NEWS LESSON

Can You Learn a Better Life from an Italian Grandmother?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Why might people online be attracted to a slower way of living?
2. Can an old friendship be copied, or does it only come with time?
3. What does a short video usually leave out about somebody's life?

2 Key words

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

1	**knead**	☐	A to make something longer
2	**approaching**	☐	B to press and fold dough with your hands
3	**scratch**	☐	C the act of making yourself a better person
4	**self-improvement**	☐	D a piece of clothing you wear over your clothes when you cook
5	**apron**	☐	E bread that is baked in one piece
6	**loaf**	☐	F the quality that makes people like something
7	**lengthen**	☐	G from scratch: using basic ingredients, not ready-made food
8	**attraction**	☐	H getting close to a certain age or time

3 Read

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

Two friends in their late eighties bake bread in a small Italian town. The internet has decided they are the answer to something.

1 At a bakery in Altamura, in the south of Italy, Grazia Incampo and Teresa Calia make the bread the town is known for. They have been friends since childhood and are both approaching ninety. In the videos that made them famous, they knead, they sing, they correct each other, and they are plainly enjoying themselves. The food looks good. The friendship looks better.

2 Their audience runs into the millions, and visitors now queue outside the shop to watch them work. When the queue gets long, the two of them bring out a tray of crackers for the people waiting.

3 Online, their appeal has acquired a label: nonnamaxxing. The word joins nonna, Italian for grandmother, to maxxing, internet shorthand for taking something to its limit. The idea is to borrow the habits associated with an Italian grandmother: making food from scratch, walking, keeping up with neighbours, giving ordinary things enough time to be enjoyable.

4 It sits oddly next to the other kinds of maxxing. Online, almost any habit can be turned into a project, from protein intake to sleep quality. Some people mean it seriously and others are mocking the whole language of self-improvement. Either way, the steady supply of advice can leave you with the feeling that there is always one more part of your life to repair.

5 Nonnamaxxing seems to point the other way. Rather than treating a walk as a target to hit, you might use it to say hello to somebody. Rather than making dinner into a photograph, you might stay at the table long enough to have a conversation. The attraction is easy to recognise, and it is less about Italy than about wanting more connection and less performance.

6 The picture does deserve a second look, though. Italian grandmothers are individuals rather than a lifestyle. Some have worked long hours all their lives, some order takeaways, some dislike cooking. A short sunny video leaves out a great deal of labour, and no amount of pasta or gardening can be promised to lengthen anybody's life.

7 There is a neat contradiction in it, too. Watching videos about slowing down is itself an evening spent looking at a screen, and buying the correct apron in order to bake the correct loaf is one more test to pass. The part that was supposed to be enjoyable, which is the meal and the company, can disappear behind the effort of getting it right.

8 Writing in the Guardian, the columnist Polly Hudson suggests minning instead: doing less rather than maximising everything. It is a joke in a column, not a measured movement. But perhaps Incampo and Calia were never offering instructions. Two women who have been friends for eighty years are not a method anybody can follow.

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 word nonnamaxxing joins the Italian for grandmother to internet slang. T F NG
2. The article says every use of maxxing is serious. T F NG
3. The bakery has existed for more than a hundred years. T F NG
4. The article says cooking and gardening can be promised to lengthen life. T F NG
5. Minning is presented as a joke in a column rather than a measured movement. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

acquired	intake	label	measured	mocking	outlook	reckless	steady

1. Once a product gets a catchy _____ , people start to talk about it as a trend.
2. Over the years the town has _____ a reputation for excellent bread.
3. A _____ stream of visitors arrives at the bakery all day.
4. The comedian was _____ the idea of self-improvement, and not everyone saw the joke.
5. The minister gave a _____ answer, careful not to promise too much.
6. Daily protein _____ is one of the things that people track online.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. They _____ friends since childhood. (BE)
2. By the time the shop opened, a long queue _____ outside. (FORM)
3. Rather than _____ a walk as a target, you might say hello to somebody. (TREAT)
4. Writing in the Guardian, Polly Hudson _____ minning instead. (SUGGEST)
5. No amount of pasta can _____ to lengthen anybody's life. (PROMISE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs have a literal meaning and a figurative one. Read the whole sentence before you choose the small word.

apart away down into off out up

1. The bakers always bring _____ fresh crackers when the queue gets long.
2. It is hard to keep _____ with every new trend online.
3. Many people turn a simple walk _____ a project with targets.
4. Try to cut _____ on the time you spend watching videos about slowing down.
5. A very long queue can put some visitors _____ going in.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. Can trying to relax turn into another kind of pressure?
2. Is it fair to turn a group of real women into a lifestyle?
3. What would you want to do less of next year?

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 label · 2 acquired · 3 steady · 4 mocking · 5 measured · 6 intake

6 Verb forms

1 have been · 2 had formed · 3 treating · 4 suggests · 5 be promised

7 Language focus

1 out · 2 up · 3 into · 4 down · 5 off

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