

前言

文章来自《经济学人》的 *机器写手无法完全取代人类*

机器写出的文章怎样？

“一开始是人写的，但是仔细一看，是空的，甚至不连贯。”

虽然机器写文章不可取，但是《经济学人》还是讲，还是有好处的...

正文

Don't fear the Writernator

Computer-generated writing will never replace the human kind

01 *Many people will be familiar with automated writing through two features of Gmail.* Smart Reply proffers brief answers to routine emails. If someone asks “Do you want to meet at 3pm?”, Gmail offers one-click responses such as “Sure!” More strikingly, Smart Compose kicks in as you write, suggesting endings to your sentences. Both are not only rendered in flawless English; they often eerily seem to have guessed what you want to say. If someone sends bad news, Smart Reply might offer “Ugh.”

02 The New Yorker's John Seabrook recently described a more powerful **version of** this technology, called gpt-2, which can ably mimic his magazine's style. Such systems use a digital network of billions of artificial “neurons” with virtual “synapses”—the connections between neurons—that **strengthen** as the network “learns”, in

this case from 40 gigabytes—worth of online writing. The version Mr Seabrook tested was refined with back-issues of the New Yorker.

a version of

● I would really like to see **a portable version of** an application like this.

我很希望能够看到一个这样的程序的**便携版本**。

● They were both striking, and strikingly like **a luxed-up version of** the designer's ready-to-wear.

它们都很惹人注目，惹人注目得就像这位设计师成衣的**奢华版**。

strengthen 加强，增强，巩固

● If that changes now, then the dollar might continue to **strengthen** and gold might at least stop going straight up for a while.

如果现在这种看法改变，美元可能就会继续**走强**，黄金或许至少会在一段时间内停止飙升。

● The company has been trying to **strengthen** its foothold in Asia for some time.

在相当一段时期内，通用公司一直试图**巩固**它在亚洲的地位。

03 The metaphor of the brain is tempting, *but* “neurons” and “synapses” deserve those scare-quotes. The system is merely making *some—admittedly very sophisticated—statistical* guesses about which words follow which in a New Yorker-style sentence. At a simple level, imagine beginning an email with “Happy...” Having looked at millions of other emails, Gmail can **plausibly** guess that the next word will be “birthday”. gpt-2 makes predictions of the same sort.

● He always speaks **plausibly** and at length about others' criticism of him.

对待别人的批评，他总是振振有词。

● He has **plausibly** argued that things might have been worse absent his recovery measures.

奥巴马辩称，若没有他的复苏措施，情况可能会更糟，这么说似乎有道理。

04 *What eludes computers is creativity. By virtue of* having been trained on past compositions, they can only be derivative. *Furthermore, they cannot conceive a topic or goal on their own, much less plan how to get there with logic and style.* At various points in the online version of his article, readers can see how gpt-2 would have carried on writing Mr Seabrook's piece for him. *The prose gives the impression of being human. But on closer inspection it is empty, even incoherent.*

by virtue of

● **By virtue of** this superior quality, this product is often sold out of stock in many areas.

这个产品因其优秀的质量，在很多地区经常脱销。

● **By virtue of** not growing up in the industry, I raise ideas that provoke and think differently.

有赖于行业外的成长背景，我能提出具有启发性且不循常规的想法。

05 Meaningless prose is not only the preserve of artificial intelligence. *There is already a large quantity of writing that seems to make sense, but ultimately doesn't, at least to a majority of readers.* In 1996 Alan Sokal famously submitted a bogus article to a humanities journal, with ideas that were complete nonsense but with language that expertly simulated fashionable post-modernist academic prose. It was accepted. Three scholars repeated the ruse in 2017, getting four of 20 fake papers published. *Humans already produce language that is devoid of meaning, intentionally and otherwise.*

devoid

● **devoid** of any achievement

没有任何成就

● It was a close, sultry day, **devoid** of sunshine, but with a sky too dappled and hazy to threaten rain.

那是一个郁闷酷热的日子，没有阳光，天上却阴霾不雨。

06 *But to truly write, you must first have something to say. Computers do not. They await instructions. Given input, they provide output.* Such systems can be *seeded* with a topic, or the first few paragraphs, and be told to “write”. While the result may be grammatical English, this should not be confused with the purposeful kind.

07 To compose meaningful essays, the likes of gpt-2 will first have to be integrated with databases of real-world knowledge. This is possible at the moment only on a very limited scale. *Ask Apple’s Siri or Amazon’s Alexa for a single fact—say, what year “Top Gun” came out—and you will get the answer. But ask them to assemble the facts to prove a case, even at a straightforward level—“Do gun laws reduce gun crime?”—and they will flounder.*

08 An advance in integrating knowledge would then have to be *married* to another breakthrough: teaching text-generation systems to go beyond sentences to structures. Mr Seabrook found that *the longer* the text he solicited from gpt-2, *the more* obvious it was that the work it produced was gibberish. *Each sentence was fine on its own; remarkably, three or four back to back could stay on topic, apparently cohering. But machines are aeons away from being able to recreate rhetorical and argumentative flow across paragraphs and pages.* Not only can today’s journalists expect to finish their careers without competition from the Writernator—today’s parents can tell their children that they still need to learn to write, too.

aeon极漫长的时期；万古；千万年

● **Aeons** ago, there were deserts where there is now fertile land.

很久很久以前，现在肥沃的土地曾是一片片沙漠。

09 Aside from making scribblers redundant, a common worry is that *such systems will be able to flood social media and online comment sections with semi-coherent but angry ramblings that are designed to divide and enrage*. In reality, that may not be much of a departure from the tenor of such websites now, nor much of a disaster. *Perhaps a flood of furious auto-babble will force future readers to distinguish between the illusion of coherence and the genuine article*. If so, the Writernator, much like the Terminator, would even come to do the world some good.

flood

● Tears of joy **flooded** her eyes and her happy heart was really touched.

她感到万分感动，双眼充满喜悦的泪。

● I walked home **flooded** with an urgency I should have felt back in March.

走回家的路上我满脑子的焦急，其实三月份的时候我就应该着急了。

● He told me that she had burst out into a **flood** of tears there.

他告诉我说，谈到那个地方她就放声大哭了起来。

● a **flood** of complaint letters

无数封投诉信