

Unit 1 Cultivate

My Hobbies Define Me

Hobbies Are Modern Activities

Nowadays, everybody has a hobby they like to do in their free time. In the past, though, this probably wasn't true because most people had to work long hours in agriculture or manufacturing, so free time must have been hard to come by. However, the Industrial Revolution and the labor movement that followed it led to a gradual decrease in working hours to eight-hour work days and five-day work weeks. For the first time in history, a majority of people had free time to enjoy activities that they found meaningful outside of work: hobbies.

Hobbies Are Serious

For many people, hobbies are serious. Serious leisure may sound like a contradiction, but that's what it takes for an activity to qualify as a hobby. To take a hobby seriously, you have to make a meaningful effort to improve your skills, take risks, overcome hardships, or become a better version of yourself. If you meet someone who has woken up at the crack of dawn to take a picture at the "magic hour," you can assume that they think of themselves as a "photographer." A runner, a gamer, or a photographer are titles that people are proud to call themselves. On the other hand, you wouldn't call yourself a "TV watcher" or "online surfer." Watching TV and surfing online aren't considered serious hobbies because there's no challenge or way to improve yourself.

Hobbies Create Community

J. R. R. Tolkien, the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, was passionate about language. He invented languages with grammar rules and histories: Sindarin and Quenya, the former inspired by Welsh, and the latter inspired by Finnish and Latin. But inventing languages was a frustrating hobby because he had to isolate himself while creating them. He wrote of the isolation that he and other people who loved languages experienced: "But they become shy, ashamed of spending the valuable commodity of time for their private pleasure, and higher developments are locked in secret places."

Things are very different now. The Internet allows people to learn about languages and meet other language enthusiasts from all over the world. Instead of working on their projects in private, they can easily find other like-minded people to share their passion, celebrate their achievements, and encourage each other along the way. They could even work together on language projects that Tolkien may have never been able to imagine.

Hobbies Are Gratifying

While some people pursue a hobby to improve their skills, some do for the sheer pleasure of doing it. Albert Einstein started learning to sail when he was 18 years old, venturing out on the lakes in Switzerland and simply enjoying the time on his boat. He continued to enjoy sailing as a life-long sailor. Although he is considered a genius in physics, he wasn't a good sailor, nor did he care about his sailing technique. His technique remained at a basic level, which was simply to "Set sail, make it fast, no thoughts of energy or speed, lean back, let the boat drift."

On a boat, he forgot everything else in the world, which may explain why he enjoyed sailing so much. For him, it was being out on the water that mattered the most. Einstein used the hobby of sailing to go to a place where he could be completely relaxed. Maybe that's why he named his boat *Tinef*, meaning "worthless" in Yiddish, after the apparent meaninglessness of his sailing adventures. Watching the waves while on his boat, Einstein forgot all his worries. Like Einstein, for many people, hobbies just provide the conditions for a sense of pure satisfaction.

Hobbies Can Contribute

You may be surprised to find that pursuing a hobby can accomplish more than self-satisfaction. That is, it sometimes leads to an unexpected contribution to society. For example, Thomas Bopp, a manager at a construction materials factory and an amateur astronomer, discovered the comet Hale-Bopp while observing the sky with his friends in the Arizona desert. To make the story even more shocking, he was using a borrowed telescope that his friend had assembled himself. And Bopp is not alone. Numerous amateur astronomers have discovered comets, stars, and supernovas, which helps us to better understand the solar system and the universe. Amateurs in many other fields have made important contributions through their hobbies, such as amateur programmers developing new technologies, amateur writers publishing their work in local magazines, amateur history researchers preserving historical sites ... The list goes on and on!

There are many reasons why people pursue hobbies. For many people, the challenge of learning a new skill or achieving a difficult goal is their primary motivation. Other people enjoy hobbies for the communities they can become a part of or the friendships they can make there. Still others enjoy hobbies because they can lose track of time and be in the moment, similar to being in a meditative state. Some people even end up making contributions to society through their hobbies, oftentimes unexpectedly. It is the physical, mental, or emotional experience, or even a combination of them that makes a hobby rewarding and fun. Perhaps it should be called "pleasure."