NEWS LESSON

An Empty Weekend Is Not a Problem to Solve



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	**perspective**	☐	A	popular at the moment
2	**optimise**	☐	B	as a basic part of something
3	**evidence**	☐	C	people who look after someone who is ill or old
4	**carers**	☐	D	a way of seeing or thinking about something
5	**fashionable**	☐	E	something you do often without thinking
6	**inherently**	☐	F	changing in a way that you cannot guess
7	**habit**	☐	G	to make something as good as it can be
8	**unpredictable**	☐	H	facts that show something is true

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. In a March 2026 Nature interview, Joseph Jebelli described how he once measured his worth by his working hours.

1 Picture a rare afternoon without plans. You could read, sit in a café or simply stare through the window. Yet instead of feeling peaceful, you begin thinking about everything you could be doing: reorganising the kitchen, improving your fitness or learning a language. Free time has somehow become another test of productivity.

2 For many people, the guilt starts before they have even sat down. An empty weekend looks like a problem to solve, rather than a welcome chance to slow down.

3 This feeling is sometimes called productivity guilt. The idea is that time only counts if we use it to achieve something visible. In a March 2026 interview with Nature, Joseph Jebelli, a neuroscientist who has written about rest, described how he had once measured his personal value by the hours he spent working. That is one person's account, not research evidence, but it names a feeling many people recognise.

4 There are reasons why this is difficult. People receive praise for working hard, and social media shows friends running marathons or launching businesses. Activities that should be relaxing can turn into goals. Even reading might feel like a challenge to complete a certain number of books every month.

5 But rest is not simply wasted time. Taking a break from a difficult task can reduce immediate pressure and may help people return with a clearer perspective. Walking, daydreaming and quiet conversation offer experiences that differ from checking another notification. The benefits depend on the person and circumstances; there is no single perfect way to relax. It can help to notice the language we use. We 'waste' an afternoon, 'fall behind' on plans or 'make up for' a lazy morning, as though relaxation creates a debt.

6 Of course, telling everybody to rest more ignores real inequalities. Some workers have unpredictable schedules, while parents and carers may rarely have uninterrupted time. Feeling guilty about resting can be a cultural habit, but the shortage of opportunities to rest is often a practical problem.

7 The pressure to optimise leisure can also change how we experience activities we once loved. A weekend walk becomes a fitness target, a hobby becomes a possible source of income and a holiday becomes an opportunity to collect impressive photographs. There is nothing inherently wrong with goals, but difficulty arises when every activity must produce evidence of progress. It can be useful to distinguish rest from entertainment and achievement.

8 Watching several fast-moving videos may be enjoyable without providing the same sense of recovery as a quiet conversation or an unhurried walk. Equally, the ideal break depends on personal circumstances. Someone who works alone all week may need company, while a person constantly dealing with customers may value silence. Allowing individual choice may be more useful than prescribing one fashionable routine.

9 Perhaps the most useful change is not another wellbeing routine. It is accepting that free time does not require a measurable result. You are allowed to enjoy an afternoon without turning it into an achievement.

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. Jebelli's description of his own experience counts as research evidence. T F NG
2. The writer says guilt is the only reason people struggle to rest. T F NG
3. Most people who feel productivity guilt are under thirty. T F NG
4. Someone who talks to customers all day might want a quieter break than someone who works alone. T F NG
5. The writer suggests that our language can make relaxation sound like a debt. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

approach **circumstances** **distinguish** **inequalities** **notification** **praise** **separate** **visible**

1. Employees who work hard often receive public _____ from their managers.
2. How much rest a person needs depends on their personal _____ .
3. It is not always easy to _____ between real rest and simply being entertained.
4. Achievements only seem to count when they are _____ to other people, for example on social media.
5. Telling everybody to rest more ignores social _____ in who has free time.
6. A single _____ on your phone can pull your attention away from a quiet conversation.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time she finally sat down on Saturday, she _____ the whole kitchen. (CLEAN)
2. Free time _____ by many people as another test of productivity. (TREAT)
3. You _____ to enjoy an afternoon without turning it into an achievement. (ALLOW)
4. If she hadn't felt so guilty, she _____ the walk more. (ENJOY)
5. The neuroscientist _____ to Nature in March 2026. (SPEAK)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Decide what the sentence needs: a contrast, a reason, an addition or a warning. Then check the grammar after the gap.

because	instead	moreover	otherwise	unless	whereas	yet

1. _____ of feeling peaceful, she began planning jobs.
2. Rest helps people think more clearly. _____ , it can reduce pressure.
3. That is only one person's account, not a study. _____ , it names a feeling many people recognise.
4. She felt guilty _____ she had not achieved anything all day.
5. Take regular breaks. _____ , the pressure will keep growing.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 praise · 2 circumstances · 3 distinguish · 4 visible · 5 inequalities · 6 notification

6 Verb forms

1 had cleaned · 2 is treated · 3 are allowed · 4 would have enjoyed · 5 spoke

7 Language focus

1 Instead · 2 Moreover · 3 Yet · 4 because · 5 Otherwise

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