This week's issue:

SHOULD SECRET WIRETAPPING BE LEGAL?

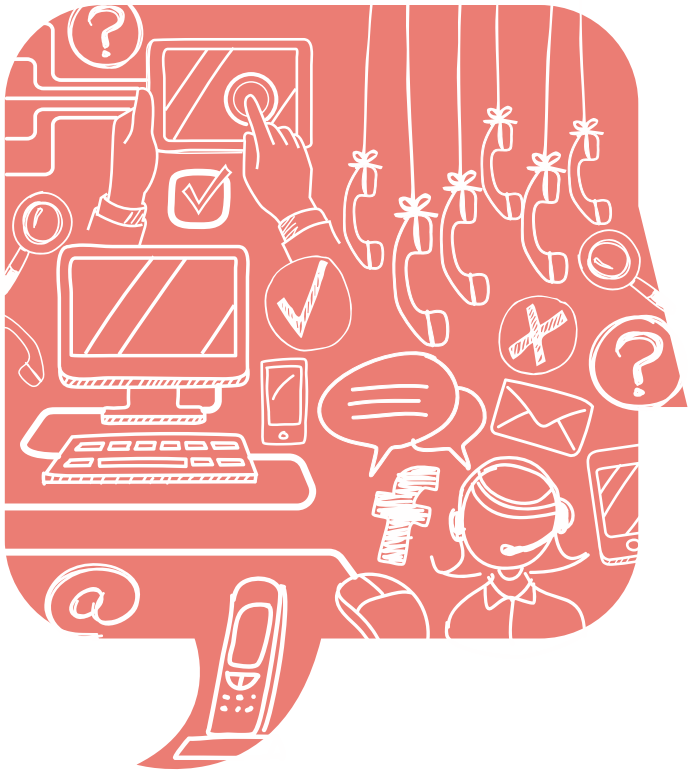
Whenever Alina talks to her cousins in Mexico, she wonders if someone from the government is listening in. She heard on the news that the government was **wiretapping** international phone calls. After the September 11th attacks, the government passed the USA Patriot Act, which allowed the National Security Agency (NSA) to tap phone calls, email accounts, and text messages of **suspicious** individuals under certain conditions. The Act required the NSA to ask judges for permission to access communications between people in the U.S.

But those in charge of protecting American security thought the limitations on surveillance of suspicious people were too strict. In 2006, a court secretly approved collecting, storing, and analyzing phone records from all the major phone companies. In fact, Verizon had to turn over all information on all phone calls in its system every day. With the growth of the internet, the records collected soon included much more than information about who was calling whom. Facebook, YouTube, Google, Skype, and other companies handed over their data to the NSA. Anything could be tapped and stored if there was a reasonable suspicion that a "non-U.S. person" had "foreign intelligence information." Government officials argued that all the information collected came from **sources** that might reveal terrorist plans. Only a few members of the government knew, though, how much data was being collected, and from how many people!

That situation changed in 2013, when a British newspaper reported that the NSA collected phone records from millions of customers every day. NSA contractor Edward Snowden was soon revealed as the source of this information. Snowden was opposed to the massive NSA surveillance, and felt it was his duty as a **patriot** to reveal its existence. That act led to widespread anger about the U.S. policy and a demand to **eliminate** government wiretapping.

Though many viewed Snowden as a traitor, his actions led to important changes. Many members of Congress and prominent judges have begun to take action against NSA surveillance programs. In addition, some major tech companies like Google have developed increased security and privacy measures. Meanwhile, Edward Snowden fled the U.S. to avoid arrest. He stated he was acting out of patriotism, but he has made himself an ex-patriot by accepting refuge in Russia. He may never be able to return to the U.S. without facing arrest.

What do you think? Was Snowden a patriot? Should wiretapping to help the government catch terrorists be legal? How much privacy are we willing to give up? Where do you stand? Remember, someone may be listening!



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USE THE FOCUS WORDS *and alternate parts of speech

wiretapping *(noun)* the act of connecting to a telephone to listen in on conversations

Sample Sentence: Sometimes government officials use **wiretapping** to find out whether terrorists are planning attacks.

Turn and Talk: How can police use **wiretapping** to catch suspected criminals?

Wiretapping can also be used as a verb ("wiretap")! *The NSA has been **wiretapping** phones in the U.S. and abroad.*

patriot *(noun)* a person who supports and defends his or her country

Sample Sentence: There is considerable controversy about whether whistleblowers like Edward Snowden are **patriots** or traitors.

Turn and Talk: What are some ways that you can be a **patriot**? Do you think people who expose crime inside government offices are **patriots** or troublemakers?

eliminate *(verb)* to get rid of, to remove

Sample Sentence: The virus smallpox was **eliminated** by vaccines.

Turn and Talk: If you were a scientist, what disease would you try to **eliminate** from the world?

suspicious *(adjective)* appearing dishonest or potentially dangerous

Sample Sentence: In 2001, the National Security Agency (NSA) began to pay attention to conversations between Americans and foreigners who the government thought were **suspicious**.

Turn and Talk: What words or phrases in a phone conversation, text, or email might seem **suspicious** to the police or the FBI?

source *(noun)* something or someone that supplies information; where something comes from; origin

Sample Sentence: The Protect America Act allowed officials to tap phone calls, email accounts, and text messages as **sources** of information.

Turn and Talk: What **sources** do detectives use to track down suspected criminals?

***source** *(verb)* to get from a specific person, place, or thing

Sample Sentence: Cocoa beans (used to make chocolate) are often **sourced** from African and South American countries.

Turn and Talk: Would you rather eat fruits and vegetables that are **sourced** from your state or a different state? Explain.

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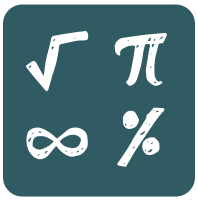

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DO THE MATH

Option 1: After the September 11th attacks, the National Security Agency (NSA) began **wiretapping** American telephones and email messages in secret. Government officials decided it was important to keep watch over people who seemed **suspicious**. They said that secret **wiretapping** would help **eliminate** terrorist attacks. They suggested that true **patriots** would not object to giving up a bit of privacy in order to improve security. Despite this explanation, many Americans oppose secret **wiretapping**, saying that it is a violation of privacy.

According to a 2015 Washington Post-Pew Research center poll, 56% of Americans approve of the NSA secretly **wiretapping** millions of Americans in order to investigate terrorism. Which fraction is closest to 56%?

A. 1/4
B. 1/5
C. 1/2
D. 1/3

Option 2: In March of 2010 a judge ruled that **wiretapping** without a warrant was illegal. Before the trial, the U.S. Justice Department had requested that the case be thrown out of court. Despite this request, the judge heard the case and made his ruling on this section of the **Patriot** Act. He said that allowing the government to spy on **suspicious** people without warrants would **eliminate** an important limit on executive power. The judge wrote a 45-page opinion on the case.

Luka just wrote a 10-page paper on **wiretapping**. He used government documents as **sources** of information. His 10-page paper took him a total of 36 hours. If he worked at the same rate, how long would it take him to write a 45-page paper?

Discussion Question: The judge mentioned in Option 2 above says the warrantless **wiretapping** program must be **eliminated** because it breaks a federal law made in 1978. In 1978, people suspected that spying on U.S. citizens would enable the government to become the **source** of too much power. Government officials must follow the rules, the judge said, despite the threat of terrorist attacks or other dangers. Do you agree with his decision? Or, in times of national trouble, should we allow the government to bend the rules?

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THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Students in Ms. Kahn's class were reading an article about how many Americans are upset that the United States government could be reading their email or **wiretapping** their phones. However, there are other **sources** of threats to our privacy besides the government! Criminals sometimes try to steal money or learn personal information about people by guessing the passwords for their online accounts. Despite this danger, many unsuspicious internet users choose passwords that are very easy to guess. One study found that some of the most common passwords are "password," "password1," "123abc," and "abc123"! Experts in online privacy have come up with ways to help **eliminate** the chance that a stranger could guess your password. The best passwords are longer than 12 characters, are not words you can find in the dictionary, and include some numbers and symbols.

"We should probably look at the passwords we use and make sure they are secure!" said Ryan after reading about this issue.

Eva wondered how many internet users had unsafe passwords. To find out, she did some research and found a report online that had data on 435,564 passwords cracked over the course of one year.

Question: How safe are the passwords chosen by internet users?

Hypothesis: Since safety is a concern, most people will create passwords with 10 or more characters.

Procedure:

1. Using the online report as a **source**, record the number of passwords with each given length.
2. Calculate the percentage of passwords with each length. Round to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Password Length (Characters)	Number of Passwords	Percentage of Passwords
1 to 6	4,720	1.1%
7	17,853	4.1%
8	170,781	39.2%
9	97,686	22.4%
10	69,241	15.9%
11	37,113	8.5%
12	22,417	5.1%
13	8,091	1.9%
14	5,141	1.2%
15 to 26	2,521	0.6%

Data Source: 2015 Trustwave Global Security Report

Is Eva's hypothesis supported by the data she found? How do you know?

Which password length is the most common? Why do you think this is?

The length of a password impacts how secure it is. For example, Trustwave reports that eight-character passwords can be easily cracked in one day, whereas 10-character passwords could take 19.5 months to decode. Do you think that the mixture of character types used (letters, symbols, and numbers) will also affect the time required to crack a password? If so, which do you think is more important for password security: length or character type?

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DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A

❑ Secret **wiretapping** is necessary to protect our national security.

OR

B

❑ Secret **wiretapping** is an unacceptable violation of personal privacy.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

❑ _____

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Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

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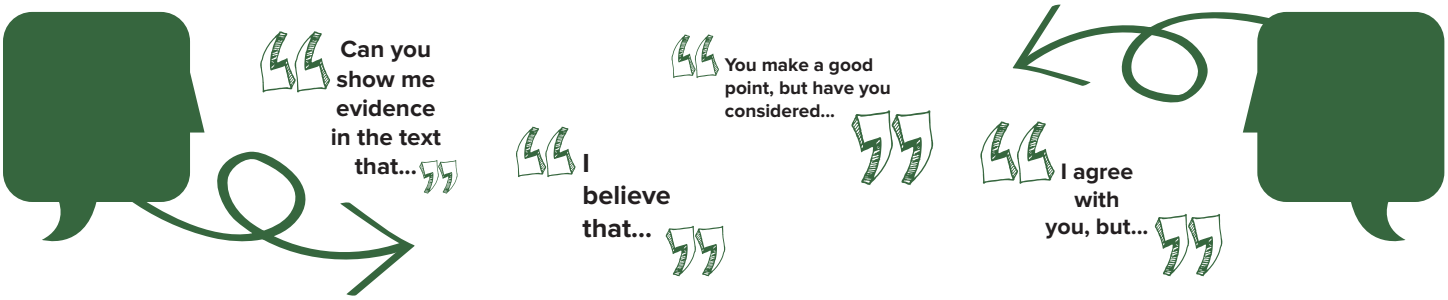
Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:



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TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

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