

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #568
Aaron Swartz | The Internet's Fallen Prodigy
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Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge, and today it is part two of our three-part mini-series on “Young, American [Outlaws](#)¹”.

[00:00:28] In case you missed part one, it was on Ross Ulbricht, the man who founded the world’s biggest online drug marketplace, Silk Road.

[00:00:36] Next up, part three will be on Luigi Mangione, the young man who [gunned down](#)² the CEO of one of America’s largest health insurance companies.

[00:00:46] And this episode, part two, will be on a man called Aaron Swartz. He was one of the most [gifted](#)³ technical minds of his generation, a founding team member of the website Reddit and a [vocal](#)⁴ [advocate](#)⁵ for a free and open internet.

¹ people who lived outside the law, criminals

² shot and killed with a gun

³ very talented or smart

⁴ speaking out strongly, not afraid to share opinions

⁵ a person who publicly supported the idea or cause

[00:01:03] In this [quest](#)⁶, however, he got on the wrong side of the law, and it ended in tragedy.

[00:01:10] So, let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:01:15] If you were going to [picture](#)⁷ the scene of a great crime, the [campus](#)⁸ at MIT–The Massachusetts Institute of Technology–might not be the first thing that comes to mind.

[00:01:27] Young men and women studying together, [hunched](#)⁹ over laptops, [furiously](#)¹⁰ trying to make a [deadline](#)¹¹ for a paper, their eyes only remaining open thanks to [copious](#)¹² amounts of energy drinks and coffee.

[00:01:42] Yet it was here, or to be precise, in a [utility closet](#)¹³ on [campus](#), that one of the greatest thefts of intellectual property in history was committed.

⁶ a long search for something important

⁷ imagine in your mind

⁸ the land and buildings of the college

⁹ bent forward with shoulders curved

¹⁰ with great energy, very quickly or angrily

¹¹ the final time or date it must be finished

¹² a very large amount, plenty

¹³ a small room for storage, often for cleaning or electrical equipment

[00:01:54] Or, if you ask someone else, that a young man did something that harmed nobody, from which he made no personal [gain](#)¹⁴, and the goal of which was to make knowledge freely available to anyone who wanted to learn.

[00:02:10] That criminal, or hero, was Aaron Swartz, a then 24-year-old computer programmer and internet activist.

[00:02:19] What followed was a two-year battle with the US Justice Department, a national debate on [censorship](#)¹⁵, [copyright](#)¹⁶, and freedom of information, and tragically ended in Swartz being found dead in his Brooklyn apartment at the age of 26.

[00:02:38] His life was short, but his [contributions](#)¹⁷, not just to the debate on [copyright](#) but also to the technology and systems we still use today, were significant.

[00:02:51] He was born in 1986, so he was very much part of the generation that grew up as the Internet was just getting started.

[00:03:01] He was closer to “the action” than most, as his father worked in technology, so there was always a computer at home he could [tinker around](#)¹⁸ with.

¹⁴ something he got or benefited from

¹⁵ control of what people can read, see, or say

¹⁶ legal right that protects who owns creative work like books, music, or films

¹⁷ things he gave

¹⁸ play with or try to fix without a clear plan

[00:03:11] And from an early age, he was very interested in computers and how they worked.

[00:03:18] It's fascinating listening to him talk about this early period of his life—the early years of the World Wide Web—and his hopes and dreams about what this might become, how it would [democratise¹⁹](#) access to information, how anyone from anywhere in the world could connect with anyone else over shared, [mutual²⁰](#) interests, no matter how [niche²¹](#).

[00:03:43] He grew up in a small community, and there were only [a handful of²²](#) people like him, with the same interests and hobbies.

[00:03:51] But on the internet, this growing magical community, he found [kindred spirits²³](#), people who shared the same interests as he did. He found his people.

[00:04:04] And this wasn't just a boy posting messages on forums; he was an active contributor to the architecture of the Internet, not just building websites but also working on the systems and technologies behind them.

¹⁹ make it open and available to everyone

²⁰ shared by many people

²¹ a small or special, that few people have

²² a small number of

²³ people who thought or felt the same way as him

[00:04:20] When he was only 12 years old, he built something called The Info Network, which was a user-generated encyclopedia. Wikipedia, essentially, but 3 years before Wikipedia.

[00:04:33] Just a few years later, he became a [core](#)²⁴ contributor to the group that made RSS.

[00:04:40] Now, without getting too technical, RSS is the technology that allows users to get information in a standardised format. It's used for news [syndication](#)²⁵, it's also used for podcasts, and it means that you can open up a podcast app, subscribe to different podcasts, and new episodes automatically appear in your feed.

[00:05:04] It's probably something you've never thought too much about before, but someone had to [envision](#)²⁶ and create this standardised feed technology, and that person, or at least one of the people in that group, was a then-teenage Aaron Swartz.

[00:05:21] Importantly, this technology is Open Source; it's free.

[00:05:27] As a publisher, podcaster or user of RSS, you don't need to pay RSS.com, the creators of RSS, or anyone to use it. It's free.

²⁴ very important or having a central part

²⁵ sending the same content to many places at once

²⁶ imagine for the future

[00:05:40] Swartz and his fellow contributors behind RSS believed this technology should exist; they built it, and they decided it should be freely accessible to everyone.

[00:05:53] So that's what it is.

[00:05:56] These contributions made him something of a [household name](#)²⁷ in certain programming circles; he would be invited to speak at conferences and give interviews, and people who didn't know anything about him would be somewhat surprised when the name "Aaron Swartz" would be announced and a 15-year-old boy would take to the [stage](#)²⁸.

[00:06:18] But he spoke with great [clarity](#)²⁹, he was exceptionally talented, and was treated as a [peer](#)³⁰ by some of the most influential people in the early days of the World Wide Web.

²⁷ a person known by almost everyone

²⁸ a raised platform where he would speak

²⁹ the quality of being clear and easy to understand

³⁰ someone of the same rank or level

[00:06:31] He was accepted at Stanford at the age of 17, but quickly **dropped out**³¹, later saying he was **disillusioned**³² with what he saw as a culture more focused on status and lifestyle than on learning

[00:06:46] At the age of 19, he founded a start-up called Infogami, which shortly afterwards **merged**³³ with another **fledgling**³⁴ site called Reddit.

[00:06:57] Reddit, as you probably know, is now one of the most visited websites in the world, with hundreds of millions of users posting, voting, and commenting every day.

[00:07:11] It is, essentially, what Aaron Swartz had always hoped the internet would be, a place for people to find **like-minded**³⁵ souls and connect over shared interests, no matter how **niche** and **obscure**³⁶.

[00:07:26] After this **merger**³⁷, he became part of the small founding team, and when Reddit was bought by the giant publishing house Condé Nast in 2006, he suddenly

³¹ left the university before finishing

³² disappointed because things were not as good as he had hoped

³³ joined together to become one

³⁴ new and not yet fully developed

³⁵ having the same interests or ideas

³⁶ not well known or difficult to understand

³⁷ when the two companies joined together

found himself with [seven figures](#)³⁸ in his bank account and working inside one of America's largest media corporations.

[00:07:46] This was not where Aaron Swartz wanted to be.

[00:07:50] He didn't care about the money or the [prestige](#)³⁹ of working for a big company.

[00:07:55] His lifestyle didn't change [in the slightest](#)⁴⁰, and this [newly minted](#)⁴¹ millionaire continued to live in a [flatshare](#)⁴², in a bedroom so small it was referred to as "the [closet](#)⁴³".

[00:08:09] What he cared about was freedom of information, the power of the internet, and the potential for technology to change society.

³⁸ an amount of money in the millions (with seven digits)

³⁹ respect and admiration from others

⁴⁰ at all

⁴¹ recently created

⁴² an arrangement in which two or more people lived in the same flat

⁴³ a small room or space for storage

[00:08:20] Anyone who knew him knew that he wouldn't [hack it](#)⁴⁴ in the corporate world, and sure enough, he left Condé Nast after just a year, saying he felt [stifled](#)⁴⁵ by the corporate environment.

[00:08:34] Afterwards, and now financially free and not [beholden to](#)⁴⁶ anyone, he threw himself into his true passion: activism.

[00:08:44] He worked with Creative Commons, the organisation that allows authors and artists to [license](#)⁴⁷ their work freely so that others can build upon it. He started groups campaigning for government transparency and accountability.

[00:08:59] And he became deeply involved in the debate over [copyright](#) law, arguing that [copyright](#) was too restrictive and unfairly limited access to knowledge.

[00:09:12] In 2008, he published what became known as the “Guerilla Open Access [Manifesto](#)⁴⁸”.

⁴⁴ be able to do something successfully

⁴⁵ held back or stopped from acting freely

⁴⁶ owing something to someone, having a duty towards them

⁴⁷ have the official permission to use it

⁴⁸ a written statement of ideas and goals

[00:09:20] In it, he argued that scientists and researchers had a [moral](#)⁴⁹ responsibility to share their work freely, and that ordinary people should take action if necessary to liberate information that was being [unjustly](#)⁵⁰ restricted.

[00:09:38] In his words: “Information is power. But like all power, there are those who want to keep it for themselves. With enough of us, around the world, we’ll not just send a strong message opposing the privatization of knowledge — we’ll make it a thing of the past.”

[00:09:58] It was a [radical](#)⁵¹ message, and it was one he would soon try to put into action.

[00:10:05] His first target was the millions of American public court documents that were not covered by any kind of [copyright](#), but for which the US government charged \$0.08 per page for users to access.

[00:10:20] Swartz believed these should be free, especially as the court system made a \$150 million a year profit from selling them.

[00:10:32] He wrote a script that downloaded them en masse and managed to download 20 million pages of court documents—an estimated 20% of the total.

⁴⁹ related to what is right or wrong

⁵⁰ in an unfair way

⁵¹ very extreme or different from usual

[00:10:45] His [intention](#)⁵² was to make them publicly available, free of charge, because they were items of public record, after all.

[00:10:54] He was caught and questioned by the FBI, but no charges were pressed.

[00:11:01] It would be his first [brush](#)⁵³ with the law, but unfortunately not the last.

[00:11:07] A year later, he set his sights on JSTOR, which, if you went to university at any point in the last 20 years or so, you might remember as one of the largest digital libraries of academic papers.

[00:11:22] JSTOR contains millions of articles from thousands of [journals](#)⁵⁴, covering virtually every field of knowledge.

[00:11:31] Swartz thought it was [morally](#)⁵⁵ wrong that these millions of academic papers and [journals](#), which had often been funded by taxpayers' money, were locked away behind expensive [paywalls](#)⁵⁶.

[00:11:45] This was...wrong.

⁵² plan or aim

⁵³ a small trouble or meeting

⁵⁴ magazines with academic or scientific articles

⁵⁵ based on what is right or wrong

⁵⁶ online barriers that make you pay to read content

[00:11:48] Knowledge, he believed, should not be locked up by governments or corporations. It should be open and available to everyone, everywhere.

[00:11:59] JSTOR kept the gates closed.

[00:12:02] So Swartz [set out](#)⁵⁷ to do something about it. As he put in his earlier [manifesto](#), “We need to take information, wherever it is stored, make our copies and share them with the world”

[00:12:16] Using the network at MIT, he began [systematically](#)⁵⁸ downloading articles from JSTOR.

[00:12:24] This wasn’t “stealing”, [per se](#)⁵⁹; he had a valid individual JSTOR account via Harvard, where he was a research fellow.

[00:12:34] The difference was that he wasn’t using his account as it was [intended](#)⁶⁰; he wasn’t downloading single files, [manually](#)⁶¹ going to each one and clicking “download” with his [mouse](#)⁶².

⁵⁷ began a task or plan

⁵⁸ in a planned, organised way

⁵⁹ by itself, in itself

⁶⁰ planned or meant

⁶¹ done by hand, not automatically

⁶² a small device used to control a computer

[00:12:46] Using similar techniques to those he had used to download millions of pages of court documents, he wrote automated [scripts](#)⁶³ to download millions of research papers from the JSTOR database.

[00:12:59] At first, he used his own laptop, sitting in [campus](#) libraries. It was fast, but not fast enough.

[00:13:08] Eventually, he went so far as to sneak into a locked [utility closet](#), where he hid a laptop connected directly to MIT's network so it could download files [around the clock](#)⁶⁴.

[00:13:21] Over the course of a few weeks, JSTOR engineers noticed strange activity.

[00:13:28] Their [servers](#)⁶⁵ were being [hammered](#)⁶⁶ with download requests, far more than a normal user would ever make. They [traced](#)⁶⁷ it back to MIT, and eventually to the [closet](#) where Swartz's laptop was hidden.

⁶³ sets of computer instructions

⁶⁴ all day and all night without stopping

⁶⁵ powerful computers that sent information to other computers

⁶⁶ used too much

⁶⁷ found the source or origin of it

[00:13:43] The police were called in. They located the [closet](#) and found the laptop. But instead of taking the computer away and trying to find its owner by [hacking](#)⁶⁸ into it, they did something less high-tech but more effective.

[00:13:59] They [planted](#)⁶⁹ a hidden camera, assuming that they would be able to catch the [perpetrator](#)⁷⁰ [red-handed](#)⁷¹, in the act.

[00:14:08] And sure enough, shortly afterwards, Swartz could be [plainly](#)⁷² seen coming into the [closet](#) and taking the laptop.

[00:14:17] Police didn't arrive in time to arrest him in the [closet](#), but he was [spotted](#)⁷³ shortly afterwards, and in January 2011, he was arrested. The laptop was [seized](#)⁷⁴, and the FBI soon became involved.

[00:14:34] Importantly, he hadn't yet done anything with the files he had downloaded, and he returned them all.

⁶⁸ breaking into it without permission

⁶⁹ secretly put in place

⁷⁰ the person who had done the crime

⁷¹ in the act of doing something wrong

⁷² clearly, without doubt

⁷³ seen or noticed

⁷⁴ taken by the police

[00:14:41] And JSTOR, the [supposed](#)⁷⁵ victim of the crime, decided not to [press charges](#)⁷⁶.

[00:14:48] They quickly [settled](#)⁷⁷, and the organisation even released a public statement saying it did not wish to see Swartz punished.

[00:14:58] And it was assumed that MIT—the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the home of many a [hacker](#)⁷⁸—would be supportive of Swartz, keen for him to get off with [a slap on the wrist](#)⁷⁹ and nothing more, and would [intervene](#)⁸⁰ on his behalf.

[00:15:15] It did not.

[00:15:17] And Swartz found himself up against the full weight of the U.S. Department of Justice.

⁷⁵ thought or believed to be

⁷⁶ officially accuse him

⁷⁷ reached an agreement to end the case

⁷⁸ a person who breaks into computer systems

⁷⁹ a very light punishment

⁸⁰ step in and try to change what was happening

[00:15:24] Federal prosecutors [stepped in](#)⁸¹ and charged him with multiple counts of computer fraud and [wire fraud](#)⁸², which carried a maximum possible sentence of 35 years in prison.

[00:15:36] For downloading academic articles.

[00:15:40] To many people, not just his friends and supporters, but people finding out about Swartz for the first time, this seemed [absurd](#)⁸³.

[00:15:50] Thirty-five years in prison was the kind of sentence given to violent criminals—to armed robbers, murderers, and rapists—not to a young man who had downloaded publicly accessible academic journals.

[00:16:06] And remember, he hadn't sold the files, hadn't shared or published them, hadn't made a cent from any of it.

[00:16:14] His goal was ideological, not financial.

[00:16:18] He believed that this knowledge should not be locked away, it should be free for anyone, anywhere, who wanted to learn.

[00:16:27] But prosecutors didn't see it that way.

⁸¹ entered the situation to try to control it

⁸² a crime of using the internet to trick people and steal money

⁸³ very silly or unreasonable

[00:16:30] They wanted to make an example of him. In their eyes, he wasn't a [principled⁸⁴](#) [activist⁸⁵](#). He was a thief, someone who had broken into a system to steal millions of documents.

[00:16:44] As the lead federal prosecutor put it, "Stealing is stealing, whether you use a computer command or a [crowbar⁸⁶](#)."

[00:16:53] A [crowbar](#), by the way, is a metal bar often used by criminals to force their way into something.

[00:17:01] As the months went on, the pressure grew.

[00:17:05] Each time his lawyers tried to negotiate a deal, prosecutors pushed for [harsher⁸⁷](#) terms. He faced the possibility of decades in prison and ruinous financial penalties unless he [pleaded⁸⁸](#) guilty to a [felony⁸⁹](#).

⁸⁴ acting according to strong beliefs about right and wrong

⁸⁵ a person who worked for change in society

⁸⁶ a strong metal bar used to force things open

⁸⁷ more severe or strict

⁸⁸ officially admitted in court that he was guilty

⁸⁹ a serious crime

[00:17:21] This [plea](#)⁹⁰ deal would mean spending six months [behind bars](#)⁹¹.

[00:17:26] Still, for someone who was only 24, it was a terrifying [prospect](#)⁹².

[00:17:32] [Pleading](#)⁹³ guilty would mean admitting guilt, admitting he had committed a crime.

[00:17:38] He would be marked for life as a [felon](#)⁹⁴, something he simply didn't believe he was.

[00:17:45] During all this time, he didn't stop his campaign for internet freedom.

[00:17:50] In 2012, while his trial was still [looming](#)⁹⁵, he played a central role in one of the most successful online protests in history.

[00:18:00] That year, the U.S. Congress was preparing to vote on a law called SOPA, the Stop Online Piracy Act.

[00:18:09] On the surface, it was about preventing copyright theft.

⁹⁰ a formal statement in court about guilt

⁹¹ in prison

⁹² something that could happen in the future

⁹³ the act of saying in court if he was guilty or not guilty

⁹⁴ a person who had been found guilty of a serious crime

⁹⁵ about to happen soon and causing worry

[00:18:13] But in practice, it gave the government [sweeping](#)⁹⁶ new powers to shut down websites, block domain names, and [censor](#)⁹⁷ online content. To Swartz and many others, it was a direct threat to the open internet.

[00:18:30] He co-founded an organisation called Demand Progress, which mobilised millions of people online to protest against SOPA.

[00:18:40] On 18 January 2012, websites including Wikipedia, Reddit, and thousands of others [went dark](#)⁹⁸ in protest. The result was extraordinary. Within days, politicians who had supported the bill [backed down](#)⁹⁹, and SOPA was dead.

[00:19:01] He had helped stop what he and many others believed would have been the end of the free internet. He was [hailed](#)¹⁰⁰ as a hero by activists, programmers, and ordinary internet users alike.

[00:19:15] But even as his reputation in those circles grew, the criminal case against him [dragged on](#)¹⁰¹.

⁹⁶ very wide or complete in effect

⁹⁷ block or remove information from public view

⁹⁸ stopped working or showing content

⁹⁹ gave up or changed position after pressure

¹⁰⁰ praised or called (something good)

¹⁰¹ continued for too long

[00:19:23] The prosecutors didn't care that JSTOR had dropped its complaint.

[00:19:27] They didn't care about his contributions to the public internet or how well-respected he was in the programming community.

[00:19:34] They cared that he had broken the law, and they were determined to win.

[00:19:40] By early 2013, Swartz was exhausted.

[00:19:44] He had struggled with [depression](#)¹⁰² for years.

[00:19:48] Friends described him as brilliant but often [fragile](#)¹⁰³, deeply idealistic but [weighed down](#)¹⁰⁴ by the injustices he saw in the world.

[00:19:59] The [looming](#) trial [magnified](#)¹⁰⁵ these struggles, these [demons](#)¹⁰⁶ he couldn't [shake](#)¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰² deep sadness that lasted a long time

¹⁰³ easily broken or easily hurt

¹⁰⁴ made heavy or burdened

¹⁰⁵ made them seem bigger or worse

¹⁰⁶ inner fears or emotional problems

¹⁰⁷ get rid of

[00:20:05] Friends said he was deeply **depressed**¹⁰⁸, **worn down**¹⁰⁹ by the endless legal battle and the weight of the possible sentence hanging over him.

[00:20:16] He had spent two years fighting, and it seemed like there was no way out. It looked highly likely that he was going to prison for a long time, and he was powerless to stop it.

[00:20:28] On 11 January 2013, his girlfriend came back to their Brooklyn apartment to find him dead, **hanging**¹¹⁰ by his belt.

[00:20:38] He was 26 years old.

[00:20:40] His death sent shockwaves through the world of technology and beyond. There was grief, anger, and disbelief.

[00:20:50] To many, it seemed like the U.S. government had **hounded**¹¹¹ a young, brilliant technologist to his death.

[00:20:59] MIT and the Department of Justice came under heavy criticism.

¹⁰⁸ very sad for a long time

¹⁰⁹ made weak or tired over time

¹¹⁰ suspended or dangling from above

¹¹¹ harassed, chased, or pressured again and again

[00:21:04] Why had they **pursued**¹¹² the case so aggressively, especially when the **supposed** victim, JSTOR, wanted no part in it?

[00:21:13] Why had they refused to offer a fairer **plea** deal, one that didn't involve prison time? He was the least violent person imaginable.

[00:21:22] In the **aftermath**¹¹³, he became a symbol. A symbol of the dangers of government **overreach**¹¹⁴, of the harshness of America's criminal justice system, but also of the potential of the internet to challenge power and change the world.

[00:21:39] His legacy lives on in the technology he helped build and in the movements he inspired: the fight for open access to knowledge, for transparency, and for a truly free internet.

[00:21:53] Yet his story also leaves us with important, sometimes uncomfortable, questions.

[00:22:00] Should acts of digital civil **disobedience**¹¹⁵ be punished like violent crime?

¹¹² followed or chased

¹¹³ the period after the bad event

¹¹⁴ using too much power or going too far

¹¹⁵ refusing to follow rules or orders

[00:22:06] Is there any **moral** difference between a crime committed for personal **enrichment**¹¹⁶ and one committed for the common good?

[00:22:14] And what does Aaron Swartz's death tell us about the society we live in, and the price of fighting for freedom in the digital age?

[00:22:23] Depending on how you answer those questions, there is probably another one.

[00:22:28] Was Aaron Swartz a dangerous criminal or one of the great **martyrs**¹¹⁷ of the Internet age?

[00:22:35] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on Aaron Swartz.

[00:22:39] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:22:43] As always, I'd love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:22:46] Had you heard of Aaron Swartz before? What did you make of this story?

[00:22:50] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:22:59] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

¹¹⁶ the act of becoming richer or gaining benefits

¹¹⁷ people who suffered or died for their beliefs

[00:23:04] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Outlaws	people who lived outside the law, criminals
Gunned down	shot and killed with a gun
Gifted	very talented or smart
Vocal	speaking out strongly, not afraid to share opinions
Advocate	a person who publicly supported the idea or cause
Quest	a long search for something important
Picture	imagine in your mind
Campus	the land and buildings of the college
Hunched	bent forward with shoulders curved
Furiously	with great energy, very quickly or angrily
Deadline	the final time or date it must be finished
Copious	a very large amount, plenty
Utility closet	a small room for storage, often for cleaning or electrical equipment

Gain	something he got or benefited from
Censorship	control of what people can read, see, or say
Copyright	legal right that protects who owns creative work like books, music, or films
Contributions	things he gave
Tinker around	play with or try to fix without a clear plan
Democratise	make it open and available to everyone
Mutual	shared by many people
Niche	a small or special, that few people have
A handful of	a small number of
Kindred spirits	people who thought or felt the same way as him
Core	very important or having a central part
Syndication	sending the same content to many places at once
Envision	imagine for the future
Household name	a person known by almost everyone
Stage	a raised platform where he would speak

Clarity	the quality of being clear and easy to understand
Peer	someone of the same rank or level
Dropped out	left the university before finishing
Disillusioned	disappointed because things were not as good as he had hoped
Merged	joined together to become one
Fledgling	new and not yet fully developed
Like-minded	having the same interests or ideas
Obscure	not well known or difficult to understand
Merger	when the two companies joined together
Seven figures	an amount of money in the millions (with seven digits)
Prestige	respect and admiration from others
In the slightest	at all
Newly minted	recently created
Flatshare	an arrangement in which two or more people lived in the same flat
Closet	a small room or space for storage

Hack it	be able to do something successfully
Stifled	held back or stopped from acting freely
Beholden to	owing something to someone, having a duty towards them
License	have the official permission to use it
Manifesto	a written statement of ideas and goals
Moral	related to what is right or wrong
Unjustly	in an unfair way
Radical	very extreme or different from usual
Intention	plan or aim
Brush	a small trouble or meeting
Journals	magazines with academic or scientific articles
Morally	based on what is right or wrong
Paywalls	online barriers that make you pay to read content
Set out	began a task or plan
Systematically	in a planned, organised way

Per se	by itself, in itself
Intended	planned or meant
Manually	done by hand, not automatically
Mouse	a small device used to control a computer
Scripts	sets of computer instructions
Around the clock	all day and all night without stopping
Servers	powerful computers that sent information to other computers
Hammered	used too much
Traced	found the source or origin of it
Hacking	breaking into it without permission
Planted	secretly put in place
Perpetrator	the person who had done the crime
Red-handed	in the act of doing something wrong
Plainly	clearly, without doubt
Spotted	seen or noticed

Seized	taken by the police
Supposed	thought or believed to be
Press charges	officially accuse him
Settled	reached an agreement to end the case
Hacker	a person who breaks into computer systems
A slap on the wrist	a very light punishment
Intervene	step in and try to change what was happening
Stepped in	entered the situation to try to control it
Wire fraud	a crime of using the internet to trick people and steal money
Absurd	very silly or unreasonable
Principled	acting according to strong beliefs about right and wrong
Activist	a person who worked for change in society
Crowbar	a strong metal bar used to force things open
Harsher	more severe or strict
Pleaded	officially admitted in court that he was guilty

Felony	a serious crime
Plea	a formal statement in court about guilt
Behind bars	in prison
Prospect	something that could happen in the future
Pleading	the act of saying in court if he was guilty or not guilty
Felon	a person who had been found guilty of a serious crime
Looming	about to happen soon and causing worry
Sweeping	very wide or complete in effect
Censor	block or remove information from public view
Went dark	stopped working or showing content
Backed down	gave up or changed position after pressure
Hailed	praised or called (something good)
Dragged on	continued for too long
Depression	deep sadness that lasted a long time
Fragile	easily broken or easily hurt

Weighed down	made heavy or burdened
Magnified	made them seem bigger or worse
Demons	inner fears or emotional problems
Shake	get rid of
Depressed	very sad for a long time
Worn down	made weak or tired over time
Hanging	suspended or dangling from above
Hounded	harassed, chased, or pressured again and again
Pursued	followed or chased
Aftermath	the period after the bad event
Overreach	using too much power or going too far
Disobedience	refusing to follow rules or orders
Enrichment	the act of becoming richer or gaining benefits
Martyrs	people who suffered or died for their beliefs

Language spotlight

1. A slap on the wrist

- **Meaning:** a very light punishment for doing something wrong
- **Synonyms:** light punishment, warning, small penalty
- **Antonyms:** harsh punishment, severe penalty
- **Examples:**
 - The student cheated on the test but only got **a slap on the wrist**.
 - Many people thought the company deserved more than **a slap on the wrist** for polluting the river.

2. Caught red-handed

- **Meaning:** caught while doing something wrong or illegal
- **Synonyms:** caught in the act, exposed, discovered
- **Antonyms:** escaped unnoticed, got away
- **Examples:**
 - The thief was **caught red-handed** trying to steal a bike.

- He was **caught red-handed** using his phone during the exam.

3. Like-minded

- **Meaning:** having the same opinions, interests, or goals
- **Synonyms:** similar, sharing ideas, on the same wavelength
- **Antonyms:** different, opposed, unlike
- **Examples:**
 - She joined a club full of **like-minded** people who also loved photography.
 - Activists often work with **like-minded** groups to make their voices stronger.

4. Backed down

- **Meaning:** stopped arguing or fighting after pressure; admitted defeat
- **Synonyms:** gave in, surrendered, yielded
- **Antonyms:** stood firm, resisted, refused
- **Examples:**

- At first the manager wanted to fire him, but she **backed down** after hearing his side of the story.
- The government **backed down** when thousands of people protested against the new law.

5. Weighed down

- **Meaning:** feeling heavy because of problems, responsibilities, or sadness
- **Synonyms:** burdened, overwhelmed, overloaded
- **Antonyms:** free, carefree, unburdened
- **Examples:**
 - She felt **weighed down** by stress during her final exams.
 - He was **weighed down** with guilt after lying to his friend.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. What did Aaron often do after Reddit was sold?
 - a) Travel the world first class
 - b) Live simply and work on projects
 - c) Buy expensive cars
 - d) Build his own company

2. Why did Swartz download millions of academic papers from JSTOR?
 - a) To sell them online
 - b) To prove his computer skills
 - c) To make knowledge free for everyone
 - d) To use them for his own research

3. What did the U.S. Justice Department charge Aaron Swartz with?
 - a) Bank robbery

b) Wire fraud and computer crimes

c) Tax evasion

d) Breaking copyright law in music

4. How did the authorities finally catch Aaron?

a) They saw him using his phone

b) They followed his emails

c) They set up a camera and saw him checking his computer

d) They traced his friends' computers

5. What happened after Swartz's death?

a) Many people saw him as a martyr for internet freedom

b) People forgot about his case quickly

c) JSTOR shut down completely

d) Reddit stopped working

True or False

6. Aaron Swartz was considered a gifted child. (True/False)
7. JSTOR wanted Aaron Swartz to go to prison. (True/False)
8. Aaron supported the SOPA law that limited the internet. (True/False)
9. Swartz believed that knowledge should be free and available to everyone.
(True/False)
10. He lived a very rich lifestyle after Reddit was sold. (True/False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

11. He was closer to “the action” than most, as his father worked in technology, so there was always a computer at home he could _____ around with.
12. But on the internet, this growing magical community, he found kindred _____, people who shared the same interests as he did. He found his people.
13. These contributions made him something of a _____ name in certain programming circles.
14. His lifestyle didn’t change in the _____, and this newly _____ millionaire continued to live in a flatshare, in a bedroom so small it was referred to as “the closet”.
15. He hid a laptop connected directly to MIT’s network so it could download files _____ the clock.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does **advocate** mean?

- a) A lawyer in a courtroom
- b) A person who publicly supports an idea or cause
- c) A person who fights with others
- d) A new student at university

17. What does **plea** mean in the context of the justice system?

- a) A request for help
- b) A punishment given to a criminal
- c) A piece of legal advice
- d) A formal statement in court about guilt

18. What does **martyr** mean?

- a) Someone who dies for their beliefs or a cause
- b) Someone who is famous for acting in films

- c) Someone who leads a political party
- d) Someone who is sent to prison unfairly

19. What does **felony** mean?

- a) A kind of university degree
- b) A small mistake
- c) A type of computer virus
- d) A serious crime

20. What does **depression** mean?

- a) A type of weather with heavy rain
- b) A strong feeling of deep and lasting sadness
- c) A medical problem with broken bones
- d) A period when the economy is growing fast

Answers

1. b) Live simply and work on projects
2. c) To make knowledge free for everyone
3. b) Wire fraud and computer crimes
4. c) They set up a camera and saw him checking his computer
5. a) Many people saw him as a martyr for internet freedom
6. True
7. False
8. False
9. True
10. False
11. tinker
12. spirits
13. household
14. slightest, minted
15. around
16. b) A person who publicly supports an idea or cause
17. d) A formal statement in court about guilt
18. a) Someone who dies for their beliefs or a cause
19. d) A serious crime
20. b) A strong feeling of deep and lasting sadness