

NAPLAN Proficiency Level Descriptions

Reading Year 9 - Exceeding

Example texts

Southward

His spine was brushed by the fingers of the night. By the cold. By some prophecy of life and destiny out in the darkness, flickering like an aurora just beyond the horizon, promising one day to fill the entire sky.

He shivered in his furs. Winter was bitter here in the north near the ice caps, though he knew it not as the north but only as home, as the place of his people, *The People* as they called themselves, as if there were no other people in the world. For all he knew there weren't, though the same sense of destiny that shimmered over the horizon told him that this was not true.

Rain sighed beside him. 'It is time', she said. Over the past cycle of the moon, they had packed and repacked the sledges with dried meat, nuts, tools and leather bags of duck fat. Now those sledges were as close to optimal as they felt it was possible to get, riding smoothly over the snow and providing little resistance to the wind.

She and he were not the bravest, they both knew, nor even the cleverest, but they were the most resourceful. A capacity for adaptation would serve them better, the group had decided, than brilliance or bravado. They could both hunt, forage, navigate, repair clothes and start a fire as well as anyone. And, as much as anyone, they had the capacity to bear suffering.

Rain strained in her traces and the sledge began to slide behind her and as she did, Otter followed. *The first steps*, he thought. Who knew how many moons it would be that they travelled? Yet the weather had turned strange, and the past two springs the ducks had not returned, and the caribou were thin in their herds. Home was home, of course, but when you could not eat, what then?

No: place was not destiny, but life was. And if there was a place for them where life could continue, continue for all of them, he was determined that the two of them would find it. And so they trudged on in the cold, their breath fine crystals of ice, following the sign of the Frog in the sky, southward, ever southward into the night.

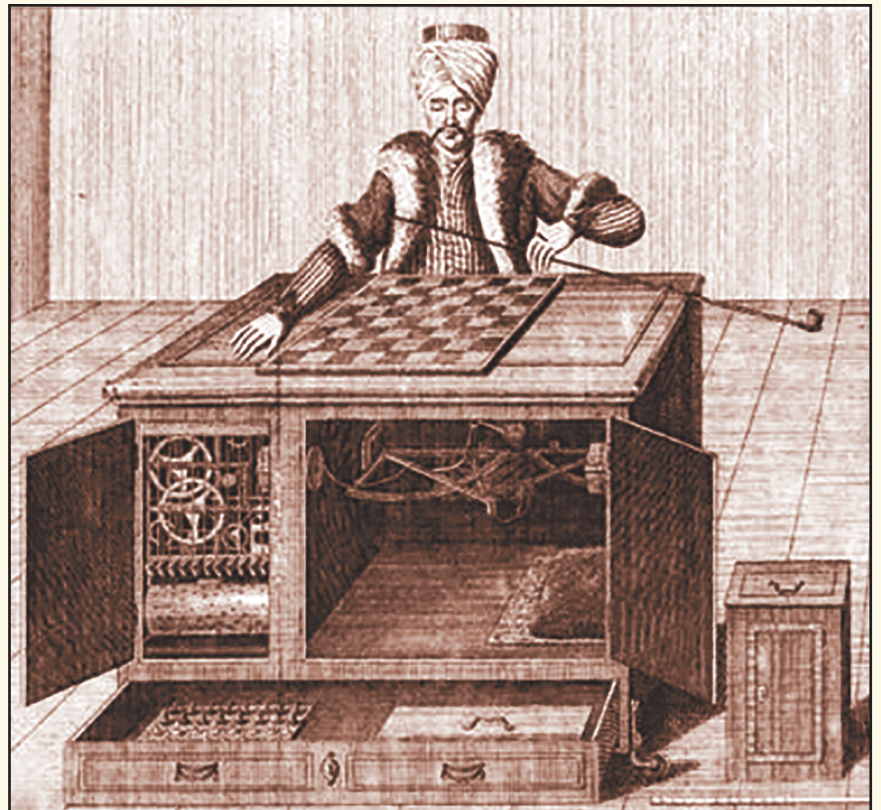


The Mechanical Turk

That a computer can beat a human being at the game of chess is hardly controversial. Way back in 1997, after all, the IBM supercomputer known as 'Deep Blue' beat Russian chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov (the reigning world champion) in a best-of-seven series of games, proving that artificial intelligence (even of a very narrow and limited variety) could overcome the skill of the best chess-playing human in the world.

In 1770, however, a chess-playing computer was a totally different proposition. Computing as a field was centuries away but the concept of automatons (mechanical beings), combining the 17th century fascinations with mechanics and amusements, was in vogue all over Europe. Wolfgang von Kempelen, a Hungarian inventor, was keen to capitalise on this interest. Enter the 'Mechanical Turk'.

Built to impress the then-Empress of Austria, the machine consisted of a large wooden cabinet topped by a chessboard, behind which sat a life-sized model of a man: the 'Turk'. The doors of the cabinet opened to reveal a complex mechanism much like clockwork through which the automaton would 'play' chess against a human opponent.



And play it did! The Turk would use his left arm to manipulate the pieces on the chessboard, guided by the machinery in the cabinet. 'He' played an aggressive game, handily defeating his first nine human opponents in less than half an hour each, and earning a grand exhibition tour of Europe from the interest generated. The machine even played and narrowly lost a match to Philidor, regarded at the time as the world's greatest chess player.

People were flabbergasted that a machine could defeat most human challengers and even test the best in the world, and often demanded that the doors of the cabinet be opened during play so they could see that no trickery was being employed. Von Kempelen obliged, and people came away amazed at the genius of his chess-playing automaton.

The Turk's 'artificial intelligence', however, was actually only artifice. The cabinet contained a series of sliding doors that allowed a crouched chess master to move around inside and remain hidden while von Kempelen opened the doors for onlookers one by one. Although stories purporting to explain how the hoax worked circulated in the chess community for years, it wasn't until 1947 that the mechanism was explained in depth, by which time the Turk had befuddled people for nearly two centuries.

Feeling confident?

Be careful!

Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge. Charles Darwin

The less people know, the less they know about how little they know. There are numerous studies that point to this fact: drivers consistently rate themselves as above average regardless of their skill level; medical technicians regularly overestimate their knowledge of actual lab procedures; a university's study of their faculty found that more than 90% of instructors rated themselves as above average, which is mathematically impossible to be true.

Everyone has without a doubt overestimated their own knowledge at some point or another. The Dunning-Kruger Effect, as this is frequently called, was explained in a 1999 study by David Dunning and Justin Kruger. It is described as a complete disconnect between confidence and actual skill. The study revealed, paradoxically, that people of limited knowledge consistently overestimate their knowledge, while those with higher degrees of knowledge often have lower estimates of their abilities.

The crux of the issue lies in the subtle difference between cognition (thinking) and metacognition (thinking about thinking). In areas of knowledge in which people are weak, they tend to lack enough knowledge of what competence in the area actually looks like. Because of this, they cannot accurately place themselves on the competence spectrum. They might have a bit of topic knowledge, but what self-knowledge? That perspective only comes with an actual degree of expertise. It's also revealed that not every expert can accurately self-evaluate, meaning someone can be perfectly competent in an area, yet not be able to truly self-assess. The under-evaluators are in danger of being perceived as less knowledgeable than those who confidently overestimate their skill.

While a natural reaction might be to use this information against someone else ('I've always said they don't know what they're talking about!'), in fact the study is meant to motivate people to question their own certainty, not that of others. Seeking independent advice can provide perspective not only on the situation but also on their own assessment. When it comes to doing anything involving an element of certainty, individuals can choose to go it alone only at their peril—no matter how confident they might feel.



Acknowledgements

The Mechanical Turk

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