

Having Fun is Time Spent Well

Academic ambition: it's hardly a bad thing. By working hard academically, you develop the habit of putting effort into classes and assignments, applying that same ambition to a life and world beyond school. Not to mention the prospect of enrolling in a well-known college that can make job-hunting easier and financial stability more attainable. But too often has society defined academic success as a be-all and end-all; consequently, guilt—no matter how big or small—nags at you when you decide to pause your bio review and explore Boston with friends. Guilt relentlessly imparts the disquieting message that you're wasting time.

But breathe, and understand that there is nothing wasteful in time spent playing.

Projects and assessments consume students. Per a 2017 American Psychological Association [survey](#), 83% of American high schoolers derive major stress from school. Holding this week's Paper issue in your hands, do you hear a small voice in your head urging you to use the time you're reading this article to do something more productive instead? Like starting on that history paper earlier so you have more time later to really go in depth with your analyses? Realize that the issue is not in the *act* of studying—rather, that oppressively agitating feeling of *having* to work is the problem we need to address.

Even if you tell yourself beforehand that your study break is well-deserved and necessary, that needle of guilt still burrows through your heart, ordering you to quit wasting time. As a result, you fail to play for real, fail to properly have fun in life. *Think about what happens in the long term*, you tell yourself. *All this studying is for a life of fulfillment*. But, on the contrary, to live a full and rewarding life, it's crucial that you immediately practice abandoning your guilt about playing—not playing as in mindlessly scrolling, but as in watching a movie, staying up talking to your roommate, or doing anything else that brings you happiness (scrolling provides gratification, which is not the same as joy). Because, as hackneyed as it sounds, a day will come when your life will end, and you will not be able to play again.

Most of us don't realize how painful loss can be. Many, myself included, have been lucky enough not to come face-to-face with grief. When I learned that every Din Tai Fung—a worldwide chain restaurant home to the most delicious soup dumplings, fried rice, and noodles—had closed its doors in Beijing, I started crying. It was quite ridiculous (my dad laughed for ages), but in those tearful minutes, I was thinking about how DTF's Beijing chain had always tasted subtly different from the same restaurant anywhere else. I would never again experience that distinct and nostalgic Beijing taste, and that realization broke me apart.

My crying scared me. How much worse would my reaction be to a loved one gone forever? More to the point of this article, how willingly would I meet my inevitable death, knowing that the opportunity to enjoy life's offerings would never come back? If my regret of not eating more at DTF were the size of a marble, at the end of my life, my regret of not enjoying myself more would fill up more volume than that of the globe. After a lifetime of worrying about work, your regret will be no less colossal than mine, and that regret will only grow if your life ends more quickly than you thought it would.

How abruptly life can end. Just a few weeks ago, my friend's nineteen-year-old brother died of an unknown virus. He had displayed no signs of ill health even just weeks before his passing—no one had expected that outcome. Most of us have heard words like *be grateful you're alive* too many times for them to truly sink in; we think it improbable that fate will direct its gaze at us before we reach old age. But it's also true that accidental injury ranks 3rd on the [list](#) of leading US death causes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. You never know when your life will end or what opportunities you'll get after.

Your continual postponement of playtime and relaxation is its own form of harmful procrastination. If you stay trapped in the mindset that you'll have time to enjoy yourself later, you'll never actually play. If you've made fun plans for the weekend, start learning to embrace them without feeling guilty. For all you know, this weekend might be the last few hours of your life.

Right before your life comes to an end, will you be thinking back to the night you prepared for that math test? No; you'll instead be struggling to gather as many memories of laughter, love, and joy as you can find. So in the long hours or mere minutes you decide to have fun, play as hard as you can.