NEWS LESSON

Why More Entertainment May Not Mean Less Boredom



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What do you reach for when you have two minutes with nothing to do?
2. When was waiting more enjoyable than you expected?
3. Would you rather be bored alone or entertained by something you did not choose?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**stimulation**	☐
2	**summon**	☐
3	**disengaging**	☐
4	**conversely**	☐
5	**nostalgia**	☐
6	**hypothesis**	☐
7	**tolerance**	☐
8	**passive**	☐

A	stopping paying attention to something
B	a warm feeling about the past, often making it seem better than it was
C	taking no active part, just receiving
D	things that keep your mind interested and active
E	the ability to accept something unpleasant without becoming upset
F	an idea that has been suggested but not yet proved
G	to make something appear or come when you want it
H	used to introduce the opposite of what you just said

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

There is always something to watch, yet waiting a few seconds can still feel unbearable. A 2024 article by Katy Tam and Michael Inzlicht asks whether constant stimulation makes dull moments harder to bear.

1 Modern life offers an extraordinary solution to an ancient human problem: whenever boredom appears, we can summon an almost limitless supply of stimulation. There is always something to watch, yet waiting a few seconds can still feel unbearable. The phone offers an effortless escape, but it may also make ordinary, unstimulating moments harder to tolerate.

2 In a 2024 perspective published in Communications Psychology, Katy Tam and Michael Inzlicht examined this paradox and proposed that digital media might contribute to the very feeling it promises to eliminate. Their argument is a research-informed hypothesis, not definitive evidence of a single cause. Nevertheless, it raises a useful challenge to the assumption that more entertainment necessarily means greater satisfaction.

3 Digital platforms often reward rapid switching. A video loses our attention and another begins; an article seems slow and we move on to a new tab before boredom can set in. This can create expectations of immediate novelty against which ordinary activities struggle to compete. The problem is not merely the quantity of content, nor that modern entertainment is uniquely harmful. It is the habit of disengaging whenever stimulation declines, which can prevent us from noticing the difference between a passing lack of stimulation and deeper dissatisfaction.

4 Boredom itself is more complicated than an empty schedule. Someone can be busy yet deeply bored if their activities feel meaningless. Conversely, a person sitting quietly might be content, curious or creatively absorbed. Persistent boredom can be distressing, but brief periods without obvious stimulation may prompt reflection or reveal unmet needs.

5 There is also a risk of nostalgia. Earlier generations did not automatically lead richer, more attentive lives, and digital tools can support meaningful friendships, education and artistic work. The effects depend on what people do online, how they do it and what alternatives are available in their lives. None of this requires a heroic digital detox. Leaving the phone in a pocket during a short journey might simply reveal how often we reach for it without deciding to.

6 The experience of boredom is shaped by context, which complicates any attempt to establish a simple relationship with digital media. Someone recovering from an exhausting shift may welcome passive entertainment, while an isolated teenager may use online communities to find connection unavailable nearby. The same platform can therefore provide relief, meaningful engagement or an unsatisfying sequence of distractions.

7 The useful question is not merely how long people spend online but whether their use corresponds to their needs and intentions. Habitual switching may prevent sustained involvement in an activity, whereas deliberate participation in a class, community or creative project may have the opposite effect. Treating all screen time as interchangeable obscures those differences and risks replacing one simplistic explanation with another.

8 The more useful question may concern our tolerance for mental silence. If every gap is filled before we can register it, boredom becomes something we react to automatically rather than understand. Learning when to put a device away may not eliminate boredom, but it could help us recognise what our attention is actually looking for.

Sources: Communications Psychology. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writers would accept that a person with a full diary could still be bored. T F NG
2. The article claims that screen time of any kind makes people more bored. T F NG
3. The article suggests that boredom is more common among teenagers than among older adults. T F NG
4. The writer implies that the same platform could help one person and disappoint another. T F NG
5. The text argues that earlier generations were more attentive than people today. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

definitive	distressing	eliminate	meaningless	obscure	paradox	prompt	sustained

1. No policy can _____ every risk; the best we can do is reduce it.
2. It is a _____ that the busiest cities can also be the loneliest places to live.
3. Until the trial ends, there is no _____ proof that the drug works.
4. A single average can _____ how unevenly wealth is spread.
5. A minor setback can _____ managers to rethink an entire strategy.
6. Learning a language needs _____ effort over many months, not occasional bursts.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of the findings was questioned by several reviewers. (RELIABLE)
2. Her _____ to answer messages drove her colleagues mad. (WILLING)
3. Researchers warned that the headline figure could be _____ if the sample was too small. (MISLEAD)
4. The study's _____ lies in how it combines two separate fields. (ORIGINAL)
5. A _____ approach to the problem would ignore many causes. (SIMPLE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs at this level are not literal. Check which verb carries the meaning, and adjust its form: a gerund after a preposition, or a base verb after to.

brush	cling	dwelling	figure	play	slip	stem

1. Many apps _____ on our fear of missing out.
2. He tried to _____ off the criticism with a joke.
3. Researchers have yet to _____ out whether the effect lasts.
4. Many users _____ into the habit of checking their phones without noticing.
5. Rather than _____ on past mistakes, she tried to look forward.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What might you notice if you left your phone in your pocket for ten minutes?
2. Should every empty moment need a purpose?
3. Could making a phone less convenient make a day more enjoyable?

9 Role-play: a phone-free evening

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the housemate with an idea

You think you both spend too much time on your phones. Suggest a phone-free evening once a week. Explain why, and offer ideas for things to do instead.

Student B · the housemate who loves their phone

You use your phone to talk to friends and to relax after work. You're not sure about the idea. Ask questions, say what worries you, and try to agree on a compromise.

Useful phrases

I'd like to try something different.
What would we do instead?
I'm not sure that's a good idea.
I use my phone to keep in touch.
How about two hours, not the whole evening?
Okay, let's give it a go.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree on a plan, and what was the compromise?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 D · 2 G · 3 A · 4 H · 5 B · 6 F · 7 E · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 eliminate · 2 paradox · 3 definitive · 4 obscure · 5 prompt · 6 sustained

6 Word forms

1 reliability · 2 unwillingness · 3 misleading · 4 originality · 5 simplistic

7 Language focus

1 play · 2 brush · 3 figure · 4 slip · 5 dwelling

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