

Reading Habits in Transition

Most experts agree that the Internet has fundamentally changed how we read, think, and remember things. However, whether this has had a positive or negative impact is still unknown.

How has the Internet changed the way we read?

There is evidence that we are reading fewer books, particularly non-fiction. Let's say you need medical advice, cooking instructions, or biographical information. Who wants to buy a 300-page book when you can find a 300-word article on the Internet about the same subject? It's easier to read, it's free, and it's a lot faster. However, we are, in fact, reading a lot more overall. In addition to our offline reading, we read online throughout the day as we check our smart phones, surf the Internet, visit social media sites, and catch up on our e-mail.

We also do a lot more skimming and scanning on the Internet than we do when we read physical books or periodicals, such as magazines and newspapers. As we surf the Internet, we skim quickly for topics that interest us and scan for the specific information we need. A search engine puts millions of possibilities at our fingertips.

How has the Internet changed how we think and remember?

Before there was an Internet, people spent a lot of time taking notes in libraries so they could remember and recall information easily. Today, when you can use a search engine to take you to what you're looking for in an instant, that kind of concentration isn't as necessary. You can simply bookmark any page and return to it easily. However, many argue that online information sources often contain errors and can't be trusted, so we need to be more careful when we use them.



Some wonder if the Internet has made it more difficult to concentrate on one task without getting distracted by other things. We are constantly interrupted by updates from social media sites and e-mail messages. We follow links to other websites where we find more links to other websites and jump from topic to topic. We are also bombarded with a lot of junk—for example, newsfeeds about celebrities, pop-up ads about products we don't want or need, and warnings about viruses.

Some consider what we read on the Internet to be trash compared to traditional offline reading, while others see many advantages in the reading we do on the Internet. Some argue that reading on the Internet is like exercise for the brain, making it easier for us to cope with distractions and think clearly as we learn to make choices that work for us. In a recent study, 81% of those surveyed agreed that our use of the Internet has actually made us smarter. If you are a digital native—that is, someone who grew up with the Internet—that's very good news, indeed.

- A RECOGNIZE POINT OF VIEW** The Reading mentions both positive and negative aspects of reading on the Internet. Summarize some of each in the chart.

Positive aspects	Negative aspects

- B UNDERSTAND MEANING FROM CONTEXT** Find and underline these words in the Reading. Use the context to match them with their meanings.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1 skimming | a the ability to pay careful attention to one thing |
| 2 scanning | b reading quickly for a general understanding |
| 3 concentration | c made to see or read things continuously |
| 4 distracted | d reading quickly in search of specific information |
| 5 bombarded | e unable to focus because of interruptions |

**EXTRA
MORE
EXERCISES**

A. Based on the information in the reading, which words or phrases correctly complete the statements below? Circle your answers.

- The overall impact of the Internet on people's reading habits and how they think and remember things _____.
 - has been positive
 - is still unknown
 - is negative
- People are reading fewer books, particularly _____.
 - fiction
 - non-fiction
 - science fiction
- Overall, people are _____ a lot more.
 - talking on smart phones
 - reading
 - writing e-mails
- _____ believe that the Internet has made people smarter.
 - The majority of people surveyed
 - Digital natives
 - Researchers