

User Profile: Bridget

Bridget is almost 12 and a sixth grader at Perry Hall Middle School. She lives in a Baltimore suburb with her mother and father in a single-family home; her older sister is away at college. Both of Bridget's parents work in the computer industry, although her mother's original background is in the fine arts.

A Day In The Life

Bridget wakes up every morning at 7:00 and gets dressed—she lays her clothes out the night before. She needs to be ready to catch the bus at 7:40. When she gets to school, she waits with her friends in a courtyard until they are called in for Homeroom. Her classes include Science, World Culture, Language Arts (writing, grammar, and novel-reading), Lunch, Reading, Math, Music Gym, Art and Health. When Bridget gets home she relaxes for about half an hour, sometimes watching TV, then does homework until dinnertime. She sometimes asks her parents for help or IMs classmates with questions about homework. After dinner, she continues her homework if she needs to and may practice piano or saxophone. She goes to bed by 9:30.

Goals & Tasks

Bridget's goals are to complete her homework and stay organized. Her homework includes reading, answering questions about and summarizing what she's read, keeping journals, doing math problems, and completing projects for World Cultures and Science by doing research and constructing physical displays. To accomplish these tasks she needs to be able to understand her reading and other concepts, find the information she needs, and incorporate what she's learned into her assignments. To stay organized, she keeps track of her schedule and materials in a large binder.

Physical Environment

For assignments that require her to use a computer, she uses the family computer in the kitchen (*top image*). The area is kept neat. The kitchen is very large, eat-in, and opens onto the living room. The computer desk itself is an island built into the kitchen, with open space on all sides. Sometimes people are watching TV or her parents are working in the kitchen, but this doesn't bother her.

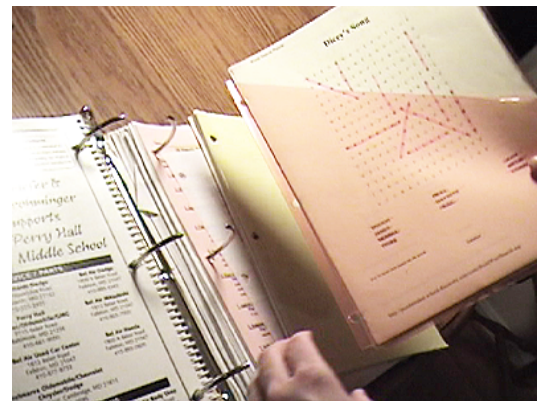
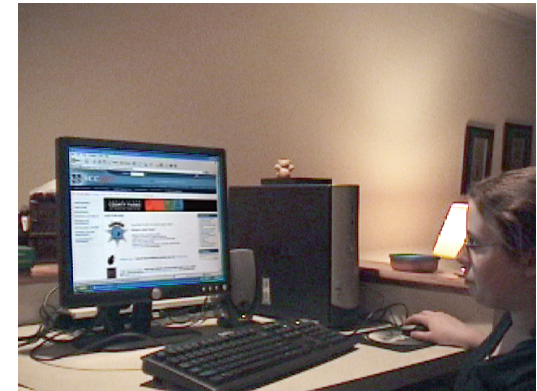
Sometimes Bridget does homework on the kitchen table, but she does most of her non-computer homework at her desk in her room (*center image*). Her bedroom and desk are neat and organized—she showed us how she filed her markers, crayons, pencils, paper, binder, CDs, and other items. There were bookshelves on the wall above a reading chair in the corner.

Use Scenario

To find information online and incorporate it into an assignment, Bridget starts by performing a search from her Yahoo!igans! Homepage. To determine which results she wants to use, she looks for information aimed at her age group, reliable sources (such as universities or public institutions), and sites that are kept up to date. She also knows that a result showing her search term(s) in bold is more relevant.

Bridget admitted that Yahoo!igans! gives her more limited search results, but it's easy to use first because it's her homepage. She also uses Google, including its advanced search to filter out "bad stuff" (something she was taught at school).

If she finds information she needs, she may copy and paste it into a Word file, then reword it.



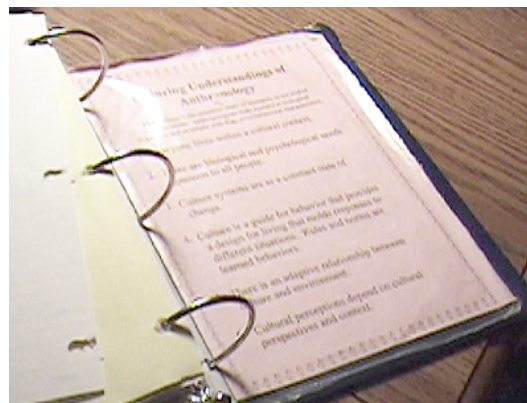
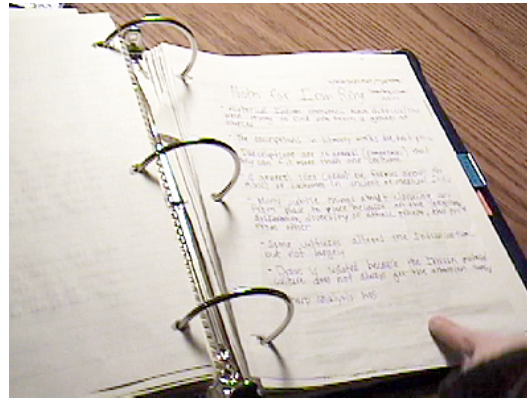
User Artifact: Bridget's Binder

Bridget keeps her school life organized in one very full 3", three ring binder. She described the binder as essential, and claimed that every student had one, or two smaller ones (one for morning classes, and one for afternoon classes, which would be traded off at lunch). She seemed amused about the ritual of having to lug around such a large thing.

The front of Bridget's binder contains a pouch for holding pens, pencils, and other small items. Following that is a school-format calendar (*top image*): it has five rows, representing Monday through Friday, which are divided into eight columns, representing the eight periods in her school day. Bridget uses the calendar to record test days, assignment due dates, and other activities. She marks off completed periods and deliverables by coloring in their respective boxes (there is no color scheme to this practice, despite appearances in the video stills).

After the calendar, the binder is divided into tabbed sections by class. A section may contain a variety of items including returned (graded) homework, tests and quizzes; assignment sheets, in-class exercises, handouts, and notes (*center image*). A few sections have plastic insert pockets for holding special items (*bottom image*: "Enduring Understandings of Anthropology"): "Important stuff goes in plastic," she told us.

Bridget also told us that to further keep things under control, she has to "clean out" the binder every once and a while, culling any old materials she no longer needs.



Key Findings: Bridget

1. Bridget struck us as very organized. Like the binder, her desk in her room is also compartmentalized, with specific areas designated for specific school supplies.
2. Bridget demonstrated a fairly sophisticated process of finding information on the internet using search engines (Yahooligans! and Google), and deciding which sources would serve her needs. She needs and wants more than "kiddie results", but at the same time the ability to filter out "bad stuff."
3. Although she didn't cite specific examples of finding and using books for the assignments she told us about, Bridget told us her general strategy for using the library for work and pleasure-reading: she will scan summaries on jacket flaps or back covers to decide which books might be relevant. She will then (by her admission) check out many more books than she can actually read, take them home, and go through them more carefully to determine which ones she really wants or needs.
4. Bridget had a strong sense of what schoolwork was meaningful to her. For example, she told us she liked math last year but not this year, because this year she felt both the teacher and the book didn't explain things well. She likes to read, but expressed frustration with "old" books like *Tom Sawyer* and *The Hobbit* because of the language they used and because they "went on and on." In contrast, she spoke with enthusiasm about projects she found interesting, such as her circuit board and ancient Chinese dynasty projects (*see matrix*)—these involved researching, creating, and presenting, and were more sociable endeavors which required the involvement of parents or classmates.

User Profile: Eric

Eric is 13 and in 7th grade at Dunbarton Middle School. He lives in Towson with his mother, father, and older brother in a single-family home; another brother is away at college. His father is a former psychiatrist who now runs a small software company; his mother is an administrator at the company. His mother is Chinese and his father Chinese-American. Everyone in his family likes to read and shares books, which can present a problem when the latest Harry Potter novel arrives. Eric is a bright kid whose interest does not appear to be fully engaged by school.

A Day In The Life

Eric gets up and gets ready for school. After a 30-minute bus ride, he arrives at school and waits with his classmates in the cafeteria until they are called for Homeroom. He puts his things in his locker, listens to school announcements, and begins his day. His classes include Technology Education, Science, Latin, Language Arts (English), Art, Math, World Cultures, Gym, and Music. His favorite "class" is Lunch. He finds Math repetitive and frustrating because it is too easy. Sometimes Eric stays after school to work on homework or participate in Chess Club.

Eric usually has 1-2 hours of homework to do. He starts at 4:30 or 5:00 and tries to finish before dinner, but sometimes needs time after, particularly when a project is due the next day. Although he uses his new iMac for all of his essay and creative writing homework, he mostly uses it for games, non-school-related web surfing, and music. When he's done with his homework, Eric often spends time playing video games and watching basketball on TV with his brothers, or reading.

Goals & Tasks

Eric's main goal is to finish his homework quickly, something he says he is able to do most of the time. His most challenging assignments come from Language Arts, where he has to interpret text passages and write poems or essays in response. For school assignments, Eric is not asked to do research either online or at the library. He is expected to use his schoolbooks, notes from class, and "any other knowledge you may have." He sometimes asks his father for help with difficult passages (such as from Shakespeare). To complete an assignment, he needs to read and understand the relevant passage(s), keep track of new vocabulary words and other notes, and integrate material from those notes into his written response.

Physical Environment

Eric has his own bedroom, which is where he does most of his homework; he sometimes reads in the living room. He has his own iMac on a table near the bed (*top, bottom images*); a computer game image dominates the screen desktop, which contains a few icons organized in two columns. A printer and bins containing school supplies sit on top of a desk next to his computer (*center image*). Bookshelves extend from one corner along part of a wall. The room is a little cramped due to all of the furniture, but it is private. When he works on an assignment, he often spreads his notebook and/or schoolbooks on the bed, where he can easily refer to them from his desk. Eric said he had a binder in which he kept his schoolwork (it may be the one on the printer in the center photo) but declined to share his materials with us.



User Profile: Eric, continued.

Use Scenario

For a typical Language Arts assignment, Eric uses post-it notes to mark relevant passages in his textbook and to make handwritten notes about vocabulary and meaning. While working on an assignment, he spreads his binder (with notes from class) and schoolbook (with post-it notes) on his bed where he can easily refer to them. Other than copying notes from these sources, he does all of his writing directly into the computer. He deletes and rewrites frequently within the same document (that is, he does not save drafts). He may print out a copy for his father to proofread. He usually hands in a printed copy of his work, but occasionally emails it directly to the teacher.

Key Findings: Eric

1. For school assignments, Eric is not expected to do research on line or at the library. He uses schoolbooks, notes from class (which may be written in his binder or on post-it notes in his books) and “any other knowledge you may have.” Therefore, his resources for writing a paper (notes, books, knowledge) are typically located outside of the computer environment.
2. Eric uses post-it notes to mark important passages in his books and to make notes on vocabulary and meaning. He then copies these notes either into his binder or directly into an assignment on his computer.
3. When working on an assignment, Eric spreads his materials – his binder and books with any notes – on his bed where he can easily refer to them from his desk. He goes back and forth from these materials to his computer as he writes.
4. Eric writes directly into his computer without using any scratch paper (for example to organize ideas). He deletes and rewrites in the same document without saving drafts, and only prints out a copy for his father to proofread or when he is ready to hand in the assignment.

Question/Followup	Bridget	Eric
<p>Would you start by showing me/telling me about a homework assignment that requires you to do some reading? (If possible, we want to see the assignment)</p> <p><i>Would you tell me about this homework?</i></p> <p><i>What do you do first in order to do this homework?</i></p> <p><i>What reading do you need to do in order to do this homework?</i></p>	<p>For Science class, Bridget had to research an animal and create 20 questions and answers to be displayed on a circuit board. On the board, the user takes a lead attached to a question and touches it to a metal spot next to the answer they think is correct—if it is, the circuit is completed and turns on a green light. To complete the research for the project, Bridget went online to find information. She also got a book from the library.</p>	<p>Eric is assigned books to read in his Language Arts class. He is required to write responses to the text, such as a poem about a theme in the book. He also must complete packets of questions.</p>
<p>Where can you find the information you need to do this homework?</p> <p><i>Where will you look for it? Can we watch?</i></p>	<p>First Bridget went to her Yahoo!igans! Homepage and performed a search on “ladybugs”, her animal. She explained how she selected what she felt were the most reliable results: She passed over a site about insects in general, another about the book “James and the Giant Peach”, and another that seemed to be about a magazine. She finally chose a site that had been made by a public park, pointing out that it had the word “ladybug” bolded in Yahoo!igans!’ search results. Bridget admitted that Yahoo!igans! gives her more limited search results, but it’s easy to use first because it’s her homepage.</p> <p>She commented that she tried to avoid sites that were aimed at very little kids, and would check Last Modified dates on pages to see if they were current.</p> <p>She then showed us how she used Google’s advanced search to filter out “bad things” (something she was taught at school), then searched again on “ladybugs”. She said, “I usually go to the first one [search result] because they’re sorted by relevancy.” She showed us a site she had visited which was produced by a university: “It’s the University of Kentucky so I guess it’s reliable.”</p>	<p>Eric gets most of the information he needs from his notes and the assigned book(s). He is not required to use the library or the internet for researching his papers. Instead of research, students are told to “use any other knowledge you have.”</p>

<p>If you need to find a book, how will you (or did you) find the book?</p> <p><i>Where did you get/find the book?</i></p> <p><i>How do you decide which book to use?</i></p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>What do you do with the information once you get it from the book? Can we watch?</p> <p><i>How do you record the information you get from the reading?</i></p>	<p>Bridget decided to take most of her information from the park's site, where she found a quiz about ladybugs. She copied and pasted the questions that fit her assignment's criteria into MS Word, then reworded them.</p>	<p>Eric marks pages he needs to refer to with post-it notes. These notes might contain information about a vocabulary word or a quote he needs to explain. He sometimes copies information from his post-it notes into his binder (notebook) or into his computer. When he's ready to write, he lays out his binder and the book(s) on the bed beside his desk and goes back and forth between his notes and entering information on the computer.</p>
<p>Where do you usually do this kind of homework?</p> <p><i>What do you like about doing homework there?</i></p> <p><i>What physical objects do you use while you do your homework?</i></p> <p><i>(Note physical environment, its organization, and contents.)</i></p>	<p>For the ladybug project and other assignments that require her to use a computer, she uses the family computer (a relatively-new Windows PC) in the kitchen. The computer area was kept neat. The kitchen is very large, eat-in, and opens onto the living room. The computer desk itself is an island built into the kitchen, with space on all sides. Sometimes people are watching TV or her parents are working in the kitchen, but she told us this didn't bother her—she said that there was “not much” going on. Friends on IM are a potential distraction but she sets her “away message” to indicate she's doing homework or in the shower.</p> <p>Sometimes she does homework on the kitchen table, but she does most of her non-computer homework at her desk in her room. Her bedroom and desk are neat and organized—she showed us how she filed her markers, crayons, pencils, paper, binder, CDs, and other items. There were bookshelves on the wall above a reading chair in the corner.</p>	<p>Eric's computer desk is in his bedroom. He has his own computer, an iMac he got a few months ago. He also has his own printer. Previously he had to use his brother's computer, which is in the kitchen. While Eric has the privacy of his bedroom, the arrangement of the furniture makes it a little cramped, and the room as a whole is a little cluttered.</p> <p>Eric has the option to write out his homework by hand, which he does only if he's “stuck at school.” He commented that when writing he erases and rewrites a lot, which is easier to do on the computer.</p>

<p>When do you usually do your homework?</p> <p><i>How long does it take?</i></p> <p><i>Do you finish it all at one time?</i></p> <p><i>If you don't, what do you do with your books, papers, whatever, in between?</i></p> <p><i>When you come back, how can you tell where to start?</i></p> <p><i>Is there anything you usually do before or during or after you work on this kind of homework assignment? Can we see?</i></p>	<p>Bridget starts her homework about half an hour after she gets home from school. She has homework in every subject, every day. It usually takes her an hour and a half to do her homework, sometimes longer. Sometimes she can get it all done before dinner, and sometimes she can't.</p> <p>Bridget proudly showed us her 3" binder, which contains her schedule, calendar, reading packets, notes, graded work, assignment sheets, a pouch with writing materials, handouts, etc. The binder is divided into sections by class. She carries it with her throughout the day and uses it to organize her homework at home. As she completes assignments, she crosses them out in the binder's schedule. She described the binder as a necessity and said that every student had one large or two small ones.</p>	<p>Eric has one to two hours' worth of homework a night. He usually gets his reading done in class, and starts the rest at home at 4:30 or 5:00pm. He tries to get it done before dinner, but will work after dinner if necessary, especially if the project is due the next day. Eric admitted that if given a week to work on something, he will wait until the last day or two. He estimated that it takes him forty-five minutes to write a two-page paper, and said he often finishes his homework quickly.</p> <p>Although Eric mentioned having a binder and using post-it notes, he declined to show us any of his materials.</p> <p>In addition to public school, Eric attends "Chinese School" on Sundays. His homework includes vocabulary, writing, correcting sentences, and forming new phrases. He does not use a computer for this homework.</p>
<p>What's the easiest or most fun part of your homework?</p>	<p>Bridget told us: "I like to do science homework because I like science, and for the most part, if I like the book we're reading, I like to do Language Arts, and Reading, because reading's easy...I just sort of like science—it's my favorite subject."</p>	<p>Eric likes it when he gets to do "fun stuff", like writing a response about a movie or doing a puzzle. He said his favorite subject is "lunch."</p>
<p>Did anyone help you understand your homework better?</p>	<p>Bridget uses IM to find classmates to explain homework assignments if she doesn't understand something. Her father Terry helps her with math homework, and her mother Lynn helps her with grammar, Language Arts and Reading.</p>	<p>Eric prints out his written homework and gives it to his father Allen, who will correct mark grammar and wording corrections. He also helps Eric with Shakespeare. His mother Naiching helps him with the Chinese homework he receives in his extracurricular Chinese class.</p>
<p>What's the hardest part of your homework, or the part you like least?</p>	<p>Bridget told us that this year, math is her hardest and least favorite subject because neither her book nor her teacher explains things clearly.</p>	<p>Eric doesn't like his math class. He told us, "You have 100 problems that are so easy you shouldn't be doing them—and you have to show all your work! It's hard to explain something that's obvious, like why $1+1=2$."</p>

<p>What will you do with this homework when it is finished? How will you know when it is finished? Are you likely to have to make any changes to it after you finish it? Who do you turn it in to?</p>	<p>Bridget keeps some finished/graded assignments in her binder.</p>	<p>Eric usually prints out his homework and hands it in. He can e-mail it to the teacher if he has a problem with his printer.</p>
<p>Do you ever work on this kind of homework with anyone else?</p> <p><i>If so, how did you divide up the work? Did you do it together? Separately? Share books? Revise each other's work? Read each other's work?</i></p>	<p>Bridget told us about a group project on Chinese history she's finishing now. Her group had to answer eight questions and present the results on a trifold display. Since there were four kids in the group (two girls, two boys), each answered two questions (though one boy apparently didn't pull his weight!). They did most of the work at one of the boys' homes, where they had access to four laptops on a wireless network.</p> <p>Most of the information they needed came from a Baltimore County Public Library middle-school-specific portal site which they had learned about from their teacher.</p> <p>The other girl compiled all of the research in a master file, then printed it out for editing. The two boys handled the editing tasks while the two girls put together the display.</p>	<p>Eric has had several group projects, including mapping out a skateboard park and model-building. He said he and his friends do not review each others' written work. Sometimes they stay after school for these projects. When friends come over to his house to work on a group project, they spread out in an open space in the basement.</p>
<p>Can you tell me about a time when you had a really hard homework assignment that involved reading?</p>	<p>Bridget's class read Tom Sawyer and had to do "reading strategies" (summaries and personal reflections for each chapter). Bridget told us: "The book was, like...<i>old</i>...Um, and, part of it...they were using slang, and I was very confused because I didn't know what the slang meant, and then they were using big words, and I didn't understand what <i>they</i> meant, either, and I just sorta got lost."</p>	<p>In English, he finds it hard to explain what a poem means or to figure out what Shakespeare's talking about.</p>
<p>Can you tell me about a time when you had a really hard time finding information on a subject?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Eric's class had to read a book called <i>Sing Down the Moon</i>, and had to write a poem about it. The book he was issued was physically difficult to read—the signatures were put together out of order.</p>

<p>Can you tell me about a time when you maybe had so much information that it was hard to know what to write about?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Can you tell me about a time when you had information for doing some homework, but your teacher made you find different information?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>What do you like most about reading?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Does anyone else in your family read? What do they read? Where? When?</p>	<p>Bridget's mother, Lynn, likes non-gory mysteries; her father Terry likes magazines and short stories; and her older sister Katie likes adventure stories.</p>	<p>Everybody in the family likes to read. Sometimes all of them want to read the same book at the same time, like a new <i>Harry Potter</i> novel.</p>
<p>How old are you? How many brothers and sisters do you have?</p>	<p>Bridget is a few months short of 12. Bridget has one older sister, Katie, who is going on 19 and a freshman in college.</p>	<p>Eric is 13. He has two brothers. One is in a sophomore in college and the other is a freshman in high school.</p>