1. Important Terms and Ideas for Describing Artificial Intelligence

There are several terms experts use to describe computer systems in the field of artificial intelligence.
Recently, the French News Agency (AFP) defined some of the common terms and ideas used in that field.
Here is a version for English learners:

Artificial intelligence

The first term is “artificial intelligence.”
When asked what artificial intelligence is, the AI-powered ChatGPT system says that the term means “the **simulation** of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn and make decisions".
AI's main quality or characteristic is taking in large amounts of data and then processing it using methods from **statistics**.
AI involves using ideas from many fields including computing, mathematics, languages, psychology, and others.
Currently, the technology is being used heavily for investigating health issues, translating human languages, and predicting problems in machine tools and self-driving cars. But AI is affecting many fields of business and industry.

Algorithm

A second important term is “algorithm.”
An algorithm is important to all computer operations. It is a series of steps or instructions followed by a computer program to get a result.
Algorithms can give rules for an AI's behavior, helping it to realize the objectives of computer program developers.
Unlike a simple computer program, AI algorithms permit a computer system to “learn” for itself.

Machine learning

A third important term is “machine learning.”
Machine learning is one method that researchers have used in their efforts to produce artificial intelligence.
Machine learning lets computers learn from data without being directly programmed on what results to produce.
In recent years, the field of **neural** networks has given important results.
In a neural network, connections between some **nodes** are strengthened and others weakened as the system learns and makes changes.
Learning can be "supervised." This means the system learns to put new data into specific groups based on a model. For example, the system could learn to identify **spam** in an email or other messaging programs.
"Unsupervised" learning permits the system to independently discover new areas or ways of doing things. These discoveries in the available data might not have been immediately clear. An example would be letting an online store identify buying **trends** in sales data.

"Reinforcement" learning adds a process of repeated trial-and-error. In this process, the system is rewarded based on its outcomes, causing it to learn and improve.
One example might be a self-driving vehicle whose objective is to reach its destination as quickly as possible but also safely. That requirement would lead it to learn to stop at red lights although it requires additional time.

Deep learning

Deep learning owes its name to its use of many layers of neural networks.
Raw data is examined by each layer in turn at growing levels of **abstraction**.
Geoffrey Hinton received the 2024 Nobel Prize in Physics. Hinton is credited with developing deep learning. Hinton received the prize along with 1980s neural-network developer John Hopfield.
Francis Bach, head of France's SIERRA statistical learning laboratory, said this about deep learning: "The more layers you have, the more complex behavior can become, and the more complex the behavior can be, the easier it is to learn a desired behavior **efficiently**."
The method might help lead to scientific discoveries.

Language models

We now turn to large language models (LLMs).
These might be the most popular example of generative AI. Large language models power tools like OpenAI's ChatGPT or Google's Gemini.
Such systems are able to write long papers, answer legal questions or even produce a cake recipe based on their statistical models.
But the technology is still new. LLM's can suffer from "hallucinations"- the creation of content that is false or incorrect.

Artificial general intelligence

A final important term is artificial general intelligence (AGI) - one the big goals of the whole AI field.
AGI suggests the unrealized dream of a machine able to reproduce all human processes of human thinking.
People who push the idea include OpenAI chief Sam Altman and his competitors at Anthropic. They consider such a system to be within reach.
The goal is to use large amounts of data and processing power to train LLMs that are increasingly powerful.
But critics say that LLM technology has important limits, including its ability to reason.
Maxime Amblard, computing professor at France's University of Lorraine, told AFP last year, "LLMs do not work like human beings."
Amblard added that humans, as flesh-and-blood -intelligent beings, are "sense-making machines" with different abilities from today's computer systems.
https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/important-terms-and-ideas-involved-in-describing-artificial-intelligence-/7965170.html

2. Rising Prices Affect Women the Most

A research organization based in Geneva, Switzerland warns that rising prices are likely to affect women more than men.
The World Economic Forum released a report Wednesday on the economic conditions of women and men around the world.
The group warns that inflation could increase the difference, what is called the gap, between men and women in the world's labor force.
The World Economic Forum is best known for holding a yearly gathering of famous business, cultural and political leaders in the Swiss town of Davos. For the past 16 years, the group has written the Global Gender Gap Report that aims to measure **gender** equality around the world.
The group said there were hopes that the gender gap would begin to become smaller as the COVID-19 health crisis eased. Now, economic shocks threaten to make the gap worse, it said.
The forum estimates that it will take 132 years for the world to reach gender equality. That is down from the 136 years estimated in last year's report.
The organization studies gender differences in four main areas: pay and economic **opportunity**, education, health, and political empowerment.
The group studied 146 countries, rating each one in the four areas of gender quality. It rated Iceland as the most gender-equal country in the world, followed by Finland, Norway and New Zealand. Rwanda, Nicaragua and Namibia were also highly ranked. Germany, Europe's biggest economy, came in 10th place. Further down the list were the world's biggest economies. The United States was 27th, China was 102nd and Japan was 116th, last among G7 major industrialized nations.
Saadia Zahidi is a top official with the World Economic Forum. She said women have been **disproportionately** affected by the crisis caused by inflation. Women were especially hurt by job losses during the pandemic and a lack of, what she called, "care **infrastructure**" — such as care services for old people or children, Zahidi said.
"In face of a weak recovery, government and business must make two sets of efforts: targeted policies to support women's return to the workforce and women's **talent** development in the industries of the future," she said.
"Otherwise, we risk **eroding** the gains of the last decades permanently and losing out on the future economic returns of **diversity**," Zahidi said.

3. When Everybody's Working At Home And The Magic Is Gone

The bank, the biggest in the U.S. by assets, has been slowly bringing some of its trading and sales staff back to the office after putting in place safety measures such as temperature checks and distanced desks. JPMorgan says those who prefer to work at home can still do so.
During a recent meeting with analysts, Dimon even said productivity has fallen at some parts of the bank, especially on Mondays and Fridays.

"There's a huge value to working together, in terms of collaboration and creativity and training the younger people," Dimon told MSNBC recently.

Coming back to once-deserted offices would come as a big change for millions of employees who have grown used to working from home, replacing long commutes on subways or crowded highways with Zoom calls in their pajama bottoms.
But Nicholas Bloom, professor of economics at Stanford University, says there may be a benefit to bringing people back to work.
A decade ago, Bloom co-authored a widely discussed study looking at a travel company in China that allowed many of its employees to work from home.
They found that employees who stayed home were actually 13% more productive than those who worked in the office — but Bloom adds a big note of caution.
https://www.npr.org/2020/09/24/916211900/as-more-americans-work-from-home-some-ceos-reopen-offices-to-find-that-missing-s

4. Fast-er food: A productivity surge at U.S. restaurants

Decades before McDonald's, there was White Castle. Historians credit the hamburger chain with creating the modern fast-food industry as we know it.
The legend goes that White Castle founder Walter "Walt" Anderson started making hamburgers in the early to mid-1910s after he grew frustrated with how long it took to cook meatballs. So one day, Anderson smashed a meatball with a spatula, and, boom, he had a hamburger patty that he could cook much faster. If that's true, Anderson's embrace of hamburgers was really part of a quest for greater productivity — to cook and sell more meat sandwiches in less time.
That origin story may or may not be bogus, but after founding White Castle in 1921, Anderson and his co-founder, Billy Ingram, pioneered many of the hallmarks of the fast-food industry, including helping to make hamburgers a national staple, standardizing practices across their chain restaurants and bringing an assembly-line mindset to food production. White Castle took many pains to be productive, like making its burgers square to maximize the number of burgers that could fit on a grill, and limiting its menu to only a few items, which streamlined the process of preparing, cooking and serving food.
So, yeah, from the very beginning, fast-food restaurants were designed to be the epitome of productivity. Nearly everything about them was geared toward serving customers as quickly and efficiently as possible.
However, according to a new study, fast-food and other restaurants stopped seeing productivity gains between 1992 and 2019. While the productivity of the rest of the economy "steadily grew," it remained "flat" for restaurants, the authors write. Fast-food chains and other restaurants struggled to find innovative ways to serve customers at a faster clip.
The study doesn't dig into why restaurants saw a slowdown in productivity growth. Maybe after so many years of innovations, fast-food restaurants hit a ceiling and had trouble finding more efficiencies. They apparently failed to take advantage of big technological changes, like the mass adoption of the internet and smartphones, to serve customers faster. Or maybe

fast-food chains did streamline their business processes with the help of new technologies, but at the same time, maybe there were productivity-sucking counterforces. For example, maybe consumers started wanting a greater variety of food and fast-food companies diversified their menus, making food preparation more complicated and slower. Whatever the reason, this study finds, fast-food and other restaurants stopped seeing significant productivity growth for nearly 30 years.

But according to this new study, that dramatically changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fast-food and other restaurants saw "a startling surge" in productivity — and they've remained more productive since.

What caused this "curious surge" in productivity? That's today in the *Planet Money* newsletter.

The name of the study is "The Curious Surge of Productivity in U.S. Restaurants," and it's by economists Austan Goolsbee, Chad Syverson, Rebecca Goldgof and Joe Tatarka.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, the economists found, the restaurant industry saw a brief but steep drop in productivity. There were tons of disruptions to business during the era of lockdowns and social distancing, and that hurt the ability of restaurants to serve customers.

Pretty soon after, however, something remarkable started happening: Restaurants awoke from their decades-long productivity slumber and started innovating to serve customers faster.

The economists found that after 2020, the restaurant industry saw a surge in productivity "to a level some 15% higher than the pre-COVID steady state that had prevailed for decades. This surge has persisted even as overall economic conditions seemed to return to normal." Put another way, the average restaurant saw 15% more sales per employee.

Why did this happen? The economists run through various explanations for the productivity surge and then knock down most of them.

Is this possibly just a weird, COVID-related fluke in the data? Nope. They found a persistent change across multiple datasets.

Is this possibly because many restaurants died during the pandemic, and this helped give a boost to the restaurants that survived? In particular, did surviving restaurants find cost savings and efficiencies — in econospeak, "economies of scale" — because they now had less competition and a potentially larger pool of customers? No, the economists found. The data doesn't support that hypothesis.

To find the answer to why restaurants got more productive, the economists turned to "microdata" from smartphones. This data offers systematic information on things like how much time and money customers spend at restaurants. This data, they say, is more comprehensive for fast-food (aka "limited service") restaurants, so they focused on that sector of the market. Their data covers visits to "over 100,000 restaurants across the U.S." from January 2019 to December 2022, representing about $24 billion in sales.

https://www.npr.org/sections/planet-money/2025/03/18/g-s1-53844/faster-food-productivity-surge-us-restaurants

5. Chinese Students Shift from US to Australia, Britain

A yearly report on international study shows the number of Chinese students in the United States fell by a small amount last year. Meanwhile, a growing number of Chinese students are choosing to go to less costly countries like Britain and Australia.

Experts say the cost of studying in the U.S., a struggling Chinese economy, and tension between the two countries are reasons for the changing numbers.

The number of foreign students studying in the U.S. during the 2022-23 school year passed 1 million for the first time since the COVID pandemic. That information comes from Open Doors, the yearly report on international study.

While the U.S. saw a 12-percent increase in foreign students in 2022-23, the number of students from China fell by 0.2 percent to 289,526. China still had more students in the U.S. than any other country that year.

India was the second-largest country to send students to the U.S. in 2022-23, with 268,923 students. That represents an increase of 35 percent from the previous year.

In the 2021-22 school year, the number of Chinese students in the U.S. fell nine percent. The COVID pandemic saw Chinese student numbers in the U.S. drop in 2020-21 by nearly 15 percent. That number is about the same as the drop in students from all parts of the world in 2020-21.

Vincent Chen advises Chinese students about studying abroad. He is based in Shanghai. He said most of the students he advises are still interested in studying in the United States. However, he also said there are growing numbers of students **applying** to study in Britain and Australia.

"If you just want to go abroad, a one-year master's degree in the U.K. is much cheaper," Chen said. "Many people can't **afford** to study in the U.S., so they have to settle for the next best thing."

Data from the nonprofit U.S. group College Board Research shows that in the 2023-24 academic year, the average cost for a U.S. private college four-year education increased 4 percent to $41,540 compared with the previous academic year.

Foreign students, including Chinese students, also study in public U.S. universities. Those schools are generally less costly than private colleges.

The British Council said three to four years of undergraduate **tuition** in Britain costs as little as $15,000 per year.

The number of Chinese students in Britain was 154,260 in 2022-23, according to the U.K. Higher Education Statistics Agency, HESA. That is about 22 percent higher than in 2018-19, when the number was 121,145.

Australia's Home Affairs office said in the 2023-24 program year, China was the top foreign country for new students at 43,389, up slightly from the previous year.

Chen gave two other reasons more Chinese students are choosing to study in Britain and Australia: Chinese media's negative image of the United States and concerns about unfair treatment in the U.S.

Bruce Zhang is a Chinese citizen who received his master's degree in Europe after studying in China. He told VOA's Mandarin Service that he had such an incident happen to him after he was admitted to a U.S. university's Ph.D. program.

When he entered Boston's Logan International Airport last year, Zhang said customs officers questioned him for more than an hour about his research. They asked him if it had any connections to the military. And he said they took his computer and mobile phone for examination.
Zhang was permitted to enter the U.S. for his studies in materials science. Still, the questioning left him so upset that he has told other Chinese to study elsewhere.
Cui Kai is a study abroad advisor based in the American state of Massachusetts. She told VOA Mandarin that experiences like Zhang's -- or worse -- happen for a reason.
Cui said those students who are questioned or denied entry have usually come to the U.S. for advanced study in an area related to security.
Former U.S. President Donald Trump signed Proclamation 10043 in June 2020. That ruling denied visas to any Chinese student who had studied or worked in an organization connected to China's "military-civil **fusion** strategy".
The U.S. says China has been using students and researchers to get important technology. Under Proclamation 10043, the U.S. took away more than 1,000 visas given to Chinese nationals and has denied thousands more.
Critics say the policy is costly to the U.S. and is making Chinese students look to universities in Europe and other places.

6. It started with friends at home. Now Dungeons & Dragons is in its stadium era

For years after it was invented in the 1970s, Dungeons & Dragons remained a niche game that people — stereotypically, nerdy boys — played at home with their friends.
But in the past decade or so, D&D has emerged as a popular form of spectator entertainment, with comedians, actors and podcasters playing the game for *other* people to watch. "Actual play," as it's known, has attracted millions of viewers online and has even spilled out into the real world, with D&D shows playing in movie theaters, touring globally and selling out

stadiums.
Dungeons & Dragons turns 50 this year. Here's what the game has meant to you
One of the most iconic examples of this phenomenon came earlier this year when the show *Dimension 20* sold out Madison Square Garden in New York. Roughly 20,000 fans showed up to watch seven comedians perform D&D, with a few rock show flourishes — like gouts of butane fire around the stage to simulate the wrath of the dragon Kalvaxis, the big villain of the night.
"Kalvaxis breathes in," actor and comedian Brennan Lee Mulligan narrated: "'Trifle with me at your own peril. BWAAAAAH!'"
But the performers are still just playing an analog tabletop game: rolling dice, checking rulebooks and using their imaginations. And the makers of D&D themselves say that actual play and its diverse audiences are helping to fuel a broader golden age of D&D right now, including the kind played by friends at home.

Brennan Lee Mulligan, who was introduced to Dungeons & Dragons in 1998, owes his exposure to his mom. Many parents were wary of D&D after it was swept up in the "Satanic Panic" of the '80s and '90s, when anti-occult campaigns like "Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons" alleged it drew kids to devil worship and suicide.
But Mulligan's mom Elaine Lee, a comic book writer, playwright and actress, was familiar with D&D from her creative circles. She hadn't played it herself, but she saw that her 10-year-old son Mulligan "was a nerdy, nerdy kid" and thought he'd like it.

https://www.npr.org/2025/08/07/nx-s1-5489813/dungeons-dragons-dimension-20-critical-role-madison-square-garden-stadium

7. Spinal Tap is back. Director Rob Reiner says they're still dialed up to 11

In 1984, the groundbreaking mockumentary *This Is Spinal Tap* lampooned heavy metal bands and rock documentaries — and introduced audiences to a new film genre.
"What we were doing was not only satirizing heavy metal, we were satirizing the documentary form and the way in which documentaries were presented," director Rob Reiner says.
Spinal Tap, the fictional band at the center of the film, was known for its excesses both on- and off-screen. The bass player stuffed his pants with a foil-wrapped zucchini, while the lead guitarists boasted of amps that "go to 11." Reiner both directed the film and played a documentary director in the movie.
Now, in the sequel *Spinal Tap II: The End Continues*, the band returns for a reunion concert. As in the original film, the band is portrayed by Michael McKean, Christopher Guest and Harry Shearer. Everyone's older in the sequel, but make no mistake: None of the characters has changed.

"The beauty of these guys, the members of Spinal Tap, is that in all those years, from their 20s, 30s up now until their 70s, they have grown neither emotionally or musically," Reiner says. "There's no growth. They basically are in a state of arrested development for, like, 50 years. And the only growth that there is, is maybe skin [tags] from getting older."
Reiner says revisiting the project came easily, especially since it meant working with the same collaborators: "We're still able to — as Chris Guest calls it — 'schnadle' with each other back and forth."
"After 15 years of not working together, we came back and started looking at this and seeing if we could come up with an idea, and we started schnadling right away," he says. "It was like falling right back in with friends that you hadn't talked to in a long time. It's like jazz musicians, you just fall in and do what you do."
This Is Spinal Tap helped pave the way for TV mockumentaries like *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation,* and for films like *Best in Show* and *A Mighty Wind*. Reiner's other directing

credits include *Stand By Me, The Princess Bride, When Harry Met Sally* and *A Few Good Men.* He also starred in the 1970s sitcom, *All in the Family.*

https://www.npr.org/2025/09/09/nx-s1-5527051/spinal-tap-rob-reiner

8. Rise in ADHD Cases Raises Questions

Allison Burk's daughter was struggling. The American **teenager** had uncontrolled emotions, a decreased ability to pay attention and trouble completing work on time. A family doctor suggested testing for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

This led to an unexpected discovery: The teen had ADHD, and her mother, Allison Burk, did too. During her daughter's testing, Burk thought, "Wait a minute. This sounds **familiar**."

"I was able to piece together that this might be something I was experiencing," said Burk, who lives in Columbus, Ohio. She sought testing for herself and was **diagnosed** with ADHD — at 42 years old.

More adults are being diagnosed with ADHD. Diagnoses have been rising for at least 20 years but seem to have increased sharply in the last few years.

A recent government study suggested that more than 15 million adults in the United States — about 1 in 17 — have been diagnosed with ADHD. The condition starts in childhood, but about half of adults with ADHD are diagnosed when they are 18 or older.

Some doctors say the number of people seeking ADHD testing is sharply increasing.

"Just in our **clinic**, requests for **assessments** have doubled in the last two years," said Justin Barterian. He is a **psychologist** based at Ohio State University.

Signs of ADHD in adults

ADHD makes it hard for people to pay attention and control their behaviors. The disorder can be genetic. Doctors often treat the disorder with drugs, behavioral therapy, or both.

Judy Sandler is 62 years old and lives in the U.S. state of Maine. She was diagnosed in her 50s. Sandler describes what ADHD feels like for her. "It's like there's an engine in you and you feel like it's always running, and you can't turn it off except with medication," Sandler said.

ADHD has been called the most commonly diagnosed mental health disorder in American children. More than 7 million children in the U.S. have been diagnosed. The disorder was once thought to be something that resolved as children became adults.

But now, experts say they believe that many people are not diagnosed as kids and that the disorder continues into adulthood.

Adults with the condition talk about having trouble **focusing** on immediate responsibilities and planning their time. Some say the disorder has led to problems in their personal relationships.

Diagnoses have been rising

Diagnoses have been increasing in both kids and adults. The recent government report also found adult ADHD was more common than earlier estimates had suggested.

"We haven't had (federal) adult ADHD data in a long time," said Angelika Claussen. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researcher was one of the study's writers.

There were signs of the rise, she added. Increasing demand for ADHD medication led to severe shortages after the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020. A 2023 study showed the rise in prescriptions, or doctors' orders for such medication, was notable in adults — especially among women.

ADHD diagnoses and medication were increasing before the pandemic. This is partly because of a change in general diagnostic measures in 2013. Those changes expanded the definition of ADHD and reduced the number of signs, or symptoms, required for diagnosis.

But cases really seemed to increase in 2020, when schools closed and many adults were forced to work from home.

"It's very difficult to focus when you are home and you have kids," Claussen said. She said such conditions may have worsened ADHD symptoms in people with less severe cases.

How ADHD is diagnosed in adults

Experts say that it was long believed that ADHD was underdiagnosed in adults. Now, experts debate about whether it has become over-diagnosed.

There is no blood or brain test for the disorder. Experts say it is diagnosed when symptoms cause ongoing problems in more than one area of life, and when those symptoms began in early childhood. Experts say the best way professionals diagnose ADHD is by getting careful histories from patients and from people who know them. They also might test a patient's memory and ability to focus.

But getting an appointment with a mental health professional can take months. And assessments can cost thousands of dollars. Many people turn to family doctors. People also take online diagnostic tests, some of which are linked to health companies that **prescribe** medications.

"There is a wide **variability** in this country in how people diagnose, how **strict** they are, and who they diagnose," said Margaret Sibley. She is psychologist at University of Washington. The American Professional Society of ADHD and Related Disorders is preparing a set of diagnosis and treatment guidelines for American health professionals who treat adults. Sibley is leading the work on the guidelines, which the organization expects to release later this year.

https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/rise-in-adhd-cases-raises-questions/7958876.html

9. Saying 'No' at Work Can Be Good for Your Health

People might find it hard to set work limits or say "no" before taking on too many responsibilities. But experts say it is important for workers to learn to set such limits, or boundaries.

These limits can be important in helping workers protect their physical and mental health. And as with any new skill, setting boundaries gets easier with practice.

Justin Stewart is a 36-year-old who works as a news show production assistant. He told The Associated Press that in the past, he had problems setting clear limits in his work life. Stewart explained that when starting his career, he held several jobs. In addition to his full-time position, he also rented cars at the airport and did sales at a store. He said his life

was so busy that he said he would sometimes sleep in his car between jobs. After a time, he had to be hospitalized for extreme tiredness and an infection.

Stewart said that over time, his busy work life finally caught up with him. “While people around me praised my **hustle**, I eventually **paid the price**.” He added, “The doctor looked at me and said, ‘I don’t know what lifestyle you’re living, but you’re too young to be this **stressed**. You’re going to have to quit something.’”

As a result, Stewart began trying to set boundaries. He gave up his side jobs after deciding he could live without the extra money. If people from the news show contacted him to work after-hours, he told them he was not available and suggested other people who might be able to help.

However, experts say making such changes can be difficult. Many people already have a hard time turning down work requests –from both co-workers and **managers**. For example, it might make some people feel good to be needed or to please others. But as with any new skill, setting boundaries can get easier over time.

Here are some suggestions from employment experts and workers for effectively setting meaningful work limits.

Take control of your time

If your goal is to do less, adding things to your daily plans may seem like a bad idea. But it can actually provide more control over your time.

Bobby Dutton is the founder of event production company GBM6.

Every Monday at 2 p.m., he plans the task he is most likely to delay finishing. And to keep from becoming too busy, he even sets his daily activities, like walking his dog and eating lunch.

Practice “no” responses

If workers have a hard time saying no, they can write down what to say beforehand. And it can also help to say it out loud.

Cara Houser is a workplace **engagement** coach. She says workers do not always have to explain themselves when turning down a request. They can simply explain they are not available, thank the person for asking, and suggest when they might be available.

Amber Krasinski grew up in a working-class environment where saying "no" to a manager could mean losing pay. As the founder of marketing company IvyHill Strategies, Krasinski worries that she will lose business if she turns down a project.

So, she often says “not yet” when one more project is too much. “That phrase has helped me through a lot of situations,” she said.

Know yourself

When asked for help, workers may want to agree immediately. However, when faced with a new work request, it can be better to take time before answering. Use the time to consider such things as workload, energy level, and interest.

Israa Nasir is a **psychotherapist** in New York. She suggests that workers pay attention to the activities and interactions that leave them feeling tired or stressed. Those kinds of events can be put on a “No List” to be dealt with later.

Technology can help

Experts say that just because mobile devices can keep people connected to work all the time, they do not have to interfere with a person’s non-working life.

For example, Nasir said she found herself checking email far too often on weekends. So, during weekends, she moved the Gmail app from her iPhone's homepage to the second page. This extra step helped her avoid checking her email.

Experts also suggest using an **email signature** as another tool to manage expectations. This tool can include more than just your name and contact information. You can also use it to let others know your working hours or upcoming vacation plans.

10. Most US Teens Do Not Drink, Smoke

Drug use among **teenagers** has continued to drop since the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large national study says.

The federally financed Monitoring the Future study has been carried out yearly since 1975. However, the study only started measuring abstinence – the practice of rejecting alcohol or recreational drug use – in 2017.

This year's findings are based on answers from about 24,000 students in grades 8, 10 and 12 in schools across the United States.

One major finding: About 66 percent of 12th graders said they had not used alcohol, marijuana, and traditional or electronic cigarettes in the previous 30 days.

That share, or proportion, of students is the largest since the yearly study started measuring abstinence.

The study is "one of the best, if not the best" source of national data for substance use by teens, said Noah Kreski. Kreski is a Columbia University data analyst who has studied teen drug use.

Among 10th graders, 80 percent said they had not used alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes or e-cigarettes recently, another record. Among 8th graders, 90 percent did not use any of them, the same as was reported in the previous study.

The only major increase found was in the use of **nicotine** pouches, small, white containers of nicotine which users place in their mouths. About 6 percent of 12th graders said they had used that form of nicotine in the past year, up from about 3 percent in 2023.

Whether that has the makings of a new public health problem is unclear. The University of Michigan's Richard Miech, who leads the study, said: "It's hard to know if we're seeing the start of something, or not."

Early in the pandemic, students across the country were told not to go to schools and to avoid parties or other gatherings. Alcohol and drug use of all kinds dropped likely because use most often happens in friend group settings. Friends often influence each other to use drugs, experts say.

As lockdowns ended, "I think everyone expected at least a partial **rebound**," Miech said.

Even before the pandemic, there were decreases in teen cigarette smoking, drinking and the use of several kinds of drugs. Experts suggested that teens were staying home as opposed to spending time in social settings, in which use of illegal substances is more likely.

But marijuana use was not falling before the pandemic. And vaping was increasing. It was only during the pandemic that those activities began to decrease also.

Some experts wonder if the pandemic lockdowns had a deeper influence.

Miech noted that a lot of teens who experiment with e-cigarettes or drugs start in the 9th grade, sometimes because older children are doing it. But the children who were 9th graders during the lockdowns never picked up the activity. And they never had the opportunity to turn into negative influencers of their younger classmates, he said.

“The pandemic stopped the cycle of new kids coming in and being recruited to drug use,” Miech said.

Mental health may also play a part. There were increased reports of depression and anxiety in kids after the pandemic began. Depression is often linked with substance use, but some people with depression and anxiety are very cautious about experimenting with drugs, said Dr. Duncan Clark. Clark is a University of Pittsburgh medical doctor who researches substance use in kids.

“Some teens with anxiety are worried about the effects of substances. They may also be socially **inhibited** and have less opportunity to use drugs,” Clark said.

https://learningenglish.voanews.com/