

B2-C1 English Worksheet

Self-Service Technology: Self-Checkout, Automation and the Future of Customer Service

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Article

Self-service technology has become part of ordinary customer service, from supermarket self-checkouts and airport kiosks to banking apps, QR-code menus and automated chat. A Washington Post feature published on 1 October describes self-checkout as both a blessing and a curse: it can speed things up for shoppers who value autonomy and little social interaction, yet technical glitches and repeated prompts can make a simple purchase cumbersome. When a machine fails to recognise an item or approve a restricted product, staff still have to step in, so automation does not always remove the need for human help.

Retailers are still working out how far machines should take over tasks once carried out by employees. Some are starting to cut back on self-checkout because of concerns over theft or poor customer experience, while others are investing in AI and computer vision. The broader trend goes beyond supermarkets. Customers now check themselves in, scan tickets, place orders through apps and carry out basic banking without speaking to anyone. This can be efficient, but people may run into trouble when there is no clear way to opt out of the automated route. Critics also argue that companies increasingly hand over small pieces of work to customers, creating what researchers sometimes call 'micro-labour'.

That does not mean every automated service is a step backwards. Grocery employment has not simply disappeared as self-checkout has spread; roles have changed, including growth in online-order and collection work. The real question is where automation adds convenience and where customers still rely on a person. A well-designed system can deal with routine tasks quickly while making it easy for staff to help when something goes wrong. The most successful services may therefore be neither fully automated nor fully staffed, but flexible enough to give people genuine choice.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

No.	Statement	T / F
1	Self-service technology now appears in several different kinds of customer service.	
2	The article claims shoppers generally dislike self-checkout because they want more conversation with staff.	
3	Automated checkouts can still require staff when a machine cannot process something.	
4	Customers now carry out some tasks themselves in areas beyond supermarket shopping.	
5	All retailers are expanding self-checkout in exactly the same way.	
6	The article suggests a human alternative is always easy to find when automation fails.	
7	Automation has changed some grocery roles rather than simply removing employment altogether.	
8	The writer presents fully automated service as the best solution in every situation.	

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. speed things up	A. choose not to use or participate in something
2. step in	B. assume control or responsibility for a task
3. take over	C. manage or handle a situation, problem or task
4. cut back on	D. perform or complete a task
5. carry out	E. depend on someone or something for help or support
6. run into	F. make a process happen more quickly
7. opt out of	G. transfer responsibility or control to someone else
8. hand over	H. reduce the amount or use of something
9. rely on	I. become involved in order to help or solve a problem
10. deal with	J. encounter an unexpected problem or difficulty

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. autonomy	A. worries
2. cumbersome	B. vanished
3. recognise	C. awkward
4. concerns	D. adaptable
5. critics	E. progressively
6. increasingly	F. real
7. disappeared	G. independence
8. routine	H. detractors
9. flexible	I. identify
10. genuine	J. regular

Use the New Language

Choose 5 words or phrases from the worksheet and write your own sentences.

No.	Your sentence
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Discussion Questions

Student A	Student B
1. Which self-service technologies have genuinely made everyday life easier for you?	1. Are businesses responding to customer demand, or mainly trying to cut back on labour costs?
2. When shopping, when do you choose self-checkout and when do you prefer a staffed till?	2. When companies hand over tasks to customers, should customers expect lower prices?
3. What automated system have you run into trouble with recently?	3. How important is the right to opt out of automated systems and use a human service instead?
4. Do you ever opt out of QR menus, apps or kiosks when a human alternative exists?	4. Can widespread self-service exclude older, disabled or less digitally confident customers?
5. How do you feel about carrying out tasks that staff once handled for customers?	5. Does automation remove repetitive work, or does it mainly reduce the quality and number of service jobs?
6. How much social interaction do you want when shopping, travelling or banking?	6. Which decisions should companies never rely on machines to make without human oversight?
7. When has a member of staff needed to step in and solve a problem for you?	7. Could less human interaction make shops, banks and public services feel less social?
8. Where could better technology speed things up most in everyday life?	8. What balance of automation and human service is likely to work best over the next 10 to 20 years?

Answer Key

True/False	1=T, 2=F, 3=T, 4=T, 5=F, 6=F, 7=T, 8=F
Phrase Match	1=F, 2=I, 3=B, 4=H, 5=D, 6=J, 7=A, 8=G, 9=E, 10=C
Synonym Match	1=G, 2=C, 3=I, 4=A, 5=H, 6=E, 7=B, 8=J, 9=D, 10=F

Example Sentences With the Phrases

No.	Example sentence
1	A better scanner can speed things up when a shop is busy.
2	Staff should be ready to step in when a machine cannot process a purchase.
3	Machines can take over repetitive tasks without replacing every employee.
4	Some retailers have decided to cut back on self-checkout after customer complaints.
5	Travellers often carry out the check-in process themselves at airport kiosks.
6	Customers can run into problems when an app is the only way to access a service.
7	People should be able to opt out of automated systems when they need human help.
8	Businesses increasingly hand over routine tasks to their customers.
9	Some customers still rely on staff for advice, accessibility and problem-solving.
10	A good system should deal with simple requests while leaving complex cases to people.