



10. TAPPING INTO YOUR CRITICAL MIND!

Using social media wisely thanks to critical thinking skills

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Using critical thinking Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Exercising critical judgment Communicating appropriately Using information and communication technologies Achieving potential
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand issues surrounding social media use; • Understand their responsibility to follow internet codes of conduct and how failing to do so can have consequences for themselves and others; • Understand attitudes and practices to help develop their critical thinking skills; • Use strategies for responsible social media use.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the clock icon. 

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the clock icon. 

Materials and preparation

- Print the *Critical thinking* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have a stopwatch on hand.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

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A. Think about it... wireless or filter-less? (20 minutes)

Tip for this exercise

Before starting this workshop, it's important to take the time **to identify your own beliefs and prejudices regarding social media**, which could influence how you facilitate the workshop. New technologies have both pros and cons. It is important to understand the nuances of these technologies in order to foster open-mindedness in your students. We also encourage you to use the term "social media" rather than "social networks," as the former encompasses all online platforms (such as online gaming sites, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok) that allow young people to communicate with one another, share content, join virtual communities, etc. (Dewing, 2013).

1. Start by saying: "Adolescents are more social-media savvy than any other age group." Now ask the students to share their knowledge with you. To stimulate the discussion, ask the following questions:
 - What social media platforms do you use?
 - What do you do on these social media platforms?
 - How many hours a day do you spend on social media? How many hours do you spend on screens in general?
 - Do you ever go on social media because you're on "autopilot," without realizing how much time you're spending online?
 - What are the pros and cons of social media?
2. Then, have the students take the True or False quiz to test their understanding of social media. After each explanation, ask students if they feel they can relate (though they do not have to respond) in order to get them thinking.

True or False Quiz

- **Screen time and social media use can have an impact on our health...**

TRUE.

These impacts can be helpful or harmful. When used in a balanced and thoughtful way, technology can have positive effects on physical and mental health (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2019). For example, some apps offer tools to help you unwind, meditate, or simply relax. Others help you better organize your daily routine, and improve your time management. Some social media platforms can be vehicles for creativity, through artistic content and games, or by serving as platforms for self-expression. They also make it easier to access support services, especially mental health, education, and social services. That access can be incredibly helpful for many families (PAUSE, 2025). Some video games can also have positive effects on young people. They can promote learning, creativity, problem-solving and sportsmanship, and help understand how to deal with failure, be aware of social issues, learn other languages, and master new technologies. They also provide opportunities for social interaction, whether with other players or through gaming communities (Government of Quebec, 2020).



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On the other hand, heavy use of social media can have harmful effects on physical and mental health. Heavy social media use can lead to a decline in healthy lifestyle habits, causing increased risks of chronic diseases and mental health disorders in the medium and long term (Schimmele et al., 2021), and particularly depression in adolescence (Kelly et al., 2018; Mills et al., 2018; Moreno et al., 2011). Repeated exposure to certain content, like unrealistic body images or posts promoting negative messages, can contribute to lower self-esteem and trigger or worsen symptoms of depression (Boers et al., 2019). In fact, young people themselves report various negative effects from social media use, including loss of sleep, trouble concentrating on tasks or activities, a decrease in physical activity, and increased feelings of anxiety, depression, frustration, or anger, as well as envy about other people's lives (Boers et al., 2019; Schimmele et al., 2021).

Screen time can also have negative effects on young people's development and functioning (High Council for Public Health [HCSP], 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2015; Canadian Paediatric Society [CPS], 2019, 2023). For example, using electronic devices (like cell phones, tablets, and computers) before going to sleep can reduce the amount of sleep young people get. This then affects their ability to function throughout the day: being drowsy or lethargic in class, trouble getting up in the morning, etc. (HCSP, 2020; WHO, 2015; Poirier et al., 2024; Royant-Parola et al., 2018; CPS, 2019, 2023).

In short, for screens to be a source of enrichment rather than a cause for concern, they need to be used in moderation ([Le bon côté des écrans](#) [website in French only]; PAUSE, 2025).

- **Using social media can affect your mood...**

TRUE.

The more active someone is on social media, the more negative they feel after using it (Fardouly et al., 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014). Social media has become a place where people compare themselves to others (Ahmad et al., 2024; Thorisdottir et al., 2019), and people who use social media platforms a lot are more likely to compare themselves negatively (Ahmad et al., 2024; Lee, 2014). For example, someone might think that other people are happier and have easier, more pleasant lives than their own. This can make them feel like life is unfair. They start fixating on ideas or dwelling on negative thoughts, leading to feelings or symptoms of depression (Chou & Edge, 2012; Feinstein et al., 2013; Villanueva-Moya et al., 2023).

- **Cyberbullying has fewer consequences than traditional bullying...**

FALSE.

Cyberbullying has the same harmful consequences as traditional bullying. In fact, the consequences of cyberbullying may be even more devastating (Saltz et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). Cyberbullying also comes with its own specific consequences, such as broken trust, invasion of privacy, and feeling powerless against a bully who may be anonymous. What's more, it's often impossible to erase all traces of cyberbullying (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020; Kwan et al., 2020; Saltz et al., 2020).

One study found that around one third of young people report having been **victims of online mistreatment**, most often in video games, private messages, or in comments and posts on various social media platforms (MediaSmarts, 2023a). And nearly half of young people say they have **witnessed bullying or cruelty online**. Whether they're witnesses or victims, when faced with such situations, young people tend to do nothing or ignore the behaviour (MediaSmarts, 2023a).



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- **Social media can help us get through hard times in our lives.**

TRUE.

Despite its drawbacks, social media gives young people a feeling of “connection with others” that is beneficial for them, especially during difficult or challenging times (Ellison et al., 2007, 2011). For example, during the pandemic, internet use was identified as a possible way to reduce isolation (Feng & Tong, 2023; Magis-Weinberg et al., 2021; Marciano et al., 2022). In fact, young people’s internet use is believed to be as closely linked to social connections as it is to entertainment. Communicating with loved ones, especially friends and family, accounts for a significant portion of time spent online. Young people from diverse backgrounds (e.g., immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, individuals with disabilities, etc.) are particularly likely to turn to social media to access support, resources, and online communities. This shows just how important these spaces are for inclusion and well-being (Guinta & John, 2018; MediaSmarts, 2022).

- **Our personal information is safe on social media.**

FALSE.

There are many risks to our personal information on social media, most notably loss of control over privacy, getting hacked, and identity theft. The more personal information you share, the more you put yourself at risk (Cosoi, 2011; Senthil Kumar et al., 2016)! Keep in mind that, just because there’s a privacy policy, that *does not mean* your personal information is safe from being shared with others. Many social media platforms have privacy policies that are difficult to understand and create a false sense of security. As a result, many young people who use these platforms think they’re safe and welcoming spaces, when in fact that might not be the case. Many platforms share or even sell your personal information! So, it’s important to be on guard to protect your digital identity and to limit the information you share online (MediaSmarts, 2021, 2023b; Tisseron, 2023).

Your digital identity is made up of all the traces you leave on the internet, often without even realizing you’re doing so. Every connection, every click leaves traces—sometimes permanent—in the public sphere: your computer’s IP address; your location; the length of time you were connected for; the websites you visited; comments, photos and videos posted by yourself or others, etc. All of this data is very likely to remain available online; it can be accessed at any time and may end up in the hands of people who would use it for malicious purposes (Amani, 2024).

- **Everything we see on social media is true.**

FALSE.

The information we see on social media is not always accurate. These days, information is plentiful and readily available. It’s getting harder to distinguish accurate and reliable information from misinformation or lies. Sometimes we might even spread false or misleading information ourselves, without realizing that’s what we’re doing (Colliander, 2019).

3. You conclude by pointing out to the students how the quiz shows that things aren’t always black and white. Using social media can have **both pros and cons**. The goal of the exercise was to encourage students to reflect on their own experiences with social media, gather information, and acquire new knowledge in order to **develop a more informed perspective**.

B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Tapping into your critical mind! – Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip—Part 1](#)



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C. Don't believe everything you read! (5 minutes)

1. Follow up the educational clip by asking students what they think it means to use “**critical thinking**.”
2. Listen to a few answers, then wrap up by explaining that, basically, “critical thinking” means not believing everything you see or read on social media. It also means being wary of the information you come across and knowing how to assess its credibility.
3. Use the figure shown in the PowerPoint presentation (Éducol, 2025; Sotir, 2014) to explain critical thinking and its components in order to help get students to think more deeply on the topic.



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Critical thinking Practices and attitudes that get us thinking about the world around us.	
Attitudes Ways of being, personality traits, personal characteristics	Practices Concrete actions, important things to do, to apply
Being curious Wanting to find out more about different subjects.	Looking up information on the subject.
Being discerning Making sure the information you have is reliable.	Asking yourself questions and assessing the information you find.
Being independent Forming your own opinion based on the information you have.	Coming up with arguments that distinguish fact from opinion.
Being a good listener Agreeing to disagree with others and taking an interest in their opinions and knowledge.	Comparing your ideas and arguments to those of others.
Being humble Allowing yourself to be wrong and change your mind.	Assessing new information and taking a position.

4. Point out that these attitudes and practices are, in fact, strategies for gradually applying their critical thinking skills in their daily lives.

D. Devil's advocate (20 minutes)

Tip for this exercise

For a successful debate, students must be able to: 1) understand the problem presented. 2) decide on their position/view of the issue. 3) come up with arguments. 4) summarize the arguments. 5) illustrate their arguments with examples; 6) consider the opposing viewpoint; and 7) prepare their conclusion (de Vecchi, 2017, p.158).



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Some helpful tips for this debate

- During a debate, it can sometimes be difficult to manage speaking turns. Feel free to clarify or repeat the rules as needed and to correct any behaviours you find inappropriate.
- You can act as the time keeper (e.g., by reminding participants that there are three minutes left or by saying that you'll listen to two more answers).
- If the students stray too far off topic, feel free to steer the debate back on track by repeating the question.
- Even if you'd like to share your own opinion with the students, it's best to let them debate among themselves and see what interesting turns the discussion might take. This doesn't prevent you from guiding the students toward a particular aspect of the debate or encouraging them to explore the topic further.
- If the debate becomes heated and emotional, you can use mindfulness to get students to focus on specific aspects, for example, by asking them questions or by telling them to take a few deep breaths or settle down (e.g., "Notice the emotions that come up when you talk about a particular subject. Notice your breathing. Is it deep, fast, slow? What does that tell you about your state of mind?")

- Explain that the next activity will be a debate on an issue related to social media.
- The purpose of the debate is to get them to think about the issue and to debate their ideas with each other. The goal is not to be right, but rather to take a position for or against the question asked.
- Add that the debate is also an opportunity for them to **explore attitudes and practices for critical thinking** (in reference to the figure on attitudes and practices seen earlier, and in the PowerPoint presentation).
- Organize the classroom in a way that promotes discussion (move the desks around, divide the room in half, place the desks in a half circle, etc.).
- Next, ask the students the debate question shown in the slideshow:
 - Is social media helpful (FOR) or harmful (AGAINST) when it comes to personal relationships?**
- Allow a few minutes for each student to choose a position on the topic, then tell them to break up into two groups: those who are **FOR** and those who are **AGAINST**.
- If the groups are really unbalanced, ask for volunteers to defend the opposite position, or form a third group for **undecided** students.



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8. Open up the debate with a five-minute discussion period between the FOR and AGAINST groups. Act as the debate moderator, inviting both sides to take turns expressing their opinions.
 9. At the end of this initial discussion period, ask the students to stop talking and stay silent. Without any explanation, show the video [Are You Living an Insta Lie? Social Media Vs. Reality](#) (2017; 3 min 12 sec).
 10. After playing the video, ask the students the debate question again:
 - **Is social media helpful or harmful to personal relationships?**
 11. Ask them to take a few seconds, while remaining silent, to consider their position on the question (FOR, AGAINST, UNDECIDED) and to revise their position if they feel the need. Without wasting any time, ask those who have changed their stance to switch groups (or sides of the classroom).
 12. You then resume the debate for another five-minute round.
 13. To reignite the discussion and encourage students to think more deeply about social media, you can use the following questions as a starting point:
 - Does being popular on social media necessarily make you feel good about yourself? If it does, is this feeling real and long-lasting?
 - Does the number of followers or likes you get reflect a genuine, authentic appreciation from other people toward you?
 - When you see a post (photo, video, text) showing someone at their “best,” what emotions (positive or negative) do you feel (envy, jealousy, frustration, dissatisfaction, joy, gratitude, etc.)?
 - Do you ever “like,” post, or share things on autopilot, not really thinking about what you’re doing?
 - Do the photos that influencers post reflect their everyday lives? What’s lurking behind these photos (money, editing, a photographer, sponsors, etc.)?
 14. At the very end of the debate, ask the students to take a firm position on the debate question: **FOR, AGAINST, or UNDECIDED**. Ask them one final time to change groups (or sides of the classroom) if they’ve changed their opinion since the midway point of the debate. Encourage them to notice the movements or changes in opinion that happened during the exercise.
 15. Conclude the activity by asking the students what they learned from this debate experience. To encourage discussion, you can ask the following questions:
 - Do you think there’s only a single correct answer to the debate question?
 - Did you find it easy or difficult to choose and express an opinion?
 - How did you feel when you had to stand up for your opinion in front of others?
 - And how did you feel listening to others’ opinions? (e.g., the urge to interrupt to share your own opinion, specific emotions, physical sensations, etc.)
 - Why is it important to develop your critical thinking on a daily basis?
- For students who changed their mind during the debate:**
- What influenced you to change your opinion?
 - Did you find it difficult to change your mind?



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For the students who did NOT change their mind during the debate:

- Why did you stick to your original opinion?
- Is it difficult for you to change your mind, in life in general?

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)



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1. Explain that, when social media is used thoughtfully and responsibly, it can be a valuable resource and can create opportunities.
2. You then present a list of **strategies for responsible social media use** (inspired by: Cent degrés, 2024; Escobar-Viera et al., 2018; Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Tandoc et al., 2015).
 - Use your critical thinking;
 - When using social media, stop and take breaks and notice how you feel;
 - Choose the pages you like and the people you follow very carefully;
 - Become aware of how social media affects you (positively or negatively) while you're using it and afterwards;
 - Try to nurture authentic relationships and put yourself in positive situations;
 - Take a moment to think before posting or sharing;
 - Limit how much personal information you disclose and share online;
 - Try going offline for a few hours (for example, while you're out with friends) or for a few days;
 - Think about the time you usually spend on social media, and what you could be doing instead;
 - Follow the "3 zeros" rule: zero screens while getting ready in the morning, zero screens during meals, and zero screens in your bedroom;
 - Turn on the "Screen Time" feature on your cell phone to see how many minutes you use it each day;
 - Turn all your screens off an hour before you go to bed, in order to sleep better;
 - Turn off non-essential notifications.

F. Educational clip – Part 2 (5 minutes)



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1. Play the video clip *Tapping into your critical mind! – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)

G. OFF-TRAIL Challenge

This week, encourage students to think about how they could improve or change their social media habits to be more effective, and to try at least two strategies to accomplish this goal. Suggest that they talk to their friends about it.



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