

How robots help

Robots and automation help in many ways.

Often robotics can provide more independence, from artificial limbs to allowing a blind person to drive with an autonomous (self-driving) vehicle. **Robots can help with therapy, education, production and growth.**

Right now, most robots have limited tasks. Robots may do something like clean a pool, but that same robot cannot also clean a floor or deliver a package. Multi-purpose robots are a dream of the future, but even when they do exist they will be very expensive compared to other solutions. **Remember, robots are made by well meaning people to make life easier, safer and more interesting.**



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Understanding Robots in Society



Attempt to define robots

You might think you know a robot when you see it, however robots have many shapes and tasks. Vacuum cleaner robots clean floors, but what about your automatic dishwasher? It washes dishes but would you also consider it a robot? You can ask a smartphone a question and it will respond back, is that a robot?

Right now, more personable robots are arriving that interact directly with us. These robots are “social robots”.

Behind robots are people

Your favorite animated characters or actors in movies portray an identity or role. Behind the scenes are many people that do voice acting, drawing, designing and many functions that make the character come to life. Similarly with robots, there are also designers, programmers, algorithms and other functions that bring a robot to life. **It is important to realize that people are ultimately behind the magic of the robot’s personality and function.**



The magic of identity

Deciding when to acknowledge and differentiate from accepting the character of a robot’s identity and its many creators can be difficult. In some cases it may be directly against the robot’s intended function. For example, when used to communicate with a child in an autism therapy. In that scenario, the child does not need to know immediately that someone is controlling the robot. In the future, at the right time and place it should be comforting to know about the people behind the scenes that worked together with the robot to help them. **The choice of suspending disbelief is a large part of the magic that is a robot’s character identity.**

Concerns about robots

Nearly everyone has seen movies where a robot tries to harm people. In addition, many people are passively concerned that “one day robots will take everyone’s jobs”. **It is true: robots will displace jobs.** Technology has displaced many jobs over time. In the past, the job of switchboard operators was to manually connect people’s phone lines. As phone use grew this job was widely automated.

One could argue that the job was not very fulfilling. **Technology aims to reduce dirty, dull and dangerous jobs. It is important for children to be educated in STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics).**

Versatility and creativity are qualities humans will always do better and easier compared to robots. It is also important for the government and businesses to work together find a balance between automation and careers.

Interacting with robots

Many people see robots as perfect and fast. While user interaction is at the forefront of robotics, it is very difficult to design robots that can quickly answer every question ever asked. Even simply greeting a robot, it may not see your face or trigger the code that tells it to say hello. You shouldn’t be too unimpressed or offended by this but rather recognize once again, humans created this robot. Be patient and speak slowly and as clearly as you can. As systems get better and faster, this will be less of an issue. Often asking political or taboo questions to robots will get you a neutral answer or no response at all. Remember, the creators of their robot often do not want to offend or give their robot a personality that will be disliked. While it can be fun to ask random questions to robots, **try to figure out what the intended task of the robot is and interact around that for the best experience.**

Be a technology advocate but still hold your beliefs

Hopefully you have a better concept of what robots are: **well meaning creations of people!**

While it is alright to suspend disbelief and interact with robots as their own entity or character, it is important to know that **even automated things have been developed by humans in some way or another.**

Understanding the ambiguous nature of robotics will help you place robots in society and interact with them better on your own terms.