NEWS LESSON

Is It Time to Stop Improving Everything?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Why do people enjoy tracking and scoring parts of their lives?
2. Which new words have you learnt this year, and where from?
3. Can a habit of self-improvement go too far?

2 Key words

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

1	**surveillance**	☐
2	**customisable**	☐
3	**endpoint**	☐
4	**manifesto**	☐
5	**unflattering**	☐
6	**mocking**	☐
7	**optimising**	☐
8	**ideal**	☐

A	able to be changed to suit what you want
B	not nice, because it makes someone or something look bad
C	watching someone or something very closely, all the time
D	making fun of someone or something
E	a public statement of what a person or group believes and plans to do
F	making something as good as it can be
G	perfect, or the best that something could be
H	the final point where something stops

3 Read

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

"Maxxing" is Dictionary.com's word of the year. One columnist has had enough of it and wants 2027 to be the year we do less.

1 Dictionary.com has announced its word of the year for 2026, and the choice says something about how we are living. It is "maxxing": not a word so much as an ending, attached to anything that can be pushed to its limit. People sleepmaxxing, protein-maxxing their breakfast, cozymaxxing on a Friday night.

2 Steve Johnson, director of lexicography at the Dictionary Media Group, said his team weighs search trends, social media and the news, then asks which word tells the year's story. Maxxing stood out, he said, because it reaches into so many different parts of life. The numbers support the choice: by August 2026 the term was appearing in digital media 19 times as often as its monthly average in 2025.

3 Its history is longer than the trend. Players of Dungeons and Dragons have been "min-maxing" character statistics for decades, and the term turns up in game theory as early as the 1940s. More recently, the suffix spread through online forums where people discussed improving their appearance, and from there into ordinary speech. Daria Bahtina, a linguist at UCLA, explains its success simply: the pattern is infinitely customisable but instantly recognisable, so using it signals that you are part of the moment.

4 There is an argument that it has costs. Jennifer Donnelly, a researcher at RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences, has written that if a part of life can be improved, it can probably be maxxed, and that this is the problem. The language implies an endpoint. Health, wellbeing, relationships and habits are not projects you finish, and treating them as such can encourage constant self-surveillance and self-criticism in pursuit of an ideal version of yourself.

5 There are limits to one-size-fits-all advice, too. Needs and circumstances differ, and an online trend is not a personal health plan. The confidence of a video is not evidence that it suits you.

6 Whether the word survives is another question. Johnson points out that some endings last for decades while others disappear completely. Kelly Wright, a linguist who tracks new terms, suspects this one will stay, for an unflattering reason: middle-aged people and corporate brands have both adopted it, and that usually kills the cool without killing the word.

7 Into this arrives a joke. Writing in the Guardian on 1 November, the columnist Polly Hudson declared that we have reached maximum maxxing and proposed a replacement for 2027: minning. Rather than pushing an activity to its limit, minning means doing it less, or not at all. Her examples are deliberately absurd, including dropping less litter, and the column is comedy rather than a manifesto.

8 Minning is one writer's joke, not a trend anybody has measured. Still, jokes land when they describe something people recognise. The suffix became popular because optimising felt aspirational. A word mocking it has an audience because, for a lot of people, it has started to feel like homework.

Sources: The Guardian, 'Maxxing' is Dictionary.com's word of the year; Dictionary.com, 2026 word of the year; 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. Dictionary.com compared August 2026 with a 2025 monthly average to show how fast maxxing was growing. T F NG
2. Kelly Wright believes maxxing will disappear because middle-aged people have adopted it. T F NG
3. Polly Hudson has stopped using maxxing words in her own life. T F NG
4. Donnelly's concern is that the language treats parts of life as things that can be completed. T F NG
5. The text suggests the minning column was based on research into how many people have given up self-improvement. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

adopted	attaches	circumstances	declared	encourage	evidence	implies	weighs

1. Several airlines have _____ the same booking system, so passengers now see identical screens.
2. A price far below the competition usually _____ that something is wrong with the product.
3. Advice that works for one person may be useless in other _____, such as when you work night shifts.
4. The study found no _____ that the new timetable improved productivity.
5. The minister _____ the project a success before the results had been checked.
6. Daily reminders on a phone can _____ people to build better routines.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. The suffix _____ through online forums before it entered ordinary speech. (SPREAD)
2. Before it became a trend, players of Dungeons and Dragons _____ the term for decades. (USE)
3. Constant self-scoring _____ to criticism of yourself. (LEAD)
4. Dictionary.com _____ its choice for 2026. (ANNOUNCE)
5. Relationships _____ as projects by some trends, which is the problem. (TREAT)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some linking words start a clause with a subject and verb, some need a noun, and some join two sentences after a full stop or a semicolon.

despite	otherwise	provided	therefore	unless	whenever	whereas

1. _____ their confident tone, many online videos give advice that does not suit everyone.
2. Maxxing sets a target to push towards, _____ minning simply asks you to do less.
3. The ending is easy to copy and instantly understood. _____ , it can be attached to almost any word.
4. A routine will not help you _____ it fits your life.
5. People should check where health advice comes from; _____ , they may follow a plan that does not suit them.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. Donnelly says health and wellbeing are not things we complete. Do you agree?
2. Why do you think a joke about doing less found an audience so quickly?
3. Which parts of life benefit from being optimised, and which do not?

9 Role-play: maxxing or minning?

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

Student A · the maxxer

You love tracking your sleep, food and steps. You want your friend to join a 30-day plan with you. Explain what you enjoy about it, and listen to your friend's worries.

Student B · the minner

You're tired of scores and targets. You want a weekend with no apps and no plans. Say why, and ask your friend to try it with you.

Useful phrases

I've been tracking my sleep for a month.

That's too much like homework for me.

I'd rather do less, not more.

Don't you feel better when you can see the numbers?

We could try a plan that's half and half.

I'm not sure that's fair, but I'll try it.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree on a plan, and who changed their mind?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 adopted · 2 implies · 3 circumstances · 4 evidence · 5 declared · 6 encourage

6 Verb forms

1 spread · 2 had used or had been using · 3 can lead or may lead or might lead or could lead · 4 has announced · 5 are treated or are being treated

7 Language focus

1 Despite · 2 whereas · 3 Therefore · 4 unless · 5 otherwise

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