

NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello, I'm Rob. Welcome to 6 Minute English. With me in the studio today is Neil. Hello, Neil.

Neil

Hi. Hi Rob!

Rob

Are you alright, Neil? Are you playing on your **smartphone** again, are you?

Neil

Err... what was that? Yeah, sorry, Rob... just doing something on my smartphone, you know, the kind of phone which allows you to go online.

Rob

Oh I can see that. But are you waiting for a call?

Neil

No. No, I just carry it with me at all times. Where I go, the phone goes. No phone, no Neil!

Rob

OK, but why do you need your phone so much?

Neil

Why?! What if I need to need to go somewhere? How will I find my way? What about the weather? Will it rain today? I need to know these things.

Rob

Why don't you just look up in the sky and see if it is cloudy?

Neil

Look up to see if it is going to rain?! I have an **app** – which is short for an application, which is a computer programme for a specific purpose. My app tells me the weather... and this

one does all the maths I need... and here's one for translations, and this one here... can tell me what I'm going to...

Rob

OK, OK, OK, I get the point. Today we're talking about computers – and we'll bring you some words **connected** with the digital age.

Neil

Connected – **to connect** – we use this verb a lot. It means 'to link, or join, one thing to another thing. In this case, connected means 'linked to the internet'.

Rob

OK, I can see you are very excited about computers. So that's what my question is all about. The first commercially produced "desktop computer" was designed and produced by the Italian company Olivetti and presented at an event in New York. When did it happen? Was it in:

- a) 1955
- b) 1965 or
- c) 1975

Neil

Well, I think it's (a) 1955.

Rob

Very interesting. You'll get the right answer at the end of the programme. Now, let's talk about computers. You can't live without them but American technology writer Nicholas Carr, the author of a book called 'The Glass Cage - where automation is taking us', thinks they might cause problems.

Neil

Problems?! They cause us problems when they **crash** – that's what we say when our computer suddenly stops working.

Rob

Well, not just that. Let's listen to Nicholas Carr. He says if we rely too much on computers we lose something. But what is it?

American technology writer Nicholas Carr

*The ability of computers to do things we used to do is growing astronomically and we're rushing to hand over to computers tasks, activities – both in our work lives and in our personal lives – and what you begin to see is what is often called a **de-skilling** effect. The person becoming reliant on computers; because they are not exercising their own **talents**, those talents begin to fade. And we begin to lose, as a result, the unique things that human beings can do that computers can't: feel **empathy**, take a broad perspective, interpret all the stuff that can't be turned into data.*

Neil

According to Nicholas Carr, using computers means that we are losing skills – he talks about 'de-skilling'. A skill is the ability to do something well because we've practised it.

Rob

And he also talks about the loss of talent – talent is a natural ability to do something – you didn't have to learn it, you're just naturally good at it. It's something we're all born with. Carr says that relying on computers means our talent is fading because we don't use it any more.

Neil

And he goes even further and says we're losing some of the things that make us human, like empathy, the ability to imagine and understand what other people might be feeling.

Rob

So, do you agree with this writer, Neil?

Neil

I think he's got a point actually.

Rob

It's like the friendships we make on social media. It is nice to get to know new people in different countries, but we have to remember that it's important to talk to people face-to-face too.

Neil

So... maybe we shouldn't use **GPS** to find our way around all the time. GPS, the global positioning system which gives us directions with the help of satellites orbiting the Earth... instead, have a conversation with someone – ask for directions.

Rob

Yes, and perhaps we can give the **spellchecker** a miss occasionally. A spellchecker is a very useful piece of software which helps us avoid making spelling mistakes when we're typing on a computer but... it is good to actually learn how to spell the words properly and not leave everything to the machine.

Neil

Good idea, Rob. I'll try not to rely so much on digital technology. Computers are here to stay and they'll become more and more sophisticated, but we have to remember they are just tools.

Rob

Yes, computers are here to stay. And by the way, when was the first commercially produced "desktop computer" launched? As I told you, it was designed and created by Olivetti and launched in New York. But when was it launched? Was it: 1955, 1965 or 1975?

Neil

And I said 1955.

Rob

Perhaps you should ask your smartphone because the correct answer is actually (b) 1965.

Neil

I don't believe it!

Rob

The computer was called Programma 101 and it was presented at the New York World's Fair. They sold 44,000 units all over the world. The initial price in the US was US\$ 3,200. Well, we are almost out of time so let's remind ourselves of some of the words we said today, Neil.

Neil

smartphone
app (application)
to connect
crash
skill
talent
empathy
GPS (Global Positioning System)
spellchecker

Rob

Thank you. Well, that's it for today. Do log on to www.bbclearningenglish.com – maybe on your smartphone, Neil – to find more 6 Minute English programmes. Until next time. Goodbye!

Neil

Bye!

Vocabulary

smartphone

phone which allows you to connect to the internet

app (application)

a computer programme for a specific purpose

to connect

to link or join one thing to another thing

crash

stop operating (computers and systems)

skill

the ability to do something well because you have practised it

talent

a natural ability to do something well

empathy

the ability to imagine and understand what another person might be feeling

GPS

Global Positioning System which gives us information about location and directions with the help of satellites orbiting Earth

spellchecker

software which prevents us from making spelling mistakes when we type text on a computer