

And it's off to work we go ...

Level: Intermediate +

Time: 90 minutes +

Summary: This lesson is about the amount of time spent travelling to and from work and how this time can be used effectively. In this lesson, students:

1. talk about their own journeys to work;
2. study a text about the pros and cons of commuting and its effects on commuters;
3. compile a list of top tips for commuters.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Group size: Any

Note: This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 6/2016.

Warmer

Students work in pairs or groups of three. They ask their partner(s) the questions and make notes of their answers. Before moving on to the next task, hold a brief feedback session in which students share any interesting information that they have found out about their partner's daily commute.

Key words

The students match the key words with the definitions. Then, they should scan the article to find the words, check their answers and see how the words are used in context. Note that the definitions for the words are given in the order the words appear in the article.

Key:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. soaked | 7. indulging |
| 2. attractions | 8. taboos |
| 3. sort | 9. forbid |
| 4. hurry | 10. confidentiality |
| 5. relieve | 11. face |
| 6. epitomize | 12. engrossed |

Understanding the article

Students answer the questions with information from the article.

Key:

1. more than 24 million for an average of 56 minutes
2. read, learn a language, write messages to friends, play games or surf the internet, listen to an audiobook or music, indulge in a hobby such as knitting
3. checking their emails when driving, talking loudly about work on the phone on public transport
4. take a book and read or pretend to read it, look at your phone and pretend to be engrossed in something such as your emails

Two-word expressions and phrasal verbs

Students find two-word expressions and phrasal verbs in the article. The paragraph numbers are given to help them. Get them to say the answers out loud to check their pronunciation.

Key:

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. even out | 4. Comfort food |
| 2. wind down | 5. grey area |
| 3. close proximity | 6. awkward encounter |

Commute

Students complete the sentences with various forms and derivatives of *commute*.

Key:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. commutes | 4. commuting |
| 2. commuters | 5. commute |
| 3. commuting | 6. commuted |

Discussion

Students discuss the questions in groups, then provide feedback to the whole class.

Top ten tips for commuters

Working in pairs or small groups, students come up with their top ten tips for commuters, which they should then present to the rest of the class.

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Extension

As a whole class, have students compile the ultimate top ten tips for commuters by getting them to vote for the best tips from each of the presentations.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learnt during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

The following Business Spotlight lesson examines an alternative to commuting: teleworking.

www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/pdf-content/business-spotlight-out-of-office-lesson-plan/551862.article

And it's off to work we go ...

1 Warmer

Discuss your answers to the questions below about travelling to work.

- How did you get to work today?
- How long does your journey usually take?
- Do you take the same route every day?
- Do you use the same mode of transport every day?
- Why do you use this mode of transport?

2 Key words

Match the key words to the definitions below. Then, find them in the article to read them in context.

attractions	confidentiality	engrossed	epitomize
face	forbid	hurry	indulging
relieve	soaked	sort	taboos

1. extremely wet _____
2. reasons for liking something _____
3. arrange things and solve problems _____
4. go somewhere quickly because you do not have much time _____
5. make a problem or bad situation less serious _____
6. give the best example of something _____
7. allowing yourself to do something that you enjoy _____
8. things that people should not do because they are offensive _____
9. tell someone that they must not do something _____
10. situations in which important information must be kept secret _____
11. be likely to have to deal with _____
12. so interested or involved in something that you think about nothing else _____

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Tony Richards

Every day in the rush hour, masses of commuters travel on busy roads and overcrowded public transport. Tony Richards investigates. Are they feeling stressed? Are they relaxing? How do they use their journey to work?

- 1 How was your journey to work today? If you went by public transport, did your train or bus arrive on time and did you get a seat? If you went by car, did you have a smooth journey or did you get stuck in traffic? If you walked or went by bike, did you enjoy the good weather or did you get soaked or frozen before you arrived at work? Or did you jog to work, as part of your regular training schedule?
- 2 Commuting – which the *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines as travelling “some distance between one’s home and place of work on a regular basis” – is an unavoidable part of working life for most people. And the experience is not always a pleasant one.
- 3 “Given the choice, I don’t think most people would choose to commute but sometimes it’s unavoidable,” says Joan Day, an American secretary who commutes for more than an hour in each direction every day. “In my case, my husband and I work in two different towns, in opposite directions from each other. So we decided to live somewhere in between. I have a longer commute than he does but he starts work earlier than I do so it evens out.”
- 4 Commuting represents a separation between home and work and can play an important role in creating a space between these two worlds. The journey to work can help you to prepare yourself mentally for your working day, while the journey home can help you to wind down and leave the working world behind before returning to family life.
- 5 Indeed, one of the attractions of individual forms of commuting – going by car, on foot or by bike – is the opportunity to have some time alone to sort one’s thoughts, in contrast to the constant conversations and meetings at work.
- 6 Time spent commuting by public transport can also be used positively, for example, for personal reading, learning a language, writing messages to friends, playing games or surfing the internet. But it also often means being confronted by further noise and large numbers of people at close proximity.

A recent study in Britain – “Health in a Hurry: The Impact of Rush Hour Commuting on Our Health and Wellbeing” – commissioned by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) looked at some of the health effects of commuting.

More than 24 million people commute to and from work each day in England and Wales, for an average of 56 minutes. The RSPH discovered that the top three public transport problems that people felt were detrimental to their health were delays, overcrowding and antisocial behaviour. “The commute is hugely stressful,” said the report’s author, Emma Lloyd. “It’s natural that many people will reach for comfort food to relieve boredom or stress.”

Because commuting exists by definition in the space between home and work, it also epitomizes, for many people, a grey area between being “on duty” (at work) and being “off duty” (in one’s leisure time).

Should you work during your commute or just relax, maybe by reading a book, listening to an audio book or indulging in a hobby such as knitting? This is very much an individual decision but there are some clear taboos. These include checking your emails when you are driving or talking loudly about work on the phone on public transport, something that some organizations forbid for reasons of confidentiality.

On the other hand, some companies actually recognize commuting time as work time. If you do work regularly during your commute, discuss this with your manager or HR department. “Some people find it less stressful to get a bit of work done – or at least to have an idea of what might be facing them that day – than to wait till they get to the office and then be surprised,” says *Business Spotlight’s* Careers Editor, Margaret Davis. “So if checking your emails before work makes you feel better, then by all means do it. If it stresses you out, read a book or listen to music.”

A mobile phone or book can also be a good way to avoid awkward encounters while commuting – for example, if you see people who you don’t know very well and aren’t sure whether or not you should talk to them. “Even if you’re not really checking your emails, you can pretend to be engrossed in them,” says Davis.

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THE EFFECTS OF COMMUTING

Percentage of commuters in the UK who feel their commute has the following effects.

- 55% more time spent feeling stressed
- 44% less time spent with family and friends
- 41% reduction of physical activity
- 38% less time spent preparing healthy meals
- 36% less time spent sleeping
- 33% increased snacking
- 29% increased consumption of fast food

Opinion polling commissioned by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) in Britain, August 2016



3 Understanding the article

Answer the questions with information from the article.

1. How many people commute each day in England and Wales and what is the average commuting time?

2. What things can people do when commuting by public transport in order to use the time positively?

3. What should people avoid doing when commuting?

4. What can you do to avoid talking to people who you don't really want to talk to while commuting on public transport?

4 Two-word expressions and phrasal verbs

Find two-word expressions and phrasal verbs in the article and write them next to the definitions below.

1. If things _____, they become similar and show fewer or smaller changes or differences. (para 3)

2. When you _____, you relax after a busy time. (para 4)

3. Something that is in _____ is very near to something else. (para 6)

4. _____ is something you eat when you are feeling sad. (para 8)

5. A _____ describes a situation in which the rules are not clear. (para 9)

6. If you have an _____, you have an unplanned meeting with someone that is uncomfortable. (para 12)

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5 Commute

Complete the sentences with the correct form of *commute*.

1. Joan Day _____ for more than an hour in each direction every day.
2. She and her husband are both _____ .
3. Time spent _____ by public transport can be used positively.
4. A recent study in Britain looked at some of the health effects of _____ .
5. Should you work during your _____ or just relax?
6. Some companies recognize _____ time as work time.

6 Discussion

- Should time spent commuting be counted as work time? Why? Why not?
- What are the alternatives to commuting?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of ...
 - taking the same route to work every day?
 - varying your route and mode of transport?
 - travelling in the rush hour?

7 Top ten tips for commuters

In pairs or small groups, write ten top tips for commuters. Then present your ideas to the rest of the class.

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Vocabulary record: And it's off to work we go ...

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
indulge			
	commuter		
		stressful	
			positively

Vocabulary record

