



**Hair politics
in schools
must stop!**

Guide to assist with studying for the NT2 Dutch Examinations

BY JAHZARA PAYNE

For those who take Dutch as a subject at school, it is popularly known that there is a certain exam that some students are nervous about, while others may have an advantage. The NT2 (Nederlands als tweede taal) Examinations is the national language exam for non-speaking Dutch students and adults who have Dutch as their second language. The exam has three/six levels which include the following:

Basic User
A1 – Beginner
A2 – Pre-Intermediate

Independent User
B1 – Intermediate
B2 – Upper-Intermediate

Proficient
C1 – Advanced
C2 – Proficiency

The exam also consists of five parts: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. The Speaking is divided into two parts when being graded, which is Interaction and Pronunciation.

There are advantages when it comes to completing and passing this examination. One of the advantages is being awarded the examination diploma. This is beneficial because it al-



lows students or adults who move abroad to the Netherlands to have opportunities at schools or jobs there. This will allow them to embrace such opportunities because the diploma will demonstrate that they have an adequate understanding of the Dutch language.

The other advantages include both a positive and negative aspect. The main advantage would be their naturalization. Some students, who are on the island, are not naturalized, meaning they are not considered Dutch citizens. However, if they pass all parts of the exam or at least four parts, they will be able to get naturalized and become Dutch citizens. The disadvantage is that if the student is unable to pass four parts, they will inevitably have to sit the actual Naturalization exam which costs a lot. In that exam, you will have to do four Dutch exams, four English exams and one Political Science exam. To be able to register for this exam, the student will have to be 18 before or by March – and if you are not that age by then, that means you will have to wait until the next year to register for that exam.

Studying for the exam might be difficult for those who struggle to study in general. Below are some tips from some former students who attempted and passed the test.

Tips to study for the NT2 Exams

- 1: Study at a higher level than the level the exam is set on; that way, the exams will be easier.
- 2: Watch videos of past examinations.
- 3: Review basic Dutch vocabulary, rather than obsessively re-viewing class materials.
- 4: Speak and have conversations in the Dutch language with others.
- 5: Listen to any content in the Dutch language, so you can have a bit of understanding when it comes to the speaking and listening portions of the exam.

With that being said, good luck to those of you who will be taking this exam in the near future. Do not pressure yourself, and ensure you are relaxed beforehand, so you are not too stressed and panicked.

All the best!



Sustainable Development Goals

BY LAVINA RAMCHANDANI



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The Daily Herald

Founder
Michael R. Granger

Coordinator
Rochelayne Rommy-Richardson

Asst. Coordinator
Jennyvier Poullino

Editor
Saheli Kirpalani

Content Coordinator
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Isabella Carazo
Lehar Marata
Raynella Romney
Suhani Nathumal

Graphic Designer
Evadney "Eve" Henriques

Contact
teentimesxm@gmail.com

Sustainable development is a global effort to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all, recognizing that eradicating poverty, combating inequality, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, and fostering social inclusion are all interconnected. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are targets for global development, aiming to be achieved by 2030. Each country faces specific challenges to achieve sustainable development, and the most vulnerable countries, such as African

countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states, face special challenges.

To reach the goal of providing 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) as official development aid (ODA) to poor nations, developed countries are required to fulfil their pledges to provide full implementation of ODA. Developed countries are also encouraged to strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve do-

mestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection.

Other developed countries, such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, are also making progress towards achieving the SDGs. For example, Sweden has made significant progress in reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and taking action on climate change. Denmark has made progress toward combating climate change, encouraging sustainable cities and communities, and lowering inequality.

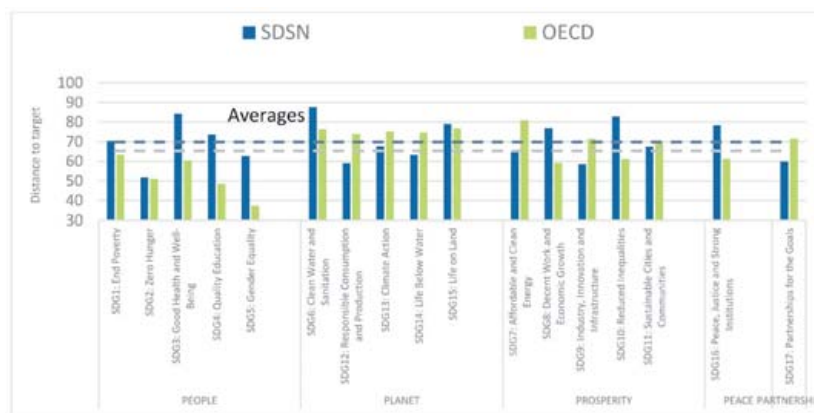
As an independent nation

inside the Netherlands, St. Maarten has particular difficulties when it comes to achieving sustainable development. It is significant to note that, despite St. Maarten's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), small island developing states (SIDS), particularly those in the Caribbean, frequently face challenges pertaining to social development, environmental sustainability, economic vulnerability, and climate change. Countries in the Caribbean area that rank among the most developed in terms of economic growth and human

silience which the Caribbean islands are focusing on. In order to guarantee that the MSDCF is implemented in accordance with each nation's national development plans, the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF) collaborates with governments, public sector organizations, and other stakeholders to support the realization of the SDGs in the Caribbean.

A worldwide agenda known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to address a number of issues, including poverty, inequality, climate change, and sustainable development. As for the World Economic Forum, nations like Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland have demonstrated exceptional performance in both social and environmental domains when it comes to accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With just one-third of the SDG objectives expected to be met by 2030, Latin America and the Caribbean is performing unevenly and highlights the need for legislative measures to quicken development.

Reduced poverty, increased access to financial services, and the promotion of sustainable economic growth are all part of shared prosperity and economic re-



Enough of the hair politics in schools!

Boomers and older people, stop reading. This might trigger your traditional perspectives that have been debunked by millennials, Gen Z-ers, and the next generation.

When stories of hair politics go viral, people are outraged for a moment, but the student at the centre of the incident is quickly forgotten and the masses move on to the next topic to rage about. We've fought against school dress codes that penalize Black students for the way they wear their hair for years now. For. Years.

There are many examples almost on a daily basis worldwide including on St. Maarten. More often than not, it always centres on a Black student. Example: a Black high school student has been disciplined and kept away from his classroom for months due to his refusal to change his hairstyle, which school officials claim violates the dress code. Despite efforts by the family attorney, the student remains in in-school suspension.

The dispute centres on his locs, which school officials argue exceed the allowed length, while his family contends that the hairstyle adheres to the rules because of how he has pinned back his locs. While his family fights for his right to have locs, instead of attending classes and receiving a proper education, he remains in in-school suspension.

"Cut his hair", "Switch schools" have been some suggestions lodged, but why should a student have to cut his hair or change schools to receive a proper education? At this point, real harm has been done to his academic, social, and personal life. Attention he didn't ask for or deserve – all because of an un-inclusive school dress code that insists on politicizing Black students.

School dress codes need to be evaluated annually. There are still antiquated, un-inclusive mandates on the books. Are locs indicative of a "dangerous" student? Is a bright hair colour blinding other stu-



dents from learning? Does requiring khaki or navy pants help students learn more? Teaching and learning is what school is about, and somehow, the needle has strayed to policing what students wear and how they style their hair.

There is internalized anti-blackness in people who make policies that disproportionately penalize. Those people aren't always non-Black. Sometimes, it is Black folks who perpetuate this harm, not knowing the history. Some schools in America and Africa demand students' hair be a certain way. In Africa, much of this was rooted in a belief that afro-textured hair was "ungodly".

An article about Kenyan schools notes that "in pre-colonial times, Christian missionaries demanded that girls who attended their mission schools cut their hair to their scalp, as they believed that Black hair was "unsightly, ungodly, and un-tameable." Beyond their students, missionaries also forbade all African women who attended their churches from wearing any artistic hairstyles, even though African women did so for many different reasons, including signifying their age, class, and rank in their community."

Over the years, some Black people have believed that certain hairstyles are better, not knowing that these hairstyles forced upon Black children were based on hate of the beautifully textured

hair growing out of their heads.

What message are we sending to children, when we tell them they do not deserve to attend class over their hairstyle? One message is that school is not that important if something so trivial can eliminate a student from the classroom setting. Also, it says that the teachers and administrators don't care how you will fare in the world without an education.

These incidents represent more than isolated cases; they embody a pattern of discrimination rooted in ignorance and bias. However, we have a challenge for the new Parliament about to be sworn in: Pass new laws providing students with protections against discrimination based on their natural hairstyles. These laws would signal a shift towards a more inclusive and accepting society, one where the majority of people are Black.

It is disheartening that, in the 21st century, we still find ourselves confronting such archaic forms of discrimination. New laws will send a clear message that no individual should be penalized for embracing their natural hair – a fundamental aspect of their identity. These laws extend beyond the confines of the schoolyard; they reverberate into the workplace, challenging ingrained biases that have persisted for far too long.

The significance of these laws cannot be overstated, particularly for Black women

and girls who have endured the unjust consequences of school policies that fail to recognize the beauty and diversity of natural hair.

Please let us not forget the importance of education in eradicating prejudice. It is not enough to legislate change; we must cultivate a culture of understanding and appreciation for the richness that diversity brings. Our schools should be places of learning, acceptance, and celebration, where every student, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, can feel proud of who they are.

While there is nothing wrong with implementing rules as it is understood that rules are needed to instill discipline in learners as early as their pre-school years. However, our society must accept that times are changing. Rules on appearances have become almost completely obsolete and not applicable to the perspectives of the youth, with the generations now seeing them as restrictive of their personal freedoms.

To the older people, that idea may seem very outrageous and quite a stretch, but knowing how our generation is now more understanding and open to how we all want to express ourselves through the way we dress, style our hair, and portray ourselves on social media, those rules are too much. How can one's personal appearance affect their academic performance and intelligence? How can expressing ourselves in the way we want to impede our futures? Is restricting the youths' freedoms so important for adults and hurtful to their pride whenever we want to break those rules?

Make it make sense. Our ways of expression aren't so "outlandish" as you think. Rules are rules, yes, but would you want your own freedoms diminished by a close-minded authority? Better think again: These outdated school policies really have to go.

Feature

BLACK HISTORY MONTH: Why recognize it in the Caribbean?

Globally, February has become synonymous with the ubiquitous celebration of Black History Month. Valentine's Day? Not so much, because trends indicate that, like me, most people in the world are wrestling with singledom because, unfortunately, "boo'ed up" is not an option for marital status. Therefore, I am thrilled that February is also the shortest month, because if I roll my eyes any longer, I might lose them!

Black History Month is synonymous with February?! But for who is it really synonymous? I am here to examine how the month-long celebration has been embraced by the Black Diaspora – most notably in the Caribbean via traditional media. I also want to dive into how we can appreciate our own dynamic history and stories of strength and perseverance through mindful and intentional dissemination of information via these mediums.

The concept of Black History Month has its roots in the United States. It was founded by African American scholar, Dr. Carter Goodwin Woodson, and began as Negro History Week in 1926. The aim was to give recognition to the contributions of African Americans, who were overlooked by Caucasian historians, throughout America's history.

Why should Caribbean people celebrate this African American tradition? Some would respond that we are black people too. However, this can be seen as another example of the Americanization of our so-



cieties. The running joke in Jamaica for years has been the saying "When 'merica sneeze, we ketch col." (When America sneezes, we catch a cold).

As a Jamaican, and citizen of the Caribbean, I understand the need for African Americans to reflect on their journey and have other races and ethnicities recognize the prowess of their influence – and my God what an influence it has been! However, adopting this African American concept in a country like Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands – where the population is 90-95% of African heritage, whether visible or not visible (because we do come in various shades of gorgeousness!) – has seemingly overshadowed our own heritage and significant contributions to the world.

I cannot say what the programming is like on any other island during the month of February, but I can tell you that, in Jamaica, it is so

predictable. In fact, I can say a bit of what it's like in Barbados from reading an article on the topic in their national online newspaper Nation News where the month was described as a "watered down greatest hits compilation of 10 talented blacks", at which point, I have never high-fived my computer screen so fast! The description was perfect!

In Jamaica, there's an overview of the life of Marcus Garvey, who did most of his famous work with the United Negro Improvement Association U.N.I.A. in the United States, our seven national heroes and Bob Marley and his accomplished offspring. There is also the usual Malcolm X biography, Martin Luther King Jr.'s life story, Rosa Parks' triumphant refusal to sit at the back of the bus. I sit only at the back of the bus, so I don't know what that says about me! Then several African American films are aired. We must see every Denzel Washington and

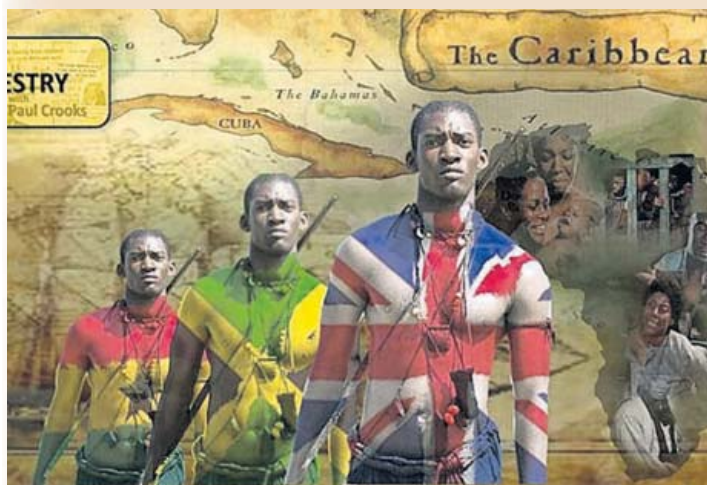
Will Smith movie. President Barack Obama has now become a staple – and drizzle a little Oprah and Whoopi in the mix.

Black History Month seems to simply give our media an excuse to sprinkle black history in between the airing of every spin-off of Law and Order, CSI, cheesy soap operas and every other foreign programming. I lost so many brain cells as a child watching soaps operas! My mother confirmed that they are still being aired! But to my pleasant surprise, she no longer watches them. That's awesome! We cannot escape foreign television and culture in our own countries whether it is music, sports, film, technology – we know all the greats.

What I am trying to say is that Black History Month in predominantly black countries is a bit strange to me. Every day should be Black History Month. This historical value of our culture and our successes is immeasurable. Jamaica with a population of only 2.9 million people is historically one of the most culturally influential countries in the world; St. Lucia produced Sir Derek Walcott Nobel Peace Prize winner for literature, first Caribbean writer to do so; Guyana produced influential Historian and Political activist Walter Rodney; Barbados has free education and was just recently named the first country to purchase digital land and will establish a Metaverse embassy (go figure!); Trinidad and Tobago is a Republic, along with Barbados, Guyana and Dominica, and Trinidad and Tobago also is rich with oil. What makes us special is endless.

Black History Month just raises the questions: Do we as Caribbean people see enough of ourselves as global achievers in the media on a consistent basis? How much do we know about ourselves? The media has so much power to inform, educate and enlighten our populations. The more information and knowledge we have of self can uplift and have us feeling good about the experiences of people who share the same space as us. There has been improvement, as media has been extended beyond newspapers, radio and television. Social Media has given rise to various platforms dedicated to showcasing the wave of success of people from the Caribbean or of Caribbean heritage.

The information is out there – no doubt about it. It is written in books in our stores, libraries, newspapers, etc. However, we should not have to buy our history or go to the ends of the earth to research it. Our history should be shared with us consistently throughout the year. I believe we lost so many years and opportunities to foster a thirst for our history among generations present and past. Let it not be for one month that we see our blackness cherished. Let us Caribbean people actively and consciously engage our past, present and future and not allow anyone or any system to give us permission to appreciate and celebrate ourselves.



Redefining Pathways to Success

BY RAYNELLA ROMNEY

In an ever changing society where we were once used to the fact that a degree is the ticket to a fulfilling career, the reality is you do not need a degree to be successful. In a world where success has always been associated with diploma and degrees, individuals nowadays are proving that a degree is not the only path to success.

Embracing online learning

In today's digital age, the rise of online courses such as Coursera has become a normalized education route. It has provided opportunities for individuals to enhance valuable skills and gain knowledge at their own pace, and it is all for free. Professional certificates in areas such as project management, data analysis and digital marketing can be awarded sometimes for free; it all depends on the course you take. These certificates can be beneficial when looking for employ-

ment.

Beyond traditional professions

While certain professions like law and medicine require a degree, many career paths (such as graphic design, data science, and social media management) thrive on skills, networking and practical experiences. The success stories of renowned figures like Steve Jobs, Walt Disney, and Mark Zuckerberg emphasize that taking the traditional academic path is not the only way to make a significant impact in the world. Their journeys have also demonstrated that determination, innovation, passion and hard work can lead to great success without necessarily obtaining a degree.

Choosing your own destiny

There is this false narrative that arts and certain industries do not lead to success. Sometimes, people tell you that you will not make it



far in fields like dancing, singing, drawing, or even if you venture into culinary arts or cosmetology. Nevertheless, countless people have proven time and time again that following your passion and putting in hard

work can push you forward in any field. Pursuing what you truly want can lead to exceptional success.

Unlocking opportunities in a connected world

Networking is essential for your personal and professional success. Building relationships, both online and offline, can not only open doors to opportunities, but can also provide valuable guidance, mentorship and exposure to diverse perspectives. Attending events, joining communities, and developing a strong social media presence comes hand in hand with the modern day approach to networking in today's society, especially as it allows people to become more interconnected with individuals from different backgrounds.

The entrepreneurial spirit

Starting a business and finding your niche is not confined to those with degrees. Some people might say "Starting your own business is where it is at." With the trend of growing an entrepreneurial spirit, small businesses and young entrepreneurs, especially on our island St. Maarten, are thriving and challenging the stereotype that success only lies within the traditional route of education and employment. If you have a vision and want to be able to create and build something meaningful on your own terms, go for it!

Standing out in the job market

The emphasis on diverse skills such as marketing and negotiation, along with the recognition that a degree does not guarantee success in a particular field, is a valuable insight. The job market is evolving, and employers are demanding a more diverse skillset. Sometimes, you do not learn these essential skills in college. Individuals who can showcase relevant experiences and skills are often more attractive to employers.

The message is simple – you do not need a degree to be successful, however, the journey requires dedication and passion. Traditional education is not the only way to success. Whether you are in the world of entrepreneurship, pursuing your artistic craft, achieving in-demand skills through an online platform, or networking, a successful life is always within your reach. Therefore, success is possible through hard work, determination and commitment to continuous learning, and is not just defined by a degree on the wall. Nevertheless, it is important to always be prepared for setbacks, discouragement and uncertainties, but perseverance is key.

The journey to success is a path you forge on your terms.



EXPLORING THE DIGITAL WORLD FOR FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES!

BY CHIRAG RAMCHANDANI

Whether you are saving up for a major life event like buying a house, planning a wedding, sending a child to college, or simply aiming to boost your savings, a second job such as being a cashier, salesperson, or even cutting grass or cleaning cars has always been an option for millions. However, did you know that this can be done through the comfort of your home? Yes, online side hustles have become the go-to solution for many millions who seek additional income or want to start earning on a smaller scale.

In this era of technology and digitalization, the internet offers a treasure chest filled of various opportunities that can seamlessly align with your regular job. To help you navigate this vast landscape, here is a curated list of online side hustles for 2024, ensuring you can make the most of your extra time and financial goals. Let's explore the world of digital opportunities out there!

1: Freelance writing

If you really like to journal, write or even want to share ideas, why not do it to earn some income? We know that the creation of content is crucial in the digital age, and companies are always on the lookout for talented writers and content producers. Nowadays, people are looking for hustles that offer flexibility and a global reach, like freelance writing. If you have a gift for language, let's explore how you can make your love of writing into a successful online business.

To begin with, you mainly need to make sure your portfolio represents your best work before launching your freelance writing career. Through platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, and Freelancer, freelancers can connect with clients who are actively looking for content creators. To launch your freelance career, create customized proposals and submit bids for pertinent projects. The complexity of the project and experience level can affect how much money a freelance writer makes. Experienced writers can charge as much as \$30-50 per hour, while beginners may start at \$5-10 per hour. If, however, you are too lazy to write with your full creativity or lack experience, AI's like Open AI's ChatGPT and Google's BARD are some free online tools that can kick-start and guide you in improving your writing and easily make that extra buck without breaking a sweat.

2: Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

If you believe you have the gift of drawing or sketching and want to see your work published, Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) is a great way to share



your work with a large, international audience of readers. Let's investigate self-publishing and the ways that Amazon KDP can publish your works in print (hard cover or paperback) or digital formats.

As simple as it sounds, books can be made without any skill by simply using online AI platforms such as Canva. Here's how:

(a): Create aesthetically pleasing notebook layouts and colouring book pages with Canva. Canva provides an intuitive interface, along with a vast selection of templates and design elements, to help you

realize your vision.

(b): If you do not already have an Amazon KDP account, create one now. Recognize the unique formatting specifications for notebooks and colouring books. Guidelines are provided by Amazon KDP to make sure your content complies with their printing requirements.

(c): Create your designs in Canva and export them in a format that works with your device. Upload your files to Amazon KDP, making sure to follow any platform-specific guidelines and to properly arrange the pages. One more thing, there is no need to worry about purchasing an ISBN

code for your book as Amazon provides one for free.

(d): Finally, Amazon will let you know about how much your colouring book or notebook will cost to make. Using that information, you can easily choose your royalty rate using Amazon KDP by basing it on the list price and then selecting the distribution channels and geographic areas in which you wish to sell your product.

3: YouTube Automation

Ever wanted to be like your favourite content creator and possibly earn as much as them? If so, you should take a look at YouTube Automation as a choice for side hustles. YouTube has developed into an important player for creators in the world of content creation. Many are using automation and AI-generated content to improve and expedite the content creation process. This helps in saving time and creating new opportunities for interesting and varied videos. Let's look at some effective ways to use AI and automation on YouTube. Here's how to do it:

(a): If you want to edit videos automatically, use programs like In Video or Clipchamp. With the help of these platforms' templates, transitions, and effects, you can easily produce videos that look professional.

(b): Create captivating thumbnails with AI-powered programs like Thumbnail Blaster or Canva. With the aid of these tools that study user behaviour and trends, you can easily produce thumbnails that increase click-through rates.

(c): Look at AI-powered voiceover services like Google Cloud Text-to-Speech and Amazon Polly. These programs produce voices that sound real, giving your videos narration without requiring human recording or voiceovers saving you on time. Once the video is complete, simply upload it to YouTube. In order to beat the YouTube algorithm, however, it is recommended that you keep consistently uploading videos to ensure your channel is active.

It is easy to make money once you know how to. There is an open library of options available in the digital world for individuals looking for flexibility and financial growth. Whether you are writing for fun, self-publishing on Amazon KDP, or exploring the possibilities of YouTube automation, the combination of technological innovation and human passion creates the foundation for a successful and rewarding path. Accept the digital era, investigate the opportunities it offers, and simply allow your 2024 goals to flourish through online side hustles.



Starting the New Year with Good Energy to Set Goals

BY ALISAH & IJAELEN

The New Year is a perfect opportunity to start working on new projects and towards the goals you have always wanted to achieve, such as better health and academic or professional goals. Setting goals may seem easy, but following through with such goals can be difficult.

Goals provide a sense of direction, motivation, a clear focus, and clarify importance. By setting goals, you are providing yourself with a target to aim for. Some individuals are not aware of how to make a proper goal, but the concept of SMART goals can help. SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. To help you focus your efforts and improve your chances of reaching your goal, a SMART goal includes all of these elements. Those who advocate for the use of SMART goals contend that they give the goal-setter a clear path forward. It is believed that the person defining the goal gets a clear idea of what has



to be produced, however, maintaining productivity is difficult. Being disciplined is necessary for productivity, as it can occasionally be difficult to resist temptation or to press on when you want to give up. Below are some strategies for maintaining discipline, as well as some pointers to assist you succeed in achieving your goals.

The first thing advised to do is to get a physical calendar that can go up on a wall in your bedroom or workplace that is large enough to be seen from a distance. The calendar should have some blank space at the top or bottom with little to no designs in that area. The purpose of this is so that a message or a word

or message will be the “theme” of the month. This should be something you can read and feel motivated by. It can be anything you want – for example, lyrics from a song or something someone you know said the other day, as long as you can read it from a distance. The significance of this is that you are able to look up at the wall and be reminded of the message you left for yourself. When February comes, you can then change the message.

ing a new car or house. A vision board can do wonders for keeping your thoughts on your vision, your attention on your intentions, and your life going in the direction you choose by appealing to you on both a conscious and subconscious level.

If you have set short-term goals, for example, if you are aiming to get more physically active by doing push-ups in your room or you want to get better at playing piano by doing self-practice sessions, then the best time to do them is first thing in the morning. If you want to develop a habit, doing that thing as soon as you wake up, when your mind is fresh, will be the most efficient way you can go about it. If you leave it until the end of the day when you are tired from doing other activities such as school or work, it may become harder to find the energy to practise these habits, and sometimes you might even forget entirely that you had planned to take action.

Another option is to make a vision board, which is a tool for maintaining focus, concentration, and clarity on the things that are really important to you. Saying, “I want a better life”, for instance, is a noble objective, but have you really considered what it entails? Make an effort to visualise your “better life”. To make a vision board, you have to actively look for pictures that capture particular aspects of this amazing new life. This entails focusing on the details. Some people may define a better life as own-



Valentine's Day Interview with Young Couples



Valentine's Day, commemorated annually on February 14, is a day dedicated to celebrating and embracing love and affection. It originates from ancient Roman and Christian traditions. As Valentine's Day approaches, we would like to begin this celebration of love by exploring teenage love through interviews with a few young couples.

We'd be a grizzly bear (boyfriend) and a panda (girlfriend).

9) If you could go on a romantic getaway anywhere in the world, where would it be?
Thailand.

10) Do you have any advice to other young couples who have recently gotten in a relationship?

Boyfriend: If you are the guy, do not ever disagree. You have to agree to everything your girlfriend says to have a happy relationship.

11) What attracted you to your partner – and was it unexpected?

Boyfriend: Her protective personality was unexpected and attracted me.

Girlfriend: After we got together, he was very protective and defensive of me, which is attractive.

12) Do you have any advice for anyone that may have feelings for someone but is scared to tell them or to commit to a relationship?

First, there is a difference between being scared and not being ready for a relationship. If you know you are not ready, definitely do not commit to a relationship. But if you are scared, take a leap of faith because you cannot determine what will happen.

13) How has your partner and relationship made you a better version of yourself?

Boyfriend: She helps me be more productive at school, in the gym, and other areas of my life.

Girlfriend: He makes me more confident about myself.

SECOND COUPLE

1) What was your first impression of your partner?

Boyfriend: She was goofy, loud, and she burped a lot.

Girlfriend: He was cute, with soft hair, and he spoke multiple languages.

2) What fictional couple do you think your relationship resembles?

Our relationship resembles Mario and Peach.



3) What's the most memorable date you've had together?

Our most memorable date was dinner at Alina in Maho. It was for our first anniversary. He bought me a Pandora ring.

4) How would you describe your partner in three words?

Boyfriend: She is lovey, cuddly, and easy-going.

Girlfriend: He is sweet, funny, and patient.

5) What's one thing you love about your partner that they don't realize?

Boyfriend: I love her smile because it always lights up my day.

Girlfriend: I love his sense of humor because he always makes me laugh.

6) Describe your dream Valentine's Day date.

A dream Valentine's Day date would be a date on the beach or a rooftop with an amazing view.

7) If your relationship had a theme song, what would it be?

Our theme song would be, "I Will Always Love You" by Dolly Parton.

8) If your relationship were an animal duo, what animals would you be?

We would be a shark (boyfriend) and a dolphin (girlfriend).

9) If you could go on a romantic getaway anywhere in the world, where would it be?

We'd go to Japan.

FIRST COUPLE

1) What was your first impression of your partner?

Girlfriend: He was loud and annoying when I first met him.

Boyfriend: I thought she was the weird kid at first sight.

2) What fictional couple do you think your relationship resembles?

Our relationship resembles Jade & Beck from Victorious.

3) What's the most memorable date you've had together?

The most memorable date we have had is a lunch date on the beach. It was romantic and peaceful.

4) How would you describe your partner in three words?

Girlfriend: He is funny, handsome, and loud.

Boyfriend: She is gorgeous, a headache, and a bully.

5) What's one thing you love about your partner that they don't realize?

Boyfriend: I love her body, but she refuses to agree with me.

Girlfriend: I love everything about him, and he knows it.

6) Describe your dream Valentine's Day date.

A dream Valentine's Day date would be to spend it at an Amusement Park.

7) If your relationship had a theme song, what would it be?

Our theme song would be, "You Rock My World" by Michael Jackson.

8) If your relationship were an animal duo, what animals would you be?



Feature

Valentine's Day Interview

Continued from pg.8



10) Do you have any advice to other young couples who have recently gotten in a relationship?

Take your time to get to know each other and build your relationship slowly.

11) Do you have any advice for anyone that may have feelings for someone but is scared to tell them or to commit to a relationship?

Take a leap of faith and if it does not work out, there are many more fish in the sea.

12) How has your partner and relationship made you a better version of yourself?

We have become better versions of ourselves by teaching each other loyalty and respect.

THIRD COUPLE

1) How long have you guys been together?

We have been together for about a year and seven months.

2) How did you first get to know each other and what has your relationship journey been like?

Boyfriend: We first got to know each other through playing chess where I wowed her with my skills and kindness. Then as we became friends

later on and got to know each other better, we started dating.

Girlfriend: We met through a mutual friend group that we were a part of, and things slowly progressed as we talked more. We became really good friends at first for about a year before we got into a relationship.

3) What attracted you to the other person and was it unexpected?

Boyfriend: Some of her main characteristics that were extremely attractive were her smile and humour, which brightened my day. Her humour came as a surprise as I thought she was just a shy girl that was quiet.

Girlfriend: His personality, mindset, as well as his intelligence really attracted me – and, yes, it was completely unexpected.

4) Name five things you like about your partner and five areas or habits you believe your partner can improve on.

Boyfriend: I like her smile, the effort she puts in to look good for me, her humour, her support through a bad day, and lastly her hugs. The only habit my significant other needs to improve on is smiling even more, stress less about things she can't control, make me worry less at times, take proper care of herself,

and be less clumsy.

Girlfriend: I like how loving and full of positive energy he is, and he is also full of kindness and gentleness, very hard-working, caring, and angelic. Some of the things he can do to improve in some areas are being more open-minded, stop putting his guard up, be more expressive and communicate more, help me help him when he is down, stop procrastinating, and judge situations more wisely.

5) How has your partner and relationship made you a better version of yourself?

Boyfriend: She pushes me to do what I have to do and ensures that I get it done.

Girlfriend: My partner and our relationship have helped me to become a more confident and outgoing person, as well as helped me to take pride in the version of myself that I am today. They have helped me to appreciate the little things in life and persuaded me to be a ball of positive energy.

6) Would you mind sharing how you are planning to spend Valentine's Day as a couple?

Hopefully, we can just go for a drive and have a nice time together.

7) Do you have any advice for anyone that may have feelings for someone but is scared to tell them or to commit to a relationship?

Take a leap of faith. It is better to know how the other person is feeling about you and don't let the chance slip away. Shoot your shot in any way possible. However, make sure to build a strong friendship that is trustworthy before moving ahead.

8) What advice would you share with new couples to help them effectively work through arguments or disagreements in a healthy way?

To work through arguments in a healthy way, both you and your partner must carefully listen to the other person's perspective before expressing anger or distress. Make sure to make your partner feel heard, and regardless of how intense the fight is, always make the other person feel safe no matter what. It is also important to take a couple of minutes to clear your mind before continuing the conversation.

9) If you had to describe your partner in one word, what would it be?

Boyfriend: Home.

Girlfriend: Ambitious.



Feature

The impact of social media on young minds

Social media is known to have both positive and negative influences on young people, as their minds are still developing and impressionable. While the benefits of social media are celebrated as they allow for people all over the world to become more interconnected and have access to various educational platforms, it is important to be aware how social media can be harmful to young children.

As previously mentioned, children are more easily influenced by social media than adults are. The content of the media can greatly affect their behaviour and educational mindset, and these effects often result in subconscious day-to-day changes within their lifestyle. As young people are usually very active on social media, they are often exposed to society's unrealistic standards of beauty, success,

and lifestyle, which can result in poor body image or low self-esteem.

Exposure to harmful and inappropriate content posted on social media platforms negatively impacts their behaviour as most children may see this type of content and think that it is okay to act in a way as an adult may act. People using social media will often make someone feel good by liking, sharing or saving their posts. This desire for external and social validation can become harmful, especially if explicit content receives positive feedback, as young people will then participate in these inappropriate activities. Children and adolescents are in that stage where their decision-making skills are still developing, and they lack the maturity level of an adult. Therefore, the disclosure of bad behaviour can lead to them not being aware of the consequence of such actions.

Furthermore, social media can also affect education, because if a child gets ad-



dicted to being on social media, it can prevent them from focusing on their academics. In the era of social media, comparison culture is heavily promoted. Hence, if a child sees people online living the life that they would like to live, they may end up comparing themselves to them, as well as to their peers in school. Additionally, cyberbullying needs to be acknowledged as it is facilitated by social media and can cause mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety, which can affect the development of a child. Moreover, addiction to these apps can deprive them from sleep, which may result in a decline in their academic performance in school.

Nevertheless, social media is not all bad. If used in a non-harmful way, it can motivate children in various ways as educational content is trending more on social media, which can encourage young people to be motivated to learn. Another positive aspect about social media is that people use their platform to express how they have overcome difficult times and share how they changed for the better, serving as an inspiration for young minds. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and be aware of both the beneficial and harmful sides of social media on the lives and minds of young people.



The impact of technology on families and relationships

BY ARTI BULLAND

We live in a digitalized world today, and there are many impacts of technology that have changed the way people are living now compared to the past. Technology has transformed human relationships without a doubt, influencing how we communicate, connect and relate with one another. The effect of technology on these relationships is complicated, with both positive and negative consequences.

To begin with, the positive effect of technology on relationships is that technology has revolutionized communication, breaking down geographical barriers and enabling instant connectivity. It has brought people so close together. We can be anywhere across the globe and be able to communicate and connect with our family and friends without having to cross any borders. Social media platforms, messaging apps and video calls have allowed people to stay in contact and maintain connections around the world. In the past, physical distance often posed a significant challenge to maintain close family ties. However, with technology advances such as video calls, whether among family or friends, they can now easily share real

time moments despite the fact of being miles apart or on different continents. Technology has created a virtual closeness that removes physical barriers.

However, despite the positive impacts of technology on human relationships, there are a few negative aspects that also have an effect on our interpersonal relationships. People nowadays do not live in the moment with their loved ones, but instead find it more important to prioritize sharing and posting those moments on social media platforms. This has influenced how people interact with the world around them. The positive effect of social media allows people to connect with each other and stay updated as it acts as a platform for sharing interests; however, it can interfere with real-life moments and relationships. Some individuals may become overly focused on capturing the perfect photo or thinking of a caption to make their post ideal, rather than fully immersing themselves in the present moment and enjoying it. This can have an impact on the quality of face-to-face interaction with their loved ones.

Another effect of technology on



families is the using of phones or other devices during meals, which reduces communication and the quality time being spent with family members. The dinner table has always been considered a place for families to come together, share experiences, and engage in conversations. However, the disruption of screens into this space often leads to a disconnection among family members. Instead of having open conversations or sharing your experience of the day, individuals have become engaged in their own virtual worlds.

Therefore, it is very important and

essential for individuals to have a balance between their virtual and face to face life. While social media is an important way of staying connected with people, it is important to know its impact on personal relationships. When people are fully engaged in the present moment without the distractions of screens, it can add so much more meaning to our interpersonal relations and more memorable experiences with the people you love. Overall, it is finding the right balance or equilibrium between the digital world and real life aspects of life.

HOW TO GROW YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

BY MAKAYLA COOKS

Social media has its pros and its cons; nonetheless, engaging oneself and uncovering the many creative social media platforms that the internet has to offer by growing your social media presence can expose you to amazing opportunities such as awards, recognition, and a stable source of income. With that being said, here are some tips on how to successfully broaden your social media platform:

1: Be active

Being active online daily already gives you the upper hand in growing your social media presence, as tuning into the main streamed apps, such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, exposes you to the latest trends and events, keeping you up to date. However, aside from “ghostly” interactions, being active does not only entail one-way interactions such as liking and following, but consistent activity also includes posting.

2: Posting and audience

By posting on social media, your following increases more than usual due to the use of hashtags, your unique authenticity, your post being re-shared, and the type of audience you are particularly targeting. As posting regularly is not in your normal routine, planning a posting/event calendar and researching the utmost best posting time rates can help regulate and coordinate your new hobby with your day to day life.

3: Your goals

As I previously stated, your following tends to grow once you continuously post selected content. There are plenty

of interesting and indifferent topics, so now it is your turn to stand out, as it will showcase what distinguishes you from the rest. If not, the option is also yours to speak on something widespread, with a bit of an authentic twist for better exposure. It is now your task to choose what interests you the most and to stay on brand with it. Being consistent in one topic in particular helps keep the attention of your already designated audience.

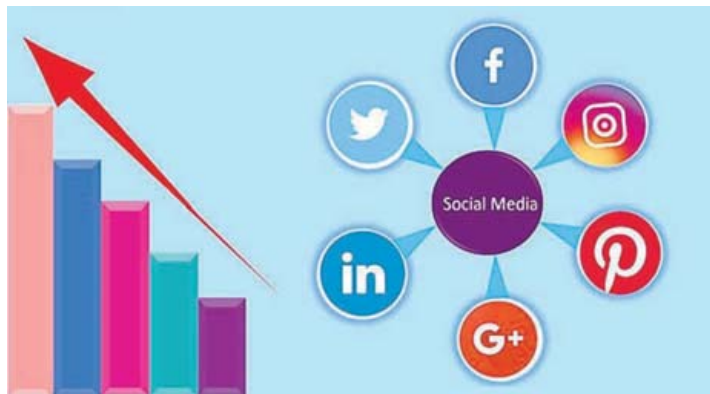
4: Becoming an influencer

On the more “professional” side, growing rapidly online can be achieved by becoming an influencer. With the task of being an influencer, not only do you grow socially but also knowledge-wise, as influential tasks mainly involve knowing a great deal about marketing. For example, people with a great amount of following help to expand a brand’s customer community by collaborating for a percentage of money, or even for free.

As a result to uplifting and marketing their product in a fun and engaging way to influence and persuade the audience, you receive an equal amount of money, while also persuading and influencing your audience to purchase their products. Thus, developing your “brand” as an influencer is a great way to pave your path to a growth in social presence, especially if you have an eye for marketing.

5: Have fun

Nevertheless, aside from using social media as a main focus, a more mellow, yet still effective way to grow in



the media, is to have fun. As we are all in our youth and in the process of discovering who we are with no help from the burden of school, using social media can serve as a fun escape from reality. With partaking in fun activities, such as trending challenges, for example testing weird food combos, dance choreography, and the tortilla challenge, you and your audience are guaranteed to have a blast as you genuinely react and experience the fun,

whilst they happily watch and enjoy as well.

Furthermore, another fun social activity known as vlogging can be done by simply obtaining a quality and affordable 4K digital camera for as low as \$120 online and recording or gaining footage regarding your daily routine, fun vacations, adventures or anything you’d like to share. Vlogging also gives you the opportunity to relive memories by re-watching your re-

cordings and experiencing some lovely nostalgic moments.

All in all, if you are looking for a new hobby this year that is guaranteed fun and engagement, the task of growing your social media presence might be the right thing for you. Additionally, remember that buying followers is easy, but as rightfully put by Tara Nicholle Nelson, “You cannot buy engagement, you have to build engagement.”

Feature

The Effects of Text Messaging on Teen Literacy

BY JESSICA SU

Text messaging (also known as texting) is among the most popular forms of communication in the world today. In spite of this popularity, and perhaps because of it, concerns have been raised about its influence on the literacy skills of young people.

With children's increasing use of mobile phones, one well-known feature of children's text messages is that they do not always adhere to conventional written language rules, but use instead a register that is called textese. This register is a form of abbreviated written – or actually typed – language that is characterized by the omission of words and the use of textisms, instances of non-standard written language.

You could say that textism is the unofficial language of texting, characterized by the following:

- The use of abbreviations, initials, and acronyms: "Wyd?" means "What (are) you doing?"
- The use of letter and number homophones: Instead of spelling out "tonight," you could simply say "2nyt."
- The use of typographic symbols and emojis: By now, everyone is familiar with emojis. Aside from these, typographic symbols are used, like "zzz" to mean "sleep or boring" and "xo" or "xoxo" to mean "hugs and kisses".
- Letter repetition for emphasis: Ever got a text that said "noooooo" when you texted someone with unbelievable news?
- Word contraction, clipping, and shortening: "C u 2mrw" instead of "see you tomorrow."
- Stylized spelling: "please" has turned into "plz."



- Phonetic replacement: "ur" instead of "your."

In the last decade, a number of studies have been conducted focusing on children's text message writ-

ing and use of textese. This is due to the assumption that characteristics of textese may leak into children's general writing, ultimately resulting in language deterioration. Understandably, with the average American teen spending about nine hours a day glued to their phone, it's not crazy to think that all that texting is bound to affect the way they read and write in some way.

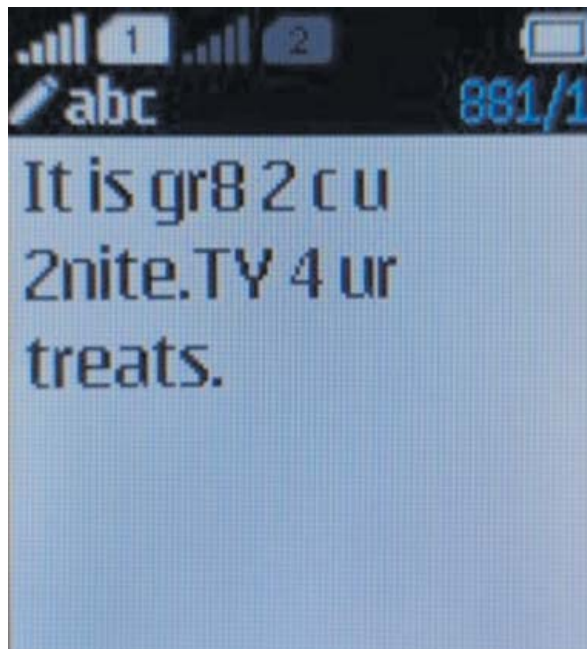
Some studies have indeed found negative associations between the frequency of use of textese and measures of spelling and other tasks measuring abilities related to literacy, such as verbal and non-verbal reasoning. It is important to note, however, that correlation does not imply causation. While these studies show an association between textese use and certain language-related skills, it is not clear whether textese use directly causes a decline in spelling or reasoning abilities. Other factors, such as individual differences in cognitive abilities, educational backgrounds, and overall language exposure, may also play a role in these associations.

On the other hand, there are studies that present a contrasting view, suggesting a positive relationship between children's use of tex-

tese and their spelling and literacy abilities. In the majority of studies, accuracy of reading textese and speed of reading and writing textese were positively associated with children's spelling, reading, and non-word reading scores. The positive associations reported in these studies could be interpreted in a few ways.

One possibility is that children who are proficient in textese may also possess strong overall language skills. Additionally, the act of engaging with textese may have some positive transfer effects on certain language-related abilities. For example, the decoding skills required to interpret abbreviations and acronyms might enhance phonological awareness and word recognition.

All in all, the relationship between textese use and literacy is complex and may vary depending on various factors, including individual differences, educational environments, and the overall linguistic and cognitive abilities of the participants. As technology and communication patterns continue to evolve, researchers will likely continue to investigate how different forms of digital communication impact language development and literacy skills in diverse populations.





A Roadmap to the High-Demand Jobs of the Future

BY SUHANI NATHUMAL

With each passing year, there is a rapid increase in technological, healthcare, and sustainability advancements. As the number of times we mark X on our calendars increases, so does the growth of these vital fields, and it is crucial that we as humans grow alongside them. For many of those who are unsure of what career to pursue, here is a list of job choices that will be in high demand in the future:

●Data Privacy Officer (DPO)

Like everything, the advancement of technology also has its downsides, such as creating false images, hacking into accounts, and leaking information. Therefore, many organizations are now investing in Data Privacy Officers as a reaction to the concerns regarding data security and privacy. The prime job of a DPO is to design and implement privacy policies, carry out routine audits, and guarantee adherence to data protection laws.

●Renewable Energy Technician

As sustainability for organizations has become more and more popular, the demand for renewable energy technicians is booming. Solar panels, wind turbines, and other renewable energy systems are installed, maintained, and repaired by them. A strong background in physics and

mathematics is recommended if this is the chosen pathway.

●Artificial Intelligence (AI) Ethicist

Our day-to-day life heavily revolves around artificial intelligence (AI). We are constantly using it to write emails, come up with ideas, schoolwork, and much more. Individuals who work as AI ethicists are the moral compass that makes sure that AI behaves morally and in line with human values. They negotiate the tricky intersection between technology and ethics, tackling issues with accountability, privacy, and bias.

●Climate Change Analyst

As climate change becomes a fast-rising priority, the need for climate change analysts has increased. Climate change analysts are responsible for the evaluation of environmental data. They offer insights into the effects of policies and initiatives related to climate change, as concerns about the phenomenon grow. Additionally, they work hand-in-hand with communities, governments, and organizations to create mitigation and adaptation plans for climate change.

●Virtual Reality (VR) Designer

Virtual reality provides an inside look to a different reality crafted by

the hands of virtual reality designers. These designers dedicate their living to create digital experiences by weaving virtual elements into the real world. Their projects range from video games to applications for education.

●Genomic Counsellor

Genomics is the study of all the genes found within an organism's body. It aids in our comprehension of how these genes combine to form living things, such as humans, animals and plants. This study can be used to detect future health issues and create medications customized to a person's needs. Due to the growth in this department, genomic counsellors are required to assist patients in

understanding their genetic information, evaluating their risks, and making well-informed health decisions.

The fast changing fields of science, technology, and sustainability are creating a wide range of interesting career opportunities. As the world revolutionizes, it is important that we adapt and prepare the youth for these career choices. These jobs mentioned above represent a glimpse into the diverse and dynamic future of the workforce. Pursuing education and gaining relevant experience in these fields will position individuals to thrive in the evolving job market, where innovation and adaptability are key.



Feature

BE AWARE AND DEVELOP YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT!

BY IVAN WU

In this age where social media have been an integral part of everyone's lives, it is important for us to be aware of our digital footprint. A digital footprint is essentially a virtual identity where all of your activities are shared and will remain permanent if not deleted. Digital footprints can be represented in all sorts of online activity such as posts, comments or stories. Even if any of these activities are deleted, it still may be "out there" because another online user may have screenshot or recorded it into their own device.

A crucial point to know is that when you are at that stage of applying for universities or job positions, these organizations will check online social media profiles for your reputation and personal interests. Therefore, think about the power your digital footprint has:

• **First impressions and reputation**
Your online presence often

determines people's first impressions of you. It is important to maintain your online presence as positively as possible.

•Long-term effects

There may be long-term effects from your digital footprint. Posts and information you share online could come back at you, which could have an impact on both your personal and work life. It is critical to exercise caution when sharing.

These are just the two most important points to consider when using social media. Even if you have not reached that stage of applying to universities or jobs, it is very important to plan for the future and build your digital footprint positively. Here are some ways to do it.

•Post volunteering and community service

Write a post about your volunteer work, community service, or charitable endeavours. Emphasize the contributions you have made and the abilities you



have developed as a result of these experiences. This is important as it shows that you aim to find ways to improve yourself and the community.

•Participation in thoughtful conversations about current events

Talk about local and international problems that are relevant to your hobbies or field. Provide insightful commentary and participate in meaningful discussions. This shows that you have critical thinking skills

and are willing to gain knowledge in new areas.

•Sharing relevant projects and achievements

Continually post updates on your research projects, internships, academic successes, and other significant accomplishments to your social media platforms. This will help you to build a positive reputation for whoever is reviewing your profile.

In conclusion, in a highly connected world, it is es-

sential that you actively manage and shape your online presence. Keeping a clean digital record is very beneficial, whether your goals are academic or professional. You can inspire people and have a positive influence on your online community, in addition to making a good impression on universities and future employers by emphasizing your knowledge, social engagement, and commitment to self-improvement.



THE CODING CORNER: Did you know?

BY CHIRAG RAMCHANDANI

A single character or symbol can completely alter the meaning of a program. This is due to the fact that programming languages have extremely strict syntax requirements, and even the smallest error can cause the code to fail.

In the programming language Python, for example, a colon (:) is used to indicate the beginning of a new code block. The entire program will fail if a programmer forgets to include a colon at the end of a conditional statement or loop. Similarly, in languages such as C and Java, including a semicolon (;) at the end of a line of code is critical, as leaving it out can result in a syntax error.

This strict syntax requirement can be frustrating for novice programmers, but it is also one of the reasons why programming is such a precise and powerful tool. A small mistake can lead to a major bug, but catching and fixing that bug can result in a much more efficient and effective program.



HOW TO IMPROVE TEEN TIME MANAGEMENT

BY ASANTÉ PHILIPPS

During the journey of being a teenager, there is often a struggle between managing schoolwork, extracurricular activities, household chores and simply having time for yourself and friends. Well, believe it or not, the proper way to deal with those problems is proper scheduling. Learning to manage how much time you spend on what you have to do throughout the day is crucial to allowing yourself time to get more things done. Dedicating time to schedule your life can allow you to have a stress-free weekend, where you can study for a test or go out with friends without worrying about the amount of work you have to get done and hand in before midnight.

The following are some helpful tips provided on how to get yourself on time and on schedule:

1. Make a head start

When schoolwork is assigned to you, do not wait till the last minute to do it. On the day the work is assigned, start by making a schedule on when you are going to get it done so you can hand it in on time and still have time to go through it. You should also be mindful of how much time you need to put into it, so that you can tend to other activities or chores. The healthy amount of time a teen should spend on homework is around two hours a day to avoid the risk of a burnout.

2. Prioritize

When you are learning how to manage your time properly, you must not major in the minor and minor in the major. It is important to understand that you must put more time into things that can affect your life severely. Your schoolwork should always be a priority. It is also something you can easily get out of the way by putting time into it, so it does not stand in your way in the future. I encourage you to write down everything you need to get done and see which is more important and needs your undivided attention. Then plan out which days you are going to work on it, how you are going to work on it, and the time you need for it. Remember to also schedule a 30- to 45-minute break, which should help you to regenerate and be ready for your next task.

3. A to-do list

If you are a teen like me, who has a lot of things



to do, it is better to make a to-do list in order to make sure you are on time with certain tasks. A to-do list keeps you in check, so you know what you have done for the day. A to-do list also makes you feel accomplished for the progress you have achieved in one day. Making a to-do list for the following week can also allow you to relax that whole other week or get a head-start on upcoming tasks.

4. Stick to a daily schedule

If you are a teen that has repetitive tasks, then a daily schedule is for you. Set your timelines for what you need to get done before your next task. If you have any extracurriculars throughout the week, you can schedule what you need to get done before those commitments. A daily schedule can help you avoid long nights and keep you on a proper sleep schedule for school, so that you can be efficient and focused in all your classes.

5. Set suitable time limits

Time-limits are always important when setting a

schedule. Time-limits help you to not spend all day getting only one thing done. Setting time-limits allows you to get immense work and tasks done in a day or even in just a few hours. Learning not to let one task take up most of your time can be very important and essential in effective time-management. By setting time limits, you can even have time to adopt a new hobby.

As a teen who tries to manage his time, I personally find that I have seen some changes in my life now that I have learned to balance my time efficiently and have a schedule that works. I am always on time and one step ahead of my assignments. Learning how to manage your time responsibly is crucial for your future when you have to manage work life, college life and personal life. Putting your time into important tasks should be encouraged while making a daily schedule. Therefore, if you are struggling with getting stuff done on time, do not stress; take a moment, recollect yourself, and make a schedule that works for you.



From Engineer to Author

Marcia Robin-Stoute's Inspiring Journey in the STEM World

BY LEHAR MARATA

Marcia Robin-Stoute, the proud St. Dominic High School Alumna of the first graduating class is now an accomplished STEM educator, with a 16-year career history in the higher education sector. "Throughout my career, I have consistently advocated for increased diversity and inclusion in STEM fields," Stoute said.

Stoute teaches civil engineering classes and primarily advocates for providing opportunities for the underrepresented minorities, including women and people of colour. Some of her great achievements include securing funding for STEM projects and championing meaningful STEM-related programs. One of her many successful programs is the TSU Pre-college Engineering Summer Program, which she designed as the Director and Principal Investigator of STEM Programs.

Through such programs, Stoute has made a significant impact in promoting diversity in the STEM field and preparing future STEM professionals. As a STEM educator, Stoute is very excited for one of her many upcoming STEM-related projects; which includes exploring software applications with middle school students. She will be introducing them to software and its applications while developing their computer literacy skills.

Stoute likes to describe her journey as, "an unexpected, but transformative adventure." She started off her college journey hoping to graduate with a business major. However, destiny had other plans for her. During her first week of college, she realized that she was not satisfied with her major. Being dissatisfied, she decided to consider other programs being offered, which is when the engineering department stole her heart. Stoute was offered a scholarship, and being presented with the vast variety of majors, she decided to take this life-changing decision. Ever since that pivotal decision was made, she has become a part of the STEM world.

As an active member of the National Society of Black Engineers, she

was able to meet new people and create lifelong connections. Aside from that, she received many other opportunities including opportunities to contribute to publications and attend conferences. "My accidental entry into STEM turned out to be a fateful and rewarding detour, leading me to a realm where passion meets purpose, and where the pursuit of knowledge transforms into a lifelong journey of discovery and impact," she said.

As they say, the road to success is never easy. Choosing to start this new adventure, Stoute faced many obstacles, her main one being financial constraints. However, she decided to proactively seek solutions and ensure that she was able to complete the new adventure she had started. Stoute applied for almost every scholarship she knew of, was a student worker on campus, and maintained a high GPA, which was a requirement for most scholarships. Though this was a challenging phase, she was grateful to have gotten the opportunity to discover the power of resilience – the power of turning obstacles into opportunities.

Dr. David Olowokere, Dr. Raymobd Agbanobi, and Dr. Carol Lewis are some of the many influential mentors she has met during her STEM Journey. She said, "These mentors collectively created an environment where I felt not only supported, but also inspired to reach higher and strive for excellence. Their impact goes far beyond academic guidance; they have played an instrumental role in shaping my perspective, fostering resilience, and nurturing the confidence needed to navigate the challenges of a STEM career."

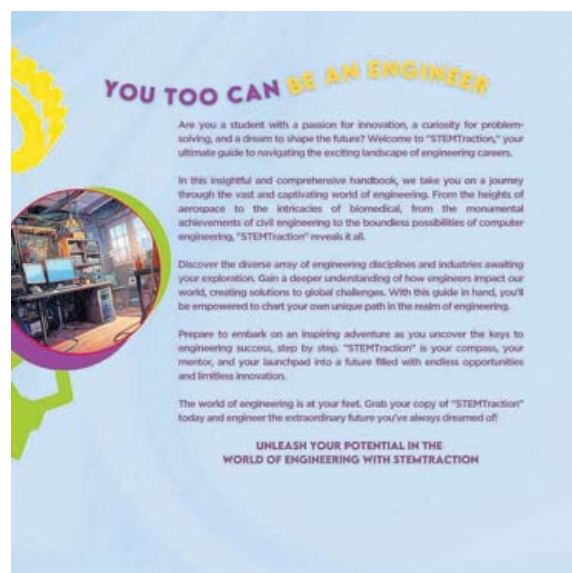
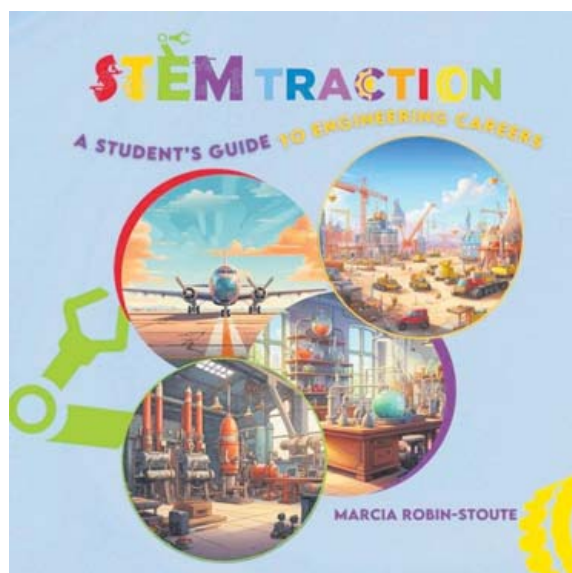
From engineer to author, how did that happen? Stoute's new book "STEMTraction: A Student's Guide to Engineering Careers" reflects her experiences as a woman in STEM. She spent time organizing her thoughts to put it all down in a concise form for her book, which was a challenging process. She used this outline to structure chapters and pick important information she needed to include so

that others could understand the depths of the engineering field. As a minority engineer, she was keen to show students from minority backgrounds that they too can excel in engineering.

Stoute's book includes many key themes and topics about the engineering field, some of them being the fundamentals of engineering, different engineering specialties, the roles of engineers, history, upcoming breakthroughs in the field, and of course promoting diversity in engineers. Through her book, she provides a holistic view of engineering, enabling students to truly understand the essence of the field and helping them determine their future paths. Stoute hopes to inspire transformative journeys, just like hers, in the minds of young people. "Ultimately, my goal is to see the youth, both in St. Maarten and beyond, embrace STEM disciplines with confidence, enthusiasm, and a clear understanding of the exciting opportunities that lie ahead. I hope "STEMTraction" becomes a steppingstone for countless individuals, propelling them toward fulfilling and impactful careers in engineering," expressed Stoute during the interview.

Throughout her journey, Stoute has always advocated for diversity in STEM, especially for women of colour. "It resonates deeply with the principles of equity, empowerment, and the belief that every individual, irrespective of their background, deserves the opportunity to thrive in STEM fields," she mentioned. She believes that it is a celebration of inclusivity, which challenges harmful stereotypes. Stoute also specifically mentioned the inclusivity of people from the Caribbean. Caribbean women carry along unique perspectives – each one with their own which has been influenced by their culture and experiences. Moreover, inclusivity aids in bridging geographic and cultural gaps, which results in a greater contribution and fostering diversity.

Stoute wishes to offer some advice for youth who plan to pursue STEM careers: Cultivate curiosity,



embrace challenges, find a support system, create networks, be resilient, and most importantly have fun! She also said, "Remember, the STEM community is vast and welcoming. Your unique perspective and contributions are invaluable. Best of luck on your exciting jour-

ney into the world of STEM!"

If you would like to contact Marcia Robin-Stoute, she can be reached at info@STEMTraction.com and you can check out her page at www.stemtraction.com