# Reading in the Digital Age

Task Overview

30 minutes for classroom activity + 60 minutes for research component + 90 minutes for essay writing and revision =
180 total minutes (90 minutes per session)

Classroom Activity (30 minutes): Using a data chart as a thought-provoker, the teacher generates class discussion on the controversy over the Internet's effect on student reading skills. As aspect of argument is highlighted: different interpretations can emerge from the same set of statistics.
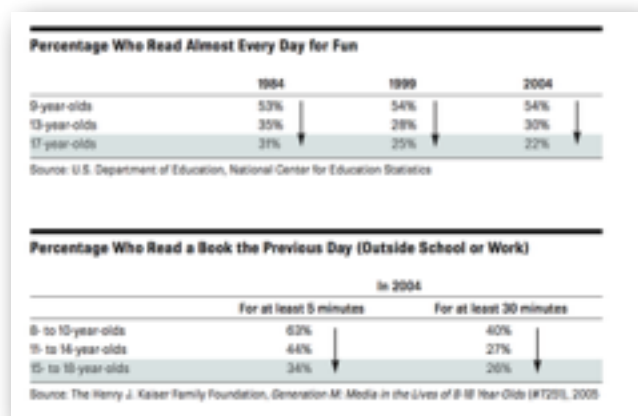
Part 1 (60 minutes): Students examine and take notes on the research sources: a series of websites, framed as the results of an Internet search, that present both sides of the debate. Constructed-response questions call upon the students to summarize and interpret the presented sources.

Part 2 (90 minutes): Students refer to their notes as needed to compose a full-length argumentative essay on the following prompt:
Is the Internet helping, or harming, the reading skills of young people?
Students are allowed access to the sources they examined in Part 1. Pre-writing, drafting, and revisions are involved.

Scorable Products: Student responses to the constructed-response at the end of Part 1 and the essay completed in Part 2 will be scored. Notes completed in Part 1 and pre-writing and drafting in Part 2 will not be scored.

Introductory Classroom Activity (30 minutes):

Teacher Instructions:

- Present on a projector (or distribute a handout of) the data table on reading statistics among young people (see next page).

- After giving students a minute to look at the chart, say, "Take a look at the first table, on the percentage who read almost every day for fun. No matter what the year, what is happening to kids' leisure reading as they grow older?"

- Invite students to describe the trend (fewer students reading daily from age 9 to 17). Try to limit them to describing the data objectively. The students may jump to offering interpretations of the data. Assure them that they will be able to offer their interpretations later in this activity.

- After that particular pattern in the data has been described, say, "What other patterns do you notice in the data?" Invite their responses, which may include: 9-year-old rates are stable over the time period, 17-year-olds are reading less over the time period, fewer readers read for at least 30 minutes, etc.

- Now say, "Statistics like these can tell us *what* is happening, but by themselves they do not say *why* this is happening. To offer an explanation of why the statistics are what they are requires people to *interpret* the data. What interpretations of this data can you offer?"

- Do not takes responses. Instead, say, "I am going to pair you up with a fellow student. Together, take 90 seconds to come up with one interpretation for a pattern that you see in the data."

- After 90 seconds, say, "Now, in the next 90 seconds, see if you and your partner can come up with a different interpretation—an alternative reason—for the same pattern you just explained."

- Now invite/call on various student pairs to share out their different interpretations of patterns in the data tables.

- As you approach the end of the 20 minutes, and if the students have not brought up the Internet on their own, tell them that when these statistics were published, the rise of the Internet was commonly proposed as the explanation. But also tell them that theory was also widely challenged.

- Say to the students, "In the performance task that you are going to participate in today, you will learn more about the Internet's effect on young people's reading skills and the debate over its pros and cons. Eventually, you will need to take a position on whether the Internet is helping or harming young people's reading skills and habits, and you will defend your point of view in an argumentative essay. The debate is far from settled, and in this essay you will have the opportunity to weigh in on the issue."

Data Table for Classroom Activity

Percentage Who Read Almost Every Day for Fun

	1984	1999	2004
9-year-olds	53%	54%	54%
13-year-olds	35%	28%	30%
17-year-olds	31%	25%	22%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Percentage Who Read a Book the Previous Day (Outside School or Work)

	In 2004	
	For at least 5 minutes	For at least 30 minutes
8- to 10-year-olds	63%	40%
11- to 14-year-olds	44%	27%
15- to 18-year-olds	34%	26%

Source: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds* (#7251), 2005

Student Directions:

Part 1 (60 minutes)

Your assignment:
You will conduct some research on how the Internet is affecting the reading skills and habits of young people like you. Later you will write an essay in which you will take a position on this much debated question: Is the Internet helping or harming the reading skills of young people?

Steps you will be following:
In order to plan and compose your essay, you will do all of the following:

1. Review and evaluate the results of an Internet search on the pros and cons of your topic.

2. Answer three questions about the sources.

3. Plan and write your essay.

Directions for beginning:
Though the Internet has been around for as long as you have been alive, it is still a relatively young technology. Not long before you were born, it did not exist. Yet in its short history (just two decades), the Internet has had a profound effect on the daily life of many people in the world. Among its influences, the Internet is a place where many people spend much of their time, time that they used to spend doing other things. Moreover, the Internet represents a new way to read text. Before the Internet, text was delivered to readers only on paper: in books, newspapers, and magazines.

The growth of the Internet has been controversial, and one of its most debated aspects has been its effect on reading, particularly for young people who are still in the process of developing their reading skills. Some people say that the Internet has had a positive influence on young readers. Others say that it has been detrimental to the development of their reading skills.

Though you may already have some feelings on the matter, you decide that you would like to learn more about both sides of this debate. So one day, while you happen to be on the Internet, you enter "effect of technology on student reading skills" into a Google search engine, and it returns what looks like an interesting mix of articles.

For today's assignment, you will review and evaluate the sources that came up in your Google search and summarize their arguments.

effect of the Internet on student reading skills

About 606,000 results (0.18 seconds)

Web
Images
Maps
Videos
News
Shopping
More

The Effects of Internet on Reading Skills | eHow.com
www.ehow.com › Education
Many people have fond memories of returning home from school, grabbing a snack, and picking up a good book or sitting down in front of the TV, perhaps to …

Online, RU Really Reading? - The New York Times
www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/books/27reading.html?...
by Motoko Rich
Jul 27, 2008 – Instead, like so many other teenagers, Nadia, 15, is addicted to the Internet. She regularly spends at least six hours a day in front of the ...

What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains - PBS NewsHour
www.pbs.org/newshour/.../conversation-nicholas-carrs-the-shallows-...
Aug 27, 2010 – In his book, "The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains," author Nicholas Carr looks through the lens of neuroscience at how the ...

America's Facebook Generation Is Reading Strong - NPR
http://www.npr.org/2012/10/23/163414069 . . .
NPR-Oct 23, 2012
In what may come as a pleasant surprise to people who fear the Facebook generation has given up on reading — or, at least, reading anything …

Goooooooooogle ›
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Next

Source #1

The Effects of Internet on Reading Skills

by Erin Schreiner, eHow Contributor

Source of text: http://www.ehow.com/list_6026924_effects-internet-reading-skills.html

Many people have fond memories of returning home from school, grabbing a snack, and picking up a good book or sitting down in front of the TV, perhaps to watch an after-school special. Today's teens do not follow this established routine. Studies indicate that teens are now trading in leisure reading and even television viewing for Internet surfing. A 2009 Telegraph article reported that the average teen now spends 31 hours a week online. This abundance of online exploration has a significant impact on students' reading ability and style, say researchers in the field.

Adapted Reading Style

The way that information is read on the Internet differs greatly from the traditional, beginning-to-end mode of reading. While engaging in Internet reading, readers scan the page and pick and choose information to read. In most cases, viewers can understand one part of the page without reading the information that lies above it. This is commonly not the case with print media, where all of the words on a page join together to create a central meaning. While the eyes of print readers follow a predictable left-to-right, repetitive pattern, the eyes of Internet readers jump about as they absorb information from the Web.

Decrease in Reading for Pleasure

The increased availability of the Internet has lead to a decline in reading for pleasure. Just over 20 percent of all 17-year-olds read for fun daily, according to a U.S. Department of Education study. This number has dropped precipitously with the advent of the Internet, the agency reports. Teens who might have before picked up a novel or magazine now turn to the Internet because of the diverse array of information readily available on this medium. While some argue that any reading, even Internet reading, is good reading, others argue that print reading is more valuable than Internet reading and that the decline in reading for pleasure rates is cause for concern.

Decline in Standardized Test Scores

While some disagree, many argue that the pervasiveness of the Internet is leading to decreased scores on reading standardized tests. A 2008 National Endowment for the Arts study points to standardized test scores as an indication that the Internet is actually hurting students' abilities to read. This organization, and many who agree with their findings, argue that the reading that individuals do on the Internet is <u>cursory</u> and not as in-depth as literary studies of years past. While there is no definitive proof on either side, the debate over the danger of Internet reading wages on.

<u>cursory</u>: hasty and therefore not thorough or detailed

Source #2
Online, R U Really Reading? – New York Times
By Motoko Rich

Adapted from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/books/27reading.html

BEREA, Ohio — Books are not Nadia Konyk's thing. Her mother, hoping to entice her, brings them home from the library, but Nadia rarely shows an interest.

Instead, like so many other teenagers, Nadia, 15, is addicted to the Internet. She regularly spends at least six hours a day in front of the computer here in this suburb southwest of Cleveland.

A slender, chatty blonde who wears black-framed plastic glasses, Nadia checks her e-mail and tracks social networking sites. She spends most of her time on fanfiction.net, reading and commenting on stories written by other users based on books, television shows, or movies.

Her mother, Deborah Konyk, would prefer that Nadia, who gets A's and B's at school, read books for a change. But at this point, Ms. Konyk said, "I'm just pleased that she reads something anymore."

Children like Nadia lie at the heart of a passionate debate among experts about just what it means to read in the digital age.

Clearly, reading in print and on the Internet are different. On paper, text has a predetermined beginning, middle and end, where readers focus for a sustained period on one author's vision. On the Internet, readers skate through cyberspace at will and, in effect, compose their own beginnings, middles and ends.

Young people "aren't as troubled as some of us older folks are by reading that doesn't go in a line," said Rand J. Spiro, a professor of educational psychology at Michigan State University who is studying reading practices on the Internet. "That's a good thing because the world doesn't go in a line, and the world isn't organized into separate compartments or chapters."

But traditionalists warn that digital reading is the intellectual equivalent of empty calories. Zigzagging through a <u>cornucopia</u> of words, pictures, video and sounds, they say, distracts more than strengthens readers. And many youths spend most of their time on the Internet playing games or sending instant messages, activities that involve minimal reading at best.

Some scientists worry that the fractured experience typical of the Internet could rob developing readers of crucial skills. "Reading a book, and taking the time to <u>ruminate</u> and make inferences and engage the imaginational processing, is more cognitively enriching, without doubt, than the short little bits that you might get if you're into the 30-second digital mode," said Ken Pugh, a cognitive neuroscientist at Yale who has studied brain scans of children reading.

Last fall the National Endowment for the Arts issued a sobering report linking flat or declining national reading test scores among teenagers with the slump in the proportion of adolescents who said they read for fun.

According to Department of Education data cited in the report, just over a fifth of 17-year-olds said they read almost every day for fun in 2004, down from nearly a third in 1984. Nineteen percent of 17-year-olds said they never or hardly ever read for fun in 2004, up from 9 percent in 1984. (It was unclear whether they thought of what they did on the Internet as "reading.")

Children are clearly spending more time on the Internet. In a study of 2,032 representative 8- to 18-year-olds, the Kaiser Family Foundation found that nearly half used the Internet on a typical day in 2004, up from just under a quarter in 1999. The average time these children spent online on a typical day rose to one hour and 41 minutes in 2004, from 46 minutes in 1999.

The simplest argument for why children should read in their leisure time is that it makes them better readers. According to federal statistics, students who say they read for fun once a day score significantly higher on reading tests than those who say they never do.

Critics of reading on the Internet say they see no evidence that increased Web activity improves reading achievement. "What we are losing in this country and presumably around the world is the sustained, focused, linear attention developed by reading," said Mr. Gioia of the National Endowment for the Arts. "I would believe people who tell me that the Internet develops reading if I did not see such a universal decline in reading ability and reading comprehension on virtually all tests."

But others say the Internet has created a new kind of reading, one that schools and society should not discount. The Web inspires a teenager like Nadia, who might otherwise spend most of her leisure time watching television, to read and write.

Few who believe in the potential of the Web deny the value of books. But they argue that it is unrealistic to expect all children to read novels such as "To Kill a Mockingbird" or "Pride and Prejudice" for fun. And those who prefer staring at a television or mashing buttons on a game console, they say, can still benefit from reading on the Internet. In fact, some literacy experts say that online reading skills will help children fare better when they begin looking for digital-age jobs.

Web proponents believe that strong readers on the Web may eventually surpass those who rely on books. Reading five Web sites, an op-ed article and a blog post or two, experts say, can be more enriching than reading one book.

"It takes a long time to read a 400-page book," said Mr. Spiro of Michigan State. "In a tenth of the time," he said, the Internet allows a reader to "cover a lot more of the topic from different points of view."

cornucopia - an abundant supply of things of a specified kind

ruminate - think deeply about something

Source #3

What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains
An interview on PBSNewsHour

Source of text: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2010/08/conversation-nicholas-carrs-the-shallows-what-the-internet-is-doing-to-our-brains.html

JEFFREY BROWN: Hello, I'm Jeffrey Brown. Welcome to Art Beat at the PBS NewsHour. Joining me today is Nicholas Carr, author of "The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains." This began with a provocative article a couple of years ago titled, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" Did you expect the kind of backlash that that provoked?

NICHOLAS CARR: I didn't. When I wrote that article, I really saw it as a personal essay about my own experience in using the internet and how it was influencing the way I personally think. I was quite surprised about the controversy the article set off.

JEFFREY BROWN: This started in a very personal way, what you saw happening to your own thinking?

NICHOLAS CARR: Yeah, it was back in about 2007, and like a lot people, I had been using the internet a lot for about 10 years by then, and obviously had received all the great benefits we get when we go online, but I noticed that I was losing my ability to concentrate, and I particularly noticed it when I'd sit down, for instance, to read a book, something that used to come completely naturally to me. I'd get a couple of paragraphs in or a couple of pages in, and my mind wanted to behave the way it behaves when I'm online jumping from page to page, checking email, clicking on links, doing Googling. That inspired me to start to think about how the technologies we use in our day-to-day lives like the net can influence actually the way that we think.

JEFFREY BROWN: So you went to look at the research on <u>neuroscience</u>, and a lot of the book takes us through that. What was the key thing you found in terms of the impact of the internet? One thing you talk about is this idea called plasticity.

NICHOLAS CARR: Right, and one of the curious things about my own experience was that the time I spent online seemed to be influencing the way I think even when I wasn't in front of a computer, when I was sitting down and trying to read or trying to concentrate. What I found is the recent discoveries about what brain scientists call neuroplasticity really helped kind of unravel that <u>conundrum</u>, because what brain scientists have discovered over the last couple of decades is that even as adults our brains are very <u>malleable</u>, or plastic, and they are constantly adapting down at the cellular level to what we use our minds for, to our environment and so forth.

What we can theorize is that as we train our brains to take in information very, very quickly in a very interrupted, distracted way—the way we experience it online—that strengthens those parts of our brain that are good at multitasking and good at zipping about, shifting our focus very, very quickly. On the other hand, we are not exercising those parts of our brain that are involved in deep concentration, deep attentiveness,

things like contemplation and reflection. And so what happens in the brain is that what we use gets stronger, the actual cellular connections, and what we don't use weakens.

JEFFREY BROWN: What are we losing in terms of our thinking process, our ability to think more deeply?

NICHOLAS CARR: What we're losing is the ability to pay deep attention to one thing over a prolonged period of time. It can be a long book, it can be listening to or engaging in a long conversation without checking your iPhone or your BlackBerry all the time. Any kind of thought process that requires focus on one thing is what is being disrupted, and unfortunately, what another thing brain science tells us is that the process of paying attention, paying deep attention, activates a lot of our deepest thought processes, our long term memory, the building of conceptual knowledge, critical thinking, all of those things hinge on our ability to pay attention.

JEFFREY BROWN: Is it also possible, though, that the gadgets that are connecting us to the internet are themselves evolving perhaps in ways that might help us in the future? I've seen some suggestions, for example, that on the iPad people are spending more time on a particular application rather than flitting around, as you worry. So is there a chance that gadgets will perhaps help us?

NICHOLAS CARR: I think it would be nice to think that these will evolve in a way that return us to our attention span, but unfortunately I think the way they are going to evolve is the way that the net has evolved up until now, which is pushing even more distractions and interruptions on us pretty much all day long.

JEFFREY BROWN: Nicholas Carr is the author of "The Shallows." Thanks for joining us.

NICHOLAS CARR: Thanks, Jeff.

neuroscience - the science that deals with the structure or function of the brain and nervous system

conundrum - a confusing and difficult problem or question

malleable - able to be reshaped without breaking or cracking

Source #4
America's Facebook Generation Is Reading Strong
An interview on NPR News

Source: http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=163414069

DAVID GREENE, HOST: We have some news this morning that could come as a pleasant surprise to people who fear the Facebook generation has given up on reading—well, reading anything longer than 140 characters. There's a new report out today from the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project. Over the past year they've been studying the reading habits of what they call younger readers and the role of books, libraries and technology in their lives. To learn about some of the findings,

we're joined by Kathryn Zickuhr, the study's main author. Kathryn, thanks for stopping by.

KATHRYN ZICKUHR: Thanks for having me.

GREENE: You know, one of the numbers that caught my eye in this report is that eight of 10 young people - and we should say that's 16 to 29-year-olds - have read a book in the past year. How do we interpret that?

ZICKUHR: Well, that's compared to about seven in 10 adults in general. So they're more likely to read and they're also a little more likely to be using their library.

GREENE: And what did the younger people say when they talked about why they still enjoy getting a print book when there are e-books and other options out there?

ZICKUHR: Well, we heard from e-book readers in general how they don't want e-books to replace print books. E-books supplement their general reading habits. And we heard from a lot of younger e-book readers about how they can read when they're waiting in line for class or waiting in line for lunch. One reader in particular told us that when he has a book that he loves, he wants to be able to access it in any format. So with the Harry Potter series and the "Game of Thrones" series, he's actually bought all of those books as print books and as e-books, just because they matter that much to him.

GREENE: And what about the library? I suppose this generation might have different needs, different demands for what they want out of their library than people did maybe 10, 20 years ago. What have you found?

ZICKUHR: Well, we found that they're very interested in the idea of preloaded e-readers - being able to check out an e-reader at a library that already has some popular titles on it. And a lot of libraries are really looking at how they can engage with this younger age group, especially with Americans in their teens and early 20s. And so a lot of libraries have activities just for them. Some libraries even have sort of diner-style booths for the teens where they can just socialize and hang out, and so that they can think of the library as a space of their own.

GREENE: Kathryn Zickuhr is a research analyst at the Pew Internet Project, and she was talking to us about a new study that shows a significant portion of the younger generation is still reading and visiting libraries. Kathryn, thanks for coming by.
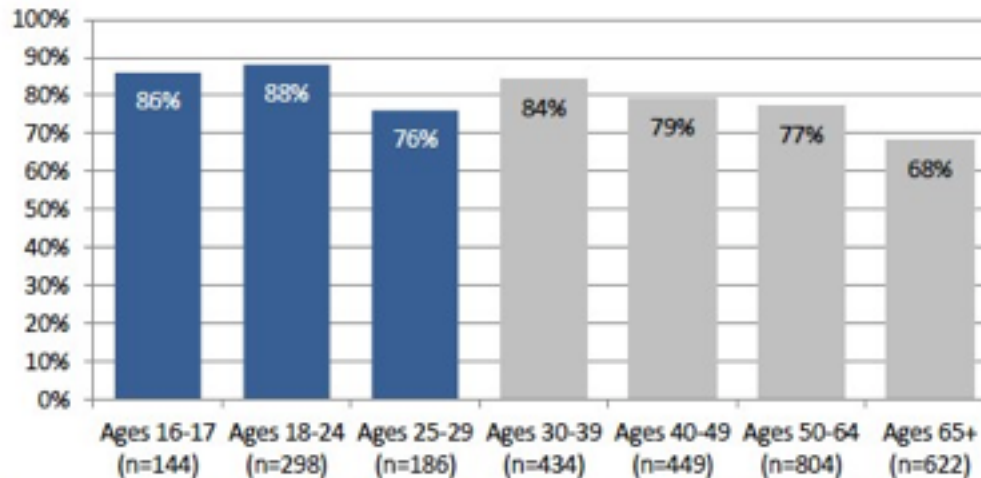
ZICKUHR: Thanks for having me.

Some data charts and tables from the original Pew report to graphically supplement this source:

from http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2012/10/23/younger-americans-reading-and-library-habits/

Book readers by age

% of all Americans who have read a book in whole or in part, in any format, in the past 12 months

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey, November 16-December 21, 2011. N=2,986 respondents ages 16 and older. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cells.

Library use in the past year

Among Americans ages 16+ in each group, the percentage who have used the library for the following purposes in the past year

	Total used library in the past year	Total used the library...		
		For research	To borrow books	To borrow newspapers /etc.
All ages 16 and older	56%	40%	36%	22%
16-17 (n=144)	72	55	51	20
18-24 (n=298)	58	45	36	23
25-29 (n=186)	54	41	33	25
30-39 (n=434)	57	40	40	20
40-49 (n=449)	59	40	43	21
50-64 (n=804)	56	39	32	24
65+ (n=622)	49	32	28	23

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Constructed Response Questions

Use information from the four texts you just read to answer the questions below. Your answers to these questions will be scored. You may click on the appropriate buttons to refer to the sources when you think it would be helpful. You may also refer to your notes. Answer the questions in the spaces provided below them.

Question 1

This question has two parts. Answer both parts in a short paragraph:

Part 1: Summarize what the sources tell you is the difference between how a person reads a printed text and how a person reads text that is on the Internet.

Part 2: According to the theories of some scientists, how does this difference in reading possibly affect the brain?

Question 2

Across the four sources you have reviewed, many claims are made both in support of and in opposition to the Internet's influence on reading skills. Identify four sentences that express the possible benefits of Internet reading and four sentences that express the asserted dangers of Internet reading. Draw your sentences from at least two different sources.

Drag and drop your selected sentences into the appropriate boxes on the table below.

	Benefits of Reading Online	Dangers of Reading Online
1		
2		
3		
4		

Question 3

Many arguments are rooted in the evidence that comes from research studies, but by themselves, research studies often can't settle a debate because, for various reasons, they do not provide a complete picture. The incomplete part of the picture may be suggested but is still open to interpretation.

Two major research studies are cited in the sources you have reviewed: one conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts, and another by the Pew Research Center. Go back and analyze the findings of these two studies in order to answer the questions in the following tables.

National Endowment for the Arts
What is a proven finding of the research study?
What is suggested by the study but not proven?

Pew Research Center
What is a proven finding of the research study?
What is suggested by the study but not proven?

Part 2 (90 minutes)

You will now have 90 minutes to review your notes and sources, plan, draft, and revise your essay. You may also refer to the answers you wrote to the questions in part 1, but you cannot change those answers. Now read your assignment and the information about how your essay will be scored, then begin your work.

Your Assignment
Recently, your local library received a generous donation to add on a new room to its building. The announcement was greeted with excitement because everyone in the community agrees that the library is cramped and needs more space.

However, that excitement quickly dissolved into a heated debate. The new room presents the community with a choice between the library's two most urgent needs: storage space for young adult literature or more computer terminals that provide Internet access for kids after school. Because the new room will be relatively small, it can only serve one of these functions, not both at the same time.

Letters to the editor of your local newspaper have been flooding in. Community members disagree over which use of the room—books or computers—will better serve the library's young patrons. What has emerged is a larger debate over the Internet's influence on the reading skills and habits of young people.

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper that argues your position on how the library should use its new space. Your reasoning needs to address the larger question that everyone is debating: **Is the Internet helping, or harming, the reading skills of young people?**

Though you may refer to your own experience, you should primarily support your claim with evidence from the Internet sources you read and viewed yesterday. You do not need to use all the sources, only the ones that most effectively and credibly support your position. No matter which side you take, you should address the opposing point of view.

How your essay will be scored: The people scoring your essay will be assigning scores for

1. Statement of purpose/focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic, maintain your focus, and address the alternate and opposing claims

2. Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay

3. Elaboration of evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your opinions and elaborate with specific information

4. Language and vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose

5. Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Now begin work on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can:

- plan your essay
- write your essay
- revise and edit for a final draft

Word-processing tools and spell check are available to you.