The Four-Day Workweek

A shorter week, the same responsibilities

SPEAK FIRST | Talk in pairs. There are no right or wrong opinions.

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1. What makes a normal work or school week tiring?
2. When are you most productive, and why?
3. Which jobs could change their schedules easily? Which could not?

1 WORD POWER

Match the six useful expressions to their meanings. Then use two of them in your own sentences.

1. employer _____
2. efficiently _____
3. burnout _____
4. staff _____
5. on duty _____
6. reliable _____

A. the people who work for an organisation

B. working and available to help

C. able to be trusted to work well or be available

D. a person or company that gives people jobs

E. in a way that avoids wasting time or energy

F. extreme physical or mental tiredness linked to ongoing pressure

2 READ THE STORY

A shorter week, the same responsibilities

Many workers dream of having an extra day off, but employers often worry about unfinished tasks and unhappy customers. One possible solution is a four-day working week with fewer hours and no reduction in pay. It sounds attractive, but how does it work in practice?

In 2022, 61 organisations in the United Kingdom joined a six-month trial. Around 2,900 employees took part. Before the change, some teams studied how they spent their time. They shortened unnecessary meetings, improved communication and changed staff schedules. The aim was not simply to squeeze five days of work into four. Instead, teams tried to work more efficiently.

The results attracted attention. At the end of the trial, 56 of the 61 organisations said they intended to continue. In employee surveys, 39% reported that they felt less stressed and 71% reported lower levels of burnout, a feeling of extreme tiredness caused by too much pressure. These results suggest that shorter hours can help some people feel healthier.

However, a shorter week is not equally easy in every workplace. A software team might reduce meetings, but a café cannot serve lunch without staff. Hospitals and shops need enough people on duty every day. Smaller businesses may find it difficult to pay for additional cover. There is also a difference between working fewer hours and working four longer days.

Supporters believe a shorter week could help employers attract staff and improve their quality of life. Critics point out that the successful companies chose to participate in the trial, so other workplaces might have different results.

Perhaps the most sensible question is not whether everybody should work four days. It is how each organisation could test a new schedule while keeping its services reliable and treating its employees fairly.

3 DID YOU CATCH THAT?

Answer in your own words. Then compare with a partner and find evidence in the text.

1. What was a main goal of the 2022 UK trial?
2. Which change did some teams make?
3. Why might a café find the idea difficult?
4. What is one limitation of the trial?

4 LET'S TALK

Choose the questions that interest your group. Give reasons, ask follow-up questions and respond to different opinions.

1. Would you prefer a three-day weekend or shorter working days? Explain.
2. What would you actually do with extra free time after the first month?
3. Can cutting unnecessary meetings help people finish earlier?
4. When do you feel most productive? What helps you concentrate?
5. Would you accept four longer working days instead of five normal ones?
6. What could go wrong if everyone in a shop wanted Friday off?
7. Could a shorter week make parents' lives easier—or sometimes harder?
8. Which jobs would find a four-day week hardest to organise?
9. How could a small café keep serving lunch with shorter staff weeks?
10. Why might some workers worry about asking for more time off?
11. Should a company offer the same schedule to everyone or different options?
12. Does having a day off always mean you get to rest?
13. Would you trust a company that promised a new timetable without explaining coverage?
14. How could a school or company test shorter weeks for one month?
15. What would make you change your mind about a four-day week?

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Try one or two of these expressions when you respond.

- One advantage would be ...
- A possible disadvantage is ...
- If we ..., we could ...
- In contrast, ...

5 MAKE A CHOICE

Your language school wants to try shorter staff weeks while staying open Monday to Friday. Agree on a practical one-month experiment.

ONE LAST THING

What is one opinion you heard today that made you think? Can you explain it fairly, even if you disagree?

YOUR WEEKLY ROTA | NEGOTIATE A FAIR PLAN

In groups, show when each person or service is available. Keep customers, learners or patients covered. Then let someone object: which day or shift would you change, and why?

Team / service	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Person or team A					
Person or team B					
Person or team C					
Open / covered?					

Our strongest reason: _____ A fair objection: _____

ANSWERS & EXAMPLES

OPTIONAL FINAL PAGE | Leave this page out when printing for class. Use it to check any exercises you finish later.

WORD POWER · ANSWER KEY

1. employer — D. a person or company that gives people jobs
2. efficiently — E. in a way that avoids wasting time or energy
3. burnout — F. extreme physical or mental tiredness linked to ongoing pressure
4. staff — A. the people who work for an organisation
5. on duty — B. working and available to help
6. reliable — C. able to be trusted to work well or be available

DID YOU CATCH THAT? · SUGGESTED ANSWERS

These are examples. Your answer can use different words if it matches the reading.

1. What was a main goal of the 2022 UK trial?

Reduce working hours without cutting pay. The trial explored fewer hours with no reduction in salary.

2. Which change did some teams make?

They reduced unnecessary meetings. Teams reviewed meetings, communication and scheduling.

3. Why might a café find the idea difficult?

It has to serve people at particular times. Customers still expect food and service.

4. What is one limitation of the trial?

Companies joined voluntarily. The participants were not a random sample of all workplaces.

EXAMPLE SPEAKING RESPONSES

Discussion questions don't have a single correct opinion. Here are two ways to approach the topic and respond to another view.

I'd welcome a shorter week if the work did not just get squeezed into four exhausting days. More free time could make a real difference to family life.

Then again, some people would rather earn more money, and jobs such as nursing or retail might need different arrangements.

Try: state your view → give a reason → add an example → consider another opinion.