

## Quiet, please

**Level:** Intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of the student worksheet and Vocabulary record per student

**Group size:** Any

### Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 2/2014. The article is written by a woman who sees herself as an introvert. It discusses the difficulties that introverts may have at work and looks at what companies can do to make the workplace a comfortable place and an effective working environment for both introverts and extroverts. The article is written in American English.

The tasks in the student worksheet will help the students to understand the content of the article and the language used. Additionally, the students will practise useful business skills such as feeling empathy with, and understanding, co-workers – especially those who have different character traits.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

### Lead-in

The warmer aims to introduce the topic of extroverts and introverts at work by asking the students how they would respond in a particular situation. The second question requires the students to read the first paragraph of the article to see how the author would respond in the same situation.

### Key words

Students match key words from the article with their definitions and then scan the article to find the words and read them in context. The definitions are numbered in the order that the words appear in the article.

**Key:**

1. *traits*; 2. *reflect*; 3. *stimulation*; 4. *lopsided*; 5. *solitude*;

6. *undervalued*; 7. *underappreciated*; 8. *recruiting*; 9. *promoting*; 10. *engagement*; 11. *crave*; 12. *inclination*; 13. *niche*; 14. *guilt*

### Language – adjectives

Students are asked to find and write all the adjectives in the article that are used to describe character traits and then to decide whether they are positive or negative traits.

**Key: (possible answers)**

*positive: magnetic, charismatic*

*negative: shy, antisocial, passive, aloof, dismissive, (not) passionate*

*grey zone: impulsive, cautious*

### Teaching and learning strategy: dealing with tasks that do not have clear answers

Not all tasks in worksheets and coursebooks are black or white. Some will produce answers that belong in more of a grey zone.

For example, in the 'Language – adjectives' task, the answers may differ from student to student, depending on their own perspective and attitudes to the traits. Any discussion that this kind of task creates is good. One way of dealing with whether the traits are positive or negative is to draw two overlapping circles on the board and write the disputed traits in the overlapping part.

If you then would like to look at the words more closely, ask the students to decide which words they might use to describe themselves. Also, ask whether it would be appropriate to use the words in a job interview or on a CV. After they have answered these two further questions and thought more closely about the words and their meanings, they may want to move some words out of the middle zone and into one of the other parts of the diagram. Or they may not.

As a general rule of thumb, the more advanced the student's level of English, the more confident he or she is likely to be. Students with more confidence are more likely to accept answers that lie in the grey zone and this may lead to (useful) discussion. Lower-level students may well prefer tasks that lead to more black and white answers as they want to be sure that what they think they know is right.

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### Understanding the article

Students answer the questions with information from the article.

#### Key:

1. That they are not interested, too shy and not passionate.
2. They are cheaper and are said to increase creativity, but they can be an introvert's 'idea of hell'.
3. A place where someone can recover from stress and return to their true nature. Everyone should have one.
4. Introverts often prefer to socialize in small groups. They prefer to get away from people in order to concentrate. Extroverts need the stimulation of being with other people.
5. Since the turn of the 20th century and the rise of big business.
6. Introverts are unlikely to volunteer information about their projects and should therefore be asked how everything is going.
7. They are good listeners and can work independently.

### Idioms and multi-word expressions

Students find expressions in the article and discuss their meanings. They should then make sentences of their own that contain the expressions they would like to be able to use confidently.

#### Key:

- be called upon (to do something) – to be asked specifically to do something*
- come into play – began*
- flocking to (the cities) – arriving in large numbers (like a flock of birds)*
- put your head down – to focus and concentrate fully on something*
- check in with (somebody) – to talk to somebody to find out how they are or what is happening*
- (do something) on your own terms – to do something in the way you want to do it and in the way you think it should be done*
- burn out – to make yourself ill through overwork and exhaustion*
- act out of character – to behave in a way that people do not expect you to behave*
- clear your head – to free your head from worries and thoughts that are troubling you so that you are able to concentrate on other things*

### Discussion

Students find out whether they can recognize themselves in the description of introverts and answer the questions in a group discussion.

### Webquest

Students can watch and listen to Dr Brian Little talk about introverts and extroverts in this online video.

### Extra reading

This extra reading is a short interview with the author of the book that the article is based around.

### Extension task

After reading the interview, students could decide what further questions they would like to ask Susan Cain.

### Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

### Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business sections on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: A sixth sense

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/a-sixth-sense/552834.article>

Business Spotlight: Calm and productive

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/calm-and-productive/552630.article>

Business Spotlight: The case against self-employment

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/the-case-against-self-employment/>

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### 1 Lead-in

Answer the questions below.

When someone asks you to give your opinion on a work-related topic, do you prefer to:

- a. answer immediately to get your point of view across?
- b. think about it and answer later?

Now, read the first paragraph of the article and say how you think the author would answer this question.

### 2 Key words

Match the words to the definitions and then find them in the article to read them in context.

lopsided

reflect

solitude

underappreciated

undervalued

traits

stimulation

- 1. particular qualities in someone's character
- 2. to show the existence or nature of something
- 3. extra activity, pressure or excitement
- 4. not equal
- 5. the state of being completely alone, especially when this is pleasant or relaxing
- 6. not recognized as being important or valuable
- 7. when it is not realized that someone has good qualities and that they are important

crave

engagement

guilt

inclination

niche

promoting

recruiting

- 8. getting someone to work in a company or join an organization
- 9. moving someone to a job at a higher level
- 10. involvement in a particular activity
- 11. to want something very much
- 12. a tendency to behave in a particular way
- 13. a small, particular space
- 14. a feeling of being ashamed and sorry because you have done something wrong

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by Margaret Davis



**Introverts like to listen rather than talk and prefer one-to-one conversations to group discussions. Despite this, they have leading positions in our extroverted world of work.**

1 At the end of a presentation of prototypes for a new product, the boss asked everyone in the group to speak. "You've got one minute to tell us which prototype you prefer and why. Let's go around the room, starting with Margaret." "Sorry, I don't do instant opinions," Margaret said, to laughter from her colleagues. My name is Margaret and if there's one thing I hate, it's being called upon to express an opinion on something I've seen for the first time just half an hour earlier. Give me a few minutes on my own and I can probably think of something, but rarely in a group.

2 This reaction is typical of introverts, or of people with some introverted traits, according to Susan Cain, best-selling author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*. Cain says that the modern workplace, with its emphasis on group work and open-plan offices, is designed with extroverts in mind. This reflects a trend in Western society, particularly in the U.S., according to Cain, a former Wall Street lawyer who describes herself as an introvert. "The extrovert ideal really came into play at the turn of the 20th century, when we had the rise of big business," Cain told National Public Radio (NPR). "Suddenly, people were flocking to the cities and they were needing to prove themselves in big corporations, at job interviews and on sales calls. We moved from what cultural historians call a culture

of character to a culture of personality," she says, adding that "what was admired was to be magnetic and charismatic."

3 Of course, no one is completely introverted or extroverted: "Such a man would be in a lunatic asylum," said C. G. Jung, the founder of analytical psychology. And introverted people are not necessarily shy or antisocial. They're just sensitive to the stimulation that dealing with large groups tends to produce. They like to socialize in small groups rather than at noisy parties, and they need to get away from their co-workers to concentrate. Extroverts, on the other hand, need the stimulation that interacting with groups provides.

4 Cain is quick to say that she is not criticizing extroverts but she is critical of the fact that extroversion has become the workplace ideal. "None of this is to say that it would be a good thing to get rid of teamwork and get rid of group work altogether," she told NPR. "It's more just to say that we're at a point in our culture, and in our workplace culture, where we've gotten too lopsided. We tend to believe that all creativity and all productivity comes from the group, when in fact, there really is a benefit to solitude and to being able to go off and focus and put your head down." An office made up only of either introverts or extroverts would not function well – or at least not for long. But introverts do bring certain advantages to their employers. They are good listeners who are able to work independently and who can be creative if given an opportunity to work on their own. Their managers need to realize, however, that introverted workers are unlikely to volunteer information about their projects, says workplace psychologist Dr. Marla Gottschalk. "By nature, introverts can be less likely to share their thoughts – which makes it even more important that you check in with them regularly. Send them an e-mail, asking how their projects are progressing. They can reflect and respond on their own terms," Gottschalk writes on her blog. Introverts can be seen as passive or aloof, when in fact, they are just thinking. To prevent their colleagues or bosses from getting this impression, they should politely inform others that they need to shut their office door or turn off the phone to get a project finished.

5 Introverts often choose careers in which they can work independently; for example, as an artist, doctor, musician, photographer, psychologist, scientist or writer. But they can be

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good managers, although they may have to overcome negative stereotypes. “The status and reputation of quiet, introverted leadership is undervalued and underappreciated,” executive coach Ray Williams writes in *Psychology Today*. “[E]xtroverted leaders are still favored in recruiting and promoting decisions.” Williams believes that the emphasis on extroverted leadership has led to business failures, most spectacularly the banking crisis of 2008. A balance between impulsive, extroverted managers and cautious, introverted managers and employees is necessary, he says. “Introverted bosses need to remember that their role requires a lot of engagement – that employees crave feedback from the boss,” Susan Cain told *The Washington Post*. It’s important for introverted bosses to get away from their desks, too. “There was one CEO who had to remind himself when walking down the hallway to make eye contact and greet people, because his natural inclination would be to walk lost in thought, solving some problem. But he realized people thought he was being aloof and dismissive of them.”



nightclub.” Open-plan offices are an introvert’s idea of hell. Yet many companies have them, because they are believed to increase creativity and are less expensive to build. Some open-plan offices do provide quiet spaces, such as libraries or telephoning rooms. “If your office doesn’t have private spaces, you need to make your own version,” Cain writes in *Bloomberg Businessweek*.

6 Lively and funny, known for his entertaining talks, Dr. Brian Little has been called “a cross between Robin Williams and Einstein.” The influential Canadian psychology professor, currently at Cambridge University in England, has taught at Oxford as well as a number of major North American universities, including Harvard. Little’s talks on YouTube have attracted thousands of followers. Yet, he describes himself as an introvert and once said on national radio that after giving a talk, he would escape to the men’s room and shut himself inside one of the cubicles. “After a talk, I’m in cubicle nine,” he said.

7 Little told *The Vancouver Sun* that introverts can be good professors, even though they find it stressful. “The risk is that they can burn out because, in a sense, you’re acting out of character,” he said. “I do need reflection time and time to be on my own. That surprises people.”

8 Little says both introverts and extroverts require what he calls “restorative niches” – places where they can recover from stress and return to their true nature. “For an introvert, a restorative niche may be a quiet walk on a deserted beach. For an extrovert, it may be the pulsing conviviality of a crowded

9 “Go to the park or a nearby coffee shop. And you have to take away the feeling of guilt – you’re clearing your head.” She suggests sending phone calls to voicemail or turning off the sound on e-mails. Some introverts also find using noise-canceling headphones effective, although this may not be socially acceptable in all offices. Brainstorming, group presentations and large meetings are often stressful for introverts. One way to deal with the stress is to be well prepared. Get an agenda before the meeting so you have time to think about the subject. If you are called upon in a meeting to express an opinion and you are not yet ready to do so, tell the group that you are still thinking about it and that you will provide an opinion later. “As introverts, if we remain quiet, people will assume we’re a) not interested, b) too shy or c) not passionate,” said a panelist at *Intuit.com*, a U.S. financial software firm. “The impression that we give by not saying anything is different than we intend.” Good advice. I think I’ll try this at our next brainstorming meeting.

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### 3 Language – adjectives

a. Find all the adjectives in the article that are used to describe character traits and write them below.

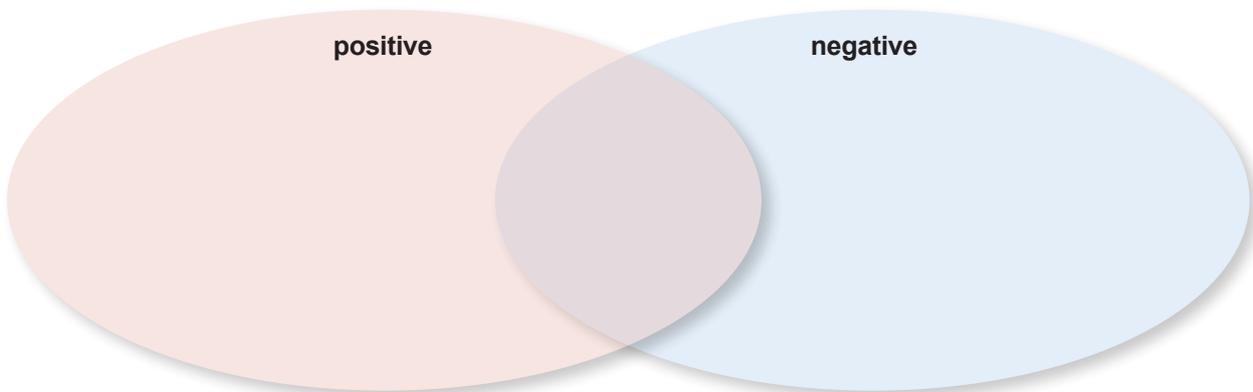
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b. Which do you consider to be negative character traits, and which do you see as positive character traits? Some traits may be seen as both depending on the context.



### 4 Understanding the article

Answer the questions below using information from the article.

1. What do people often assume about introverts who remain quiet?
2. Why do many companies have open-plan offices? What problem do they cause for introverts?
3. What is a 'restorative niche'? Who should have one?
4. How do introverts and extroverts differ in their response to being in groups?
5. Since when have companies preferred to employ extroverts and why?
6. Why should managers regularly ask their more introverted employees about their work?
7. What are the advantages of introverted employees?

### 5 Idioms and multi-word expressions

Find the expressions below in the article and discuss their meanings.

- be called upon (to do something)
- come into play
- flocking to (the cities)
- put your head down
- check in with (somebody)
- (do something) on your own terms
- burn out
- act out of character
- clear your head

Now make sentences of your own that contain some of the expressions you would like to be able to use confidently.

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### 6 Discussion

Read the information below and answer the questions.

#### Are you an introvert?

No one is either completely introverted or completely extroverted. But certain personality traits may be a sign that you have introverted tendencies. Here are a few of them:

- You prefer listening to talking.
- You prefer one-on-one conversations to group activities.
- You prefer to express yourself in writing.
- You tend to think before you speak.
- You prefer not to show or discuss your work with others until it is finished.
- You don't enjoy multitasking.

Source: Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking* (Penguin)

- a. Do you recognize yourself or any of your colleagues as an introvert?
- b. Can you identify with how extroverts and / or introverts are described in the article?
- c. Have you encountered any difficulties at work because you are an introvert working with extroverts (or the other way around)?
- d. How could your workplace be improved to make it a more comfortable place for introverts?
- e. Dr Brian Little says we all need a 'restorative niche' where we can recover from stress and return to our true nature. Do you agree? Do you have a place like this?

### 7 Webquest

Watch Dr Brian Little talk about introverts and extroverts in this video:

<http://www.speakers.ca/speakers/dr-brian-little/>

### Extra reading

Susan Cain's *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking* was one of the most successful nonfiction books of 2012. It has been translated into more than 30 languages.

For author Cain, herself an introvert, producing the book was a labor of love. Perhaps because she feels so strongly about the subject, she was also able to promote the book, giving media interviews and going on international book tours. "My year of speaking dangerously" is how she refers to the promotional activities.

Susan Cain communicated with Business Spotlight via e-mail about the surprising success of her book.

**Has your book made it more acceptable — perhaps even cool — for people to describe themselves as introverts?**  
Yes. I have been amazed by the people who are coming forward to identify themselves as introverts now. Recently,

I sat on a panel with [media mogul] Arianna Huffington, [Bill Clinton's former communications director] George Stephanopoulos, and [actress] Candice Bergen, and they all claimed to be introverts!

**Is it possible for introverts to behave like extroverts at work? And, if so, do they suffer any physical or psychological repercussions?**

Yes, it's possible — they do it all the time. And yes, if we act too often out of character, as the psychologist Brian Little says, we suffer repercussions both physical and psychological. The key is to step out of character strategically and in small doses but to give yourself what Little calls 'restorative niches' in which to be true to yourself.

**As an introvert, how do you prepare for a book tour or speaking engagement?**

I give myself many breaks between engagements! It also helps that I'm so passionate about my subject.

