

Night Owls

Sleep patterns, body clocks and flexible working hours

DSE 2023 Paper 4 Set 2.1 • Lesson 3 • Speaking Practice



Early Birds vs. Night Owls

Warm-up

QUESTION 1 (Student A)

Do you wake up early on weekends?

NIGHT OWL - LATE TO BED



Netflix



YouTube



Instagram

QUESTION 2 (Student B)

Do you often have problems waking up in the morning?

Sleep early · No screens before bed · Regular body clock



Calm



Fitbit



Starbucks

Level up your language: 10 expressions for this discussion

1. sleep deprivation

instead of "not enough sleep"

not getting enough sleep

2. sleep-deprived (adj)

instead of "very tired"

so tired you cannot think clearly

3. to burn the midnight oil

instead of "stay up late to study"

to stay up late to study or work

4. to catch up on sleep

instead of "sleep more at the weekend"

to make up for the sleep you lost

5. take a toll on your health

instead of "be bad for your health"

to slowly damage your health

6. impair your concentration

instead of "make it hard to focus"

to make thinking or focusing harder

7. daytime drowsiness

instead of "feel sleepy in class"

feeling sleepy during the day

8. chronotype

instead of "my body is used to late nights"

your natural body clock

9. flexible working hours (flextime)

instead of "choose your own hours"

staff can partly choose their hours

10. core hours

instead of "the hours everyone must work"

the fixed hours everyone must work

What is the hidden cost of being a night owl?



Early bird vs night owl (from the exam article)

Think about it:

- Night owls have a ____% higher risk of dying younger.
- Which other health problems does the article mention?
- What could happen to a night owl's mood and schoolwork?

16%

higher risk of heart attack or stroke for night owls

Journal of the American Heart Association · 28 January 2026

The wider picture:

79% night owls were more likely to have poor overall heart health (AHA)

1 in 4 Hong Kong students sleep under 7 hours on school nights (CUHK)

91% of Hong Kong people who sleep under 7 hours wish they could sleep more (YouGov)

Skill: Conceding a point, then countering with evidence

A: I think companies should let night owls start work later because they are more productive at night.

B: **I disagree, Candidate A.** That is not fair to early birds, and the office can never close.

B*: **That's a fair point**, Candidate A. **I understand that** early birds should not be treated unfairly. However, we should also look at the **(1)** _____. In fact, the article **(2)** _____ that when companies let night owls start later, there was a gain of US\$277 million in **(3)** _____. In other words, working with a person's **(4)** _____ benefits the whole company. I believe a system of **(5)** _____, with a few **(6)** _____ in the middle of the day, would keep everyone happy. **Any other thoughts?**

Upgraded words - the numbers match the blanks in B*:

1 evidence

2 reported

3 productivity

4 chronotype

5 flexible working hours

6 core hours

This article appeared in a lifestyle magazine:

Night Owls

‘Night owls’ are people who are naturally more awake and active at night and tend to go to bed late. Research has found that night owls face higher rates of poor health, including having a 10 percent higher risk of dying younger than ‘early birds’ or people who get up early and feel more energetic first thing in the day. Night owls often suffer from long-term lack of sleep and this can increase the chance of diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Not having enough sleep even for just one night can make us moody; when it happens every single night for an extended period, depression can develop.



Associate professor Kristen Knutson at Northwestern University said: “This is a public health issue that cannot be ignored. We need to recognise that people have different body clocks which regulate the time we feel sleepy and wakeful throughout the day. Some people naturally wake up early while others feel more awake at night. All of this comes down to a combination of genes and the person’s environment.”

Employers can benefit from adjusting start times to suit individual employees’ needs. Another study found that when companies let night owls start work later in the day or allowed them to work from home, there was an estimated US\$277m gain in productivity. It argues that people who are more awake at night should be allowed to start and finish work later. Not everyone is suited to get up for an 8am start.

Your group is doing a project on sleeping patterns and you are meeting to discuss this. You may want to talk about:

- the advantages of being a night owl
- the advantages of getting up early
- whether companies should have flexible working hours for people with different sleeping patterns
- anything else you think is important

PART B Individual Response

The examiner will ask you one or more questions based on Part A. You will have up to 1 minute to respond.

Ideas for your discussion



1 Advantages of being a night owl

- quiet hours – no interruptions after 10 p.m.
- creative peak – best ideas come late at night
- suits online, global or freelance work
- in sync with friends' late-night life

2 Advantages of getting up early

- morning energy – start before you feel behind
- time to plan, revise, exercise or eat breakfast
- awake for morning lessons and public exams
- finish earlier – more free time and daylight

3 Flexible working hours?

- match work to a person's body clock
- later starts raised productivity by US\$277m
- fairness – keep some core hours
- not possible for every job (nurses, drivers, shops)

4 Anything else important

- screens and caffeine steal our sleep
- much of the risk is habits, not genes
- should Hong Kong schools start later?
- sleep protects our mood and mental health

Part B: Individual Response practice

Would you consider a job that requires working at night?

Yes: matches my body clock, quieter, shift allowance, works across time zones

No: health risks, poor sleep, less family and social time, travelling home at night

Do you envy people who only need a few hours of sleep?

Envy: more hours for study, work and hobbies

Not envy: they are often sleep-deprived; quality of sleep matters more than quantity