NEWS LESSON

# Shouldn't I Be Doing Something Useful?



BEFORE YOU READ

## 1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. When does taking a break start to feel like wasting time?
2. Would you enjoy a free afternoon more if it was planned?
3. Do you find it easier to rest alone or with other people?

## 2 Key words

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

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **neuroscientist** | ☐ | A | something you can do well because you learned it |
| 2 | **guilt** | ☐ | B | to finish something good that you wanted to do |
| 3 | **productivity** | ☐ | C | how much useful work you do |
| 4 | **skill** | ☐ | D | worries that make you feel you must do something |
| 5 | **calmer** | ☐ | E | a bad feeling when you think you did something wrong |
| 6 | **pressures** | ☐ | F | a magazine with serious articles about a subject |
| 7 | **achieve** | ☐ | G | more quiet and relaxed |
| 8 | **journal** | ☐ | H | a scientist who studies the brain |

## 3 Read

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

**A free afternoon turns into a list of jobs. The neuroscientist Joseph Jebelli says breaks and time to think matter, especially for difficult mental work.**

1 You have a free afternoon. Nobody needs your help and there is nothing important to finish. You sit down with a cup of tea. A few minutes later, a thought appears: 'Shouldn't I be doing something useful?' Many people find it difficult to relax without feeling guilty. They think about cleaning, exercising, learning a skill or catching up on messages. Even free time can become a list of jobs. Some people call this feeling productivity guilt.

2 In March 2026, the science journal Nature spoke to neuroscientist Joseph Jebelli about his book on rest. He described how he once connected his value as a person to how much work he completed. He argued that breaks and time to think are important, especially when someone does difficult mental work.

3 Rest does not always mean sleeping. It might mean sitting quietly, going for a slow walk or looking out of the window. These moments may help us feel calmer and return to a problem with fresh energy. However, not every type of rest works in exactly the same way for everybody.

4 Our phones can make relaxing more complicated. During a quiet moment, it is easy to start checking messages and news. Sometimes this is enjoyable. At other times, we put the phone down and feel that our minds have not really had a break.

5 There is another problem with always trying to be productive. We can start believing that every hobby needs a purpose. If we go swimming, it should improve our health. If we read a book, it should teach us something. If we visit a museum, we may feel we need to take photographs to show other people. These activities can all be wonderful, but they do not need to become jobs.

6 Sometimes listening to music or talking to a friend is enough. It can help to choose one period each week when you do not make a plan to improve yourself. You can simply decide what you feel like doing. Rest does not have to look impressive in a photograph, and other people do not need to approve of it.

7 Work, family and financial pressures can also make it hard to find time to rest. Not everybody has the same amount of free time. Still, it may help to remember that a day is not a competition. We need time to achieve things, but we also need time when nothing has to be achieved.

Sources: Nature Careers. Picture: AI illustration.

## 4 True, false or not given

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

1. Rest can include sitting quietly or going for a slow walk. T F NG
2. Every type of rest works the same way for everybody. T F NG
3. Jebelli's book became a bestseller. T F NG
4. Nature interviewed Joseph Jebelli in March 2026. T F NG
5. The writer thinks every hobby should have a purpose. T F NG

## 5 Vocabulary

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

| approve | competition | complicated | expensive | financial | purpose | schedule |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

1. Checking messages during a quiet moment can make relaxing more _____ .
2. Some people worry about bills and other _____ problems when they try to rest.
3. A day is not a _____ , so you do not have to win it.
4. Many people think a hobby must have a _____ , such as improving their health.
5. Other people do not need to _____ of how you spend your free time.

## 6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Many people find it difficult to relax without _____ guilty. (FEEL)
2. In March 2026, Nature _____ to the neuroscientist Joseph Jebelli. (SPEAK)
3. For years he _____ that his value came from his work. (THINK)
4. Talking to a friend _____ enough to feel rested. (BE)
5. He _____ that breaks are important for difficult mental work. (ARGUE)

## 7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Think about the link: is it a contrast, a reason, a result or a surprise? Read the whole sentence before you choose.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| although | because | especially | however | otherwise | so | unless |

1. _____ I felt guilty, I enjoyed the walk.
2. I turned my phone off _____ I wanted a proper break.
3. It was raining, _____ we stayed at home.
4. Rest is useful, _____ for people who do difficult mental work.
5. I wanted to relax. _____ , I kept checking my messages.

SPEAK

## 8 Talk about it

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

1. Should rest have to make you more productive afterwards?
2. What would make a day feel worthwhile without achieving anything?
3. Which everyday pressure makes switching off hardest?

## 9 Role-play: an empty Sunday

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

**Student A · the friend with a plan**

You've got a free Sunday and you hate wasting it. Suggest a busy plan, such as a long run, a museum visit and some study. Explain why you think the day should be useful.

**Student B · the friend who wants to rest**

You want to do nothing on Sunday. Say why you need a quiet day and what you'd like to do instead. Try to agree on a plan that works for both of you.

**Useful phrases**

I don't want to waste the whole day.
Honestly, I just want to switch off.
Shouldn't we do something useful?
Why does everything have to be a plan?
Could we do one thing and then relax?
That's fair, let's try it your way.

**Afterwards, tell the class: what did you agree, and who gave way more?**

ANSWER KEY

**2 Key words**

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

**4 True, false or not given**

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

**5 Vocabulary**

1 complicated · 2 financial · 3 competition · 4 purpose · 5 approve

**6 Verb forms**

1 feeling · 2 spoke · 3 thought · 4 is · 5 argued

**7 Language focus**

1 Although · 2 because · 3 so · 4 especially · 5 However

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