

www.**Breaking News English**.com

Ready-to-use ESL / EFL Lessons

The Breaking News English.com Resource Book

“1,000 Ideas & Activities For Language Teachers”

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/book.html>

Britain's sick day culture

URL: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0602/060209-sick.html>

Contents

The Article	2
Warm-ups	3
Before Reading / Listening	4
While Reading / Listening	5
Listening Gap Fill	6
After Reading	7
Discussion	8
Speaking	9
Homework	10
Answers	11

9 February, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Britain's sick day culture

A recent study conducted in Britain has discovered that February 6 is the day when most Britons take the day off sick. Professor Cary Cooper, who conducted the research, said absenteeism due to fake illnesses is particularly prevalent on this day. Apparently, early February instills in many workers a sense of gloominess and “many people are still feeling the post-Christmas blues”. The study showed that over 50 percent of 4,000 interviewees took at least one fabricated sick day each year. There was considerable regional variation, with Londoners skiving off an average three days a year, compared to 13 for workers in the northern city of Liverpool. Most people phoning in sick feigned coughing or sore throats to add a touch of authenticity to their falsification.

Reasons varied for taking a “sickie”. There was widespread consternation at the dearth of official and national holidays, even though British workers fare well compared with their counterparts across the Atlantic. Other reasons cited included a need to recharge batteries after the Christmas and New Year break, an extension to a weekend break, time to recover from a hangover or simply to catch up on sleep. Many people also expressed a reluctance to use the odd day’s holiday from their overall vacation entitlement. Most British workers prefer to take a two-to-five week block off, rather than fritter it away here and there. The good news for bosses is that the incidence of workers lying to take a day off is decreasing.

WARM-UPS

1. HOLIDAYS: Write down some or all of the national holidays in your country. Talk about these in pairs / groups. What do you do on each of the holidays? What other holidays do you think your country should have / celebrate?

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Recently / studies / Britain / February 6 / being sick / absenteeism / fake illnesses / gloominess / feeling blue / coughs / national holidays / New Year / vacation / lying

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. FEELINGS DAYS: Look at this list of randomly chosen days of the year. In pairs / groups, talk about how you usually feel on these days. What kinds of things do you usually do around these times?

- February 6
- April 22
- June 17
- July 31
- September 8
- October 19
- November 24
- December 31

4. EXCUSES: Take part in mini role plays. Student A is a boss / teacher, student B is a worker / student. The boss / teacher does not think the worker's / student's excuses for taking a day off are good enough. The excuses are below:

- a. I had to wait for the TV repairperson.
- b. I had a bad headache.
- c. The car didn't start.
- d. I was exhausted from the weekend.
- e. I had a toothache.
- f. I had to meet my friend at the airport.
- g. I was depressed.

5. SICK: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "sick". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. OFF SICK: Which of the following are good reasons for taking a day off from school / work sick?

- Wanting more national holidays
- To recharge one's batteries
- Go on a date
- Because it was raining
- Having a hangover
- To catch up on sleep
- To avoid a busy day at work / school
- Feeling blue

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. The British government has introduced a national sick from work day. T / F
- b. February 6 is the day on which most sick days are taken in Britain. T / F
- c. Londoners take an average of 30 days a year off sick. T / F
- d. Most people feign coughing or a sore throat when phoning in sick. T / F
- e. Another word for a day off sick is a "sickie". T / F
- f. Americans have more national holidays than Britons. T / F
- g. Britons prefer to take their holiday in two-to-five week chunks. T / F
- h. The incidence of workers taking sick days in Britain is on the increase. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| a. prevalent | disquiet |
| b. instills | fabrication |
| c. skiving off | recuperate |
| d. feigned | lack |
| e. falsification | shirking |
| f. consternation | squander |
| g. dearth | widespread |
| h. recharge batteries | faked |
| i. fritter away | prevalence |
| j. incidence | produces |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. absenteeism | regional variation |
| b. February instills in many workers | feigned coughing or sore throats |
| c. There was considerable | recharge batteries |
| d. Most people phoning in sick | consternation |
| e. to add a touch | due to fake illnesses |
| f. widespread | of workers lying to take a day off |
| g. the dearth of | away here and there |
| h. a need to | of authenticity to |
| i. fritter it | a sense of gloominess |
| j. the incidence | official and national holidays |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Britain's sick day culture

A recent study conducted in Britain has _____ that February 6 is the day when most Britons take the day off sick. Professor Cary Cooper, who conducted the research, said _____ due to fake illnesses is particularly prevalent on this day. Apparently, early February instills in many workers a sense of _____ and "many people are still feeling the _____ -Christmas blues". The study showed that over 50 percent of 4,000 interviewees took at least one fabricated sick day each year. There was _____ regional variation, with Londoners _____ off an average three days a year, compared to 13 for workers in the northern city of Liverpool. Most people phoning in sick _____ coughing or sore throats to add a touch of authenticity to their _____.

absenteeism

feigned

considerable

discovered

post

falsification

gloominess

skiving

Reasons varied for taking a "sickie". There was _____ consternation at the _____ of official and national holidays, even though British workers _____ well compared with their counterparts across the Atlantic. Other reasons _____ included a need to recharge batteries after the Christmas and New Year break, an extension to a weekend break, time to recover from a hangover or _____ to catch up on sleep. Many people also expressed a reluctance to use the _____ day's holiday from their overall vacation entitlement. Most British workers prefer to take a two-to-five week block off, rather than _____ it away here and there. The good news for bosses is that the _____ of workers lying to take a day off is decreasing.

simply

fare

fritter

cited

widespread

incidence

dearth

odd

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Britain's sick day culture

A recent study _____ in Britain has discovered that February 6 is the day when most Britons take the day off sick. Professor Cary Cooper, who conducted the research, said _____ due to fake illnesses is particularly prevalent on this day. Apparently, early February _____ in many workers a sense of gloominess and "many people are still feeling the post-Christmas blues". The study showed that over 50 percent of 4,000 interviewees took at least one _____ sick day each year. There was considerable regional variation, with Londoners skiving off an average three days a year, compared to 13 for workers in the northern city of Liverpool. Most people phoning in sick _____ coughing or sore throats to add a touch of authenticity to their _____.

Reasons varied for taking a "sickie". There was widespread _____ at the dearth of official and national holidays, even though British workers fare well compared with their _____ across the Atlantic. Other reasons cited included a need to _____ batteries after the Christmas and New Year break, an extension to a weekend break, time to recover from a hangover or simply to catch up on sleep. Many people also expressed a _____ to use the odd day's holiday from their overall vacation entitlement. Most British workers prefer to take a two-to-five week block off, rather than _____ it away here and there. The good news for bosses is that the _____ of workers lying to take a day off is decreasing.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'sore'** and **'throat'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "SICK DAY" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about holidays and sick days.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|--------------|-----------|
| • February 6 | • sickie |
| • fake | • fare |
| • gloominess | • cited |
| • fabricated | • catch |
| • skiving | • odd |
| • touch | • fritter |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Do you ever take days off from work/school because you are sick?
- c. Have you ever lied to be absent from work/school?
- d. What do you think of truancy or people skiving off from work?
- e. Is there a time of the year in your country when people generally feel gloomy?
- f. Are there regional variations in your country regarding who are the best workers / students?
- g. Have you ever telephoned anyone pretending to be sick?
- h. Do you think you are good at thinking up excuses or lying?
- i. Are you ever doubtful when another student / coworker is off sick?
- j. How often and when do you get the blues?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think there are enough national holidays in your country?
- d. What do you do to recharge your batteries?
- e. Is it easy for you to think of an excuse and take a day off because of a fabricated illness?
- f. Do you ever fritter away your holiday, time or money?
- g. Do you think bosses or teachers are suspicious when workers or students call in sick?
- h. Do you think calling in sick directly after a weekend is extra suspicious?
- i. Do you think someone should be punished if they take a day off when they are not really sick?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

EXCUSES: In pairs / groups, think of five excuses you would use to take a day off sick. Talk about what you could do to make your excuse more believable.

Change partners / groups. Tell each other your excuses. Give each other feedback on the quality of each excuse and the possibility of a boss / teacher not believing it.

Return to your original partner(s) and share what you heard from your earlier partner(s).

Conduct a class survey to find out what the most common excuses were. What were the most inventive excuses? Which ones would you try or never try?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find information on sick days and holidays in your country. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. SURVEY: Conduct your own "sick day" survey among your family and friends. Report your findings to your partner(s) in your next class. Did you all write about similar things?

4. SICK: Write about the times you have been sick. Did you always take a day off from school or work? Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F b. T c. F d. T e. T f. F g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. shows	reveals
b. fake	invented
c. gloomy	blue
d. in fact	actually
e. pretended	play-acted
f. vacation	holiday
g. recharge batteries	recover
h. total	overall
i. waste	squander
j. decreasing	falling

PHRASE MATCH:

a. absenteeism	due to fake illnesses
b. February instills in many workers	a sense of gloominess
c. There was considerable	regional variation
d. Most people phoning in sick	feigned coughing or sore throats
e. to add a touch	of authenticity to
f. widespread	consternation
g. the dearth of	official and national holidays
h. a need to	recharge batteries
i. fritter it	away here and there
j. the incidence	of workers lying to take a day off

GAP FILL:

Britain's sick day culture

A recent study conducted in Britain has **discovered** that February 6 is the day when most Britons take the day off sick. Professor Cary Cooper, who conducted the research, said **absenteeism** due to fake illnesses is particularly prevalent on this day. Apparently, early February instills in many workers a sense of **gloominess** and "many people are still feeling the **post**-Christmas blues". The study showed that over 50 percent of 4,000 interviewees took at least one fabricated sick day each year. There was **considerable** regional variation, with Londoners **skiving** off an average three days a year, compared to 13 for workers in the northern city of Liverpool. Most people phoning in sick **feigned** coughing or sore throats to add a touch of authenticity to their **falsification**.

Reasons varied for taking a "sickie". There was **widespread** consternation at the **dearth** of official and national holidays, even though British workers **fare** well compared with their counterparts across the Atlantic. Other reasons **cited** included a need to recharge batteries after the Christmas and New Year break, an extension to a weekend break, time to recover from a hangover or **simply** to catch up on sleep. Many people also expressed a reluctance to use the **odd** day's holiday from their overall vacation entitlement. Most British workers prefer to take a two-to-five week block off, rather than **fritter** it away here and there. The good news for bosses is that the **incidence** of workers lying to take a day off is decreasing.