

Do digital devices make us dumb?

Level: Intermediate (B1-B2)

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. *infeasible*
7. *undergraduates*
8. *shallow processing*
9. *braced*
10. *MBA*
11. *recall*

3. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to choose *T* (True) or *F* (False) for the statements according to the information in the article. When you check answers, ask them to correct the false statements.

Key:

1. *F – Despite a few disgruntled comments, he says his students were overwhelmingly positive.*
2. *T*
3. *F – Much recent debate has focused on the risks of artificial intelligence in enabling cheating or in fostering 'cognitive offloading', as people delegate their critical thinking to computers. But less attention has been paid to reduced concentration or retention when students engage too much with digital technologies.*
4. *F – He recognises the importance of AI in the workplace, and encourages his students to use the technology elsewhere in courses and even assessments.*
5. *T*
6. *T*
7. *F – Baron points out that publishers have increasingly switched to digital formats, and some professors argue that because they are lower cost, they improve accessibility.*
8. *F – But a study on students at Princeton led by Pam Mueller suggested that while those who type take more notes, they are engaging in more 'shallow processing'. They are less effective at summarising ideas and perform less well when tested afterwards on the concepts discussed.*

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Be sure they give reasons for their answers.

2. Key words

- a. Ask students to match the words 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 key words are used in context. Explain that they can change answers in the activity if necessary after seeing the words in context.

Key:

1. *multitasking*
2. *distraction*
3. *cognitive offloading*
4. *disgruntled*
5. *hostile*

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

- 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 (general meaning) or B (business meaning) 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. Point out that the answers to

question 1 are from the article, the answers to 2 and 3 are based on their own experiences and opinions and question 4 tests their general knowledge.

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 decide which things on the list they think may be results of overuse of digital technology. 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 read the three problems that a company is having and to think of at least one thing the company could do to solve or reduce the problem. 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.