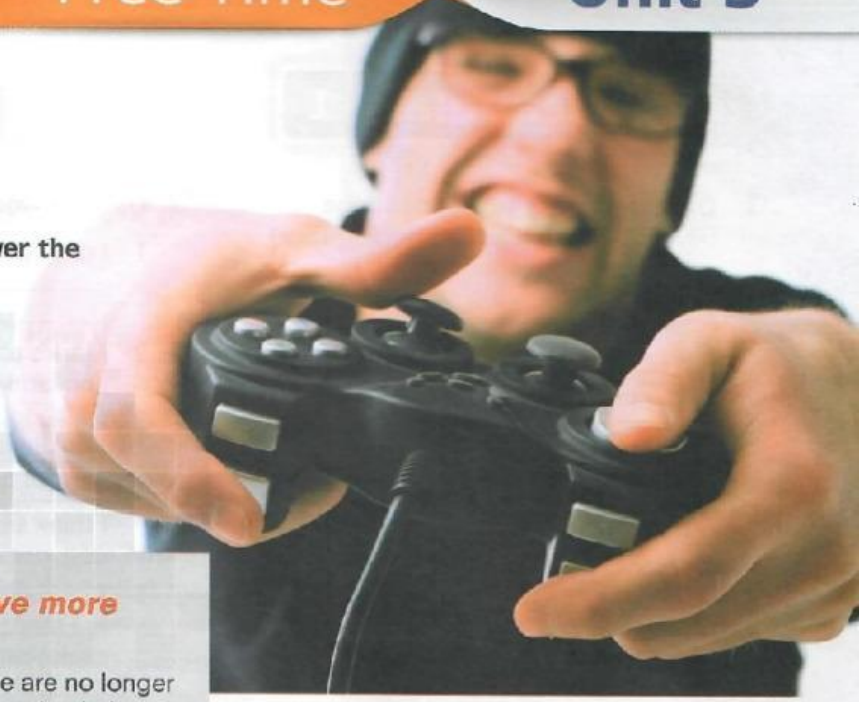
Reading

Read this article about free time and then answer the questions. Choose the best answer a, b, c or d.



Where does all the *free time* go?

Technology should mean that we have more free time, so why don't we?

Changes in technology mean that work and leisure are no longer always separate. Today, it's common for people to take their office with them every evening in the form of their laptop. They get on with work at weekends, and check their email on the train to and from the office. Mobile phones mean employees are always available.

As well as work taking up more of our free time in this way, technology itself sometimes means everyday activities can take longer. Machines can't always help us. Think about how long a simple telephone call to a company takes before a real person answers your question. Getting money out of the ATM is quick and easy, but you will have to stand in a long queue if you have a problem.

Before modern technology, people usually worked from nine to five. Families ate meals together. Nothing interrupted them. With no Internet or electronic games and only a few television channels, they had to make their own entertainment. Today, if our screens go black for a short time, as a result of a power cut, let's say, we find it's surprisingly fun to play old-fashioned games, like board games and card games. We may even have some interesting conversations with each other. Time passes more slowly, though, than when we are busy chatting on our computers or watching our favourite shows. Without our screens, it feels as if we have more free time.

Modern life allows multi-tasking like never before. Teenagers spend time on the computer doing their homework, while at the same time checking Facebook, playing music and texting their friends on their mobile. Older people may attempt something similar while cooking dinner. This seems to save time, but sometimes it means that dinner is burnt!

According to Parkinson's Law, the time it takes to complete something depends on the time available. For example, an old lady may spend all morning writing and posting a birthday card. By the time she has written it, found the address, taken it to the post office, queued for a stamp and returned home, hours have passed. A busy person, on the other hand, would take a lot less time! C Northcote Parkinson gave this example to show that activities take longer if you have more time. The trick then, is to imagine you have less time than you really do and use technology only when it speeds things up. In this case, the old lady should learn to email!

1 In the first paragraph, why does the writer say people have less free time?
   - a They stay at their office longer.
   - b Computers mean there is more work.
   - c They often work outside the office.
   - d Their boss is always calling their mobile.

2 Why does the writer use the examples of the telephone call and the bank?
   - a To show how machines can help us with our problems
   - b To show that machines are more efficient than people
   - c To show that technology is getting slower
   - d To show that sometimes customers still have to wait a long time

3 What does 'they' in the third paragraph refer to?
   - a families
   - b meals
   - c electronic games
   - d television channels

4 What does the writer mean by 'multi-tasking' in the fourth paragraph?
   - a doing one job after another
   - b doing a lot of things together
   - c doing jobs very fast
   - d doing work on a computer

5 What is the main point of the text?
   - a everyone has more free time than in the past
   - b old people spend longer on activities than young people
   - c modern technology does not always mean more free time
   - d people often waste their free time

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