

## **The A to Z English Podcast: Technology from the 80s and 90s**

<https://atozenglishpodcast.com/technology-from-the-80s-and-90s/>

In this episode, Kevin and Jack talk about what technology was like back when they were young! The conversation started to go long, so expect more discussions about tech from these two oldies later on. We also had some listener mail from [episode 10](#) about your favorite things!

Share your answers to the discussion questions in our [WhatsApp group chat!](#)  
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We would love to hear your feedback and suggestions for future episodes.

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### **Full Episode Transcript**

Kevin: Welcome to an a to z English Quick Chat. We're going to surprise each other with a topic for the day and just see where the conversation goes. Check out our site for a study guide, for vocabulary notes, discussion questions and remember we've got links to Whatsapp, a Facebook page and all of our other social media where you can check in the conversation. So. Jack, we've been talking with a lot of our listeners in our Whatsapp group actually and something I've found interesting is that there's a lot of young people in there.

Jack: That's right.

Kevin: And we are old compared to some of them and it, I kind of think it would be interesting to talk about technology because even one thing in our Whatsapp group so many of our listeners are doing voice memos in there and I'm just not used to that.

Jack: yeah right.

Kevin: Like i do text like I like typing and that voice message is weird and it feels like that's where tech is going and so tech has changed so much in our lives, I mean. When we were kids, we had no internet.

Jack: I didn't have the internet um even actually my whole uh school career you know elementary, middle and in high school.

Kevin: Cool. So, when did you get? When did you get your first computer in your house?

Jack: Oh, I never had a computer.

Kevin: When you were growing up you never had a home computer?

Jack: I never had a home computer. I had a **word processor**. So, imagine if you have a computer but you take away everything fun and interesting about it and just leave the whatever's left over the unfun part the you know typing and papers and printing papers and think documents, yeah that's what that's what I had was a word processor that was, it's basically a typewriter with a little bit of editing that you can do.

Kevin: And just for everyone listening. Just so you know, Jack and I are both oldies, but Jack has me. He's older than me by uh five years so not a huge difference but when it comes to technology, we were both born right when you know home computers and internet and things were starting to move around the world, and so we're even though we're only a few years apart there's a significant difference because for me, Jack, we had a we had a personal computer in my house when I was in I'm pretty sure we had one in elementary school when I was when I was in elementary school and it was a very simple computer. It had like no Windows. it was a DOS system, so you know there was no graphical interface which most of our listeners probably can't imagine like if you wanted to play a game or if you wanted to open the word processor, you would have to type. You just come, you'd open it up and it would just be a black screen with the letter c colon forward slash and you would just type text and you would just go like you'd say like go to word processor folder. Open word processor, you know in different text but basically that you'd have to type the

Jack: Type in the **command** basically.

Kevin: Right exactly! Yeah, yeah, so, we had that when I was in elementary school and then I do remember connecting not to the internet but I remember connecting to a BBC. It was a bulletin board, something not the BBC from England.

Jack: Oh, okay a different BBC. I was thinking that...

Kevin: Yeah yeah, no this is a different BBC. It was just basically a bulletin board and it was I don't even remember exactly how they worked. You would dial in with your modem, and so you'd use the phone line and dial in and you'd connect to someone's server where then sometimes they had games, sometimes they just had chat rooms where you could talk to your friends and like very simple stuff, but I remember doing that in in elementary school.

Jack: Oh, I did that in elementary school with my uh, on my friend's computer. So, my friend had a computer, and he was talking about using expressions like the internet or uh and I didn't understand any of it. I didn't know what that was.

Kevin: Yeah right.

Jack: And so he we were able to uh like you said go to some uh someone's private server I suppose right? He would share some kind of game and it was always just like a very simple kind of like not even, not even Super Mario level, you know, grab, it was a couple squares actually.

Kevin: Kind of you know speaking of that, did you have, did you ever have any video game systems?

Jack: Yeah, we were, I was a hardcore video game guy, Like, I love the original Nintendo. So, I started with the uh, I can go, I can go back really far here for our listeners because I was there at

the very beginning. I bought Pong at a **garage sale** when I was in elementary school, and my television and Pong is basically two... it's like tennis or ping pong, and you move the cursor up and down, and it knocks the ball back and forth that was it. That was like the first video game.

Kevin: It really was the first video game. I mean if you bought it from a garage sale like you bought it obviously **used** of course because I think that came out in the 70s at some point originally.

Jack: Yep, it was sitting in somebody's garage for a long time, and I just bought it for like a dollar or two dollars and brought it home.

Kevin: Nice!

Jack: And we had that for a little while, but it got boring quickly, and then my parents bought me an Atari which was very popular in the 80s as well. Um, I think Nintendo and Atari had kind of a battle and Nintendo obviously won, but uh yeah, it was uh you know it was one of those things where we didn't know at the time which one would be the uh you know the winner, so the Atari. I had like Pac Man and all and it was it was a fun. It was very fun. They had great games, so yeah.

Kevin: I never had an Atari. My brother and I, we did buy the first Nintendo, the NES, the Nintendo entertainment system and we bought that not when it was, because again, we're a couple years younger, so we bought that like a couple years after it was first released. So, it wasn't a **brand new** product, but it was still the video game system, and yep, We had that with the original Mario and Duck Hunt of course.

Jack: Yes!

Kevin: Yeah, and yeah, so we had those original Nintendo systems as well, so I mean that's a computer. That's the original tech. Now I mean computer systems and video games today are obviously so much different.

Jack: Yeah, and I think a lot of it has to do with if your parents are into you know uh computers and stuff like that, so when you're young, if you're you know in my generation, because I'm old. In the 1980s, some people did have computers, but it just wasn't very common. None of my friends, you know, other than my one friend who did have a computer, but even when we played games it wasn't computer games. We would play Nintendo or Atari, so yeah, they were separate. They weren't, it wasn't a gaming system.

Kevin: It was a video game always, not a computer game, it was a video game.

Jack: Exactly.

Kevin: I guess that's a good point about if your parents were connected to it. I think although my mom and dad weren't super techy necessarily, they, my mom at least, had a connection with it because my grandfather way back in the day, he was one of the first binary programmers for Eastman Codex, so like my mom has stories of him bringing back you know like a book of ones and zeros and ones and zeros and ones and zeros and finding the problem in the code of the ones and zeros code.

Jack: Wow.

Kevin: So at least my mom like understood you know tech is a thing and computers are a thing and this will be the future, and we need to go from there.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, I mean that that is really interesting because I you know as time went by um my friends, some of my friends started to get computers when I was getting into like high school and stuff like that okay um but my family just wasn't, we were not computer people. And so I was very much like kind of afraid of computers. They were too, they were just mysterious to me and I didn't know how to operate them, and so I would write my papers either by hand, so I would just write my essays you know handwritten, or I would uh type it on a word processor or a typewriter. So okay, yeah, I got and I took uh, even in high school, I took two or three typewriting classes, so like how to type basically, yeah, how to type. So, basically just a big room full of typewriters, and we would just type documents, just copy.

Kevin: Oh wow!

Jack: Yeah, look at it and then type it and I you know I kind of uh proudly can say I got up into I think I was 75 words a minute, something like that.

Kevin: That's pretty good. That's, that's quite fast. I type I think I type around that speed now actually after years of practice, you know, like that's a pretty good speed. I learned that's funny to compare them. I learned typing from a program called Mario teaches typing, and speaking of Mario, because of course you know I was a Mario fan and so I had like you know on one of my early computers, we had a program that was Mario teaches typing, and it was like the original Mario game right where Marios is running from the left to the right side of the screen but for each Goomba or each bad person or each you know block that you have to jump or whatever it starts with a letter.

Jack: Yeah.

Kevin: You know so it's like you have to hit whatever and you're jumping over you jump on them and then it starts to get more complicated and faster. It becomes a word or a sentence or and it's faster and faster and otherwise Mario dies if you if you don't get it, so I learned typing not from just yeah copying text but from like a game basically. I gamified typing.

Jack: Yeah.

Jack: I'm kind of curious to our listeners out there um how did you learn to type? Like what you know, do they teach? You know, for the younger generation, I imagine that computers are in schools everywhere, so if you know go to school now, you have access to a computer. My daughter was uh using a computer from the time she was you know uh five years old, so she can you know scroll on a screen and she can do all kinds of uh you know computer you know things on a computer that I could never do even as an adult. Now I've learned to do it because I had to, but it was, it's just interesting to compare my childhood to my daughter's childhood.

Kevin: So along with typing, I'd be curious how, it depends on the age of our listeners as well, like what kind of phone they first had when they had a cell phone because remember like you and I, we never had a cell phone until we were quite late. I had my first cell phone here in Korea in 2007 or 2008. And I remember original cell phones. They actually had like a keyboard right like actual

physical buttons. You know the phones today. It's just all on the screen. But I remember teaching at an academy and one of my young students, she was probably like your daughter's age like 13 or 14 something like that and because there were physical buttons, it's like a keyboard. You can feel where your thumbs are on it. Uh, I remember I was teaching her something and I saw her hands under the table just going away and she was able to type very fast without looking at her phone keyboard as well, and like I asked, I was like get your phone really quick. I wasn't angry. I was like hold on. I looked at it and she had typed like a full sentence, a full paragraph, not looking at this little nine button keyboard down under her.

Jack: Using the uh, is it called qwerty is that what the old text message?

Kevin: qwerty, no qwerty is the keyboard that you use right now.

Jack: Oh, okay

Kevin: Because look at your keyboard, Jack. The top and bottom that the keyboard is QWE.

Jack: Oh, okay i thought qwerty was where you press the three times and it you get uh it's like yeah.

Kevin: qwerty is your keyboard because if you look at the thing.

Jack: I just noticed that it said, yeah I've never put that together before today.

Kevin: No, I'm not sure what though. I don't know the name of that three like you know where the button has abc and then cef and yeah you have to like go through all of those, um, I don't know the name of that offhand, but yeah, it, she was using that system and it was just crazy quick and very impressive. But Jack, I mean this is this technology topic, I think we could carry this, we could talk about this for days, and we haven't even gotten away from our like elementary school let alone when we were in high school let alone when we actually had the real internet and things like that. I think we'll have to uh part two this one or maybe uh turn this into a multiple uh episode conversation. This is definitely gonna be a part two part three part four because I mean tech is such an interesting part of our lives and you and I have seen it from where there really wasn't any tech or very little at least to now most of our listeners just are you know have always had tech like always in their lives and the way that like games and things are all combined now with your computer and everything, and so in your smartphone.

Jack: So, I think uh we covered video games we'll talk about uh some other uh examples of tech.

Kevin: Yeah, we'll have to get back to the early internet. I mean just one last thing because the interesting thing about the internet is I remember going online right now you're just always online. you're always on the internet. When we were younger, it was like I'm gonna use the internet and you would have to go and log into it and turn it on and now even that is different. Like, internet is just everywhere, it's yeah ubiquitous...

Jack: I don't know how yeah I lived without it for so, you know as long as I did.

Kevin: And that's and that's what we can talk about because there's so many things that like our phones do today for us that we somehow did without many years ago, and it's interesting to

compare because I remember doing without it, but I don't know in retrospect why exactly, yeah but let's come back to this later because we've got to get to some listener mail of course. We do have some listener mail, so you go ahead and get to that. Who have we heard from this week?

Jack: So, today I'm going to read listener mail from one of our listeners named Salomeh and Salomeh writes in uh regards to the episode of uh what are your favorite things and so for her, she said, in the past few years my favorite things were reading pdf books from her computer and cell phone so that kind of goes along with our episode. Reading books on your phone, yeah reading books on your phone, reading books on your computer, she enjoys surfing the web, playing computer games and drinking coffee. So, I think surfing the net, you know surfing the internet and drinking coffee has to be one of the most fun things you can do.

Kevin: They go together very well, coffee and the internet. Nice, and that was episode 10 right? what are your favorite things.

Jack: Yes, that's right.

Kevin: For now, let's go ahead and wrap up. So, for everybody, thanks for listening. Remember to go join our Whatsapp group. It's linked on the webpage. You can join in the discussion as well. Tell us what you think. Ask questions, reply to the discussion, or if you have any topics, anything that you want us to talk about, anything, we'll go from there. So, everybody thanks for listening and we'll see you next time!

Jack: Bye, bye!

## **Key Words**

**Word processor:** a machine that lets users create, save, and print documents

**Command:** an order or instruction

**Garage sale:** a sale of used or unwanted goods; normally held in a person's garage or yard

**Used:** not new; an item for sale which was owned by a previous person

**Brand new:** new; an item for sale which has never been previously owned

## **Discussion Questions**

1. How did you learn to type?
2. How old were you when you first used the internet?
3. How old were you when you got your first smartphone?
4. Do you enjoy playing computer games? Why or why not?