

Living in the Computer Age

Let's get started...

Stand up and ask each other how many brothers and sisters each person has. Form a line arranged from the most brothers and sisters to the fewest brothers and sisters. How many total brothers and sisters are there in the group?

New words and Idioms:

E-mail, research, online, Internet, access, website, network, chat room, censor, privacy, telecommuting, electronic, transcontinental, telegraph system, deliver, Morse code, Pony Express, basic tools, defense tool, impact, develop, rural, "junk mail," "rush hour," "be fed up with," "drop someone a line," etc.

Background:

Before 1861 when the first *transcontinental telegraph system* was completed and messages could be sent using the *electronic* dots and dashes of *Morse code*, *Pony Express* riders on horses would *deliver* mail to places across the United States!

Today, computers are becoming *basic tools* for communication, success and survival in our society. They are used for many things – work, information, communication, games, meetings, calendars, and pictures.

In a short time, computers have had a strong *impact* on jobs and the lives of people all over the world. At first the government *developed* computers as a *defense tool*. In the 1990's *Internet access* was offered to the general public, allowing people all over the world to communicate.



In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:

Do you have a computer? How has it changed your life? Have you ever used a computer to help you learn English? If you don't have a computer, talk about why not. If you don't have a computer at home, do you know where you can go to use one?

Share your partner's answers with the group.

Discussion Questions:

Many schools in the United States now have computers for their students. Some schools don't have the money to buy computers. Do you think students who don't have computers in school are getting less of an education?

Do schools in your country have computers? How many people have them at home?

Do you think that schools should prepare students to use the Internet and computers as a part of their general education? If you have children at home, do they use computers to do their homework?

Many jobs that used to be done by people are now being done by computers. Can you think of any examples? Do you think that most jobs in the future will require the use of computers?

Some businesses will let people work at home in their “home office.” *Telecommuting* might seem like a new idea, but in the past most people worked near or in their homes. Telecommuting can reduce *rush hour* traffic, air pollution, and energy use. People can live in *rural* areas and still do their jobs. What do you think are some of the good and bad things about people working at home?

People can use computers to write their resumes and search for jobs. They can go *online* to check out prices and buy anything from food to clothing to airline tickets. Have you ever purchased anything online? If so, what kinds of things?

Computers are good tools for doing *research* and looking up information. What kinds of things have you looked up on the computer? Have you found any good *websites*?

Computers allow us to share information from all over the world in many languages. Do you ever use the computer to read information or newspapers in your own language?

One of the most popular uses of the internet is to send *e-mail*. With e-mail you can communicate with friends and family. A person who travels or people who live far away can keep in touch by e-mail. Do you use email? Does anyone in your family use email? How many places in the world have you sent e-mail?

Do you still write letters and personal notes to family and friends? Do you think there is a difference between getting an e-mail birthday card and receiving one in the mail?

Some companies now let their customers pay their bills online. Would you be comfortable paying bills over the Internet? Are you concerned about *privacy*?

Some people think we spend too much time using computers and too little time with other people. What do you think? Do you know anyone who works on the computer in the middle of the night? Do you know anyone who uses a computer to play games?

A *chat room* is a site on a computer *network* where online conversations are held in real time by a number of people. Have you ever been part of a chat room?

One of the basic rights of Americans is freedom of speech. Do you think that anyone should be able to put anything they want on a website? Do you think the government should *censor* websites?