

Name _____ **Central Themes**



What's Going On?

No one can deny that the now ubiquitous email is one of the most useful aspects of the Internet. It is fast, efficient, and ecologically friendly. In fact, in 2012, there were 144 billion emails sent every day; if every one of those emails had been a note on a piece of paper, then it has been estimated that e-mail saves 1.8 million trees *every day*. E-mail has transformed the world of business, and keeps friends and families connected. But is it also turning us all into addicts?

Email follows what is called the “variable interval reinforcement schedule” in operant conditioning. Operant conditioning means using reinforcement and punishment to create associations between particular behaviors and their consequences. For example, if you send a child to a time out every time he interrupts someone’s conversation, you form an association between interrupting (the behavior) and the time out (the consequence) and the behavior decreases. The same theory works in the opposite way; when you perform a behavior (like checking your email) and are rewarded by five minutes of diversion watching the cute cat video that your Aunt Martha forwarded to you, you are more likely to check your email again later in hopes of finding something else. Slightly different from operant conditioning, the “variable interval reinforcement schedule” creates an association between the behavior and the reward, but not every time; consequently, the subject tends to perform the behavior over and over again, in hopes of securing the reward—exactly the same process which drives an addiction to gambling. Because the reward only comes at unpredictable times, you tend to perform the behavior more and more frequently.

Directions: Read the passage. Highlight or underline key ideas in each passage.

When summarizing, describe all key ideas from the text. Do **not** include opinions or personal info in your summary.

Create a title for this article: _____

What is the central idea? _____

Briefly summarize the article. _____
