

AI Voice Explainer

How can I tell if a voice is prerecorded or artificial?

The Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) restricts calls that play prerecorded or artificial voices. The TCPA's restrictions apply even if a human being is available for part of the call, such as when a live caller comes on the line after playing a recording or reaches your voicemail and decides to leave a prerecorded message. Recorded messages are pretty easy to identify since they can't interact with you like a real person can. However, advances in technology now mean that some computers can talk to you like a real human being. Artificially generated "AI" voices can be much more difficult to identify than simple prerecorded messages, but are still subject to the TCPA. Even though it can be tough to tell whether you're speaking to an AI voice, there are a few things you can listen for to try to tell if the voice on the other end of the phone is real or an AI.

For example, calls with real human beings often have some background noise because the human caller is sitting somewhere speaking into a microphone or telephone receiver. Even if a human is sitting in a quiet room, you can often hear a slight hum from a microphone; however, computers using AI voices don't need microphones and so if the phone call goes completely silent when nobody is speaking, that can be a clue that you're talking to an AI voice.

Also, humans often need a second or two to think before they respond to you, especially if you say something unexpected. Lots of people pause to think before speaking, or start a sentence with an "umm" or another sound that lets you know they're preparing to speak. AI voices often answer immediately because they're programmed to respond quickly and without saying "umm" or "uhh." If you have a feeling that someone is responding a little too quickly, or if they give identical responses like they're reading from a script, then this can also be an indication you're speaking to an AI voice. Also, some AI chatbots can't tell that they have reached your voicemail. If you get a message that sounds like it's trying to speak to your voicemail like it was a real person, then that is probably an AI generated or prerecorded message.

Although some AI voices are quite sophisticated and can be very difficult to tell from a human voice, not every AI generated voice perfectly matches human speech. If the caller sounds like a robot and doesn't change their tone of voice or the speed at which they speak, then you're probably talking to an AI. Finally, AI voices can sound like virtually anyone, including famous people. It's unlikely a famous politician or movie star is calling you. If the voice sounds like someone famous, the call is probably a scam and you should hang up immediately.