



***“New technologies always reshape society, and it's always tempting to worry about them solely for this reason.”***

Tristan Harris, American technology ethicist

## 1. Big Tech Discussion

1. Which companies do you consider to be 'big tech'? How have these companies changed our lives? Has this change been for the better or worse?
2. How much influence do these companies have? Is it too much? Why?
3. Is big tech a threat to freedom of speech?
4. Should big tech companies be forced to allow people to say what they want on their platforms?
5. What content should be allowed on big tech platforms? Which content should not be allowed?
6. How difficult do you think it is to monitor all the content on big tech's platforms?
7. What role has big tech played in the spread of misinformation? What effect has this had on society? What should they do about this problem?
8. Do you feel comfortable with all the personal information big tech has access to? How do they use this? What problems can this cause?

## 2. Big Tech Vocabulary

- **to self-regulate** (verb), **self-regulation** (noun) – *to regulate oneself in line with accepted norms without interference from government bodies.*
- **tech giant** (noun) – *a company that dominates its section of the technology sector.*
- **oligopoly** (noun) – *a sector of the economy dominated by a small number of companies.*
- **market dominance** (noun) – *a position of power in a market allowing a company to maximise profits, stifle competition, and influence that sector.*
- **market share** (noun) – *the proportion of a sector of the economy controlled by a company or product.*
- **alt-tech** (noun) – *social media platforms and internet service providers that provide services to those that have been excluded or banned from big tech companies, especially popular amongst conservatives, right-wing extremists, and conspiracy theorists.*

**Using the vocabulary words above, complete the following sentences (remember to use the correct form of the word, e.g. verb conjugation or plural noun):**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ sites like Parler and Gab were used by antidemocratic extremists to encourage the violent overthrow of democracy after Donald Trump lost the 2020 election.
2. Amazon achieved \_\_\_\_\_ in the e-commerce sector with a share of 47% compared to its closest competitor, Walmart, who only managed to achieve a 6% share.
3. Despite making assurances to Congress, Facebook has failed to \_\_\_\_\_ itself as day after day, more and more misinformation and extremist content is posted on its platform.
4. In the early days of the internet, Yahoo was the \_\_\_\_\_ of the search sector until it was usurped by Google.
5. Microsoft was fined \$613 million for taking advantage of its 74% worldwide \_\_\_\_\_ in the operating system market to gain unfair advantages over its competitors.
6. The European Union agreed to introduce new laws to break up the \_\_\_\_\_ of the tech sector to allow new and innovative companies to compete.

### Big Tech vocabulary comprehension questions

1. Has big tech failed to self-regulate itself? If so, why? What is the solution? What regulations should there be on big tech?
2. Which non-American tech giants can you think of?
3. Is it better for the tech market to be dominated by an oligopoly rather than many smaller companies? How many streaming services, search engines or operating systems do we really need?
4. Which companies have achieved market dominance in their respective markets?
5. Are big tech companies still innovative, or do they now just rely on acquiring new companies to increase their market share?
6. What do you know about alt-tech? Why were these companies established? Are they dangerous? Why are they so popular with far-right activists?

### 3. Video: Who Should Moderate Big Tech Content?

You are going to watch a video by The Wall Street Journal called "Section 230: The Law at the Center of the Big Tech Debate."

*Watch the video here: <https://yourenglishpal.com/blog/esl-conversation-lesson-plan-big-tech/>*

**While you watch the video, answer the following questions:**

#### Multiple choice

1. Who is responsible for content on social media platforms?  
a) *social media companies*      b) *social media users*      c) *the government*
2. Who has the right to moderate social media content?  
a) *social media companies*      b) *the government*      c) *nobody due to free speech laws*
3. Why did Stratton Oakmont win its defamation case?  
a) *Prodigy moderated its content*      b) *Prodigy didn't moderate its content*      c) *Congress stepped in*
4. When was Section 230 written?  
a) *1994*      b) *1995*      c) *1996*

#### Sentence completion

1. S230 was written so tech companies could hire engineers and developers instead of a team of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Republicans claim that S230 allows big tech companies to censor \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Democrats claim big tech companies allow too much \_\_\_\_\_ about elections.
4. Joe Biden promised to revoke some of the legal \_\_\_\_\_ big tech companies enjoy.

#### Short answer

1. Susan Ness is concerned that changing S230 could limit what?
2. There is agreement amongst lawmakers and big tech CEOs that there needs to be more what?
3. Why is it particularly hard to pass new laws?
4. How might it be easier to change S230?

## 4. Big Tech Conversation Questions

1. In 2019, Amazon and Facebook both spent \$16 million lobbying the US government, with Google, Microsoft and Apple not far behind. Why do you think they did this, and how does this make you feel?
2. How do you feel about big tech companies avoiding so much tax? How do they do it, and how can they be stopped?
3. Why do big tech companies have such a problem with diversity (a massive underrepresentation of women and minorities)? How could this problem be solved?
4. What do you think about Elon Musk's bid to buy Twitter? What do you think is the motive? How would Twitter be different under his leadership?
5. Could Mark Zuckerberg be a cyborg sent from the future to change the course of human history?
6. Is it possible to live your life without using the services of big tech? How could you do that? What are the alternatives?
7. Could big tech get so powerful that these companies effectively replace national governments in the future? Will big tech take over the world? Has it already?
8. In which areas of our lives will big tech play a role in the future?

## 5. Big Tech Writing Task

Write about your opinion of big tech. Try to use some of the vocabulary you learned earlier in this lesson. In your answer, you could include some of the following topics:

- How big tech has changed our lives.
- How much influence big tech companies have in society.
- What role big tech companies will play in the future.

### **Alternative exam practice question:**

Who should be held responsible for content on big tech platforms (social media, websites, etc): big tech companies or their users?