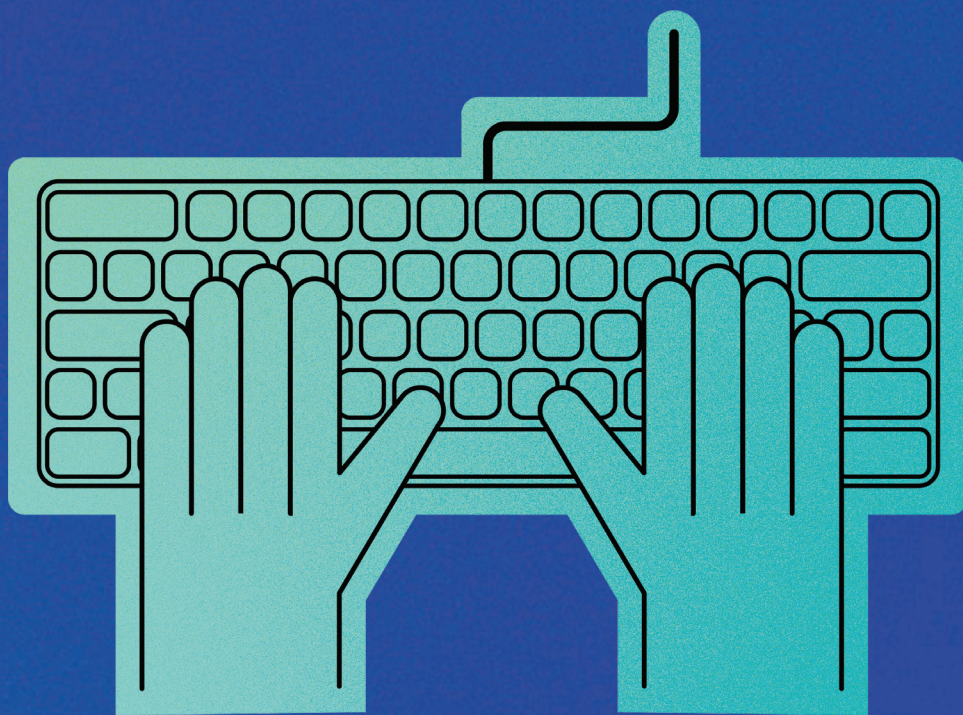


Digital Skills Guidebook



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Introduction

Having strong digital skills is no longer simply a “nice to have” - it is now essential to every young person’s experience. Employers increasingly expect new recruits to be confident in using digital tools, understanding AI, and demonstrating core technical abilities. McKinsey & Company (2025) found that hiring managers, in seeking to close the digital skills gap, are prioritising both the upskilling of their existing workforce and adopting skills-based hiring practices rather than focusing solely on university degrees. This highlights a clear need for all young people to develop and demonstrate a solid foundation in digital skills, as they are integral to their studies and later on their career.

It is easy to assume that growing up with smartphones means everyone is digitally confident. Young people are often referred to as “digital natives,” or more recently, “AI natives.” However, being a native does not necessarily mean being competent, it simply means having grown up alongside digital technologies. In reality, there remains a significant digital skills gap in the UK. Millions of people sit within a “hidden middle”: not digitally excluded, yet lacking the advanced skills needed for the modern workplace. For instance, the Association for Learning Technology (2025) reports that 21.7 million working-age adults are unable to complete all the essential digital tasks identified as critical by employers and government.

” 88 percent of young people realise that their digital skills will be essential for their careers (Skills UK)

There are many digital skills frameworks and guides available online to help you improve your digital capabilities. This Guidebook builds on those resources. We start from the assumption that if you are engaging with this guide, you already meet the Foundation Level as defined in the Essential Digital Skills Framework (FutureDotNow, 2023).

- The Foundation Level consists of the most fundamental tasks to set up an individual for success online. There are eight tasks that comprise the Foundation Level. An individual needs to perform all eight tasks without assistance to have the Foundation Level.

1. You can turn on the device and enter any account login information as required.

2. You can use the available controls on your device (e.g. mouse, keyboard, touchscreen, trackpad).

3. You can use the different settings on your device to make it easier to use (e.g. adjust font size, volume settings, brightness of screen, voice activation or screen readers).

4. You can find and open different applications/programmes/platforms on your devices (e.g. opening a web browser, messaging applications).
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5. You can set up a connection to a Wi-Fi network on your devices (e.g. when at home, work, out in public or visiting family and friends).
6. You can open an Internet browser to find and use websites (e.g. Safari, Google, Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Edge).
7. You can keep your login information and passwords for a device and any accounts secure (e.g. not shared with anyone or written down or left prominently near a device).
8. You can update and change your password when prompted to do so.

Publication aims

This publication has four main aims. As a reminder, it is not an exhaustive list of all digital skills or competencies, nor does it provide tools for many of the foundational technical skills that are mentioned but not addressed here.

- 1 Provide guidance on key digital skills**
such as critical thinking, communication, and time management, that will help you demonstrate your digital competence for future steps in employment, further, or higher education. It also encourages you to reflect on your current skills and identify areas for growth.
- 2 Support you in staying safe online**
by offering practical tools and strategies to protect yourself from online harms, including cyberbullying, scams, and exposure to harmful or misleading content.
- 3 Encourage you to manage your online presence**
and take steps to safeguard your digital identity, ensuring you present yourself positively and responsibly across digital platforms.
- 4 Help you achieve digital balance**
by providing tools and strategies that promote healthy, mindful use of technology, supporting your overall digital wellbeing and mental health.

We have organised the skills above into four categories, each with four subsections. Each subsection combines evidence-based strategies with opportunities for you to reflect on your own skills.



ChatGPT was used to suggest activities for the various sections. These were checked and adapted by the Editor of the Guidebook, Dr Iro Konstantinou.



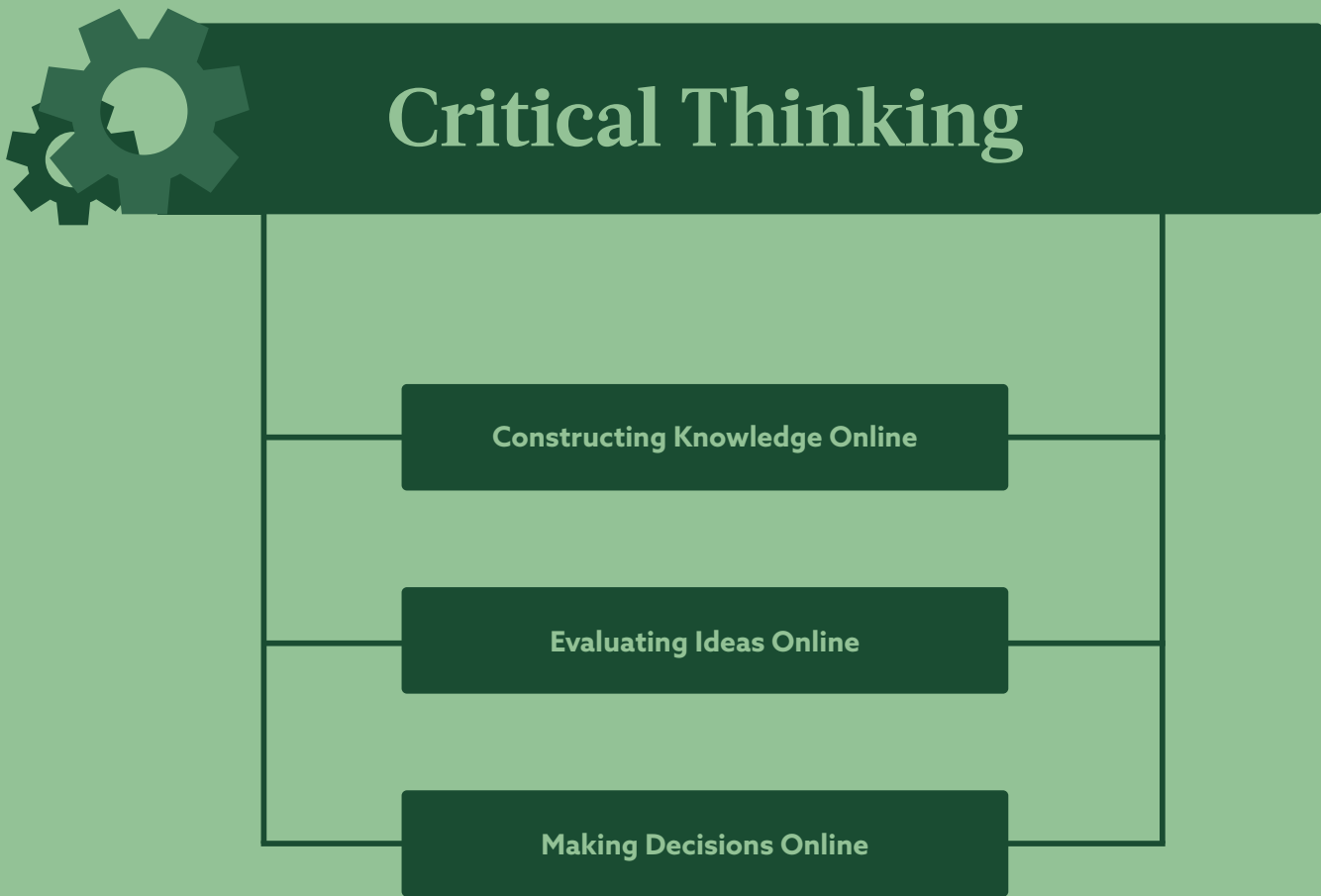
Digital skills

1a:
Critical thinking

Critical thinking

In the digital age, we are constantly exposed to information online: social media posts, videos, articles, adverts, and AI-generated content. Critical thinking helps you **decide what to trust, how to respond, and how to act responsibly**.

Think of it in **three stages**: Constructing Knowledge, Evaluating Ideas, and Making Decisions which corresponds to the Skills Development Framework for Critical Thinking by ACER.



Constructing Knowledge Online

a. Identify gaps in your knowledge

- o Ask questions about what you don't understand or seems confusing online.
- o When exploring topics online, you'll often see many different opinions, experiences, and interpretations. Being open to multiple perspectives means recognising that **your view isn't the only one** and that understanding others can help you see the bigger picture.
- o **Diversify your sources:** Follow or read from people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. This can help you avoid living in an "echo chamber," where you only see views that match your own.
- o **Think critically, not cynically:** You can stay open-minded without believing everything you see; consider new ideas but still check for evidence.

Practise: A TikTok video claims "drinking lemon water cures acne."
Ask: Where is the scientific evidence? Who made this claim?

b. Evaluate the quality of online information

- o **Check the reliability of sources:** Who wrote it, their credentials, and if the site or profile is legitimate.
- o **Distinguish fact from opinion or clickbait.** Facts can be proven true or false (for example, "The Earth orbits the Sun"). **Opinions** express what someone thinks or feels ("I think space travel is a waste of money"). **Clickbait** uses shocking headlines or emotional language ("You won't believe what happened next!") to get you to click, even if the content doesn't match the title.
- o **Connect ideas and draw conclusions:** Use what you've found to form your own, evidence-based understanding of the issue.

Practise: A blog post may be written by someone without medical training. Compare with NHS or peer-reviewed health sites. For example, a post titled "This one food CURES anxiety!" is likely opinion or clickbait; look for credible sources, such as NHS or mental health organisations, to confirm if there's real evidence behind the claim.

Compare how different news outlets or social media accounts report the same story. What facts do they share? What opinions or emotions do they add?



Evaluating Ideas Online

a. Use logic to test ideas

When you come across information online, think carefully about **how the argument is built**. Critical thinkers look for whether the logic makes sense or if something feels off.

- o **Spot contradictions:** If someone's argument doesn't match their evidence or changes halfway through, question its reliability.
- o **Notice flawed reasoning:** Watch for claims that use emotion instead of facts or that jump to conclusions without proof.

Tip: When you find a claim online, such as "People who play video games get bad grades", ask yourself:

- "Does this actually make sense?"
- "Is there proof that one thing caused the other?"
- "Could there be another explanation?"

b. Spot hidden assumptions and biases

Being a critical thinker means not only recognising **bias in others**, but also noticing it **in yourself**. A good starting point is to question what bias content creators might bring to their posts:

- o Ask what motivates the person posting: are they trying to inform, persuade, entertain, or sell?
- o Look for **loaded language** ("Everyone knows this is the best!") or emotional appeals that replace facts.
- o Check if they gain anything, such as money, followers, or likes, from convincing you to agree.

Recognise your own assumptions: We all tend to believe things that confirm what we already think (called confirmation bias). Challenge yourself to explore viewpoints that make you think differently.



Making Decisions Online

a. When making choices online it helps to pause and **think about your decision-making criteria**. Clear criteria help you make smarter, safer, and more meaningful digital decisions. Here are four key things to consider:

- o **Accuracy:** Is this information true and supported by reliable evidence? Double-check facts with trustworthy sources before believing or sharing.
- o **Safety:** Could this choice put you, or someone else, at risk? Think about whether a website, link, or interaction feels secure and appropriate.
- o **Privacy:** What personal information might you be revealing? Be cautious about accounts or apps that ask for unnecessary data or permissions.
- o **Impact:** How might your action affect others or your digital reputation? Even small choices, like commenting, reposting, or tagging, can have real-world consequences.

b. Weigh up your options

When you face multiple sources or opinions online, it's easy to go with the one that's most popular or emotionally powerful. But critical thinkers take a step back and compare options based on clear, logical criteria, such as accuracy, reliability, tone, and evidence.

Imagine you're researching a current event, for example, climate change or new technology.

You find two articles: one gives detailed explanations, includes expert quotes, and links to scientific research. The other uses strong emotional language, dramatic images, and no sources. A critical thinker compares them based on criteria like **accuracy, tone, and evidence** and concludes that the first article is more credible, even if the second one feels more engaging. By practising this kind of comparison, you train yourself to see **quality over popularity**, making you a more thoughtful and informed digital citizen.

AI systems can also reflect human bias.

- o AI tools learn from the data they are trained on and that data often comes from the internet, where not all information is fair, accurate, or balanced. This means that AI can omit, repeat or amplify existing stereotypes or inequalities.
- o **Bias in AI content:** If an AI tool has mostly seen examples of one gender or culture in a certain role, it might reproduce that pattern (e.g., showing men as CEOs and women as assistants).
- o **Bias in search or recommendations:** Social media algorithms or AI search tools may prioritise content similar to what you already like or agree with, reinforcing your existing beliefs and creating "echo chambers."
- o **Bias in decision-making tools:** Some organisations use AI to screen job applications or recommend products, but these systems might unfairly favour or exclude certain groups based on biased data.

Let's Practise

Choose one post, article, or video from your feed and work through the tasks below. Write short answers.

- 1

Source & URL check

a. Post title / link: _____

b. What is the exact web address (URL)? _____

c. Does the domain look official? (Yes / No) ____ Why? _____
- 2

Media check (image or video)

a. What part of the post uses a photo or video?

b. List two signs that suggest it might be edited, cropped, or out of context:

a) _____

b) _____
- 3

Media check (image or video)

a. What quick verification did you do? (e.g., searched the headline, used an official site): _____

b. Did you find a reliable source that supports the claim? (Yes / No) _____

c. Based on what you found, will you Share / Comment / Ignore? _____

Why? _____
- 4

Look beyond your algorithm

a. Find one other source or viewpoint on the same topic (write the site or account): _____

b. How is it different from the post you checked? _____
- 5

AI-check

a. Does the content read like it might be AI-generated? (e.g., generic wording, no sources, repetitive phrases) Yes / No _____

b. One quick way I checked for AI (what you did): _____

1b: Organisation and time management

Organisation and time management

Stand-up comedian George Carlin once quipped that in the future a “time machine will be built, but no one will have time to use it”. As life becomes increasingly busy with a variety of demands, it is essential to consider how we can manage our time effectively to boost productivity. More importantly, strong time-management skills are linked to wellbeing and overall life satisfaction (Aeon et al., 2021). Technology plays an interesting role in this context, as it can both help and hinder our ability to manage time. On the one hand, digital tools can streamline tasks, organise schedules, and make managing responsibilities more efficient. On the other hand, technology can also be a source of distraction; for example, spending excessive time scrolling through social media, which can undermine effective time management.

Below are several tools that can help you manage your time effectively while also turning some of technology’s potential distractions into productive resources.

Effective use of digital tools *

- Calendar and Scheduling**
 - o **Google Calendar** – Schedules classes, assignments, reminders.
 - o **Microsoft Outlook Calendar** – Integrates with email and Teams for work/study planning.
 - o **Apple Calendar** – Syncs across iPhone, iPad, and Mac devices.
- Task and Project Management**
 - o **Trello** – Visual boards for projects, homework, or collaborative tasks.
 - o **Todoist** – Tracks daily tasks, deadlines, and recurring assignments.
 - o **Notion** – Combines notes, to-do lists, and project management in one workspace with AI tools.
 - o **Microsoft To Do** – Simple task tracking synced with Microsoft ecosystem.
- Note-taking and Collaboration:**
 - o **Google Drive** – Stores, organises, and shares files with cloud backup.
 - o **Dropbox** – Secures file storage and sharing.
 - o **OneDrive** – Integrates with Microsoft Office for easy access and collaboration.

Prioritisation and Planning

- Setting Goals & Task Priorities:**
 - o **Eisenhower Matrix apps: Eisenhower or Sorted³** – Separate urgent vs important tasks.
 - o **Todoist or TickTick** – Assign priority levels to tasks and set reminders.
- Time-blocking & Scheduling**
 - o **Google Calendar or Outlook Calendar** – Allocate study blocks and breaks.
 - o **Clockify** – Track how long tasks take to improve planning.
- Focus & Anti-Multitasking Tools:**
 - o **Forest** – Grow a virtual tree while staying focused.
 - o **Focus@Will** – Music to improve concentration.
 - o **Cold Turkey or Freedom** – Block distracting websites during studying sessions.
 - o **RescueTime** – Monitors how time is spent on apps and websites.
 - o **Toggl Track** – Track study sessions for productivity insights.
 - o **Pomodoro** – Time-management tool that uses the Pomodoro Technique.

*This is not an exhaustive list, and there are many other apps that offer similar features. While most have paid versions, the free options should be sufficient for your current needs.

Reflect – Audit your week

- 1** Write down **your typical weekly schedule** (school, homework, activities, free time).
- 2** Track how much time you spend on:
 - a. Social Media
 - b. Gaming or entertainment
 - c. Study/work tasks
 - d. Sleep and self-care
 - e. Social activities

Reflection Questions:

- Are you spending more time than intended on distractions?
- Which parts of your week feel rushed or stressful?

Identify your priorities

- 1** List the **3 most important tasks** you want to complete this week.
- 2** Rank them using a **priority sytem**:
 - o **A = urgent and important**
 - o **B = important but not urgent**
 - o **C = neither urgent nor important**

Choose your digital tools

Choose 3 tools from the list on page 14 that can help you manage your priorities this week:

- _____
- _____
- _____

1c: Using Artificial Intelligence

Using Artificial Intelligence

Over the last couple of decades, AI powered systems have become integrated into the worlds of finance and commerce, entertainment, healthcare, justice and security, and more recently (and often with controversy) the creative arts. More often than not, these AI systems are invisible to users; face recognition in CCTV systems for example, or recommendation algorithms in social media and streaming services. In the world of education, AI systems are often more visible as they clash so dramatically with tradition. On the one hand are paper based examinations and essays written without digital tools, and on the other hand are conversational AIs (like ChatGPT) that can answer questions and synthesise whole texts in moments. Students already use AI heavily. A study by Oxford University Press (2025) found that:

8 in 10 young people use AI tools in their schoolwork

Among the top concerns for students (60%) was AI tools encouraging copying rather than original work and over half (51%) worry that AI resources may be biased or reinforce untrue stereotypes

One third (32%) stated they can't tell if AI content is true, whilst a fifth (21%) were unsure

AI tools are going to continue to develop and become more commonplace. It also is highly likely that the use of AIs will feature significantly in the majority of future careers. According to the World Economic Forum (2025), people today are more than twice as likely to add AI skills to their profiles compared to 2018. AI literacy has become a key differentiator for job seekers: professionals who embrace AI are more likely to stay ahead of the competition and position themselves for long-term career success. The WEF (2025) suggests that for young people preparing for their future careers, it's important to recognise that the value of human skills has risen sharply, even in roles that once placed less emphasis on them. Since 2018, the demand for these uniquely human abilities, such as creativity, empathy, communication, and critical thinking, has grown by around 20%. As organisations better understand what AI can do, they're also realising what it can't: tasks that rely on human judgement, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, skills that will continue to set people apart in the workplace. The CFA Institute (2025) makes the same argument: many employers will be looking for technical skills to be able to use AI and other technologies, but they also believe in the power of unique human skills, such as empathy, flexibility, adaptability, resilience and relationship-building.

AI Literacy

The OECD (2025) outlines four key ways in which you need to develop AI literacy:

- 1

Engaging with AI:
Using AI tools to access new information or recommendations. Students learn to recognise when AI is being used and to critically evaluate the accuracy, relevance, and limitations of its outputs.
- 2

Creating with AI:
Collaborating with AI in creative or problem-solving tasks. This involves crafting effective prompts, refining AI outputs, and considering ethics such as fairness, ownership, and responsible content use.
- 3

Managing AI:
Making intentional decisions about how AI supports human work. Learners practise delegating structured tasks to AI while maintaining focus on creativity, empathy, and judgement, ensuring AI use remains ethical and purposeful.
- 4

Designing AI:
Exploring how AI systems are built and the social and ethical effects of their design. Through hands-on learning, students investigate how data and design choices influence fairness and develop the confidence to shape AI for human benefit.

The OECD also suggests that you need relevant Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes to effectively engage with AI.



- Knowledge**
The Nature of AI
AI Reflects Human Choices and Perspectives
AI Reshapes Work and Human Roles
AI's Capabilities and Limitations
AI's Role in Society



- Skills**
Critical Thinking: Evaluate AI-generated content.
Creativity: Collaborate with AI to create and refine ideas.
Computational Thinking: Decompose problems and provide instructions.
Self and Social Awareness: Recognize AI's influence.
Collaboration: Work effectively between AI and humans.
Communication: Explain how AI is used.
Problem Solving: Determine when and how to use AI.



- Attitudes**
Responsible
Curious
Innovative
Adaptable
Empathetic

Ethics of AI

It is important to remember that AI systems can be biased and may not always provide accurate information. You should therefore approach AI with caution and a critical mindset (see also the section on Critical Thinking). Research has shown (e.g., Chen, 2023) that AI can reflect or even amplify bias and discrimination, sometimes presenting information that overlooks diverse perspectives. Additionally, the ethics surrounding AI remain complex and evolving, requiring us to continually reflect on how we understand, apply, and uphold ethical principles in our use of AI. The Alan Turing Institute (Leslie, 2019) proposes the below **FAST principles** when engaging with AI.



- FAIRNESS**
All AI systems must meet a threshold of non-harm, which means they do not have an inequitable impact and are implemented in an unbiased way.



- ACCOUNTABILITY**
This requires humans to be involved throughout the process of the design and implementation of an AI system.



- SUSTAINABILITY**
Designers and users must be sensitive to the impact of AIs on society and individuals. They must monitor their accuracy, reliability, security, and robustness.



- TRANSPARENCY**
Designers of AI must be able to explain in plain language how AI systems affect those who use them and the ethical impacts of such use.

Check how well you can engage with AI

1 Develop your AI Literacy for your studies

- ☐ I can recognise when AI is being used (e.g., recommendations, chatbots, filters).
- ☐ I can evaluate whether AI-generated information is accurate, reliable, and relevant.
- ☐ I know how to use AI tools to support my learning, not replace my own thinking or creativity.
- ☐ I understand the basics of how AI works (e.g., data, algorithms, bias).
- ☐ I practise prompt engineering—writing clear, specific, and ethical prompts.
- ☐ I can reflect on the strengths and limits of using AI in my studies.

2 Build AI Literacy for the Workplace

- ☐ I understand how AI is used in different industries.
- ☐ I can identify which AI tools or platforms are relevant to my future career interests.
- ☐ I stay informed about new AI developments that could impact my field.
- ☐ I can explain the benefits and limitations of AI in a professional context.

3 Understand and Apply AI Ethics

- ☐ I understand that it is unethical to use AI to generate work and present it as my own.
- ☐ I understand that AI can be biased and that human oversight is always needed.
- ☐ I question AI-generated results and check multiple sources for accuracy.
- ☐ I use AI in ways that respect privacy, data protection, and intellectual property.
- ☐ I consider how my use of AI affects others and society.
- ☐ I can explain how I apply ethical principles, such as fairness, accountability, and transparency, in my work.

4 Reflect on your Human Skills

- ☐ I can identify and describe my key human strengths (e.g., empathy, adaptability, collaboration, creativity).
- ☐ I understand why these skills are increasingly valuable in an AI-driven world.
- ☐ I practise combining my human skills with AI tools to improve outcomes.

5 Strengthening your Human & Digital Skills

- ☐ I can communicate clearly and work effectively with others (teamwork and empathy).
- ☐ I adapt quickly to new technologies or ways of working.
- ☐ I use creativity and problem-solving to approach challenges in new ways.
- ☐ I demonstrate ethical awareness and fairness when using technology.
- ☐ I reflect regularly on my personal strengths and how to apply them in future roles.
- ☐ I update my CV or portfolio to include examples of AI-related projects or learning.
- ☐ I can talk confidently about how I use AI responsibly and effectively.
- ☐ I recognise that lifelong learning will be essential as technology continues to evolve.
- ☐ I set personal goals for developing both digital and human skills.

Creating with AI: Prompt engineering

The most effective way to develop your AI skills is to practise actually using it. An essential skill to master is creating effective prompts: what we call prompt engineering. A 'prompt' is simply the input given to an AI, typically in the form of a chunk of text you've typed in.

An effective prompt should be broken down into the following clauses:

- **Who** are you?
- **What** do you want the AI to do, and/or who do you want the AI to 'pretend' to be, or act in capacity of?
- **Why** do you want the AI to do it?
- **How** do you want it to be done?
- **With what** additional information should the AI achieve this?

In some topics (e.g. history, creative writing), you can even add a couple more clauses:

- **When** should this be set?
- **Where** should this be set?

Here's an example:

What	I want you to play the role of a university lecturer interviewing me for a place.
Why	I want to practise the interview process so that I am better prepared for my interview, taking place next week.
How	Ask me a question, let me respond, and then follow up with further questions that encourage me to give more details. Be friendly, but also keep in mind there is stiff competition for places so don't go easy on me.
With what	I have already submitted a personal statement, which I paste below, where I stated I am studying Further Maths, Chemistry, and Biology A levels. I regularly attended 'Biology Society' events at school with lots of inspirational guest speakers.

You can also use conversational AIs to create educational activities, to get AI to act as your tutor. For example,

Odd one out and why

I am a _____. I want to play a game of 'odd one out' with you to help with my understanding of _____.	Possible recipe ingredients:
Each time we play, give me a list of 5 items and ask me which is the odd one out. There should be a clear thread that links 4 of the 5 items but keep this secret.	GCSE History student... ...Tudor History
First, all I must do is state the odd one out. If I guess incorrectly, give me another chance. If I guess correctly, congratulate me and ask me what the thread was that linked them.	A level English Literature student... ...characters in Shakespeare plays
If I then get the thread right, start again with another. If I get it incorrectly, tell me the thread and let me guess again.	GCSE Latin student... ...the roles of the Roman Gods

Accreditation: Steve Birtles, Eton College

1d: Transferable digital skills

Transferable digital skills

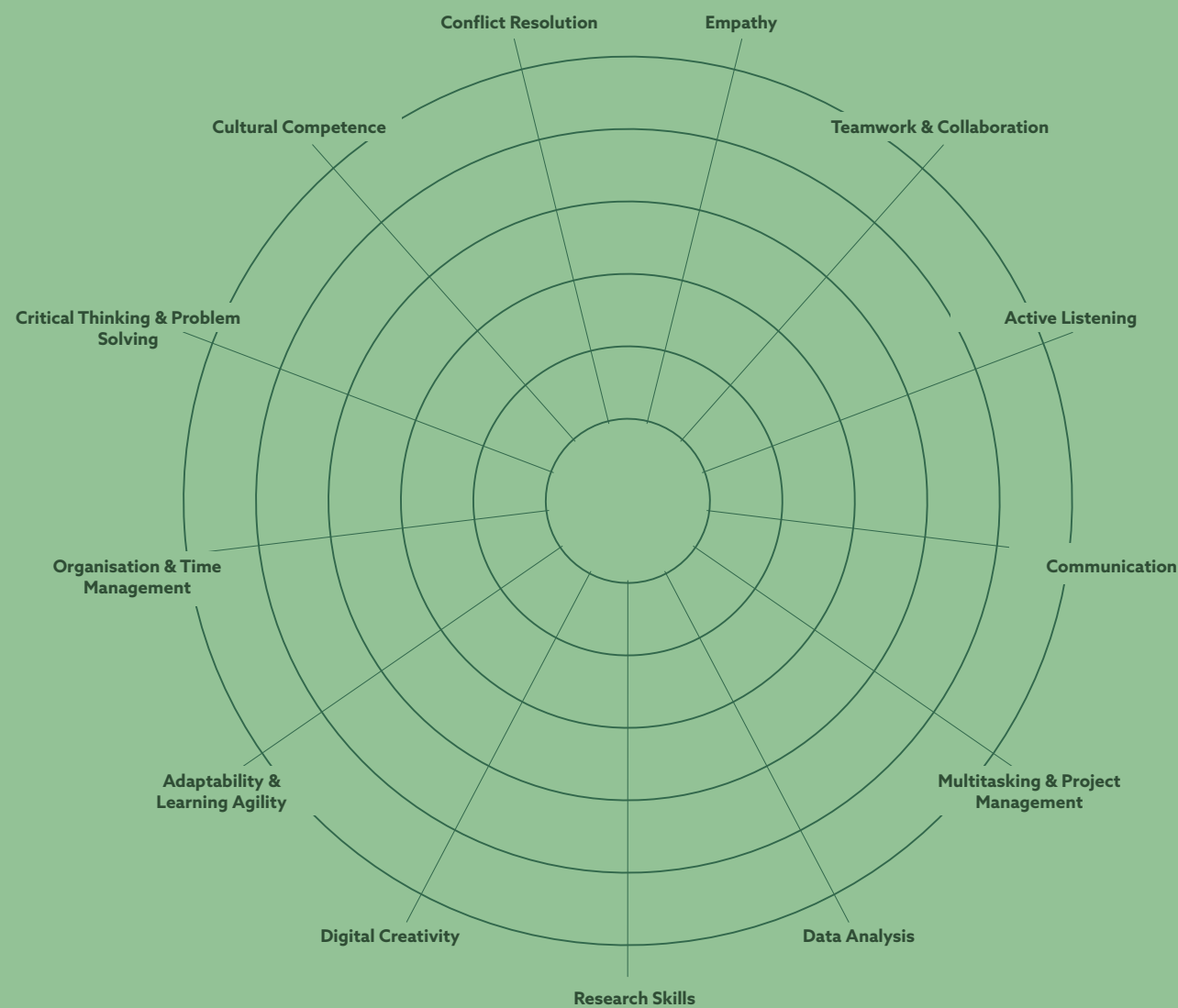
When thinking about your future goals, whether that means getting into university, securing a job, or starting an apprenticeship, it's important to understand the skills you'll need in an increasingly digital world. You should also be able to explain how these skills apply both online and offline, and how they can be transferred between different contexts. In a time when technology and AI are rapidly changing the way we work and learn, the ability to adapt and reskill has never been more valuable (Harvard Business Review, 2023).

The list below outlines key skills that are valuable in both digital and real-world contexts (Multiverse, 2025) and are highly valued by employers and universities alike. Each skill includes examples of how it can be demonstrated in practice, along with space for you to reflect on and record how you can evidence your own strengths.

Skill	Digital Development Examples	Your Examples
Communication	• Contributing thoughtfully to online discussions or forums • Creating and presenting digital content such as blogs, podcasts, or videos	
Active Listening	• Paying attention during video calls, taking notes, and summarising discussions • Asking clarifying questions to confirm understanding	
Teamwork & Collaboration	• Using shared platforms (Google Docs, Trello, Teams) to co-create and manage projects • Providing and responding to constructive feedback online	
Empathy	• Being supportive in online communication, showing understanding in group chats or feedback • Recognising tone and responding sensitively in digital interactions	
Conflict Resolution	• Addressing misunderstandings respectfully in online settings • Mediating digital group disagreements using calm and solution-focused communication	

Cultural Competance	• Engaging with international digital communities • Seeking out news and information relating to different countries	
Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	• Using AI and digital sources to analyse, compare, and evaluate information • Analysing data or sources to decide what's accurate or useful for a school project	
Organisation & Time Management	• Using task management apps like Notion, Google Calendar, or Todoist • Setting priorities and tracking deadlines digitally	
Adaptability & Learning Agility	• Learning new software or online tools independently • Taking part in MOOCs or LinkedIn courses to expand your digital skills	
Digital Creativity	• Designing infographics, videos, or interactive presentations using Canva, Figma • Using AI tools for brainstorming and prototyping ideas	
Research Skills	• Conducting online literature searches and evaluating source credibility • Using citation and research management tools like Zotero or Mendeley	
Data Analysis	• Working with spreadsheets or data tools (Excel, Google Sheets, PowerBI) • Visualising and interpreting data trends using digital dashboards	
Multitasking & Project Management	• Managing multiple tasks using digital workflows (Asana, ClickUp, Trello) • Coordinating timelines, outputs, and progress tracking for online projects	

“My Transferable Digital Skills Wheel”



Skills Wheel

Based on the examples you gave above, rate yourself on each skill from 1 to 5:

1 = I need to develop this skill

3 = I'm fairly confident but could improve

5 = I'm very confident and use this skill often

Reflect on your results:

- Which skills are your strongest?
- Which areas would you like to improve?
- What actions or tools could help you build those skills (online or offline)?

Set a goal:

Choose one or two skills you'd like to strengthen this term. Write down what steps you'll take; for example, "Join an online study group to practise teamwork," or "Use Notion to improve organisation."

Digital safety

2a: Online content

Online content

Online safety depends on two things: what you share with others and what you choose to engage with.

Content created by others

Ask yourself these questions before using resources from the Internet:

- 1 Author**
 - Is the name of the author/creator on the page?
 - Are his/her credentials listed (occupation, years of experience, position or education)?
 - Is the author qualified to write on the given topic? Why?
- 2 Purpose**
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - If not stated, what do you think is the purpose of the site? Is the purpose to:
 - Inform or teach?
 - Explain or enlighten?
 - Persuade?
 - Sell a product?
- 3 Objectivity**
 - Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda?
 - Is the author's point-of-view objective and impartial?
 - Is the language free of emotion-rousing words and bias?
- 4 Accuracy**
 - Are the sources for factual information clearly listed so that the information can be verified?
 - Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
- 5 Reliability and Credibility**
 - Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it unsupported by evidence?
 - Are quotes and other strong assertions backed by sources that you could check through other means?
- 6 Currency**
 - If timeliness of the information is important, is it kept up-to-date?
 - Is there an indication of when the site was last updated?

Georgetown University, 2025

DeepFakes

The term ‘DeepFake’ usually refers to an AI-generated video, image or piece of audio content that is designed to mimic a real-life person or scene. The content might be created from scratch, or pre-existing content may have been manipulated. DeepFakes are often created with the intention to deceive or entertain viewers. As the technology improves, DeepFakes are becoming more realistic and harder to detect. The Alan Turing Institute and MIT recommend:

1

1. Check facial details: Look closely at the face, as most DeepFakes involve facial transformations. Subtle distortions often appear around the cheeks, forehead, or eyes.

2

2. Examine skin texture: Does the skin look too smooth, too wrinkly, or inconsistent with the person's age, hair, or eyes? Mismatched skin tones or unrealistic textures are red flags.

3

3. Observe eyes and eyebrows: Pay attention to lighting and shadows. Are there shadows where you'd expect them? Do the eyes reflect light naturally? DeepFakes often struggle with realistic shadowing.

4

4. Look at glasses and reflections: Check for unnatural glare or reflections. If the glare doesn't move naturally as the person turns their head, the video might be fake.

5

5. Inspect facial hair and moles: DeepFakes can add or remove beards, sideburns, or moles, but they often look blurry, inconsistent, or oddly static.

6

6. Watch for blinking patterns: Does the person blink too much or too little? Some DeepFakes show unnatural blinking or have long periods without blinking.

7

7. Analyse lip movements: Make sure speech matches lip movement and expressions. Mismatched timing or stiff lips can signal a manipulated video.

8

8. Notice visual or timing inconsistencies: Look for odd transitions, jerky motion, or slight delays between speech and movement.

9

9. Check digital clues: AI tools like GANs or diffusion models often leave tiny pixel-level “fingerprints” that make fake media detectable with specialised software.

10

10. Verify the source: If a suspicious video or image comes from an unverified account, bot, or troll, treat it cautiously. Analyse the metadata (posting patterns, account age) and confirm with trusted sources before sharing.

Algorithms

As artificial intelligence becomes more embedded in our daily lives, algorithms, the systems that guide what we see and do online, play a major role in shaping our digital experiences. They determine which products appear when we shop, what news stories fill our feeds, and which videos or posts are recommended to us. With so many people now relying on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and news apps instead of traditional media, these algorithms have enormous influence over how we access information. Over time, the way they rank and personalise content can shape our thoughts, beliefs, and emotions, reinforcing certain opinions, promoting stereotypes, and narrowing our view of the world (Hu, 2025).

Case Study

How social media algorithms decide who you are
Journalist Prianka Srinivasan (ABC News) created a fake Instagram account on a factory-reset phone with no prior history. She wanted to explore how the algorithm would shape her feed based solely on her behaviours and device signals.

1

A blank slate & random feed

2

Steering the feed

3

Small steps lead to extreme content

4

Reflection & takeaways

Initially, her feed was full of random content: food videos, kittens, landscapes, and men holding fish. Even though she tried not to interact much, Instagram began learning from small behaviours, such as how long she paused on a video. The app also used location data, showing local Melbourne news and AFL clips despite the account being new and anonymous.

Prianka tried to shift her feed intentionally. She first engaged with motherhood content, searching for “new mother” videos, playing with baby-tracking apps, and watching related content near her phone. Within a few days, Instagram recommended more videos about infants, parenting tips, and baby gear.

To experiment further, Prianka adjusted the feed towards teenage boys’ interests, liking gaming and “masculine” lifestyle videos. Surprisingly, a few small interactions caused the algorithm to escalate content quickly. Her feed soon included extreme, sensational, and polarising videos: semi-pornographic content, influencer clips promoting extreme masculinity, and ideological messages like Andrew Tate or Sean Strickland videos. This highlighted how algorithms can rapidly intensify content based on minimal input, creating an attention-driven spiral.

Prianka observed that even minor engagement signals can dramatically shape a feed. She highlighted the risk of filter bubbles, where content becomes extreme or narrow without the user actively seeking it.

Key takeaway: reclaiming control over your feed requires intentional choices about what to engage with, diversify, or avoid.

Discussion Questions

- How does this relate to your own social media habits? What small interactions might be influencing your feed?
- What strategies could a user employ to prevent being pushed into a filter bubble or extreme content?

2b: Cyberbullying

“

The Office for National Statistics (2024) found that an estimated 1,544,000 children aged 10 to 15 years (34.9%) experienced an in-person bullying behaviour and 847,000 children (19.1%) experienced an on-line bullying behaviour.

In England, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey suggests the proportion of adolescents who reported being cyberbullied has increased since 2018, from 12% to 15% for boys and 13% to 16% for girls. Nearly one in five (19%) reported being cyberbullied at least once or twice in the past couple of months, and 11% reported cyberbullying others.

(BBC, 2024)

”

Cyberbullying

Some examples of cyberbullying include:

- Spreading malicious and abusive rumours and gossiping
- Emailing or texting you with threatening or intimidating remarks
- Mobbing (a group or gang that target you)
- Harassing you repeatedly
- Intimidation and blackmail
- Stalking you on-line and continually harassing you
- Posting embarrassing or humiliating images or videos without your consent
- Posting your private details on-line without consent
- General bullying or stalking
- Grooming (enticing or goading you on-line to self-harm or commit a crime)
- Setting up a false profile, identity fraud or identity theft
- Using gaming sites to attack or bully you
- Theft, fraud or deception over the internet

There are many reasons why people are mean online. For example,

- Sometimes they are involved in bullying offline.
- Sometimes they hit back at someone who was mean to them first.
- Sometimes they are angry or upset so they want to make others feel bad too.
- Some people try to be funny, but the joke goes too far and hurts another person’s feelings.
- Some people share things online, not thinking first about whether it could hurt or embarrass someone else, or sometimes they plan to hurt another person but later wish they hadn’t done it **(Australian Government, 2025)**.

Since a lot of cyberbullying happens on social media, here is what you can do to protect yourself, according to UNICEF:

- Learn about the privacy settings of your favourite social media apps.
- You can decide who can see your profile, send you direct messages or comment on your posts by adjusting your account privacy settings.
- You can report hurtful comments, messages, photos and videos and request they be removed.
- Besides ‘unfriending’, you can completely block people to stop them from seeing your profile or contacting you.
- You can also choose to have comments by certain people to appear only to them without completely blocking them.
- You can delete posts on your profile or hide them from specific people.

Good to know:
On most of your favourite social media, people aren’t notified when you block, restrict or report them.

Activity: “Kindness Ripple”

- 1

Think of one small act of kindness you could do online this week (e.g. leave a positive comment, message a friend, share something uplifting).
- 2

Write it down here:
My online kindness action: _____
- 3

After you do it, reflect:
a. How did it make you feel? _____
b. How do you think it made the other person feel? _____

2c: Social media safety

Social media safety

It's hard to believe that social media is less than 30 years old, given how deeply it's woven into our daily lives. With billions of users across countless platforms, it offers incredible opportunities to stay connected with friends and family, share stories, and access news and information from around the world. However, alongside these benefits come a number of important challenges and risks that users need to be aware of:

- Privacy risks
- Cyberbullying
- Scams and phishing
- Inappropriate content
- Misinformation and fake news
- Online grooming and exploitation
- Addiction and overuse
- Body image and comparison
- Data collection and tracking
- Reputation and digital footprint
- Echo chambers and polarisation
- Impersonation and fake profiles

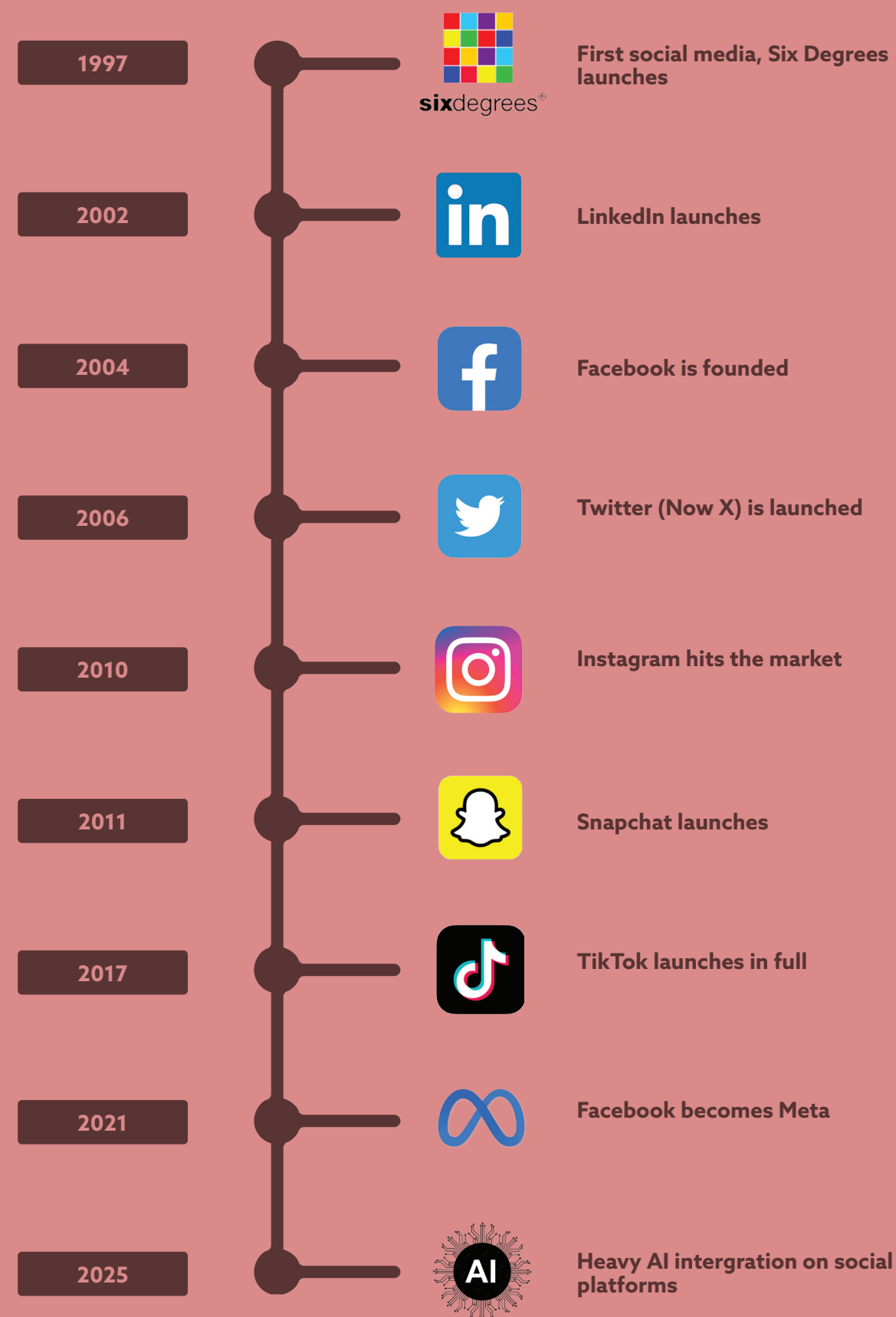
“

Just over a third (35.0%) of children accepted a friend request online from someone they did not know.

An estimated 19.2% of children spoke to or exchanged messages with someone online in the last year who they had never met in person before and 4.4% met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online, with boys more likely than girls (5.7% compared with 3.1%).

(Office for National Statistics, 2024)

”



Remember: most social media platforms provide information on how you can protect yourself while online.

For example:

- | | |
|---|--|
|  <p>TikTok's Safety Centre provides information on how to stay safe online by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Keeping your contact information updated 2 Turning-on 2-step verification 3 Creating a strong and unique password 4 Checking any security alerts you might receive about unauthorised activity 5 Not trusting third party websites which might approach you offering free things 6 Verifying any links which are sent to you via private message 7 Not trusting if someone contacts you pretending to be from TikTok |  <p>Instagram provides tools which allow you to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Make your account private so only you choose who can see your posts 2 Blocking people on Instagram 3 Filtering out and hiding comments 4 Restricting someone from being able to interact with you or post comments on your posts 5 Reporting posts, profiles, comments and messages for hateful conduct, bullying and harassment 6 Stopping someone from sending you messages 7 Being able to report message requests |
|---|--|

The National Cyber Security Centre offers guidance on the safe and responsible use of all social media platforms.

Reflect:

- 3 key online risks you might have: _____
- 3 platform tools or settings to stay safe: _____
- 3 personal habits to protect your wellbeing online: _____

Discuss

- How has social media changed the way you connect, learn, or express yourself?
- Do you think the benefits of social media outweigh the risks? Why or why not?
- How does social media make you feel after you've spent time on it, and what could you change to make that experience more positive?
- What's one thing you could do differently to use social media in a safer or more mindful way?

2d: Being a consumer online

Being a consumer online

For many people, online shopping is simply “shopping.” Who can resist one-click ordering and next-day delivery? However, bad actors and cybercriminals may try to trick consumers into paying for goods that don’t exist or seek to capture personal information for financial gain. You don’t need to abandon your cart, though. With some simple preventative measures, you can enjoy your online shopping habits with peace of mind. Here is what the National Cybersecurity Alliance recommends:

1

Think before you click

Beware of emails, texts or other promotions that seem suspicious or encourage you to urgently click on links. If you receive an enticing offer, check to see it is coming from an actual retailer and uses a web address that matches the company’s online store. Remember: if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

2

Do your homework

Scammers are fond of setting up fake e-commerce sites. Prior to making a purchase, read customer reviews of the merchant. In addition, see if the store has a physical location and any customer service information.

3

Share with care

Pay attention to the types of information a website collects to complete your transaction. If a merchant requests more data than you feel comfortable sharing, cancel the transaction. If the account autosaves it, delete the stored payment details after making the purchase.

4

Use secure Wi-Fi

Shopping online using public Wi-Fi while at a coffee shop or airport is convenient, but it is not very secure. Avoid making online purchases via public Wi-Fi. Instead, use your phone data whenever possible. You can also save items in your cart for later and make the purchases at home on your own secure network.

5

Enable multi-factor authentication

Create long and unique passphrases for all accounts and use multi-factor authentication (MFA) wherever possible. MFA will fortify your online accounts by enabling the strongest authentication tools available.

Shopping through social media

These days, a lot of buying and selling happens directly through social media. Apps like TikTok let creators promote products in videos, and features like in-app shopping make it easy to buy instantly. Even AI tools like ChatGPT can be used to explore products, compare prices, or generate ideas for selling online. With so many options, it’s important to stay alert and think carefully before buying.

Spotting ads and Influencer Marketing

Many influencers are paid to promote products. Sometimes it's clear, sometimes it's not. Look for clues like **#ad**, **#sponsored**, or **paid partnership**.

Look for a post online and consider:

- Does the post show a brand or logo several times?
- Does it sound more like an advert than a review?

The Money Saving Expert website has a few recommendations:

- 1** Always make sure you complete your purchases through the app. For example, the TikTok Shop does not provide protection outside the app, so if you fall victim to a fraudulent ad, you will have no way to get compensation.
- 2** Check seller reviews before buying something as you need to ensure that the products are not fake and that you will receive a good service.
- 3** Online platforms like TikTok and other marketplaces sometimes feature **fake or counterfeit items**, especially expensive branded products that are advertised as genuine. To protect yourself, look out for red flags that suggest a deal might not be real:
 - The **price seems too good to be true**: genuine designer items rarely have massive discounts so question why someone is selling something so expensive so cheaply.
 - The **seller has few or no reviews**, or their profile looks new or incomplete.
 - The **listing includes spelling mistakes** or poorly written descriptions.
 - The **product photos look suspicious**; for example, if they're copied from official brand websites, heavily filtered, or look computer-generated.

One of the safest and most reliable ways to shop online is by using well-known, trusted websites or apps. Another great option is to buy from places recommended by friends or family, what marketers call Word of Mouth (WOM.)

Digital Citizenship

3a: Responsible online behaviour

Responsible online behaviour

The **Online Safety Act 2023** was created to help protect both young people and adults on the internet. It makes social media platforms and search engines more accountable for keeping users safe by reducing illegal and harmful content, and by removing it quickly when it appears. The law also includes stronger protections for children, making sure they are not exposed to content that isn't appropriate for their age.

Illegal activity based on the Act includes

- Encouraging or assisting serious self-harm
- Cyberflashing
- Sending false information intended to cause non-trivial harm
- Threatening communications
- Intimate image abuse
- Epilepsy trolling

But while these new laws aim to make the internet safer by stopping serious harmful behaviour, staying safe online is also about how we behave in our day-to-day interactions. Each of us has a role to play by thinking carefully about what we post, how we interact with others, and how we use digital tools responsibly.

Key rules:

- 1 Practise digital respect:**
Treat others online the way you would in person. Tone can be misunderstood in text, so take a moment to re-read before posting or commenting. Avoid sarcasm or jokes that might sound hurtful out of context.
- 2 Think before you share:**
Once something is online, it's almost impossible to fully delete it. Before sharing content, ask: Is it accurate? Is it kind? Is it necessary?
- 3 Protect others' privacy:**
Don't share other people's photos, videos, or personal information without permission, even if it seems harmless. Everyone has the right to control their own digital presence.
- 4 Respect intellectual property:**
Give credit when you use someone's ideas, images, or work. Use Creative Commons or royalty-free materials and cite your sources, just like you would in schoolwork.
- 5 Avoid spreading misinformation:**
Always double-check where content comes from before reposting. Look for original sources, and be wary of sensational headlines or edited videos designed to provoke strong reactions.
- 6 Be transparent and authentic:**
Whether you're posting, commenting, or collaborating, be honest about who you are. Don't create fake profiles or exaggerate your achievements.

7

Engage positively in communities:

Join discussions to contribute meaningfully, not just to argue or criticise. Supportive, constructive engagement helps online spaces stay healthy and welcoming.

8

Be aware of your digital footprint:

Every post, like and comment builds your online identity. Ask yourself how your actions today might look to future employers, friends, or people you will come across in your professional career.

Think of these scenarios

1

Scenario 1:

Amira finds a funny meme about one of her classmates and shares it in a group chat, thinking it's just a harmless joke. Within hours, it's been screenshotted and shared widely across social media. The classmate finds out and feels embarrassed and hurt. Amira didn't mean any harm, but her one click turned private humour into public humiliation.

Discussion:

- Was Amira responsible for how the meme spread, even though she didn't post it publicly?
- What could she have done differently?
- How might this incident affect trust and relationships in her friendship group?

2

Scenario 2:

Josh discovers a website offering "free" access to paid study resources and shares the link with his classmates. A teacher later explains that the site is actually distributing pirated materials, which violates copyright law. Some students who used the site also received phishing emails afterwards.

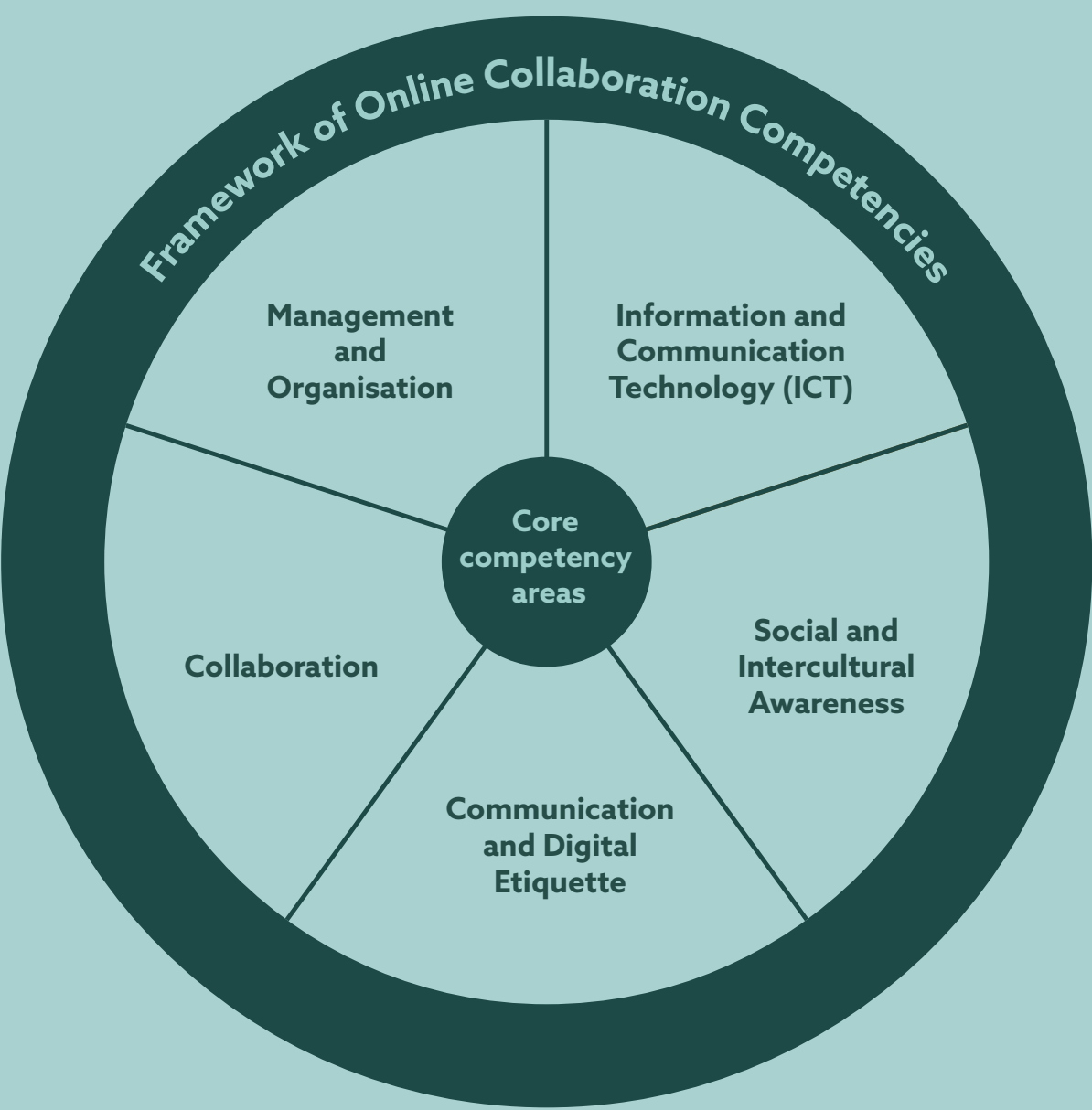
Discussion:

- Why might Josh have thought he was doing something positive?
- How could he check whether a site or resource is legitimate before sharing it?
- What can this teach about respecting creators' work and protecting your own online safety?

3b: Online collaborations

Online collaborations

Online collaboration is an essential skill in today’s digital world, as so much of our communication and teamwork now happens virtually. While most group work in school still takes place face-to-face, developing strong online collaboration skills is vital for success in higher education and the workplace. It’s not just about knowing which digital tools to use, it’s also about understanding online etiquette, building trust, and demonstrating character and empathy through screens, which can be more challenging than in-person interactions. We have adapted the Framework of International Online Collaboration Competencies (Kolm et al., 2023) to make it relevant for young people preparing for their futures beyond school.



Here are some elements for each core skill you might want to think about (adapted from Kolm, 2023):

Information & Communication Technology (ICT)

- 1. Protect personal data, privacy, and digital content responsibly.
- 2. Use a variety of digital tools creatively and confidently as technology evolves.
- 3. Communicate effectively using both asynchronous (e.g. email, forums) and synchronous (e.g. video calls, chats) tools.
- 4. Troubleshoot common tech issues and support others in using digital tools.
- 5. Choose the right platform or app for different types of collaboration.

Social & Intercultural Awareness

- 1. Be aware of your own cultural perspectives and how they shape your thinking.
- 2. Adapt your behaviour and communication style to suit different social and cultural situations.
- 3. Show curiosity and respect for the beliefs, ideas, and traditions of others.
- 4. Recognise and value the customs of different cultures in online communication.
- 5. Use cultural diversity as a strength in group work to generate new ideas.

Communication & Digital Etiquette

- 1. Be mindful of tone, body language, and online etiquette (e.g. emojis, punctuation, timing).
- 2. Communicate clearly and confidently with different stakeholders.
- 3. Express your ideas and feelings constructively and respectfully.
- 4. Listen actively and respond thoughtfully in online discussions.
- 5. Give and receive feedback in a way that is helpful, kind, and professional.

Collaboration

- 1. Offer constructive feedback and encourage others’ contributions.
- 2. Manage disagreements calmly and seek solutions that benefit the group.
- 3. Reflect on your own teamwork style and communication habits.
- 4. Actively listen to team members and show empathy for their perspectives.
- 5. Stay open-minded and willing to adjust your approach for the sake of group success.

Management and Organisation

- 1. Recognise your own strengths and weaknesses when working in a team.
- 2. Take responsibility for your role and complete tasks on time.
- 3. Work systematically towards shared goals and deadlines.
- 4. Be dependable and consistent in your communication and actions.
- 5. Acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of others.

3c: Your digital footprint

Your digital footprint

A digital footprint is the trail of data we leave behind whenever we use technology. Sandra Matz, a behavioural scientist from Columbia University, clarifies there are two types of traces we leave behind. Some of it is intentional, like posting on social media, following accounts, or sharing playlists. Such interactions announce who we are, and social scientists call these “identity claims”. Other parts are unintentional; they’re the traces we leave without really thinking about it. These are called “behavioural residue”. They’re created as we interact with technology: when we swipe our credit cards, search on Google, shop online, or accept cookies. Together, these traces create a detailed picture of who we are, shaping how others see us and sometimes even how opportunities are offered to us. Managing your digital footprint carefully is important because it can have long-lasting effects on your personal, academic, and professional life.

How to clean up your digital footprint

According to Goldman Sachs

1

Search for Yourself

Look up your name online to see what information is connected to you. Try variations or misspellings too. If you find anything harmful, contact the website admin to remove it.



Google your full name and variations



Check images and news sections



Remove or request removal of harmful content

2

Clean Up Your Social Media

Review all your profiles and make sure they show you in a positive light. Untag yourself from questionable posts and consider creating content that reflects your interests or achievements.



Review photos, posts and comments



Untag or delete anything inappropriate



Unfollow people you don't know or trust



Add positive/professional content

3

Follow the Rule of Thumb

Ask yourself: Would I hire me if I saw this profile? If not, it's time for an update.



Review you profiles through an employer's eyes



Remove or hide anything unprofessional



Highlight your strength and skills

4 Delete Unused or Old Accounts
Old accounts can be a security risk. Delete or deactivate anything you don't use any more, from apps to social media to email addresses.

- ✓ List old accounts you don't use
- ✓ Delete or deactivate them
- ✓ Remove unused apps from your devices
- ✓ Contact sites for help if you can't delete directly

5 Check and Adjust Privacy Settings
Protect your information by reviewing your privacy settings regularly, especially after updates.

- ✓ Review app, browser and device settings
- ✓ Limit posts/photos to friends only
- ✓ Re-check settings after updates

6 Think Before You Click
Websites and ads often track your activity or try to trick you into unsafe clicks. Stay alert.

- ✓ Don't click suspicious popups or links
- ✓ Be cautious with cookies and data collection
- ✓ Use incognito/private browsing when needed
- ✓ Only visit trusted websites

80%

of employers and recruitment agencies use social media content as part of their assessment of candidate suitability (Moncur, 2022)



3d: Build your personal brand online

Build your personal brand online

Personal branding is the deliberate and strategic process of defining and communicating what makes you valuable and unique. As Avery and Rachel Greenwald explain in Harvard Business School Online (2024), your personal brand reflects the collection of beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and expectations that others associate with you. The goal of personal branding is to shape that perception so that the story people tell about you is:

- **Accurate:** It truly reflects who you are.
- **Coherent:** It's consistent and makes sense.
- **Compelling:** It captures interest and draws people in.
- **Distinctive:** It highlights what sets you apart from others.

If you don't take control of your personal brand, others may form assumptions that don't represent you accurately. In the age of social media, where your online presence often shapes first impressions, it's especially important to define your brand intentionally as you prepare to enter the world of university applications and the job market. What can do you?

Make sure your LinkedIn profile is professional and accurate

LinkedIn suggests the below for a great profile:

- **Add a professional photo** – makes your profile more credible and easier to recognise. Those with a profile photo receive twice as many visitors.
- **Create a standout headline** – highlight your expertise or personality.
- **Write a short summary** – share your mission, motivation, and key skills in 1–2 paragraphs.
- **Include work and education** – keep experiences up to date and add examples of your work. Even things you don't think about can be relevant, such as a Saturday job.
- **List relevant skills** – showcase your abilities and ask connections to endorse them.
- **Request recommendations** – positive feedback from teachers or peers boosts your credibility.
- **Check profile strength** – use built-in tools (like LinkedIn's strength meter) to see what's missing.

The University of Pennsylvania recommends:

Define who you are

- ☐ **Clarify your purpose:** What motivates you? What kind of impact do you want to make?
- ☐ **Identify your strengths:** List the skills, values, and qualities that make you stand out.
- ☐ **Find your unique value proposition:** What can you do better or differently from others?

Know your audience

- ☐ **Define your target audience:** Who do you want to reach: universities, employers, or specific industries?
- ☐ **Understand where they are:** Which platforms (LinkedIn, TikTok, Instagram) are most relevant to your goals?
- ☐ **Tailor your message:** Create content that speaks to your audience's interests and needs.

Craft your story

- ☐ **Create your brand story:** Share your journey, goals, and experiences.
- ☐ **Stay consistent:** Use a similar tone, bio, and image style across all platforms.
- ☐ **Show your personality:** Be genuine — your individuality makes your brand memorable.

Build an online presence

- ☐ **Update your profiles:** Use a clear photo, professional bio, and links to your work or achievements.
- ☐ **Create a simple portfolio or website:** Showcase school projects, volunteer work, or creative pieces.
- ☐ **Post purposefully:** Share content that reflects your goals and values, not just trends.

Grow your brand

- ☐ **Engage meaningfully:** Comment on posts, join relevant groups, and start conversations.
- ☐ **Ask for testimonials:** Teachers, mentors, or teammates can write short endorsements about your skills.
- ☐ **Monitor your impact:** Use built-in analytics (on LinkedIn or Instagram) to see what resonates and adjust your content.

Personal branding SWOT analysis

SWOT Element	Questions to ask yourself
Strengths	• What are my top 3 skills or qualities that others recognise in me? • What achievements or experiences make me credible or unique? • What do people associate with me when they think of my name?
Weaknesses	• Are there posts or images online that don't align with my goals? • Am I missing key digital skills (e.g., writing, design, networking)? • Do I struggle to communicate my strengths confidently?
Opportunities	• Are there mentors, teachers, or industry professionals I can connect with? • Could I publish articles, join student groups, or volunteer in relevant projects? • Are there scholarships, internships, or competitions that fit my personal brand? • How can AI or technology help me optimise my digital presence?
Threats	• Are there negative posts, comments, or tags associated with my name online? • Could overuse of filters, AI tools, or plagiarism harm my authenticity? • Do I rely too heavily on one platform that might change or disappear?



**Digital
Wellbeing**

**4a:
Predictors of digital
wellbeing**

Predictors of digital wellbeing

Much of the existing research and discussion on digital wellbeing tends to focus on technology overuse, often offering strategies and tools to help people manage or reduce addictive online habits. However, the concept of digital wellbeing extends far beyond this: it explores how digital technologies influence what it means to live a fulfilling and meaningful life in today's information-driven world.

Digital wellbeing has become deeply intertwined with overall human wellbeing, as the line between our online and offline lives continues to blur. For students in particular, factors such as identity, background, and personal circumstances - including age, gender, and culture - cannot easily be separated from their digital experiences (Prinsloo, 2024).

A recent study (Mayiwar, 2024) found that digital wellbeing is closely linked to digital self-control and digital literacy, and not to digital ignorance (what they call homo ignorance). Students who show strong digital self-control, for example being able to manage screen time, avoid distractions, or use devices intentionally, tend to have higher wellbeing. The study also found that feeling confident and capable online (subjective digital literacy) was linked to higher digital wellbeing. Interestingly, actual technical skill (objective literacy) didn't have the same effect, suggesting that how confident you *feel* using technology matters as much as what you can technically do.

Meanwhile, digital ignorance, intentionally avoiding online information, didn't improve digital wellbeing. While tuning out can make people feel more in control or less overwhelmed, it can also lead to missing out on social connection or important updates, which may increase anxiety in the long run.

In short: feeling in control, confident, and informed online supports better digital wellbeing, while avoidance or overuse can have the opposite effect.

You can check your digital wellbeing, digital self-control, homo ignorance, and digital literacy (scales adapted from Mayiwar, 2024).

The digital wellbeing scale

1	I feel secure in my online activities
2	I feel secure that my personal data is safe online
3	I feel in control of the digital footprint I leave during my online activities
4	I am confused by the lingo of IT experts (e.g., cyber security, DDoS attacks, artificial intelligence)
5	I feel worried that vicious people can use my personal digital data for bad purposes
6	I am worried about how digital technology will influence our lives in the future

The digital self-control scale

1	I have a hard time breaking bad online habits
2	I sometimes say/write inappropriate things online
3	I sometimes buy products online just to reach the spending limit for free shipping
4	I often buy products and/or services online even though I cannot afford them
5	I wish I had more self-discipline about my online activities
6	Scrolling on my phone or computer prevents me from doing my work
7	I have issues with being present in my daily activities when I have my phone with me

The digital homo ignorance scale

1	I avoid taking decisions about the integrity and security of my personal data online
2	When I am online, I often bookmark content (e.g., products I think of buying, content I would like to read) but never visit them later
3	When I am online, I avoid reading information that could cause unpleasantness
4	I avoid checking my e-mails
5	I just read news from online outlets that share my values
6	I unfollow and/or unfriend people on social media, with whom I disagree
7	I check my social media accounts as soon as I have a couple of minutes of free time
8	I often get surprised when I realise how much time I have spent online

To assess your **subjective digital literacy**, answer the question: How would you rate your knowledge about online and digital tools?

Objective digital literacy

- 1. Cookies:** How well do you understand what cookies are and how they track your online activity?
- 2. Phishing emails:** How confident are you in spotting and avoiding phishing or scam emails?
- 3. Online product recommendations:** How well do you understand how algorithms recommend products or content to you?
- 4. Free online services:** How well do you understand how “free” platforms (like search engines or social media) are funded and use your data?
- 5. Search results:** How well do you understand why search engines show certain results first?
- 6. Integrity policies:** How familiar are you with a website or app’s privacy and integrity policies and what they mean for your data?

4b: Doomscrolling and digital detox

Doomscrolling and digital detox

What's the first thing you do when you wake up? If you grab your phone and start scrolling through endless bad news, you're "doomscrolling." And you're definitely not the only one.

It's easy to see why. With constant reports of conflict, climate disasters, and social or political tension, our feeds are filled with worrying stories. Many of us feel the need to keep checking for updates, hitting refresh over and over.

The term doomscrolling became widely known during the pandemic, when people followed daily COVID updates. But even years later, this habit hasn't gone away. Experts from Harvard warn that constantly consuming negative news online can quietly harm our mental and physical wellbeing: increasing anxiety, stress, and even disrupting sleep (Harvard Health Publishing, 2024).

Dr. Nerurkar explains that doomscrolling can lead to something called "popcorn brain." This happens when we spend so much time online that our brains get used to constant stimulation, like information popping nonstop. Over time, this makes it harder to focus on real-life activities, which naturally move at a slower pace than the fast, endless stream of digital content (Harvard Health Publishing, 2024).

When was the last time you found it hard to focus after being online for a while?

If this sounds like you, you might want to consider the following (Brown University Health, 2023):

You feel the need to check your phone constantly; you can't concentrate unless you check your device often.

You feel that you are missing out on something if you are not checking your phone for notifications and social posts regularly.

After spending time on social media, you feel sad, angry, or anxious.

If you can't find your phone, it triggers stress and anxiety.

Your devices disrupt your sleep.

You begin comparing yourself to others on social media.

You'd rather interact with individuals virtually than in person.

Your device is causing work-life balance issues, with work creeping into your personal time because your device is always on.

If many of these apply to you, you might want to think about Digital Detox. The term “detoxification” is defined as the process of removing toxic substances or qualities.

In the case of a digital detox, it refers to a set period of time for an individual to stay away from the devices and social media sites that have become such an integral part of life, such smartphones, computers, tablets, televisions (Brown University Health, 2023).

Try a digital detox



Avoid phubbing
Prioritise in-person interactions by placing your phone out of sight, especially during conversations or family time



Disable notifications
Where possible, turn off push alerts for emails, social media and messaging apps to reduce constant digital interruptions



Limit evening usage
Set specific cut-off times in the evening to reduce screen time before sleep



Take voluntary breaks and set goals
Schedule regular breaks from technology by spending that time in nature, practising mindfulness or meditation or engaging in a physical hobby



Use monitoring apps and tools
Utilise digital wellbeing or screen-time apps to track usage and set daily limits on social media or gaming



Bedroom boundaries
Keep phones (and other devices) out of bedrooms to improve sleep quality and establish a calm environment

Setia et al., 2025

4c: The illusion of perfection

The illusion of perfection

Social comparison theory (developed by Leon Festinger in 1954) suggests that people naturally compare themselves to others as a way to understand and evaluate themselves. These comparisons can go in different directions: we might look at someone we think is doing better than us (upward comparison), someone doing worse (downward comparison), or someone we see as similar (lateral comparison).

Most of the time, people tend to compare themselves to those they believe are more successful or better off, which can lead to feelings of envy, lower self-esteem, or a drop in mood. With the rise of social media, these comparisons have become even more common and intense, since we’re constantly exposed to idealised images and achievements, especially around appearance and lifestyle, that can distort how we see ourselves (Bonfanti et al. 2025).

The Children’s Society points to three areas you need to be mindful of:

1

AI-powered image editing:

More and more social media platforms now include AI-powered filters and image editing tools that let users instantly change how a photo looks. With just one click, you can smooth your skin, reshape your face, or even alter your body. The technology has become so advanced that it can now create completely fake but realistic images that look like real people, even though they’re entirely generated by AI. While this might seem like harmless fun, it can have negative effects. Young people already face huge pressure from social media and advertising about how they should look. When AI tools make it easy to create and share “perfect” but unrealistic images, it can increase body image issues, lower self-esteem, and make it harder to know what’s real and what’s not online.

- Discussion:
- a.

How can AI image-editing tools change the way people see themselves and others online?
- b.

Do you think using filters or AI edits is harmless fun, or can it become misleading? Why?
- c.

What responsibility do influencers or content creators have when they use AI-edited photos?

2

Algorithmic bias and discrimination:

An eating disorder awareness group recently asked an AI tool to create images of the “most desirable” man and woman. The AI’s version of the “perfect” woman had blonde hair, tanned skin, brown eyes, and a slim figure. The “perfect” man had sharp cheekbones, brown eyes, and well-defined muscles.

The results reflected narrow and outdated beauty ideals, revealing the biases built into the technology itself. Many algorithms used on social media tend to promote content that fits beauty standards which highlight body types, skin tones, and facial features which can be unrealistic. This can make online spaces feel less inclusive and can lead people who don’t fit those standards to feel left

out or less confident about their appearance. Ultimately, AI-generated beauty ideals reinforce the illusion of perfection, a false sense that there’s only one way to look beautiful when, in reality, beauty is diverse, imperfect, and unique to each person.

- Discussion:
- a.

Have you ever compared yourself to someone online and later realised their image was filtered or edited? How did that make you feel?
- b.

Why do you think algorithms tend to promote certain types of looks or lifestyles more than others?
- c.

What might be the long-term effects of constantly seeing “perfect” people online?
- d.

Do you think AI should have rules or limits when it comes to generating images of people? Why or why not?

3

Targeted ads:

Young people are especially influenced by the messages and images they see online, which makes them more likely to chase the ideals constantly promoted to them. Comparing themselves to heavily edited or filtered images can create stress, anxiety, and even depression.

On top of this, AI-driven advertising and personalised content often target young audiences with messages that reinforce unrealistic beauty standards. This means that every time they scroll, watch videos, or use apps, they are constantly bombarded with ads, suggested posts, and influencer content that imply they need to look or act a certain way to fit in or be successful. Over time, this nonstop exposure can make it hard for young people to feel confident in their own appearance or choices, and can intensify feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy.

- Discussion:
- a.

How often do you notice ads or suggested posts on social media that focus on appearance or lifestyle?
- b.

How could you take steps to reduce the impact of unrealistic beauty standards on your own self-image?
- c.

Do you think social media platforms should do more to prevent harmful or misleading content from targeting young people? Why or why not?
- d.

What strategies could help you engage with social media in a healthier way (e.g., following diverse creators, limiting certain content, taking breaks)?

4d: The Digital Wellbeing Pledge

The Digital Wellbeing Pledge

Trying to look after our mental and physical wellbeing is something most of us strive for every day. But maintaining that same balance online should be just as important; it's part of what it means to live well in a connected world.

The challenge is that, while it can be easier to resist certain pressures in our everyday lives, it's much harder to resist the pull of algorithms, targeted ads, and digital platforms carefully designed to keep us hooked. These systems are created by people who understand human behaviour deeply, which means we need to be equally aware and intentional about how we use them.

This pledge takes inspiration from the Inspired Internet Pledge, signed by companies such as TikTok and Snapchat, an initiative that connects technology with mental health and emotional wellbeing in real, practical ways. Each company involved chooses how to act on their commitment, supported by advisors who ensure that progress is meaningful and ongoing. The ultimate goal is simple: to build a healthier internet for everyone, especially for young people.

This version of the pledge focuses on individual awareness and responsibility. It highlights five key areas that contribute to digital wellbeing, but you're encouraged to make it your own. Add principles, reflections, or goals that fit your personal digital life.



I pledge to balance my time

- i. I will use technology with purpose, not just out of habit.
- ii. I'll take breaks from screens, especially before bed.
- iii. I'll make time for offline activities that recharge me.
- iiii. I'll aim for mindful use, not mindless scrolling.



I pledge to protect my mind

- i. I will look after my emotional and mental health online.
- ii. I'll notice when digital spaces make me feel stressed or anxious.
- iii. I'll unfollow or mute accounts that harm my self-esteem.
- iiii. I'll seek positivity, connection, and balance online.

3

I pledge to be AI aware

- i. I will question what I see and understand how algorithms shape my feed.
- ii. I'll remember that AI can be biased or wrong.
- iii. I'll check sources before believing or sharing information.
- iiii. I'll look for diverse voices and perspectives, not just what the algorithm serves me.

4

I pledge to respect others online

- i. I will contribute to digital spaces with kindness and honesty.
- ii. I'll think before I post, comment, or share.
- iii. I'll be supportive, inclusive, and fair in my interactions.
- iiii. I'll report harmful content and stand up for respectful communication.

5

I pledge to build my digital future

- i. I will use technology to grow, learn, and create opportunities for myself and others.
- ii. I'll build a positive digital footprint and professional online brand.
- iii. I'll explore new tools, skills, and ideas that inspire me.
- iiii. I'll use the digital world to connect meaningfully, not compare endlessly.

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