

Why I quit complaining about cyclists, scrapped my car and chose public transport

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

- a. Read the title of the article. Complete the chart with your own ideas. Then discuss with a partner.

Form of transport	Advantages	Disadvantages	Possible in my city/town?
<i>Cycling</i>			
<i>Driving</i>			
<i>Public transport</i>			
<i>Walking</i>			

2 Key words

- a. Match the words in the word pool with their definitions. All the words appear in the article.

backlash	bumbling	caustic	eccentric	faff
horde	inferno	menace	nuisance	on board
rage	reckless	scrap	stir up	thoughtless

- throw away something you no longer need _____
- something or someone that may be harmful or dangerous _____
- a strong, usually negative, reaction from a group of people to a change

- intentionally rude or hurtful _____
- a big group of people _____
- cause a negative feeling or emotion to begin or grow _____
- doing something in a dangerous or careless manner _____
- a huge fire or a very hot place _____
- uncommon or strange in a funny, quirky way _____
- to agree and get involved with a plan or course of action _____
- something difficult or problematic to do _____
- doing something in an unskilled or confused matter _____

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13. doing something without considering how your actions or words may cause damage to someone _____
14. something or someone that makes you angry or upset _____
15. a feeling of uncontrollable anger _____

b. Use the words from task A to complete the following sentences.

1. His _____ actions hurt everyone around him, causing pain to all those who love him.
2. Despite Helen's good intentions, her _____ efforts only created more confusion.
3. The constant noise from the new road became a _____ for all residents.
4. Her _____ driving endangered not only herself but also other motorists and pedestrians.
5. Janet's _____ remarks made everyone in the meeting uncomfortable.
6. This project is such a _____. I can't wait to get it over and done with.
7. Increasing tourism in the area represents a _____ to the local ecosystem.
8. Even though he tried to control his emotions, his _____ was evident.
9. The factory was an _____ by the time the fire department arrived.
10. In the end, the board decided to _____ the plans for a new shopping mall.
11. Tom has encouraged others to get _____ with his ideas on how to celebrate their anniversary.
12. He's an _____ artist whose creations have always been a topic of discussion in the art community.
13. His controversial statements have sparked a fierce _____ from the public.
14. As the doors opened, a _____ of excited customers rushed into the shop to buy the newest phone.
15. He admitted he'd tried to _____ up trouble among his colleagues by spreading false rumours.

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During the pandemic, I fell for the beauties of nature and a slower pace – and revised my thoughts about men in Lycra.

Yvette Caster

27 November, 2023

- 1 “Cyclists are a menace and should be banned from the roads,” read the headline. It was 2015, and the most controversial article I had ever written had just been published on a national newspaper’s website, attacking Mamilis – middle-aged men in Lycra – and anyone, as I then saw it, stupid enough to ride a bike.
- 2 The backlash was caustic. Furious hordes accused me of stirring up hate, of encouraging reckless, criminal motorists and of indirectly putting cyclists in danger. Cyclists who had been knocked off their bikes and people whose cycling relatives had been injured got in touch. I was horrified but also convinced that most motorists were careful, sensible and well-meaning, so the accidents must have been tragic, rare, isolated incidents.
- 3 Looking back now, I understand their rage better. I thought I’d thrown a stick on a campfire, but I’d poured petrol on an inferno. According to the Department for Transport, about 100 cyclists die on British roads every year. In 2022, 4,056 were seriously injured and 11,546 slightly injured. When I wrote the piece, nowhere I had ever lived, which included cities across the country, seemed suited to cycling, and I, like my friends, viewed cyclists as eccentrics. I grew up in a remote country village with two buses a day: one into town, one out. There were no pavements or bike lanes and no safe way to walk or cycle the eight miles to town – and there still isn’t. I could not understand why anyone would take the risk of cycling down windy country roads when 4x4s existed, or pedal through London, a place where everyone seemed to hate cyclists.
- 4 But my attitude changed during lockdown. There was no lightbulb moment – but suddenly the noise of the roads was gone. Cars were no longer important because we weren’t allowed to travel. In their absence, instead of traffic outside my window, I heard birdsong. A strange kind of peace descended. Nature grew louder.
- 5 I had cared about the climate crisis before but I didn’t see what I could do to make a difference and felt little connection to the natural world. When nature grew louder, I started to feel more at home in it. I started to spend more time in it. I started to wonder how I could change my lifestyle to suit the natural world, not the other way round. It helped that the pandemic forced me to change my routines. I worked from home. I socialised by Zoom. My world became smaller. And as I came out of lockdown, I left old habits behind. That drive to the shops? I realised I could walk it. That drive to a friend’s? I could catch a train or call them. When my car broke down one day, instead of getting it fixed I sold it for scrap and didn’t get a replacement.
- 6 That was the last push I needed to get fully on board with public transport. I rode local buses, even though there’s just one an hour where I live. I took trains to parts of the country I’d only ever driven to. I travelled to remote areas of Scotland by public transport. I learned to appreciate the journey, not just the destination. These small adjustments made me see I wasn’t too old to change, and that I could do more to reduce my carbon footprint. Was it a faff compared with driving? Yes. I let go of some independence and forgot about late-night socialising. But in many ways, it is great to be free of my steel box on wheels. I developed more patience, more flexibility, more gratitude towards the people who work in public transport, as well as friends kind enough to give me occasional lifts. And, at 42, I’ve inherited my grandma’s role as the chatty old bird at the back of the bus.
- 7 My attempts at reducing my carbon footprint have been bumbling at best. I have turned vegan, then back. Working as a travel writer, I’ve cut back on flying but have still taken flights several times this year. In short, I’m still trying.
- 8 I went from disliking cyclists to wishing there were more on the roads. Looking at the article now, I know it was written by a thoughtless younger version of myself, putting clicks before people. I’ve come to appreciate those taking journeys that save us from pollution. I wish my town, and Britain, could repay cyclists’ and pedestrians’ efforts with an infrastructure to help them go everywhere, safely.

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- 9 Some friends still see cyclists as a nuisance. Others see me as odd for staying car-free. Still, I enjoy my chats with the station master and watching the smiles when my Pomeranian joins me on my travels. I'm even planning to try cycling. Just don't ask me to wear Lycra.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these sentences True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct the false sentences, underlining the corresponding evidence in the text.

1. The author's initial article openly criticised cyclists.
2. The testimonies made the author change their mind.
3. The writer failed to predict the impact her words would have.
4. The author's views were predominantly based on security concerns.
5. Before lockdown, the author did not get involved with any environmentalist actions.
6. The decision to switch to public transport was prompted by the breakdown of the author's car.
7. The writer has been able to make several changes to her lifestyle to help the environment.
8. She still agrees with most of the opinions she shared in her initial article.
9. The author believes there is nothing governments can do to protect cyclists and pedestrians.
10. The author's friends support her position and have changed their habits as well.

4 Key language

a. Complete the chart by transforming the words given. Go back to the article to check your answers.

Adjective	Noun	Verb
1. _____	controversy	-
2. _____	fury	-
3. _____	horror	-
4. _____	tragedy	-
-	5. _____	replace
absent	6. _____	-
-	7. _____	adjust
8. _____	occasion	-

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b. Complete these phrases from the article with the correct prepositions.

1. During the pandemic I **fell** _____ the beauties of nature and a slower pace.
2. Cyclists are a menace and should be **banned** _____ the roads.
3. The most controversial article I had ever written had just been **published** _____ a national newspaper's website.
4. Furious hordes **accused** me _____ stirring up hate.
5. People whose cycling relatives had been injured **got** _____ **touch**.
6. **Instead** _____ traffic outside my window, I heard birdsong.
7. I had **cared** _____ the climate crisis before, but I didn't see what I could do to make a difference.
8. I felt little **connection** _____ the natural world.
9. I developed more patience, more flexibility, more **gratitude** _____ the people who work in public transport.
10. Working as a travel writer, I've **cut back** _____ flying but have still taken flights several times this year.

c. Work in pairs. Take turns to share sentences about yourselves using the phrases above. Check you are using the right prepositions.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Cyclists are a menace and should be banned from the roads."
- "Motorists are careful, sensible, and well-meaning, so accidents are tragic, rare, isolated incidents."
- "Using public transport helps develop patience, flexibility, and gratitude."
- "Towns should repay cyclists' and pedestrians' efforts with infrastructure to help them go everywhere safely."

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6 In your own words

- a. Work in pairs or small groups. Look at the chart in the Warmer task (page 1) and select one of the means of transportation given.

Prepare a presentation about its advantages and disadvantages and what could be done to make it more accessible and sustainable. Do some online research and gather information to support your views.