

Wasting Time or Taking a Break?

1 We all want to be as productive as possible at work. We don't want to waste time. Some activities clearly waste time. For example, if sharing simple information, an email that takes seconds to write, send, and read is a good use of time. Conducting a thirty-minute meeting on the same information would be a waste of time.

2 Many people agree that breaks are necessary and not a waste of time. At minimum, they are necessary to use the restroom or have a snack, water, or meal. In fact, many companies allow for a ten-minute break for every 4 hours of work.

3 A lot of research and current thinking supports the idea that people are much more productive when they work in cycles of intense focus followed by short breaks.

4 A 2011 study of 84 participants led by a psychology professor showed that those who took short breaks during a fifty-minute repetitive computerized task performed better than those who worked continuously without interruption.

5 The Draugiem Group, a group of companies in Latvia, used software to track their workers' productivity. They found that the most productive workers repeatedly worked fifty-two minutes with intense purpose and then took a seventeen-minute break before returning to work.

6 Similarly, practitioners of the Pomodoro Technique work in twenty-five minute cycles with full focus, then take a five-minute break. After 4 such cycles they take a fifteen to twenty-minute break before returning to work.

7 While it is not clear just how long a work cycle or break should be, the idea is the same: intense focus followed by a break. But if a worker takes 10 minutes to buy a pair of shoes online, is this an acceptable use of break time? Some may say this is wasting time not taking a break. However, simply taking your mind off of a focused task is the main point of a break. Using your smartphone to check social media, send personal texts or messages, or even buy some shoes is certainly different than analyzing data, writing a report, designing a home, or doing whatever your work requires. It may not be as beneficial as physical exercise, but it is still a break.

8 In fact, of 3,200 workers surveyed by salary.com in 2012, sixty-four percent report regularly visiting non-work-related websites every day. Thirty-nine percent spend one hour or less per week on non-work-related tasks and twenty-one percent spend five hours per week. The survey respondents believe short breaks improve their productivity, and consider their online activity as short breaks.

9 What do you think? Is online shopping giving yourself an acceptable way to refresh your mind at work? If you think so, you're not alone. However, that doesn't mean your employer shares your views. Know your company's policy on internet use before you start shopping.

CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION.

1 The author's main argument is that taking breaks at work is a good use of time.

True False Not Given

2 Many companies give their workers 30 minute breaks every four hours.

True False Not Given

3 Research suggests that people are more productive when they work hard, but take many short breaks.

True False Not Given

4 The study led by the psychology professor gave participants short breaks of ten minutes.

True False Not Given

5 The Draugiem Group's workers and practitioners of the Pomodoro Technique both work intensely for a period of time, and then take a short break.

True False Not Given

6 Researchers have discovered the ideal amount of time you should work for and break for.

True False Not Given

7 According to the author, using your smartphone counts as a break.

True False Not Given

8 The author exercises during breaks because that is the best use of break time.

True False Not Given

9 The salary.com survey found that most workers don't visit non-work related websites at work.

True False Not Given

10 The author advises reading your company's policy on internet use.

True False Not Given