

Do Americans work too much?

Level: Intermediate upwards

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Minimum of two students

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 2/2012. In the article, two working Americans offer their professional views on whether Americans work too much and give reasons and justification for their opinions.

The tasks in the student worksheets will encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language and also to practise useful business skills, such as summarizing and asking and answering questions in written form.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks.

Warmer

Students complete these sentences in writing using their own words. When they have done this, they should compare and discuss what they have written in pairs or small groups.

Business vocabulary

Before reading *one* of the articles, the students work together to match the words and expressions from both articles A and B with their definitions.

Key:

Article A	Article B
1. e	1. e
2. a	2. d
3. f	3. b
4. c	4. f
5. d	5. c
6. b	6. a

Summarizing and writing comprehension questions

Stage 1: Divide the class into two groups (it doesn't matter if there is an unequal number of students). Give one group Article A (page 2 of the student worksheets), and the other group Article B (page 3 of the student worksheets). The students should not receive both articles! All the students should read through their article quietly. Once they have done so, they should discuss it with other students who have the same article.

Stage 2: Together with students who have read the same article (A or B), the students should orally summarize the article by saying what they understood and adding additional information to each other's comments.

Stage 3: Still working together in a group (with other students who read the same article) – or, if the group is large, in smaller groups – the students should write approximately six comprehension questions about the article. Explain that these questions will be given, along with the article, to the students who read the other article. Therefore the questions should be clear, legible and grammatically correct. The answers should also be able to be found in the article (not from personal experience or general knowledge) and they should not be too easy.

Teaching and learning strategy: Comprehension questions

Good reading comprehension questions usually fall into two categories: multiple choice or those that require students to provide an answer by putting information found in the text into their own words.

Not-so-good reading comprehension questions are those that only require the students to copy a word or passage directly out of the text, or closed questions that require only a yes or no answer.

Getting students to write their own comprehension questions for one another will test their own comprehension of the text as well as their ability to formulate clear and correct questions. Working in pairs or groups will encourage peer correction of content, spelling, lexis and grammatical structures.

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Answering comprehension questions

Stage 1: A-B

The students should all find another student (A and B pairs) with whom they can exchange articles and comprehension questions. They should give their partner their paper containing the article and the comprehension questions.

Stage 2: A-A / B-B

The students should now all have a new sheet of paper containing the part of the article they haven't yet read, plus six comprehension questions about the new text. Working alone, in pairs or in small groups, they should read the article and answer the questions about it.

Stage 3: A-A / B-B

The students should compare and discuss their answers, making any final corrections. They should then return the page, with the text plus questions and answers, to the students who set the questions.

Stage 4: A-A / B-B

The students should now read through the answers to the questions they set and decide whether the answers are correct and meet their requirements.

Stage 5: A-B

Allow time for corrections, discussion and feedback about the questions and answers.

Talking points

Now that they have read both parts of the article, the students discuss what the authors said about the environment and work efficiency. They can now also discuss any other factors that they think should have been included in the article, decide which opinion they most agree with and relate what has been talked about to their own work situation.

Webquest: Compare and contrast

Using information available on the internet, students complete the table which compares certain work-related statistics between the US, their own country and a third country of their own choice. They may present or discuss their findings to the class. This task can be set as homework if there is a lack of either time or internet access available in class.

Vocabulary record

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

Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics, go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: Do you talk too much?

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/do-you-talk-too-much/551620.article>

Business Spotlight: The Golden State?

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/the-golden-state/551672.article>

Do Americans work too much?

1 Warmer

Complete these sentences in your own words and discuss them.

Too much work is ...

Long and stressful work hours ...

2 Business vocabulary

Match the words and expressions on the left with the meanings on the right.

Article A

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. paid sick leave | a. a condition in which someone is too fat in a way that is dangerous for their health |
| 2. obesity | b. the amount of use of things such as fuel and energy |
| 3. social safety net | c. the total value of the goods and services that a country produces in a year |
| 4. gross domestic product (GDP) | d. not growing or increasing |
| 5. stagnant | e. when employees get their full salary when they are not at work because they are ill |
| 6. resource consumption | f. a system that is designed to help people who have serious financial problems |

Article B

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. feel entitled to | a. accumulating and collecting time (spent at work) |
| 2. resent | b. not working in the best possible way, and not doing what is expected |
| 3. inefficient and unreliable | c. removing a person who is not suitable or good enough |
| 4. incompetence | d. to get annoyed about something |
| 5. weeding out | e. believe that you have a right to something |
| 6. clocking up hours | f. lack of skill or ability to do something correctly or well |

Do Americans work too much?

Article A

Do Americans work too much?

by Talitha Linehan



YES!

“Americans work long hours out of a sense of necessity, not choice”

JOHN DE GRAAF

According to the Gallup-Healthways survey, those countries that have the best work-life balance and shortest work hours, including Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands, tend to have the happiest people. We have an enormous gross domestic product (GDP) but our average wage has been stagnant for decades – and we are far behind Europeans when it comes to many other quality-of-life measures.

Long work hours are harmful, not just to workers but also to the environment. To save time, Americans buy throwaway products and drive alone to work, leading to high levels of resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Studies in the US and Sweden have found that a reduction in American work hours to European levels would lead to a 20 to 30% reduction in energy use and carbon output.

Americans work long hours out of a sense of necessity, not choice. Gallup finds that Americans are 20% happier on weekends than workdays, and surveys show that the majority of Americans want more vacation time. But most people here live in a great deal of insecurity or fear, especially with the economic crisis, high unemployment rates, health care that depends on the job and a social safety net that has been seriously reduced in the past 30 years. They are afraid to complain.

Americans should aim for a work-life balance that is closer to that of Europeans, who work far fewer hours. We can't turn this around overnight, but we need to start taking steps – or we'll become increasingly overworked, overstressed, unhealthy and unhappy.

JOHN DE GRAAF is director of a campaign to reduce overwork, *Take Back Your Time* (www.timeday.org), and media director of The Happiness Initiative (www.happycounts.org). He is co-author of *What's the Economy For, Anyway?* (Bloomsbury Press).

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1 Too much work is the point at which work begins to have a significant negative impact on people's lives. In America, more than 20% of employees work excessive hours (over 48 hours a week, according to the International Labor Organization), while 30% do not receive any paid vacation time and more than 40% get no paid sick leave.

2 Many Americans work so much that they don't have time or energy for a healthy lifestyle. They eat fast food instead of taking the time for a proper meal and sit in front of the TV instead of exercising. Overwork is surely one reason why Americans have nearly twice as much chance as Europeans of suffering from chronic illnesses, such as heart disease and diabetes, in old age. We have the shortest life expectancy among rich nations and the world's highest obesity rate.

3 Long and stressful work hours have a negative impact on mental health as well. Levels of anxiety and depression here are nearly double those in Europe. Americans also have less time to spend with family and friends than Europeans do.

3 Summarizing and writing comprehension questions

Summarize and discuss the article you have just read with other students who read the same article. Write six comprehension questions about the article.

4 Answering comprehension questions

Swap pages with a student who read Article B. Read the article and answer the questions about it.

Do Americans work too much?

Article B

Do Americans work too much?

by Talitha Linehan



NO!

“Americans feel entitled to wealth and success without having to work for it”
CHARLENE POTTER

of complaining about how much they work, Americans should be grateful that they have a job, especially in these tough economic times.

I grew up in Canada and lived in Japan for 11 years, before moving to the US in 2001. America ranks behind these and other countries when it comes to work ethic. Most Americans don't take pride in their work unless they own their own business – and are inefficient and unreliable, as a result. If I want someone to do something, I often have to ask them two or three times.

When I moved here, I opened a bank account. The clerk entered my name incorrectly in the computer. I told her about the error and she said she would change it right away. For months, I received bank statements with the wrong name. I reported the error to the bank repeatedly, but it was never corrected. I finally closed the account and went to another bank. This kind of incompetence would be unacceptable in Canada or Japan.

In the past, a lot of companies were overstaffed. When the recession hit, they kept only their most efficient workers while weeding out those who were clocking up hours but doing very little. My friend Trudy, who works for a publisher, had five people working under her ten years ago and now they are all gone. She does the work of all of them. If they had all been working at capacity, this would not have been possible.

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1 Americans might work long hours but that does not mean that they work too much. Just because you're at work doesn't mean that you're working. In many cases, Americans don't work hard enough. They waste hours in unnecessary and unproductive meetings, take too many breaks and spend too much time sending personal e-mails, chatting to their colleagues and surfing online. If they worked harder, they might not have to work so many hours to get the job done.

2 Studies have found that Americans have poor life satisfaction. The reason for this may not be that Americans work too much but that they don't get a sense of personal pleasure from the work that they do. One of the problems is that they feel entitled to wealth and success without having to work for it. They are in love with the idea of the American Dream but that's all it is for most people – a dream. They sit around waiting to become rich and famous and resent having to work in the meantime. Instead

3 Summarizing and writing comprehension questions

Summarize and discuss the article you have just read with other students who read the same article. Write six comprehension questions about the article.

4 Answering comprehension questions

Swap pages with a student who read Article A. Read the article and answer the questions about it.

Do Americans work too much?

5 Warmer

Discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups.

- What points do the two Americans make about working environments and work efficiency?
- Are there any more factors or points of discussion which you think should have been included?
- In general, who do you agree with more: John De Graaf or Charlene Potter?
- Using the figures in the first paragraph of Article A as a reference point, do you and your colleagues work too much?

6 Webquest: Compare and contrast

Search for information on the internet and complete the table for the US, your country and a third country of your choice. How do the figures compare? Tip: Try searching for *comparison of working hours*, *comparison of public holidays* or *sick leave per year*.

	US	my country	
average hours worked per week			
paid vacation days per year			
public holidays per year			
average sick days taken per year			
retirement age			

Here are some direct links that might help you:

- <http://business.blogs.cnn.com/2011/04/13/what-country-works-the-most-each-day/>
- <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/Timeoffandholidays/index.htm>
- <http://www.articles.totallyexpat.com/global-comparison-employee-statutory-and-public-holiday-entitlements/>
- http://www.cnbc.com/id/33431347/Which_Country_Gets_the_Most_Vacation_Days
- <http://www.prnewswire.co.uk/cgi/news/release?id=106596>
- http://paul.kedrosky.com/archives/2010/04/retirement_ages.html

