



Rules for robots get closer

Lesson code: 1ZAR-P73A-38NB

UPPER-INTERMEDIATE+

1 Warm-up

Do you think robots will be useful in the future or will they create problems? Why/why not?

2 Key words

Match the words on the left to their definitions on the right.

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 1. extensive | a. a description of possible future events |
| 2. a function | b. having a large range |
| 3. aspects | c. particular parts of something |
| 4. potential | d. possible or likely |
| 5. risk | e. something that a machine does |
| 6. existence | f. the possibility that something bad might happen |
| 7. a scenario | g. the state of being a living thing |

3 Find the information

You are going to read an article about plans to make rules about how robots should behave in the future. Choose the best answer for each question, then scan the text on page three to check your answers.

1. What does the author of the report believe we are on the edge of?
 - a. a dangerous era
 - b. a robot revolution
 - c. discovering how to make robots that can feel
2. What does the report suggest that all robots should have?
 - a. an ID tag
 - b. an instruction manual
 - c. a kill switch

3. What should countries of the European Union do if robots take people's jobs?
 - a. introduce a basic income
 - b. increase the minimum wage
 - c. create more jobs

4. According to the report, what might robot owners have to do?
 - a. pass a test about robot rules
 - b. pay tax on their robots
 - c. get insurance to cover any damage caused by their robots

5. What does the author of the report think will happen in the future?
 - a. robots will take most of the jobs from humans
 - b. humans will learn to work together with robots
 - c. robots will become vital to humans

MEPs vote on rules for robots

23 January 2017

- 1 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have voted in favour of a report that proposes a complete set of rules as to how humans will interact with artificial intelligence and robots in the future.
- 2 In the report, the author states that she believes the world is on the edge of a "new industrial" robot revolution.
- 3 The report suggests granting legal status to robots as "electronic persons". They would have specific rights and obligations, which would include making up for any damage they may cause.
- 4 Designers would have to make robots with a kill switch in case they got out of control, meaning that their functions could be shut down if necessary, the report recommends.
- 5 At the same time, users should be able to use robots "without risk or fear of physical or psychological harm", the report says.
- 6 An employee of law firm Osborne Clarke, Lorna Brazell, was surprised by how extensive the rules were, and questioned whether robots needed legal status.
- 7 "Blue whales and gorillas don't have personhood but I would suggest that they have as many aspects of humanity as robots, so I don't see why we should jump into giving robots this status."
- 8 The rules about robots will be for the makers, designers and users of the robots as they can't be converted into machine code. Some of the rules for robot behaviour outlined in the report state that a robot should not harm a human being, should obey orders it is given, and protect its own existence as long as this does not conflict with any other rules.
- 9 Even with the new age of robots having the potential for endless prosperity, the report states that with the threat of robots taking jobs from humans, member states should think about introducing a basic income for their citizens.
- 10 The report also recognised the possibility that within a few decades, AI intellectual capacity could surpass that of humans.
- 11 This scenario, if humans are not properly prepared for it, will "pose a challenge to humanity's capacity to control its own creation and, consequently, perhaps also to its capacity to be in charge of its own destiny and to ensure the survival of the species".
- 12 Relationships between humans and robots raise questions about privacy, human dignity (particularly in the case of care robots) and the safety of humans if systems fail or are hacked into.
- 13 Consequently, research into robotics should be done in the interests of the health and happiness of humans. Designers might be required to register their robots, as well as provide access to the source code to investigate accidents and damage caused by robots. They may also need permission to build new robots from an ethical committee.
- 14 Producers or owners could be expected to take out insurance to cover any potential damage.
- 15 A European agency would be set up for robotics and artificial intelligence that would provide technical, ethical and regulatory advice.
- 16 The author of the report, Luxembourg MEP Mady Delvaux, asserted that robots will never totally replace humans in the workplace, saying instead: "There will be a cooperation between robots and humans. I imagine that everyone can learn to work together with the robots."
- 17 "A robot is not a human and will never be human. A robot can show empathy but it cannot feel empathy," she added.

Source: *rt.com, BBC News, The Guardian*

4 Checking understanding

Put 'T' (true) or 'F' (false) next to each statement below. Explain why the false answers are false.

1. Robots would have to compensate for any damage they cause.
2. Animals should be given the same legal status as humans.
3. A robot can protect itself only if it doesn't hurt a human.
4. Robots will be able to understand the rules.
5. Designers will not share code with the owners of their robots.
6. Research into robots should be done for the well-being of humans.

5 Verbs from the text

Match the verbs below to their less formal similes and then put them into the sentences.

- | | |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1. outline | a. be better than |
| 2. harm | b. describe |
| 3. pose | c. give |
| 4. surpass | d. hurt |
| 5. ensure | e. make sure |
| 6. grant | f. present |

1. Please _____ the details of the job. I want to understand exactly what I will be doing.
2. The next decade will _____ a serious challenge for people designing robots.
3. I hope the hotel will _____ my expectations. The price for the room was very expensive.
4. I don't think it's a good idea to _____ legal status to robots. They are not human beings.
5. If robots _____ a human, their owners will be held responsible for their behaviour.
6. It is important to _____ that all safety procedures are followed correctly.

6 Find the words

Find a word or phrase in the text which means....

1. suddenly decide to do something, often without thinking carefully about it (*phrasal verb, P.7*): _____
2. an amount of money given to everyone to live on (*noun, P.9*): _____
3. being successful and having a lot of money (*noun, P.9*): _____
4. ability to do something (*noun, P.11*): _____
5. making official rules about what is acceptable (*adj, P.15*): _____
6. the ability to understand someone else's feelings (*noun, P.17*): _____

7 Talking point

Discuss any of the questions below.

1. Do you think it is necessary to have rules for robots? Why/why not?
2. Do you think that robots might take a lot of jobs in the future? Why/why not?
3. Do you think that robots might start to behave badly and become out of control? Why/why not?
4. Do you think there might be a time when robots have the same rights as humans? Why/why not?