



How Will Humanity Go Extinct?

Discussion > Advanced 8



Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

extinct	That has died out completely (of an animal or plant species).
[adjective]	<i>Ex: International efforts have been made to keep panda bears from becoming extinct.</i>

existential	Relating to the existence of something.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: Global warming poses an existential threat to many Pacific Island nations.</i>

deploy	To put soldiers or equipment in position for action; to put something into use.
[verb]	<i>Ex: We are going to deploy a three-part strategy to capture a larger share of this market.</i>



catastrophe	An event that causes widespread harm or destruction.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Destruction of the rainforests is a catastrophe for the entire world.</i>

displacement	A situation in which people are forced to leave their homes due to a war or natural disaster.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Famine has led to the displacement of thousands of people.</i>

antibiotic resistance	The ability of bacteria and other microorganisms to resist the effects of antibiotics.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Antibiotic resistance is mainly caused by the overuse of antibiotic medicines.</i>



Exercise 2 – Reading

Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.

How Will Humanity Go Extinct?

What are the chances that humans will go extinct in the next hundred years? It depends on who you ask.

The 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change estimated there is a 9.5 percent chance, while the Future of Humanity Institute's survey estimated 19 percent. Martin Rees, co-founder of the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at Cambridge University argues that civilization has a 50/50 chance of making it through the 21st century.

To give some context, 99.9 percent of all species that ever existed on Earth are already extinct. Usually, species die out for natural reasons or because of a natural disaster, like that which killed the dinosaurs. It is possible that another asteroid will hit Earth, but many believe that a man-made threat is actually more likely to cause human extinction.



Nuclear Weapons

Bill Perry, a former US Secretary of Defense, said that "nuclear war between the United States and Russia would mean no less than the end of civilization."

In 2017, it was estimated that there are 15,000 nuclear weapons in nine countries, though less than a third of them are thought to be deployed.

In 1947, a group of scientists created a clock which represents how close humanity is to the threat of nuclear war. The closer the clock is to midnight, the closer we are to a global catastrophe. Since January 2018, it has been two minutes away.



Climate Change

Very recently, the Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change issued a report stating that the world is warming faster than previously thought. According to the authors, global carbon emissions must be reduced to zero by the middle of the century to stop global warming exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius.

If this goal is not reached, the authors warn, large areas of land would disappear as sea levels rise, leading to mass displacement, and it would become impossible to produce enough food to feed the world's population.

Sadly, that's not all we have to be concerned about. Scientists also warn that antibiotic resistance could lead to the "end of modern medicine," as Sally Davies, Britain's Chief medical officer, puts it. Others believe that artificial intelligence is a serious threat to humanity. Stephen Hawking argued that "success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history – unfortunately, it might also be the last."



Exercise 3 – Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your tutor.

1. Do you think a man-made or natural catastrophe is more likely to cause humans to go extinct?
2. How likely do you think it is that a nuclear war between the US and Russia will take place in the future?
3. Would you support a global ban on nuclear weapons? Why? Why not?
4. Do you think that success in creating AI would be the last event in human history?
5. Are you optimistic that global carbon emissions will be reduced to zero by 2050?
6. Why do you think many governments have been slow to act with regard to climate change?
7. Are you satisfied with the steps your government is taking to fight climate change?
8. What areas of the world do you think will be most affected if global warming exceeds 1.5 degrees?