

Home alone

Level: Intermediate +

Time: 90 minutes +

Summary: This lesson is about the advantages and disadvantages of working from home, for both employees and employers. In this lesson, students:

1. consider which tasks or jobs in their companies could be done from home;
2. study a text about the pros and cons of homeworking;
3. discover how emphatic stress can alter the meaning of a sentence;
4. create an infographic, illustrating statistics on working from home;
5. discuss their own experiences of and attitudes towards homeworking and compare it to working in an office.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Group size: Any

Note: This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 3/2017.

Warmer

Students discuss the warmer question, which should get them thinking about the feasibility of working from home.

Key words

Students read the definitions and scan the article to find the key words. The clues are given in the order that the words appear in the article.

Key:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. <i>dedicated</i> | 6. <i>commutes</i> |
| 2. <i>distraction</i> | 7. <i>sacrifice</i> |
| 3. <i>wholly</i> | 8. <i>accountability</i> |
| 4. <i>nomads</i> | 9. <i>monitoring</i> |
| 5. <i>value</i> | 10. <i>counter</i> |

Understanding the article

Students work in pairs or small groups to fill in the matrix with as much information as possible from the article. Ask for feedback to find out which quadrants they have written the most information in. Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa?

Key:

advantages for the employee	disadvantages for the employee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>more freedom and flexibility; the ability to integrate the demands of personal life into the work schedule</i> • <i>potentially higher job satisfaction; less work-related stress</i> • <i>money normally spent on work clothes, childcare and commuting can be saved</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>potential distractions of home life</i> • <i>possible tendency to be more lazy and relaxed, therefore greater efforts, discipline, sacrifice and focus are necessary</i> • <i>risk of always being available and being unable to switch off from work</i> • <i>feelings of isolation and disconnection from colleagues</i>
advantages for the employer	disadvantages for the employer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ability to employ or hold on to talented staff who also care for someone or have a disability that makes it hard for them to get to work</i> • <i>homeworkers often more productive, committed and loyal as they value being able to work from home</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>difficulty in trusting staff to work from home</i> • <i>possible loss of team spirit and corporate culture</i> • <i>employees may feel that they are less accountable and there is a danger of data security breaches</i> • <i>need to monitor homeworkers in a different way from office staff; may need to implement new monitoring, tracking and management systems</i>

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Emphatic stress

Read out the example sentence. Get students to repeat the sentence with the correct emphatic stress. Talk about the meaning the stresses give the sentence.

Then, students should read sentences 1 to 4 out loud, notice how the new emphasis gives the sentences new meanings and match the sentences to meanings a to d.

Key:

1. *b*
2. *d*
3. *c*
4. *a*

Statistics

Students work with the statistics. In task a, they should discuss their answers before checking with you.

Key:

- 58% – *experienced workers*
- 39% – *working parents*
- 32% – *senior-level managers*
- 21% – *introverts*

In task 2, small groups of students should use their creativity to create an infographic that illustrates the second set of statistics. Groups could exchange infographics when they have finished or you could display them on the wall.

Discussion

Students discuss the questions with reference to their own working lives and the facts in the article.

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

This Business Spotlight lesson is about introverts (mentioned in the statistics activity in this lesson as being likely to work from home):

www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/quiet-please/553425.article

And this Business Spotlight lesson is about teleworking:

www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/out-of-office/551863.article

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1 Warmer

Which jobs or tasks in your department, company or field of business could be done effectively from a home office?

2 Key words

Scan the article to find the key words that match the definitions. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. used for just one purpose (para 2) _____
2. something that gets your attention and prevents you from concentrating on something else (para 2)

3. completely (para 3) _____
4. people who move from place to place in order to find food and water for their animals or themselves (para 3) _____
5. consider something to be important (para 4) _____
6. journeys to and from work every day (para 5) _____
7. the act of giving up something important or valuable so that you can do or have something else (para 7) _____
8. a situation in which people know who is responsible for something (para 9)

9. regularly checking something or watching someone in order to find out what is happening (para 9)

10. take action to reduce the negative effects of something (para 10) _____

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by Julian Earwaker



Can you really work better from home? Or are there too many distractions, with the borders between work and private life disappearing? JULIAN EARWAKER wanted to find out.

- 1 “You do know I work at home? I’m working at home; I’m not at home. And you wouldn’t have booked that appointment if I’d been at work.” This was a recent conversation between Andy and his wife after she had booked a door repair company to come on a day when only Andy was home.
- 2 Andy is a product manager with a global technology company and works from the family home in Surrey, south-east England, four days a week. He has a dedicated office, complete with desk, chair, computers and telephone. At his feet lies what he calls his “biggest distraction”: Milo, the family puppy.
- 3 Research from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that 4.8 million people, or 15.1 per cent of the UK workforce, now work mainly or wholly from home. Globally, the terms “remote workers”, “digital nomads” and “distributed teams” are becoming more common.
- 4 So why do they do it? According to the *Guardian*, it’s the “freedom and flexibility” that attracts most people. Homeworking means choice of schedules, methods and environments. It allows time for picking up the kids from school, doctor’s or hairdresser’s appointments and receiving home deliveries. It also means fewer distractions from office talk and politics and unimportant meetings. There are big advantages for employers, too: according to the employment organization Acas, homeworking results in “greater commitment and loyalty from employees who value being able to work from home”. Acas research links the autonomy and control of homeworking with higher job satisfaction and less work-related stress.
- 5 Homeworking saves money, too: work clothes, childcare and travel costs. Across the UK, commuters now average a total of more than 50 minutes a day. Almost four million workers travel two hours daily. Every Monday, Andy takes the train to the office in west London, which takes between 90 and 140 minutes each way. When he started, Andy went into the office every day. Now, that seems a very strange idea indeed. Technology makes things easy. His manager is in Denver, Colorado and working from home with regular

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phone calls and teleconferences is the norm for Andy and his team.

Apart from the puppy, Andy’s main distractions are his three children. “I’m a good self-starter, good at doing the work that needs to be done wherever I am,” says Andy. “But I do focus harder when I’m in the office.”

“The home is a comfort zone and the setting encourages laziness and relaxation more than it does work,” writes business expert Toby Nwazor in *The Huffington Post*. “This is why working from home can be quite challenging and requires great effort, discipline, sacrifice and focus.”

Perhaps that’s why union representative Frances O’Grady reports scepticism among business leaders. “Many employers still don’t trust their staff to work from home,” O’Grady told *People Management*. “But it increases productivity, helps businesses hold on to talented staff and allows people with caring responsibilities or a disability to access the labour market,” she adds.

According to recruitment experts Hubstaff, employers share concerns about loss of team spirit and corporate culture, accountability and data security. Hubstaff recommends providing proper training, arranging regular virtual meetings, using time-tracking and productivity monitoring tools, and implementing password management systems.

For homeworkers themselves, there is a risk of being “always on” – checking emails late at night and taking calls outside of office hours. Lifestyle coach Shahilla Barok recommends dressing for work each morning, keeping the home office separate and shutting the door and switching off the computer at the end of each working day. Barok also suggests having a strong social network of friends and colleagues to counter the isolation, lack of support and loss of companionship that many homeworkers experience.

“On any one day, I would rather be working at home than in the office,” says Andy. “But after a while, I definitely need to go into the office, meet other people and discuss work with them. Different tasks get done better in different places. But for homeworking, you do need the attitude where you say, ‘I’ve got to get this done’.”

JULIAN EARWAKER is a freelance journalist, prison writer-in-residence and book author.

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3 Understanding the article

Fill in the matrix with information from the article about the pros and cons of working from a home office.

advantages for the employee	disadvantages for the employee
advantages for the employer	disadvantages for the employer

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4 Emphatic stress

In the first paragraph of the article Andy says:

'I'm working at home; I'm not at home.'

The main stresses in this sentence are on the underlined words. By stressing these two words, Andy tells us that he is busy and not relaxing, even though he's not in the office. Placing the stress on other words would give the sentence a different meaning.

Say sentences 1 to 4 out loud. Decide what they mean, then match them with their possible meanings a to d.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. I'm <u>w</u> orking at home. | a. My husband is at home, not me. |
| 2. I'm working at <u>h</u> ome. | b. Chris isn't working at home: I am. |
| 3. I'm <u>n</u> ot at home. | c. You might think I'm at my house but I'm actually somewhere else. |
| 4. I'm <u>n</u> ot at home. | d. I'm not working in the office. |

5 Statistics

1. What types of people do you think work from home? Write the types of people next to the correct percentages.

working parents

senior-level managers

introverts

experienced workers



Who are homeworkers?

58% are _____ .
 39% are _____ .
 32% are _____ .
 21% call themselves _____ .

Source: FlexJobs' '5th Annual Super Survey'

2. Create an infographic to illustrate the statistics below.

Why choose working from home?

79% – better work–life balance
 75% – fewer distractions
 69% – fewer meetings
 68% – reduction in office politics
 67% – reduction in stress from commuting

Source: FlexJobs' '5th Annual Super Survey'

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6 Discussion

Have you ever worked from home?

- Yes – talk about your experience.
- No – why not? Would you like to try it?

What are the biggest distractions in your (home) office?

How flexible are your working hours?

Are there any aspects of your personal life that make it difficult to work usual office hours?

How long is your current commute to work?

Can you think of a time when having a home office would have been useful?

What equipment would you need in order to set up a home office and do your job effectively?

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Vocabulary record: Home alone

verb	noun	adjective	adverb
homework			
	productivity		
		dedicated	
			wholly

Vocabulary record

