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Readers reply: for which tasks is artificial intelligence least well suited?

The long-running series in which readers answer other readers' questions on subjects ranging from trivial flights of fancy to profound scientific and philosophical concepts.

For which tasks is artificial intelligence least well suited? *Neil Hislop, Reading*

Send new questions to **nq@theguardian.com**

Readers reply:

1. Skilled trades, nursing and nurses' aides, surgeons, veterinarians, dog groomers, cleaning/janitorial, gardening and yard care, restaurant workers, personal care, physical therapy, street sweeping and snow removal, trucking and delivery drivers … off the top of my head in just a few minutes. Glad I'm a painting contractor/decorator! **LizManus.**

2. My husband's job – maintenance in a residential care home. There are many and various repairs: broken power points, broken radiator covers, equipment checks, Pat testing, etc. A robot could probably paper a wall, but could it cut around light switches? Paint awkward spaces such as bannister rails? The jobs that are the least valued as far as wages go are the jobs that cannot easily be done remotely or by machines or robots – and those held by the same key workers who were so loudly praised during the pandemic and taken for granted before and since. **ClareM8**

3. Teaching – especially in teaching the act of communication in a community services context. We teach "active listening", which includes paying attention to your body language, tone and biases, and responding to the listener's. The complexities of human language can be taught in theory, but the human touch with regard to those suffering complex trauma would be hard to beat. Sadly, I can see people undermining the importance of this and replacing it with AI. **Natasha2**

4. The laundry. I think it would have terrible trouble reading those little faded, creased "care" labels, although it could probably be trained to sort the colours. **Travellingran.**

5. I would be interested to see AI unloading my dishwasher. **Thatoldboke**

6. AI is particularly unsuited to psychic readings. **Leoned**

7. ChatGPT says: “AI is least well suited for tasks that require emotional understanding, creativity and nuanced social interactions. Additionally, situations where a deep understanding of human values, ethics or complex decision-making based on subjective experiences is crucial may pose challenges for AI.” **ProfessorSpi**

8. AI is least suitable for giving advice. Machines can “learn”, but in my experience they never understand or answer questions in a way that make sense. I don’t understand how businesses can rely on so-called chatbots. They cannot replace skilled staff members who have real ears, brains and voices. It also scares me that such “bots” are even used for providing counselling or therapy. **AMD**

9. The current generation of artificial intelligence is very well suited to administrative or data-processing tasks. Many of the products are actually marketed as assistants or co-pilots, which indicates exactly how they are expected to be used. They are not so good at leadership roles or making decisions. Sure, they can help interpret data to support a human making a decision, but they can’t determine what the question is. For now, at least, they are our eager assistants.

AIs are capable of some tasks typically assumed to be creative, such as creating artwork or composing music. But even here they only assist a human, giving someone without the ability to draw the ability to create a quality artwork. In short, they democratise tasks such as programming, writing, drawing or composing, allowing humans with ideas to direct the machines to create exactly what they want. They are not – currently – capable of the independent thought needed to come up with new ideas.

The natural partner for the AI is the robot. AI technology leads robotic technology, meaning that AIs are much more pervasive in the digital world than in the real world. Manual tasks outside of a controlled environment like a factory or a warehouse are outside the capability of robots and therefore AIs. This will certainly change over time as robots continue to improve, but the improvements are likely to be slower than with the AIs themselves. **PMC**