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# AI and Time Travel

## Two big dreams of science fiction

Science fiction has always loved big ‘what if’ questions. Two of its biggest ideas are **time travel** and **artificial intelligence** (AI). H. G. Wells’s novel *The Time Machine* is often seen as the book that started the science fiction genre. In it, Wells imagined a machine that could travel thousands of years into the future. Later, other writers and filmmakers added intelligent robots and computers to the mix. Both ideas—time travel and AI—show our interest in knowledge, the future and the limits of human ability.

- **deep:** complicated; important
- **models:** examples
- **predict:** say what is going to happen
- **revolutionary:** (here) new and exciting
- **sets of data:** collected digital information

## Wells's revolutionary\* machine

When Wells's novel was published in 1895, the idea of time travel was completely new. Instead of using magic to travel through time, Wells saw time travel as a scientific invention. His time traveller built a time machine to go forward and see what the world may be like in the future. But Wells wasn't just telling an exciting story—he was also asking deep\* questions. What is the future of society? Will technology improve life for everyone, or make things worse? By imagining the future, Wells was also helping people reflect on the problems of the present.

## AI—a new time machine

Artificial intelligence didn't exist in Wells's day. It is just as revolutionary today as his time machine was. In fact, AI has something in common with Wells's time machine. They both look at time, knowledge and pushing human limits. The time machine lets us travel through time, while AI lets us travel beyond the limits of our brains. It can copy human thinking and, sometimes, even improve it.

This is why we can think of AI as a 'mental time machine'. It helps us **predict\*** the future without leaving the present.

AI uses huge sets of data\* to create models\*. These models are then used to create possible situations. This way, AI can be said to predict the future.



In pairs, think of where AI gets its data. How can this be a problem? Is it really predicting the future?

# THE TIME MACHINE

THE TIME  
TRAVELLER

THE  
NARRATOR

FILBY



THE  
JOURNALIST



THE  
EDITOR



THE  
MEDICAL  
MAN

THE  
PSYCHOLOGIST



THE VERY  
YOUNG MAN



The  
Future World



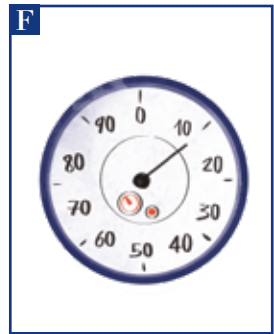
THE  
ELOI

WEENA

THE  
MORLOCKS

# BEFORE READING

1 Look at the pictures. Match the two sentence halves below. Then write the words under the pictures.



- a  A laboratory is a room
- b  You can travel into the
- c  Glass is a hard
- d  Metal is a hard,
- e  You can pull or push
- f  A dial is a part of a machine

- 1 past or the future with a time machine.
- 2 material that you can see through.
- 3 a lever to make a machine work.
- 4 that shows measurements, e.g. time.
- 5 for doing scientific work.
- 6 shiny material.



**2 Listen and complete the extract from the story with the words below.**

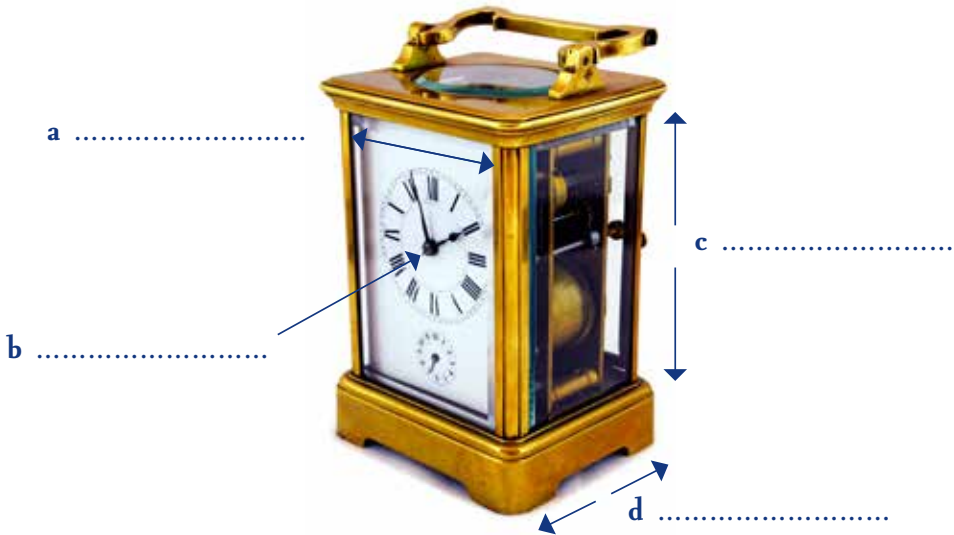
dimensions    geometry    height  
length    objects    space    width

‘The (a) ..... that you learn at school is wrong,’ said the Time Traveller. ‘There are not three (b) ....., there are four.’

‘I don’t agree,’ said Filby. ‘All (c) ..... have length, width and (d) .....’

‘Any real object must have four dimensions,’ continued the Time Traveller. ‘It must have (e) ....., (f) ....., height and duration in time. Can an object that does not last for any time really exist? Time is the fourth dimension of (g) .....’


**3 Label the clock with the four dimensions of space.**



**4**  Describe the clock to a partner. Use some of the words from Exercises 1 and 2 to help you.



## 1 SPACE AND TIME

 We were sitting in the Time Traveller's study after our usual Thursday evening dinner. The Time Traveller (I will call him this to make things easier) was talking about one of his strange ideas•. As he spoke, his grey eyes were shining•, and his pale• face became red. We sat and listened to him with interest•.

'The geometry that you learn at school is wrong,' said the Time Traveller. 'There are not three dimensions, there are four.'

'I don't agree,' said Filby. 'All objects• have length, width and height.'

'Any real object must have four dimensions,' continued the Time Traveller. 'It must have length, width, height and duration• in time. Can an object that does not last for any time really exist•?' Time is the fourth dimension of space.'

The Very Young Man was interested now.

'So why do we think of time as different?' asked the Psychologist.

'Because in our minds, we see time going in one direction through our lives,' explained the Time Traveller.

'But we cannot move freely• in time as we can move in space,' said the Medical Man.

'Can we move freely in space?' asked the Time Traveller, smiling. 'We can go backward and forward, and right and left, but how about up and down?'

'There are balloons!' replied the Medical Man.

'But before balloons we could not,' said the Time Traveller.

- **duration:** length of time
- **exist:** be real
- **freely:** without being stopped
- **ideas:** things one thinks about
- **interest:** feeling of wanting to know more about something
- **objects:** physical things
- **pale:** light-coloured
- **shining:** bright with light

‘But we cannot move in time,’ interrupted• the Psychologist.

‘We may learn to, just as we learnt to move up by inventing• the balloon,’ said the Time Traveller.

‘Impossible•!’ said Filby.

‘I have been studying the idea of four dimensions,’ said the Time Traveller. ‘Long ago, I had an idea for a machine...’

‘A Time Machine!’ shouted the Very Young Man.

Filby laughed.

The Psychologist said a Time Machine could be useful to learn about the past.

‘What about the future?’ added the Very Young Man.

## THE TIME MACHINE

Would you want to travel to the past or the future?

What time period would you like to visit?

‘I did not say anything until I could test my idea with an experiment•,’ said the Time Traveller. ‘Now, I will show you.’

He went to his laboratory and came back with a metal object. It was as big as a clock and very carefully made, with different metal and glass parts. He put it on a small table in the middle of the room.

‘This is a model of my Time Machine,’ said the Time Traveller.

‘It is beautiful,’ said the Medical Man. We all moved forward to look at it carefully.

- **experiment:** scientific test
- **impossible:** not possible
- **interrupted:** spoke while another person was speaking
- **inventing:** making for the first time

‘It took me two years to make,’ said the Time Traveller. ‘This lever sends it forward into the future. This one, into the past. I’m going to push the first lever,’ he continued. ‘And the machine will disappear• into the future. Look carefully at the model and the table, to make sure there are no tricks•.’

Then the Time Traveller pushed the first lever with his finger. The little machine turned, became unclear• like a ghost•, shone faintly•, then disappeared!

We looked at each other.

‘Do you really believe that the machine has travelled into the future?’ asked the Medical Man.

‘Certainly,’ said the Time Traveller. ‘What is more, I’m building a bigger machine. When that is finished, I want to travel in time myself. Would you like to see it?’

We followed him down the long corridor• to his laboratory. Inside, there was a larger copy of the Time Machine. It was nearly complete, but some glass bars were on the table.

‘Are you serious•? Or is this a trick, like that ghost you showed us last Christmas?’ asked the Medical Man.

‘I want to travel through time on that machine,’ said the Time Traveller. ‘I have never been more serious in my life.’

Filby looked at me and smiled.

- **corridor:** long passage between rooms
- **disappear:** no longer be there
- **faintly:** not very much
- **ghost:** spirit of a dead person

- **serious:** (here) saying something true
- **tricks:** things one does to make someone believe something that is not true
- **unclear:** (here) not easy to see

## 2 AN AMAZING\* DINNER



We did not say much between that Thursday and the next. But we all wondered\* about the idea of time travel. I thought about the model and discussed it with the Medical Man. He knew another trick, like this one, but he did not understand how it worked.

On Thursday, I went to the Time Traveller's house as usual. When I arrived, some of the guests were already there, including a journalist and the editor of a daily newspaper. The Medical Man read a note, 'The Time Traveller may be delayed\*. He wants us to start dinner. He will explain when he arrives.'

At dinner, we talked about the Time Traveller, and I made a joke\* about travelling in time. The Editor was curious\*, and the Psychologist told him about the Time Machine that we saw last Thursday. As he was talking, I saw the door from the corridor open slowly, and the Time Traveller stood before us.

'What's wrong, man?' cried the Medical Man, who saw him next. Everyone at the table turned towards the door.

The Time Traveller looked terrible. His jacket and hair were covered in dirt, and his face was white. He looked exhausted\*. He stopped in the doorway, as if the light hurt his eyes. Then he came into the room, walking with difficulty\*. We waited for him to speak.

- **amazing:** very good and surprising
- **be delayed:** be late
- **curious:** state of wanting to know something
- **exhausted:** very tired

- **made a joke:** said something funny
- **with difficulty:** (here) badly; not easily
- **wondered:** asked ourselves



He came to the table and pointed to the wine. The Editor gave him a glass, and he drank it immediately.

‘What has happened to you?’ asked the Medical Man.

‘I’m alright,’ he said, taking more wine. Some colour came back into his face. He looked around the warm, comfortable room. Then he spoke again, slowly. ‘I am going to wash and dress, then I will explain. Keep me some food—I’m very hungry!’

As he walked to the door, I noticed<sup>•</sup> that he was only wearing socks. And they were covered in blood.

‘Is it a joke?’ asked the Journalist.

‘I think it is about the Time Machine,’ I replied. The Psychologist agreed. I continued the story about the previous<sup>•</sup> Thursday. But the new guests did not believe it.

## THE PREVIOUS THURSDAY

What happened the previous Thursday?



In pairs, role-play the conversation between the narrator and one of the new guests.

‘He was so dirty,’ joked the Journalist. ‘Do they not clean their clothes in the future?’

When the Time Traveller came back, he was wearing clean clothes and looked normal again. But he was still very tired.

• **noticed:** saw

• **previous:** the one before; last

‘Our friends told me that you have travelled into the middle of next week!’ said the Editor. ‘Do you know which horse is going to win the race• tomorrow? I’ll pay you for the name!’

The Time Traveller sat down, smiling his old smile, and said, ‘Where is my dinner?’

‘Story!’ shouted the Editor.

‘I will not say anything until I have eaten,’ replied the Time Traveller. ‘Salt, please!’

‘One word,’ I said. ‘Have you been time travelling?’

‘Yes,’ said the Time Traveller, with his mouth full.

Dinner was not easy. The Journalist made jokes. I thought of questions I wanted to ask him. The Time Traveller hungrily ate his dinner. At last, he spoke.

‘I am sorry,’ he said, ‘I was very hungry. I have had a most amazing time. Come into the study and I will tell you about it.’

‘Did you tell the new guests about the machine?’ he asked me.

‘But it is impossible!’ said the Editor.

‘I want to tell you what happened,’ said the Time Traveller. ‘Most of what I say will seem• like a lie. But it is all true. I was in my laboratory at four o’clock—and since then, I have lived eight days that no other person has ever lived. I am exhausted, but I will not sleep until I tell my story. You must not interrupt me. Is it agreed?’

‘Agreed!’ we all said.

And the Time Traveller began his story.

• **race:** competition to see who is fastest

• **seem:** look to be

# AFTER READING VOCABULARY

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## 1 Use five of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

chemical chins crab grab  
ruins unpleasant upset wasting

- a Along with some matches, he also found a ..... which he knew would burn well.
- b The Time Traveller was trying to explain how ..... time travel was.
- c They had small ears, mouths with red lips, and pointed .....
- d He realized that he was ..... time. He needed to find his Time Machine as soon as possible.
- e He heard the Morlocks hurrying after him, trying to ..... him with their hands.

## 2 Write three sentences with the words left out in Exercise 1.

## 3 Put the verbs in the box in the correct tense to complete the sentences.

burn out come in go on set off turn on

- a When I ..... in the Time Machine, I thought the people of the future must be more intelligent than us.
- b My match ....., and when I lit another, the creature was gone.
- c The Morlocks, blinded by the light, couldn't understand what ....., and they were running around, trying to escape.
- d The servant ..... like a ghost and moved across the room very quickly.
- e At ten o'clock this morning, I ..... the first Time Machine in the world.

## **P** B1 Preliminary English Test Reading Part 5

### **1** Complete the sentences by choosing the correct answer (A, B, C or D).

- 1 'Of course I believe this machine can travel into the future,' said the Time Traveller. 'What is ....., I am building a bigger machine.'  
A better                      B certain                      C more                      D strange
- 2 'Can an object that does not last for ..... time really exist?' he asked.  
A any                      B no                      C some                      D long
- 3 Trees and buildings ..... and fell around him.  
A rose                      B rise                      C raised                      D arise
- 4 All the buildings were big, and some of them ..... ruins.  
A had only                      B were with                      C have been                      D were in
- 5 The Time Traveller (I will call him ..... to make things easier) was talking.  
A as                      B after                      C just                      D this
- 6 They stood around me, but I pushed ..... them and ran outside.  
A at                      B past                      C on                      D with
- 7 Some of the wells seemed very deep, but I could see ..... water in them.  
A any                      B nothing                      C no                      D the
- 8 She followed him around and ran to meet him ..... his walks.  
A from                      B around                      C in                      D to
- 9 I needed to find out more about the Underworld, but the Upperworld people ..... no help.  
A had                      B wanted                      C were                      D did
- 10 I had to hold on to the Time Machine ..... it moved from side to side.  
A that                      B as                      C until                      D so