource for students to draw on later.

Wikis are used in different ways. Sometimes they form the basis of an electronic seminar where you discuss what has been revealed by the information collated. At other times, though, the wiki simply acts as a resource that you have built jointly on an important concept. It is something that you can return to in later modules. Rehabilitation, for example, is a recurring theme relevant in many fields of healthcare work, cancer care, mental illness and trauma care.

Activity 7.3 Critical thinking

Imagine now a concept that you think might be explored using a wiki. It should be one that is open to the experience of others, their knowledge of people and practice, as well as literature or research. Why might it be exciting to explore concepts in this way?

An outline answer is given at the end of this chapter.

Electronic forums

Most courses offer electronic forums, which are places where students and tutors can communicate with one another, either asynchronously (i.e. over time) or synchronously (i.e. at a designated time) (Adams et al., 2015). Quite often an electronic forum is used to conduct a seminar where you mutually review the articles that you have read. As with wikis, you access the relevant electronic forum using your membership or student identification number and individual password, a process that ensures the relative privacy of discussions within that space. Individual forum discussions are connected to course modules, and postings made there may demonstrate your 'attendance' or even contribute to course marks achieved.

In the forum, a series of individual discussions is initiated (often by the tutor); as each student adds responses of their own, a 'thread' develops. At different points, the tutor may tidy up the thread, editing material so as to ensure the final record of discussion remains comprehensible to all. Electronic forums are, of course, rather different from the tutorials you might share in a classroom. For one thing, a record exists of what each student has contributed. This can seem a little worrying if you equate conversations here with records of performance. It takes a little while to appreciate that most forums are places of honest and thoughtful speculation.

Electronic classrooms

Electronic forums are valuable, especially the asynchronous ones, as you have the opportunity to visit them when it suits you best. Nonetheless, the conversations can seem a little slow or stilted. For this reason, many universities use electronic classrooms. Electronic classrooms are designed to function as tutorials within the online environment, and they offer significant benefits when it comes to managing study time (Andrew et al., 2015). There are no car parking or public transport expenses associated with attending these tutorials, but you will need access to a modern computer that runs the latest software, as well as a headset microphone, so that you can participate successfully.

You join the electronic classroom using a preset web address (a URL) and log in with your membership or student identification number and individual password. What then appears is a whiteboard screen upon which you or your tutor will be able to draw diagrams, make lists and sketch flow charts. Beside the whiteboard screen, there is a series of control features with which you need to acquaint yourself using university training sessions. Commonly, these features include:

- a facility to ask questions or make points (using your microphone);
- the opportunity to vote in debates or in response to tutor questions;
- a facility to view streamed audio/video material;
- the opportunity to visit other web addresses using hyperlinks provided (highlighted words that take you to a new place if you click on these with your mouse);
- a facility to move to a 'breakout' room where you conduct small group discussions.

Electronic classrooms usually require a little technical preparation (configuring your computer) and some discipline (especially in the use of microphones). They can seem unfamiliar, insofar as you do not necessarily see the faces of other students. Against that, however, they provide real-time interactive learning for students who might not be studying on campus. Using an electronic classroom, you develop computer-facilitated conferencing skills that may be important in your future healthcare work.

Case study: Making good use of feedback

We come now to the first of four case studies within this chapter. As part of your coursework, it is possible that you will submit both formative assignments (those not awarded a grade) and summative assignments (those that are grade-bearing) electronically to your tutor, as well as receiving your feedback in a similarly paperless way. Electronic submission has the advantage that you can obtain a record of the assignment being submitted on time. One of the other key advantages of an electronically submitted assignment is that the tutor can give you both summary feedback (as an end of work commentary) and feedback in the form of textual annotations which you can read as part of an attachment emailed back to you (see Figure 7.1).

Children have particular difficulties expressing pain. Younger ones have a more limited vocabulary to describe the pain and may use general terms like 'tummy' to refer to its location. They don't have a clear sense of time and may struggle to describe the duration of the pain. MacGrath (1989) [McGrath (1990) in your reference list[ER1]] explains that nurses have to use parents to help interpret the pain. Parents are familiar with the way in which a child expresses themselves and can help determine whether pain may be a problem, for example when the child seems distracted and unable to concentrate on what they are doing[ER2]. Children have just as much pain as the rest of us and it's wrong to assume that they don't feel pain in the same way as adults[You need a reference here and perhaps to consider making this a separate paragraph. This paragraph is all about the expression of pain and your last point is about the incidence or nature of pain encountered].

Comment [ER1]: Are there more recent references that you could use?

Comment [ER2]: Do you think there are any circumstances when we need to be more cautious about relying upon a parent to help interpret a child's pain? If you are unsure, why not look up 'Munchausen by proxy' syndrome?

Figure 7.1   Examples of track change and margin note commentary feedback

Figure 7.1 illustrates two forms of feedback on a single paragraph extract from a student's assignment answer. The first is called 'track changes' and is presented here as underlined text that appears within the body of the essay work. In the first instance, track changes have been used to correct the presentation of a reference. The adjustment shows the correct spelling of the author name and queries the date of publication. In the second track change, the tutor provides guidance on both the

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referencing of the work and the planning of coherent paragraphs. The second form of feedback consists of marginal annotations using the 'comment' feature. ER in this instance stands for 'educational reviewer', although initials can be changed to reflect the name of the tutor. It does not stand for 'error', because some margin annotations might be used to congratulate you on your work.

While the volume and complexity of written feedback on an assignment answer may vary, good feedback remains unambiguous. There are no unexplained '?s' and '!s' dotted around that leave you to guess what the tutor means. Some questions then follow: What purpose is the feedback fulfilling? How will you make sense of it? What will you do next?

The purpose of feedback

One purpose of feedback is to correct a misapprehension, whether it concerns a reference, a drug calculation or an assertion about ethical care (McCarthy et al., 2018). Corrections are often handled using track changes, with the tutor either deleting something and inserting the correct material or commenting on the deficits. But other feedback may have a more subtle function. Comment ER1 in Figure 7.1 is designed to prompt some further thought and enquiry. Sometimes feedback is more rhetorical and designed to illustrate the way in which the tutor is 'thinking aloud' (ER2). Tutors do not invariably expect you to respond to such remarks, but may leave them for further consideration. On occasions, the marginal commentary is intentionally provocative as well as rhetorical, as in this example: 'Perhaps we are naive to imagine what can be easily assessed. It is bound up with private experiences, memories and fears. I wonder what you think?'

Making sense of feedback

We need, then, to make sense of the tutor's feedback. Does it require a response on my part? Does it prompt some new work for me? However important a coursework mark or grade might seem, the commentary that accompanies your assignment answer is important too. Even if you have achieved a good mark, there is always something more to glean from the commentary provided. Why is this a good essay? Seeing the pass mark and heaving a sigh of relief are not enough. You need to ascertain what the tutor thinks you have learned here and what could remain to be achieved. For instance, does the tutor comment on the structure of your essay answer? Does the feedback highlight your ability to argue a case?

Doing something with feedback

While logistically tutors supporting large student groups cannot enter into protracted dialogue with every student, there is a strong case for corresponding further with your tutor in the following circumstances:

- where you have secured a poor grade and/or where the commentary suggests that you have misunderstood the question;
- where the commentary suggests a significant gap in your subject knowledge (that gap may prove important in later assessments);
- where the feedback has posed new questions to you (you wish to ask the tutor to help clarify a matter);
- where the tutor has suggested other possible lines of enquiry.

It is understandable to worry that you may inconvenience a busy tutor; but if they signal the above things, they really do welcome your follow-up enquiry. The conversations that follow on from the assignment feedback will help you to develop your powers of discrimination and argument formation.

Activity 7.4   Reflection

Reflect now on any assignment feedback that you have received to date and answer the following question:

- Did I use this to help develop my critical thinking or reflective practice?

If the answer is no, decide next why that was:

- Did the electronic form of communication put you off, making it seem impersonal?
- Or, on the contrary, did it make receiving feedback easier?

As this answer is based on your own reflection, there is no outline answer at the end of the chapter.

Case study: Making arguments in the forum

My second case example of electronic media-mediated learning concerns the use of electronic forums. Tutors use these forums for various purposes, including the development of study group conversations that track changes in your collective thinking (tutors

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can archive forum discussions and later invite your group to revisit past reasoning). Making contributions to the electronic forum can seem more difficult, though. I asked Fatima to reflect on contributing to forums. She said:

> *I have enjoyed the different forums that we shared so far. To read other people's ideas is encouraging. But posting my ideas was more difficult. It was easy to support someone else, to say, 'Yes, I agree', but more difficult to suggest something of my own. I found myself thinking, 'This is not polite, to insist in this way to my colleagues.'*

Fatima's reflections are familiar to tutors. However, making arguments is necessary if you are to advance your thinking. There is a need to formulate arguments and to test them with supportive peers and an empathetic tutor. Happily, the system for posting forum messages involves composition and there is a chance to review your posting before you press 'send'. While most students do this to check their grammar and syntax, the greatest benefit of the pre-submission check is being able to consider whether your points seem coherent and clear. No one in the forum expects perfection, especially in a synchronous discussion. No one anticipates that their comments will always be supported either. Just as in other conversations, there will be some good points made and some that seem more questionable. Making a clear argument, though, is something that we can practise when we edit messages before they are posted.

Activity 7.5   Critical thinking

Imagine that you are engaged in a forum discussion about the right (or otherwise) of individuals to end their own lives. The last posting made by another student (John) expresses a deeply held religious conviction that patients should not exercise such a right, and that to do so relieves healthcare practitioners of the responsibility to deliver better end of life care. Now it is your turn to offer something. Consider the three observations below and decide which, if any, you might post to the forum. I discuss the merits of each below but encourage you to evaluate them first:

1. I can see John's point regarding who should have the right to curtail a life, but it is fair to observe that significant numbers of people do not express a religious conviction and question whether there is an absolute law here. Patients are consumers. If we require patients to make choices in other areas, why are they not capable of making decisions about death?

2. One of the things that we wrestle with is how patients' decisions make us feel. Their actions seem to reflect on us: 'I ended my life because you couldn't help me.' This seems a terrible thing, and yet these are views that we can imagine patients holding.

3. The media debate concerning this topic is often about the intentions of those who facilitate death. If there are inheritance benefits being sought, or if the death of the person simply makes life more convenient for others, ending a life undermines dignity in society. But if the decision is truthfully about the relief of suffering, as well as acknowledging that quality of life has gone, perhaps we have to support carers.

    As this answer is based on your own observation, there is no outline answer at the end of the chapter.

In Chapter 1, you were briefly introduced to the business of making arguments. Whether or not the above observations represent arguments is debatable, as we shall shortly discuss. But let me start first by indicating that seminar discussions and real-time electronic forums are often difficult places to make formal (philosophically logical, inductive) arguments. We are after all thinking on our feet. Arguments (those that we might agree upon) might emerge after some considerable discussion. One of the reasons that Fatima might find it uncomfortable offering responses in an electronic forum could be that she senses her offerings are 'just opinions'. I would suggest that it is premature in such discussions to imagine that you must all venture logical arguments. Oftentimes we creep up on better explanations of what is happening through discussion. One of the functions of a forum, as well as the guidance of tutors, is to help you learn to argue.

So, let us look at each of the observations in turn. Arguments comprise a case (that which you advocate) and the premises which you believe support it. Not only must each premise be factually correct, but they must fit in a clear way with the case (Pape, 2019). Better arguments usually include the word 'because'. For example, patients struggle to secure a right to end their lives (the case) because: (a) regulatory authorities fear that pressure may be placed upon individuals to curtail their lives; (b) religious groups argue that such a route represents a sin; and (c) those close to the dying person might act not in the interest of the patient. Here, (a), (b) and (c) are the premises. In an argument, premises should be open to scrutiny and their fit with the case open to debate. You could, for example, look at religious teaching on suicide.

Observation 1 is, I suggest, a speculative opinion. The case is that patients have a right to make choices about their death. For this observation to start working as an argument, we would need premises about patients' decision-making rights. Nonetheless, it is a valuable starting observation. A tutor might say, 'What evidence is there that we allow patients to make big decisions about their health?' You see, it is about logic. It might be illogical to deny patients a choice to end their lives if we give them responsibility for most other things about their lives (informed consent).

What about observation 2? This is an observation about cost, is it not? Specifically, it is a fear that if patients were to elect for voluntary euthanasia, we would have to confront that it felt like an indictment of our efforts to care. Strictly speaking, there is not a case – it too is speculative. This is another facet of dying and euthanasia, but it is an observation about the emotional cost to us of the patient's decision. There might be an argument here if you ventured something about why clinicians are circumspect about promoting euthanasia as a right.

Observation 3 seems a speculation with an argument struggling to get out. The case is (roughly) that the debate on euthanasia rests upon the inferred motives of those who are complicit in the patient's decision to end their life. If the motive is noble (to end suffering and despair), then euthanasia might be contemplated. But if the motive is, say, pecuniary (a relative inherits the patient's home), then that undermines the case that euthanasia is in the patient's own interests. An interesting debate could emerge from this regarding how we might exclude the selfish motives of those who facilitate euthanasia.

What can we say, then, about the business of contributing within electronic forums? First, it seems necessary to accept that forums are not the same as face-to-face seminars. They leave a record, and it is for this reason that you will naturally wish to compose your contributions carefully. Second, successful forums are permissive and allow that arguments might develop within and through them. You will make several observations and the clarity of matters will improve as the group takes stock of what has been posted. It is OK to 'feel your way' in these matters. Your tutor has a key role here, helping to sum up points. Third, discussions held in electronic forums are not and should not be reputation busters. Your tutor should make this clear at the outset; otherwise, trust will not grow within the study group.

Case study: Interacting successfully within the electronic classroom

In the third case study, we turn to successful learning within the electronic classroom environment. Although you have already learned valuable principles while reading about learning from lectures and seminars, there are some subtle variations here that you need to be aware of. Much of what you need to consider now relates to attending sensitively to the needs of fellow learners, as well as making the technology work for everyone. As you cannot necessarily see other class participants, you have to imagine how they feel as they interface with the classroom using a computer.

Let us start with strategy. Your strategy should begin before the class itself and should ensure that you are well prepared to play an inquisitive role during the session. Preparation begins by noting on what date and at what time the class session begins. It can be very disruptive to join the class late and then try to catch up on what has already been done. To ensure that you can contribute fully, it is necessary to do a

brief computer check. Most of the electronic classroom platforms have a log-on wizard facility, which allows you to check that you can hear the audio output clearly and test that your microphone is working well. Running these sound checks well in advance should ensure that there is much less chance you will inconvenience others. Familiarise yourself with the various control functions at your command within the electronic classroom. Check to see that you can turn your microphone on and off (the screen icon will change). You need to have your microphone off when you are not speaking, otherwise your open-channel microphone might block a fellow student.

The classroom is likely to have a separate response box where you can type in text (e.g a question). Conduct a trial run before the class to ensure that your typed text appears in the box as expected. Your tutor will be able to see this while running the session. Do not assume, however, that all such typed text responses are instantly acted on. Responses to such student queries may be saved for a summing-up point. Identify whether you are able to indicate your understanding of the session using emoticons (smiling or frowning faces). Your tutor might rely on these to determine the pace and direction that the class takes.

Attending to the class itself requires a little extra thought as well. Remember that you will be seated before a computer screen, possibly many miles from the university itself. The tutor cannot readily see if you are listening intently or whether you look interested or bored. So, I recommend that you:

- have a notebook and pencil to hand (you may wish to compose queries or reflections carefully before posting these within the electronic classroom);
- have refreshments to hand (avoid spilling liquids on the computer, however);
- use the 'out of the room' icon to indicate when you are not present in class.

Class sizes vary, but a key consideration is to post responses, either typed or audio, that seem constructive and do not dominate the discussion. Remember that you cannot see the scowls of other students in this environment. So, monitor whether others have already typed in questions or reflections within the text box, and where possible save your points for the frequent 'Are you all happy?' breaks that experienced tutors tend to use. If you wish to refer to something specifically, note down the location in your notebook: 'I have a query about slide 4 in the PowerPoint presentation …'

Where students agree, classroom sessions are archived (i.e. they are recorded) so that you and your fellow students can access them again later. If this has not been agreed, however, you will need to make notes as you proceed through the class. PowerPoint presentations are often sent to you by the tutor for later reference. Anticipate, however, that at the end of the session, you may be asked to conclude what you understood. Having notes to hand will help you to do that and to indicate what you hope to follow up study on. As with face-to-face lectures, the notes made here are likely to be brief and will need expansion after the class has finished.

Case study: Evaluating website information

The final case study within this chapter concerns the critical evaluation of website information. Quite commonly within electronic learning, you will be invited to conduct a search on the internet and will then be asked to critically examine what you found there. Chapter 8 provides additional guidance on the critical examination of evidence, but I also need to add some remarks on the internet as a source of knowledge. The internet represents a new frontier of information, much of it unregulated and some of it arguably spurious (Jordan and Chambers, 2017). While the internet can be liberating, it can also be misguiding.

The internet is comprised of service providers that offer search facilities to different website addresses (URLs). Each website offers a range of content and authors. In many instances, the website providers will be the content authors as well. So, for example, if you go to the website for the NMC (**www.nmc-uk.org**), the content provided will be authored by the NMC itself, or its approved researchers or consultants. In other instances, however, a website may provide the facility for different authors to post their content. The website owners note that the content found there does not necessarily reflect their views. One of the strengths of the internet is that it provides a forum for a wide range of views and insights, some of them cutting-edge. There is a minimum of regulation, save for that demanded by governments to protect the vulnerable and limit criminal activity.

The first questions that you should pose when you find internet information, then, are: Who are the authors? Who makes the claims presented here? In many instances, there are no authors named in website information; the conventions of published books or articles do not apply. It is then necessary to examine what they argue (searching for possible bias) and to determine whether the author's perspectives may have been shaped by the owner of the website. For example, you find a paper on the part played by sugar in the human diet that makes a number of assertions about why it is beneficial. Counterarguments about the risks of excess sugar consumption are not aired. The paper is found on the website of an organisation with close associations with several processed food manufacturers. Caution may then be required, and you might question whether the information found is impartial.

A further important question to ask regarding internet information is: When was it published? When you reference a website in your work, you detail the date that the site was accessed. What is also important, though, is to determine how old the information found there is. When was it published on the site, or indeed previously elsewhere? The best papers included within websites have both author details and details about when the paper was uploaded to the website. Many others, however, will lack one or more of these details, and then you will need to be circumspect about whether you can recommend this resource within your review. If the information was integral to the website itself (rather than an embedded paper), you might check the last date that the website was updated. This is sometimes stated within the 'home' page.

Activity 7.6 Research and evidence-based practice

Choose a subject to research on the internet – so much the better if this relates to a controversial subject, such as the causes of obesity, the rights of a particular patient group, cigarette smoking, or similar.

Use the facilities of your internet service provider to identify relevant websites and choose one of these to scrutinise in greater depth. How easy was it to ascertain who authored the website information and any affiliations that they had? Check whether the information provided seems to support the stated position or mission of the website owners (often expressed as 'our mission' or 'about us'). Check to see whether the website provides information about when the site was last updated and against what, if any, criteria.

As this answer is based on your own observation, there is no outline answer at the end of the chapter.

In examining websites as possible sources of information, the appropriate attitude is one of healthy scepticism (Jordan and Chambers, 2017). It is not necessarily the case that the information found is not valuable, but without details of its origin it is harder to check for bias. In healthcare, as elsewhere, commercial, ideological and political influences may play a role in shaping what is provided. As a critical consumer of this information, you will need to ask questions about what interest the information might serve – whether it was provided for your needs or those of others.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I began with the argument that electronic media has much to offer learning, but some careful thought is required when using it. The way you reason using electronic media will be different from reasoning in class. This is not to suggest, however, that these media in some way undermine the critical thinking and reflection that can operate here. The quality of feedback possible with an electronically submitted assignment, the excitement that can be generated in an electronic classroom, the richness of information on the internet, and the depth of debate possible within an electronic forum can be exceptional. The very fact that you can access conversations at times to suit you, and that there is space to compose your answers with care that is not available in a real-time face-to-face conversation, highlights the critical thinking opportunities here.

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Electronic media is not without challenges, though, and you may have observed within this chapter just how different this communication can seem. For some, it feels artificial, especially if students are private and contemplative in nature. If electronic learning environments are used without clear thought, the reputation of electronic learning quickly deteriorates. It is at its best where the tutor marshals fascinating resources to which the class has prompt access, which then form the focus of attention for discussion. Tutors are becoming adept in creating welcoming and supportive electronic learning environments. They recognise the anxieties that can lurk as you prepare your first postings, and they know that to contribute to something which remains 'on record' undermines the confidence of some. Acknowledging these concerns, they arrange feedback and summarise discussions in ways that demonstrate tolerance, an appreciation of your efforts, and a commitment to imaginative new ways to learn.

Activities: brief outline answers

Activity 7.1 Critical enquiry (page 109)

Well-filmed and adequately narrated skill demonstrations can be a boon in nurse education, but there are caveats to note. The first is that skills and procedures operate in the context of clinical policies and with resources that might be different in your healthcare system, so it is important to check how well the demonstration works with local requirements. Many principles expressed within demonstrations (e.g. cross-infection control) are universal, but it is still worth checking the published date that the item was added to the internet to ensure that what you study is reasonably current. Check whether the demonstration includes any close-up camerawork, which might be important when demonstrating skills such as wound suturing, for instance. Does the demonstrator offer a rationale for the sequence of work done, and is there adequate recognition of the patient's needs?

Activity 7.2 Reflection (page 110)

While finding your way around the electronic facilities offered by a large university library can be daunting for some (delivered information), in my experience it is the interactive electronic learning activities that worry students the most. This is because a complex media has been inserted between those communicating. We are less able to monitor the reactions of others to what we contribute. All mediated forms of communication take time to adjust to. For example, it probably took you a little while to get used to texting abbreviations on a mobile phone when you first started. Much of nursing is interpersonal, and there are good reasons to replicate that in nurse education. Technology should not become a media that dominates learning to the detriment of demonstrating that which we must master in practice. Nonetheless, it would be unwise to dismiss the many merits of electronic learning media. It is capable of bringing vast amounts of knowledge to you and speeding up your enquiry.

Activity 7.3 Critical thinking (page 111)

My example of a wiki topic is entirely topical in 2021 as the world wrestles with the Covid-19 pandemic. It concerns what is understood about the virus, its spread, and the risks for human beings. This is a topic that is almost daily streaming new information, especially about risks to different groups of patients. You may have personal experience of the virus and revised your notion of risk because of it. It is exactly the sort of topic that lends itself to wiki development.

Further reading

Flyverbom, M. (2019) *The Digital Prism: Transparency and Managed Visibilities in a Datafied World.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mikkel Flyverbom reminds us that digital technology is increasingly intruding into every aspect of modern life, sometimes obtrusively so. The argument runs that the digital revolution increases connectivity between people but diminishes privacy. It is well worth thinking about, for instance, with regard to patient records and the safety and reputation of healthcare professionals. Is there a case to limit such technology, and if so when is that point reached?

Littlejohn, A. and Hood, N. (2018) *Reconceptualizing Learning in the Digital Age: The (Un)democratising Potential of MOOCs.* New York: Springer.

Once upon a time, distance and open learning universities were distinct from those that taught on campus. However, the differences between the two now blur – your electronic-based learning could happen in either institution. What blurs matters further are massive open online courses (MOOCs), which are presented by universities and studied by a much wider variety of students. Pause to consider, though, what happens when learners in your group come from a much wider background and study your module to different ends. The design of education is a principal interest for your tutor, but you too are in the midst of a technological revolution and that affects how you are invited to think.

Useful websites

I want to suggest two useful resources found on YouTube (**www.youtube.com**). The first is for any of you who feel lost by the multitude of information available on the internet, entitled *How I Learn Things Online (Way More Efficiently)* by Nathaniel Drew (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVmMbMa3ncI**). Nathaniel is a photographer and an enthusiastic speaker on the personal organisation of enquiry. You will have access to dedicated university library resources, but it is still valuable to contemplate what the internet offers. If you venture there, then your enquiries will need to be disciplined. Nathaniel researches photography, but his enquiry principles still hold good for healthcare.

The second resource is entitled *How to Use Zoom for Remote and Online Learning* by Flipped Classroom Tutorials (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=9guqRELB4dg**). Universities use a variety of platforms to deliver online classroom teaching, and this is just one of them. What it does do, however, is to help you understand how the tutor manages such an environment. There is no reason why a group of nurses cannot band together to use such a platform for professional update purposes. Sue (our case study registered nurse) helps to run a journal club using this technology. Each takes a turn running the monthly meetings and every session reviews at least one research article.