

Data shows humans losing brain power

[theday.co.uk/data-shows-humans-losing-brain-power-421](https://www.theday.co.uk/data-shows-humans-losing-brain-power-421) March 2025



Digital dementia: New research across countries and ages reveals a growing struggle to concentrate, and declining verbal and numerical reasoning.

Could screens be to blame? In the modern day we have surrounded ourselves with distraction machines. Some believe they are wasting not only our time, but our intellect as well.

What's happening?

Evidence suggests that standard scores in **numeracy** and **literacy** are declining in the wealthy world.

The drop is sharpest among teenagers, whose average scores have fallen by almost 15 points in reading and more than 20 in maths since 2006.

This sudden change coincides almost exactly with the widespread use of smartphones.

Find out more

Studies have found that the mere presence of a phone in a room distracts us, making it harder to think and learn.

And because we can simply look up anything that we cannot immediately call to mind, we are not exercising our memories.

One of humanity's most important strengths is our ability to read large amounts of information and break it down into simpler language. It is a skill that every school qualification tests to some extent.

But the evidence suggests that more and more people, from students to professionals, are outsourcing this activity to **generative AI**.

It is easy to imagine a future world in which we never have to use our brains at all, except to order around different technologies to do the hard work on our behalf.

Could screens be to blame?

Some say

Yes! The evidence confirms that screens distract us, ruin our sleep, and degrade our memories. It is time to kick our smartphone habit.

Others think

No! Lots of other things, including **microplastics** in our brains and worry about the state of the world, could be responsible for a drop in our intelligence.

Six steps to discovery

Some people say

1. Connect

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled."

Plutarch (46 – 120), Greek philosopher

What do you think?

How do you feel about this story? - Do you feel your phone is having an effect on your brain?

2. **Wonder**

What questions do you have? - For example: Has humanity always been in decline? Does it matter if we become more stupid?

3. **Investigate**

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. **Construct**

What is your point of view? - You are made dictator for one day. Your task: to introduce a policy that will rescue people's brain power from the screen scourge. What do you do?

5. **Express**

What do others believe? - Organise a class discussion on the question, "Should we treat phones like drugs?"

6. **Reflect**

What might happen next? - You are transported forward in time to 2125. What does the world look like? Have we completely lost the ability to use our brains? How reliant are we on technology? Write a short story about the day you spend in this brave new world.

Glossary

numeracy - The ability to understand and use numbers.

Literacy - The ability to read and write.

Generative AI - A type of AI that can create new content and ideas, including conversations, stories, images, videos, and music.

Microplastics - Microplastics are fragments of degraded plastic that are less than five millimetres in length. They are blown into the atmosphere and transported by ocean currents.