

Is It OK to Be Rude to Alexa?

Or should we all be saying “please” and “thank you”?

About the Story

Lexile® Measure 910L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to read and analyze a text that presents arguments on both sides of a debate, then take a stand

Featured Skill: argument writing

Additional skills covered in this lesson plan: identifying central ideas and details, evaluating an argument, using text evidence

Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.8, W.1, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Is It OK to Be Rude to Alexa?

Or should we all be saying “please” and “thank you”? By Joe Levi

It's overcast, and now she's in a rush. In need of a boost, she turns to her family's voice assistant.

"Alexa, play Olivia Rodrigo." While the best gets going, she considers his outfit. Is it warm enough for shorts?

"Alexa, tell me the weather." As she waits down breakfast, Ella asks Alexa what time it is. When the bus arrives in two minutes. She grabs her backpack and heads for the door. Wait—she's missing something.

"Alexa, find my phone." Finally, Ella settles into her seat on the bus and sighs in relief. She made it, and she has Alexa to thank for it.

Except she doesn't thank Alexa, ever. She never says "please" either. But should she?

Does It Matter? Voice assistants like Alexa, Siri, and Google Assistant are programs designed to take orders and provide us with tips, reminders, and other useful information. These digital assistants are increasingly popular. They're loaded onto everything from phones and laptops to smart speakers like the Echo Dot.

By 2024, there will be more devices with voice assistants in the world than people, according to Statista.

Now questions are arising about how we should interact with this technology. Some say there's no need to be nice to digital assistants because they're not human. Others say it's wrong to bark orders, whether at your sister, your cat, or your Echo Dot. So should we speak to voice assistants the way we want to be spoken to?

Pieces of Equipment

We might call digital assistants by human names, but they aren't people. They don't experience emotions. You can't offend a voice assistant or hurt its feelings. Digital

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Your Teaching Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Article read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Connected readings

from the Scope Archives:

- “Should Robots Look Like People?”
- “Would You Implant Your Phone in Your Brain?”
- “Your Phone Is Spying on You”

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Persuasive Appeals: Ethos, Pathos, Logos
- Featured Skill Activity: Essay Kit
- Anchor Chart: Great Transitions
- Anchor Chart: Argument Essay Checklist
- Lesson Plan Slide Deck

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Prepare to Read (15 minutes)

Do Now: Take a Poll (5 minutes)

- Project the following question on your whiteboard for students to respond to in their journals as they enter the classroom:

Is it OK to be rude to voice assistants such as Alexa and Siri? Why or why not?

- Take a poll and invite students to justify their responses. Then tell them that today, they will read and analyze arguments on both sides of the debate. Let them know they'll be asked for their opinion again after reading.

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions as a class. Highlighted words: *courtesy, etiquette, expectations, imperiously, impolite, interact*. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Optionally, print the PDF version or share the slideshow link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently before class.

2. Read and Discuss (45 minutes)

- Optionally, for students' first read, have them follow along as they listen to the **audio read-aloud**, located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View. Then have students silently reread the article to themselves.
- Project the article. Complete the following steps as a class, modeling text marking on your whiteboard while students mark their magazines:
 - Using a **RED** pencil, draw a star next to a sentence that expresses the main argument (central claim) on one side of the debate. (e.g., "Some say there's no need to be nice to voice assistants because they're not human.")

2. **Underline the details that support that main argument.** (*"We might call voice assistants by human names, but they aren't human"; "They don't experience emotions. You can't offend a voice assistant or hurt its feelings"; "These programs use human-sounding voices only because someone designed them that way"; "We don't type 'please' when we Google something. We don't say 'thank you' to a washing machine for cleaning our stinky socks"; "On the other hand, if you show a voice assistant the same courtesy you show people, over time, you might begin to think of it as a person. You might start to worry about hurting its (nonexistent) feelings. Who needs that kind of stress? Plus, your expectations might become unrealistic, setting you up for disappointment when Alexa doesn't behave like a human would."*)
 3. **Have students repeat steps 1 and 2 independently, but for the other side of the debate, this time using a BLUE colored pencil.** (Star: *"Others say it's wrong to bark orders, whether at a sibling, a cat, or an Echo Dot."* Underline: *"For one thing, being polite is a learned behavior. It's a habit we develop only through practice—and must continue practicing to keep up"; "Plus, if you get in the habit of being rude to Alexa—imperiously commanding it to do what you want, shouting when it doesn't understand you—you might get in the habit of being rude period"; "Making matters worse, rudeness is contagious. A 2016 University of Florida study found that people who were treated rudely—or simply observed a rude interaction—were more likely to be rude themselves"; "Hearing you shout at your device could upset your pets, for example"; "If younger siblings hear you, they might start to imitate you—except they might yell at people the way you yell at Siri."*)
- Have students fill in the "Yes/No" chart in their magazines based on the details they underlined in the text. Then discuss: Do you think the writer shows bias—that is, a preference for one side of the debate or the other? Explain and support your answer with text evidence. Which supporting detail do you think is the strongest? The weakest?

Optionally:

- Post the statements "YES, it is OK to be rude to voice assistants" and "NO, it is not OK to be rude to voice assistants" at opposite ends of your room. Have students choose a place to physically stand between the two statements, based on their point of view. Be sure to have students form an arc, rather than a straight line, so that they can see one another as they speak and listen.
- Invite students to share their opinions in dialogue with one another. Students should offer reasons and support for their opinions, and counterarguments to the reasons and support presented by others. Invite students who change their minds and want to move to do so, and have them explain why they chose to move.
- At the end of the dialogue, compare the number of students who support each side with the number who supported each side at the beginning of the dialogue and at the very beginning of class.

3. Write About It: What Do You Think?

(45 minutes)

- Have students work individually to complete the **Essay Kit**, a guided writing activity and outline that will help them write their own argument essay in response to this question:

Is it OK to be rude to voice assistants?

- Students can use the **Great Transitions** and **Argument Essay Checklist** anchor charts to help them edit and evaluate their essays.

Connected readings from the Scope Archives—other debates about our relationship with technology:

- Essay Kit: [“Should Robots Look Like People?”](#)
- Scavenger Hunt: [“Your Phone Is Spying on You”](#)
- Essay Kit: [“Would You Implant Your Phone in Your Brain?”](#)