

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

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions.

1. Do you think AI bots will take over some human jobs? Why (not)?
2. Should some jobs or activities be protected against AI? How?

2 Reading for gist

a. Skim the article and choose the main idea.

- a. AI bots have started writing better screenplays than humans, which worries human writers.
- b. Screenwriters are using AI bots to help them write better dramas.
- c. Writers are demanding to protect their work and careers from AI competition.

3 Key words

a. Write the words from the box next to the definitions below. Check your answers and your understanding of the words by using them to complete the example sentence after each definition. Then read the complete article to see how each key word is used in context.

disrupt erode polish slim strike rank

1. a period during which people refuse to work, as a protest about pay or conditions of work

There are fewer trains running today because public transport workers have gone on

_____.

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

The CEO's unreasonable demands on workers have _____ their trust in him.

3. very small _____

The website is looking great so far, but there's a _____ chance we won't

have it ready by the launch date.

4. improve using skill _____

The first draft of the ad has been approved, but the creative team still needs to _____ the text.

5. change the way a business or industry usually operates _____

Airbnb has completely _____ the hotel industry.

6. put something onto a list based on its success, importance, size, etc.

How would you _____ the skills or characteristics that you are looking for in a new assistant?

augment

collision

deploy

deskilling

exploit

residual

7. when two people or ideas strongly disagree with each other _____ *Hannah and Ivan have never agreed about performance management, and I think, now that she is his superior, they are headed for _____.*

8. remaining after the rest of something has gone or ended _____

There may be _____ delays in Sofia's schedule this afternoon following the three-hour board meeting this morning.

9. use a situation so that you get benefit from it, even if it is wrong or unfair to do this

Workers' families are shocked at how the media has tried to _____ the factory accident.

10. use something to achieve an objective _____

Management announced that they will _____ a new strategy to meet sustainability goals.

11. the action of reducing the level of skill that a worker needs for a job by using new technology

instead _____

Some pilots argue that technology has caused too much _____.

12. increase the size, amount, or value of something _____

A conference will be held to _____ cooperation between researchers.

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*.

Continued on next page

- 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.

FT

John Gapper, 5 May, 2023

© [The Financial Times](#).

All rights reserved.

Articles republished from the *Financial Times*.

4 Understanding the article

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Screenwriters are in 'the second act' because the crisis is being resolved.
2. The writers' list of demands draws attention to the fact that software might be able to do some of their jobs.
3. Because writing requires a lot of expertise to engage viewers, AI will not likely write something spectacular in the immediate future.
4. According to Goldman Sachs, screenwriting is the most likely profession to be disrupted by AI.
5. The rise of streaming platforms has meant more money for screenwriters.
6. Studios will likely employ AI to write story outlines and polish dialogues.
7. The guild wants its members to be paid as much for rewriting AI output as if it were theirs.
8. According to the author, it would be great if people used AI to improve their work and be more productive.

5 Business language – adjective + noun collocations

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

contract employment imagination implications material path question reward

1. literary _____
2. vivid _____
3. high _____
4. traditional _____
5. consistent _____
6. short-term _____
7. broad _____
8. crucial _____

b. Complete the sentences using the above collocations.

1. Most of my friends are planning on going to university after we graduate, but I don't want to follow a _____.
2. I sat in on a brainstorming session and couldn't believe the creative _____ of our team.
3. Many freelancers have time off between projects and struggle to find _____.
4. The app uses stories, rhymes, and other _____ to help children learn.
5. The world of startups is full of high risks and _____.
6. When choosing a career, there are two _____ you need to ask: what do you enjoy doing, and what are you good at?
7. We need to think about the _____ of our decision before we go through with it.
8. Some people don't like the uncertainty of it, but I love the variety that comes with working on _____.

6 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What are the benefits of using AI in the workplace?
- Which AI uses should be promoted? Why and how?
- In what careers are humans most likely to be replaced by technology?
- What are the negative consequences of creative deskilling?
- Should AI be regulated? Why? How? By whom?

7 Wider business theme – AI ethics and governance

a. Read the situation below.

Situation

Imagine a future in which most large companies fire and replace most of their employees with AI bots. Their technology is more efficient, productive, and less expensive. 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 opinion on the situation. First, list your ideas and beliefs about the new role of technology and humans in this changing context. 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 express your ideas. Try to reach an agreement about the union's beliefs and mission. Make notes.

Useful language

I'm convinced that ...

I do not doubt that ...

I firmly believe that ...

It is clear that ...

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

If we want to ..., we should ...

That is why the best course of action is to ...

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