Your Virtual Self

‘Really good technology helps us all be more human and connect with each other as we never could before.’

Amber Case

TO START
1. Look at the photo. Have you ever used anything similar to this type of technology? Explain.
2. What technology do you use in your daily life? Think about your home, your schoolwork and your free-time activities.
3. Imagine you don’t have a mobile phone. How would you contact your friends? Explain.

This girl is wearing a high-tech armband that can find her friends nearby, send text messages and even act as a video-game controller.
Anthropologists traditionally study human behaviour and culture. They look at the way humans live and work together. Amber Case is an anthropologist, but she studies a different type of anthropology. Amber is a cyborg anthropologist. Do you know what a cyborg is? Part human, part machine, a cyborg is usually associated with science fiction films or comic books.

Amber believes that in today’s digital world, we’re all cyborgs. We rely on technology all the time. Our mobile phones and tablet computers are like extra body parts that we carry around with us. ‘Our mobile phones have become like children,’ explains Amber. ‘If they cry, we pick them up. We plug them into the wall and feed them. When they’re lost, we panic.’

In the past, we humans developed tools that extended our physical abilities. We used them to improve the environment, farm the land, move around faster or protect ourselves. In the 21st century, our smart tools – our gadgets – extend our mental abilities. With modern technology, we can communicate faster and find any information we want in an instant. Social media allows us to connect with people around the world. So friendships can form based on our shared interests, not just our location.

Although there are a lot of positive things about technology, Amber thinks there is also a negative side to our new cyborg selves. She worries that our constant access to other people interferes with our ability to just be alone. Wherever we are, there’s someone we know who’s online and ready to interact with us. ‘We aren’t taking time to slow down and figure out who we really are,’ says Amber.

Despite these concerns, Amber doesn’t think that machines are taking over. ‘We’re sharing with each other – human to human – in a very real way.’
According to Amber Case, in today’s world of ______________________, people have two selves. There’s the real self, and then there is a second self – the ______________________ self. This is the person that you become when you go online. There are some risks to having a virtual identity. Through your virtual self, you create huge amounts of ______________________ about yourself that anyone can ______________________. Another problem is that you’re never really alone. People still ______________________ with your virtual self when you’re not there. Even when you’re sleeping, your friends are using their smartphones to connect with you on ______________________. This ______________________ online interaction means it’s very difficult to disconnect!

LEARN NEW WORDS Listen to these words and match them to the definitions. Then listen and repeat. [468]

- extend
- interfere
- rely on
- take over

1. take control of ______________________
2. make something larger ______________________
3. feel that you can’t be without ______________________
4. get in the way of something ______________________

YOU DECIDE Choose an activity.

1. Work independently. Do you think modern technology has made us better at communicating? Write a paragraph to explain your opinion.
2. Work in pairs. Discuss a piece of technology that has really changed your life. How has it made your life easier?
3. Work in groups. Discuss. How often did you communicate with friends and family online in the last week? Imagine you don’t have a mobile phone or a computer. How would you communicate with your friends and family?

SPEAKING STRATEGY

Checking for understanding

Do you mean that cars will drive themselves in the future?
Do you actually believe that we won’t need to write by hand?

Responding

That’s right. There are already self-driving cars on the road!
That’s exactly what I mean. No one will need pencil and paper in the future.

1. Listen. How do the speakers check that they understand each other? Write the phrases you hear. [470]

2. Read and complete the dialogue.

Carla: Twenty years from now, I doubt that anyone will have a mobile phone.
Santana: Seriously? Do ______________________ that we won’t talk on the phone in the future?
Carla: No, ______________________. I just think that we’ll have technology in our brains. So then we won’t need to carry anything with us.

3. Work in pairs. Spin the wheel to make a prediction about the topic you land on. Your partner will check for understanding.

4. Discuss in groups. Why is it important to check that you understand something? What might happen if you get the wrong idea about what someone is saying?
Read. Circle the correct answer.

The Internet is great, and it gives you the ability to do a lot of things. You can / should learn about some really interesting topics and find people who have the same interests as you. But at the same time, you must / shouldn’t always think about what you say and do online. You don’t have to / should remember that real people with real feelings are reading your words. You should / can’t behave the same way online as you behave in real life. Everyone says mean things sometimes, but when you write something online, it will always be there for everyone to see. You may / have to say things you don’t believe, but you can / can’t ignore other people’s feelings. When you talk to people in real life, they can see your face and your body language. Online, they just read your words, so you can’t / have to be very careful about the words you choose.

Work in pairs. Write advice using can, may, should, must and have to.

1. Someone is mean to you online.

2. A stranger sends you a message on social media.

3. You want to start your own blog.

4. Someone uses a photo of you without asking you first.

Work in groups. Take turns discussing problems at school or online. Give advice using can, may, should, must or have to.

Discuss in groups. People hack into businesses, banks, government websites and personal e-mail accounts. What information do they want to find? What can they do with this information? What should you do if your own account gets hacked?
Discuss in groups.

1. Amber believes that eventually, with calm technology, electronic devices will do all the boring, repetitive tasks in our lives. How will this benefit us? What negative impact might this have on us?

2. Calm technology will allow different machines in our lives to share information about us, our routines and our personal habits. Do you think that sharing this information is a security risk? Why or why not?

3. Design a house that uses calm technology. Think of all the ways it can use calm technology to make our lives easier without demanding our attention.

Often it seems like technology is everywhere. Computers and smartphones are at the centre of almost everything we do. They’re constantly demanding our attention. We text our friends during the day, sleep with our devices by our beds and check our messages as soon as we wake up.

According to Amber Case, in the future, technology will no longer be interrupting us all of the time. Instead, we will use calm technology – a concept first developed by scientist Mark Weiser in the 1970s. In his vision, calm technology works quietly but constantly, at the edge of our attention. We know it is there, but we don’t focus on it. According to Mark, the best technology should be invisible and let you live your life.

We already use many different types of calm technology in our everyday lives. Do you have a smoke alarm in your house? That smoke alarm is always there, checking the air for smoke and quietly keeping you safe. It only reminds you it’s there when you’ve burnt your toast! Or there may be lights in your home or school that are sensitive to movement. When somebody passes in front of their sensor, the lights turn on. You don’t think about this type of technology until you see the light go on. Even a microwave oven is an example of calm technology. You’re not standing at the hob heating your food: the microwave is doing it for you. You don’t think about its work until you hear the beeping noise signalling that your food is ready.

In the future, Amber imagines that our houses will use calm technology to open the curtains for us in the morning, to turn down the heat when we leave, or even to choose the best music for our mood. The minute we walk through the door, our house will respond by turning on the lights and music, setting the radiators to a comfortable temperature and perhaps even starting to prepare our dinner!
1 **BEFORE YOU WATCH** Discuss in pairs.
   1. When you’re communicating with your friends, does speed matter? Do you expect your friends to respond instantly? Why or why not?
   2. When might you want to slow communication down? Why?

2 **WORK IN PAIRS** You are going to watch a video called *The Distance Between Two Points*. Before you watch, do the following:
   1. Draw two points on a sheet of paper. Label them A and B.
   2. Now draw the shortest route from point A to point B.
   3. How could you make this route even shorter?

3 **WHILE YOU WATCH** Check your responses
   How does Amber say the distance between two points is made shorter? Does your response from Activity 2 match what she says? *Watch scene 3.1.*

4 **AFTER YOU WATCH** Read the sentences. Circle the correct answer.
   1. Amber’s dad said that a straight line was / wasn’t always the shortest distance between two points.
   2. Amber thinks technology reduces / creates the distance between two people.
   3. Amber studies how technology affects culture / must be used all the time.
   4. With calm technology / social media, others can interact with our virtual selves when we’re not there.
   5. Amber created an interface that tells her phone when she’s at home / her family members are online.
   6. Amber believes that people sometimes need distance from / need constant access to one another.

5 **YOU DECIDE** Choose an activity.
   1. **Work independently.** Imagine you can send a letter back in time to your great-great grandparents. Write a description of a smartphone.
   2. **Work in pairs.** Amber’s phone has an invisible interface so that it knows when she’s at home. How could your phone help you based on your location? What kinds of things could it do? Give at least three ideas.
   3. **Work in groups.** Think about how communication has changed over the past 100 years. Create a timeline showing at least five ways that communication has changed. Then add two or three predictions for how communication will change in the future.
**GRAMMAR 2.038**

Must, might and can’t: Expressing certainty

I checked these facts on three different websites, so they must be true.

This might be her social media page. I'm not sure.

He can’t be the author of this article: he doesn’t know anything about the topic!

1. **Read.** The information below came from the Internet. Some sentences are true and some are false. Use must, might and can’t to write what you believe.

1. Giant tortoises can live for one year without food or water. **That must be true! My own pet turtle can live without food for a while. / That can’t be true! All animals need to eat and drink.**

2. There were computers during World War II. ______________________________

3. You only use ten per cent of your brain. ______________________________

4. On average, youngsters spend over 150 hours a week using technology. ______________________________

5. There are robots that can play football. ______________________________

6. More people die every year from vending machine accidents than from shark attacks. ______________________________

2. **Work in groups.** Write two true sentences and one false sentence on a piece of paper. Read your sentences to the group. Can they guess the false sentence?

   1. **My mum knows how to fly a helicopter.**
   2. **My house is 100 years old.**
   3. **I have 15 cousins.**

   **Answers to activity 2:** true. 2. true. 3. false (100%); 4. false (50%); 5. true; 6. true.

3. **Write.** Write an opinion essay to answer the question: Can we live without smartphones?

   **In an opinion essay, we want to tell others what we believe about a topic. We use facts to support our argument. We must make it clear when we’re stating a fact and when we’re expressing an opinion.**

   **Facts include:**
   - a date or time of an event
   - a statistic
   - a description of an event

   **Opinions include what the author:**
   - believes is possible
   - thinks about something
   - says is good, bad, important, etc.

   **Can we live without smartphones?**

   For most people my age, it’s hard to imagine life without a smartphone. It seems like almost everybody has got one! In fact, there are 640 million personal computers in households around the world. Most people use them every day for work and play. Actually, the first personal computer was invented in 1975. Before that, people survived without computers and the Internet, so it must be possible!

   I believe that there would be some advantages to life without a smartphone. We would probably do more exercise because we wouldn’t be sitting in front of our screens all day. Maybe we would get better at remembering things because we wouldn’t always check facts online. I think we would also interact more with each other because computers wouldn’t demand so much of our attention.

   However, I think that it would also be very difficult for young people today to live without smartphones. We use them to communicate with our friends and family all around the world. We also use computers to research information about many different subjects. Computer technology has helped improve our lives in many different areas. For example, mechanics use computers to check our cars, doctors use computers to analyse health tests, and architects use computers to design modern, safe buildings.

   In conclusion, although I think that we may have had healthier lifestyles in our computer-free past, I believe that, in today’s society, we can’t live without computers.

   **Work in pairs.** Do you agree with the writer’s opinion? Think of one more argument against and one more argument in favour of life without computers. Use facts to support your arguments.

   **Write.** Write an opinion essay to answer the question: Can we live without smartphones?
Make an Impact

YOU DECIDE  Choose a project.

1. Plan and conduct a survey.
   - Write questions to find out about your classmates’ online activity.
   - Conduct the survey and summarise the results.
   - Present the results and make recommendations.

2. Advertise an app or website.
   - Choose an app or a website that you use regularly.
   - Write a list of its best and worst features.
   - Create an advert for the app or website. Present it to the class.

3. Plan and hold a technology fair.
   - In a group, bring in five or six different technological gadgets.
   - Write a short description of each piece.
   - Display your descriptions with the gadgets.
   - Hold a technology fair. Discuss how each item is used with your classmates.

Connect with People

‘Today’s technology extends our mental self. It’s changing the way we experience the world.’

Amber Case
National Geographic Explorer, Cyborg Anthropologist

1. Watch scene 3.2.
2. What are your favourite ways to connect with people now? Is it the same for everybody in your life? Explain.
3. How will technology change our communication in the future? Will it help or harm communication? Explain.