

The Google Effect

Kip McGrath Education Centres

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Kip McGrath Education Centres Founder, Kip McGrath, was recently interviewed about how the internet can be a positive tool for study and what to watch out for!

1. Do you think the internet is suitable for high school students to use for help with their homework, research and studying?

The internet is the greatest single database of knowledge and is available to students from a single, accessible point. Research used to be about the information that you got from a teacher or a textbook. The internet has put students in control of the information they can access for homework and research.

The internet is definitely a suitable and important resource for high school students.

2. How do you think the internet compares with traditional methods such as books and other library resources? What would you say are the pros and cons of each method?

Traditional media cannot compare to a source of information such as the internet, but there are definitely pros and cons of both.

Internet research

Pros

- The internet is highly accessible, even for students who don't have a home computer. Schools, libraries and many public places have computers with internet access.
- The internet is constantly updated with new and relevant information. This can give high school students access to cutting edge information.
- In many instances you can gain direct access to the author of information on the internet, via email.

Cons

- Much of the information on the internet is made up of user generated content (UGC). This means that anyone can create content, making it difficult to control the quality and relevance of the information.
- May not match the school curriculum.
- There is so much information available on the internet that it can often be difficult to find relevant information.

Traditional methods of research (textbooks and library)

Pros

- Traditional methods of research are generally created or provided by qualified sources. That is people or groups that are experts in their field.
- Reading a book or textbook will give you a generalist overview of a subject or topic. However it is often necessary to conduct more research to find additional perspectives or further information.

Cons

- Books or traditional research methods can often contain material that is presented from only one point of view or perspective.

- Once a textbook is published, the information it contains can become outdated or obsolete very quickly, depending on the subject matter.

3. Is there anything that students need to be wary of when using the internet for homework?

- Engineered vs. user generated content
User generated content (UGC) is content on the internet produced by the general public (or end users) rather than paid professionals and experts in the field. 82.5 million people created content in 2008 (eMarketer). UGC is often monitored by web administrators to determine if content is relevant to a site's general theme, but students must ensure they check any UGC against information from reputable sources.

In comparison, engineered content is created by established experts, academics and professionals.

- Verification
Always verify your information, by checking multiple information sources. This will help you to ensure that your information is correct and relevant.
- Plagiarism
Plagiarism is the use of another author's written work as your own. It is important that when you search information that you interpret it and rewrite it in your own words, because:
 - Your teacher will be able to tell very quickly if what you have submitted is not in your own language or writing style and may penalise you for plagiarism. Many schools are also using software to detect plagiarism.
 - If you copy UGC, you may be using unverified or incorrect information.
 - Web sourced information must be referenced in the same way that traditional sources are referenced (e.g. the Cambridge referencing method).

4. What advice would you give to students about getting the most out of the net for school? How can they utilize it effectively?

The internet is the proliferation of data congregated into a single source point. Searches are what help you to retrieve the data you need, so it is important to search the terms that will get you the most relevant results.

- Use more keywords in your searches and be more specific. Don't search 'dolphins' if you really want 'information on bottlenose dolphins'. It will help you to return more relevant results.
- Use Wikipedia to find the best search terms for a topic.
- Put quotation marks around your key words or phrases to increase your success of finding relevant information. This tells search engines to only find websites that contain these exact words or phrases.
- Include the type of domain you are looking for in your keyword search if you know that you are looking for information from specific organisations. For example .edu for educational institutions, .gov for government agencies and .org for non-profit organisations.

Like with any type of research, when you find the information you are after it is important to consider a number of factors.

- Validate the information
This means that you should confirm that the information comes from a reliable source. You can authenticate research by checking where the information comes from. This may mean

checking the qualifications of the author or the organisation that is providing the information.

- Qualify the information
Check that the information you have found makes the grade. You can do this by checking more than one website to make sure the information is correct.

It is important to approach your teacher if you are having ongoing programs with any subject or topic at school, or if you are unsure of any information you find on the internet.

5. What do you think of sites like Wikipedia? Can they be trusted? Are there any sites that you would recommend?

Wikipedia is a fantastic resource and can be trusted if you understand how the content is created. Like any information source; there are some important pros and cons.

Cons

- Visitors do not need specialised qualifications to contribute; therefore information may not always be reliable.
- Newer articles may not yet have been reviewed by an editor and may contain errors and misinformation.

Pros

- Articles are monitored for accuracy by an international group of editors and volunteers, as well as contributors, so errors and incorrect information generally gets picked up quickly.
- Unlike traditional sources like printed encyclopedias and textbooks, Wikipedia is updated constantly. Articles can be added or updated within minutes of a historical event or change, rather than years for many of the printed reference materials.
- Wikipedia's articles provide links to guide the user to related pages with additional information and often reference other reliable sources of information.
- The older articles tend to be more comprehensive and balanced as they have been edited and reviewed.

Provided you are aware of these issues and verify your information, Wikipedia is a great source of information.

6. If teens are doing their homework/studying on or near the computer, do you think they might be tempted to use social networking or listen to music at the same time? Is this a bad thing or is it ok?

Having a computer with access to the internet will always tempt students to use social networking sites and listen to music, but this isn't always a bad thing.

Many social networking sites are proving to be a great educational resource and utility. Students can use many social networking sites to ask questions in real time and share information.

If you find yourself using social networking sites during the time you set aside for study and homework, develop some time management rules or goals to help yourself use your time more effectively. For example:

- Reward yourself for every hour you spend on study or homework with 10 minutes on a social networking site.
- If you are studying for a longer period of time, take a short break every hour and only access social networking sites during this time.

If you are having trouble managing your time and find yourself checking social networking sites every 5 minutes when you should be studying, ask a friend or parent to help monitor you. Also, don't get upset if your parents monitor your internet use. There is so much content available on the internet that it is natural for parents to want to be aware of what information you access.

In regard to listening to music while you are studying, unless you are searching for and downloading music, this is not a bad thing. It depends on your study habits and what works well for you. While playing loud music when studying is not a good idea, having music on in the background can help some people focus and relax.

7. Anything else you wish to add?

The internet is one of the greatest leaps forward for knowledge in history. From one single, accessible source, people can search information on almost every topic imaginable.

The internet also puts people in control of the information they can access.

If you have great skills in searching for relevant information and continue to verify any information you find, the internet will be an invaluable resource for you.