The Four-Day Workweek

An extra day off. What would you do with it?

Pick a side

1. Choose: more free time, more money or less stress. Explain.
2. Would you rather finish earlier every day or have a whole day free?
3. What steals time from your week?

Get the story

Imagine someone in your family came home with surprising news: their workplace was testing a four-day week, with the same pay. Would life become easier, or would four very busy days create new problems? The idea is about paid work, but it raises questions teenagers know well: how do we use our time, what helps us concentrate, and when do we need a break?

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.

Get the story / continued

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.

Now consider your own week. School, homework, sport, helping at home and meeting friends all take time. Workplace research does not prove that a four-day school week would have the same results. Schools would need their own evidence. Still, you can use similar questions to judge a timetable: who benefits, who needs extra help, and what would you measure before calling an experiment a success?

Word power

employer - a person or company that gives people jobs

efficiently - in a way that avoids wasting time or energy

burnout - extreme physical or mental tiredness linked to ongoing pressure

staff - the people who work for an organisation

on duty - working and available to help

reliable - able to be trusted to work well or be available

attract - make someone want to come or join

cover - people available to do the necessary work

participate - take part in an activity

fairly - in a way that treats people equally and reasonably

Prove it

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

A. Make employees work longer days

B. Reduce working hours without cutting pay

C. Close all shops on Fridays

2. Which change did some teams make?

A. They removed every customer

B. They reduced unnecessary meetings

C. They stopped communicating

3. Why might a café find the idea difficult?

A. It has to serve people at particular times

B. It cannot use computers

C. Employees dislike free time

4. What is one limitation of the trial?

A. No one answered a survey

B. It lasted ten years

C. Companies joined voluntarily

Quick mission: Timetable trade-off

In pairs, choose between a free Friday and shorter school days. Name who benefits, who might struggle and what evidence could change your minds.

This or that?

Choose a side. Give a reason. Respond to a different view. Opinions earn points for reasons, not agreement.

1. Four long days or five shorter days?
2. Friday off for all or different days off?
3. More pay or more free time?
4. Fewer meetings or fewer messages?
5. A quiet day off or a day full of plans?
6. Trial first or change the rule now?

Watch / notice / question

Use the optional short video linked on your student page, or use the article as a report. Identify a main claim, supporting evidence and an unanswered question.

Student page: https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/four-day-workweek/

Have something to say

1. What would you actually do with an extra free day?
2. Should everyone have the same day off?
3. Would you accept four longer days?
4. Which jobs would be hardest to change?
5. Could free time cost a family extra money?
6. How could technology save time without keeping people online all evening?
7. What makes a break useful?
8. Does being busy mean being productive?
9. Should customers help decide opening hours?
10. Which is fairer: equal hours or equal results?
11. How would you stop a shorter week becoming more stressful?
12. What evidence would change your mind?

Make your case

Your youth centre wants to test a four-day staff timetable. It must remain open after school on five weekdays. Design a rota, explain how visitors will get help, and plan a one-month trial.

Plot twist: One staff member can only work mornings, and Friday is the busiest afternoon. Revise your plan.

Final outcome: Present a rota, one benefit, one risk and two things you will measure.

Useful language

I would choose ... because ...

One advantage is ..., but ...

I see your point. However, ...

What evidence supports that?

Could we agree on ...?

I used to think ..., but now ...

One more idea

Design a one-week time experiment. Change one habit, predict the result and choose a fair way to measure it.

Exit ticket: one useful word, one idea you questioned and one question you still have.

Source links, optional media and the interactive game: https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/four-day-workweek/