

The Internet vs. Human Thinking

Today we will be looking at several responses to the question “How is the Internet changing the way you think?” This question was given to over one hundred scientists and other thinkers by www.edge.org in 2010. Their answers were collected and posted on this website; our course pack has a small selection of these ‘mini-essays.’ (This is a website dedicated to exploring the connections between the sciences and the humanities. It features many ground-breaking thinkers in ‘cognitive psychology,’ philosophers and other scientists.) A sample of these responses is in the Course Pack on pp. 195 - 204.

**Several of these short excerpts directly engage the ideas from Nicholas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”

● In groups of 2:

1) My group is looking for the Internet’s effect on: (**Circle one** – different teams will work on different topics)

Memory

Attention Span

Reading Habits

As a group, choose an idea from one of the excerpts that has something to say about the effect of the Internet on one of the above areas of human thinking (cognition). Is the effect positive or negative (or a bit of both)? Is the writer **optimistic** or **pessimistic** (or neutral or **realistic**) about using the Internet every day?

2) Next, look over Steven Pinker’s answer to the question on pp. 198-199. What is his ‘counterargument’ or rebuttal to Nicholas Carr’s argument that Google might be changing the way we think? Also, see if you can complete these two sentences:

Nicholas Carr argues that _____

_____ (____). (Fill in the page number for this paraphrased

fact from the source essay.) However, Steven Pinker argues that " _____

_____ (____). (Fill

in the page number for your quote.)

****Make sure your chosen paraphrase (from Carr) and quote (from Pinker) expresses a contrast between these two writers. (Notice these two sentences use a 'connecting adverb' – however -- from our grammar quiz!)**

3) Is there a response in the selected reading that seems to be '**ambiguous**' or neither wholly positive or wholly negative? Explain the position of the author in your own words (as a paraphrase) and record the author's last name and page number (use a cite).

4) As a group **choose your favorite response** to the question of how the Internet is changing the way we think. (You can include Nicholas Carr's essay if you want.) what does this response explain about our minds and the Internet? Why is this response effective or convincing to you? Try to be as specific as you can.

5) **Challenge Question:** Does the response in #4 show some **critical thinking about technology** (the Internet), instead of being only a technology optimist or a pessimist (even a Luddite)? Do you see how a strong essay (even these short ones) are not just 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down,' but pay attention to the complexity of our experiences with technology?

(~25 min.)

- Choose a reporter who will give your responses to the class. We will collect some answers to the above questions.