

Do digital devices make us dumb?

Level: Advanced (C1-C2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Overview: This article discusses the possibility that the overuse of digital technology may reduce students' ability to comprehend and retain information, to think critically and to engage with their teachers and fellow students.

Business topic: Effects of digital dependence on employee cognition

Business language: Words that have both general and business meanings

Activities: Key words, understanding the article, business language, discussion of how the dependence on digital technology may affect learning, discussion of how to limit the negative effects of digital technology on employees

Groups: Whole class, pairs, small groups

6. 'shallow processing'
7. braced for a hostile reaction
8. digital distraction
9. MBA
10. dubious reputation

3. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to choose the best answer according to the information in the article. Encourage them to read the questions carefully and to look back at the relevant sections of the article and reread them before choosing answers if necessary.

Key:

1. b
2. a
3. a
4. b
5. c
6. b
7. a
8. c

4. Business Language – words with a general meaning and a business meaning

- a. Ask students to match the words with the definitions. Encourage them to scan the article to look at how each phrase is used in context to check their work. When you check the answers, make sure the students understand both the words themselves and the sentences they are used in.

Key:

1. paid off
2. equity
3. retention
4. screen
5. audience
6. brain drain
7. accessibility
8. facility
9. assessments

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. After a few minutes, you may want to open the discussion to the class.

2. Key words

- a. Ask students to match the phrases with the definitions. When they have finished, and before checking answers, ask them to read the whole article carefully and to look at how the phrases are used in context. Explain that they can change answers in the activity if necessary after seeing the phrases in context.

Key:

1. foster 'cognitive offloading'
2. 'screen inferiority'
3. stand-up comedy
4. the genie is out of the bottle
5. put to one side

- b. Ask students to use words from the previous activity to complete the sentences. Tell them to pay attention to the context and to write *G* or *B* to indicate whether the word is used in a general or a business context.

Key:

1. *brain drain*, *B*
2. *retention*, *B*
3. *equity*, *B*
4. *audience*, *G*
5. *assessments*, *B*
6. *screen*, *G*
7. *paid off*, *G*
8. *accessibility*, *B*
9. *facility*, *B*

5. Discussion

- a. Put students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. After a few minutes, you may want to open the discussion to the class and ask some students to share their ideas.

Key:

1. *Students are less engaged in their classes, their concentration and retention of information are reduced, their reading comprehension is poorer, their abilities to summarise information and to think critically are reduced.*
4. *The television was accused of 'dumbing people down' long before other types of screens existed. This is probably true to some extent because watching shows like soap operas or reality shows does not stimulate critical thinking or teach us anything, and watching TV is considered a more passive activity than reading, so our brains are less engaged. However, like the internet, TV has plenty of interesting, educational shows that allow people to learn about history, science and many other topics.*

6. Wider business theme – Effects of digital dependence on employee cognition

- a. Put students in groups or pairs and give them a few minutes to discuss things that they think may be results of the overuse of digital technology and to make a list. You may want to ask them to share their ideas with the class.
- b. Ask students to read the text and check their ideas from task a. When they have finished, ask them if any of the information in the text surprised them. For example, some may be surprised to learn that one possible effect of overusing technology is that our brains could actually be shrinking.
- c. Put students in small groups and ask them to think of as many things as they can that a company could do to solve or reduce the problems in the list. After a few minutes, ask the groups to share their ideas with the class. Point out that they can use phrases from the *Useful language* box to help them frame their answers. Some possible solutions could be to schedule 'focus time,' when people would turn off notifications, ignore their phones and computers and allow their brains to relax and think creatively; have digital-free meetings; remind employees to take breaks and move around; if necessary, have media literacy training sessions.