

Writing Situation

Read all three of the following sources to analyze ideas and evidence about the effects of using technology.

Write an argumentative essay in which you make a claim about either the potential risks or benefits of using technology. Use the information from the texts in the passage set to support your claim. Cite evidence by title or source number.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages;
- plan your response;
- write your response; and
- revise and edit your response.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims;
- use evidence from multiple sources; and
- avoid overly relying on one source.

You may write or type your response.

Your writing should be in the form of a well-organized, multi paragraph essay.

You have 90 minutes to read, plan, write, revise, and edit your response.

Planning Sheet

Source # 1

This article, from June 18, 2012, is from the New York Times Opinion Pages, and is about the effects of social media on people's relationships.

Social Media as Community

by Keith Hampton

Keith Hampton is an associate professor in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers, and a past chairman of the American Sociological Association's section on Communication and Information Technologies.

Updated June 18, 2012 *New York Times / Opinion Pages* Excerpt

Neither living alone nor using social media is socially isolating. In 2011, I was lead author of an article in *Information, Communication & Society* that found, based on a representative survey of 2,500 Americans, that regardless of whether the participants were married or single, those who used social media had more close confidants.

The constant feed from our online social circles is the modern front porch.

A recent follow-up study, "Social Networking Sites and Our Lives" (Pew Research Center), found that the average user of a social networking site had more close ties than and was half as likely to be socially isolated as the average American. Additionally, my co-authors and I, in another article published in *New Media & Society*, found not only that social media users knew people from a greater variety of backgrounds, but also that much of this diversity was a result of people using these technologies who simultaneously spent an impressive amount of time socializing outside of the house.

A number of studies, including my own and those of Matthew Brashears (a sociologist at Cornell), have found that Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago. However, a loss of close friends does not mean a loss of support. Because of cellphones and social media, those we depend on are more accessible today than at any point since we lived in small, village-like settlements.

Social media has made every relationship persistent and pervasive. We no longer lose social ties over our lives; we have Facebook friends forever. The constant feed of status updates and digital photos from our online social circles is the modern front porch. This is why, in "Social Networking Sites and Our Lives," there was a clear trend for those who used these technologies to receive more social support than other people.

The data backs it up. There is little evidence that social media is responsible for a trend of isolation, or a loss of intimacy and social support.

Used by permission of New York Times.

Source # 2

This New York Times Upfront article, from October 4, 2010, discusses the pros and cons of search engine technology.

Is Google Making Us Stupid?

YES

Who doesn't love Google? In the blink of an eye, the search engine delivers useful information about pretty much any subject imaginable. I use it all the time, and I'm guessing you do too.

But I worry about what Google is doing to our brains. What really makes us intelligent isn't our ability to find lots of information quickly. It's our ability to think deeply about that information. And deep thinking, brain scientists have discovered, happens only when our minds are calm and attentive. The greater our concentration, the richer our thoughts.

If we're distracted, we understand less, remember less, and learn less.

That's the problem with Google—and with the Internet in general. When we use our computers and our cellphones all the time, we're always distracted.

The Net bombards us with messages and other bits of data, and every one of those interruptions breaks our train of thought. We end up scatterbrained. The fact is, you'll never think deeply if you're always Googling, texting, and surfing.

Google doesn't want us to slow down. The faster we zip across the Web, clicking links and skimming words and pictures, the more ads Google is able to show us and the more money it makes. So even as Google is giving us all that useful information, it's also encouraging us to think superficially. It's making us shallow.

If you're really interested in developing your mind, you should turn off your computer and your cellphone—and start thinking. Really thinking. You can Google all the facts you want, but you'll never Google your way to brilliance.

Nicholas Carr, Author

The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains

NO

Any new information technology has both advocates and critics. More than 2,000 years ago, the classical Greek philosopher Socrates complained that the new technology of writing "will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls because they will not use their memories."

Today, Google is the new technology. The Internet contains the world's best writing, images, and ideas; Google lets us find the relevant pieces instantly.

Suppose I'm interested in the guidance computers on Apollo spacecraft in the 1960s. My local library has no books on that specific subject—just 18 books about the Apollo missions in general. I could hunt through those or turn to Google, which returns 45,000 pages, including a definitive encyclopedia article and instructions for building a unit.

Just as a car allows us to move faster and a telescope lets us see farther, access to the Internet's information lets us think better and faster. By considering a wide range of information, we can arrive at more creative and informed solutions. Internet users are more likely to be exposed to a diversity of ideas. In politics, for example, they are likely to see ideas from left and right, and see how news is reported in other countries.

There's no doubt the Internet can create distractions. But 81 percent of experts polled by the Pew Internet Research Project say the opportunities outweigh the distractions.

Socrates was wrong to fear the coming of the written word: Writing has improved our law, science, arts, culture, and our memory. When the history of our current age is written, it will say that Google has made us smarter—both individually and collectively—because we have ready and free access to information.

Peter Norvig, Director of Research

Google Inc.

Used by permission of (*The New York Times Upfront*, Vol. 143, October 4, 2010)

Source # 3

This June 6, 2010 article from the New York Times is about the effects of juggling various technologies on the human brain.

Attached to Technology and Paying a Price

by Matt Richtel

SAN FRANCISCO — When one of the most important e-mail messages of his life landed in his inbox a few years ago, Kord Campbell overlooked it. Not just for a day or two, but 12 days. He finally saw it while sifting through old messages: a big company wanted to buy his Internet start-up.

The message had slipped by him amid an electronic flood: two computer screens alive with e-mail, instant messages, online chats, a Web browser and the computer code he was writing. While he managed to salvage the \$1.3 million deal after apologizing to his suitor, Mr. Campbell continues to struggle with the effects of the deluge of data. Even after he unplugs, he craves the stimulation he gets from his electronic gadgets. He forgets things like dinner plans, and he has trouble focusing on his family.

This is your brain on computers.

Scientists say juggling e-mail, phone calls and other incoming information can change how people think and behave. They say our ability to focus is being undermined by bursts of information. These play to a primitive impulse to respond to immediate opportunities and threats. The stimulation provokes excitement — a dopamine squirt — that researchers say can be addictive. In its absence, people feel bored.

The resulting distractions can have deadly consequences, as when cellphone-wielding drivers and train engineers cause wrecks. And for millions of people like Mr. Campbell, these urges can inflict nicks and cuts on creativity and deep thought, interrupting work and family life.

While many people say multitasking makes them more productive, research shows otherwise. Heavy multitaskers actually have more trouble focusing and shutting out irrelevant information, scientists say, and they experience more stress. And scientists are discovering that even after the multitasking ends, fractured thinking and lack of focus persist. In other words, this is also your brain *off* computers.

Technology use can benefit the brain in some ways, researchers say. Imaging studies show the brains of Internet users become more efficient at finding information. And players of some video games develop better visual acuity.

More broadly, cellphones and computers have transformed life. They let people escape their cubicles and work anywhere. They shrink distances and handle countless mundane tasks, freeing up time for more exciting pursuits.

For better or worse, the consumption of media, as varied as e-mail and TV, has exploded. In 2008, people consumed three times as much information each day as they did in 1960. And they are constantly shifting their attention. Computer users at work change windows or check e-mail or other programs nearly 37 times an hour, new research shows.

The nonstop interactivity is one of the most significant shifts ever in the human environment, said Adam Gazzaley, a neuroscientist at the University of California, San Francisco.

“We are exposing our brains to an environment and asking them to do things we weren’t necessarily evolved to do,” he said. “We know already there are consequences.”