

READING

# Barter economy

**LEVEL**

Upper-Intermediate  
(B2)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B2\_2113R

**LANGUAGE**

English



## Learning outcomes

- I can read and understand the main points in a text about a barter economy.
- I can describe bartering systems and express my opinions about living without money.



## Warm-up

**Do you think it's  
possible to live  
without money?**

**Share your answer with the  
rest of the class!**



# The barter economy (1/4)

**Read** the first part of the text.

Ever wondered if you could live without money? Most of us, at some point in our lives, have dreamt of leaving the beaten track behind in order to enjoy the simpler things in life. Our capacity to make and grow products with our bare hands has inspired many people to downsize and turn to community-based living.

Bartering is the simple process of directly swapping goods of relatively similar value instead of exchanging money. It's based on the idea of reciprocity, which is the process of exchanging things for mutual benefit. In communities where money is in short supply and practical skills are in abundance, a bartering-based economy might just be the thing that brings communities closer together in the face of economic pressures.

But is bartering a real economic alternative to a money-based system? To answer this question we might need to look a little deeper into the history of economics.



# The barter economy (2/4)

1. **Read** the second part of the text.
2. Then **answer** the questions below.

According to some historians, it is a myth that bartering economies existed before money economies. Rather, bartering developed as a substitute to money-based economies. When people had a lack of money, bartering could be used to avoid going hungry by making the most of what they had to exchange for things they needed.

There are some examples of traditional Indian communities who used bartering type systems without ever using money-based substitutes. However, their bartering systems were more like gift systems. Unlike money-based systems, where an exchange of items occurs at a mutual time, gift systems functioned on a delayed bartering model. The barter was therefore more like a lending and repayment system for practical goods exchanged at different times that helped support members of the community in economically lean times. This suggests that money-based exchange systems have always been a part of human communities, even though money has changed throughout time. So is it really possible to drop out of the system and live without money?

Can you summarise the idea of reciprocity?

How are gift systems different from money-based systems?

Can you think of any lending and repayment systems today?





# Matching

**Match** the words to their definition.

1 **to downsize**

2 **to swap**

3 **abundance**

4 **mutual**

5 **capacity**

6 **lean times**

a to give something and be given something else

b feeling the same emotion, or doing the same thing to or for each other

c ability to do something

d to reduce, to make something smaller

e a time when there is not enough of something, especially money or food

f more than enough



I want to leave **the beaten track** behind in order to enjoy the simpler things in life!

**The beaten track** is the usual route or destination.

Why do you think it's called this?



# Prediction

In breakout rooms or together as a class, **answer** the question below.

**What are some ways besides bartering that people can live without money?**





# ”

## The barter economy (3/4)

**Read** the third part of the text.

According to some, it's possible to live without money, but direct bartering is only one way of getting by. So, what can someone do today? There are at least two or three options. The first is growing your own food or alternatively, volunteering on a farm that grows food and is willing to let you live on their property for free. Many countries also have wwoofing (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) networks, which welcome people who want to exchange their volunteer labour for a place to live and eat. The idea is that people interested in wwoofing support organic agriculture and sustainable living. But if you live in the middle of a big city getting out to a farm to wwoof might not be practical. What does a person do then? If you are city-bound, the way to survive is to find food that is being thrown away. Many supermarkets throw away food that has reached its expiry date, but which is still tasty and hygienic to consume. Looking for food that is being thrown out is called dumpster diving or skipping – the dumpster or skip being the big waste bins usually located near the loading bays of big supermarkets. But the big question is still: how do you live without money and not end up homeless?





# Discuss

Answer the questions below.

**Have you ever heard of wwoofing? Would you try it?**



**What do you think about dumpster diving?**

# The barter economy (4/4)

1. **Read** the final part of the text.
2. Then **answer** the questions below.

Have you ever heard of couchsurfing? Couchsurfing is a network of people offering their sofas for others to sleep on for free.

You might be thinking at this point that living without money is only possible if you are young and free of responsibilities. You may also think that eating out of a dumpster is hardly ideal, especially if you have children. You wouldn't be alone in having these concerns. However, people can live with much less than they think they can and in fact find themselves feeling much happier and better off as a result.



Can you summarise what couchsurfing is?

What did you find most interesting about the text?

Do you agree or disagree with the last sentence?  
Why?



## Discuss

**Can you think of any other economic alternatives to those mentioned in the article?**

**Share your ideas with the rest of the class!**







# End of the lesson

Idiom

***beyond one's means***

**Meaning:** spending more money than you can afford to spend

**Example:** I had to move into a flat with flatmates because I was living beyond my means and could no longer afford my own place.



# Additional practice



# Fill in the gaps

**Complete** the sentences with the correct word(s).

- 1 Last year, we decided to \_\_\_\_\_. We sold our house and bought a camping van. It's great—it's smaller, less expensive, easier to maintain!
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ respect is important for a partnership to work.
- 3 In \_\_\_\_\_ it's important that everyone in the community tries to help and support one another.
- 4 I had an \_\_\_\_\_ of tomatoes from my garden, so I shared some with my neighbours.
- 5 I'm not so sure I have the \_\_\_\_\_ to live off the land, but I would be interested to try!

abundance  
mutual  
capacity  
lean times  
downsize



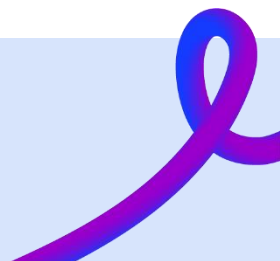


# Discuss

**Describe a time when you entered into a reciprocal agreement with someone.**



**Describe a time when you bartered something. If you've never bartered, what might you barter?**





## Discuss

**Answer** the questions below.

**Have you ever tried  
couchsurfing?**

**If so, how was your experience?  
If not, would you be interested in  
trying?**





# Answer key

## **P.5:**

- Reciprocity is the process of exchanging things for mutual benefit. For example, swapping goods of relatively similar value instead of exchanging money.
- Gift systems function on a delayed bartering model, whereas money-based systems involve an exchange of items at a mutual time.
- Some lending and repayment systems today are: Klarna, and pay later options with PayPal, Apple, and Amazon.

**P.6:** 1.) d 2.) a 3.) f 4.) b 5.) c 6.) e

**P.16:** 1.) downsize 2.) mutual 3.) lean times 4.) abundance 5.) capacity



# Summary

## Barter economies

- *to downsize; to swap; abundance; mutual; capacity; lean times; the beaten track*
- *I'm hoping to **downsize** my life and live with less.*
- *When I have an **abundance** of produce, I **swap** it with my neighbours.*





# Vocabulary

to barter

to downsize

to swap

abundance

mutual

capacity

lean times

the beaten track

