

The lost art of boredom



ILLUSTRATION: AZRA HUMAYRA

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The day is gradually coming to an end. At last, you finally have some time to yourself. So, for the next few hours, you endlessly scroll through reels, watch a few episodes of the series you're currently obsessed with or maybe game for a bit.

Not once do you allow your brain to rest.

Not once do you leave space for boredom.

At a time when productivity defines you as a person, when short-form content is the norm, when we are constantly caving in to the latest trending movie or series, and when silence must be filled with music, we have lost the art of doing nothing.

Is it far fetched to dwell upon the growing dismissal of boredom? Or is it scary? Is it the

emptiness we fear? Or exposure?

Boredom is not relaxing, I must admit, not because it's mundane but because it's uncomfortable. Far too many of us are afraid to be alone with our thoughts, even when we realise it's a rabbit hole. Feelings shoved under the rug, moments we don't want to relive, questions we don't want to ask. We never stay in this moment long enough to

see the good it might do, as thoughts take shape, associations are formed, and critical thinking is put into place. We don't want to look deep into the emptiness and uncover how profound it can actually be.

There's an image problem with boredom; it's frowned upon and best if avoided. It's an itch which must be scratched. Yet, according to the neuroscience of boredom, in the moments of "emptiness", our brain actually

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shifts. When you are not occupied, the brain triggers the default mode network (DMN), inducing self-reflection, daydreaming, sifting through memories, etc. In the simplest of words, it makes space for new things. Boredom is misunderstood. It's not a dead state. It's our brain at its most active. We just refuse to let it be.

"We figured out a way to eliminate boredom. We've been able, almost completely, to shut off the default mode network in our brains," says Harvard professor Arthur C Brooks.

We love to romanticise the notion of philosophy, the strange allure of deep conversations, and the idea of life's meaning, its existence, and its purpose, as long as we don't extend it to ourselves. When we get to the ugly bits of understanding too much, we give up. Boredom is confrontation. We don't like it, so we must get on our phones immediately.

Anytime there is a moment of pause, we reach for instant gratification, enveloping the silence with a song, watching a movie, or going out for a snack. Anything but stillness. Not allowing ourselves to be bored might come off as always giving in to distractions. Yet, it is ultimately deprivation.

Yes, it could be reflexive. Guilt manifests when we do nothing. "Why am I sitting still?" and "Why am I not doing enough?" are some of the questions we ask ourselves. Productivity in a capitalistic world has robbed us of being by ourselves and shamed us into always being on the go.

This moment of shame also surfaces when we intentionally stumble upon people creating something, whether it's a recipe from scratch or a quirky piece of art. "God, I wish I were that creative," we wonder. But do we allow ourselves to be? When the brain is constantly stimulated, when relentless entertainment erases our imagination, when there is no space for thoughts to be mulled over, for an idea to form, for it to be materialised, how can one expect creativity? In the process, we have rendered ourselves as passive beings, always consuming, seldom thinking, and never creating.

Boredom isn't something that happens to us. It's a skill that needs practice. The next time you have that urge to reach for your phone, the pressure to do something productive, resist it. Sit with it. Allow your thoughts to drift. You never know what you might discover.

Reference:
Harvard Business Review (August 28, 2025). *You Need to Be Bored. Here's Why.*

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How journaling can help you improve yourself

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In our lives, we track our transactions, work hours, calories, and steps, but an essential component remains untouched: our thoughts and feelings. In the bustle of life, running and commuting from place to place, we sometimes seem absorbed in thoughts about different aspects of our lives, be they sources of problems or merriments. They come and go in harmony with boredom or tiredness, and it occurs subconsciously.

There always seems to be this unfortunate disconnect between your conscious and subconscious. You control the former, but the latter feels spontaneous and sometimes unnerving, too.

To track and make sense of these thoughts and feelings, you always get, journaling can be a befitting cathartic outlet. Simply, journaling just means externalising all your day-to-day thoughts so you can preserve and inspect them at your will.

"Thoughts" here can refer to anything from simple things like "I'm tired" to stronger emotions like grief. In your leisure time, you could just sit down and jot them down in a diary or your phone.

A direct and immediate benefit is that writing down your emotions can be an excellent emotional regulation strategy. A study titled "Putting feelings into words: Affect labelling as implicit emotion regulation" has shown externalising your thoughts in this way results in the attenuation of your emotions and can significantly improve mood. In technical terms, this is called "affect labelling".

But the merits of journaling appear conspicuously in the long term if you regularly put in entries to track your thoughts instead of putting them in every now and then. When a stimulus triggers a negative emotion and bugs you, writing it down can sometimes help you notice patterns. For example, if a certain action triggers your anxiety recurrently, if you write it down, you can later analyse the patterns behind the anxiety and take deliberate steps to deal with the cause.

You may ask, why can't I think about these in my own mind instead of writing them down, which can get tedious? There are several reasons for this. You can hardly ever "think" about an issue that bothers you and then sort it out. Pondering about negative emotions can just lead to

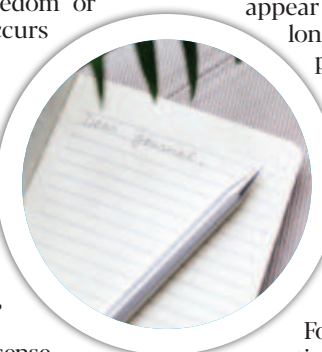
more self-consciousness and biases to cloud your reasoning. As I said in the beginning, there is always this disconnect between your conscious and subconscious.

Recollection of memory in your mind is sometimes spontaneous and selective or dependent on preconceived biases, which can lead to a vicious cycle of cognitive distortions which might dilute your perception of reality. This will lead to more problems than solutions. Your mind is not a book where the facts are laid out for you to peruse and reach conclusions. Your mental faculties may be great at reasoning, but they falter when it comes to remembering information verbatim.

However, your journal exists to make up for this. A journal doesn't distort reality or garble your memory. It will stay there as you've kept it, so you can analyse it later and understand yourself better, and hopefully become a better version of yourself gradually.

Reference:
Sage Journals (2018). *Putting feelings into words: Affect labelling as implicit emotion regulation.*

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Is tipping a matter of culture or morality?

FAIZA ADIL

Clutching the bill after finishing a heavy meal and wondering how big the hole in your wallet is about to get might be a worthwhile worry, a necessary evil, even. That's why we've got taxes and service charges on most meals ordered outside. And then we've got the waiter who's standing right behind you while you struggle to bite into the too-big burger without seeming like a leashed dog being offered a treat. How much should you tip them, you wonder?

Tipping is a form of gratuity, which is derived from the word "gratitude". So how does one quantify

at a restaurant or café in Japan accounts for the service you'll receive at their establishment, which makes sense considering the fact that a customer pays to eat and a server gets paid to bring out said food.

Across the ocean, the West observes tipping in a much more aggressive fashion, with a moral obligation to tip about 20 percent of your bill. This makes sense sometimes, but basically reduces gratuity to a fixed ratio regardless of effort, quality, and even gratefulness.

This also means that a

so on a case-by-case basis. This is largely thanks to a tip culture that rewards good service rather than imposing unwritten social obligations. Unlike either of the extremes of Japan or America, the amount you tip is almost wholly dependent on you and the service you're asking for. Regular at the roadside hotel? They'll definitely remember a good tipper, so you'll always have better seats and faster service.

Our approach to tipping is also largely attributed to the fact



gratefulness? You could dilute it to a percentage or a matter of feeling - different cultures practise this mundane task in wildly different ways. In most instances, it should be the customer's discretion how they wish to tip.

Unfortunately, we don't live in a world devoid of judgement, so based on where you're sitting right now, tipping isn't morally ambiguous, and this minute action may be seen as a token of character. But how different is this phenomenon in other cultures?

A charitable person in Dhaka might be seen differently in Japan or America, although in completely different contexts. Some cultures find the act of tipping offensive - an insinuation that you look down on them. In Japan, *omotenashi*, or hospitality, is a source of pride, so tips are seen as disrespectful, and a genuine expression of thanks is preferred. The amount you pay

server would get USD 100 in tips if they worked at an upscale place, and another would get much less elsewhere. Americans tip under the scrutiny of their fairly strict societal obligation to make up for the obscenely low wages paid to service workers.

Dhaka has a much more lenient culture when it comes to tipping, relying more on the tone of gratitude, sometimes bordering on bribery. Tipping is often customary for services that employ minimum wage workers and don't deduct proportionate service charges. But depending on where you are and what you're getting, the server displays social cues for the average customer to communicate their expectation.

Most people agree that they don't feel pressured to tip but do

that a tip of BDT 50 to 200 is acceptable in most establishments, regardless of your bill. This isn't to say that a moral obligation doesn't exist when it comes to tipping. A charitable individual would leave a tip to encourage great work - to help servers and generally reward a service well done. And as the word suggests, gratuity is innate appreciation. Which means tip at your own discretion - not a set percentage, but a gracious amount as an extension of your thanks, a practice common in Dhaka.

So, place a tip when the server deserves it or you know they're getting paid way too little for demanding work.

Faiza is trying to calculate the socially acceptable tip for her bill, send her your thoughts on the matter on IG @fzouls

Three digital platforms for journaling

Day One

The Day One app is a virtual haven for journaling. It captures the essence of owning a physical journal while introducing dynamic features that surpass traditional mediums. Day One's calendar view provides a captivating visual journey through your entries, with coloured dots marking each day's musings. You can hover over a date and get a glimpse of your entry, inviting you to revisit past moments.

GoodNotes

GoodNotes is a popular note-taking app that allows you to create and organise your journals digitally. It offers an extensive library of custom templates, handwriting recognition, and multimedia integration, making it convenient for bullet journaling purposes. The app facilitates users with a range of functional features including the "Lasso" tool that enables precise selection and dragging of elements across templates.

Journey

Journey is a secure and versatile journaling app that offers a sleek interface to chronicle your thoughts, memories, and personal growth. With seamless integration of photos and videos, mood tracking and location tagging, Journey enriches your journaling experience with a rich tapestry of multimedia. Journey's design features a captivating calendar and timeline view, allowing you to track your journaling progress and revisit past entries.