

FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS FOR DIGITAL LITERACY

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In this module students should learn:

1. The basic technological terms used for computing and the internet
2. A basic understanding of the internet and what it can be used for
3. The differences in storage types within computing
4. How the internet works and how to use the internet (using web browsers and the basics of web searching)
5. The difference between broadband and the internet
6. How websites collect information and data about users
7. The basics of Bluetooth

Definitions of Computer and Internet Terms

In order to develop the skills necessary to effectively use new forms of technology, it is important to have a basic understanding of the vocabulary and terms that are used within these technologies. Oftentimes, users may know how to complete a task with their computer, but they may not know why or how to explain what they are doing or simply know the terms needed to describe their devices. It is important to develop an understanding of this vocabulary as it can prove incredibly useful to the user when they need to learn a new skill or troubleshoot their devices.

A basic understanding of the terminology used in computing and mobile devices can give the user a toolset with which they can seek out and understand further information about their devices. The information in Module 1 provides clear definitions and information about these key concepts and terms that will aid users with the knowledge to use their devices and the internet.

Internet Uses

The internet, while ubiquitous in much of modern life, is often a nebulous and mysterious concept for many. The internet can loosely be understood as a complex network of interconnected computers and computer systems which allows people from across the world to communicate, share ideas, and access a wide array of resources and information. In this module, we will provide information and definitions to help address some of the foundational skills needed to use and understand the internet and how it can be used to benefit you. The complexity of the internet and new technologies can often be a source of anxiety for beginner users. Therefore, it is important to provide users with a very basic understanding of the internet, its uses, and how to benefit from using the internet. The uses of the internet are nearly limitless. The internet can be used to communicate, share work, engage with cultures from around the world, start a business, learn a new trade, etc. Therefore, understanding the basics of how to work and use the internet can be a great benefit to you and a source of inspiration.

To get an understanding of where your users are in their technological journey, it may be useful to ask the participants to either write down or answer aloud what their current internet activities look like. This activity both helps establish the needs of your audience while also getting the learners engaged and helping them conceptualize the myriad of uses the internet offers them. Use the learning materials to explain that the internet has many different facets and can be used as a source of information, communication, shopping, socializing, learning and a source of pertinent information that can help them in their daily lives (such as healthcare or financial information). Many senior citizens often have more experience with the internet than they may know themselves; therefore, it is important to engage in a conversation about the way they currently use technology. Explain that the internet does not “live” solely on a computer but rather can be accessed from various technological devices including mobile phones, tablets, etc.

Storage Types

One common source of confusion for many beginner users is the lack of understanding about where information/data is being stored on their computer. Users often conflate the internet, cloud storage, and local storage as the same entity, often being described simply as “on their computer.” In this section, you should try to provide an explanation and explain the differences between each of these types of storage that are commonly used: local storage(hard drive and removable drives), cloud storage, and the internet. Attempt to develop an understanding that the information on a website or from a browser is not stored locally within the computer hard drive but rather exists outside of the hardware. Also help develop an understanding of cloud storage and how it is different from information and data that is stored within a computer hard drive.

How the Internet Works

This section should draw upon some of the key concepts that were defined at the beginning of the module (see “Definitions of Computer and Internet Terms”). Users will not need a very technical or complex understanding of how the internet works, but rather they need to understand the building blocks of the internet and how to use them. The first step of this process is understanding what a web browser is and how to open one to access the internet. It may be helpful to explain that there are many different web browsers that can be used. Provide students with examples of commonly used browsers (Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, Safari) so that users can conceptualize and identify browsers as the software frame that is used to access the internet. From here, you can explain how to use the browser’s address bar to input a URL (website address) to access the intended website such as google.com. Using Google as an example will allow you to explain the differences between the browser, the search bar, and a search engine. This section should also explain the basic browser vocabulary that can be applied to nearly every web browser (including the back/forward buttons, address bar, search bar, tabs, bookmarks, minimize, full-screen, close and links). Coupling this explanation of the basic building blocks of web browsers and search engines with the practice exercises in internet searching will give the users experience and practice with the basic functions of the internet and their device.

Broadband Access vs. the Internet

This section aims to teach users what broadband is and how it relates and differs from the internet. Using a metaphor or examples may be helpful to describe this concept. The internet is like a plumbing system which transports information and data: to get water out of the pipes we must have an access point, like a water fountain or faucet. Broadband access can be understood as the access point and the infrastructure that is required to connect our computer to the internet. Broadband comes in many different forms and from various providers: DSL, cable internet, fiber optic, or satellite. Broadband access is usually purchased via monthly subscription services. Broadband and the internet are not synonymous. Broadband is the frame that allows us to access the Internet with our computer.

How Is Your Data Being Collected on the Internet?

The fear of security threats and the invasions of one's privacy are often reasons why some individuals are averse to integrating technology into their daily lives. Providing students with knowledge and information about how they are being tracked and the types of data that are being collected on them when using the internet, as well as providing some basic information about what they can do to protect their identities and their privacy while using the internet can help these individuals manage their fears and practice safe, preventative measures that can protect them and their data.

Information about the protective measures that users can take to ensure their privacy can be found on the Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Advice article (deleting web browser history, adjusting privacy settings, tracking permissions, location sharing, and opting out of personalized ads). Provide an explanation of cookies and how they are used to track internet activity and explain why companies may be interested in tracking their online activities. It may be useful to explain that just because a company has enabled cookie tracking or just because their data may be collected from a website does not mean that it is a threat to their identity or that there are monitoring devices within their technology, but rather it is often being collected simply to create personalized advertisements.

What is Bluetooth?

Bluetooth is a wireless technology that allows devices to communicate with each other over short-range radio frequencies. Bluetooth can be used to transfer data from one device to another or to connect devices to each other. For example, you can use a Bluetooth connection to connect your PC to a wireless keyboard or a wireless mouse, and most commonly Bluetooth is used to connect wireless headphones to your cell phone. Bluetooth is an incredibly useful technology, but it is important to be mindful that there are some security risks associated with Bluetooth technology. Hackers can access your device through Bluetooth technology; therefore, it is recommended that when you are not using Bluetooth you disable it in your device settings.

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