

How seniors are learning to lead more digital lives

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

- Who in your family is over 70 years old? Do you have any friends or neighbours who are over 70?
- How do you communicate with them? Face to face, by phone, by email, by letter, by video call ...
- Why do you use this method of communication?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

resources

tangle

civil

crucial

hitch

perpetuate

encounter

persevere

cheat sheet

clunky

savvy

uptake

1. a problem that is not very serious _____
2. experience or discover something (possibly for the first time) _____
3. make something such as a situation or process continue, especially one that is wrong, unfair or dangerous

4. the qualities and skills that someone has and can use for dealing with problems

5. polite _____
6. knowledgeable about a particular thing _____
7. a situation that is difficult to deal with because things are not organized properly

8. awkward and slow _____
9. a piece of paper that provides you with information and hints so that you can remember something

10. the number of people who do something such as use a service or study a particular subject

11. extremely important _____
12. continue trying to achieve something difficult _____

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OK Zoomer: how seniors are learning to lead more digital lives

A generation who grew up with black-and-white TV are now video calling like teenagers – and for many, the transition has been relatively painless

Mariella Attard

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- 1 “I used to look at some people using WhatsApp video and think, ‘I wonder what that’s all about,’” says 74-year-old Jillian Cheetham. “Now, you know, I’ve discovered it’s pretty easy.”
- 2 Her book club, which has been going for ten years, has just had its first Zoom meeting. “It was lovely to be together again and feel that we can keep on going,” Cheetham says.
- 3 “There’s no wine and cheese on the table or tea and cake at the end of it; it’s not as much fun when it’s virtual. But we’re discussing a book we all really enjoyed. And apart from a few hitches like some people’s frames freezing, it was really, really satisfying.”
- 4 “Technology wasn’t really relevant until perhaps the last 25% of my career,” says Cheetham, a former secondary-school teacher, business owner and financial-industry professional.
- 5 “There was no training whatsoever. And if my computer wasn’t turning on, I’d ring IT and they’d sort it out. Up until about 2000, you could learn the program specific to what you needed to do. There wasn’t a need to go beyond that if you didn’t want to.”
- 6 But that’s all had to change for her generation: “We’ve been forced to encounter technology in a very different way if we want to continue to have any quality of life.”
- 7 The need to connect is precisely what’s driving many seniors to do just that, according to Dr Torgeir Aleti from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, who’s researching how technology helps support connectedness and social inclusion among older people.
- 8 This confirms what he and his colleagues have suspected for a long time: “It’s just a stereotype that is constantly perpetuated, that seniors don’t know this stuff.
- 9 “The idea that it’s not for me, I don’t have the skills or the resources, or I’m afraid of doing something wrong – these things are now being pushed into the background because we’re in a situation where it’s that or just patting the cat for two weeks while I’m waiting to go out again,” Aleti says.
- 10 Many are turning to younger generations for help, with mixed results.
- 11 “Over the phone, it always starts off civil, and I always begin with the intention that somehow I’ll be able to solve her problem for her,” says Cheetham’s daughter, Naomi. “But as you know with technology, sometimes it becomes overwhelming, no matter how tech-savvy you may be.”
- 12 Tasks that could easily be demonstrated in person quickly turn into a multi-step tangle of complicated workarounds – like talking someone through using Zoom for the first time.
- 13 “I taught her to do a video call on WhatsApp first and how to switch her camera around so I could see what she was doing on her screen rather than her face. It was an enormously clunky way to do it,” Naomi says.
- 14 “That’s when I realized she’d need a cheat sheet. I used the Snipping Tool to show all the screens. It was like IKEA instructions – as few words as possible.” Her mother sent that on to others, who passed it on to their friends, too.
- 15 “Naomi is great,” Cheetham says. “I can’t sing her praises enough. But I find the best teachers are people of my own generation. That seems to work best for me, anyway.”
- 16 Glen Wall, the vice-president of U3A Network Victoria in Australia, agrees. He’s seen a remarkable uptake in technology among members of the University of the Third Age organization, which runs courses for older people and has been moving classes online since early March. In less than three weeks, 15 tutors in his area were running sessions over Zoom for about half their students. Wall says a second wave is now coming onboard.
- 17 “People are sort of working it out,” he says. “I know of a 94-year-old who talked his 93-year-old mate into buying his old iPad off him. He bought a new one, and he’s taught his mate to push that button so he can talk to him every morning.”
- 18 Community connectors are crucial to spreading the knowledge. “They’ll be the sort of person

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that can use technology or find out how to and then have the ability or passion to share the experience,” Wall says.

- 19 One such person is U3A member Awhina Te Amo, a full-time carer for her 70-year-old mother, who has Alzheimer’s disease. Before social distancing, Te Amo accompanied her mother to line dancing, choir, tap dancing, chair aerobics and tai chi. Now a lot of it is virtual.
- 20 “We also stay connected with others through WhatsApp, email, and I’m currently working on a YouTube channel,” Te Amo says. “We have a little group on Facebook, and I’m teaching others what I’ve been learning. I’m just passing on the knowledge as best as I can.”
- 21 Relying on a trusted circle of people is the key to solving many technology dilemmas, according

to Wall. “If a person talks about what they are looking to do – not how – in their group of friends, they will most likely find someone that’s actually done it. And that person will show them.”

- 22 Meanwhile, Cheetham is persevering with the unfamiliar. “If there’s one thing this coronavirus is going to do, it’s going to shift the balance of interactions more strongly in the direction of tech communication,” she says.
- 23 “So it’s one thing to prefer something else, but to be functional, my generation are going to have to use technology more.”

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3 Comprehension check

Decide whether these statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the information in the article. Correct any that are false.

1. Jillian Cheetham never had to use technology in her job.
2. Her book club has started having meetings online, which is a lot of fun as everyone brings their own drinks and snacks.
3. Cheetham’s good friend, who is in her 90s, made Cheetham a cheat sheet using screenshots.
4. A university for older people has started running its courses online, but so far, not many of the older students have managed to work out how to use the software.
5. Cheetham says that older people find it easier to learn how to use new tech when someone their own age explains it to them.
6. Cheetham says that once coronavirus is no longer a problem for people her age, they will stop communicating with each other online.

4 Find the word

Find the following phrases and phrasal verbs in the article. Then use them in sentences of your own.

1. deal with or solve a problem (two words, phrasal verb, para 5)
2. talk about how good someone is (three words, verb phrase, para 15)
3. join a group (two words, verb phrase, para 16)
4. solve a problem by considering the facts (two words, phrasal verb, para 17)
5. change or affect the result of something in your favour (three words, verb phrase, para 22)

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5 Using the key words

Fill the gaps using key words from task 2. Then complete the sentences with your own endings.

1. My earliest _____ with technology was in ...
2. By drawing on all her inner _____, Phoebe was able to ...
3. In general, the carnival went well despite a few technical _____, such as ...
4. The talks remained relatively _____, right up until the moment when Mark ...
5. The cables behind my PC used to be in a complete _____, until one day when Emilia decided to ...
6. It's always worth not giving up immediately but _____ when you want to ...

6 Discussion

- **Which video call or video conferencing apps have you tried?**
 - o Which do you prefer and why?
 - o What were the biggest challenges that you encountered?
- **Do you remember your first video calls?**
 - o How has your ability to use the systems and deal with any hitches improved since then?
- **How has your (or your family's or your company's) attitude to video calls and conferencing changed since the coronavirus pandemic?**
- **Your 80-year-old neighbour has asked you to teach them how to video call. How will you approach this task?**