

READING

1 Work in pairs and discuss the question. Give reasons and examples for your answers.

What are the challenges and benefits of remote working for both employers and employees, students and teachers? Think about:

- motivating staff/students.
- managing staff/students.
- working in large teams.
- technical issues.
- work hours.
- mentoring.

2 Look at the titles of the article below and the blog post on page 36 about remote work and study. What might you expect the texts to include? Which might be the more formal? Scan the texts to check your ideas.



A Video call fatigue

Your screen freezes. There is a weird echo. A dozen heads stare at you. There are the break-out rooms, the chat functions, the one-to-one meetings and at the end of the day you are exhausted even though you haven't moved from your work or study space. But what, exactly, is tiring us out? Is video chat harder?

Being on a video call requires more focus than a face-to-face chat, says Gianpiero Petriglieri, an associate professor who studies workplace development. But this applies equally well to online classes or learning situations for students. Video chats mean we need to work harder to process non-verbal cues like facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice and body language; paying more attention to these consumes a lot of energy. 'Our minds are together when our bodies feel we're not. That dissonance, which causes people to have conflicting feelings, is exhausting. You cannot relax into the conversation naturally,' he says. Rather than **strengthening bonds** between participants, it can do the opposite and **exacerbate divisions**. Relationships between team members can become strained.

The 'gallery view' of the video call is challenging for the brain, which has to work overtime to try to decode visuals of a whole range of people. We try to observe protocol and maintain eye contact with a camera rather than a face, we smile awkwardly, nod appropriately,

cover up any signs of boredom and try not to let our eyes drift to the real faces on the screen staring at us.

Silence is another challenge, he adds. 'Silence creates a natural rhythm in a real-life conversation. However, when it happens in a video call, you become anxious about the technology.' It also makes people feel uncomfortable. One study showed that delays on phone or conferencing systems shaped our views of people negatively: even delays of 1.2 seconds made people perceive the responder as less friendly or focused, or even **engendered distrust**. Indeed, sometimes people who were thought to have been listening intently were actually found to have been working on something else entirely at the same time!

What **aggravates the problem**, says Marissa Shuffler (associate professor at Clemson University), is that if we are physically on camera, we are very aware of being watched. 'When you're on a video conference, you know everybody's looking at you; you are on stage, so there comes the social pressure and feeling like you need to perform. Being performative is nerve-wracking and more stressful.' It's also very hard for people not to look at their own face if they can see it on screen, or not to be conscious of how they behave in front of the camera.

It has been suggested by experts that to **ease those stress levels** we may wish to consider going old-school – use emails, share files, have shorter, more personal calls. Or even use a phone – remember those?

B

All good online, apart from ...

By Rebecca Hart
Published 19th May



It's now six months since I started my online course at university, and I must admit I love every minute of it. It's the flexibility – we can stream lectures when we want and arrange study calls with other students at times to suit us all. And – ahh – not having to waste time and money on commuting every day! Big plus. Weirdly, I'm getting a lot done. Before I moved to studying online, my assignment writing would be down to the wire – midnight the night before submission deadline! Now I seem much more organised somehow. I imagine that's down to having fewer distractions – not being tempted to spend ages in the café with friends and so on. Although my parents do need to be reminded not to bang on my door when I'm in an online class. I've heard people in jobs say that working remotely can be hard. They don't establish a proper routine and end up with work spilling into their home and social lives, which stresses them out. And I've got friends who say they feel isolated and miss being in a physical classroom and

getting immediate feedback that **boosts morale**. I can understand that, but for me it certainly works. Rather than having my workflow interrupted, I'm left alone to focus on what I'm doing, and there are always people I can reach out to when I need to. Also, I have a good social life when I'm not studying, which **alleviates any boredom** I might experience. If I had to pick out any drawbacks of studying online, I'd have to say that some of our online discussion classes can be a pain. It's often difficult to contribute or ask a question and on a bad day they can seem never-ending. Some people take it as a chance to catch up socially and unless the leader is quite disciplined, you sit there listening to people wittering on for ages and start to lose the plot. And afterwards, for some reason I feel drained – even though I haven't done a thing apart from look at a camera and make the odd comment! But for me, at least, the advantages outweigh the drawbacks and I'm really glad I chose this option.

3A Read the texts again and answer the questions (1–8) in your own words.

- 1 Why do video chats or conferences consume more energy than face-to-face ones?
- 2 What does the word 'dissonance' in Text A paragraph 2 refer to?
- 3 What are 'video call protocols' and why is it sometimes difficult to observe them?
- 4 Are silences helpful during a video call? Why/Why not?
- 5 Why is being on camera sometimes stressful?
- 6 Why does the writer of Text B use 'ahh' near the beginning of paragraph 1?
- 7 What advantages to remote studying does the writer of Text B give?
- 8 What disadvantages are mentioned?

B Find colloquial ways of saying the following in Text B.

- 1 an advantage
- 2 because of
- 3 talking for a long time about something unimportant
- 4 occasional

C Make notes on questions 1 and 2. Work in pairs and compare your answers.

- 1 How do the styles of each text differ? Consider:
 - vocabulary.
 - grammatical structures.
 - interaction with the reader.
- 2 What are the differences in structure of the two texts? Consider:
 - paragraphing.
 - sentence length and complexity.
 - introductions and conclusions.

VOCABULARY

verb–noun collocations

4A Scan the texts in Ex 2 again. Match the collocations in bold with the meanings (1–7).

- 1 reduce the amount of tension
- 2 makes you feel more valued
- 3 increases possible differences between people
- 4 makes a difficult situation worse
- 5 improves relationships
- 6 stops the monotony
- 7 created a feeling of suspicion

B Complete the questions with the correct form of the verbs you found in Ex 4A.

- 1 How has a difficult situation you've been in been recently?
- 2 How do you try to stress levels when you're feeling tense?
- 3 How might remote working distrust?
- 4 How do you boredom when you're not busy?
- 5 How can employers bonds between employees?
- 6 How has your morale recently been ?

C Work in pairs and discuss the questions. Share your ideas with the class.

- 1 How do you feel during video calls or online meetings?
- 2 Have you ever worked or studied remotely? Are there any points you would like to share that are not mentioned in Texts A and B?

D Learn and practise. Go to the Vocabulary Bank.

» page 138 **VOCABULARY BANK** metaphors