

Mindfulness or Productivity: Which Should We Prioritise?

Advanced (C1-C2)



WARM UP

Part 1. Read the quote below and then discuss the questions.

"We are always getting ready to live but never living."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

1. Do you agree that modern life pushes us to do rather than be?
2. Is mindfulness compatible with productivity, or are they in conflict?
3. Should workplaces promote mindfulness, or is it a personal choice?
4. What risks come from over-focusing on productivity? What about over-focusing on mindfulness?



READING TEXT

Part 1. Read the following text.

Mindfulness or Productivity: Which Should We Prioritise?

Modern culture often treats productivity as the highest virtue. From efficiency apps to constant performance metrics, the message is clear: more output equals more value. Yet this emphasis fuels stress, cognitive overload, and a burnout cycle that undermines the very productivity it celebrates.

Mindfulness offers a contrasting ideal: present-moment awareness, acceptance, and focus. Research shows it can reduce stress, regulate emotions, and even improve concentration. Still, critics argue that “corporate mindfulness” is a convenient patch — encouraging employees to meditate rather than addressing systemic overwork. Others warn that excessive inward focus risks detachment from goals and responsibility.

The real question may not be whether to prioritise mindfulness or productivity, but how to integrate both. Can we cultivate awareness without losing ambition? Can productivity thrive without mindfulness to support wellbeing?

Part 2. Discuss the questions below based on the text.

1. How does the text describe the cultural dominance of productivity?
2. What benefits are linked to mindfulness according to the text?
3. Why might workplace mindfulness programmes be criticised?
4. What risks are associated with too much focus on mindfulness?
5. What position does the author suggest about balancing mindfulness and productivity?



DEBATE

Part 1. Match the terms to their meanings.

Attention economy	Present-moment awareness	Efficiency culture	Burnout cycle
Cognitive overload	Corporate mindfulness	Task orientation	Workplace wellbeing

1. _____ A focus on completing tasks quickly, often at the expense of reflection or creativity.
2. _____ A set of practices or programmes that bring mindfulness into companies.
3. _____ The mental strain from being exposed to too much information at once.
4. _____ The prioritisation of productivity and efficiency above other values.
5. _____ The commercial system where human attention is treated as a resource to capture.
6. _____ The cycle of overwork leading to exhaustion, collapse, and recovery attempts.
7. _____ The promotion of health, balance, and mental resilience in professional settings.
8. _____ A state of awareness focused on the here and now.

Part 2. Complete the sentences with the correct terms.

1. Social media thrives on the _____, competing constantly for our focus.
2. Employees trapped in the _____ often see productivity fall despite longer hours.
3. Meditation is designed to develop _____ rather than rushing ahead mentally.
4. Companies offering yoga sessions may be accused of practising _____ instead of reducing workloads.
5. Juggling endless emails can easily result in _____.
6. A culture that praises only output reflects an entrenched _____.
7. Effective leaders know that _____ directly improves motivation and retention.
8. A strong _____ helps people complete daily goals but may cause tunnel vision.

Part 3. Look at the useful expressions. Rewrite the sentences using these expressions to make them sound more formal and persuasive for a debate.

Framing the issue: Perhaps the real question is whether... / We might reframe this as...

Hedging: It could be argued that... / To some extent, I agree, although...

Challenging assumptions: Doesn't that overlook the fact that...? / Are we assuming that...?

Weighing trade-offs: We must balance X against Y... / The benefits are clear, but we must also consider...

Conceding then pivoting: That's a fair point; however... / I agree up to a point, but...

1. Productivity is always more important than mindfulness. ->

2. Mindfulness is a waste of time in business. ->

3. Companies shouldn't get involved in wellbeing. ->

4. Mindfulness is enough to solve stress at work. ->

Part 4. Take part in a structured debate with your teacher/partner. Use the vocabulary and debate expressions from this lesson. Speak fluently, challenge ideas politely, and support your opinions with clear reasons and examples.

Attention economy

Present-moment awareness

Efficiency culture

Burnout cycle

Cognitive overload

Corporate mindfulness

Task orientation

Workplace wellbeing

Round 1: Argue that productivity should be prioritised over mindfulness.

Round 2: Argue that mindfulness should come before productivity.

Round 3: Free debate — propose how mindfulness and productivity could reinforce one another.



REFLECTION

Part 1. Discuss the following questions.

1. Do you prioritise productivity or mindfulness in your life? Why?
2. How could you create a better balance between the two?
3. Should companies have a role in promoting mindfulness at work?

WRAP-UP TASK (OPTIONAL HOMEWORK)

Write an opinion blog post (180–220 words):

“Can mindfulness and productivity work together, or must we choose one?”

- Use at least 4 vocabulary items (e.g., attention economy, burnout cycle, present-moment awareness, workplace wellbeing).
- Use at least 2 debate expressions.
- Present one counterargument and refute it briefly.

