



## EduTrend Contents

P4C · TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITY · MIDDLE SCHOOL

# Does Technology Make Us Smarter?

From Plato's worry about writing to search engines

**Ages 12–14**

**Level: Intermediate**

**50 minutes**

**Circle and small groups**  
· up to 30

**Activity 04**

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

## ACTIVITY 04 · AT A GLANCE

# Does Technology Make Us Smarter?

Students read the story from Plato's Phaedrus in which the Egyptian king Thamus warns that the new invention of writing will make people forgetful and only seem wise. Students compare this with modern worries about search engines, calculators and AI assistants. They create questions and enquire into whether technology makes us smarter or just makes us feel smarter.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain Thamus' argument;
- compare old and new technologies;
- reason about knowledge and memory;
- build a justified view.

### KEY WORDS

writing · memory · Plato ·  
knowledge · tool · search

### CURRICULUM LINKS

History: the invention of writing.  
Computing: search and AI. English:  
note-taking and memory.

**1****STIMULUS**

Share something to  
think about

**2****THINK**

Quiet thinking time

**3****QUESTION**

Create and choose  
a question

**4****ENQUIRE**

Reason together

**5****BUILD**

Agree, disagree,  
add

**6****REFLECT**

Last words

## Materials (per class)

- Thamus story card
- Technology cards
- Question and thinking-move cards
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

## Before the session

- Read the stimulus and note possible concepts.
- Prepare question and thinking-move cards.
- Set out a circle so everyone can see each other.
- Print the worksheets.

### SAFETY

Everyone may pass. Discuss ideas, not people,  
and use the story or invented examples rather  
than personal situations.

## ACTIVITY 04 · SESSION PLAN

# Step by step

Stay neutral: ask for reasons, examples and counter-examples rather than giving your own view.

| Time                    | What happens                                                      | Say or ask                                                 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0–8 min<br>Stimulus     | Share the Thamus story and modern technology cards.               | <i>"What did you notice?"</i>                              |
| 8–20 min<br>Questions   | Students create questions in pairs and vote on one.               | <i>"Which question is most interesting to talk about?"</i> |
| 20–44 min<br>Enquiry    | Enquire into the chosen question, building on each other's ideas. | <i>"Does technology make us smarter?"</i>                  |
| 44–50 min<br>Last words | Each person says one last thought or passes.                      | <i>"Has your thinking changed?"</i>                        |

**CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)**

Explain whether technology makes us smarter.

## ACTIVITY 04 · FACILITATOR NOTES

# The philosophy in brief

In the Phaedrus, Socrates tells the story of Theuth, who invented writing, and King Thamus, who doubted its value. Philosophers call the idea that tools can become part of our thinking the extended mind.

## Common ideas to listen for

- “Plato wanted to ban writing.” He raised a worry.
- “Using tools makes you less intelligent.” It depends how they are used.
- “Knowing where to find it is the same as understanding it.” They differ.

## Adapting the activity

### Support

Compare writing and calculators.

### Stretch

Argue what Thamus would say about AI assistants.

WORKSHEET 1

# Our questions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Write questions the stimulus makes you wonder about.

## Our questions

| Question | Who asked | Votes |
|----------|-----------|-------|
|          |           |       |
|          |           |       |
|          |           |       |
|          |           |       |
|          |           |       |

WORKSHEET 2

# Old and new worries

Compare.

## Old and new worries

| Technology    | Worry | Benefit |
|---------------|-------|---------|
| Writing       |       |         |
| Calculator    |       |         |
| Search engine |       |         |
| AI assistant  |       |         |

## WORKSHEET 3

# Last words

Before and after.

**Is knowing where to find information the same as knowing it? Before the enquiry I thought... Now I think... because...**

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## FOR THE TEACHER

# Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

| Student | Asks a philosophical question | Gives reasons and examples | Listens and builds on others |
|---------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
|         |                               |                            |                              |
|         |                               |                            |                              |
|         |                               |                            |                              |
|         |                               |                            |                              |
|         |                               |                            |                              |
|         |                               |                            |                              |
|         |                               |                            |                              |

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

## ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Does Technology Make Us Smarter? is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Technology and Humanity programme (middle school, level: intermediate). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at [edutrend.org](https://edutrend.org).

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