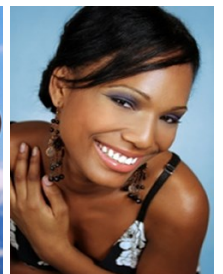# Describing selves

ESL TeenStuff

Objectives

In this lesson you are going to explore how to put forward persuasive points of view and debate a controversial issue by expressing your own beliefs on this issue. You'll also look at lexis used to talk about human and artificial minds.

After completing this lesson you should be able to:

▶ Predict key themes in a text and verify your predictions effectively.

▶ Express your opinions on a controversial issue in a formal debate.

▶ Make an initial identification of language used to show a writer or speaker's stance or opinion on an issue.

▶ Assess how persuasive you are and consider how you can improve your skills at persuading others.

Language review

A *Work with a partner.*

Look at the verb forms in the box below.

◆ assault	◆ sentence	◆ infringe
◆ ban	◆ fine	◆ trespass
◆ breach	◆ forge	◆ punish
◆ commit	◆ evict	◆ shoplift
◆ counterfeit	◆ harass	◆ libel

Check these things.*

Decide which words can be used as nouns as well as verbs, which one can be used as adjectives, and those which collocate with the following noun phrases.

*See last page.

B Make a note of the items below that are unfamiliar to you and then check their meanings.

◆ an elderly person	◆ an offender
◆ a contract	◆ an offense
◆ copyright	◆ a tenant
◆ banknotes	◆ private property
◆ a defendant	◆ an employee

Write example sentences for your items and share some of these *with the class.*

Example

harass (v) - harras an employee
harassment (n)
He continued to harass me despite the warning, so I reported him to the boss.

C Read the following paragraph.

Decide which alternative is the best option where pairs of items have been italicized.

In the United States, criminal and *civil/civic* law serve different purposes. The *primary/prime* purpose of the first is to *resolve/clear up* disputes and to *procure/provide* compensation for injured *persons/parties*. Here it is the supposed victim who brings the *case/lawsuit* and these are concerned exclusively with *private/public* law. In the second case, the aim is to prevent *unwanted/unwished for* behaviors and punish those *offenders/criminals* who *commit/contemplate* acts *deployed/deemed* as undesirable by society *as a whole/at large*. Here it is the government that decides whether *changes/charges* should be *brought/pressed*.

*See last page.

D Check your ideas *with a partner.*

When satisfied, take turns to read the text to each other.

Comment on the pronunciation of your partner.

Note down new collocations.

Advanced (C1-C2)   Unit 1: Lesson 3A

Describing selves

Mind and body

A — Before you start.

Work in pairs. Match items from the two columns below.*

See last page.

Say what the terms refer to if you can.

♦ computer	♦ response
♦ the behaviorist	♦ program
♦ the subconscious	♦ attention
♦ the mind-body	♦ processes
♦ conscious	♦ problem
♦ physiological	♦ school of psychology
♦ stimulus-	♦ mind
♦ memory and	♦ revolution
♦ a constructive	♦ mental experiences
♦ the cognitive	♦ process
♦ visual	♦ perception

Using the phrases you have collected so far, predict the content and some of the details of the text you are about to read on an aspect of the history of psychology.

B — Read the text.

Check whether your pairings, and your predictions, were correct.

THE LOSS AND RESURGENCE OF THE MIND

Behavior, the physical activity of organisms, including overt bodily movements and internal glandular and other physiological processes was for a significant period of the twentieth century held by many to be the sole concern of the professional psychologists. The behaviorist school of psychology was launched in 1913 by J. B. Watson, who considered the introspective methods of his predecessors to be unscientific and insisted that all learning was a product of stimulus-response conditioning. The subconscious mind, along with age old conundrums, such as the seemingly intractable mind-body problem, were banished from the scene. Behaviorism maintained its dominance until the advent of the cognitive revolution initiated by Herb Simon's 1956 development of the computer program, the General Problem Solver, which drew scientific attention to the possibility that problem-solving could be simulated by a computer. This was also the year in which Noam Chomsky delivered a devastating critique of the main tenets underlying behaviorism. Conscious mental experiences such as visual perception, memory and attention were now seen as constructive processes which occurred internally. From then on, many younger working psychologists turned their own attention inward.

Describing selves

An interview

B

A *Task preparation*.

Read this section a transcription of an interview with psychologist Dr. David Dedekind.

Jenkins: There was a time when visual perception was seen… was viewed… as some kind of spectator watching a perfectly formed image of the world out there…'the Cartesian theater' so to speak. Things have changed since then though, haven't they?

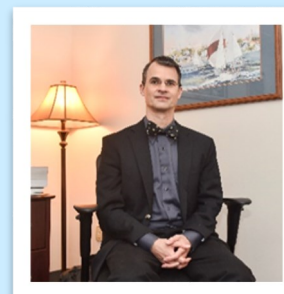**Dedekind**: That's quite right. It was the philosopher Daniel Dennett who first coined the term…and noted that a single place in the brain where it all comes together and is somehow viewed by a homunculus…a kind of little man seated in the theater…is extremely improbable…and indeed deeply problematic.

Jenkins: Ah…so what might be some of the problems associated with this view of our mental life? It does, after all, seem like an intuitively correct idea.

Dedekind: That may be so…however, this outmoded view suffers from a number of problems fatal to its acceptance as a model of what really goes on inside our heads when we are…to take one example…seeing things in our everyday lives.

Jenkins: Go on…

Dedekind: Yes, well first of all the whole idea is neurologically very implausible. It is well known that cognitive processing is spread throughout the human brain…not located in one place.

B *Work with a partner*.

Decide whether these statements are true according to what you have just read.

- The common sense view of how we perceive objects in the world is on the right lines, more or less.
- The interviewer takes a very different position on the issue from the interviewee.
- There are good grounds for rejecting the notion of a homunculus residing somewhere in our heads according to Dr. Dedekind.
- Dr. Dedekind feels quite strongly about this issue and is very confident that he is right.

C Check your ideas *as a class*.*

Re-read the transcription and do these things.*

- Note or highlight specific language which shows the stance of the psychologist towards the older view of visual perception.
- Decide how strong these items are and suggest synonyms which might be a little more neutral.
- Compare your ideas *with a partner*.
- Share some of your ideas *with the class*.

See last page.

Describing selves

Is intelligent AI a danger?

C

A *Task*.

Read this annotated bibliography.

Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig, Artificial intelligence: a modern approach (3rd Edition)

Written in an engaging and easy to follow style, Russell and Norvig's textbook is the most widely read textbook on the subject of AI and the 4th most cited this century. The book offers a thorough introduction to the subject fully backed up by the most recent research. It is divided into useful parts which include the standard areas of machine learning, probabilistic reasoning, decision-making, planning and game playing, as well as sections on natural and computer communication and perception. There is a particularly useful section on robotics.

Russell first wrote an AI textbook in 1994 in which one section posed the question of what happens if we succeed in building machines that are more intelligent than us, and the possible consequences of this for humankind. The authors return to this discussion in the conclusion to this book. The key question of whether computers could be designed to be consciousness is answered cautiously, the authors avoid giving an answer in the affirmative and reserve judgement on the issue.

There are useful exercises and lots of material useful for generating discussion on this increasingly important area. A must for computer scientists, as well as psychologists and philosophers, new to the field or otherwise.

B Discuss these opinions *in small groups*.

♦ Machines which have minds will be built within the next 50 to 100 years.

♦ These AIs will have true conscious awareness and have full understanding of anything humans can understand.

♦ They will also have true perceptual experiences and memories.

C For this task, you are going to hold a formal debate on the topic in the box below.

Follow these instructions:

♦ Choose a moderator to manage the debate

♦ Form groups based on whether, in general, you agree that there will be AIs which will be conscious designed in the near future

♦ Prepare notes of arguments you could use in favor of /against the motion above. The moderator should structure the debate

♦ Practice giving your arguments together

♦ Set up a space for your debate and then begin. Remember to summarize at the end.

MOTION - Artificial Intelligences will be developed which can do everything a human mind can do later in the current century and this development will present a clear danger to humanity.

Describing selves

For and against

D

A

Task feedback.

You are going to assess the performance of the other group in the debate you just held.

Read this short summary of some of the issues.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is progressing rapidly and while AI in the popular imagination is often portrayed as the province of robots with human-like characteristics. The term encompasses anything from search algorithms, to self-driving cars, and self-guided missiles (narrow AI) to long-term research projects which seek to build detailed, functional simulations of the human brain (general AI). There is no doubt that narrow AI can outperform humans on specific cognitive tasks such as playing chess, or solving equations and has the advantage in terms of the speed of accomplishing such tasks. However, a fundamental criticism of general AI is that embodied cognition, human embodiment as a necessary aspect of our intelligence, lies at the foundation of our ability to understand meaning, and our consciousness. To simulate a human brain it would be necessary to simulate the body and the environment in which it operates.

B

Work with a partner from your group.

Give marks out of 10 for the other group for each of these categories.

The points argued by the groups were relevant to the topic under discussion.	/10
They focused on the opposing side's arguments and tried to answer these.	/10
The arguments they used were clear and concise.	/10
The summary at the end highlighted the main issues and supported their points, as well as to rebut the arguments used by the opponents.	/10
Adverbs were used to express stance (their opinions, attitudes, or evaluation of arguments).	/10
The group persuaded you to change your mind.	/10

C

Work with a pair of students from *the other group*.

♦ Exchange your assessment of the other group's performance.

♦ Suggest some improvements to ways they could deliver their opinions in the context of a formal debate.

Describing selves

Summing up

Today you...

- predicted and summarized the content of a descriptive text on an aspect of the history of psychology using key phrases.

- read a section of an interview with a psychologist who expressed his views on a conception of the human mind.

- read a model annotated bibliography as a means to get you thinking about the issue you were about to debate.

- held a formal debate on a motion supporting the idea that AIs will be developed which can accomplish anything human minds can do, and that this is a danger for our future.

- read a summary of some issues in the field of AI.

- assessed how persuasive you can be and identified areas on which you can work in order to get your point across effectively.

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Independent study

TASK - Find a text, an online/magazine article on an issue related to human psychology:

- Decide whether this stance is favorable or negative towards the idea being expressed

- Mark adjectives and adverbs, or combinations of these, used to indicate the writer's opinions

- Choose three or four of these items which you think are important in expressing how the writer feels about the topic they are discussing

- Bring your items to class and share them

- Summarize the content of your article orally in no more than two minutes

- Tell the class your own views on the issue

For further practice go to the PDF handout "Approaches to writing (2) – Writing an essay - frameworks"

Describing selves

Suggestions & answers

Answers from Language review

In this context, *assault, ban, breach, sentence, fine* can be used as both verbs and nouns, while *counterfeit* can be used as an adjective. The following combinations are most likely:

assault an elderly person, breach a contract, forge banknotes, convict a defendant, punish an offender, evict a tenant, trespass on private property, harass an employee

In the United States, criminal and *civic* law serve different purposes. The *primary* purpose of the first is to *resolve* disputes and to *provide* compensation for injured *parties*. Here it is the supposed victim who brings the *lawsuit* and these are concerned exclusively with *private* law. In the second case, the aim is to prevent *unwanted* behaviors and punish those *offenders* who *commit* acts *deemed* as undesirable by society *as a whole*. Here it is the government that decides whether *charges* should be *brought*.

Answers from page A

- computer program
- the behaviorist school of psychology
- the subconscious mind
- the mind-body problem
- conscious mental experiences
- physiological processes
- stimulus-response
- memory and attention
- a constructive process
- the cognitive revolution
- visual perception

Answers from page B

- The common sense view of how we perceive objects in the world is on the right lines more or less. **NO**
- The interviewer takes a very different position on the issue from the interviewee. **NO**
- There are good grounds for rejecting the notion of a homunculus residing somewhere in our heads according to Dr, Dedekind. **YES**
- Dr. Dedekind feels quite strongly about this issue and is very confident that he is right. **YES**
- All of the items are quite strong.
- somehow viewed (seen), extremely improbable (not likely to be true), deeply problematic (difficult to explain), That may be so…(that's probably correct), outmoded view (traditional view), suffers from (has a problem with), fatal to its acceptance (would be difficult to accept), what really goes on (the actual state of affairs), very implausible (is unlikely to be the case)
- Notice the preponderance of adverbial phrases used to indicate a strong opinion on an issue.

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Approaches to writing (2)

Writing an essay - frameworks

The basic structure of an essay

Key Points

Much writing in academic and other contexts follows a basic format, namely, introduction - body - conclusion. In general, this format follows the convention of moving from the general to the specific and back again to the general in the conclusion. Some general guidelines for writing essays are:

♦ The INTRODUCTION typically consists of five components – a brief overview of the context, an outline of the topic or issue under discussion, a statement of the thesis the writer wants to establish, explanation of how the topic or issue will be addressed, a map of the route the reader will take through the main body of the essay

♦ The MAIN BODY section follows the structural model you adopt in order to address the question. You will usually include a topic sentence and background information, as well as one or more of the following-in depth analysis of an issue (problem-solution-evaluation-recommendation), description of a process or sequence, comparison or contrast of ideas/data, discussion of different aspects of a single theme, classification of things or ideas

♦ The CONCLUSION typically includes restatement of the question, reference to the thesis statement in the introduction, important features of the topic you have covered, reference to evidence or research used in support of your views and your arguments, recommendations for future actions based on your conclusions

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B Analyze the question.

Construct a basic structural plan you could use as a basis for an answer.

Share your plan with a colleague if you can.

Explain how you would answer the question

♦ Reading essay questions thoroughly is a key step in writing a good answer

♦ You should pay particular attention to the meaning of the verb in the question which tells you what you are expected to do exactly, e.g. argue, discuss, outline, summarize etc.

♦ This will guide how you plan the main body of the essay

A Read this question for an argument essay.

In its pursuit of an ever higher quality of life, the human race is becoming increasingly reliant on Artificial Intelligence. Although this has undoubtedly helped us in many areas of life, people are rapidly becoming in danger of being sidelined. Faced with a fully-automated future and the very real possibility that our creations will become more intelligent than ourselves, the best approach is surely to call a halt to this potentially disastrous development before it is too late. Argue for or against this proposition.

Approaches to writing (2)

Writing an essay - frameworks

Model introduction

Although most of us remain blissfully unaware of the fact, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already intimately woven into many corners of our lives. There is a broad consensus of agreement among experts that progress in AI research is holding steady, and that this will pick up speed at a phenomenal rate in the coming years. While the actual and potential benefits of this research are clearly enormous, the already large impact the development of AI has on society is very likely to increase exponentially, and we are unlikely to be ready for its repercussions on a societal level. Unemployment will almost certainly rise to unprecedented levels, and not only for those employed in manual jobs. Already increasing levels of economic inequality are likely to be exacerbated hugely as a result. Considerable thought needs to be given by both government agencies and private organizations to the formulation of clear practical policies to deal with these and other important issues arising as a result of the revolution in the ways technology affects our lives. In this essay, I will argue that while we must recognize the fact that AI is already with us, has very clear benefits, and is too well-established to simply jettison even if we could do this, ethical issues raised by this emerging technology go much deeper than this. As a result, urgent steps need to be taken to control its development. The consequences for the ordinary person in the street are potentially grave and serious attention needs to be given this issue from their perspective.

C Read the above introduction to an answer written in response to the question in A.

Answer these questions.

♦ Does the writer include a) an overview of the context, b) an outline of the topic, c) a thesis statement, d) a route map to help the reader to navigate the main body sections of the essay, e) a clear statement of the writer's stance, f) a statement of how the writer will address the question in the main body?

♦ Which line might be better placed in the essay's conclusion?

♦ How would you characterize the style used in this introduction?

♦ Does the writer successfully move from the general to the specific?

Writing an essay - frameworks

Model body paragraph

A distinction often made by researchers is that between narrow AI (built for specific tasks and domains and which may be capable of making intelligent decisions limited to these contexts) and strong, or general AI, (machines built that could successfully execute any intellectual tasks humans are capable of performing.) It is the first type of AI which is already with us and manifests itself in the algorithms lying behind the machine learning of your preferences on Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Netflix. From the moment you wake up your life is suffused with machine learning and it's not just in cyberspace. Your car, your smartphone, your bank, your hospital, and your school, all routinely use artificial intelligence daily and your life would be very different without them. Undeniably, AI's successes have been spectacular, and on the face of it there would seem to be very strong arguments indeed for continued research into AI, at least into this soft version. One such argument goes along the lines that AI's successes represent the latest exemplars of humankind's longstanding quest for development of the best tools for completing tasks of all kinds, whether physical, mental, or indeed cultural. On this basis alone, they relieve us from countless hours of drudgery, allow access to masses of data no human could hope to process adequately, and free us up to spend our time doing just those things we gain most fulfillment from. But extreme caution needs to be exercised here. While recognizing that machine intelligences seemingly outperform humans on dull individual tasks, and that this may appear beneficial at first sight, little or no discussion has been held on the practical implications of such developments for ordinary people. Consequently, before moving on to examine the second part of the distinction between soft and hard AI, it is necessary to take a closer look at potentially important practical implications of the future impact of the AI we already have in some detail. This is where we turn next.

D Read the first body paragraph of the answer written in response to the question in A.

Answer these questions.

- ♦ Why does the writer begin the paragraph with by defining topic-related terms?
- ♦ Does the paragraph include a topic sentence which states the main ideas in the paragraph?
- ♦ Does this help the reader to understand the ideas which follow?
- ♦ Which contrast is made in the central part of the paragraph?
- ♦ What is the main argument in the paragraph?

Approaches to writing (2)

Writing an essay - frameworks

Answers and suggestions

C

a) an overview of the context - YES

b) an outline of the topic - YES

c) c) a thesis statement - YES. *In this essay, I will argue that while we must recognize the fact that AI is already with us, has very clear benefits, and is too well-established to simply jettison even if we could do this, ethical issues raised by this emerging technology go much deeper than this.*

d) a route map to help the reader to navigate the main body sections of the essay-NO. The writer does not do this in the introduction.

e) a clear statement of the writer's stance - YES. The writer's thesis statement makes this clear, as do the two examples problems (the rise in unemployment and economic inequality), which show the writer thinks there are serious problems to be addressed, along with the choice of language in these sections particularly, but not exclusively, e.g. *unprecedented levels*, *to be exacerbated hugely* etc.

f) f) a statement of how the writer will address the question in the main body. NOT SPECIFICALLY

Which line might be better placed in the essay's conclusion? The last line.

How would you characterize the style used in this introduction? Academic/formal but neutral in places

Does the writer successfully from the general to the specific? YES

D

Why does the writer begin the paragraph by defining topic-related terms? To give some background information and help structure this and the next paragraphs. The writer deals with the first topic in the first body paragraph and says that she will turn to the second issue (strong/general AI) in the third paragraph. (This move in the last line of the paragraph is an example of 'signposting'.)

Does the paragraph include a topic sentence which states the main ideas in the paragraph? YES. *It is the first type of AI which is already with us and manifests itself in the algorithms lying behind the machine learning of your preferences on Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Netflix.*

Does this help the reader to understand the ideas which follow? YES. The writer goes on to outline benefits and arguments in favor of current AI before presenting a counter argument.

Which contrast is made in the central part of the paragraph? The contrast between benefits and dangers, i.e. the topic of the essay as seen from the writer's stance.

What is the main argument in the paragraph? That while the current benefits of narrow AI are clear, and probably inescapable, the impact of further research and development on social aspects of our lives needs to be taken much more seriously.