



THE TRUTH ABOUT BOREDOM



We all hate being bored, particularly at work.

In fact, most of us try hard to avoid ¹ it and, thanks to modern technology, there are now hundreds of ways to keep ourselves entertained. People watch videos or play games on the way to work, check their phones when they're in boring meetings, and talk with friends or listen to music while they do dull administrative tasks. But some scientists think we're making a mistake. They believe that boring activities can be good for us, and a recent psychology experiment tests this idea.



In 2013, Dr. Sandi Mann and Rebekah Cadman did an experiment to test people's creativity, i.e., how good we are at coming up with new ideas. ² Their idea was to see if boredom had an effect on how creative we are. They gave 140 people some plastic cups and asked ³ them to think of different ways to use them. However, half of the people spent 15 minutes doing some very boring activities first. They had to read telephone numbers from a long list and copy ⁴ them on a piece of paper.

The results of the experiment were very interesting. The people who did the boring activities first were much more creative and thought of lots of ideas. Some people suggested wearing the cups as party hats or filling ⁵ them with fruit juice and freezing them to make popsicles. Whereas, the people who didn't do any boring tasks found it hard to think of many ways to use the cups.



Dr. Mann says a little boredom can be positive for us. ⁶ She doesn't think we should be afraid of "doing nothing." Many very successful people do "boring" activities in their free time. For example, rock musician Jack White, repairs furniture. ⁷ His hobby helps him relax and think of ideas for new songs. At work, some successful people do similar things to be more creative, like cleaning out their desk or deleting old e-mails.

However, there are good and bad ways to be bored. You should only do boring activities for a short time. And you should avoid physical activities that make you feel tired, as this can make you less creative. So, if you usually listen to music, read the news, and send messages to friends when you're bored at work, why not try doing less? Make yourself a cup of coffee, organize your paperwork, or look out the window—maybe ⁸ it will change your life ... and you can always tell your boss that you're being creative.



Thinking corner

- 1 How often do you feel bored?
- 2 What jobs do you think are boring?
- 3 Do you think boredom is a bad thing? Why/Why not?
- 4 What can you do to stop being bored at work?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____



Skill skimming a text

When we skim a text, we read it quickly to understand the main ideas.

- Look at the title, pictures, and any headings, and predict what the text is about.
- Read the first sentence in each paragraph carefully. These are "topic sentences" and are usually a summary of what the paragraph is about.
- Think about the ideas from all the topic sentences to understand the general meaning of the whole text.

2 Read the Skill box. Then read the **highlighted** topic sentences in the text and check (✓) the best description of the text.

- 1 Modern technology makes us feel bored more quickly. ☐
- 2 People can have better ideas after they do boring activities. ☐
- 3 Boredom in offices is a serious problem for companies. ☐

3 Answer the questions in pairs. Read the text again and check your answers.

- 1 What do most people do when they are bored?
- 2 How did the scientists use the plastic cups to test people's creativity?
- 3 What activity did some people do first to make themselves be bored?
- 4 Who was more creative in the experiment? What ideas did they have?
- 5 What does Jack White do to give himself ideas for new songs?
- 6 What kinds of activities make us more/less creative?

3. Answer the questions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

4 Has the text changed your opinion about being bored? Why/Why not?

	4. Answer the question:

5 A Look at the extract from the text. Who or what does *They* refer to?

*Some scientists think we're making a mistake. **They** believe that boring activities can be good for us.*

	<i>They</i> refer to _____



Text builder pronoun referencing

We use pronouns and possessive adjectives to avoid repeating nouns:

*Sharon had a **fantastic idea** yesterday. **It** was really creative.*

***Carlos** always works late. I saw **him** in the office at 8:00 last night.*

***My parents** earn a lot of money, but I think **their** jobs are very boring.*

B Read the Text builder. Find pronouns 1–8 in the text and say what they refer to.

1. **it** : _____
2. **Their** : _____
3. **them** : _____
4. **them** : _____
5. **them** : _____
6. **She** : _____
7. **His** : _____
8. **it** : _____

6 A Complete the text with the pronouns in the box. What do the pronouns refer to?

his it he them

Karl Duncker was a German psychologist. ¹_____ is most famous for developing a way to test creativity. In ²_____ experiment, he gave students a candle, a book of matches, and a box of thumbtacks. He asked ³_____ to stick the candle to a wall and light ⁴_____ without dripping any wax on the table.

