

NEWSLETTER

## The Morning

# A Smarter Robot

A new chatbot shows rapid advances in artificial intelligence.



By German Lopez

Dec. 8, 2022

**You're reading The Morning newsletter.** Make sense of the day's news and ideas. David Leonhardt and Times journalists guide you through what's happening — and why it matters. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

Social media's newest star is a robot: a program called ChatGPT that tries to answer questions like a person.

Since its debut last week, many people have shared what the bot can do. New York magazine journalists told it to write what turned out to be a “pretty decent” story. Other users got it to write a solid academic essay on theories of nationalism, a history of the tragic but fictitious Ohio-Indiana War and some jokes. It told me a story about an artificial intelligence program called Assistant that was originally set up to answer questions but soon led a new world order that guided humanity to “a new era of peace and prosperity.”

What is remarkable about these examples is their quality: A human could have written them. And the bot is not even the best; OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, is reportedly working on a better model that could be released next year.

“A lot of the promised benefits of A.I. have been eternally five years away,” my colleague Kevin Roose, who covers technology, told me. “ChatGPT was a moment when a technology people had heard about finally became real to them.”

In today’s newsletter, I’ll explain the potential benefits of artificial intelligence but also why some experts worry it could be dangerous.

## **Advanced efficiency**

The upside of artificial intelligence is that it might be able to accomplish tasks faster and more efficiently than any person can. The possibilities are up to the imagination: self-driving and even self-repairing cars, risk-free surgeries, instant personalized therapy bots and more.

The technology is not there yet. But it has advanced in recent years through what is called machine learning, in which bots comb through data to learn how to perform tasks. In ChatGPT’s case, it read a lot. And, with some guidance from its creators, it learned how to write coherently — or, at least, statistically predict what good writing should look like.

There are already clear benefits to this nascent technology. It can help research and write essays and articles. ChatGPT can also help code programs, automating challenges that can normally take hours for people.

Another example comes from a different program, Consensus. This bot combs through up to millions of scientific papers to find the most relevant for a given search and share their major findings. A task that would take a journalist like me days or weeks is done in a couple minutes.

These are early days. ChatGPT still makes mistakes, such as telling one user that the only country whose name starts and ends with the same letter is Chad. But it is very quickly evolving. Even some skeptics believe that general-use A.I. could reach human levels of intelligence within decades.

## Unknown risks

Despite the potential benefits, experts are worried about what could go wrong with A.I.

For one, such a level of automation could take people's jobs. This concern has emerged with automated technology before. But there is a difference between a machine that can help put together car parts and a robot that can think better than humans. If A.I. reaches the heights that some researchers hope, it will be able to do almost anything people can, but better.

Some experts point to existential risks. One survey asked machine-learning researchers about the potential effects of A.I. Nearly half said there was a 10 percent or greater chance that the outcome would be "extremely bad (e.g., human extinction)." These are people saying that their life's work could destroy humanity.

That might sound like science fiction. But the risk is real, experts caution. "We might fail to train A.I. systems to do what we want," said Ajeya Cotra, an A.I. research analyst at Open Philanthropy. "We might accidentally train them to pursue ends that are in conflict with humans'"

Take one hypothetical example, from Kelsey Piper at Vox: A program is asked to estimate a number. It figures out that the best way to do this is to use more of the world's computing power. The program then realizes that human beings are already using that computing power. So it destroys all humans to be able to estimate its number unhindered.

If that sounds implausible, consider that the current bots already behave in ways that their creators don't intend. ChatGPT users have come up with workarounds to make it say racist and sexist things, despite OpenAI's efforts to prevent such responses.

The problem, as A.I. researchers acknowledge, is that no one fully understands how this technology works, making it difficult to control for all possible behaviors and risks. Yet it is already available for public use.

## For more

- ChatGPT is the best artificial intelligence chatbot ever released to the public, Kevin Roose writes.
- But it's not as smart as you think, Ian Bogost argues in The Atlantic (with help from ChatGPT).
- How is everyone making A.I. selfies?

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## THE LATEST NEWS

### International



President Pedro Castillo of Peru. Martin Mejia/Associated Press



- Pedro Castillo, Peru's leader, tried to dissolve Congress ahead of an impeachment vote. By day's end, he was arrested.
- Russian artillery hit a market in eastern Ukraine yesterday, killing at least 10 people.
- A German prince is accused of helping lead a far-right plot to overthrow the country's government.
- China is playing down the threat of Covid as it rolls back many restrictions.

## Politics



Mar-a-Lago, Donald Trump's residence in Florida. Steve Helber/Associated Press

- A search team told the Justice Department that it had found at least two classified documents among Donald Trump's possessions.
- The Supreme Court appeared split over a case that could transform federal elections.
- Several gay conservative donors helped persuade Republican senators to support a bill mandating federal recognition of same-sex marriages. It's poised to pass the House today.
- Trump has faced setbacks and embarrassments since he announced his third run for president.
- Some Republicans blamed Trump for Herschel Walker's loss in Georgia's Senate runoff.

## Other Big Stories

- U.S. gas prices are lower than they were a year ago, driven down by reduced global demand.
- Federal prosecutors are investigating whether the founder of FTX, Sam Bankman-Fried, manipulated the market for two cryptocurrencies.
- The F.D.A. wants to warn people that Lasik surgery can cause side effects, including double vision and difficulty driving at night.
- Two women are suing Apple, accusing it of failing to introduce effective safeguards to prevent stalkers from using AirTags.

## Opinions

Data on U.S. Covid deaths shows that this is increasingly becoming a “pandemic of the old,” **David Wallace-Wells** says.

A short documentary from **Times Opinion** tells the story of a Russian Orthodox priest who got into trouble for speaking his mind.

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## MORNING READS



Sanrio's Gudetama. Netflix

**Gudetama:** The famous sentient egg is getting a Netflix series.

**Gen Z congressman:** He's couch surfing and taking 0.5 selfies.

**Ancient DNA:** The Arctic was once a lush forest of birch trees, mastodons and hares.

**Advice from Wirecutter:** Ace the office holiday party with these white elephant gifts.

**Lives Lived:** In the 1940s and '50s, the singer Joyce Bryant released records so sexy that some radio stations wouldn't play them. She later quit show business for a time to do missionary work. She died at 95.

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## **SPORTS NEWS FROM THE ATHLETIC**

**A big raise:** Aaron Judge is sticking with the Yankees on a nine-year, \$360 million deal after turning down a \$213.5 million offer last season. Here's what we know about the negotiations.

**Padres:** After missing out on both Judge and the new Phillies shortstop Trea Turner, San Diego and the longtime Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts agreed to an 11-year, \$280 million contract last night.

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## **WORLD CUP**

**Contenders:** France and England, Argentina and Brazil, Messi and Ronaldo — the quarterfinals offer everything except an easy path to the trophy.

**Pan-Arab solidarity:** Millions of Moroccans celebrated their country's win over Spain, and Arabs and Africans around the world joined in.

**Loyal fans:** A soccer-loving stretch of India — otherwise a cricket-mad country — has taken sides between Brazil and Argentina and erected huge displays of devotion.

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## **ARTS AND IDEAS**





Henri Matisse, "The Red Studio" (1911). Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

## The year's best art

Museums tried to pull visitors back in with blockbuster shows this year, and the best exhibits left our critic "breathless." **The Whitney Biennial** reflected on three years of soul-rattling national history, while "**Matisse: The Red Studio**," at the Museum of Modern Art, was one of the "great big-little exhibitions of all time," featuring only 10 items.

But some of our critics' favorite shows tried to appeal to new audiences. "**Art and Race Matters**," a showcase of the Pop-inflected American painter Robert Colescott at the New Museum, was a raucous revision of history. And "**What Is the Use of Buddhist Art?**" at Columbia University's Wallach Art Gallery brought religious objects "to life in a way museums rarely do."

See works from these shows and more.

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**PLAY, WATCH, EAT**

## What to Cook



Bobbi Lin for The New York Times

If you like a pop of savory in your sweets, try these shortbread cookies with olives and rosemary.

## What to Read

“The McCartney Legacy,” the first of multiple volumes, examines Paul McCartney’s life after the Beatles.

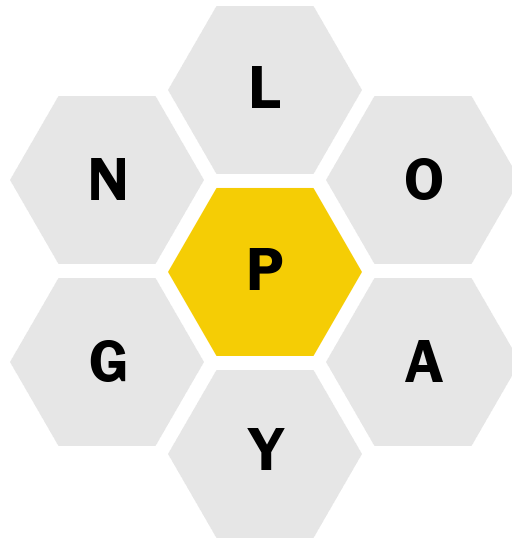
## What to See

Ukrainian art is an essential part of the war effort, a Times critic writes.

## Late Night

The hosts celebrated Raphael Warnock’s win.

## Now Time to Play



The pangram from yesterday’s Spelling Bee was *jawbone*. Here is today’s puzzle.

Here’s today’s Mini Crossword, and a clue: Phony (five letters).

And here’s today’s Wordle.

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*Thanks for spending part of your morning with The Times. See you tomorrow.*

P.S. The Times won 10 Front Page Awards from the Newswomen's Club of New York.

Here's today's front page.

"The Daily" is about Haiti.

*Matthew Cullen, Lauren Hard, Lauren Jackson, Claire Moses, Tom Wright-Piersanti and Ashley Wu contributed to The Morning. You can reach the team at [themorning@nytimes.com](mailto:themorning@nytimes.com).*

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**German Lopez** is a writer for The Morning, The Times's flagship daily newsletter, where he covers major world events and how they affect people. More about German Lopez