Too Much Screen Time?

A Reading A–Z Level S Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,173

Connections

Writing
Using information in the book and outside resources, write a persuasive essay explaining your opinion on screen time.

Math
Ask your classmates how much time they spend using a screen each day. Organize the data in a graph. Analyze your data. Share what you find with your classmates.

Reading A-Z

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Written by Keith and Sarah Kortemartin

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Focus Question

What is screen time? What effects can it have on people?

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Correlation	
LEVEL S	
Fountas & Pinnell	O
Reading Recovery	34
DRA	34

Contents

Many people enjoy video games. Are they spending too much time trying to beat the game?

Time's Up!

A girl wearing a black helmet and a purple backpack runs across a grassy field. She scoops up an ax from the ground. Then she chops down a tree and begins building a tower. Someone is coming up behind her, so the girl ducks behind a wall to hide. She has a chance of winning, but only if she doesn't get caught.

A voice floats up from downstairs. "Dinner is in five minutes!"

Oh no! Quitting the game now would be a disaster—there's no time for dinner! But Dad insists. Screen time is over. Winning will have to wait until tomorrow.

Screen Time: Good or Bad?

Video games and social media apps are incredibly popular. Everyone at school might be playing the same games and swiping through the same photos. They're all watching the same videos, TV shows, and movies, too. Then they text, chat, and post about them.

Tablets are one of the most popular devices eight-to-twelve-year-olds use to watch TV and play games.


Many people have smartphones or tablets with them at all times.

All of these activities use screens—flat **electronic** panels that display images and information. The world is full of screens. They are on TVs, computers, **smartphones**, and tablets. Screens are at school, at home, and just about everywhere in between. The time people spend every day looking at screens is known as "screen time." Some families have **strict** rules about how much time children can spend with screens. Others may have fewer rules. Why do any of these rules exist? Are adults just trying to ruin the fun, or are there good reasons to limit screen time?

People have been asking questions about screens for many years. Some of the first scientific studies of the effects of television appeared in the late 1940s. Scientists continue **researching** the effects of screen time on health, **relationships**, and brain development. However, **technology** develops quickly. Many devices, apps, and games are fairly new. This makes it **challenging** for researchers to collect good results.

Screen Time Statistics

A 2017 survey of families across the United States found that 98 percent of homes with children under the age of eight have smartphones or tablets. Children under the age of eight spend just over two hours per day using screens, including TVs, computers, and tablets. Those between the ages of eight and eighteen spend more than seven hours per day using screens.

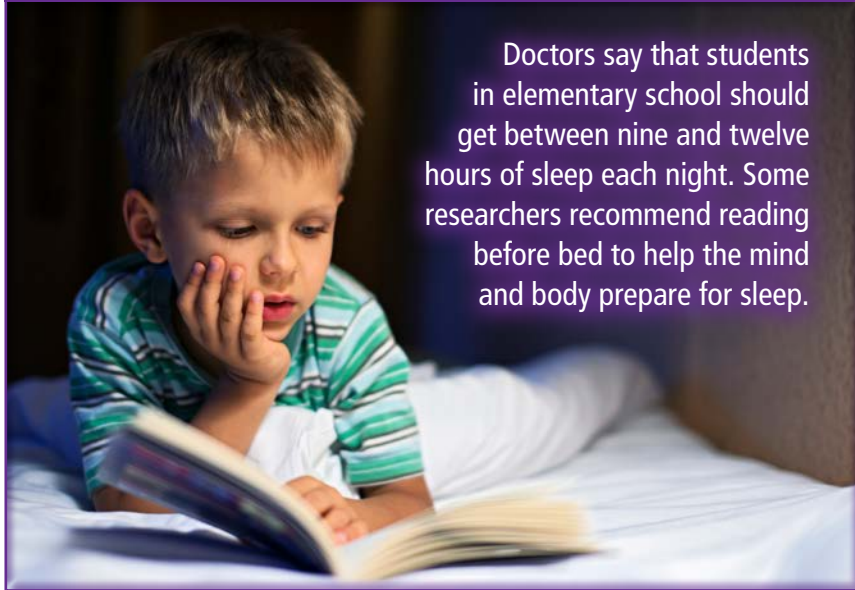| Hours		
12		
9		
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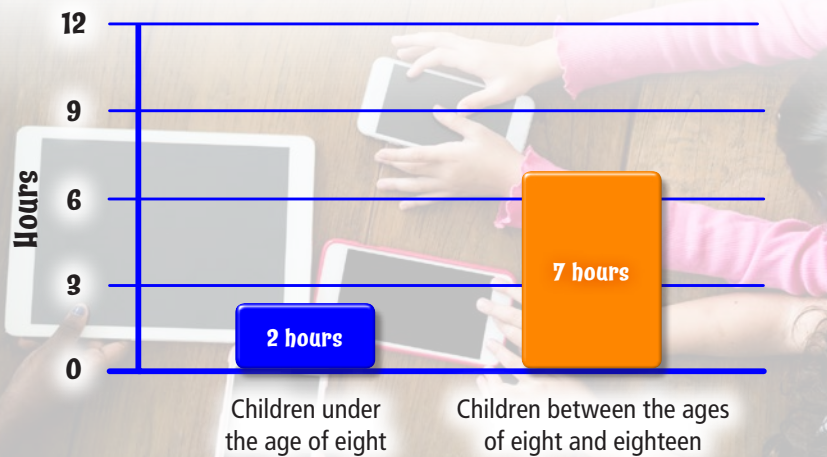
Screens and Health

A boy stays up late playing video games. The next morning, he wakes up late and almost misses the bus. Mom makes a new rule: no screens before bed. She wants her kids to get enough sleep.

People often do not realize how much time has passed while they play games or look at social media.

Many people watch TV or look at **social media** before bed. They believe it will help them relax and fall asleep more easily. However, most researchers recommend turning off electronic devices an hour or two before bedtime. The light from phones, tablets, and other screens tricks the brain into thinking it is daytime. This makes it harder to fall asleep at night. Looking at screens before bedtime causes people to get less sleep and to wake up more often during the night. Lack of sleep can cause changes in mood, make it difficult for students to pay attention in school, and lead to other health problems.

Sleep Signals

Doctors say that students in elementary school should get between nine and twelve hours of sleep each night. Some researchers recommend reading before bed to help the mind and body prepare for sleep.

Obesity is a health problem that has been linked to both lack of sleep and screen time. When people spend a lot of time watching TV or playing video games, they are likely spending a lot of time sitting still. Spending more time with screens may mean that people are spending less time being active and getting exercise. Sometimes, watching TV and playing games cause people to forget to pay attention to the signals their bodies are sending. People may eat snacks while watching TV and not realize when they are full. This can lead to overeating and becoming overweight.

Screens and Social Life

A family eats dinner together. Mom is answering emails on her phone, and the children are watching a movie.

People often look at screens even when they are with others.

Dad makes a new rule: no screens at the dinner table. He wants the family to actually talk to one another.

In many ways, screens are helpful for communication and connecting with other people. Social media, communication apps, and video calls allow people to be almost constantly in contact with one another. Screen time can also help people build new relationships. By sharing and commenting on videos, images, or music, people can meet others who have similar creative interests. Video games can also be social. Often, people who enjoy playing games become friends with others who enjoy games. They may then play or watch games together.

However, some adults are concerned that young people spend too much time staring at screens and not enough time **interacting** with others in real life. They worry that, as a result, young people cannot properly understand emotions or develop strong relationships. Researchers think that screen time is healthiest when it involves social interaction, whether online or in person. When two people watch a video or read an article online together, they can talk and ask each other questions to understand it better. When two people play a video game together, they can work together to beat the game.

Seeing Screens

Many people think screen time can be damaging to eyesight. Rates of myopia, or nearsightedness, have doubled in the United States and Europe over the last fifty years. Many researchers think myopia is connected to a lack of sunlight. If children spend a lot of time indoors, they may not be getting enough sunlight for their eyes to develop properly.

Screens and Learning

A mom watches her children during their screen time. They are staring at different screens, and she thinks they look like zombies. She wonders whether all these screens are damaging their brains. She makes a new rule: from now on, all screen time must be educational.

Many kinds of screen time may be good for students. Some shows and games can help students learn. Students may use screen time to develop their creativity and skills in creating videos or editing photos. Video games can help people learn to react quickly, make strategic decisions, and solve problems. Students may even learn skills such as coding computer programs or fixing **technical** issues. When students use social media, watch movies, or do research online, they may come across people who are different from them or ideas they have never thought about before. This can help students become more welcoming to new people and more willing to become involved in their communities.

Many students use tablets and computers in school. Some teachers say these devices help students work together.

However, some researchers think that screens change how the brain processes information. Some have linked screen time to lower test scores or shorter attention spans. Scientists don't yet know all the ways screens impact the brain and learning. They say that the best screen time is active and **engaging**. This means using screens to be creative or to play games that involve problem-solving rather than simply watching videos.

Some activities that use screens help people spend time together and build relationships.

How Much Is Too Much?

For many years, scientists recommended that children use screens for only one or two hours each day. However, many researchers now say that the amount of time spent using screens may not matter as much as what children are doing with screens. They argue that active and interactive screen time can be healthy. Screen time becomes a problem when it gets in the way of important things such as health, relationships, and schoolwork.

In the future, scientists will continue studying the effects of screen time. Parents will likely continue to make rules limiting screen time. Everyone at school will continue to play games and use social media. Many people will see screens every day. Plenty of good things can come from all this screen time, but it's a good idea for both children and adults to pay attention to how much time in a day they spend looking at a screen. They should be aware of how screen time affects their health, relationships, and learning—and it's always a good idea to stop in time for dinner.

Many researchers recommend that families make mealtimes or bedtime screen-free to help balance the amount of time spent with screens.

Glossary

challenging *(adj.)* hard to do or demanding (p. 7)

electronic *(adj.)* of or relating to devices made of many small electrical parts (p. 6)

engaging *(adj.)* attractive or interesting in a way that holds a person's attention (p. 13)

interacting *(v.)* speaking or doing things with others (p. 11)

obesity *(n.)* the state of being unhealthily overweight (p. 9)

relationships *(n.)* the ways in which two or more living things or groups interact or deal with each other (p. 7)

researching *(v.)* studying or investigating, especially to discover new information (p. 7)

smartphones *(n.)* mobile phones with computer features and Internet access (p. 6)

social media *(n.)* types of websites or programs that people use to share information, pictures, or other content (p. 8)

strict *(adj.)* requiring that rules be obeyed or certain behaviors followed (p. 6)

technical *(adj.)* of or relating to the techniques or knowledge of a certain field (p. 12)

technology *(n.)* machines or tools that are developed through the use of scientific knowledge (p. 7)