

<WRWeb 17.2 webtask \*\*\*\*>

## Apocalypse soon or Apocalypse not?\*\*\*\*

*The end of us*

90 minutes

individual and pair work



### Introduction

President Trump threatening to ‘totally destroy North Korea’. Another hurricane lashing out. A second monster earthquake jolting Mexico. Terrorists striking in London. And that’s just a sampling of what some people say are forewarnings of the looming total apocalypse. Yes, the world seems to be coming to an end ... but what have been the greatest threats? And if we know what those threats are, can we turn the tide? Can technology save us or destroy us? All of these things deserve a closer look ... if you want to live!

The *purpose* of this web task is to read about apocalyptic predictions of the past and how/why they didn’t become true; also, to look into the world of accelerated technological advances that may, according to many people, lead to the phenomenon called the *singularity* – a potential apocalyptic ‘event’ in and by itself. The *theme* of the web task is our future world and the possible end of mankind as we know it. The *final task* is to write a letter of application to one of the many advanced-technology companies founded by futurist Ray Kurzweil.

### Exploration

A

<https://www.wired.com/2012/08/ff-apocalypsenot>

<https://newrepublic.com/article/119697/scientists-preparing-apocalypse>

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Read the <i>Wired</i> article from 2012. List the apocalyptic predictions and how they didn’t become a reality.   |
| 2 | Read the <i>New Republic</i> article from 2014. Describe or summarise how the singularity (or artificial superintelligence) could wipe out mankind and what needs to happen to avert that danger. |

## B

[http://www.kurzweilcyberart.com/aaron/aim\\_clip\\_cohen.html](http://www.kurzweilcyberart.com/aaron/aim_clip_cohen.html)

<http://singularity.com/themovie/#.W9YhYHpKg8Y>

<http://www.kurzweilai.net/what-is-the-doomsday-clock-and-why-should-we-keep-track-of-the-time>

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Watch the 1987 cyberart video about Harold Cohen's AARON. What does Cohen have to say about 'machine creativity'? How 'right' do you feel his theory has been over the course of the past 30 years? |
| 2 | Watch the movie trailer for <i>The Singularity Is Near</i> . What are your thoughts? Is it sensationalist? Just stuff made for TV? Fact or fiction? Support your answer with any arguments.         |
| 3 | Read the article about the Doomsday Clock. Summarise why it is now closer to midnight than ever before. What are the major events that have moved it forward since its inception?                   |

## Final Task

Your final task is to apply for a job with one of the many companies founded by Ray Kurzweil. Your letter could be anywhere from 200-250 words.

- Why Kurzweil? Read about him at <http://www.kurzweiltech.com/aboutray.html>.
- Browse the companies Kurzweil founded and that are listed on his site: [http://www.kurzweiltech.com/companies\\_static.html](http://www.kurzweiltech.com/companies_static.html). From the list of companies, choose the one you'd most likely want to work for after carefully reading what that company is all about.
- Prepare and write a letter of application in which you explain your enthusiasm for the work and research the company does, the contributions it makes to science and society, how it fits in with your career goals, etcetera.
- For the purpose of this assignment, make up your educational background, e.g., you can write that you have a Computer Science degree.
- Consult websites and/or YouTube videos that offer support as to how to write a successful letter of application. Two such sites are <https://www.biospace.com/article/how-to-write-the-best-cover-letter-for-a-research-scientist-job-> and <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-write-a-job-application-letter-2061569>. The YouTube videos vary in length and depth; one that might help you is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=queppL85Ago>.
- Having finished, give your work to a classmate and give feedback on each other's letters. Formulate at least five tips on how the letter could be improved (don't just pay attention to spelling and grammar, but also to contents and structure).
- Rewrite your own letter incorporating the five tips.