



Office Inventions Tense Review/Speaking

All the objects or substances below were meant to make working life easier or more pleasant. Can you guess what they are from the clues?

This was invented by a Hungarian called Laszlo Biro, who was working for a newspaper and was annoyed at wasting so much time filling fountain pens with ink.

I think this is _____

This was invented by Dick Drew, the same man who had earlier invented masking tape. It became 3M's most successful product ever.

I think this is _____

Although Xerox later became the most famous brand for this product due to producing the first compact version that could be connected to a normal telephone line in 1966, in fact the first machine that could transmit writing through an electrical wire had been invented in 1843 by the Englishman Alexander Bain.

I think this is _____

This was invented by Bette Nesmith Graham, who was working as a typist and needed something to correct the many mistakes she made while she was typing. The invention was bought by Gillette Corporation in 1979 for \$47.5 million plus royalties. IBM had previously rejected the product in the 1950's.

I think this is _____

Although this invention seems very simple, the modern version wasn't invented until 1899, by which time steel that was flexible enough to be bent into this shape had become commonly available. Before that time people had used string and pins etc. to hold paper together, but all those methods damaged the paper.

I think this is _____

These things were invented by accident when Spencer Silver was working in the 3M laboratories trying to develop a strong glue. Although the glue he developed was not strong enough for what he was looking for, it later became famous for how easy it was to remove it from the surface it had been stuck to.

I think these are _____

Use the list on the next page to help.



Answering machine
Automatic pencil (= Mechanical pencil)
Bluetack
Calculator
Chair with wheels
Clocking in machine
Cubicle
Correcting fluid (=Tippex)
Dictaphone/ (Digital) voice recorder
Electric pencil sharpener
Erasable pen
Ergonomic keyboard
Filing cabinet
Floppy disk (= Diskette)
Fountain pen
Guillotine
Headset
Hole punch
Laptop (computer)
Mobile phone (= Cellphone)
Mouse/ Mouse pad
Networked computers/ Intranet
Online training
PDA
Paperclip
Pen tablet
Post Its
Power nap area
(Laser/ Colour) printer
Ring binder
Rolodex
Ruler
Scissors
Sellotape
Smartphone
Spam filtering
(Printable) sticky label
Tablet computer
The Internet
Touch screen
USB stick (= USB thumb drive)
Video conferencing
Water cooler
Whiteboard/ Whiteboard pen
Windows-based operating systems
Wireless mouse
(Landline/ Desk) telephones
Anti-virus software
Ballpoint (pen) (= A biro)
Bluetooth
Carbon paper
Clipboard
Cloud computing
Computer / Machine / Online translation
Date stamp
Drinks machine
Energy saving light bulbs
Eraser
Fax (machine)
Filofax
Fluorescent light
Glue stick (= Pritt Stick)
Hands-free phone/ Conference call function
Highlighter pen
Intercom
Laser pointer
Monitor camera
Multiple monitors
Online maps
PC/ Desktop computer
Pager (= Beeper)
Partition
(Digital/ Colour) photocopier
Postage franker
Presentation software, e.g. PowerPoint
Projector
Robot vacuum cleaner
Rubber band
Scanner
Security badge
Shredder
Smoke detector
Stapler
Swivel chair
Teleconferencing
Thumbtack (= Drawing pin)
Typewriter
Vending machine
VoIP
Whiteboard with printer
Wi-fi
Wireless keyboard
Word processor



Read the texts below and by memory and grammatical knowledge fill in the gaps without looking at the worksheet above.

This _____ (invent) by a Hungarian called Laszlo Biro, who _____ (work) for a newspaper and was annoyed at wasting so much time filling fountain pens with ink.

This _____ (invent) by Dick Drew, the same man who _____ (earlier invent) masking tape. It became 3M's most successful product ever.

Although Xerox later _____ (become) the most famous brand for this product due to producing the first compact version that could be connected to a normal telephone line in 1966, in fact the first machine that could transmit writing through an electrical wire _____ (invent) in 1843 by the Englishman Alexander Bain.

This _____ (invent) by Bette Nesmith Graham, who _____ (work) as a typist and needed something to correct the many mistakes she _____ (make) while she _____ (type). The invention _____ (buy) by Gillette Corporation in 1979 for \$47.5 million plus royalties. IBM _____ (previously reject) the product in the 1950s.

Although this invention seems very simple, the modern version _____ (not invented) until 1899, by which time steel that was flexible enough to be bent into this shape _____ (become) commonly available. Before that time people _____ (use) string and pins etc to hold paper together, but all those methods damaged the paper.

These things _____ (invent) by accident when Spencer Silver _____ (work) in the 3M laboratories trying to develop a strong glue. Although the glue he developed was not strong enough for what he was looking for, it later _____ (become) famous for how easy it was to remove it from the surface it _____ (stick) to.

Check your answers with the previous page. Why are the different tenses used in each case?

Using the tenses above, test each other on the facts above with full questions and answers.

Make up stories about the inventions of the other objects and see if your partner can guess which one you are describing. How much do they believe your story could be true?



Discussion questions on the topic of office inventions

- Which of the things do you think are most important?
- Which of the things do you think are least important?
- Are there any which you think have actually had a negative effect on life? (That is, we would be better off if they had never been invented)
- Argue about why one of the things has or hasn't improved working life and life more generally, each of you taking one side of the argument.
- Which would you most like to have invented? Why?
- How important would the latest technology in the office be for you when choosing a job?
- Which ten office technologies do you think might be on their way out? Compare with <http://mashable.com/2012/09/25/extinct-office-tech/> and discuss your feelings about that list (whether you think it is true, how you would feel about that changes, etc)

What would you think about these kinds of office inventions?

- 3D video conferencing
- An office which looks more like a café
- Automatic simultaneous translation of speech
- Being forced to work from home at least twice a week
- Buildings designed to force people to meet colleagues from other departments
- Computers that can be operated by waving your arms around (like Microsoft Kinect)
- Daily automated health checks
- Delivery of internal documents etc by robot
- Facial recognition instead of security badges
- Fingerprints or retina scanning instead of passwords
- Food and drink delivered to your desk by a robot when you order it from your computer
- GPS tracking of all employees while at work (e.g. so it is possible to find them when you need them)
- Holography
- HUD glasses
- Mobile phone access on planes
- Offices designed to stimulate creativity
- Online training based on computer games
- Planes equipped as offices
- Reliable scanning and recognition of handwriting
- Robot receptionists
- Robot security
- Smaller more local offices with interaction between them done electronically
- Special meeting rooms for different purposes, e.g. a brainstorming room
- Thought-operated computers
- Virtual meetings (like Second Life)
- Voice activated computers
- Wearable computers



Speaking tasks on the topic of office inventions

Work on one or more of the inventing tasks below:

- Work together to invent something to replace one of the things in the list and then do one or more of the roleplays above with your own invention.
- Design a robot to help in offices. It should be realistic with present technology, including in price. Present it to the class.
- Design a totally new kind of office then present it to the class.
- Come up with lower-tech alternatives to things in the list
- Decide how to re-launch an outdated thing such as a pager
- What are the most unpleasant things about working in an office? Brainstorm and rank the biggest inconveniences, then try to think of technological solutions.
- Choose a present office technology which you think is on the way out and design a replacement.
- Choose one thing which is not yet become popular in all offices and decide how to improve and/ or market it to make it more so.

Roleplays on the topic of office inventions

Do a selection of the roleplays below, starting with any one you like or the one that your teacher gives you.

Pretend one of you is an inventor who has just retired and the other is an interviewer from a newspaper or engineering magazine. Roleplay an interview about the history of the invention.
Imagine you have invented one of the things in the list but your boss won't accept that that is a good idea. Roleplay trying to persuade him or her that it will be popular.
Roleplay trying to sell one of the things on the list to someone buying supplies for their office who has never heard of it (because it is a new invention at the time you are speaking). Try to persuade them that it is worth trying.
Roleplay a phone conversation from someone who bought one of the products for the first time at your suggestion but isn't happy with their purchase. Try to persuade them to keep trying to use it.
You both claim to have invented one of the things in the list. Argue about how you developed what you did before your partner.
You are on the committee to award the new Nobel Prize for Engineering and the list above is the shortlist. Decide together which invention should be given the prize.