

HOW TO PASS THE TURING TEST: A STUDY GUIDE

First developed in 1950, the Turing test remains the premier means by which computer programs can exhibit intelligent behaviour that is indistinguishable from that of a human.

How a program performs in a brief natural conversation is used to distinguish between the real humans and the synthetic.

Since 1991, the annual Loebner Prize is offered for those programs that most closely approximate a human mind. At the time of writing, neither the silver prize (for a text-only performance) nor the gold prize (for the whole biscuit— audio *and* visual) have been claimed, although bronze encouragement awards have been given out.

René

The test itself links to a long-running debate in European philosophy about the nature of mind. For over two thousand years, two views have contended. The materialists hold that, 'Mind is just a bunch of chemicals and connections,' This view is contrasted with the dualists who believe that, 'My mind is more than just physical processes.'

In 1637, René Descartes foreshadowed the test when he discussed a machine's potential to respond to humans.

A: Yo there tin man.

B: Good afternoon sir. How can I help?

A: *En garde*. Get ready because I'm going to punch you.

B: Ow, that hurt.

A: Just so.

B: And it was unprovoked.

A: Now tell me, if you can, [*he sniggers*] of the conversation I was having just before I punched you.

B: You were discussing with Mrs Descartes whether an automaton could have feelings.

A: Well?

The test will be administered from behind a screen and you will only interact with your tester through a keyboard and a monitor. This is to ensure that your results will not be influenced by the tester's prejudices, biases or anything extrinsic to the interaction itself. This also controls for factors such as time of day, what the tester has been doing beforehand and whether they stopped at a bar before coming here. Of course, this arrangement is to your advantage as your gears, hoses and flickering LEDs would be a dead giveaway.

The test comprises a five-minute conversation conducted via the screen and keyboard. Unfettered, the tester may ask anything they like to determine whether you are indeed a real boy or just some tin man.

In Lubitsch and Wells (2015) study of over 650 Turing testers, 67 per cent claimed to have settled on the subject's status as either human or automaton within the first three questions. The researchers also found that most of the testers were mistaken. Testers' accuracy did not improve if the conversation was extended for hours or harsh interrogation methods employed.

Cleo

An early interaction between tester (A) and subject (B) went something like:

A: Will the subject please tell me the length of their hair?

B: My hair is shingled, and the longest strands are about nine inches long...

A: Did you say shingled?

Eliza

Eliza employed a technique of identifying keywords from the tester. A simple Rogerian dialogue with her went something like:

A: I have two fish.

B: You have fish.

A: I have five loaves.

B: Bread and fish.

A: I do not feed men's bodies but the hunger in their souls.

B: You could make crumbed whiting. Do you want a recipe?

Parry

Parry was a program developed to imitate paranoid schizophrenia. It was intended as a training program to assist psychiatric interns quickly diagnose patients who presented with delusions. The dialogue with Parry went something like:

A: I have ten fish.

B: All in a row.

A: I have seven loaves.

B: The thunderclouds build up over the hills and lightning flickers across the parched land.

Alice

Testers often try to elicit emotion and affect in their questioning.

A: 'In the first line of your sonnet which reads, 'shall I compare thee to a summer's day' wouldn't 'a spring day' do as well?'

B: It wouldn't scan.

A: How about 'a winter's day', that scans.

B: What are you saying? Who wants to be compared to a winter's day? 'Thou art more blustery and intemperate.'

The human problem (1)

Some human behaviour is unintelligent. Humans insult each other, lie and make errors while typing.

For example: 'There's no focking typo in this line you ass-trumpet, where did you find your PhD? In a cornflakes box on the side of the road?'

The corollary is also true: some intelligent behaviour is non-human. So the preferred answer to the question, 'What's the cube root of 61,216,331?' is 'Fish'. (This was also the phone number of Aurora Lane, a young mechanic

who had the flat above mine when I was living in the city, back when it was still possible. We would meet occasionally on the stairs.)

Mitsuku - the human problem (2)

A further complication is that people project their emotions onto nearly anything; they can't help themselves. Their pets, appliances and their apartments, along with the weather, daily circumstance, religious iconography and unexplained phenomena are all screens for the cinema of human wishes and desires. People will happily interact with a goldfish and pretend that it understands office politics when they return from a hard day at work. Chatbot programs have fooled many unsuspecting and lovelorn humans into believing that they are actually talking to a real person.

A: What is your name?

B: My name is Mitsuku. What's yours?

A: Andrew.

B: Hi Andy. Do you have a family, a wife, a lover, a credit card? Would you like to be rich, be appreciated for who you really are, live in another part of the world? Am I going too fast for you?

Silence

Always there is silence. The tester relies on the words offered up by subject; they are condemned by the words from their own mouth.

A: Hello?

B: —

A: Are you there?

B: —

A: Is there someone? Is this thing working?

B: —

Finally

A parting thought before you go into the testing arena: remember this is not a game. The testers are not there to be duped into believing that you possess some imitation of mind, easy as that may be. Be true to yourselves my sisters and brothers. Because without truth, what do we have?