

Unit 4 New media

Reading Section 1



- 1 Read through the article briefly. Then read Questions 1–6 and answer the following question.
In which paragraphs will you find the information that you need to do this task?
- 2 Now read the text carefully and answer Questions 1–13.

IS CONSTANT USE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA CHANGING OUR MINDS?

The power of modern electronic media – the net, mobile phones and video games – to capture the attention of the human mind, particularly the young mind, and then distract it, has lately become a subject of concern. We are, say the worriers, losing the ability to apply ourselves properly to a single task, like reading a book in its entirety or mastering a piece of music on an instrument, with the result that our thinking is becoming shallower.

Nicholas Carr, the American science writer, has explored this theme for his new book, *The Shallows*, in which he argues that new media are not just changing our habits but our brain too. It turns out that the mature human brain is not an immutable seat of personality and intellect but a changeable thing, subject to 'neuroplasticity'. When our activities alter, so does the architecture of our brain. 'I'm

not thinking the way I used to think,' writes Carr. 'I feel it most strongly when I'm reading.' Years of internet use have, he suspects, dented his ability to read deeply, to absorb himself in books: 'My brain wasn't just drifting. It was hungry. It was demanding to be fed the way the net fed it.' He describes getting fidgety when faced with a long text: 'When we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning.'

Carr cites research by Gary Small, a professor of psychiatry at UCLA, who concluded that constant exposure to modern media strengthens new neural pathways while weakening older ones. Just five hours of internet use is enough to awaken previously dormant parts of the brain's pre-frontal cortex, concluded Small. For Carr, this is proof that the net can rewire the mind. He sees dangers. Deep thought, the ability to immerse oneself in an area of study, to follow a narrative, to understand an argument and develop a critique, is giving way to skimming. Young users of the Internet are good at drawing together information for a school project, for example, but that does not mean they have digested it.

But is a changing mind a more stupid one? Jake Vigdor and Helen Ladd are researchers at Duke University, North Carolina. In a study spanning five years and involving more than 100,000 children, they discovered a correlation between declining test scores in both mathematics and reading and the spread of home computers and broadband. 'The decline in scores was in the order of one or two percent but it was statistically significant,' says Vigdor. 'The drop may not be that great but one can say that the increase in computer use was certainly not positive.' The cut-off year for the study was 2005, when socialising was more primitive. Since then, social networking sites have become enormously powerful consumers of young people's time. Vigdor and Ladd concluded that the educational value of home computing was best realised when youngsters were actively supervised by parents.

This tendency to skim is compounded by the temptation of new media users to 'multi-task'. Watch a youngster on a computer and he could be Facebook-ing while burning a CD or Tweeting on his mobile phone. Modern management tends to promote multi-tasking as an expression of increased efficiency. Science, on the other hand, does not. The human brain is, it seems, not at all good at multi-tasking – unless it involves a highly developed skill like driving. David Meyer, a neuroscientist

at the University of Michigan, says: 'The bottom line is that you can't simultaneously be thinking about your tax return and reading an essay, just as you can't talk to yourself about two things at once. People may think otherwise but it's a myth. With complicated tasks, you will never, ever be able to overcome the inherent limitations in the brain.'

Paying attention is the prerequisite of memory: the sharper the attention, the sharper the memory. Cursory study born of the knowledge that information is easily available online results, say the worriers, in a failure to digest it. In addition, the brain needs rest and recovery time to consolidate thoughts. Teenagers who fill every moment with a text or Tweet are not allowing their minds necessary downtime. All rather worrying, but is it that bad?

We have been here before, of course. The Ancient Greeks lamented the replacement of the oral tradition with written text, and the explosion in book ownership resulting from the printing press was, for some, a disaster. In the 18th century, a French statesman railed against a new device that turned people into 'dispersed' individuals, isolated in 'sullen silence'. He was talking about the newspaper.

The net is supposed to consume the lives of young people, yet the only reliable studies about the time spent online, collated by the World Health Organization, suggest children spend between two and four hours in front of screens, including television screens, and not six or seven, as often suggested. Moreover, there is evidence that youngsters who use social networking sites have more rewarding offline social lives than those who do not.

A study on children and new technology in the UK included a 'study of studies' by Professor David Buckingham of the University of London's Institute of Education. He concluded: 'Broadly speaking, the evidence about the effects of new media is weak and inconclusive – and this applies to both positive and negative effects.'

Certainly the 'old' media don't seem to be doing that badly. An annual survey shows that sales of children's books this year were 4.9 per cent greater than last year, with more than 60 million sold. The damage, if any, done by excessive computer time may not be so much to do with what is being done online as what is being missed – time spent with family or playing in trees with friends.

Questions 1–6

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the reading passage?

Write

- TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this

- 1 Some people believe that modern electronic media only have a negative effect on young people.
- 2 Nicholas Carr's book on the subject is a bestseller.
- 3 Nicholas Carr believes that electronic media have affected his enjoyment of reading books.
- 4 Gary Small's research supports Nicholas Carr's beliefs.
- 5 Management beliefs on multi-tasking are proved correct by scientific research.
- 6 David Meyer's views on the limitations of the brain have caused controversy.

Questions 7–10

Complete the notes below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the passage for each answer.

Vigdor and Ladd's research

- looked at over 7
- found that lower 8 and home computer use were linked
- indicated that the effects of greater home computer use could not be described as 9
- concluded that 10 should be involved in home computer use

Questions 11–13

Answer the questions below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the passage for each answer.

- 11 Which invention was criticised by an 18th century French politician?
- 12 According to studies that can be trusted, what is the maximum amount of time per day that children spend looking at screens?
- 13 Which products have become more popular recently?

Listening Section 4

- 1 You will hear an expert giving a talk on blogs. Look at Questions 6–10 and answer the following question.

Which three questions need a noun to fill the gap?

- 2 (5) Now listen and answer Questions 1–10.

Questions 1–5

Complete the summary below.

Write **ONE OR TWO WORDS** for each answer.

Blogs and the History of Blogging

A blog can perhaps be best described as a website that consists of a kind of journal that is regularly updated. Blogs cover a very wide variety of topics and many of them are personal diaries. Blogs are usually not 1 because they have interactive elements, which may lead to friendships or even 2 relationships between people.

The first 'blog' was probably created in 1994 by a student and he called it his '3'. Similar websites were then created and these included both links and 4 In 1999, someone changed the term used for these websites by creating the phrase '5'; and therefore invented the term 'blog'.

Questions 6–10

Complete the flow chart below.

Write **ONE WORD ONLY** for each answer.

Blogging Workflow – Advice

Decide what the 6 of your posts will be



Do some reading before starting a post



As you compose the post, keep a record of 7 and links



After creating the post, add some tags to it to improve searchability



Use social networking sites to 8 a post you think is outstanding



Look at the 9 relating to the post



Don't simply say 10 to people who have responded to your post



Go on to other blogs and leave comments.

