

THE FLEXIBLE WORK DAY

1. Warm up: In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. What hours did you usually work five years ago?
2. What hours do you usually work now?
3. What is the best time of day for you to work? Why?

2. Focus on vocabulary

Part A: Match the vocabulary to the definitions.

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|--------------------------|--|
| 1. hybrid working (n) | a. a mixture of working from home and working in the office |
| 2. realm (n) | b. giving the body the vitamins and elements it needs to work well |
| 3. biorhythm (n) | c. help someone to do something |
| 4. nutritional (adj.) | d. used in a specific situation for a particular task |
| 5. facilitate (v) | e. the ability of employees to learn about and use new digital technology so as to adapt |
| 6. digital dexterity (n) | f. always being the same and not changing making it uninteresting |
| 7. monotonous (adj.) | g. gather together in a group |
| 8. dedicated (adj.) | h. the natural pattern of how processes happen in the body, affecting things like hunger and sleep |
| 9. cluster (v) | i. an area of interest, knowledge or activity |

Part B: Complete the questions with the vocabulary from Part A. Answer the questions.

1. Which work have you done in the past that you found _____ and boring?
2. Which would you prefer if you could choose: working in an office, working from home or _____?
3. What does your company do to _____ positive relationships between departments and employees?
4. Do you like to be in situations where you are _____ together with other people? Why/Why not?
5. When is the best time for you to work so that you are in tune with your natural _____?
6. Do you have a _____ workspace in your home or company office? Or do you prefer to work from different locations?
7. What have you done in the past few years to improve your _____ to help you adapt to new technologies?
8. Do you think that the majority of work in the future will be in the digital _____? Or do you think that there will still be a large number of people doing traditional work by hand? Why?

3. Listening for gist

Listen to the interview with a professor and tick all of the questions that you hear.

1. What effect will it have on the number of people working?
2. Do you think there will be a change in why we work?
3. What does this mean for management in the future?
4. What sort of person will be the most successful in future?
5. How will employees have to develop in future?
6. Are we in a new age of work?

4. Listening comprehension

Part 1: Complete the table according to whether the professor did *agree*, *disagree* or *didn't mention* the point.

	<i>AGREE</i>	<i>DISAGREE</i>	<i>DIDN'T MENTION</i>
1. Remote and hybrid working is more popular than it used to be.			

2. There are many similarities between the way people organised work in pre-industrial times and now.			
3. After the industrial revolution, your manager's opinion of you became less important.			
4. More companies will use software to monitor employees' work.			
5. As monitoring software gets more sophisticated, it will create more problems for workers' health.			
6. Managers will increasingly make sure work is done well and on time, as employees will get training and help from the Internet.			
7. Workers will need to continually update their knowledge of digital systems.			

Part 2: Decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the professor.

1. Automation could lead to work being less interesting for many people.
2. Managing the difference between our personal and professional lives will require greater effort.
3. Offices may be converted to living spaces.
4. People will start to require larger homes.
5. Populations in cities will continue to expand.
6. We wouldn't have changed the way we work if it hadn't been for the pandemic.

5 Skimming for gist

Match the sentences to gaps 1 - 4. There are more sentences than gaps.

- A. The long work days continued with 12 hours per day, 6 days per week being the norm.
- B. It has also reduced the culture of staying late at the office in order to be seen to be working.
- C. When they returned at the end of the day, many were too tired to do household tasks such as laundry and childcare.
- D. Their labour was focused on the results of what they did rather than the hours they spent doing it.
- E. As the 1950s progressed, lawyers began to make more money than any other profession leading to them being regarded with suspicion.
- F. During the 1950s, lawyers noted that they weren't making as much as doctors and dentists, due to charging fixed rates for their services.

Up with the sun?

How the working day has changed

I. Before the late 1700s, the majority of people did manual work on farms, growing food and looking after animals. Society was largely dependent on sunlight as electric light wasn't widely used until the 1800s, so people got up early and worked during daylight hours until dark. However, their days were interspersed with breaks, meals and naps to keep them going. _____¹ After all, if they didn't plant the crops in time, for example, they wouldn't grow. So, there was a natural motivation to complete tasks.

II. When the Industrial Revolution arrived, increasing numbers of workers started spending their days in a factory. _____² Over time though, reforms meant that this was reduced to the 40-hour week that many still use today. This was when the concept of working 9 - 5 came in: eight hours per day, five days per week. As technology advanced and offices began to be used, the same hours were used there.

III. _____³ The American Bar Association (ABA) suggested that, just as factories were paid according to the number of products they produced, lawyers should be paid according to units of work they did - the most useful unit being the hour. So, the concept of billable hours came in, meaning lawyers could charge according to the amount of time they spent on a case rather than the service as a whole. It didn't take long for lawyers to begin working far longer hours, as now, the longer they spent working, the more money they were making for the firm. This concept passed on to other industries and became embedded in attitudes to work.

IV. When the pandemic hit in 2020, it forced a lot of people to stay at home and deal with their responsibilities, such as child care and household tasks, in one place. With no daily commute, employees were able to be more flexible with the time they worked and adopt a more non-linear approach. Since then, with remote and hybrid working now a much more accepted way of working than the period pre-pandemic, this has continued. Workers have found that they are able to more easily manage their personal and professional lives by breaking up their working periods through the day. _____⁴ There



have been numerous studies showing that more hours spent working doesn't necessarily equate with a greater level of productivity. Yet if staying late is part of the office culture you're in, it's hard to ignore. Working from home means that, just as with pre-industrial times, the focus is once again results-focused rather than time-focused.

sources: abajournal.com, bestlifeonline.com, BBCWorklife

6. Reading comprehension

Match the sentences to endings a - g.

1. Prior to the invention of electric light,
2. Following the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, increasing numbers of
3. As labour reforms took hold,
4. Due to concern that their earnings were below that of doctors and dentists,
5. The concept of a worker's productivity being based on how long they spent working spread from
6. As a result of restrictions during the pandemic,
7. As with pre-industrial times, there's been a shift to

- a. lawyers to other professions.
- b. the working day was generally from 9 am to 5 pm.
- c. workers began to once again adopt a non-linear approach to the working day, mixing work with personal responsibilities.
- d. workers were dependent on sunlight and so worked as long as it was available.
- e. workers completing tasks rather than measuring time spent.
- f. lawyers began measuring their work in terms of time spent on a task.
- g. workers worked long days in factories.

7. Talking point

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. Do you agree with the article that there is increasingly a shift to a non-linear work day in the way people work? Do you think that's true in your country? Why/Why not?
2. How has the way people work changed in your country over the past 300 years?
3. Do you agree that people will increasingly work from home in the future? Why/Why not?
4. What would be the ideal way to work for you personally? Why?

8. Read the question. To what extent do you agree with the above point of view?

While much has been made of the changes to work hours caused by the pandemic, people will always fundamentally need to have someone who measures the quality of their work. This is the only motivation that really encourages good work. Therefore, the office and office hours are not going anywhere soon as managers and employees will always need to be in the same place.