NEWS LESSON

When Every Pause Is Filled Before You Notice It



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	**perspective**	☐	A	thinking about nice things instead of what is around you
2	**meaningful**	☐	B	what you believe will happen or should happen
3	**wellbeing**	☐	C	important and worth doing
4	**expectations**	☐	D	to use, read or watch something
5	**circumstances**	☐	E	to see or show the difference between two things
6	**distinguish**	☐	F	how happy, healthy and comfortable you feel
7	**consume**	☐	G	a piece of writing that gives an expert's view on a subject
8	**daydreaming**	☐	H	the facts and conditions of a situation

3 Read

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

Katy Tam and Michael Inzlicht argue that digital media may sometimes deepen boredom rather than relieve it. Their article interprets existing research; it proves no single cause.

1 Standing in a queue used to involve looking around, daydreaming or chatting to a stranger. Today, it often takes only seconds before somebody reaches for their phone, and for many of us that movement has become second nature. Entertainment is constantly available, so why do researchers suggest that boredom may be becoming more common?

2 Think about the last time you stood in a queue without taking out your phone. Did you look around, start a conversation or immediately feel that something was missing?

3 In a 2024 perspective article for Communications Psychology, researchers Katy Tam and Michael Inzlicht discussed evidence of rising boredom and proposed a possible explanation: digital media may sometimes make boredom worse instead of relieving it. Their article presents an interpretation of existing research, not a single experiment proving that smartphones cause a worldwide increase.

4 Part of the problem may be the speed with which we consume content. Short videos and endless feeds encourage us to move on as soon as our attention weakens. Having unlimited alternatives can make an ordinary activity feel disappointing. Instead of becoming absorbed in one experience, we give up on it and look around for something more stimulating.

5 Yet it would be unfair to blame all digital entertainment. People use technology for meaningful learning, creativity and keeping up with the people they care about. Boredom is also influenced by working conditions, emotional health and whether daily activities offer a sense of purpose. A phone can provide genuine enjoyment or simply help someone pass a difficult journey. Being bored is not always a sign that something has gone wrong. It may simply be the point at which our minds stop receiving instructions and begin looking for something of their own to do.

6 Researchers distinguish between an occasional boring moment and persistent boredom that interferes with wellbeing. The first can be perfectly normal. It may signal a need for a new activity or provide a chance for our thoughts to wander. The second deserves more attention, particularly when it is connected with low mood or isolation.

7 Boredom also depends on expectations and circumstances. A quiet afternoon can feel peaceful to someone who has had a demanding week but unbearable to a person who feels isolated or stuck. That difference matters when discussing the effects of technology. A phone might connect somebody to friends when they have limited opportunities to meet in person, while the same device could encourage another person to avoid activities they would enjoy more.

8 The researchers' hypothesis therefore should not become a rule that everybody needs less screen time. It invites us to question a particular pattern of automatic consumption. If we repeatedly check for novelty without becoming satisfied, the answer may involve changing what we do with our devices rather than simply counting the minutes we spend using them.

9 Perhaps the interesting experiment is not deleting every app but noticing our habits. If every pause is immediately filled, we may never discover whether we need entertainment, connection, rest or a new challenge. Sometimes the ability to tolerate a little boredom gives us room to make that choice.

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. Tam and Inzlicht based their article on a new experiment of their own. T F NG
2. The writers think boredom can sometimes be a useful signal. T F NG
3. The text says how many hours a day the average person spends on a phone. T F NG
4. The same phone could have opposite effects on two different people. T F NG
5. The writers' main advice is that everybody should spend less time on screens. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

absorbed	genuine	hypothesis	isolation	novelty	persistent	stimulating	tolerate

1. She was so _____ in the novel that she missed her stop.
2. A _____ cough that lasts for months should be checked by a doctor.
3. Doctors say long periods of _____ can harm a person's mental health.
4. Many people find it hard to _____ long delays at airports.
5. I could tell his apology was _____ ; he looked truly sorry.
6. The scientists tested their _____ that sleep improves memory.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the bus arrived, we _____ for forty minutes. (WAIT)
2. In many schools, phones _____ during lessons. (BAN)
3. If she _____ her phone at home, she would have chatted to the stranger next to her. (LEAVE)
4. At nine last night, he _____ a film on his phone. (WATCH)
5. I _____ my phone every few minutes, but now I check it twice a day. (CHECK)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. The small word often changes the meaning completely. Choose the verb that matches the meaning, then check its form and whether the phrase takes an object.

came	felt	look	moved	put	set	stayed

1. After a few seconds, most viewers _____ on to another video.
2. When we feel bored, we often _____ around for something more exciting.
3. I decided to _____ my phone away and enjoy the view.
4. Cleaning the shelf, she _____ across an old photograph.
5. They _____ up a book club that meets every Sunday.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 absorbed · 2 persistent · 3 isolation · 4 tolerate · 5 genuine · 6 hypothesis

6 Verb forms

1 had been waiting or had waited · 2 are banned · 3 had left · 4 was watching · 5 used to check or would check

7 Language focus

1 moved · 2 look · 3 put · 4 came · 5 set

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**