

Past, present and future inventions vocabulary and speaking

Warmer

In small groups, find which of you is more interested in and knowledgeable about technology.

Use the list below to continue your discussion.

Inventions used now

3D movies	Air conditioning	Answering machine
Anti-virus software	Automatic pencil (= Mechanical pencil)	Ball bearing
Ballpoint (pen) (= A biro)	Bar code	Blutack
Breathalyser	Bulletproof vest	Chain saw
Clocking in machine	Cloud seeding	Correcting fluid (=Tippex)
Date stamp	Dishwasher	DVD
Electric drill	Electric kettle	Electric pencil sharpener
Elevator	Email	Erasable pen
Eraser	Escalator	Freezer
Fridge (= Refrigerator)	Glue stick (= Pritt Stick)	GM food
GPS	Hard hat	Heart transplant
Highlighter pen	Hole punch	Hoover (= Vacuum cleaner)
Hybrid car	Industrial robot	Infrared night vision
Instant messaging	Internet	Jet foil
Jet ski	Keyhole surgery	Laptop (computer)
Laser eye surgery	Low energy light bulbs	Machine gun
Massage chair	Microscope	Microwave (oven)
Mouse	MP3 player	MRI scan
Nuclear power station	Nut and bolt	Pacemaker

Padlock	Paperclip	Photocopier
Pill battery	Pneumatic tyre	Pocket calculator
Post Its	Rechargeable battery	Reinforced concrete
Rubber band	Rubber gloves	Satellite
Scanner	Sellotape (= Scotch tape = Sticky tape)	Sewing machine
Shotgun	Shredder	Smoke detector/ Smoke alarm
Solar panel	Soldering iron	Stapler
Superglue	Tank	Taser (= Stun gun)
Thumbtack (= Drawing pin)	Tumble drier	TV remote control
Tweezers	USB flash drive (= USB = USB stick)	UV light
Vending machine	Video conferencing	Video game console
Welding torch	X ray	

Roleplays on the topic of inventions

Do a selection of the roleplays below, each time pretending that you are at a time when the thing that you are talking about has recently been invented or could soon be.

You think that you can invent one of the things on the list but the head of the funding committee (your partner) thinks it isn't likely that your research will be successful. Try to persuade them to give you as much money as you can get.

You are both futurologists. One of you thinks that one of the things on the list will be invented (fairly) soon and the other thinks it will be invented far into the future if ever. Discuss until one of you run out of arguments or you reach a compromise position.

Imagine you have invented one of the things in the list but your boss won't accept that that is a good idea. Roleplay trying to persuade him or her that it will be popular and profitable, and try to get as many people as you can on your team to develop it.

You are the government committee which must decide on the restrictions of use on one of the inventions. Decide what the restrictions should be, one of you arguing that there should be tighter restrictions and the other that there should be fewer or no restrictions.

You are the committee to award the Nobel Prize for Engineering and three of the things in the list are on the shortlist. Decide together which invention should be given the prize.

Pretend one of you is an inventor who has just retired and the other is an interviewer from a newspaper or engineering magazine. Roleplay an interview about the history of your invention.

Roleplay trying to sell one of the things on the list to someone who has never heard of it (because it is a new invention at the time you are speaking). Try to persuade them that it is worth trying.

Roleplay a phone conversation from someone who bought one of the products for the first time at your suggestion but isn't happy with their purchase. Try to persuade them to keep using it.

You both claim to have invented one of the things in the list. Argue about how you developed what you did before your partner and so you should be credited with the invention.

It is twenty years after the invention of one of the things on the list. Argue about whether it was overall a good thing that it was invented or not, using your imagination about what the consequences were. You think it was a good idea and your partner disagrees.

One of you thinks that an invention above will have a huge impact, whereas the other thinks normal life won't change much. Argue until you come to a compromise or one of you gives up.

Do the same roleplays, but pretending you are in or just before the time of one of the past and/ or future inventions below.

Past inventions

(Wooden) barrel	Abacus	Airship
Barrel organ/ Player piano	Battering ram	Bellows
Bone tools	Bow and arrow	Bronze weapons
Candle	Cannon	Car phone
Carbon paper	Carpet sweeper	Clockwork toys
Horse-drawn carriage	Chimney	Magnetic compass
Crossbow	Dot matrix printer	Dumb waiter
Fax	Filofax	Flint tools
Floppy disk	Fountain pen	Gas lamp
Gunpowder	Harpichord	Horse-drawn omnibus
Hovercraft	Iron weapons	Laser disk
Lava lamp	Mercury thermometer	Minidisc
Monocle	Moveable type	Movie film
Musket	Overhead projector (= OHP)	Papyrus
Parchment scroll	Pendulum clock	Pocket watch
PDA	Personal stereo (= Walkman)	Pager (= Beeper)
Quill and ink	Radio cassette player	Record player
Reel to reel tape recorder	Rolodex	Slide rule
Space shuttle	Spear	Steam engine
Steam ship/ Paddle steamer	Sundial	The telegraph
Twin tub washing machine	Video cassette recorder	Windmill
Woodblock printing	(Film) camera	(Solid) wooden wheel

Possible future technologies

A medical cure for criminality	Androids/ Robots which are indistinguishable from people	Bionic limbs
Breeding of extinct animals such as dinosaurs	Chips in our brains	Warp speed (= Faster than light travel)
Cryonic suspension	Driverless taxis	Gravitational shielding (= Anti-gravity)
Flying cars	Human cloning	Growing of human organs
Human teleportation	A beam which can immobilise objects and people	Choosing your dreams from a menu
Ordinary clothes which are bullet proof	Satellite hotels	Invisibility/ Personal cloaking devices
Lightsabres	Limitless cheap electrical energy, e.g. from fusion reactors	Laser guns with the possibility of stun settings
Medicines which improve our intelligence	Personal force field shields	Time machines/ Time travel
Reading people's minds	Virtual reality that is indistinguishable from real life	Replicators (= Machines that can scan and copy anything)
Reprogramming people's minds	Robotic exoskeletons (= External artificial skeletons that makes you stronger)	Robots with feelings
Selecting characteristics of your future child from a menu	Self-replicating machines	Uploading our minds (personalities, memories, etc) into supercomputers

Inventions pelmanism

Try to find any similarities between the words above, using a different sentence each time. Cross off any you can make a sentence about and score two points. You can't use any part of the name of either object when you are saying your sentence, i.e. you can't say "An electric pencil sharpener and... are both electric".

Useful language for comparing inventions

- back
- be used to...
- beautiful
- bottom
- break
- bulky
- cause
- compact
- component
- dangerous
- difficult to...
- expensive
- front
- function
- hard-wearing
- heavy
- height
- include/ contain...
- invented...
- length
- lift
- light
- made from/ with...
- main feature
- move
- obsolete
- operate
- pocket-sized
- popular
- powered by...
- produced/ manufactured...
- rotate
- round
- shape
- side
- square
- surface
- top
- triangular
- weight
- width