

Intermediate 3
Unit 8: Reading
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Controversial Issues in Technology

controversy (n.) = debate, dispute
controversial (adj.) = questionable, disputable
issue = problem, topic, subject

Letters and phone conversations are private. It is against the law to open someone's mail without permission or to secretly listen in on someone's telephone exchange. Furthermore, the same privacy protections are given to people who use e-mail. For instance, without a warrant it is illegal for the police to read the messages that a person has received or sent on a computer. Nevertheless, in several cases employees have complained about invasion of privacy on the part of co-workers or their employer. The law is not completely clear on this issue: First of all, each person has a secret password for his or her e-mail, but the company also keeps a complete list of these words. Second, an employer can say, "The company owns everything you have written during worktime because you are using our computer system." Therefore, as things stand right now, it is probably a good idea for computer workers to be grateful about the messages they send; an e-mail system may not be the best place for personal thoughts or secret letters.

private ≠ public
against the law = illegal

Point:

The word "mail" is uncountable.

Don't Say: I received two mails.

Say: I received two pieces of mail.

Say: I received two letters.

listen in on = eavesdrop
telephone exchange = telephone conversations
furthermore = moreover, additionally
privacy = someone's right to keep their personal matters and relationships secret
warrant = permission, authority
nevertheless = however
password = a secret word or combination of letters or numbers, used for communicating with another person or with a computer to prove who you are
own = possess, have
grateful = thankful

Electronic surveillance, i.e., a close watch over someone, is the cause of wide disagreement — depending on the purpose of the surveillance. High-tech surveillance systems can be very useful in solving crime cases, in finding missing children, in looking for accident victims, and so on. However, detection devices such as tiny microphones, laser sensors, video cameras, etc., also

make electronic surveillance possible in the workplace. In one case, a receptionist with a perfect fourteen-year employment record lost her job because of information collected by the company's computer system. The new monitoring system, which checked on workers' speed and performance, recorded that she was spending about nine minutes "too long" with each visitor or caller. The receptionist, who said she was helping company sales by being friendly to customers, sued her employer in a court of law. She complained that electronic surveillance at work not only causes unnecessary stress but also invades people's privacy.

surveillance = watching, monitoring

i.e. = that is (to say), in other words

and so on = etc.

record = the facts that are known about a person or a company and the actions they have done in the past

- *employment record*

sue = file a complaint against

court of law = a place where trials and legal cases are decided, or the group of people who deal with legal cases there

invade (v.) = to enter an area of activity in a forceful and noticeable way

invasion (n.) = an action or process that affects someone's life in an unpleasant and unwanted way

Since 1990, there have been hundreds of reports of mysterious electronic interference with the communication systems of airplanes. Because important flight information — about directions, plane temperature, wind speed, etc. — has disappeared from pilots' computer screens, they have lost their way. Technicians haven't found certain answers to these mysteries, but some people suspect that the cause may be passengers' use of portable computers, electronic games, CD players, etc., inside the plane. Modern airplanes have so many sensors, chips, and wires that they are like "computers with wings"; electronic radiation from entertainment equipment may send confusing signals to airplane antennas.

electronic interference = jamming signals

jammer = a device which can produce electronic interference

Through biotechnology, scientists can create new foods in the laboratory. For example, they can change a tomato genetically so the fruit can stay on the plant longer, have more taste, and not get soft quickly. They can put a gene from a vegetable plant into a fruit, or even combine some animal genes with plant genes. But are these new foods safe? And what should the creators and growers have to tell the government, supermarkets, and consumers? Producers claim that genetically engineered products are not much different from traditionally grown foods; nevertheless, some people want to know exactly how scientists changed the DNA material, how many copies of a new gene are in the food, and what problems might come up. For example, will new DNA structures genetically strengthen the bacteria that cause disease?

gene (n.) = a part of the DNA in a cell that controls the physical development, behavior, etc. of an individual plant or animal and is passed on from its parents

genetically (adv.) = in a way that relates to genes

- *genetically modified = GM*

come up = arise

strengthen ≠ weaken

bacterium (Singular) = **bacteria** (Plural)

Source:

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