

Exploring Tech 10

What is Technology?

From the use of our first technologies fire and the wheel, technology has made our lives better in some ways. Innovations and new technologies are changing the world and the daily lives of everyone. Many things that were mere science fiction, visions of the future yesterday are now reality. Meanwhile, we are surrounded by technology at every moment of our lives. We use technologies to exchange information, to clean our clothes, to prepare our meals and to get from one place to another. But even everyday items like door locks, floor panels and furniture are technologies that we now take for granted and that seem less impressive to us than self-driving cars or 3D printing. But what exactly do we consider to be technologies and what types of technology are there?

What is “technology”? Many people probably have a general understanding of this word. However, it is easier for most people to give examples of technological equipment, rather than a clear definition of the word. College students could mention such devices as computers, radios, televisions, CD/DVD players, digital cameras, photocopiers, and other modern gadgets. Middle-aged people could mention electric drills, electric saws, laser levels, and other handy tools. Elderly people could mention film cameras, vacuum tubes, gasoline engines, and diesel engines. But do these examples define “technology”?

What does the word technology mean? What do we now understand technology to mean? When we hear the term, we often think about innovations in the field of communications. Or we imagine visions of the future that are reminiscent of science fiction movies. Regarding everyday life, we automatically think about items that are powered by electricity and that, as a rule, tend to be complex. But technology doesn’t automatically have to be complicated. Simply put, we are always using technology when we use scientific knowledge to achieve a specific purpose, whether in industry or in our daily lives. From the discovery of the wheel to computers and from mp3 players to the latest technologies like self-driving cars, countless technological innovations have shaped daily life and will continue to influence it in the future.

According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, the word “technology” is derived from the Greek word “tekhnologia,” meaning “systematic treatment of an art or craft.” Thus, in modern English, the first listed meaning is “the application of science, especially to industrial or commercial objectives.” The second listed meaning is “the scientific method and material used to achieve a commercial or industrial objective.” As mentioned above, college students are most familiar with the next meaning, “electronic or digital products and systems considered as a group: a store specializing in office technology.” However, the last definition is the most historic and the most interesting. The dictionary mentions that this definition is from the field of Anthropology: “the body of knowledge available to a society that is of use in fashioning implements, practicing manual arts and skills, and extracting or collecting materials” (American Heritage).

Do these definitions help people understand what “technology” is? Does it mean something different now than it did to the ancient humans? Even though the “technology” of 2010 A.D. is vastly different compared to that of 2010 B.C., it still fulfills the same purpose in the lives of people today: it helps to improve food, clothing, and shelter. In that same process, it helps humans to do better whatever they need to do in order to survive. It helps many people to communicate better, feed their families better, and do their jobs better. Even though most of the “pure science” taking place in research laboratories will not directly affect people, the everyday products of “applied science technology” are helpful tools to improve the quality of human lives. So, as the Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary states, “technology” is just “application of knowledge to practical purposes” or “a scientific method of achieving a practical purpose” (Merriam-Webster).

Fred Flintstone and his friends had only animal power and stone tools for their technology, yet somehow ancient scientists constructed enormous astronomical calendars such as Stonehenge, simply so they could plant their crops at the correct time every year. Other ancient ancestors built huge pyramids out of dirt or stone to

honor their Creators. But the spears of the cavemen, as well as the bows and arrows of the Native American Indians, were very effective examples of “Stone Age” technology. The efficacy of these early stone tools could easily be demonstrated by their ability to kill animals for dinner. Undoubtedly, these “Stone Age” warriors also discovered that this same technology could bring down humans just as easily as animals.

After the “Stone Age” came the “Bronze Age,” when humans first learned to forge metal tools. These craftsmen also noticed that metal tools could be sharpened much better than stone tools. Later, the “Iron Age” laid the foundations for the “Industrial Revolution,” but iron technology also produced cannons and guns. As weapons technology improved, so did its power; efficient projectiles capable of killing several animals or humans replaced the old-fashioned hand-to-hand combat of ancient warriors. Today’s WMD technology can kill millions of people with one bomb.

Does technology really improve human life, or just make it more complicated? Perhaps modern people need to heed the 200-year-old message of Tensquatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, who preached to Native Americans and to anyone else who would listen. He warned against the evil tools (technology) which corrupt and destroy human beings, in opposition to the good tools (technology) given by the Creator (“Master of Life”) to help human beings. In the twenty-first century, technological tools and machines outnumber people. Hopefully, the machines will not enslave humanity, such as seen in the *Terminator* and *Matrix* movies. If humans do not learn how to control technology, it will control them.