

# Lesson 1

## Does Television Play a Positive or Negative Role in the Modern Society?

### Text

#### Do the Advantages of Television Outweigh the Disadvantages?

Television is now playing a very important part in our life. But television, like other things, has both advantages and disadvantages. Do the former outweigh the latter?

In the first place, television is not only a convenient source of entertainment, but also a comparatively cheap one. For a family of four, for example, it is more convenient as well as cheaper to sit comfortably at home, with almost unlimited entertainment available, than to go out in search of amusement elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. They do not have to pay for expensive seats at the theatre, the cinema, or the opera, only to discover, perhaps,

that the show is disappointing<sup>2</sup>. All they have to do is press a button, and they can see plays, films, operas, and shows of every kind, not to mention political discussions and the latest exciting football match. Some people, however, maintain that this is precisely where the danger lies. The television viewer takes no initiative<sup>3</sup>. He makes no choice and exercises no judgment. He is completely passive and has everything presented to him without any effort on his part.

Television, it is often said, keeps one informed about current events, allows one to follow the latest developments in science and politics, and offers an endless series of programmes which are both instructive and entertaining. The most distant countries and the strangest customs are brought right into one's sitting-room.<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that the radio performs this service just as well; but on television everything is much more living, much more real. Yet here again there is a danger. We get so used to looking at it, so dependent on its flickering pictures<sup>5</sup>, that it begins to dominate our lives.

There are many other arguments for and against television. The poor quality of its programmes is often criticized. But it is undoubtedly a great comfort to many lonely elderly people. And does it corrupt or instruct our children? I think we must realize that television in itself is neither good nor bad. It is the uses to which it is put that determine its value to society.

## I . Listen

*Listen to the text with the help of the following notes.*

1. it is more convenient ... in search of amusement elsewhere: (对四口之家来说)舒服地坐在家里,有着包罗万象的娱乐节目供选择,当然要比外出到别的地方寻找娱乐活动更为方便,更合算了。
2. only to discover ... disappointing: 最终发现演出是那样令人失望。此处 only to 表示出乎意料。
3. takes no initiative: 没有任何主动性。
4. The most distant countries ... into one's sitting-room: 最遥远的国度、最奇异的风俗民情被直接送到人们的起居室。
5. flickering pictures: 闪烁不定的图像。

## II . Read

*Read the following passages. Underline the important viewpoints while reading.*

### 1. Why Watch Television?

Matthew: Television is undoubtedly a great invention, but one of the main criticisms of it is that people just aren't selective enough. Lesley, you've got a television; how do you pick out the sorts of programmes you want to watch?

Lesley: I try and look at the programmes that are on to decide which particular ones interest me, rather than

you turning it on at seven o'clock and you leaving it on until half-past eleven when the programmes finish.

Matthew: Do you think of television though as a great time-waster?

Lesley: Un . . . I think it can be a time-waster and it depends on how particular people are about what they want to see. . . Mm, it can just be a sort of total amusement for someone and totally consuming without really considering what it is they're watching.

Matthew: Aha, but how do you prevent it coming into your life and taking over your evenings and at the same time perhaps get . . . get out of the television some of the sort of best things . . . best programmes that. . . that undoubtedly are on television?

Lesley: Well, I suppose one of the problems is . . . will depend on what a person's life style is, and that if he has other outside interests which are equally important to him as television, he will then, you know, mm . . . be more careful about which programmes he wants to watch because he has time which he wants to use for other things.

Matthew: Do you think though that . . . that in . . . in a sense television has killed people's own er. . . sort of , creativity or their ability to entertain themselves because if they're bored all they do is just turn on the television?

Lesley: Yes, I think that is a danger, and I think that . . . in fact is what is happening to a lot of people who use

it as their ... their main ... um field of amusement and ... because they don't have other outside interests and even when people come round they'll leave the television on and not be, you know, particularly interested in talking to them, you know the television will be the main thing in the room.

Matthew: Peter, have you got a television?

Peter: I have, in fact I've got two televisions.

Matthew: Do you watch them a lot?

Peter: Er ... no I ... I watch very seldom er ... In fact, I find that I watch television most when I'm most busy, when I'm working hardest and I need some sort of passive way of relaxing, something which requires nothing of me, then I watch television a lot. When I've got more energy left... um ... in my own private time, in my free time, then I find I do more different things. I do things like um reading, or going out, or working on anything ... my hobbies.

Matthew: Do you think though that people can live a perfectly happy life if they haven't got a television?

Peter: Oh yes, I think people who don't have a television or people who don't watch television can be expected to be more happy. You can assume I think if they never watch television they are happier people than the people who watch a lot of television, because I think that television goes with the kind of life which leaves you with nothing to spare, nothing left, you have to be given potted, passive entertain-

ment.

Matthew: But in that case you . . . you seem as though you're completely against television, is that true?

Peter: No, it's not. I . . . I have a television in fact, I have two as I said, but er I . . . I . . . I think there's a dilemma, a difficult situation. Television in itself is very good; a . . . a lot of the information and a lot of the programmes are very instructive, they introduce you to things you may never have thought of before or never have heard about before. But in watching, it makes you very passive; you sit for hour after hour and you get very receptive and very unquestioning and it seems to me the important thing in life is to be active, to . . . to do things, to think things and to be as creative as possible, and television prevents this.

## 2. Children and Television

Housewife: What do I think of television? Um, um, well, um, it keeps the family at home, the kids don't go out at night so much now, they come straight in from school most of them, they run in and straight, well the television's on when they come in, I watch it myself during the afternoon. Er, well it's company really and, er, well, then the kids come home, they eat their tea, I have no trouble with them eating their tea because they just . . . well, they don't even look at what they eat, they just sit down and, erm, they eat it and they like the

programmes and, and it keeps them quiet while I'm cooking the tea for their dad when he comes home an hour later and tea is ready when the news is on when he comes in, and, er and the news is on or perhaps the football match or something, er, they have to be quiet then, they're not very interested in that themselves, they like the cartoons and things but, em, yeah, well, I think television's great, er, we get on much better in the house now, um, well, we've got things to talk about, erm, you know, if I miss a programme, er, if I'm cooking or something in the kitchen, I miss a bit of what's going on, I mean I have the door open so I can hear, but if I miss a bit then they will tell me, and then perhaps later or perhaps the next day we'll have a chat about it, you know. It gives us something to talk about really. Um, I don't think it hurts the kids, I don't think it's a problem, you know, like, er, it stops them, makes their eyes go funny or something, I don't think it's a problem like that. I don't think it's a problem at all. They've... they've learned a lot from television, I think, they're always piping up with questions and learning a lot from the television.

### 3. Television Is Doing Irreparable Harm

“Yes, but what did we use to *do* before there was television?” How often we hear statements like this! Television hasn't been with us all that long, but we are already beginning to forget what the world was like without it. Before we admitted the one-eyed monster into our homes, we never found it difficult to occupy our spare time. We used to enjoy civilised

pleasures. For instance, we used to have hobbies, we used to entertain our friends and be entertained by them, we used to go outside for our amusements to theatres, cinemas, restaurants and sporting events. We even used to read books and listen to music and broadcast talks occasionally. All that belongs to the past. Now all our free time is regulated by the ‘goggle box’. We rush home or gulp down our meals to be in time for this or that programme. We have even given up sitting at table and having a leisurely evening meal, exchanging the news of the day. A sandwich and a glass of beer will do—anything, providing it doesn’t interfere with the programme. The monster demands and obtains absolute silence and attention. If any member of the family dares to open his mouth during a programme, he is quickly silenced.

Whole generations are growing up addicted to the telly. Food is left uneaten, homework undone and sleep is lost. The telly is a universal pacifier. It is now standard practice for mother to keep the children quiet by putting them in the living-room and turning on the set. It doesn’t matter that the children will watch rubbishy commercials or spectacles of sadism and violence—so long as they are quiet.

There is a limit to the amount of creative talent available in the world. Every day, television consumes vast quantities of creative work. That is why most of the programmes are so bad: it is impossible to keep pace with the demand and maintain high standards as well. When millions watch the same programmes, the whole world becomes a village, and society is reduced to the conditions which obtain in pre-literate communities. We become utterly dependent on the two most prim-



itive media of communication: pictures and the spoken word.

Television encourages passive enjoyment. We become content with second-hand experiences. It is so easy to sit in our armchairs watching others working. Little by little, television cuts us off from the real world. We get so lazy, we choose to spend a fine day in semi-darkness, glued to our sets, rather than go out into the world itself. Television may be a splendid medium of communication, but it prevents us from communicating with each other. We only become aware how totally irrelevant television is to real living when we spend a holiday by the sea or in the mountains, far away from civilization. In quiet, natural surroundings, we quickly discover how little we miss the hypnotic tyranny of King Telly.

#### 4. Television Is Good for People

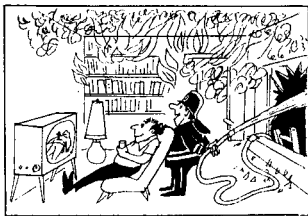
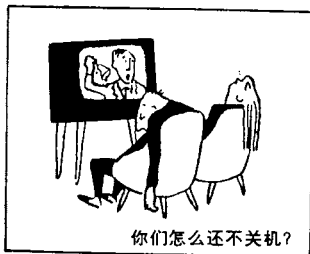
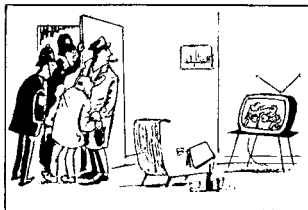
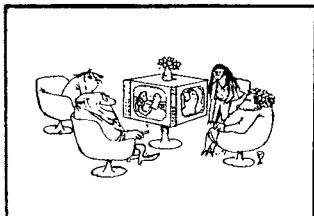
TV may be a vital factor in holding a family together where there are, for example, economic problems and husband and wife seem at breaking point. The dangerous influence is surely no more than what all of us are exposed to every day... in advertising, in the press.

Primary and secondary education have improved out of all recognition since the arrival of TV in the home and this is not only because of programmes designed for schools. Through TV a child can extend his knowledge and it provides vital food for his imagination.

## 5. Television Is to Blame

TV passes on to children the corrupting values of a corrupt society. It's only a matter of time before we can give statistical evidence of how many criminals society has given birth to in front of the TV on Saturday night.

You can blame TV for the fact that children take longer to learn to read these days and barely see the point any more of acquiring the skill. In my opinion watching TV should be strictly confined to “treats”.



### III. Consider

Does television play a positive or negative role in the modern world?

#### Arguments

1. Television is now playing a very important part in our lives.
2. Television is not only a convenient source of entertainment, but also a comparatively cheap one.
3. Television keeps one informed about current events, allows one to follow the latest developments in science and politics and offers an endless series of programmes which are both instructive and entertaining.
4. A lot of television programmes introduce people to things they never thought of before and have never heard of before.
5. Television series have done a great job in popularizing many literary masterpieces.
6. Television has been good company to those who do not work, like housewives, lonely old people, etc.
7. With television people are still free to enjoy other “civilized pleasures”, or even more.
8. There is a considerable variety of programmes on television. The viewer is always free to choose whatever he wants to see.

9. Television provides enormous possibilities for education, like school programmes via closed-circuit television.
10. Television provides special broadcasts for those in TV university, or open university. It also offers specialised subjects like language teaching, sewing, cooking, painting, cosmetics, etc.
11. Television does the job of education in the broadest sense. Instructive programmes achieve their goal through entertaining the viewers.
12. Television provides an outlet for creative talents.
13. People all around the world are no longer distant and isolated from each other. The most distant countries and the strangest customs are brought right into one's sitting-room.
14. Compared with the radio, everything on television is more lifelike, vivid, and real.
15. Television may be a vital factor in holding a family together where there are, for example, economic problems and husband and wife seem at breaking point.

### Counter-arguments

1. Television is a great time-waster.
2. People who don't watch television are happier than those who watch it because television goes with the kind of life which leaves the viewer nothing to spare, nothing left.

3. Television makes the viewer completely passive because everything is presented to him without any effort on his part.
4. The very danger of watching television lies in the fact that the viewer takes no initiative. He makes no choice and exercises no judgment.
5. Television passes on to children the corrupting values of a corrupt society.
6. Television is to blame for the fact that children take longer to learn to read these days and barely see the point at all of acquiring the skill.
7. Television takes up too much of our time. We no longer have enough time for hobbies, entertaining activities, and other outside amusement like theatres, cinemas, sports, etc.
8. Unfortunately all our free time is now regulated by television.
9. People rush home, gulp their food, which is often as simple as sandwich and a glass of beer, and start watching the TV programmes.
10. The monster, i. e. television, demands absolute silence and attention. No one dares to open his mouth during a programme.
11. People have grown addicted to television, often neglecting the necessary and more important things like meals, sleep and even work.
12. A lot of parents use television as a pacifier for their children. They put their children in front of the set and don't care whether the children are exposed to

- rubbishy commercials or spectacles of violence as long as the children are quiet.
13. Most of the television programmes are bad and they do not keep pace with the high demand of viewers and do not maintain high quality.
  14. The wide coverage of television programmes has reduced society to the conditions in pre-literate communities: we are utterly dependent on the most primitive media of communication: pictures and spoken words.
  15. What the viewer receives from television is nothing but second-hand experience. He is completely cut off from the real world.
  16. The more the viewer watches television, the lazier he becomes. He is glued to the set instead of going out.
  17. Television prevents people from communicating with each other. It has done a lot of harm to the relationship between family members.

### Questions

1. Do you like watching television? Why (Why not)?
2. Do you think television has done more good than harm to its viewers or vice versa? Explain.
3. Do you think it is harmful and damaging for children to watch a lot of television? What suggestions do you have on this aspect?
4. What would you do if you were in charge of TV programmes?

#### IV. Write

*Work out an outline of your own viewpoints. The outline should consist of major statements and supporting evidence and examples. Do not write down every word of your speech.*

#### V. Speak

- i. *Speak according to your outline, or give spontaneous speeches when you disagree with your classmates or when you want to support your own group with similar opinions.*
- ii. *Language devices: You are expected to extend your ability to agree or disagree with other people's opinions and to ask them to explain their points of view.*

I couldn't have put it better myself.  
That's just what I was thinking.  
There's something in that, I suppose.  
I'd go along with you on that.  
I couldn't agree more.

You are not serious, surely.  
Oh, come on.  
That's a little far-fetched, isn't it?  
Well, I don't know.  
Well, the point I'm trying to make is that...

VI. Sum up

- i . *The whole class decide on the best prepared speech and the best spontaneous speech.*
- ii . *The whole class pick out the most convincing statements from the arguments and counter-arguments.*
- iii . *The teacher gives comments on students' ideas and language.*