IS YOUR DIGITAL INFORMATION SAFE FROM AN ATTACK BY HACKERS OR A NATURAL DISASTER?

Could our digital records disappear in a disaster or an attack?

A solar storm or deliberate hostile actions could severely disrupt our internet-based civilisation

record: *a permanent account of a past event*
clay: *earth that is moulded when wet and then dried to create products such as bricks and ceramics*
to unearth: *discover something by digging in the ground*
to benefit: *to receive an advantage or profit*
to wipe out: *to eliminate or erase something*
at their fingertips: *have something easily available*
broadcasts: *radio or television transmissions*
to trigger: *to cause an event to happen*
to tamper: *to make unauthorised alterations to something*

The **clay** tablets left by the ancient Sumerians around 5,000 years ago in the modern day deserts of Iraq provide the earliest written record of a long dead people.

Although it took decades for archaeologists to decipher the mysterious language preserved on them, they have given us an idea of what life was like at the dawn of civilisation.

Similar tablets and carved stones have been **unearthed** at the sites of other mighty cultures that have long since vanished – from the hieroglyphics of the Ancient Egyptians to the inscriptions of the Maya of Mesoamerica. The stories and details they contain have survived millennia to be discovered and deciphered by modern historians.

But there are fears that future archaeologists may not **benefit** from the same sort of long-lasting record when they search for evidence of our own civilisation. In the 21st century we live in a digital world where information is stored as lists of tiny electronic ones and zeros that can be edited or even **wiped out** by a few accidental gestures.

The advent of the internet means people have more information **at their fingertips** than at any previous point in human history. Yet this knowledge we have built up is perilously vulnerable. What is easy to access is also easy to destroy. Many scientific papers are now solely

published online. Entire catalogues of news **broadcasts**, television programmes and films are stored digitally. Official documents and government papers reside in digital libraries.

A recent conference of space weather scientists, together with officials from Nasa, warned of the fragile nature of all this digital information. Charged particles thrown out by the sun in a powerful solar storm could **trigger** electromagnetic surges *(see picture on left)* that could make our electronic devices useless and erase data stored on memory drives. Severe solar storms like these appear to happen every 100 years. The last major event to hit the Earth was in 1859 and disrupted telegraph systems all over the world. In the age of the internet, such an event would be catastrophic.

But there are other threats too – malicious hackers or even careless officials could **tamper** with these digital records or delete them altogether. And what if we simply lose the ability to read this information? Technology is changing so fast that media formats are soon obsolete. Minidiscs, VHS and the floppy disk have all become outdated within decades and any information stored on one of these formats could become indecipherable in the near future.

Perhaps we need a new type of long-lasting tablet like the Sumerians used. Scientists are already working on the idea but there are two essential questions that need answering: what information do we store and where do we store it?

Adapted from: http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20161018-the-worlds-knowledge-is-being-buried-in-a-salt-mine

Weekly English Practice

10th November 2016

English Coaching Projects S.Coop.

weeklyenglishpractice.wordpress.com

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"Let's chat about that!"

Write your answers in an email and send them to your ECP coach!

- What digital information have you lost? Photos, music, documents? Work/personal?
- What type of obsolete technology do you have at home or at work?
- How much of your life is online?
- If the internet was severely disrupted tomorrow how would it affect your life?
- What information would you make safe for future generations and what not?

"iLook, iThink, iSpeak" Express yourself better!

"Let's socialise in English and have a good evening."
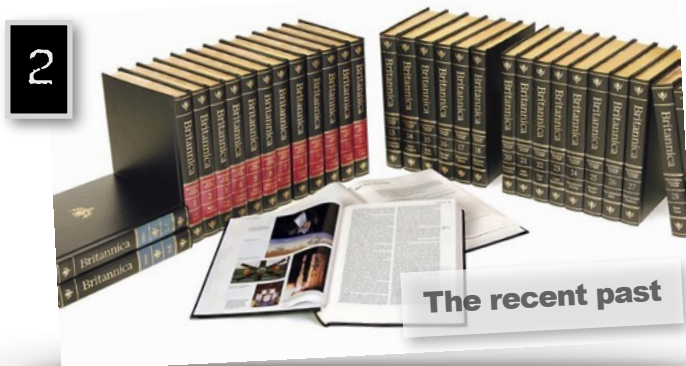
Come to our English Pintxo Pote!

Thursday, 10th November @20.30 @El Portalón

See you there!

English Pintxo Pote

FRED talks
Fun, Relevant, Engaging Discourse

Friday 2nd December
@The Molineux Bar @The ECP Hub

Storing and using our memory

▷ Look at the pictures and talk about the historical epoch they depict.

▷ How much information did (will) society have in each epoch and who had (will have) access to it?

▷ Who created (will create) it and how?

▷ Who controlled (will control) it and how?

1 The ancient past

2 The recent past

3 The future?

What do you know about Russia?

Come and practise your listening and presentation skills in English!!

If you would like to do a FRED TALK, please let us know.

Talk for a maximum of 8 minutes on any topic of your choice.

And if you don't fancy speaking, simply come down to the ECP Hub and support your fellow students by listening to them!

Free food and drinks.

Come and practise your social English :-)