

The documents below consider the issue of access to the internet. Read them **both** in order to answer all the questions on the question paper.

Document 1: adapted from 'Should internet access be a basic human right?', an article by Ryan Moore published on the news website Examiner.com, in February 2011.

Since the beginning of world history, it has been a practice of corrupt leaders, governments, and powerful men of all types to keep control of the people by controlling the information they had. An educated and informed people can learn to work together to rid themselves of tyranny and oppression, as history has often shown.

Today, there is a new weapon available to the common people, a tool that can be used to access unimaginable amounts of information and spread it quickly amongst a population. This incredible piece of technology is commonly referred to as the internet. Now here is a question for you. Should access to the resources and information provided by the internet be a basic human right?

The internet not only helped the people of Egypt in 2011 to organize protests through social media networks such as Facebook, it also brought support from around the world. Before the internet, the story may have made the nightly news, viewed by a few million people. With the internet billions of people across the globe are watching.

The UN's Declaration of Human Rights has laid down what every human naturally has rights to. According to Article 1, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Article 26 states, "Everyone has a right to education. Education shall be free ..." Then Article 19 is "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression ..." and finally Article 27 adds "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."

The internet is a global network of shared cultural life stored in bits of information on computers not owned by any one person or organization. It is a free resource with access to a multitude of educational materials. It is a forum for expression, ideas and opinions to share with the rest of the world. So, if we are all born equal, and are given the rights from this declaration of human rights, then the internet and access to it uncensored should be a basic human right.

There are many governments that keep their people in the dark, limiting and censoring what information they can access over the internet. Cuba and North Korea are examples of where these practices take place. Since the people don't have access to the same knowledge and information most of the rest of the world has, they are being denied some basic human rights.

The world is changing; technology is speeding up that change. The internet helps put power into the hands of every single person that has access to it, for once finally giving people the power over their own lives in a very raw democratic way. It has helped bring the world closer together, from Cincinnati to Cairo; it is the start of a true global society. To limit any one person or group from being able to participate in this new community is taking away one of their basic human rights.

Document 2: adapted from 'We owe the internet for changing the world. Now let's learn how to turn off', an article by Jonathan Freedland in *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, published in February 2011.

How is the internet changing the way you think?

Given the subject I thought it wise to engage in a little light crowd-sourcing, floating that question on Twitter. There are the idealists, grateful for a tool that has enabled them to think globally. They are now plugged into a range of sources, access to which would once have required effort, expense and long delays. It's not just faraway information that is within reach, but faraway people – activists are able to connect with like-minded allies on the other side of the world.

But there were laments as one respondent to my Twitter appeal put it: "Sadly I think less and Google more".

The biggest complaint was about the quality of thinking in the online era. What the internet has done, say the dissenters, is damage our ability to concentrate for sustained periods. Being connected meant being constantly tempted to look away, to hop from the text in front of you to another, newer one. One tweeter replied that he now thought "about more things for shorter amounts of time".

This, the worriers fear, is not just irritating; it might even damage our civilisation. How capable will people be of creating great works if they are constantly interrupted, even when alone? "What the net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation," angsts Nicholas Carr, who believes the internet is steering us toward "the shallows".

Now there are even devices available that limit internet access to prevent you getting too distracted. The writer Jay Rayner responded to my poll by confessing he'd recently rented a house with no internet connection to get some work done, adding that the internet "actively stops me thinking".

The impact of all this is not confined to the quality of intellectual inquiry. It's affecting family life, too. I recall the friend who saw a counsellor for advice about his disruptive children. Diagnosis: they were playing up to get attention from parents who had one eye forever on the BlackBerry. Some couples report tension, with one constantly tweeting while watching television or even during dinner. That's not so much a third person in the marriage as an entire crowd.

It's not the internet itself that's doing this. It's the advent particularly of mobile technology, of the smartphone, turning the internet from an occasional, "opt-in" activity to what Rushkoff, an American theorist, calls an "always on' condition of my life". The internet is no longer just on your desk, but in your pocket, nagging you to stop what you're doing and pay attention.

We cannot turn back time. Nor, given the internet's power for good currently on display around the Middle East, should we want to. But we need to reassert control. We need, in short, to rediscover the off switch.