Scott Brady graduated from Cary-Grove High School, where he lettered in golf. He is majoring in marketing at NIU, and his current interests include academics, instrumental music, Nintendo 64, and the Dog Pound Deli. Scott plans to become a successful entrepreneur and patent holder. This critical analysis helped him develop awareness of the elements of delivering a message, including audience, ideas, and content.

Scott wrote this critical analysis in Max Hoover's English 104 course.
In his article, “Get Smarter,” Jamais Cascio finds the idea that technological enhancements are taking over the human mind and making us “stupid” irrelevant. It’s not the information overload that concerns Cascio; it’s the inability of the existing tools to handle all of the content and information about “everything.” Cascio believes there are resources to help us manage unpleasant global situations. Cascio’s argument engages Nicholas Carr’s article, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” by arguing that, despite Carr’s claims to the contrary, humans shouldn’t be afraid of the technologies Carr references. Cascio also attempts to help people figure out ways they can absorb the information to make them smarter. Cascio uses many strategies to evolve people’s thinking and get them to accept his argument by respectively responding to Carr’s essay, introducing ways that people can absorb the information successfully, and giving detailed background material on these new ways to support his claim.

Cascio begins his article by describing the last significant ice age, 74,000 years ago. Mount Toba erupted in Sumatra, triggering an ice age that only a few thousand human families survived. Though this occurred some time ago, ice ages and other global disasters are not impossible today. The fact that only a few thousand families survived during this ice age is disturbing, but Cascio believes that, if we become more informed and intelligent through new technological advances, should another ice age occur, the number of surviving families would be much greater. Today, we seem to rely more and more on newer technologies to take care of the world. As a result, Cascio takes issue with Nicholas Carr’s position, as outlined in his article, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” Carr contends that these new technologies, specifically Google, are actually making us less intelligent because people are drifting away from standard reading formats, such as printed books and other, more sophisticated ways of absorbing information.

Since Cascio’s argument contradicts Carr’s, he knows that it is necessary to address Carr’s argument in order to respectfully disagree with it. Cascio
realizes that his readers have most likely read Carr’s article, so, for his argument to be successful, he uses different strategies to somewhat alter his readers’ perspectives on the subject matter. One of the strategies Cascio employs is to reference other experts in the field.

To support his claim, Cascio summarizes Steven Johnson’s *Everything Bad for You Is Good for You*, in which Johnson implies that today’s media and technological resources have, in fact, made us smarter (par. 11). Cascio explains that, according to Johnson, television shows, video games, etc., reference broad subjects and provide interactive engagement with today’s world, which results in making people more informed about what is actually going on without their realizing it (par. 11).

After bringing Johnson into the discussion, Cascio resumes his discussion of Carr’s material and relates it to his own thoughts on the matter. Cascio states that Carr’s theory that technology and its content is making us stupid may have raised some anxiety about people’s natural ability to think: “We’re becoming so accustomed to interruption that we’re starting to find focusing difficult, even when we’ve achieved a bit of quiet. It’s an induced form of ADD—a ‘continuous partial attention-deficit disorder, if you will’” (par. 10). By saying this, Cascio shows that he partially agrees that technology can have an effect on people, as Carr and his sources believe. However, the distinction that Cascio is trying to explain is that it isn’t necessarily the content and how we absorb it that is the problem, but rather that the technological tools for handling the information are still in their youth.

Cascio believes that the future of engineering and the reform of technology will eventually bring people to “intelligence augmentation” (par. 15) When people hear “intelligence augmentation,” they think of computer chips that are lodged into their heads to deliver immediate access to extraordinary amounts of information to their minds. Obviously, this does not sound pleasant. That’s why Cascio believes there is a drug out there that can be just as effective. Cascio uses an ADD-type prescription drug called “modanifil” as an everyday enhancement to his natural ability to think, comprehend, and stay awake. He contends that the drug gives his mind greater clarity, causing him to feel, overall, more intelligent (par. 28). The only downfall to the theory that everyone should take modanifil, or any form of an ADD drug, is that it may be viewed among society as drug doping the human mind. While it may seem unlikely that an entire nation would take a drug to feel smarter and stay awake longer with more clarity, Cascio believes that it is necessary because the people who do not take advantage of this beneficial drug will always be falling behind those who do.
Cascio uses modanifil as a specific example because he is a user of the drug and is able to safely use it in his study as a sufficient, reliable source of enhancement: “The change was subtle but clear, once I recognized it: within an hour of taking a standard 200-mg tablet, I was much more alert, and thinking with considerably more clarity and focus than usual. This isn’t just a subjective conclusion” (par. 28). Cascio’s use of his own experience is an effective strategy because it establishes ethos and bolsters his credibility. In saying, “This isn’t just a subjective conclusion,” Cascio implies that his experience with the drug will likely be true for others.

Towards the conclusion of Cascio’s essay, he argues that the knowledge people will eventually be able to carry will be much more effective in difficult decision-making situations and will support more complex analyses of information, skills that are beneficial in any profession (par. 43).

Works Cited