HOW THE VISUAL MEDIA AFFECT PEOPLE

By Richard Gardner

[A] How do television and the other visual media affect the lives of individuals and families around the globe? The media can be very helpful to people (and their children) who carefully choose what they watch. With high-quality programming in various fields of study—science, medicine, nature, history, the arts, and so on—TV, video tapes, and DVDs increase the knowledge of the average and the well-educated person; they can also improve thinking ability. Moreover, television and other visual media benefit elderly people who can’t go out often, as well as patients in hospitals and residents of nursing facilities. Additionally, it offers language learners the advantage of “real-life” audiovisual instruction and aural comprehension practice at any time of day or night. And of course, visual media can provide almost everyone with good entertainment—a pleasant way to relax and spend free time at home.

[B] Nevertheless, there are several serious disadvantages to the visual media. First of all, some people watch the “tube” for some hours in a day than they do anything else. In a large number of homes, TV sets—as many as five or more in a single household—are always one. Many people watch TV for many hours a day or spend hours playing games or surfing on their computers; they download music, movies and other forms of entertainment. Instead of spending time taking care of their kids, parents often use a video screen as an “electronic baby-sitter.” As a result, television and video can easily replace family communication as well as physical activity and other interests.

[C] Second, too much TV—especially programming of low educational value—can reduce people’s ability to concentrate or reason. In fact, studies show that after only a minute or two of visual media, a person’s mind “relaxes” as it does during light sleep. Another possible effect of television and videotapes on the human brain is poor communication. Children who watch a lot of TV may lose their ability to focus on a subject or an educational activity for more than 10 to 15 minutes. Maybe it is because of the visual media that some kids—and adults too—develop attention deficit disorder (ADD), a modern condition in which people are unable to pay attention, listen well, follow instructions, or remember everyday things.

[D] A third negative feature of the media is the amount of violence on the screen—both in real events in the news and movies or in TV programs. It scares people and gives them terrible nightmares; the fear created by media images and language can last for a long time. On the other hand, frequent viewers of “action programming” get used to its messages: they might begin to believe there is nothing strange or unusual about violent crime, fights, killing, and other terrible events and behavior. Studies show that certain personality types are likely to have strong emotional reactions or dangerous thoughts after some kinds of “entertainment.” They may even copy the acts that they see on violent shows—start fires, carry and use weapons, attack people in angry or dangerous ways, and even worse.

[E] Because of the visual media, some people may become dissatisfied with the reality of their own lives. To these viewers, everyday life does not seem as exciting as the roles actors play in movies or TV dramas. They realize they aren’t having as much fun as the stars of comedy shows. Furthermore, average people with normal lives may envy famous media personalities, who seem to get unlimited amounts of money and attention. Also, media watchers might get depressed when they can’t take care of situations in real life as well as TV stars seem to. On the screen, they notice actors solve serious problems in hour or half-hour programs—or in twenty-second commercials.

[F] Yet another negative feature of modern television is called “trash TV.” These daily talk shows bring real people with strange or immoral lives, personalities, or behavior to the screen. Millions of viewers—including children—watch as these “instant stars” tell their most personal secrets, shout out their angry feelings and opinions, and attack one another. TV watchers seem to like the emotional atmosphere and excitement of this kind of programming. What effect does frequent viewing of such programs have on people’s lives? It makes television more real than reality, and normal living begins to seem boring.
Finally, the most negative effect of all of these kinds of visual media might be addiction. People often feel a strange and powerful need to watch TV, download visual material, or play a DVD even when they don’t enjoy it or have the free time for entertainment. Addiction to a TV or computer screen is similar to drug or alcohol dependence: addicts almost never believe they are addicted. Even so, truthful media addicts have to answer yes to many of these questions.

- Do you immediately turn on the TV set or computer when you arrive home from school or work?
- Do you watch a lot of programming that requires little focus or thinking ability?
- Can you concentrate on another topic or activity for only ten to fifteen minutes at a time?
- Do you enjoy the action and violence of the media more than activity in your own life?

A. Paraphrase the following sentences:

1. Instead of spending time taking care of their kids, parents often use a video screen as an “electronic baby-sitter.” As a result, television and video can easily replace family communication as well as physical activity and other interests.

2. Maybe it is because of the visual media that some kids—and adults too—develop attention deficit disorder (ADD), a modern condition in which people are unable to pay attention, listen well, follow instructions, or remember everyday things.

3. Studies show that certain personality types are likely to have strong emotional reactions or dangerous thoughts after some kinds of “entertainment.”

B. Summarize the reading in one paragraph.

Notes: Make sure that all the main points and important details, together with the documentation, are included. Paraphrasing strategies are also used for summarizing.

C. Write a reaction paragraph to one of the points of the reading

Notes: Use your own personal experiences and pre-existing knowledge to illustrate or develop your reaction. Some of the points discussed in the reading are listed below as examples.

Media replacing other activities
The effects of TV on the mind
The effects of violence in the media
Dissatisfaction with normal living
Boredom with real life
The media addiction

THE END
FEAR OF GAINING WEIGHT HAS BECOME A MENTAL ILLNESS
By William Redmond

[A] Anorexia nervosa is termed to define mental illness in which a person has an intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted perception of their weight and body shape. People with this illness believe themselves to be fat even when their weight is so low that their health is in danger. A person with anorexia nervosa severely restricts food intake and usually becomes extremely thin.

[B] Although cases of self-starvation have been known since antiquity, anorexia nervosa has become much more common in modern Western societies as thinness has increasingly become a primary measure of attractiveness. The disorder is thought to be most common among whites, people of higher socioeconomic classes, and people involved in activities where thinness is especially prized, such as dancing, theater, and distance running. More than 90 percent of cases are diagnosed in females, but some experts believe that many cases of anorexia nervosa in males go unreported. The disorder typically begins in the mid- to late teenage years.

[C] Researchers estimate that about 0.5 to 1 percent of young women in the United States suffer from anorexia nervosa as it is clinically defined by the American Psychiatric Association. However, many more individuals, perhaps 5 to 10 percent of all young women in the United States, have a distorted body image and a preoccupation with becoming thin, though they do not fit all the criteria for a clinical diagnosis of anorexia nervosa.

[D] People with anorexia nervosa—who are sometimes known as anorectics or anorexics—have a preoccupation with food, weight, dieting, and body image. They are dissatisfied with their bodies, perceive themselves to be fat regardless of their actual weight, and are obsessed with becoming thin. Many are so focused on outward appearance that they have little awareness of internal sensations such as hunger and fullness. Anorexics usually undertake strict diets, severely restricting food intake and avoiding certain foods they deem taboo. They may also undergo intense, strenuous exercise regimens and weigh themselves frequently.

[E] Despite eating very little, many people with anorexia nervosa become overly involved with food by preparing elaborate meals for others or taking over food shopping or preparation for the family. At meals, they may cut their food into tiny pieces, eat very slowly, and dispose of food secretly. About 50 percent of people with anorexia nervosa also develop bulimia nervosa. This is a type of eating disorder in which individuals engage in episodes of binge eating, or consuming large amounts of food in a short period, and then purging the food from their bodies by self-induced vomiting or abuse of laxatives.

[F] People who develop anorexia nervosa often share certain personality attributes, such as perfectionism, introversion, low self-esteem, difficulty expressing emotions, and a need for control. As the disorder develops, they may experience depression, irritability, sleep problems, lack of sexual interest, and they may withdraw from friends and family.
In 50% to 75% of cases, anorexia nervosa is accompanied by other mental illnesses, particularly depression and anxiety disorder. At least 25 percent of people with anorexia nervosa also have obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). A person with OCD experiences recurrent, often irrational thoughts or fears and feels compelled to perform certain behaviors over and over. Some evidence suggests that the psychological symptoms of anorexia nervosa, such as obsessive behavior, preoccupation with food, and depression, may actually be an effect of food deprivation. In many cases, however, the depression or another mental illness develops before the diagnosis of anorexia nervosa, and some scientists believe these other mental illnesses may make people more vulnerable to developing anorexia nervosa.

People with anorexia nervosa usually deny that they have a problem. They do not see low weight as a health risk or symptom of a psychological problem. They believe that dieting and losing weight is logical because they perceive themselves to be fat. Many feel pride in their ability to adhere to their strict diet. To the outside world, anorexics frequently appear normal. They are often successful in school and other activities, and may be perceived as respectful, obedient, helpful, and compliant—in short, they are seen as model young people.