

Machine Spotting Walk

On any walk or errand, hunt for the places where a machine counts, recognises, recommends, or decides. A way to notice how many automatic systems a child already passes every day.

AGE BAND	DURATION	GROUP SIZE	CONCEPT
Ages 6–12	Any walk, 20 minutes or more	One adult, one or more children	Noticing systems

What your child practises

Your child can point out automatic systems in everyday places and say what each one does: counting, recognising, recommending, or deciding.

What you need

- Nothing, though a scrap of paper and a pencil make it easier to keep score
- Any route: a walk to school, a trip to the shops, a bus ride

Why it works

Automatic systems are easy to miss because they are designed to be. Before a child can ask whether a system is fair or useful, they need to notice that it is there. Sorting what they find into four kinds of job also teaches something subtle: a door that opens by itself is not making the same kind of choice as a machine that decides who gets a discount.

How to play

1. Before you set off, agree on four kinds of machine to look for: **counts** (a ticket barrier, a step counter), **recognises** (a camera, a scanner, a sensor that sees you), **recommends** (a “you might also like” shelf or screen), and **decides** (anything that says yes or no to a person).
2. As you walk, call out anything you spot. Agree together which kind it is.
3. Some will be arguable. A traffic light might just run on a timer, or it might sense the cars. Say what you think and why.
4. At home, count your finds. Which kind did you see most? Which was hardest to spot?

Make it easier, make it harder

- **Easier:** look only for things that move or light up by themselves.
- **Harder:** for each find, guess who set it up and who could switch it off.

Talk about it

- Which machine surprised you most?
- Which ones made a choice about a person? How would you know if it got it wrong?
- Is there one you would switch off if you could? Why?

If your child asks

“Are all these machines AI?” No, and that is a good thing to notice. Many are simple: a sensor and a rule, like “open the door when something is close.” AI usually means a system that learned its rule from lots of examples instead of being told it. From the outside they can look the same, which is one reason it is hard to know when AI is being used.