

Personal Learning Networks

November 2025





We cannot stop the desire to know. The desire to know is balanced with our desire to communicate, to share, to connect, and our desire to make sense, to understand — to know the meaning.

George Siemens, *Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age*
December 12, 2004

We are essentially social beings. We live in societies, of course; but more fundamentally perhaps, it is our participation in social communities and cultural practices that provides the very materials out of which we construct who we are, give meaning to what we do, and understand what we know.

Etienne Wenger, *Communities of practice: where learning happens*,
Benchmark Magazine, Fall Issue 1991

Learning experiences

What have your experiences with learning been like? Think about ...



a delightful experience



a favourite experience



a sensible experience



a weird experience

<https://padlet.com/traceyehm/pln1>

Outline

What to learn

What do we need to know?

Networked learning



How to learn

Exploring the options



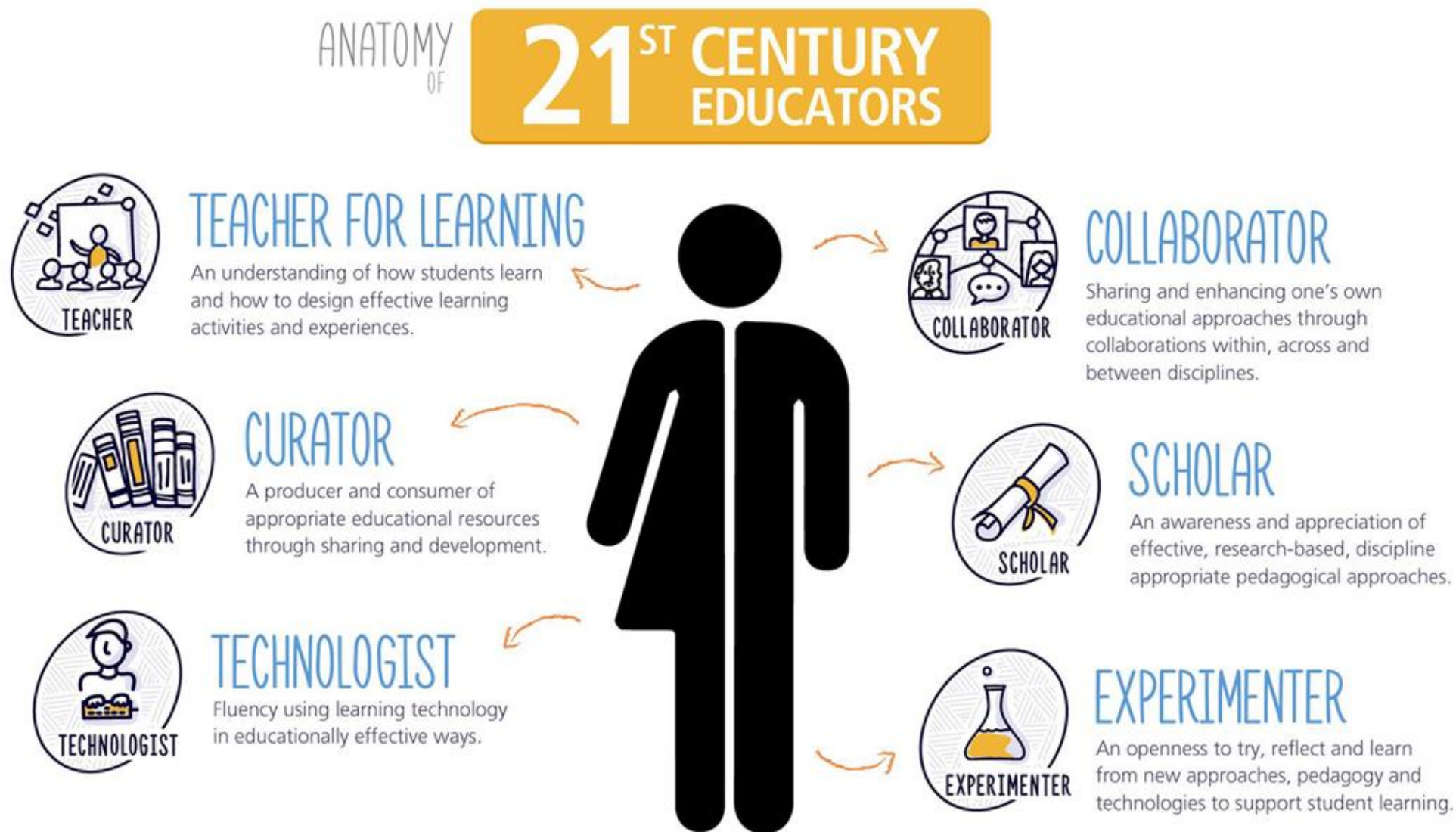
Putting it all together

Designing your plan and starting your network

Keeping track of your learning places



What are teachers doing?



Simon Bates Anatomy of the Teacher

Educator Anatomy

Text from graphic on the previous page



Teacher for Learning

An understanding of how students learn and how to design effective learning activities and experiences.



Collaborator

Sharing and enhancing one's own educational approaches through collaborations within, across and between disciplines.



Curator

A producer and consumer of appropriate educational resources through sharing and development.



Scholar

An awareness and appreciation of effective, research-based, discipline appropriate pedagogical approaches.



Technologist

Fluency using learning technology in educationally effective ways.



Experimenter

An openness to try, reflect, and learn from new approaches, pedagogy, and technologies to support student learning.

What is your anatomy?

Which of those roles are important in your work?

What do you spend the most time on?

What is missing?

What are confident in?

Where do you want to learn more?



Map your roles

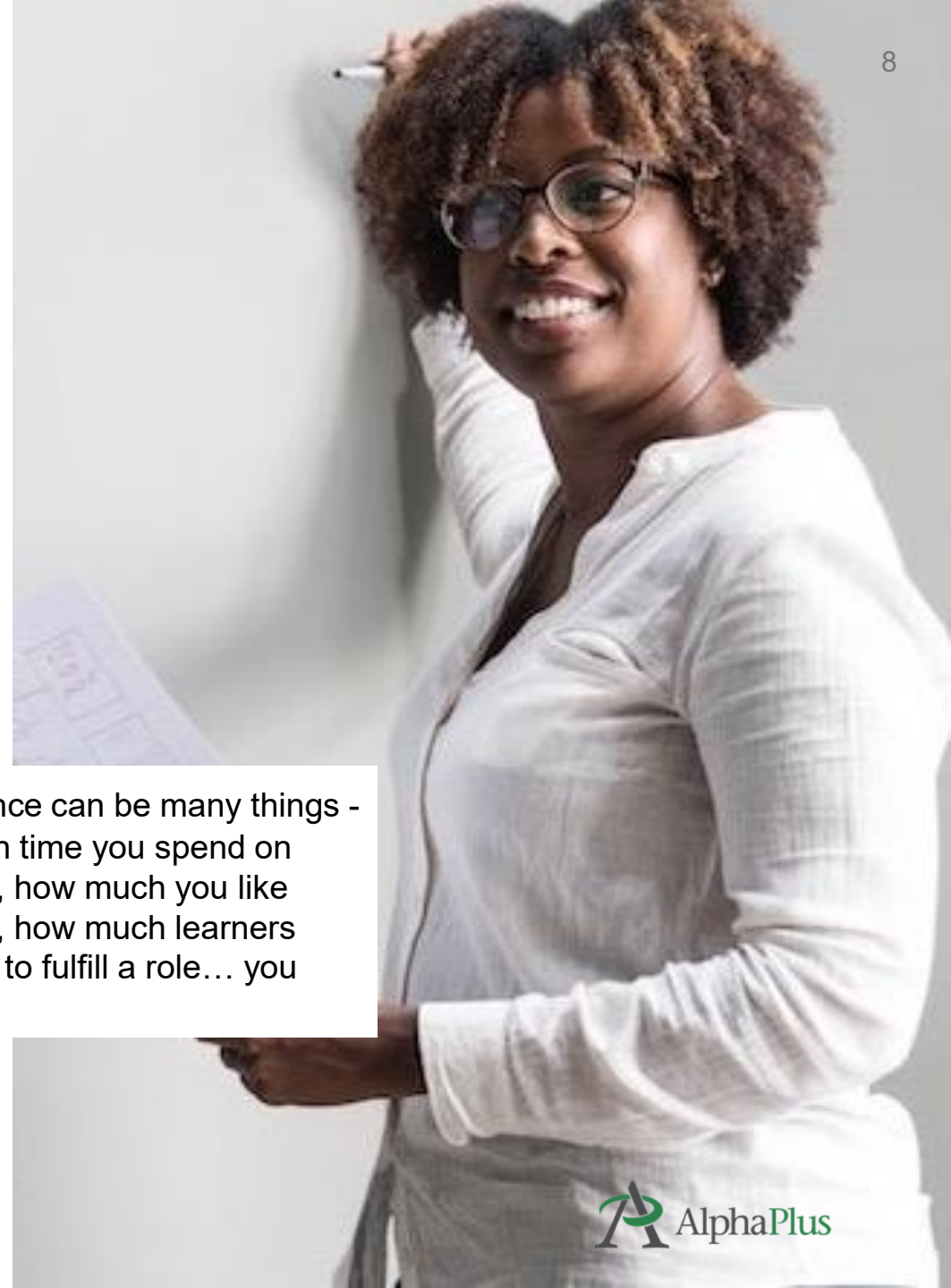
1. Choose an empty slide.
2. Write your name or avatar to the top of the slide where you are going to work.
3. Use the icons to create a map of your own learning framework.

Some ideas:

- Change the sizes to indicate the importance* of each one.
- Place them in an order of importance.
- Add and delete icons.
- Categorize them.
- For example
 - know enough/need to know more
 - learn by myself/learn with others
 - learn online/learn in hard space ...

Activity: Mapping your anatomy

*Importance can be many things - how much time you spend on each role, how much you like each role, how much learners need you to fulfill a role... you decide.



What do you want to learn?

1. Choose an empty slide.
2. Write your name or add your picture--or your group name or picture--to the top of the slide where you are going to work.
3. Fill in column 2.

Activity: Learning goals





What is Connectivism?

... or why do I feel so weird all the time?

Connectivism is the understanding we are trying to make decisions about the present and the future on top of a set of altering foundations.

Sometimes things change slowly and incrementally and sometimes the foundation shifts suddenly.

The ability to draw distinctions between what is important and what is unimportant is vital but also difficult.

How can Connectivism help us?

Connectivism acknowledges that decision-making is a learning process.

Being able to figure out

- what changes are going to impact our lives and our work
- how we can prepare for those impacts
- when we need to rethink the decisions we have already made based on our current knowledge and experience

can be difficult.

It is this struggle that can make us feel as if we are falling behind. We aren't – we are in a continuous process of navigating shifting sands, and we are getting better at it because we are using our knowledge and experience about decision making to guide our learning plans.



Connectivism tells us

- Our capacity to learn can be as important as the knowledge we have already developed. At times and in some circumstances, it may be more important.
- And our knowledge and the understanding and experience with learning and making decisions about what to learn that guides all current and future learning.
- Our ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.
- Learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions. We need to nurture and maintain connections to facilitate continual learning.



In other words...

we need each other!



What is a Personal Learning Network?

It is a way of adapting some of the connectivist ideas to 21st-century learning.

Personal Learning Networks are formal and informal networks of people with similar goals and interests who interact using digital tools to share information, learn from each other, problem solve and collaborate.

Personal Learning Networks are **curated** lifelong learning opportunities for professional development. They support practitioners who want to activate their intellectual curiosity in the company of others in a world of changing information and technologies.

What are the benefits of a Personal Learning Network?

Teaching can be isolating: Personal Learning Networks help educators to escape the isolation that can become part of the profession.

Teachers are busy: A virtual personal learning network can help us overcome networking barriers related to time, place, and distance.

Teachers need time to reflect: Online discussion forums, blogs, and courses can prompt you to reflect more regularly on our teaching practice.



The benefits of learning from others

Diversity matters: Personal Learning Networks create space for a variety of experiences and perspectives and can help us find interesting ways to innovate in our practice.

Finding information or support: As a seeker of information, a personal learning network can help us solve challenges, learn about how other practitioners are applying methodologies and resources, and find mentors who might not be available locally.



The benefits of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is an essential part of personal and professional development: It is a continuous process that helps us stay relevant in our field, keep up with changes in trends, adapt to ambiguity and maintain our intellectual flexibility.

Modeling how to be a lifelong learner: Building an online presence and/or learning how to work with e-tools shows colleagues and learners that we are intellectually curious and see the value in continuous professional and personal learning.



The benefits of sharing your knowledge

Sharing your expertise and ideas: As a creator of information, you can help others by talking about your experiences, experiences, interesting experiments and what you are researching.

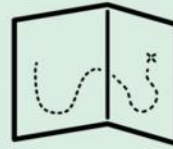
Developing leadership: Participating in virtual discussions, workshops and courses helps others get to know you and benefit from your professional wisdom.



Learn and connect
in the ways that
you enjoy best.



Explore your own
interests, goals and
passions.



Create your own
learning schedule.



Evaluate research
and promising
practices.



You are in
charge of your
own PLN.



Brainstorm and fine
tune your ideas.



Educators benefit
from your
knowledge and
wisdom.



The field benefits
from your
knowledge and
perspective.



Learners benefit
from connected
teachers.



You are in charge of your own PLN

Text from graphic in previous slide



- Learn and connect in the ways that you enjoy best.
- Explore your own interests, goals and passions.
- Create your own learning schedule.
- Evaluate research and promising practices.
- Brainstorm and fine tune your ideas.
- Educators benefit from your knowledge and wisdom.
- The field benefits from your knowledge and perspective.
- Learners benefit from connected teachers.

Reflections and questions

What questions do you have?

Which aspects of Personal Learning Networks interest you the most?



Building a Personal Learning Network

Define a purpose: Think about what your short--term and long--term learning goals are, who the related experts are, and where you might find the information. For example, do you want to locate data to solve a classroom problem tomorrow, try out a new tech tool, or learn about a general topic over time?

We have started to set out some learning goals.

Now we will look at where and how we like to learn.



Tools for Personal Learning Networks

A digital PLN can include a variety of places to learn, depending on preferences and goals.

You can develop a variety of tools for a well-rounded learning network that meets your needs.

One way to think about building a PLN is to decide what you need it to do.

If you want to gather information that helps you stay current with new developments in a particular area, blogs, newsletters and podcasts can provide a steady stream of up-to-date information.

When you want to take advantage of the experience of a wider variety of practitioners, social networking tools can be a place to find new information as well as support, collaborators and to engage in discussions.



Personal Learning Networks can include



| Informal/indirect learning | Formal/direct learning | Networking |
|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Blogs Newsletters Podcasts Social media (reading) | Workshops Webinars Courses | Social media (connecting) Conferences |

Examples: informal learning/broadcasts

| Blogs, Journals | Podcasts | Newsletters, Bulletins |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Calgary Learns</p> <p>Decoda</p> <p>As I was saying... Brigid Hayes: policy stuff</p> <p>Adult Literacy Education Journal from ProLiteracy</p> <p>The Change Agent</p> <p>Cult of Pedagogy US, K-12 but interesting</p> | <p>Literacy Legacy : Training for Instructors from MTML</p> <p>What's Literacy? from Literacy Quebec</p> <p>NEW Innovating Adult Literacy: Stories from Across Canada</p> <p>Conversations in Adult and Further Education (Ireland)</p> | <p>Ontario Native Literacy Coialition</p> <p>Online Learning News from Contact North</p> <p>AI Bytes from Literacy Link South Central</p> <p>The Connector from Calgary Learns</p> |



Examples: formal learning/direct education

| Workshops | Webinars | Courses |
|---|--|--|
| <p>EdTechTeacher Some free, US, K-12, has worked with AlphaPlus</p> <p>Laubach Literacy Ontario - slide decks</p> | <p>Teach Online from Contact North</p> <p>CLO – collection</p> <p>Pop-Up PD for Literacy Educators - collection</p> <p>Calgary Learns – see PD offerings in the newsletter</p> <p>Decoda Webinars</p> <p>ProLiteracy Webinars</p> <p>EdTech Webinars</p> | <p>CLO Literacy Basics</p> <p>ProLiteracy Courses</p> <p>World Education Self-paced courses</p> <p>https://www.crowded.world.org/training</p> <p>World Ed YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@WorldEducationInc/videos</p> |



Examples: networking

| Social media | Conferences | Calendars |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Linked In</p> <p>YouTube</p> <p>Facebook</p> <p>Instagram</p> <p>Threads</p> <p>TikTok</p> <p>Bluesky</p> | <p><u>CESBA</u></p> <p><u>CESBA LBS</u></p> | <p><u>Literacy Resources and Discussion Forum</u></p> <p>Calendar for Pop-Up PDs on this page</p> <p><u>LLEO Calendar</u></p> <p>(<u>Networks</u>)</p> |



Examples: libraries

Using a library

(local public library, university catalogue, [Unesco Library](#))

- Inter-library loan
- Access to e-resources (databases, magazines, books)
- Request a purchase

Subject terms:

- Elementary education of adults
- Literacy--Canada
- Adult education
- Reading (Adult education)
- Numeracy

Excellent for journals:

[Adult literacy research](#) (online resources)

[Copian Library](#)



Where are you learning now?

What are some of the good places you have found?

1. Choose an empty slide.
2. Write your name or add your avatar--or your group name or avatar--to the top of the slide where you are going to work.
3. Fill in columns 1-3.

| Places I learn | Things I learn there | What I like about it |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Activity: Places to Learn

A list from November 2025



Getting started

- **Start small:** If you want to start following blogs, start with 2 or 3, not 20. If you want to experiment with social media, pick one platform for the academic term, get to know it well, and start connecting with/following a few people or organizations to start with.
- **Spiral:** Once you connect with people or organizations related to your interests and goals, try to find out whom they are connected to and add those second--level contacts or resources to your network if appropriate. This process is called “spiraling out” because you start from one point and then expand your network’s reach in bigger and bigger circles.
- **Share and participate:** As you become more comfortable with a media type or tool, start contributing your expertise and experiences. All teachers know something worth sharing! This action could take many forms such as writing your first post, writing reflective comments in the chat box during a webinar, commenting on someone’s blog, or posting on a professional social media account.



Your PLN

1. Choose an empty slide.
2. Write your name or add your avatar--or your group name or avatar--to the top of the slide where you are going to work.
3. Fill in columns 1-3.

| | Things I want to learn | Places to learn |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|
| Things to enhance my practice (doing the things I do now differently) | | |
| Things to expand my practice (doing new things) | | |
| Things to... | | |

Activity: Putting it together



Transfer your PLN

When you are done, paste your table into this doc:

[Download link](#)

[Copy link](#) (you will need to be logged in to a Google account)



Curating

- **Curate:** Add new contacts and resources as you spiral out from helpful members in your PLN. Occasionally review your network's content and remove sites, resources, and contacts that don't contribute to your current learning goals.

[Curating Resources in Adult Literacy](#)



How do we keep track?

Bookmarks

[Bookmarking apps](#)

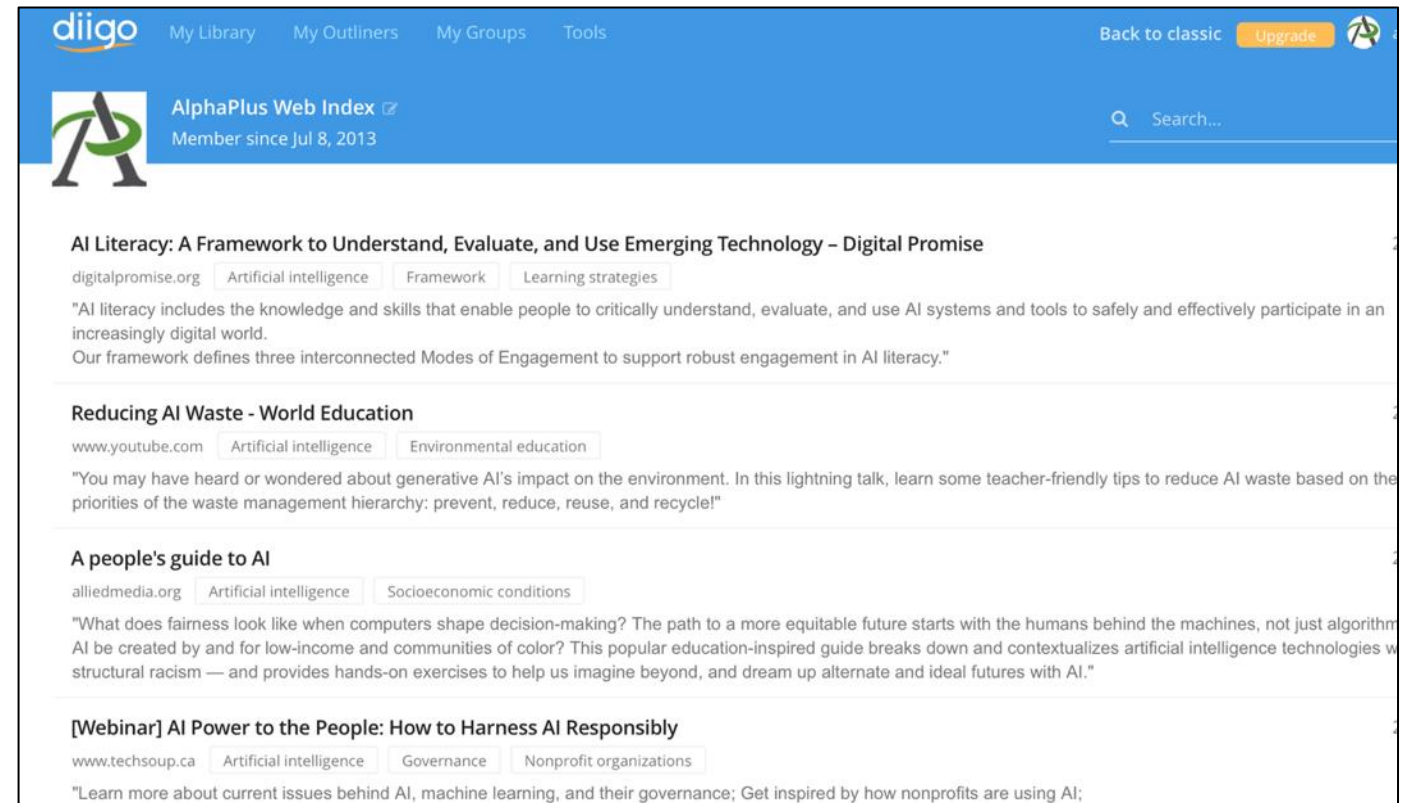
I email myself. I have a folder in my email account called Readings and I drop everything in there.

Tip: If you use the reader view on your phone and then click Share, when the article is sent to your email, the whole article appears in the email (not just the link).

Example of using a bookmarking tool

Resources you might want to keep a trace of:

- Webinar recordings
- Articles
- Websites
- Quotes



The screenshot shows the diigo bookmarking tool interface. The top navigation bar includes links for "My Library", "My Outliners", "My Groups", and "Tools". A user profile for "AlphaPlus Web Index" is shown, indicating membership since July 8, 2013. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area displays a list of saved resources:

- AI Literacy: A Framework to Understand, Evaluate, and Use Emerging Technology – Digital Promise**
digitalpromise.org | Artificial intelligence | Framework | Learning strategies
"AI literacy includes the knowledge and skills that enable people to critically understand, evaluate, and use AI systems and tools to safely and effectively participate in an increasingly digital world.
Our framework defines three interconnected Modes of Engagement to support robust engagement in AI literacy."
- Reducing AI Waste - World Education**
www.youtube.com | Artificial intelligence | Environmental education
"You may have heard or wondered about generative AI's impact on the environment. In this lightning talk, learn some teacher-friendly tips to reduce AI waste based on the priorities of the waste management hierarchy: prevent, reduce, reuse, and recycle!"
- A people's guide to AI**
alliedmedia.org | Artificial intelligence | Socioeconomic conditions
"What does fairness look like when computers shape decision-making? The path to a more equitable future starts with the humans behind the machines, not just algorithms. AI be created by and for low-income and communities of color? This popular education-inspired guide breaks down and contextualizes artificial intelligence technologies with structural racism — and provides hands-on exercises to help us imagine beyond, and dream up alternate and ideal futures with AI."
- [Webinar] AI Power to the People: How to Harness AI Responsibly**
www.techsoup.ca | Artificial intelligence | Governance | Nonprofit organizations
"Learn more about current issues behind AI, machine learning, and their governance; Get inspired by how nonprofits are using AI;"

What can you do with Diigo?

- **Bookmarks:** Collect sites, images, PDF files, notes and access them from anywhere.
- **Tags:** Add relevant keywords to collected resources for easy future retrieval.
- **Notes:** Use your Diigo library to keep note of anything relevant and tag them with relevant keywords.
- **Highlights:** Highlight text directly on any web page for personal reference.



[AlphaPlus Web Index](#)

Other tools

Microsoft OneNote

[Google Keep](#)

[Evernote](#)

[Symbaloo](#)

[Diigo Video Library](#) (tutorials)



Social media tips

Learn the social norms (rules): Each networking platform has its own culture and rules. Sit back, watch, and learn. Observe how people share information on your chosen platform, and enjoy and apply the ideas and resources you discover.

As you join a new community, you can spend time observing interactions before you contribute. This tactic is called “lurking” or “lurk and learn.”

As you lurk and learn, you can observe norms around:

Levels of formality – How do people address each other? How do people use slang, informal language, abbreviations, and emoticons when they write? Is the language more formal or academic?

Interaction patterns – If someone comments on your contribution, are you expected to reply? Do these behaviors depend on the type of content being shared? Where are you expected to get permissions – adding to lists, using @ mentions, etc.?

Content sharing – Are people expected to provide references, hyperlinks, or attachments when they contribute something? Are they expected to use Alt Text for images?





Some ways to interact on Bluesky

@traceyehm.bsky.social

FOLLOW: See posts of the posters you like best in your Following feed. These are your regulars. Add information to your Profile so people can decide to follow you back.

POST: Write up to 300 characters. Add images with ALT TEXT. Add links – when the thumbnail appears, delete the link to save characters. You can mention other accounts (respectfully) by using the @ symbol.



REPLY: Respond to a post – start a conversation with the poster or others who reply.



DIRECT MESSAGE: use the Chat function to talk to people “privately.”



REPOST: Share a post with your peeps in your feed.

QUOTE POST: Make a comment on a post and share it with your peeps in your feed.



SAVE: Add a post to your Saved collection to read later.

LIKE: Send your appreciation to the poster and add this post to your Liked collection.



FEEDS: You can add accounts that you follow or don't to Lists. Lists become Feeds that you can pin the Feeds so they show up easily. You can follow or pin other people's feeds.

STARTER PACKS: Here is how <https://bsky.social/about/blog/06-26-2024-starter-packs>

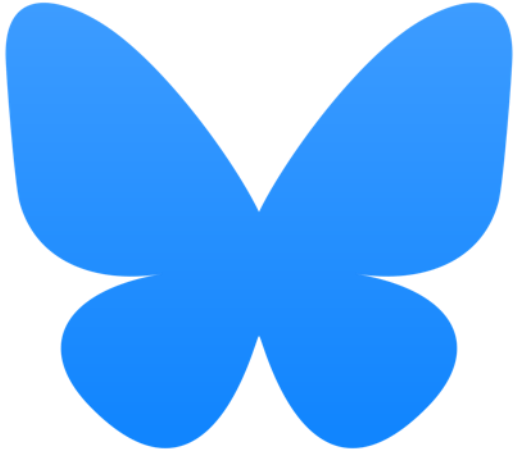
Bluesky tip sheet text

How to interact on Bluesky

- FOLLOW: See posts of the posters you like best in your Following feed. These are your regulars. Add information to your Profile so people can decide to follow you back.
- POST: Write up to 300 characters. Add images with ALT TEXT. Add links – when the thumbnail appears, delete the link to save characters. You can mention other accounts (respectfully) by using the @ symbol.
- REPLY: Respond to a post – start a conversation with the poster or others who reply.
- DIRECT MESSAGE: use the Chat function to talk to people “privately.”
- REPOST: Share a post with your peeps in your feed.
- QUOTE POST: Make a comment on a post and share it with your peeps in your feed.
- SAVE: Add a post to your Saved collection to read later.
- LIKE: Send your appreciation to the poster and add this post to your Liked collection.
- FEEDS: You can add accounts that you follow or don't to Lists. Lists become Feeds that you can pin the Feeds so they show up easily. You can follow or pin other people's feeds.
- STARTER PACKS: Here is how <https://bsky.social/about/blog/06-26-2024-starter-packs>



EduSky



#EduSky 🍏

By [@afreeparticle.com](https://bsky.app/profile/@afreeparticle.com)

A feed for discussion related to education. This feed filters #EduSky posts to help prioritize conversations related to education & teaching.

If you follow [@afreeparticleemoji.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/@afreeparticleemoji.bsky.social) you can use 🍏 to post to the feed.



Tracey's educator list: <https://bsky.app/profile/did:plc:rqdsrc4w7w5oxejonfs2cbb4/lists/3lgexuzb4772s>

Tracey's librarian list: <https://bsky.app/profile/did:plc:rqdsrc4w7w5oxejonfs2cbb4/lists/3lanlhqxa6e2l>

Thank you

Guylaine Vinet

gvinet@alphaplus.ca

alphaplus.ca

416-322-1012 x 121

1-800-788-1120 x 121

Tracey Mollins

tmollins@alphaplus.ca

alphaplus.ca

416-322-1012 x 108

1-800-788-1120 x 108

