NEWS LESSON

Turning a Slower Life into One More Thing to Maximise



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Why does the language of self-improvement reach into free time?
2. What is lost when a way of living becomes a trend with a name?
3. Who has the time and money to live slowly, and who does not?

2 Key words

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

1	**suffix**	☐	A	over a long period in the past
2	**attaches**	☐	B	recorded in writing, photos or video
3	**justification**	☐	C	squeezing something into a smaller space
4	**compressing**	☐	D	a different suggestion made in reply to another one
5	**documented**	☐	E	a good reason for something
6	**demanding**	☐	F	joins one thing to another
7	**historically**	☐	G	a group of letters added to the end of a word
8	**counter-proposal**	☐	H	needing a lot of effort or skill

3 Read

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

The internet has found the appeal of living like an Italian grandmother. The difficulty is what happens to slowing down once it becomes a trend.

1 Grazia Incampo and Teresa Calia have been friends since they were children. At a bakery in Altamura, in Puglia, they make the bread and pasta the region is known for, and the clips have found an audience far larger than the town. It is tempting to read their appeal as a recipe: food made by hand, a friendship of eighty years, an unhurried afternoon, and the rest of us might work out how to live.

2 The internet has supplied the name already. Nonnamaxxing attaches nonna, the Italian for grandmother, to maxxing, the suffix for taking something to its limit. It borrows a fond image of the Italian grandmother, cooking, walking, gardening, staying close to her neighbours, and offers those habits as the opposite of a life spent between screens and obligations.

3 The phrase is funny mainly because of the company it keeps. Maxxing is also fixed to protein, productivity, sleep and appearance, as though an optimal setting were waiting to be found in every hour of the day. Sometimes the language is sincere and sometimes the exaggeration is the joke. Either way most people recognise the feeling underneath: a suspicion that even their free time could be run better.

4 What makes the nonna image attractive may be what it leaves out. A meal is not fuel and it is not content; it is a reason to sit down together. A walk needs no justification from a watch. Talking to a neighbour can be the point. Set against the volume of advice about self-improvement, these ordinary acts look almost radical, which says more about the advice than the acts.

5 A carefully framed video is still a narrow window. Italian grandmothers share neither a personality nor a timetable, and older generations were hardly spared demanding work and money worries. Nor does a garden or a particular kind of flour guarantee anyone a longer life. Compressing a varied group of women into one comforting type tends to overlook the individuals the trend claims to be admiring.

6 Then there is the problem of simplicity as a performance. If a slower life requires the right linen, everything cooked from scratch and the results documented, it has quietly acquired a long list of tasks. What is a pleasant choice for one person is an expensive piece of organisation for another.

7 There is also a difference between making time and having it made for you. A long lunch is a lovely idea until somebody counts the shopping, the cooking and the washing up, and in most families that work has historically fallen to women, usually on top of a job. The honest version has everybody in the kitchen, rather than one person producing a peaceful afternoon for everyone else.

8 Polly Hudson's counter-proposal in the Guardian is minning: doing less, rather than maximising. It is commentary rather than evidence of anything, but it exposes the question underneath both labels. What is the extra room actually for, another admirable routine or an afternoon worth being present in? Incampo and Calia are under no obligation to answer. They are two old friends at work, and the thing people are watching may simply be that.

Sources: Washington Post, Nonna-maxxing serves up a recipe for la dolce vita; Dictionary.com, nonnamaxxing; Polly Hudson, Let us make 2027 the year of minning, The Guardian. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

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

1. The article suggests that the praise for slow living tells us as much about the advice around it as about the habits themselves. (T) (F) (NG)
2. According to the article, the work behind a long lunch has historically been shared equally in most families. (T) (F) (NG)
3. The two women were first filmed by a national television channel. (T) (F) (NG)
4. The article says living slowly costs some people more effort than others. (T) (F) (NG)
5. The article treats minning and nonnamaxxing as two answers to the same underlying question. (T) (F) (NG)

5 Vocabulary

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

contagious	exposes	negligible	overlook	radical	spared	tempting	unhurried

1. Her proposal to scrap the fee entirely was too _____ for the committee, which preferred small adjustments.
2. It is easy to _____ the contribution of volunteers when a charity is led by one famous face.
3. After years of commuting, he enjoyed the _____ pace of village life.
4. Few households were _____ the effects of the long recession.
5. The leaked memo _____ how little the board understood its own customers.
6. It is _____ to blame a single factor, but the real causes were many.

6 Word forms

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

1. Her _____ to routine means she has never missed a morning at the bakery. **(DEVOTE)**
2. The clip gives a _____ picture of what daily life is really like. **(MISLEAD)**
3. Many viewers doubted the brand's _____ when it began to sell aprons. **(SINCERE)**
4. A weekly trip to a specialist market is not _____ for every household. **(AFFORD)**
5. The _____ between work and rest has become blurred for many people. **(DISTINCT)**

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Here the gap is the verb, and the particle is given. Check that the verb has the meaning the whole phrase needs, not just the right grammar.

back	bear	cash	dwell	factor	play	rule

1. The writer is careful not to _____ down how hard older women's lives were.
2. Studies cannot _____ up the claim that one diet adds years to your life.
3. Nobody should _____ out the possibility that the trend will fade within a year.
4. The advice does not _____ in the cost of ingredients and time.
5. Brands are quick to _____ in on any trend with a catchy name.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. The article says ordinary acts start to look radical. What does that say about the advice around them?
2. Is nostalgia for the past usually honest about it?
3. Would you rather be admired for a routine or be present in an afternoon?

9 Role-play: a slower month at home

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

Student A · the housemate who wants a slower life

You've watched videos of two grandmothers baking in Italy. You want your house to try nonnamaxxing this month: cook at home, eat at the table together, no phones at dinner. Persuade your housemate.

Student B · the busy housemate

You work long hours and you like quick meals. Say what worries you and ask for something smaller. Try to agree on a plan you can both live with.

Useful phrases

I'd love us to cook together twice a week.

That's a nice idea, but I'm really busy.

What if we start with one dinner?

Could we agree on a day to try it?

I don't mind, as long as we're not too strict.

We'll see how it goes.

Tell the class: what did you agree, and who gave up more?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 radical · 2 overlook · 3 unhurried · 4 spared · 5 exposes · 6 tempting

6 Word forms

1 devotion · 2 misleading · 3 sincerity · 4 affordable · 5 distinction

7 Language focus

1 play · 2 back · 3 rule · 4 factor · 5 cash

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