



# Watching and Waiting

Read this story aloud or make copies for your group or team members.

## 99-Word Story

It was lunchtime. Sarah slid her leftovers into the microwave and tapped the minutes, seconds, and start keys, then waited. And waited. She tapped her toes and still waited.

Finally in frustration she announced through gritted teeth, “I don’t have time for this!” Storming back to her office she left her lunch behind.

Why was she so upset? There is absolutely no faster way to reheat food. Perhaps she wanted someone to eat it for her too!

The more you focus on time, the more you seem to have – especially when you want it the least.

You can build upon the theme of this 99-Word Story by using some of the following questions for your own reflection or to spark a discussion within your team or organization.

## Discussion Questions

- Share an example of how time watching has reduced your productivity.
- What are some reasons we become distracted by watching the clock?
- Which is worse in your workplace, having too much time or having too little?
- What are your best strategies for using time most effectively?
- How do you avoid excessive clockwatching?

There are many ways to understand this story as the discussion questions suggest. If you or your group would like to compare or contrast your interpretation with an outside viewpoint, consider this analysis.

## Interpretation

Why does time slow during a crisis? Why do the years fly

by as we age – or when we wait for the microwave? In the book ***Time Warped***, author Claudia Hammond explains that these observations are tied to our perception of time; the way our brain focuses attention, collects data, adds emotion, and remembers.

When we are bored, fearful, and bereft of stimulus or novelty, time seems to slow making days or weeks drag endlessly. Yet, over longer time periods, that same routine and repetition make the years contract as we look back on them in our old age. There simply are not enough high points to register distinct events worth remembering.

In contrast, focused attention, novelty, a high emotional state, and a sense of flow make the hours and days fly. And when we look back at a busy time period like this, it may seem to have expanded because we remember it being filled with so many unique experiences.

Time measurement is an arbitrary construct. A quick check of the internet reveals that the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians laid the foundation for our current system but no one knows why they divided every hour into 60 minutes or even every day into 24 hours - although those numbers are easily divided by multiples of both 2 and 3.

Yet having a sense of time is essential for our ability to function. We need a sense of time in order to speak coherently (correctly placing and emphasizing phonemes) as well as to understand what others say. Our sense of time is indispensable in our ability to cross a street safely, drive a car, throw or catch a Frisbee, or tell a joke.

Time is one of those concepts that so pervades our lives that we rarely think about what it means to us. In everyday usage, we toss around many time-related concepts.

Metaphorically...

- We curse time or drag it out but take it as a gift when we unexpectedly gain more.
- We would like to find more time but instead often lose it, kill it, forget it, or waste it.
- When we are having fun, it flies but when under stress, it slows and even stops momentarily.
- We might borrow some once in a while and save it whenever we can but many of us still wish we could manage it better.
- Even though no one has actually traveled through it, you can be frozen in it if you never change or if you don't run on it.

Time is also a metaphor for the arbitrary nature of many work practices. People have been paid by the hour at least since the Industrial Revolution when round-the-clock factory work began to replace agricultural work that had been governed by the passage of the sun. At this point, time became money - at least in North America.

Thinking about how we perceive time opens the possibility that time may not be money. Perhaps time in the workplace is effort; the energy we can exert. Perhaps time is results; what we are able to produce. Or maybe, like the 99-Word Story, time is patience, perspective, or anticipation of something essential.

The way we think about and describe time reveals insights into the way we view work, the contributions of other people, what we accomplish, and when.

What kinds of conversations about time have you had in your organization and what new ideas about productivity, collaboration, and purpose have resulted? Please "take a moment" to [share](#) your insights!

#### **More Information:**

*Time Warped* by Claudia Hammond, HarperCollins, New York, © 2013, ISBN 987-0-06-222520-7

["Why Time Slows Down When We're Afraid, Speeds Up as We Age, and Gets Warped on Vacation"](#)  
*A review of Claudia Hammond's book.*

#### **See also:**

["What Exactly is Time Perception?"](#)  
*A summary of current research on time perception which covers many topics similar to Hammond's book.*

#### [Temporal Illusions:](#)

*An explanation of the ways we are deceived by our perception of time.*

["Time to Dump Time Zones"](#) by James Gleick, New York Times, November 5, 2016  
*James Gleick, the author of "Time Travel: A History," points out the arbitrary nature of some of our thinking about time.*

#### An [Interactive Time Zone Map](#)

*Note the political nature of time zones. China, which is as large as Europe has just one time zone. Australia has four zones which do not all run north to south and sometimes change by 30 minutes rather than 60.*

["The Power of a Minute: How to Get More Out of Every Minute in Your Day"](#) by Kevin Eikenberry. [Kevin Eikenberry](#), a consultant in organizational leadership and learning, describes how to find more time for doing the things you've always wanted to do.

**Reprinted from *99's on the 9<sup>th</sup>***

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