

Hold on to your jobs, humans: The rise of the bots

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions. **AI** =artificial intelligence it doesn't have humanity

1. Do you think AI bots will replace humans in **some sectors**? Why (not)?
2. Should we restrict the types of tasks or jobs executed by AI? Why (not)?
3. **How can human interests be protected against unforeseen harm from AI technology?**

2 Reading for gist

a. Skim the article and choose the main idea.

- a. **AI** bots are producing more engaging screenplays than humans, making screenwriters anxious.
- b. **Demands** are being made to protect human screenwriters' work and future careers.
- c. AI bots are collaborating with screenwriters to aid them in better crafting dramas.

3 Key words

a. Read the definitions and find key words in the article that match them. The paragraph numbers are given in brackets to help you. Check your answers and your understanding of how the words are used by using them to complete the example sentences after each definition. Then, read the complete article to see how each key word is used in context.

1. **gradually reduce the value or level of something or become reduced in this way**

_____ (paragraph 2)

Their failure to deliver what they promised has _____ eroded _____ their clients' trust.

2. something that you say or do in an attempt to gain an advantage _____

_____ (paragraph 3)

Their reckless _____ was a success, and they were pleased with the outcome of the negotiation.

3. very small, slight _____ (paragraph 4)

Most companies in the aerospace sector had _____ profit margins than in previous periods.

4. useful _____ (paragraph 4)

You will find the latest version of our app includes a _____ 'export' feature.

5. improve using skill _____ (paragraph 4)

*She came up with the first draft of the sales pitch and got help from her team to
_____ it.*

6. put something onto a list according to its success, importance, size, etc.

_____ (paragraph 5)

Our firm _____ in the nation's top ten best companies to work for last year.

7. making something change slightly so that one particular person or thing is preferred or more likely

to succeed than another; change in this way _____ (paragraph 6)

The best design strategies _____ in favour of answering customers' needs.

8. not serious or sensible _____ (paragraph 6)

*Their business plan has been described as _____ and unrealistic – they're
not likely to get any returns in the first decade.*

9. a very small sign of something that has almost disappeared or stopped existing

_____ (paragraph 7)

*The building that was now home to low-key small businesses still showed
_____ of a more glamorous past.*

10. remaining after the rest of something has gone or ended _____ (paragraph 8)

*While management–employee relationships have vastly improved, the _____
effects of a more strained past were still evident.*

11. stop working together _____ (paragraph 11)

*A group was formed to investigate work-life balance, but it was quickly _____
when its own activities intruded into its members' private lives.*

12. use something _____ (paragraph 12)

They _____ their A-team to deal with the incoming customer complaints.

13. break into a lot of separate parts _____ (paragraph 13)

*A dozen new takeaway restaurants have popped up in the area and _____
the market that was previously dominated by two Italian restaurants.*

14. the action of reducing the level of skill that a worker needs for a job by using new technology
instead _____ (paragraph 13)

*Are robots in hospitals helping nurses to combat burnout or another example of
_____?*

Writers vs AI bots is more than a Hollywood drama

SCREENWRITERS' STRIKE REFLECTS WIDER JOB INSECURITY AND FEAR OF BEING USURPED BY TECHNOLOGY

JOHN GAPPER

- 1 A confrontation broke out in Los Angeles this week as 11,500 writers for film and television went on strike. Screenwriters know all about confrontations: they are the second acts of three-act dramas, when the main characters face a crisis that only gets resolved at the end.
- 2 "You **put** them in the worst possible position they could ever possibly **get** into in their lives," George Lucas, creator of the *Star Wars* films, once **remarked** of the second act. In this drama, writers have **seen** their pay **erode** in the streaming era, have **lost** the comfy conditions of broadcast television and **fear** their jobs will be **taken** by robots.
- 3 It is strange to find among a list of demands submitted to producers by the Writers Guild of America the call for only humans, not AI chatbots, to be allowed to "write or rewrite literary material". Drawing attention to the fact that you think software could do some of your job is a bold **gambit** but screenwriters have vivid imaginations and reasons to be insecure.
- 4 The chances are slim of ChatGPT or another artificial intelligence agent advancing rapidly enough to write *The White Lotus* or *Everything Everywhere All at Once* in the immediate future. They sometimes make things up, which could come in handy, but it requires a lot of expertise to create dramas that engage viewers, structure them into episodes and polish dialogue.
- 5 Nor is screenwriting high among the professions that economists expect to be disrupted by AI soon: entertainment and media rank only in the middle of industries likely to be affected, with administration and legal services at the top, according to Goldman Sachs. Robots are not yet beating down the doors of the writers' rooms on which Hollywood relies.
- 6 But the writers' strike reflects a wider business phenomenon: the tilting of high rewards towards a few individuals at the top end, and the disruption of traditional paths to promotion with growing responsibility for apprentices. Machines are learning more than before, while humans learn less: it is not fanciful to fear a collision between the trends in future.
- 7 There was a moment during the last writers' strike over pay in 2008 when studios let slip what was to come. Jeff Zucker, then chief executive of NBCUniversal, talked to the *Financial Times* of the "vestiges of an era that's gone by and won't return". He cited the broadcast tradition of ordering many pilot episodes, turning only some into series and gradually winnowing them down.
- 8 It was an expensive habit, but it provided steady work for writers on series that would run for 20 episodes or more, as well as residual payments for repeat showings on cable networks. Writers were employed for much of the year, and they worked not only on drafting initial scripts but also on rewriting during production and learning how dramas worked in the studio.
- 9 "Part of the job is to train the writers under you so they eventually understand what you do. How can you make a show if you've never been taught?" says Blake Masters, a writer and producer who created the drama *Brotherhood*. What felt to employers like financial extravagance meant consistent employment and long-term training and opportunity for the writers.
- 10 This diminished with the rise of streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, which preferred shorter series of six to eight episodes to give their subscribers constant novelty. They also paid highly to attract the top showrunners, such as Netflix's reported \$150m deal in 2017 with Shonda Rhimes, writer and producer of series including *Bridgerton*.

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- 11 They moved to hiring writers on short-term contracts to develop new dramas in what are known as “mini-rooms”; these are disbanded before the show is commissioned. This approach not only pays writers less and limits residuals but means they do not gain practical experience in productions; they must find themselves another mini-room project instead.
- 12 So writers cannot be blamed for fearing that studios will also exploit AI. Rhimes is not going to be replaced by a robot, but AI could be deployed in subtler ways. It is easy to imagine a future showrunner creating a story outline, getting an AI model that has been trained on thousands of scripts to rough out potential scenes, and finally giving the result to humans to polish.
- 13 The guild wants to stop its members’ work from being used to train AI. It also wants them to be paid as much for rewriting AI output as if it were theirs. Both safeguards appear fair to me: without them, studios that fragmented the work of junior writers seem very likely to use AI to do some of their work for free. Technology could unleash a vicious cycle of creative deskilling.
- 14 The strike thus has broad implications. As Erik Brynjolfsson of Stanford University has written, the crucial question for AI in the workplace is whether it gets used to augment or automate labour. The first would raise productivity (and make better drama); the second would concentrate wealth and power in fewer hands. I hope for a happy resolution, but the danger is real.



John Gapper, 5 May, 2023

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4 Understanding the article

a. Answer the questions with as much detail as possible.

1. Why are screenwriters in 'the second act'?
2. Why was submitting the Writers Guild of America's list of demands a bold move?
3. Why is it unlikely that an AI agent will write something spectacular in the immediate future?
4. According to Goldman Sachs, which sectors will most likely be disrupted by AI?
5. According to Jeff Zucker, what broadcasting tradition is a thing of the past?
6. Why was the rise of streaming platforms bad news for writers in more than one way?
7. How is AI likely to be employed in studios?
8. What is the guild demanding regarding its members' work?
9. According to the author, what would be a happy outcome of AI use in the workplace?

5 Business language – adjective + noun collocations

a. Use the nouns in the box to complete the collocations. Then, find and circle them in the article to check your answers.

contract	chance	cycle	deskilling	employment	extravagance
imagination	implications	path	question	reward	showrunner

1. vivid _____
2. slim _____
3. high _____
4. traditional _____
5. financial _____
6. consistent _____
7. short-term _____
8. top _____
9. vicious _____
10. creative _____
11. broad _____
12. crucial _____

b. Complete the sentences using the above collocations.

1. Most of my peers in the start-up world did not follow a _____ as I did, and many of them do not have degrees.
2. To design a user-friendly new product, you need to ask some _____ about user needs.
3. Many viewers have speculated that her latest film about workplace discrimination is not just the product of a _____ but is a borderline memoir.
4. Millennials have suffered the consequences of the economic recession, and around 20% have not secured _____.
5. Jack is competing with two more senior colleagues for the position, so he has a _____ of success.
6. Internships can provide a tough start to a new career, but _____ await those who persist.
7. We don't have an in-house tech team, but we hire support on _____ on an as-needed basis.
8. Corporate travel, once thought of as essential for networking and business growth, is now considered _____.
9. The new law has _____ for all companies providing tech services from abroad.
10. There has been a _____ of low pay and burnout in the sector.

6 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Which applications of AI might be positive for humans and should be promoted? Why and how?
- Besides screenwriting, which other careers are most at risk of being usurped by technology?
- Apart from unemployment, what are the other implications of creative deskilling?
- Should AI be regulated? Why and how?
- Who should be held accountable for AI regulation and responsible use?

7 Wider business theme – AI ethics and governance

- a. Read the situation below.

Situation

Imagine a not-so-distant future in which most large companies make most of their employees redundant and replace them with AI bots. Their technology is more efficient, productive, and less expensive than their flesh-and-blood peers. Companies and (many) customers are happy. But what about the humans that used to do those jobs?

- b. You are attending a labour union meeting to discuss your stance on the situation. First, list your ideas and beliefs about the new role of technology and humans in this changing corporate landscape. Think about what the union's mission should be regarding workers' rights when competing with AI bots. Consider employee rights, company needs, profitability, sustainability, customer needs, future implications, etc.
- c. Then hold a meeting to voice your ideas. Discuss the union's collective beliefs and mission. Make notes.

Useful language

I do not doubt that ...

I'm utterly convinced that ...

I firmly believe that ...

It is undeniable that ...

... is the core issue here. / ... is crucial.

If we wish to ..., we should ...

Therefore, the best course of action is to ...

- d. A **manifesto** is a concise document that declares beliefs, ideas, or a mission and calls for change or action. Write a manifesto on behalf of the labour union. Make your manifesto as engaging as possible. Elaborate on and support each idea and include a call to action.