

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 4

PART A Group Interaction

This article appeared on a business website:

Family Mart's first "unmanned convenience store" in Japan

We paid a visit to a Tokyo convenience store where there's no human clerk to pay.

On Thursday, Family Mart opened a new branch inside Tokyo Station. It has the sort of food and beverages you'd expect in a Japanese convenience store, but there aren't any employees at the check-out counters. That's because the payments are all done through a slick, unmanned system.

One difference you'll notice right away is that there's a gate you pass through when entering the shop. As we stepped through, a recorded voice called out, "Irasshaimase!" ("Welcome!").

The total selection of products isn't quite as wide as it is at some Family Marts, but customers can still get toiletries and face masks.

There actually is one Family Mart employee on the premises, who only handles shelf-stocking and customer inquiries. When we walked up to the check-out counters with our purchases, no human cashier was present. We didn't even have to scan anything. The terminal already knew what we had in our hand to buy and it made an electronic beep to draw our attention to the screen, where the total amount to be paid was displayed. You can pay with an e-money card, credit card or cash.

Oh, and by the way, there's also a gate you have to pass through in order to leave the store, and if you have an unpaid bill, it won't open up until you settle your account.

Your group is doing a project on unmanned convenience stores. You are meeting to discuss this. You may want to talk about:

- the benefits of unmanned convenience stores
- the limitations of unmanned convenience stores
- whether unmanned convenience stores are a good idea for Hong Kong
- anything else you think is important

PART B Individual Response

1. Do you often shop at convenience stores?
2. What do people usually buy at a convenience store?
3. Do you prefer self-checkout or paying at the cashier?
4. Is customer service important to you when shopping?
5. Do you think there will be more theft in unmanned stores?
6. Would you find shopping at an unmanned store too impersonal?
7. Do you think the trend of unmanned stores will continue to grow?
8. Do you think automation is making life too convenient?