

Digital Detox

A Week Without Social Media

What happens when you put your phone down and look up?

■ B1 Reading ■ 30 min ■ Everyday Life

Level	B1 (Intermediate)
Skill	Reading
Topic	Everyday Life — Digital Habits & Mental Health
Duration	30 minutes
Age Group	Teens & Adults

Learning Objectives

- ◆ Read and understand a personal narrative about social media habits
- ◆ Learn 15 key vocabulary items related to technology and mental health
- ◆ Identify the main ideas and supporting details in a reading passage
- ◆ Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of social media
- ◆ Write a personal reflection paragraph about screen habits

1 Before You Read — Quick Survey

Think about your own habits and answer these questions:

1. What is the first thing you do when you wake up? Do you reach for your phone?
2. Have you ever tried to spend a whole day without social media? What happened?
3. Do you think social media makes people happier or less happy? Why?

2 Reading: Unplugged

Unplugged — My Week Without Social Media

My name is Sara, and I am a 22-year-old university student. Like most people my age, I spend a huge amount of time on my phone. I scroll through Instagram during breakfast, watch short videos on TikTok while waiting for the bus, and check my notifications dozens of times throughout the day. Last month, I read an article that said the average person spends nearly two and a half hours on social media every single day. I was shocked — not because the number was high, but because I knew my own **screen time** was probably even higher.

That article made me think. Was I really in control of my phone, or was my phone in control of me? I decided to try something radical: a full week without any social media. No Instagram, no TikTok, no Twitter, no YouTube. I deleted all the apps from my phone on a Sunday evening, took a deep breath, and waited to see what would happen.

Day 1–2: The Withdrawal

The first two days were harder than I expected. I kept reaching for my phone out of **habit**, unlocking the screen, and then staring at it blankly because the apps were gone. I felt strangely **anxious** — what if something important was happening and I was missing it? Psychologists call this feeling **FOMO**, or the Fear of Missing Out, and it is incredibly powerful. I found myself picking up my phone over thirty times on the first day alone, even though there was nothing to check. It was like my brain was on **autopilot**, following a routine that no longer existed.

I also noticed how **bored** I felt during small moments of waiting — in a queue at the supermarket, during a break between lectures, or sitting on the train. Without social media to fill those gaps, I had to sit with my own thoughts, and at first, that felt deeply uncomfortable.

Day 3–4: The Adjustment

By the middle of the week, something started to shift. The constant urge to check my phone began to fade, and I started noticing things I had been ignoring for months. I had a proper conversation with my flatmate over coffee instead of sitting next to her in silence while we both scrolled through our feeds. I went for a walk in the park and actually looked at the trees, the dogs, the children playing — instead of walking with my head down, staring at a screen.

My **concentration** improved dramatically. I sat down to study for two hours without a single interruption, something I had not managed to do in a very long time. Research shows that every time we switch between tasks — like checking a notification while reading — it takes our brain about 23 minutes to fully **refocus**. No wonder I had been struggling to finish my assignments on time.

I also slept better. Before the detox, I used to lie in bed scrolling through my phone for at least an hour before falling asleep. The blue light from the screen and the endless stream of **content** kept my brain active when it should have been winding down. Without that stimulation, I fell asleep faster and woke up feeling more **refreshed**.

Day 5–7: The Discovery

The final three days were genuinely enjoyable. I rediscovered hobbies I had abandoned — I read an entire novel, something I had not done in over a year. I cooked a proper meal from scratch instead of ordering takeaway while watching videos. I called my grandmother on the phone and talked to her for forty minutes. She told me stories about her childhood that I had never heard before. These experiences felt richer and more **meaningful** than anything I had ever seen on a screen.

I also became more **aware** of how much social media had been affecting my **self-esteem**. Without constantly comparing my life to the carefully edited highlights of other people's lives, I felt more content with who I was and what I had. I stopped thinking about how many likes my photos got and started appreciating the moments themselves.

After the Detox

When the week was over, I reinstalled the apps — but I set strict time limits. I now allow myself thirty minutes of social media per day, and I never use my phone in bed or during meals. The experience taught me that social media is not inherently bad, but our relationship with it can become **unhealthy** if we are not careful. It is a tool, and like any tool, it works best when we use it **intentionally** rather than mindlessly.

If you have never tried a digital detox, I would strongly encourage you to give it a go. You might be surprised by what you discover — not on a screen, but in the world around you and within yourself.

3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
screen time	the amount of time spent looking at a phone, computer, or tablet	My average screen time last week was four hours a day.
habit	something you do regularly, often without thinking about it	Checking my phone in the morning has become a bad habit.
anxious	feeling worried or nervous about something	She felt anxious when she could not find her phone.
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out — the worry that others are having fun without you	FOMO makes people check social media constantly.
autopilot	doing something automatically without conscious thought	I was scrolling on autopilot — I did not even realise I was doing it.
bored	feeling uninterested because you have nothing to do	Without my phone, I felt bored during short waiting moments.
concentration	the ability to focus your attention on one thing	Social media notifications can seriously damage your concentration.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
refocus	to direct your attention back after being distracted	It takes the brain about 23 minutes to refocus after an interruption.
content	material such as text, images, or videos published online	There is so much content online that it is impossible to see it all.
refreshed	feeling rested and full of energy	After sleeping without screen time, I woke up feeling refreshed.
meaningful	having real importance, value, or purpose	Face-to-face conversations are more meaningful than online chats.
aware	having knowledge or understanding of something	I became more aware of how social media affected my mood.
self-esteem	confidence in your own worth and abilities	Comparing yourself to others online can lower your self-esteem.
unhealthy	harmful to your physical or mental well-being	Spending five hours a day on social media is unhealthy.
intentionally	doing something on purpose, with a clear plan	She used social media intentionally — only for work and close friends.

4 Useful Collocations

screen time · social media · bad habit · mental health · time limit · digital detox · pay attention · feel anxious · lose concentration · low self-esteem · online content · phone addiction · blue light · face-to-face conversation · scroll through · wind down

5 Reading Comprehension

1. What made Sara decide to try a digital detox?

- a) Her doctor told her to reduce screen time
- b) She read an article about average social media usage ✓**
- c) Her phone broke and she could not use it
- d) Her university banned social media on campus

2. What is FOMO?

- a) A type of social media app
- b) A medical condition caused by too much screen time
- c) The fear that other people are having experiences without you ✓**
- d) A new technology that blocks social media

3. How long does it take the brain to refocus after checking a notification?

- a) About 5 minutes
- b) About 10 minutes
- c) About 23 minutes ✓**
- d) About 45 minutes

4. What positive change did Sara notice in her sleep?

- a) She started sleeping twelve hours a night
- b) She fell asleep faster and felt more rested ✓**
- c) She stopped having bad dreams
- d) She no longer needed an alarm clock

5. What hobby did Sara rediscover during the final days?

- a) Reading — she finished an entire novel ✓**
- b) Painting — she completed three paintings
- c) Running — she trained for a marathon
- d) Photography — she started a photo blog

6. What is Sara's final conclusion about social media?

- a) It should be completely banned for everyone
- b) It is only useful for work and nothing else
- c) It is always harmful and should be avoided
- d) It is not bad itself, but needs to be used intentionally ✓**

6**Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks**

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box:

screen time · concentration · habit · self-esteem · refreshed · anxious · intentionally · meaningful

1. I try to limit my _____ to less than two hours a day.

2. Checking your phone every five minutes is a bad _____ that is hard to break.
3. She felt _____ when she could not access the internet for a whole afternoon.
4. Loud notifications kept breaking my _____ while I was studying.
5. After a good night's sleep without my phone, I woke up feeling completely _____.
6. Comparing yourself to influencers online can seriously damage your _____.
7. A long phone call with an old friend is more _____ than scrolling through posts.
8. She decided to use social media _____, setting a timer for 20 minutes each day.

7 Answer Key

■ Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. screen time
2. habit
3. anxious
4. concentration
5. refreshed
6. self-esteem
7. meaningful
8. intentionally

8 Speaking & Writing Tasks

■ ■ Speaking Task: Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- How many hours do you spend on social media each day? Are you happy with that number?
- Do you think social media has more positive or negative effects on young people?
- Could you survive a week without social media? What would be the hardest part?
- How has social media changed the way people communicate with each other?

■ Useful Phrases for Discussion

- **I must admit that** I spend too much time on my phone.
- **The main advantage / disadvantage of** social media is that...
- **On the one hand**, social media helps us stay connected. **On the other hand**, it can be addictive.
- **Personally, I think** a digital detox would be good for most people because...
- **What surprises me is that** most people do not realise how much time they spend online.

Writing Task: Personal Reflection

Write a paragraph (120–160 words) about this topic:

"Describe your relationship with social media. Is it healthy or unhealthy? What would you like to change?"

Use vocabulary from this lesson. Include specific examples from your own life. Try to use linking words like *however, although, on the other hand, as a result*.