

I. History.

In the history of any civilization, from ancient Rome to Babylon, or from the ancient Greeks to the modern age, technology and its development is a slippery thing to keep track of. Before machines, there were many very important inventions, some simple objects such as bowls, knives, simple houses and clothes, and, of course, the wheel. When we think of the 20th century, the list of life-changing technological advances is almost too long to list. The discovery of electricity opened the possibility for so many inventions. The invention of the car transformed the way we live our lives; as did the invention of the computer, which also opened the door for so much more. Some of the technological discoveries and inventions of the 20th century are as life threatening as they are life giving. Perhaps the best example is the “splitting of the atom”, giving rise to nuclear power that can provide energy for whole cities, or just as easily destroy them with one of its weapons of mass destruction.

What is probably even more difficult to fathom than the new inventions themselves is the rate at which they have been invented, especially in the latter half of the 20th century. In the last couple of decades or so, for example, it is often stated that computer power doubles every 18 months. This means that computers which are merely 2 or 3 years old are slow and outdated compared to new computers on the shelves of electronics stores. One of the most incredible and life-changing technologies in recent years has been the public availability of the world-wide-web, or the internet, or just, “the net”. The net has changed the ways we communicate, do business, shop, relax, amongst many others. For leisure activities, computer games that are played over the internet are now big business, and we look on in awe at the MMORPGs that are available now.

Vocabulary

1. Civilization
2. Fathom
3. Computer
4. The “splitting of the atom”
5. MMORPG

Discussion Questions

1. Give 3–5 examples of simple, everyday items that at one point in history would have been an incredible and life-changing invention.
2. How often do you use a computer? What different things do you use one for?
3. Do you use the internet for leisure? If yes, in what ways? Do you play MMORPGs?
4. What do you think was one of the most important inventions (or discoveries) ever? Why?
5. How do you think technology will change in the next 20–30 years? What do you think might be invented in the future?

||. Internet, culture and language.

By living within a family group or a social group, we form a community. Through basic human interaction we share ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and so on. To do this, we must form basic language. In doing so, we are inventing and accumulating culture. It used to take years, generations, to update language as those authors of dictionaries who controlled this were only in academia. But in the modern era, the primary difference is not in the content but the speed at which this content can travel between members of a family or social group. So now the mechanics of social media take over. Someone in Ecuador posts what they feel is a socially relevant video. They post the video on social networking. And almost as quickly as the post is made, it has been accessed on the internet endless times and “gone viral”, meaning the post is now the most relevant thing on the net ... for the next few hours of the day, anyway.

So now, online dictionaries are nearly constantly updating new changes to words and even adding new words on a regular basis. One example of a word that has been updated with a modern meaning is ‘tablet’. What did ‘tablet’ used to refer in ancient times, and what does it refer to now? What famous tablets are there in human culture? One pair of stone tablets in particular comes to mind. But what is the commonly used definition of ‘tablet’ today? Today, ‘tablet’ most commonly refers to a wireless handheld graphical communication device which can stand alone as a basic gaming and multi-media platform. Phew! There are new and interesting words being invented and added to online dictionaries almost every day. Just pick your favorite internet dictionary and go wild!

Vocabulary

1. Language
2. Viral
3. Social Networking
4. Culture
5. Tablet

Discussion Questions

1. Explain ‘viral’ as it pertains to the internet.
2. Explain the difference between an ancient, stone tablet and a modern-day, electronic tablet.
3. Can you think of some words that you understand now but that you would not have understood 10, 15 or 20 years ago? Are all of these words related to technology?
4. In what other ways has technology changed how we live our lives?
5. What are one or two of your favorite inventions in the past few decades? Why? What do you use them for?

|||. Benefits of technology.

Call them what you like, there is an unending list of electronic devices, including televisions, DVD players, MP3 players, PCs (personal computer) and PC-related items, or just plain gadgets like cutting edge wrist watches. Of course, the list of benefits gained from these devices is quite long. Electricity, the light bulb, antibiotics, the automobile, all the way out to space flight; where families once sat around a radio the size of a modern day TV for entertainment and news, this then became the television and then the internet and, tomorrow, who knows? Nowadays, with our computers, be they servers or tablets, it seems we find ourselves doing online searches, browsing, and texting much of the time.

Technology as a whole has become, to say the least, a vital necessity. Without the automobile, buses, trains and air travel, how would we get about in our daily lives? Can we now imagine a world without the internet or television, or even the radio? How would we learn about current events and receive important messages from all levels of government? And take the refrigerators out of every kitchen and see what mayhem removing a so-called “convenience” would cause!

Vocabulary

1. Cutting edge
2. Modern convenience
3. Browsing
4. Texting
5. Modern era

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define ‘technology’?
2. Give 3–5 examples of indispensable technologies (i.e. technologies that, without which, you would find your life radically changed).
3. Give 3–5 examples of useful technologies (i.e. technologies that you don’t need but that are helpful in your life).
4. What are some of the drawbacks of some of the technologies you have discussed in this lesson?
5. What is the most important technology ever invented? Why do you think so?

IV. Are there negative aspects of modern technology?

How can technology be negative? It seems as though throughout history things have gotten better each time there was a technological advancement. Yet it can also be said that there are negative aspects of technology. For example, laziness could be one. The television, with more and more channels and content becoming available, often has parents using it as a stand-in babysitter so they can get other things done. So, instead of going outside to play, children might stay indoors and not only lazily watch TV, but also become fat just sitting there in front of it. Perhaps TV has made both parents and children lazy. Things have only gone further down this path with the internet. Games, multi-media, and social-media websites have further increased laziness. And it gets worse.

As a society, as a greater community, we used to go out and interact with one another, do things together, and help one another out in times of need. Now it seems we only go out to run an errand, and then head back home. How far away did we get from our “sanctuary”? Probably not very far; and while we were out, we probably posted, tweeted, and/or texted on our smartphones! We are well into what many see as a society of people who have stopped actually interacting with other people, except for online. There is even now a difference between our “online lives” and the “real world”. This has started some scary new trends. One is cyberbullying, which has created a generation of people that feels the anonymity of the internet allows them to say and do things they would not normally do, and sometimes cruel things.

Vocabulary

1. Errand
2. Responsibility
3. Sanctuary
4. “Real world”
5. Cyberbully

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that television has made us lazy? Why or why not? If it has made us lazy, how might we be able to rectify this?
2. What are some of the other negative aspects of modern technology? How can these be addressed?
3. Compare socializing with people online and in the “real world”. What are some of the pros and cons of both?
4. What is cyberbullying and what should be done about it?
5. What are some of the dangers of people hiding their identities online, or of being anonymous online?

V. The future of technology and society.

So, where does our society go from here? Do we become a society that draws so far away from one another that we lose our sense of community? Do we become a society that is so introverted that we can't come out from our holes easily to interact with people face to face? Whatever we believe as answers to these questions, we should check how anonymous we are happy to be. The truth may be not as anonymous as we sometimes think. Take a look, for example, at social media. Although people may assume different identities, it is not many who do so. And although others may portray certain parts of their lives in distorted ways, people still want recognition and respect for what they have done. Second, no one likes cyberbullying. Even when people think that their social media sites are not their "real life", it can nonetheless be annoying or hurtful when negative or cruel comments are received. Whether online or offline, whether on social media sites or in the "real world", society at all levels still needs to take more responsibility and be more proactive in showing proper respect to other people.

As for technology, there are some amazing things on the horizon. You can simply watch movies or read sci-fi books for more ideas about this. While 3D printers are improving every day as they find ways to replicate more and more things, devices that assist us in our homes are becoming more and more commonplace. Smartphones keep on improving in all manner of ways every few months. Now they are see-through, flexible, waterproof, and shockproof – it sounds like they are unbreakable! Computers and robots are now building cars and doing surgery. We do not yet know what else may come to be; but let's take it slow and be responsible, and ensure that we put ourselves as humans and our society first.

Vocabulary

1. Introverted
2. 3D
3. Robots
4. Smartphone
5. Surgery

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that technology has made people more introverted?
2. What are some of the pros and cons of social media sites?
3. Smartphones are all around us everywhere today and many people own one. Do you think people use smartphones too much in their daily lives?
4. If you had an operation, would you prefer a human or a robot to perform it? Why?
5. What are some of your expectations for the future of technology? What new technologies do you think will be invented?