ALL WORK AND NO PLAY

A TALKING POINTS LESSON FOR ENGLISH READING, SPEAKING, WRITING & VOCABULARY
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Introduction

Do we work too much?

Has work become the only thing we think about?

Do we relax enough?
All Work and No Play

It started about two years ago.

I got a headache, and I went home and took some painkillers. I thought nothing of it. Just a headache.

But the next morning, I still had a headache. I took two more painkillers and got ready for work. I had the headache all day, and it just didn’t seem to shift from my brain.

I got home, and that night I didn’t sleep. I just couldn’t sleep. I paced the room and watched TV with the sound turned low.

The next day I felt awful. I spoke to my boss and said that I needed to leave early. He told me to take the next day off.

I went to see a doctor, and he told me I was suffering from stress. I couldn’t believe it. My life did not seem stressful at all. Where was the stress coming from?

Then he told me to talk to a specialist about my lifestyle. I agreed and made an appointment.

I spoke to the specialist, and she went through all the things I did every day.

As we went through all my lifestyle habits, she pointed out how unhealthy I was.

The first thing she pointed out was how I took work home every evening. And this is true — I often had work that I could do at home. I didn’t think anything of it. Everyone did it. And if you didn’t do it, then it would reflect badly on you. It made you look like you didn’t care about the company. That you had no interest in the job you were doing.

Another thing she showed me was that I was spending too much time online. I had to be online for my job, but I was spending hours in front of a computer screen staring at things on the internet.

And when I wasn’t using my computer, I was staring at my smartphone.

The specialist said that I was always working. I was never having a rest period.

But again, it seemed to be normal to do this.

Then she talked about exercise. I know that I am not sport-minded and I don’t go running every day, but I didn’t think I had anything to worry about. I was not overweight, and I thought I walked a lot — every day to the subway station and in the evening from the subway station back home.

She pointed out that this was not enough. She advised me to do something like playing badminton with a friend two times a week. It’s not just the exercise — it’s the fact that I am doing something recreational and fun that makes it so healthy. She said everyone needs to do this.
We looked at my diet — this was terrible. I realised I was eating all the wrong food. Very little in the way of fresh vegetables and fruit. Most of it processed food.

The doctor created a whole new lifestyle for me. Told me to take up sport or exercise. Funny enough, I play badminton twice a week. And I love it. I really look forward to it.

I eat more healthily and I leave work alone in the evenings and weekends. In fact, at the weekend I have a digital detox — I turn my phone off and I leave my computer alone. I do other healthier things like reading books and cooking meals.

My life has taken a turn for the better. Not only do I feel less stressed, but I feel happier too.
Reading Comprehension Questions

When did Fisher’s condition begin?

What were the symptoms?

What happened the next day at work?

Who did Fisher talk to about his condition?

What did they say?

What negative things did the specialist say Fisher was doing in his life?

What did the specialist advise Fisher to do?

What exercise did Fisher do every day before?

Did he think there was a problem with his weight?

What sport does Fisher do now every week?

What does he do with his phone and computer every weekend?

What does he do instead?

How does Fisher feel today?
## Essential Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>headache</th>
<th>painkillers</th>
<th>to shift</th>
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<td>I paced the room</td>
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<td>suffering</td>
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<td>habits</td>
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<td>staring</td>
<td>sport-minded</td>
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<td>advised</td>
<td>badminton</td>
<td>recreational</td>
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<td>diet</td>
<td>processed food</td>
<td>digital detox</td>
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### Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

**Notebook**—a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.

“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”
Discussion Questions

Do you think Fisher could have just changed his lifestyle by himself? Why bother going to see a specialist?

Why do you think Fisher feels he must take work home with him every day? Is this how modern companies work today?

What do you think about Fisher’s lifestyle?

Do people work too much these days? Why?

Is this the same in your country? Talk about it for a little.

What advice would you give to someone that works too hard these days? Think of three good reasons why they need to not work all the time.

Do you think people are under pressure to work hard these days? Why/why not?

If you have a job, do you work as hard as Fisher in his story? If so, why?

If you had a job, would you work as hard as Fisher in the story? Why/why not?

Do men work harder than women? Or vice versa?

Which country’s people work hard? Which country’s people do not work hard? Why do you think so?

Look at the following saying: All work and no play make Jack a dull boy. What do you think it means? Can you give examples that you know of?

What is a workaholic? What does this word mean, and how did it arrive in the English language? Do you have similar words in your language? Can you explain these words in English?

What do you think is a good work/life balance? How many hours should we work every week compared to playing, resting, being with family and friends? Try to explain your reasons.
Work Idioms

Look at all the idioms below. Try to find out the meaning of these phrases. You can use an online dictionary to help you.
Try to make a sentence of your own using all the idioms.

- To burn the candle at both ends
- working all hours
- working my fingers to the bone
- pull your weight
- to go the extra mile
- to knuckle down
- to work like a dog
- busy as a bee
- to be snowed under
- to have a lot on one’s plate
Role Play: Working Too Hard

This is a role play activity with two characters.

1. You are a workaholic. You think nothing of working a 12-hour day, and even then you will still take work home. You work most weekends and if you do have a day off you feel restless and out of sorts. You believe your company needs you and you feel obliged to always be on duty. Your phone is never off.

2. You are a good friend of the character above. You think your friend works too much. Try to convince your friend that there are more things to life than just working. Tell your friend about the benefits of spending time with friends and family. Or of doing exercise or recreational activities.

In the class, divide into pairs. Choose a character and then create a role play.

When you are ready, show the class.
The Value of Recreational Pursuits

Look at the following extracts where people talk about their free-time activities and the benefits they receive from them.

John

I like to go skiing whenever I have the time. I like being outside in the fresh air and it’s great to get out of the city. The feeling of going down one of the slopes at high speed on skis is just exhilarating. When I go away for the weekend skiing, I always go with my friends. It’s a great time—we ski during the day and then in the evening have dinner, drink something hot to keep us warm and talk into the early hours.

Clare

I like to spend time reading. After working all week and dealing with all the things I have to do in the HR department, I find sitting down with a book a great way to relax. I am also a member of a book club—and we meet every Thursday. I always go to these meetings because it is so nice to meet up with other people who like to read. But it is also good to just forget about work for an evening. Reading helps me to immerse myself in another world. And by doing that, I can stop thinking about work so much.

Philip

I like to play board games. I don’t play any of these modern games—I usually play the older games like Monopoly or Cluedo. It’s just fun, I think. I have a few friends who also like to play board games, and we go to the local pub once a week to play games. This has grown into a big event now. I like to do this because I’m out with my friends and I am doing something I love. It’s just a relaxing and fun evening out.

Catherine

I used to go horse riding when I was much younger, but I decided to get back into it again. I don’t go riding so much anymore, but I like to help out at the stables. Clearing out and feeding the horses, taking care of them—it just makes me feel good. Plus, I am outside for most of the day getting fresh air. It’s also really good exercise, as I am moving around a lot. I try to do this every Saturday and sometimes on Sunday too. I go into work on a Monday and I feel completely refreshed.

Read through all the above extracts in class. Then get into small groups and look at each person and their recreational activities one by one.
What are the benefits that each person receives from their free-time activities? Look through what each person says, but also try to think about what benefits they might have just using your own imagination and thoughts.
My Recreational Life

You must have some things that you like to do after work—or after a hard day at school and studying.

Think about what you do in your free time and what benefits you receive from doing this activity.

Look at the example below, and then make your own list.

**Hillwalking**

The benefits are:

- lots of fresh air
- exercise
- being left alone with my own private thoughts
- if I am hillwalking with others, we can have conversations about all kinds of things
- fantastic scenery and views
- being up high and feeling on top of the world
- building up a big appetite and enjoying a great meal at the end of the day
- the silence
- seeing some wildlife and realising that I am not the only living thing in this world

*Now you try!*

Make a big list of all the benefits you get from your free time pursuits.

If you don’t have any free time interests, what would you like to do and what benefits could you receive from doing it?

*Why don’t you start doing this activity this week?*
Role Play: No Days Off

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in this role play:

1. You are a member of staff on the sales team. You have been working very hard recently and you would like to take some time off, maybe three or four days so that you can recharge your batteries and relax. You love your job, but you also need some time to yourself. You think this is a perfectly reasonable request.

2. You are the manager of the sales team. One of your team members has asked for some time off, but you don’t think you can spare them any time off at all. Things are very busy, and you need everyone to be at work. When the person asks for time off, you have to put your foot down and say no.

In pairs, take your time to prepare your role play.

*When you are ready, you can show the class and your teacher.*
Writing

Write a short article about the importance of free time and why people should not work all the time.

You can include any details of the things covered in the lesson plan so far.
Teacher’s Notes

Introduction
Go through all the questions and ask the students. Elicit as many responses as you can. If you are a foreign teacher working abroad, you might want to add one or two comments of your own about working in your culture to try to get more responses from the students.

All Work and No Play
Pick a few students to read through all the text. You might need to read through twice, but hopefully, the students are at the right level where they can pick up most of the meaning.

Reading Comprehension Questions
You can do this by going through all the questions as one group with all the class. Or you could put the students in small groups. Or let them do the whole exercise individually.

Essential Vocabulary
This is a list of vocabulary that may be very useful to your students.
You can do this for homework or as an in-class activity.
For either purpose, I would suggest doing the following:
• Look the word or phrase up in a dictionary
• Write down the meaning of the new word in the students’ vocabulary notebook
• Think of a sentence using the new word
You could do this as a class activity for the first four or five words, then assign the rest as homework. Students often need to practice using a dictionary, so this could be a useful exercise for them.

Discussion Questions
This is a class activity.
Go round the class, and ask the students all the discussion questions one by one. Their answers and responses may encourage further or follow-up questions.
The point is for the students to become active in discussing what they have read and the vocabulary they have gained.

**Work Idioms**
You can do this as one class working altogether.
Go through all the idioms, paying special attention to pronunciation.
For lower-level students, you may need to go through each idiom and find out the meaning as one class working together. If you have a projector, then you could show the meanings of the idioms that you find in an online dictionary or in another internet reference.
But ideally, you should get the students to find out the meanings by themselves. They may complain about this, but the best way for them to learn and remember English words and phrases is to do the research and find out the meanings by themselves.
You could put them in small groups to do this—or make them work alone.
But once they have found out all the meanings, get them to call them out one by one.
Once there is a clear understanding of all the idioms, the students should make sentences of their own using their own words and ideas.
This could be done in class or as homework.

**Role Play: Working Too Hard**
This is a role play exercise. It is self-explanatory.
The students divide into pairs, and each student chooses a character to do in the role play. Give the students some time to prepare, then let each pair show their role play in front of the class.

**The Value of Recreational Pursuits**
In class, read through all the extracts.
The students should then find out what all the benefits are for each person and their free-time activities.
If you are in a lower-level class, then you can do this as one group. As the teacher, you should elicit responses from the students.
But if the students are more advanced, then let them work in small groups or alone. They should make a list of benefits from the extracts but also try to think of other benefits that each speaker may get from their free time activity.

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**My Recreational Life**

In this exercise, the students use the same methods as in the above exercise. But this time they are looking at their own free-time activities that they may do after work, school or college.

Go through the example and the list of benefits for clarity and understanding and then give the students some time to think about their own recreational activities.

Depending on their level, you may want to put them in groups or working on their own.

**Role Play: No Days Off**

This is another role play exercise.

This time there are two characters at work—a staff member and a manager. The set up should be self-explanatory.

Give each pair some time to prepare and then show to all the class.

**Writing**

This is a writing exercise based on everything done in the lesson beforehand.

The students should write an article on the importance of free time. Depending on their level, I will leave it to your discretion on how many words they should write in their article.

When they have completed their articles, you could ask them to read out loud in class. The other students could then give feedback on each student’s article.
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