

The Value of Friction

C1 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary + Discussion | 60-75 minutes

BEFORE YOU READ

Talk with a partner. When does making a task easier genuinely help people, and when might it weaken an important skill?

1. Match the words (1-6) with the definitions (A-F).

- | | | |
|---------------|-------|---|
| 1. friction | _____ | A. done suddenly without careful thought |
| 2. deliberate | _____ | B. a recognisable feature that helps identify a place |
| 3. impulsive | _____ | C. effort or resistance that slows an action |
| 4. landmark | _____ | D. return to a useful state after a problem |
| 5. productive | _____ | E. careful and intentional |
| 6. recover | _____ | F. producing a useful result |

2. Read the article. The bold words are the vocabulary from Activity 1.

1. Modern design often promises to remove **friction**: one-click payment, automatic recommendations and instant replies. Because friction usually means an obstacle, its removal appears obviously positive. Yet a small amount of effort can sometimes make people more attentive, **deliberate** and independent.

2. Consider navigation. Digital maps are useful, especially in unfamiliar places. However, people who always follow instructions may develop a weaker sense of direction than those who occasionally plan a route, notice **landmarks** and **recover** from a wrong turn. The goal is not to reject technology, but to decide when convenience has a hidden cost.

3. The same argument appears in education. A tool that supplies an immediate answer may save time, but it can also prevent a learner from testing an idea or noticing an error. **Productive** difficulty is not pointless difficulty: it is effort that leads to better judgement, memory or skill.

4. Designers therefore face a difficult question. Should a system remove every delay, or should it sometimes encourage a pause? A confirmation message before a major purchase may feel inconvenient, but it can prevent an **impulsive** decision. Good design is not always the fastest design.

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UNDERSTAND, DISCUSS AND WRITE

3. Comprehension. Answer in complete sentences. Use the article to help you.

1. Why does the article question the automatic removal of friction?

2. What hidden cost can constant use of digital maps have?

3. How does the article define productive difficulty?

4. Why might a confirmation message be useful?

5. What central question does the article ask designers?

4. Discuss. Talk in small groups. Give reasons and examples.

- Which everyday system would benefit from more friction?
- Which system would benefit from less friction?
- Can a service be both convenient and educational?
- When does convenience become dependence?

5. Homework: Write an opinion paragraph.

Write 180-220 words: 'Convenience has made people less capable.' Discuss this claim. Include a counterargument and reach a clear conclusion.

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ANSWER KEY AND TEACHING NOTE

Vocabulary matching

1. friction - C
2. deliberate - E
3. impulsive - A
4. landmark - B
5. productive - F
6. recover - D

Comprehension answers

1. Why does the article question the automatic removal of friction?

Because some effort can make people more attentive, deliberate and independent.

2. What hidden cost can constant use of digital maps have?

It may weaken a person's sense of direction and ability to recover from mistakes.

3. How does the article define productive difficulty?

It is effort that leads to better judgement, memory or skill.

4. Why might a confirmation message be useful?

It can create a pause that prevents an impulsive decision.

5. What central question does the article ask designers?

Whether systems should remove every delay or sometimes encourage a pause.

Teaching note

Compare vocabulary answers before reading. Help learners plan a response to the claim about convenience: examples, a counterargument and a conclusion. Accept accurate comprehension paraphrases and supported personal responses.