Digital Habits Checkup
(Check, Choose, Challenge, Boost & Track)

A protocol to help students rethink and revamp their digital habits.

Check -- Check and take stock of your digital habits – all the tech habits that are part of your life right now. Habits can be positive, negative, or both. Brainstorm and list as many of your habits as you can. Draw/insert an emoji(s) next to each habit to represent how it usually makes you feel.

Choose -- Choose one digital habit from the list you created that is something you want to change or try to do differently. Why is it important that you change this habit?

Challenge -- Make a plan for how you would like to try a personal challenge to your habit for a set period of time (e.g., one or two weeks). Consider when you will do something different and what you can do instead while you're doing your challenge. (When you're trying to change a habit, it's not enough just to say what we won't do. We also have to come up with something to do instead!)

Boost -- What are some ways you can give your new habit a "boost" and make it easier to do? If you're trying to break a bad habit, what are some things you can do so that you don't slip back into old ways?

Track -- Keep track of your progress. Each day, answer two questions: How's it going with your challenge today? What made your challenge hard or easy today?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

Based on principles from habit science, the Digital Habits Checkup helps students be alert to and take stock of their digital habits so they can make positive changes that support well-being. This routine directs ongoing consideration to: the self and personal well-being. Using it repeatedly helps cultivate dispositions that support mindful digital engagement.

Application: When and where can I use it?

This activity can be used anywhere educators see a connection with their learning goals. For example, in:

- advisory period, where students are learning SEL or character education skills;
- library or media class, where students are learning about digital citizenship and technology;
- health class, where students are learning about healthy and unhealthy lifestyle choices.

This activity is flexible! Students can complete the Habits Check-up in a short period of time (e.g., 15 minutes). Or, you can extend the steps with more discussion and expand the activity so it's a special unit with follow-ups as students track and revamp their habits over a week or month.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

To facilitate this activity, make a copy of the **Digital Habits Checkup: Student Handout** which provides scaffolding for each of the steps of the protocol. A tip for building interest before you dig in is to sharing this example related specifically to smart phone and computer "notifications." To begin, have students turn up the volume on their phones and ask each student to document the notifications during a single class period.

Share your experience with this thinking routine on social media using the hashtags #PZThinkingRoutines and #DigitalHabitsCheckup .

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Digital Habits Checkup

The example provides a rich jumping-off point for conversations about the volume of digital disruptions. Or, start off by discussing persuasive design more generally and discuss how the features of tech (e.g., infinite scroll, notifications) are intentionally designed to capture and hold our attention (see The Center for Humane Technology's *Persuasive Technology* resource for reference).

In the first step (*Check*), consider using a digital board like Linoit or Padlet to have students share digital habits and react to/build on their classmates' reflections.

For the *Choose* step, consider creating a list of the examples students are selecting for themselves. If students are having trouble getting started or crafting a statement about what behavior they want to do differently, consider providing them with the sentence starters "I want to start doing xx …" or "I want to stop or do less of xx …". These starters will model how it's helpful to include the intended or hoped for or changed action that the student is intending to take around the digital habit.

For the *Challenge* step, support students to name specific details of their challenge. What are they going to do (or not do) and when? Use a sentence starter like "*I will …*". Consider ending this step with a discussion of potential barriers or things that might get in the way of actually succeeding with their challenge. Propose the question: *Could you commit to trying your challenge for three days (or one week or one month)? If not, why not? How could you revise your challenge so you pick something that feels both helpful and doable?*

For the *Boost* step, encourage students to get specific about what they can do to be successful at sticking to their Challenge. What will they do instead of their current habit? What could they do to help themselves stay on track? Depending on the specific challenge, examples might include unfollowing certain accounts, setting screen time limits, using a media-use tracking app like Moment or ZenScreen, committing to tech-free wind down time, charging devices in not easy to reach places (outside a teen's room), setting device-free times in one's schedule, or adding a health or meditation app.

Let them know that the class or group will return to the "boost" step two to three days after they begin their challenge. They can do this individually or with a partner. They might find that their current plan is a good one, but they need to take a few extra boost steps to help themselves stick to the changed behaviors.

For the final *Track* step, encourage students to select a format or tool for how they plan to track their progress on their hoped for behavior change. Examples of such formats or tools include using a journal or daily log, writing a blog, or creating a documentary-style video diary. If time permits, use a few minutes each day to have them reflect with a partner on how it's going or to share as a group. You can use tracking as an opportunity to help students reflect and assess how their challenge is going and whether or not they need to revise their challenges as needed.

The key is to help them recognize that they have the power to identify digital habits they don't like and change them. Remind the group that sometimes starting with a very small goal is a good first step and way to find some initial success. Even just cutting back a negative habit or increasing a desirable habit a little bit can be a meaningful start.

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