

IELTS Academic Practice Test

Work-Life Balance

Test Number: 003 **Target Level:** B1-B2 Intensive **Total Time:** Approximately 2 hours 45 minutes

Section 1: Reading

Time: 60 minutes

Reading Passage 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 1–10**, which are based on Reading Passage 1 below.

The Search for Equilibrium

In an era defined by constant connectivity and demanding careers, the concept of work-life balance has become a central concern for millions of employees and a critical challenge for employers. Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium between an individual's professional responsibilities and their personal life, including family, leisure, and self-care. Achieving this balance is not about a perfect, $\frac{50}{50}$ split of time, but rather about having the flexibility to manage both aspects of life without one consistently overwhelming the other. The consequences of a poor work-life balance can be severe, leading to chronic stress, burnout, and a decline in both mental and physical health.

The pressure to be constantly available is a significant factor disrupting this balance. The advent of smartphones and remote work technologies means that the traditional boundary between the office and home has become increasingly blurred. Many employees feel an implicit expectation to answer emails and take calls outside of standard working hours, effectively turning their personal time into an extension of the workday. A 2023 survey by the Future of Work Institute found that 65% of employees check their work emails after 8 p.m., a habit that prevents the psychological detachment necessary for genuine relaxation and recovery.

Recognizing the negative impact of this 'always-on' culture, some companies and even governments are beginning to take action. In several European countries, including France and Spain, 'right to disconnect' laws have been introduced, giving employees the legal right to ignore work-related communications outside of their contracted hours. Companies are also implementing their own policies, such as promoting flexible working arrangements, offering compressed workweeks (e.g., a full 40-hour week completed in four days), and providing more generous parental leave. These initiatives are not just about employee well-being; they are also a strategic business decision. Research has consistently shown that employees with a healthy work-life balance are more productive, more engaged, and less likely to leave their jobs.

However, achieving a good work-life balance is also a personal responsibility. It requires individuals to be proactive in setting their own boundaries and prioritizing their time effectively. This can involve simple strategies like scheduling personal appointments and leisure activities in a calendar, learning to say no to additional, non-essential work, and making a conscious effort to be fully present when outside of work. For many, it also means re-evaluating their personal definition of success, moving away from a purely career-focused metric to one that encompasses overall life satisfaction.

The conversation around work-life balance continues to evolve, especially as younger generations enter the workforce with different expectations about the role of work in their lives. The pursuit of this equilibrium is no longer seen as a luxury, but as an essential component of a healthy and sustainable career. As society continues to grapple with the demands of modern life, finding this balance will remain a critical challenge for the foreseeable future.

Questions 1–5

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 1?

In boxes 1–5 on your answer sheet, write

TRUE	if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE	if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN	if there is no information on this

1. A perfect $\frac{50}{50}$ split of time is the only way to achieve work-life balance.
 2. The majority of employees surveyed in 2023 checked work emails in the evening.
 3. 'Right to disconnect' laws are most common in North America.
 4. Companies that promote work-life balance often see benefits in employee productivity.
 5. Younger generations are less concerned about work-life balance than older generations.
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Questions 6–10

Complete the sentences below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 6–10 on your answer sheet.

1. A poor work-life balance can lead to chronic stress and _____.
2. The traditional line between the office and home has become _____ due to modern technology.
3. Some companies are offering _____ to allow employees to complete their work in fewer days.
4. Achieving a good work-life balance is also a _____, requiring individuals to set their own boundaries.

5. The pursuit of work-life balance is now considered an _____ of a sustainable career.
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Reading Passage 2

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 11–20**, which are based on Reading Passage 2 below.

The Four-Day Week: A Revolution in the Workplace?

The traditional five-day, 9-to-5 workweek has been the standard model for over a century, but a growing number of companies are challenging this norm by experimenting with a four-day workweek. The concept is simple: employees work four days a week instead of five, with no reduction in pay. Proponents of this model argue that it can lead to a happier, healthier, and more productive workforce. However, critics raise concerns about its feasibility and potential drawbacks. This passage explores the arguments for and against this revolutionary approach to work.

A. The Case for Change

The primary argument in favour of a four-day week is its positive impact on employee well-being. A shorter workweek provides employees with an extra day for personal errands, hobbies, and spending time with family and friends. This can significantly reduce stress and burnout, leading to improved mental and physical health. Numerous trials have supported this claim. For example, a large-scale trial in the UK involving over 60 companies found that 71% of employees reported lower levels of burnout, and 39% said they were less stressed than before the trial. Furthermore, a well-rested and happier workforce is often a more focused and productive one. The same UK trial reported a 1.4% increase in revenue for the participating companies, suggesting that reducing hours did not harm their financial performance.

B. The Productivity Puzzle

How can employees get the same amount of work done in fewer hours? The answer, according to advocates, lies in increased efficiency. The pressure of a shorter workweek forces companies and employees to rethink their work habits. This often involves cutting down on non-essential meetings, reducing distractions, and adopting more focused work methods. Technology also plays a crucial role, with automation

and better software helping to streamline tasks that were previously time-consuming. The four-day week is not about working longer hours over four days; it is about working smarter.

C. The Challenges and Criticisms

Despite the promising results, the four-day week is not without its challenges. One of the main concerns is that this model may not be suitable for all industries. For customer-facing businesses, such as retail or healthcare, it can be difficult to maintain service levels with reduced staff availability. This might require complex scheduling or hiring more staff, which could offset the financial benefits. There is also a risk that the pressure to complete five days' worth of work in four could lead to an intensification of work, where employees feel even more stressed during their working days.

D. A Model for the Future?

While the four-day week may not be a one-size-fits-all solution, the conversation it has started is invaluable. It has forced businesses to question long-held assumptions about how work should be structured. The successful trials have demonstrated that it is possible to decouple working hours from productivity and to prioritise employee well-being without sacrificing business success. The future of work may not be a universal four-day week, but it is likely to be more flexible and more focused on outcomes rather than the hours spent at a desk. The experiment has opened the door to a more human-centred approach to work.

Questions 11–14

Reading Passage 2 has four sections, **A–D**.

Choose the correct heading for each section from the list of headings below.

Write the correct number, **i–vi**, in boxes 11–14 on your answer sheet.

List of Headings

i.	The difficulty of applying the model everywhere
ii.	The link between happiness and productivity
iii.	A new way of thinking about work
iv.	How to work less but achieve more
v.	The history of the five-day week
vi.	The benefits for employee health

1. Section **A** ____

2. Section **B** ____

3. Section **C** ____

4. Section **D** ____

Questions 15–20

Complete the summary below.

Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 15–20 on your answer sheet.

The Four-Day Workweek

The four-day workweek is a modern alternative to the traditional five-day model. One of its main benefits is an improvement in employee **15** _____. *A large trial in the UK showed that employees experienced less stress and burnout. The companies in the trial also saw a slight increase in their* **16** _____, suggesting that business was not negatively affected.

The key to making this model work is to increase **17** _____. *This can be achieved by reducing the number of unnecessary meetings and using technology to streamline tasks. However, there are some* **18** _____. The model may not be suitable for all industries, particularly those that are customer-facing. There is also a risk that the pressure to get work done in four days could actually increase **19** _____ for some employees.

Ultimately, the four-day week may not be a universal solution, but it has encouraged a more **20** _____ approach to work.

Reading Passage 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 21–30**, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.

The Rise of the Digital Nomad

A new type of professional is emerging in the modern workforce: the digital nomad. These are individuals who leverage technology to work remotely, allowing them to live a location-independent lifestyle. Rather than being tied to a single office, digital nomads can perform their jobs from anywhere with a reliable internet connection—a coffee shop in Bali, a co-working space in Lisbon, or a quiet apartment in Kyoto. This lifestyle, once reserved for a handful of freelancers and tech entrepreneurs, has become increasingly mainstream, accelerated by the global shift towards remote work.

The motivations for becoming a digital nomad are varied. For many, the primary appeal is the freedom and flexibility it offers. The ability to travel the world while maintaining a career is a powerful draw, offering a chance to escape the monotony of a traditional 9-to-5 routine. This lifestyle allows for a richer life experience, enabling individuals to immerse themselves in different cultures, learn new languages, and meet people from all over the world. For others, the motivation is more financial. By choosing to live in countries with a lower cost of living, digital nomads can often save money and enjoy a higher quality of life than they could in their home country.

However, the life of a digital nomad is not without its challenges. The constant travel and lack of a permanent base can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. While it is easy to meet other travellers, forming deep, long-lasting relationships can be difficult when you are always on the move. Another significant hurdle is the administrative complexity. Digital nomads must navigate a maze of visa regulations, tax laws, and healthcare systems in different countries. Finding reliable internet and a suitable workspace can also be a constant struggle in some parts of the world.

Furthermore, the digital nomad lifestyle raises important questions about the nature of work and community. While it offers unparalleled personal freedom, it can also lead to a disconnect from a local community. Critics argue that digital nomads sometimes fail to integrate into the places they visit, living in a 'bubble' of other expatriates and remote workers. This can lead to a superficial engagement with the local culture and can even contribute to issues like rising housing costs in popular nomad destinations.

Despite these difficulties, the digital nomad trend shows no signs of slowing down. As technology continues to improve and more companies embrace flexible work policies, the number of people choosing this lifestyle is likely to grow. The digital nomad represents a significant evolution in the relationship between work and life, challenging the traditional idea that a career must be tied to a specific geographical location. It is a lifestyle that embodies the ultimate form of work-life balance for some, but it requires a high degree of self-discipline, adaptability, and a willingness to embrace uncertainty.

Questions 21–25

Choose the correct letter, **A, B, C**, or **D**.

Write the correct letter in boxes 21–25 on your answer sheet.

1. What is the defining characteristic of a digital nomad? A. They only work in the technology industry. B. They work remotely and are not tied to a single location. C. They do not need an internet connection for their work. D. They only work for a few months each year.
2. What is one of the main motivations for becoming a digital nomad? A. The desire to work longer hours. B. The opportunity to live a more settled life. C. The freedom to travel while maintaining a career. D. The chance to avoid using technology.
3. What is a common challenge faced by digital nomads? A. Having too much free time. B. The difficulty of finding good food. C. Feelings of loneliness and a lack of deep relationships. D. The simplicity of visa and tax laws.
4. What is one criticism of the digital nomad lifestyle mentioned in the passage? A. Digital nomads often learn too many languages. B. They can become too deeply involved in local politics. C. They may not fully integrate into the local

communities they visit. D. They tend to work fewer hours than traditional employees.

5. What quality is essential for a successful digital nomad? A. A resistance to change. B. A desire for a predictable routine. C. A high degree of adaptability. D. A preference for working in a traditional office.
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Questions 26–30

Complete the notes below.

Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 26–30 on your answer sheet.

The Digital Nomad Lifestyle

- **Motivations:**

- The main appeal is the freedom and **26** _____ it provides.
- It allows for a richer life experience and cultural immersion.
- It can also have **27** _____ benefits by living in cheaper countries.

- **Challenges:**

- The constant travel can lead to feelings of **28** _____.
- Dealing with visas, taxes, and healthcare can be administratively complex.
- There are concerns that digital nomads may not **29** _____ into local communities.

- **Conclusion:**

- The lifestyle requires a high level of self-discipline and a willingness to embrace **30** _____.
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Section 2: Listening

Time: Approximately 30 minutes (plus 10 minutes transfer time)

Listening Task 1

You will hear a human resources manager, Sarah, giving a presentation to employees about a new company policy. Listen and answer questions 1–6.

Questions 1–6

Complete the notes below.

Write **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

New Flexible Working Policy

- **Goal of the Policy:**
 - To give employees more control over their **1** _____.
 - To improve well-being and boost productivity.
 - **Main Components:**
 - **Flexi-time:**
 - Employees can choose their start and finish times.
 - Must be present during core hours (10 a.m. to **2** _____).
 - **Remote Work:**
 - Can work from home up to **3** _____ per week.
 - Company will provide technical support.
 - **No-Meeting Fridays:**
 - No internal meetings after **4** _____ on Fridays.
 - This provides **5** _____ for focused work.
 - **Implementation:**
 - The policy will be **6** _____ from the first of next month.
-

Listening Task 2

You will hear two friends, Chloe and Tom, discussing the challenges of remote work. Listen and answer questions 7–12.

Questions 7–9

Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, or **C**.

1. What does Tom miss most about working in the office? A. The comfortable chairs. B. The social connection with colleagues. C. The free coffee.
2. What is the biggest challenge Chloe faces when working from home? A. She feels lonely and isolated. B. She finds it difficult to stop working in the evenings. C. She doesn't have the right technology.
3. What has helped Chloe to stay focused while working from home? A. Working in a different room each day. B. Taking frequent breaks to watch TV. C. Having a dedicated workspace and a fixed routine.

Questions 10–12

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the conversation?

Write

TRUE	if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE	if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN	if there is no information on this

1. Tom finds it easy to concentrate when he is working from home.
 2. Tom's workspace at home is in a separate, dedicated room.
 3. Both Chloe and Tom agree that a hybrid model would be the ideal work arrangement.
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Section 3: Writing

Time: 60 minutes

Writing Task 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The table below shows the results of a survey on the average number of hours worked per week by employees in four different European countries in 2010 and 2020.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.

Average Weekly Working Hours

Country	2010	2020
Germany	38	35
France	37	36
UK	42	40
Spain	40	38

Writing Task 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Some people believe that employers should not be allowed to contact their employees outside of working hours. Others argue that this is impractical in today's global and technology-driven economy.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Section 4: Speaking

Time: 11–14 minutes

Part 1: Introduction and Interview (4–5 minutes)

Let's talk about your work or studies.

- What work do you do? / What subject are you studying?
- What is the most interesting part of your job/studies?
- What are your career plans for the future?
- Is it easy to find jobs in your country?

Now, let's talk about daily routines.

- What is your typical daily routine?
 - What is your favourite part of the day? Why?
 - How do you usually relax in the evenings?
 - Has your daily routine changed much compared to when you were a child?
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Part 2: Individual Long Turn (3–4 minutes)

You have one minute to prepare. You may make notes if you wish.

Describe a time when you were very busy.

You should say:

- when this was
 - what you had to do
 - how you managed the situation and explain how you felt at that time.
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Part 3: Two-Way Discussion (4–5 minutes)

Let's consider the topic of time management.

- Why is it important for people to manage their time effectively?
- What are some common ways that people waste time in their daily lives?
- Do you think technology helps people to save time, or does it cause them to waste more time?

Now, let's talk about work-life balance.

- What do you understand by the term 'work-life balance'?
 - In your country, do people generally have a good work-life balance? Why/Why not?
 - What can companies do to help their employees achieve a better work-life balance?
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Section 5: Grammar

Time: 25 minutes

Part 1: Sentence Transformation

Instructions: For questions 1-5, complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. **Do not change the word given.** You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

1. My boss said I could leave early. **ALLOWED** My boss _____ leave early.

2. I find it difficult to disconnect from work in the evenings. **DIFFICULTY** I _____ from work in the evenings.
3. You should take a break if you are feeling stressed. **WERE** If I _____, I would take a break.
4. She started working here three years ago. **FOR** She has _____ three years.
5. I regret working so much last year. **WISH** I _____ so much last year.
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Part 2: Error Correction

Instructions: For questions 6-10, read the text below. Some lines are correct, and some have a word which should not be there. If a line is correct, put a tick (✓). If a line has a word which should not be there, write the word.

A Busy Week

Line	Text	Answer
6.	This week has been one of the most busiest weeks of my life.	___
7.	I have had to work late every night to finish a project.	___
8.	My manager asked me to do a lot of the extra tasks.	___
9.	I am looking forward to the weekend so I can to relax.	___
10.	If I would have more time, I would go to the gym.	___

Part 3: Multiple Choice

Instructions: For questions 11-20, choose the correct word or phrase to complete the sentence.

1. If the company _____ a four-day week, I would be much happier. A. offered B. will offer C. offers
2. He is so busy that he has _____ time for his hobbies. A. a little B. little C. a few

3. I must remember _____ my laptop at the office tonight. A. leaving B. to leave C. leave
4. This is the first time I _____ from home. A. have ever worked B. ever worked C. am ever working
5. You _____ check your emails on holiday; it's supposed to be a break! A. have to B. should C. shouldn't
6. My company is considering _____ more flexible working hours. A. to introduce B. introduce C. introducing
7. The manager _____ is responsible for the team is on holiday. A. who B. which C. whose
8. I have been working on this report _____ 9 a.m. this morning. A. for B. since C. from
9. Despite _____ a demanding job, she still finds time for her family. A. of having B. she has C. having
10. It is important to set clear _____ between your work life and your personal life. A. boundaries B. frontiers C. limits
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END OF TEST