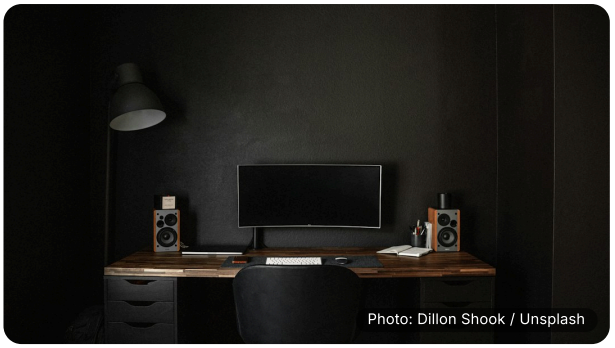
At some startups, AI agents outnumber staff

LEVEL C1


Photo: Dillon Shook / Unsplash

I. WARM-UP

1. Where do you already use AI in your work or studies?
2. When do you prefer a human, not a bot? Why?
3. What tasks at your job could software do better?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

autonomous
able to act and make decisions without direct human control

delegate
to give a task or responsibility to someone or something else

ratio
a comparison of two numbers showing how much there is of each

status symbol
something that shows success or power to other people

integrate
to connect and work together with other tools or systems

productivity
the amount of useful work produced in a set time

workforce
all the people employed by a company or in an industry

alienate
to make someone feel distant, unwelcome, or not listened to

III. READING

At Anything, an AI startup, Dhruv Amin works with 15 people and roughly 150 autonomous AI agents. There is an agent office manager for kitchen supplies. It is the ratio of agents to humans that some founders now brag about. What is driving the shift, many say, is cost.

Startups treat agents as a status symbol that proves they can do more with less. Tools from big tech—OpenAI's Dots, Anthropic's Claude Cowork and Microsoft's Scout—integrate with thousands of services to run tasks after staff go home.

New vendors are pushing the same idea, such as Viktor's "AI chief of staff" and Lindy's custom agents for sales and support. Yet tensions are growing. Customers and colleagues who want human contact feel alienated, roles are cut, and employees must supervise bots that make mistakes.

McKinsey reports 40% of large organisations used agents between May 2025 and June 2026, up from 27% a year earlier. Boston Consulting Group says firms expect to delegate enough work to cut their workforce by 10–15% in coming years, while MIT research finds no major productivity gains so far.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "What is it like to work when your...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which startup has about 150 agents and 15 people?
2. Why do some startups see agents as a status symbol?
3. According to McKinsey, what share of large organisations used agents?
4. What do BCG and MIT each say about the effects of agents?
5. Name two big-tech tools that integrate with many services.

V. DISCUSSION

1. Should companies delegate more tasks to AI agents? Why or why not?
2. Where is human interaction essential in your job or studies?
3. How can managers prevent colleagues feeling alienated by agents?
4. Is a high agent-to-human ratio a healthy status symbol?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Adding emphasis - cleft sentences

Use cleft sentences to focus one part. It-cleft: It + be + X + that/who + clause. Pseudo-cleft: What + clause + be + focus. After It, use that/who; after a What-clause, use “is”; “are” is also possible before a plural noun.

> “**It was the cost that** *worried startups.*”
>
> “**What many founders want is** *fewer humans per agent.*”

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

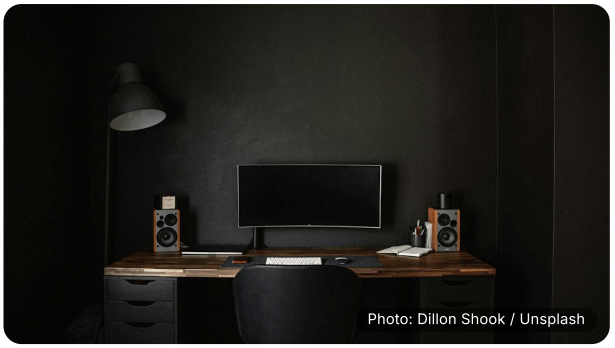
Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. It was agents (that ran / ran) tasks after hours. _____
2. It is employees (who / what) must supervise the bots. _____
3. What startups prize (are / is) doing more with less. _____
4. It was kitchen supplies (what / that) the manager handled. _____
5. What customers need now (is / are) a human reply. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Dillon Shook / Unsplash

I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 8–10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or clarify autonomous, delegate, ratio, status symbol, integrate; check pronunciation of ratio and autonomous.
- Run a jigsaw read: half the class highlights benefits named; half lists risks. Job losses can feel personal, so begin in pairs and tell students they may discuss the article rather than their own job situations.
- For differentiation, stronger students research one named tool (Dots, Claude Cowork, Scout) in pairs for 3 minutes and report one capability not in the text.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Start with a quick poll, then ask for one concrete task and one risk from each side.
2. Prompt examples like customer complaints or mentoring; ask why a bot may fail there.
3. Elicit two actions (clear rules, human review) and push for who does what and when.
4. Have students rank pros/cons of high ratios, then compare lists across groups.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In teams, prepare a 90-second argument for or against replacing a team with agents.

Writing: Write a 120-word memo advising your CEO whether to adopt Viktor, Lindy, or Scout, with one reason.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

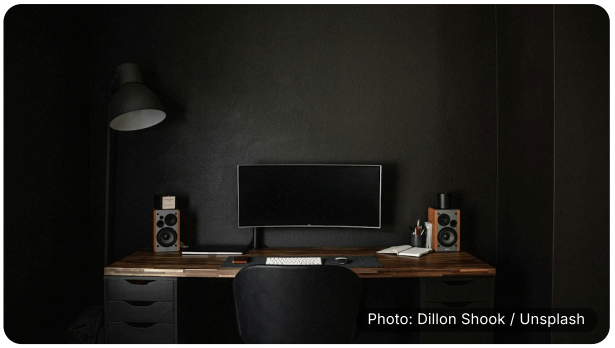
Grammar exercise: Adding emphasis - cleft sentences

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

TEACHERS ONLY

These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Dillon Shook / Unsplash

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which startup has about 150 agents and 15 people?
   Anything, the AI startup where Dhruv Amin works.
2. Why do some startups see agents as a status symbol?
   They show a company can do more with less.
3. According to McKinsey, what share of large organisations used agents?
   40% between May 2025 and June 2026, up from 27% the year before.
4. What do BCG and MIT each say about the effects of agents?
   BCG says firms expect 10–15% workforce cuts; MIT finds no major productivity gains yet.
5. Name two big-tech tools that integrate with many services.
   OpenAI's Dots and Anthropic's Claude Cowork (also Microsoft's Scout).

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. It was agents (that ran / ran) tasks after hours. **that ran**
2. It is employees (who / what) must supervise the bots. **who**
3. What startups prize (are / is) doing more with less. **is**
4. It was kitchen supplies (what / that) the manager handled. **that**
5. What customers need now (is / are) a human reply. **is**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use cleft sentences to focus one part. It-cleft: It + be + X + that/who + clause. Pseudo-cleft: What + clause + be + focus. After It, use that/who; after a What-clause, use "is"; "are" is also possible before a plural noun. (Examples constructed.)

> "**It was the cost that** *worried startups.*"
>
> "**What many founders want is** *fewer humans per agent.*"