

Reading Exercise > My Son's a Computer Genius

Read an article about a schoolboy who set up a successful Internet business. Choose from the sentences A-I the one that fits each gap (1-7). There is ONE EXTRA sentence which you do not need to use. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Tom Hadfield created a £15m Internet business by the age of 16. His father describes life with a child prodigy.

Tom was always advanced for his age. He learned to walk and talk early, and was fascinated by words and numbers. He was only two when he got his first computer. In fact, it was bought for his older sister. Even before his aptitude for mathematics became apparent, Tom was teaching himself to play chess on it. **0**

Although Tom's sister attended the local primary school, Tom never quite settled in at the neighbourhood playgroup. **1** Early pastimes included shuffling and memorising the order of two packs of playing cards, or working out how many seconds there are in a day, a week, a year.

We hoped that school would keep him occupied, but although he enjoyed the many friends he made, he soon grew bored with lessons. It wasn't the teachers' fault. **2** What about his friends? What would happen when he was in the top year? The proposed solution raised more problems than it tried to solve.

By the time he was seven or eight, Tom was playing football regularly for



his school and for a team organised by supporters of the local football club. His skills as a businessman had begun to show through as well. He washed our car, and those of the neighbours, for 50p each. **3** He preferred to invest it in a bucket, sponge and bottle of car shampoo.

Secondary school began and Tom soon discovered the World Wide Web. For his twelfth birthday, we got him 'wired up', largely because this was the only way to get him home from the house of a friend who already had Internet access. **4** We learned later that Tom was already planning then to postpone serious studying until the year he took his final exams at 16.

Tom says that he drew up the business plan for Soccerbet, now the world's most popular football website, while he was

daydreaming in a lesson. Since then, its success has provided his father with full-time employment, generated millions of pounds in advertising, and now attracts more than seven million readers a year. The site is now valued at £15m.

5 He has also had the chance of leaving school to pursue a football career as a goalkeeper with Brighton F.C. or stay at school and follow a business career.

6 One is, 'Aren't you worried about Tom spending so long at a computer?' And the other: 'Isn't it a problem that he misses so much school because of his business commitments?' The answer to both is no. Tom spends anything up to twelve hours a day at the keyboard, but he still manages to go around town with his friends and play football two or three times a week. He rarely watches television.

As for missing school, the teachers who understand Tom recognise the benefits he enjoys from being active in the 'real' world. **7** If anything, the past four years have been like an extended business studies project, an experiment in personal and social education. After sixth-form college, Tom hopes to go to Oxford University to study Politics, Philosophy and Economics. Throughout, he intends to enjoy himself doing all the things normal adolescents do, while building up his own business.

So it may not be long before he is sitting at his computer in his room at university, running a global business in his spare time.

- A His other interests have not harmed his education; they have added to it, made it more meaningful.
- B They suggested the possibility of moving him up a year but that was no answer.
- C There are to questions friends most frequently ask.
- D From that day, school began to recede further and further into the background.
- E We all hoped secondary school might prove more challenging.
- F As a result, Tom has been offered employment around the world, frequently by corporations that did not realize that he is still a schoolboy.
- G Instead he preferred to play by himself at home.
- H But he did not want to spend the money on sweets.
- I By the age of three, he had learned how to break into the program and change sides every time the computer was about to declare checkmate.

