

# Communications 11

## Introduction Assignment

This assignment is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your ability to conduct a close reading of an informational text, and to respond to the text effectively.

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Student No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

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Based on the instructions provided by your school, complete the following *Communications 11* assignment independently and return it to your teacher.

**There are three parts to this assignment:**

Part A: Multiple Choice	4 marks
Part B: Short Answer Questions	15 marks
Part C: Paragraph Composition	6 marks

**Contents:**

12 pages

**Assignment time:**

2 hours

**Before you start, read these important tips.**

1. Read each question carefully before answering.
2. Answer all questions to the best of your ability.
3. Take your time. Check your work before handing in the assignment.
4. Write neatly and check your spelling.

**Now read the following informational text and answer the questions at the end. (25 marks)**

# Web 2.0: The New Internet

To understand the impact of the Internet on its users and societies at large over time, we need to understand how the Internet has evolved since it first began being widely used. For most of its early history, the Internet was a passive medium: you absorbed what it offered, but you didn't play much of a role in shaping it—unless you made websites. In the past few years, things have begun to change. The Internet that we use today is sometimes referred to as Web 2.0. This is a new, user-generated Internet—one where people participate more regularly in its creation, and can interact with each other online. In the Web 2.0 world we've shifted from being passive consumers of Web content to being active producers.

Let's spend some time learning the about basics of Web 2.0. Then you'll understand better how this new and improved Web is affecting us all.

## Web 2.0: Understanding the Basics

Web 2.0 is made up of a number of important tools, services, and applications. Among them are blogs, wikis, social bookmarks, podcasts, and social networking services.



## Blogs

A web log or *blog* is a web page consisting of paragraphs of information, opinion, personal diary entries, and links. Each entry, called a post, is arranged chronologically, with the most recent post appearing first. Each post is generally assigned one or more tags, sometimes known as *descriptors*. These are keywords that describe the content of the post. Many blogs now also include *tag clouds*. A tag cloud is a collection of tags that varies in font size and sometimes in colour. The largest tags are the ones that have been used most often in a blog. Clicking on a tag takes you to a list of other posts (written by the same author, usually on a related or similar subject) that have been tagged with the same keyword.

One of the great things about blogs is they can be updated as often as you like. If something important or interesting happens or if you just have some ideas to share, you can blog on the subject and have your post immediately published on the Internet for others to read. In this way, blogs are far more dynamic than traditional web pages. Most blogs also have a “comments” area where others can respond to a post. This creates a two-way conversation between the blog author and other readers. This makes blogs a very social tool.

Blog entries can be automatically forwarded to readers using something called an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed. An RSS feed collects information from RSS-enabled websites and forwards that information to subscribers. In order to be able to use a feed, a prospective user must install a software tool known as an *aggregator*, or *feed reader*, onto his or her computer. The user then decides which RSS feeds he or she wants to receive and subscribes to them. The client software will then periodically check for updates to the RSS feed and send these on to all subscribers.

## Wikis

A wiki is a set of web pages that is created by, updated, and maintained by its users. Adding new pages or changing existing ones is easy thanks to a simple online editing tool.

Wikis rely on the “wisdom of the crowd.” This means that the information in wiki entries is generally reliable because many people have had a chance to edit and refine it. In a wiki we’re all writers and editors, adding and changing information until it’s just right. Pages can also be built and changed very quickly, meaning the wiki stays current. The most familiar example where wiki technologies are used is Wikipedia, where anyone can submit an entry.

A real strength of wikis is the “history” function. If you disagree with a change that someone makes to a wiki page, you can restore that page to its previous version. This level of openness and power has undoubtedly led to some malicious editing and vandalism. However, these acts can easily be overcome through a quick rollback to an old version of the wiki page. Alternatively, access to a wiki page or site can be restricted to a known and trusted community of users.

## Social Bookmarking

In the past, when you found a website you liked, you bookmarked it on your Web browser. This saved a link to the website on your computer. With social bookmarking, you save your links on a public website. Your links can now be shared with other people.

Most social bookmarking systems (like *delicious*) require you to identify your bookmarks using tags. These are one-word descriptions of each website. You can add as many tags as you like for each site. For example, if you find a great website on trees, you could tag this site with *trees*, *forests*, *branches*, *limbs*, or any other words that describe the website. When your bookmarks appear on the public site, they usually appear in one big list but they also can be searched by your tags. These tags usually appear in a menu to the side of your list. Many social bookmarking sites also feature tag clouds. In this case, tag clouds are lists of the most popular websites bookmarked by the entire community of users. RSS feeds can also be included. These alert you when new bookmarks are added to the social bookmarking site.

## Sharing Multimedia

One of the most popular services in Web 2.0 concerns sharing multimedia. A number of sites allow people to upload photos (e.g., Flickr), videos (e.g., YouTube), and audio (e.g., Odeo). Web users are no longer just consumers of content; they are producers and publishers as well. Millions of people now participate in the sharing and exchange of these forms of media on the Internet.

## Podcasting

Podcasts are audio recordings of talks, interviews, or lectures. Podcasts are downloaded from the Internet and then played on a personal computer or a mobile device like an MP3 player or a cell phone. Podcasts can also be streamed over a web browser, which means that it’s not necessary to download them.

To make a podcast you record your content as an MP3 file and then upload it to the Internet. Then you let the world know about your podcast via an RSS feed. This process (known as “enclosure”) adds a URL link to the audio file, as well as directions to the audio file’s location on the host server. Podcast listeners subscribe to the RSS feeds and receive information about new podcasts as they become available. Distribution is therefore relatively simple.

## Social Networking Services

A social networking service creates a community of people with similar interests and activities. When you join one of these sites, you can look for and contact people you know, or would like to know, and add them to your social network. You can then connect with these people whenever you like and send them updates on what you’re doing. The two most common social networking sites are Facebook and MySpace. Are you a member of one of these networks, or perhaps both? Are you a member of a different one?

### Twitter

Another very popular social networking service is Twitter. With Twitter you can send short text-based messages (called tweets) up to a maximum of 140 characters. People can sign up to receive your updates, and you can sign up to receive theirs (via RSS feed). Twitter lets you stay hyper-connected to the people around you.

Critics argue that Twitter caters to people who crave attention but have nothing of real substance to say (“Just ate a tuna fish sandwich!”). Twitter can be much more than that, though. When used properly, Twitter *starts*—not *stifles*—conversations between people. In true Web 2.0 fashion, good tweets encourage others to respond. This demonstrates the power of the Internet to foster meaningful social communities.

### Twitterature: What Do You Think?

Twitterature is the reduction of classic works of literature to 140 characters or less. For example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* becomes: "Danish guy's mum marries his murdered father's brother. He sees his dad's ghost. Everyone dies." *Wuthering Heights* by Jane Austin becomes: "Catherine Earnshaw marries Edgar Linton but really loves Heathcliff. Sigh." J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is reduced to: "Rich kid thinks everyone is fake except for his little sister. Has breakdown."

Critics see Twitterature as a further dumbing down of our language. How can you possibly explain a classic novel or play in a maximum of 140 words? Others feel just the opposite. In their minds, it takes a lot of talent to explain the essence of these great works in such a short passage.

What do you think? Is Twitterature a good thing or a bad thing?

## The Impact of Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is transforming how we communicate and interact with each other online. It's also having a major impact on some of our traditional institutions. One of those institutions is the newspaper business. In the past, newspapers played a dominant role in reporting the news. In the Web 2.0 world, anyone with a digital camera or a video camera can upload images to the Internet, write a blog, or upload a podcast and become a citizen journalist. News that was traditionally produced by recognized media outlets is now also coming from the bottom up, i.e., from average citizens.

Web 2.0 has forever changed the way news is delivered, and who is entitled to deliver it. Examples of that change are easy to find. For example, Global News encourages witnesses to events to contribute to their news reporting. Did a barbeque in your neighbour's yard blow up and set his house on fire? Did you catch it on film before the news crews arrived? If so, the network wants to hear from you. Other media outlets have also embraced citizen-based journalism. In South Korea, the OhmyNews network has as its motto, "Every Citizen is a Reporter." OhmyNews has a staff of about 40 reporters but the bulk of its news comes from about 50,000 ordinary citizens.

## INTRODUCTION ASSIGNMENT

Web 2.0 technologies have turned average citizens, formerly known as the audience, into reporters. It has also turned news into a 'conversation' rather than a one-sided report. News blogs, for example, let readers introduce their own news and comment on news provided by other readers. News is now a back and forth discussion on the Web.

So, in a nutshell, what do all these new Web 2.0 tools mean? Simple: they mean the average person can now have an active presence on the Internet. Some call this the rise of the amateur. Paul Anderson (2007) explained it this way:

*With a few clicks of the mouse a user can upload a video or photo from their digital camera and into their own media space, tag it with suitable keywords and make the content available to their friends or the world in general. In parallel, individuals are setting up and writing blogs and working together to create information through the use of wikis. What these tools have done is to lower the barrier to entry.... (p. 14)*



## Questions

### Part A: Multiple Choice (5 marks)

Put the letter of the correct answer in the parentheses to the right.

1. How is a *tag cloud* best described?
  - a. A data aggregation feed webcaster
  - b. A high security socket layer scrambler for mobile devices
  - c. A directory listing all software applications assigned to a Web user's profile
  - d. A series of descriptors used to categorize information included on a web page ( )
  
2. What is *delicious* in the Web 2.0 world?
  - a. A Web-based social bookmarking application
  - b. A wiki engine for creating dynamic Web publications
  - c. Software for generating and managing podcast syndication
  - d. An application for sharing media (photos, video, and audio) online ( )
  
3. How are RSS feeds used?
  - a. To install software updates
  - b. To notify users of upcoming events marked on their calendars
  - c. To synchronize data found on a device's hard drive with a remote server backup
  - d. To notify the public when new blog posts, podcasts, twitter posts, etc. have been posted ( )
  
4. Which choice best explains the meaning of the phrase, "...lower the barrier to entry..." in the last paragraph of the text?
  - a. People can use applications like Twitter without having to worry about writing lengthy posts.
  - b. Users of Web 2.0 technologies can create their own content on the Web more easily than in the past.

- c. The cost of an Internet connection for a computer or a mobile device is less expensive than it used to be.
- d. Web 2.0 technologies are more accessible to users with the introduction of open standards for programming on the Web. ( )

**Part B: Short Answer Questions (15 marks)**

Provide an answer to each question using complete sentences. You will be evaluated on the focus, consistency and logic that you provide in your answers. (3 marks each)

- 1. What is the main difference between the early Web and Web 2.0?

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- 2. What is one advantage of wiki publishing compared with traditional publishing?

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3. How have Web 2.0 technologies changed news reporting?

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4. What is the purpose of social networking software?

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5. What are tag clouds used for?

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### Part C: Paragraph Composition (6 marks)

Answer the following writing prompt in a well-constructed paragraph.

How have Web 2.0 technologies changed peoples' ability to communicate with one another, for better or for worse? Use at least one example from the text to support your point of view.

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/ 4	Part A: Multiple Choice
/ 15	Part B: Short Answer Questions
/ 6	Part C: Paragraph Composition
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/25	<b>Total</b>