

IELTS Listening Lesson 32

Setting:

You will hear a university professor giving a lecture to economics students about the topic of the gig economy.

Questions

Complete the sentences below.

Write NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER for each answer.

Questions 1–6: Sentence Completion

1. The gig economy is mainly based on workers taking up _____ instead of permanent jobs.
 2. Platform-based companies connect customers and service providers through _____.
 3. Many workers value the gig economy for its _____ in scheduling.
 4. Gig workers often lack benefits such as health insurance or _____.
 5. Algorithms can control workers by assigning tasks and even _____ them from platforms.
 6. Some governments have introduced _____ worker classifications to offer limited protections.
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Questions 7–8: Multiple Choice

Choose the correct letter, A, B, or C.

7. What is one challenge of organizing unions among gig workers?
- A. They are usually located in different countries
 - B. The work is highly competitive
 - C. The work is decentralized and isolating
8. According to the lecture, what is one benefit of gig platforms in developing countries?
- A. They lower living costs
 - B. They increase access to credit
 - C. They create income opportunities
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Questions 9–10: Matching

Match each topic with the correct description.

Write the correct letter, A, B, or C, next to questions 9–10.

- A. May disappear due to automation
 - B. Improves service access for customers
 - C. Helps accumulate worker benefits over time
9. Suggested idea of portable benefits
10. Use of technology in the gig economy
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Script

Good afternoon, everyone. Today, we'll be examining the gig economy—a term that's become increasingly common in the past decade and has significantly reshaped the way people work around the world. I'll walk you through its key characteristics, how it operates, and the implications it has for labor rights and the future of employment.

So, let's start with a basic definition. The gig economy refers to a labor market characterized by short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs. Workers are typically hired for individual tasks or "gigs," often facilitated by digital platforms. Think about ride-share drivers, food delivery couriers, freelance designers, and even tutors. These individuals usually work independently and are paid per job, rather than receiving a consistent salary.

One of the reasons the gig economy has grown so rapidly is because of the rise of platform-based companies, such as Uber, Deliveroo, TaskRabbit, and Fiverr. These platforms act as intermediaries, connecting customers with service providers through apps or websites. From a business perspective, this model is incredibly efficient. Companies can scale rapidly without the financial responsibilities that come with hiring full-time employees, such as paying benefits or pensions.

From the worker's perspective, the gig economy offers flexibility. It allows people to choose when and where they work. For students, parents, or individuals seeking supplementary income, this model can be attractive. In fact, studies show that over half of gig workers say they value the control they have over their schedules.

However, this flexibility often comes at a price. One of the most debated aspects of the gig economy is the lack of labor protections. Many gig workers are classified as independent contractors, not employees. This means they're generally not entitled to benefits like health insurance, paid leave, or even minimum wage protections in some jurisdictions.

For example, if a ride-share driver gets injured while working, they might not have access to workers' compensation. Similarly, because there's often no formal employment contract, job security is minimal. Work can dry up unexpectedly, and there's usually no guarantee of future earnings. Additionally, gig workers must often cover their own costs—like fuel, equipment, or insurance—which cuts further into their income.

There's also the issue of algorithmic management. In many cases, the platform uses an algorithm to assign tasks, rate performance, and even deactivate workers from the system. While this can make operations smoother, it introduces a level of surveillance and control that workers often find opaque or unfair. Imagine receiving a low rating from a customer and being automatically penalized without recourse or explanation.

On a broader scale, the gig economy challenges traditional understandings of employment and raises questions about the future of work. Should a person working full-time hours for a single platform be considered an employee? Some governments and courts have started to push back against the contractor model. For instance, in the UK, a 2021 Supreme Court ruling stated that Uber drivers were entitled to basic labor rights like holiday pay and a minimum wage.

In response, there have been growing calls for regulatory frameworks that better reflect the hybrid nature of gig work. Some countries are

experimenting with intermediate classifications—neither full contractor nor full employee—that offer limited protections, such as social insurance contributions, while maintaining some degree of flexibility.

Another emerging trend is the unionization of gig workers. Though organizing has traditionally been difficult due to the decentralized and often isolated nature of gig work, new digital tools are helping workers band together. In countries like Spain and Canada, we're seeing app-based couriers and drivers form digital unions, advocate for better conditions, and even strike.

But it's not all negative. The gig economy has also enabled entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly in regions where traditional employment is scarce. In developing countries, platforms can offer vital income streams to people who might otherwise be unemployed. For instance, freelance marketplaces allow individuals to offer services like translation, web development, or even online tutoring to a global clientele. This can boost both income and skills development.

Let's not forget the impact on consumers. The gig economy has made services more accessible and convenient. Need groceries delivered in an hour? There's an app for that. Need someone to assemble your furniture? There's an app for that, too. The challenge, however, is finding a balance between consumer convenience, corporate profit, and worker wellbeing.

And then there's technology—the lifeblood of the gig economy. Without smartphones, GPS, and instant payment systems, this kind of flexible labor market wouldn't exist. But as artificial intelligence becomes more capable, it may eventually replace some gig-based jobs altogether. Automated delivery robots, self-driving taxis, and even AI customer service could make certain roles obsolete.

So, where do we go from here? The future of the gig economy will likely involve hybrid models, where flexibility is preserved but worker protections are enhanced. Governments, companies, and labor organizations will need to collaborate to create new policies that reflect the realities of platform-based work. For instance, some proposals include portable benefits—where workers can accumulate healthcare or retirement benefits even as they move between gigs or platforms.

To conclude, the gig economy represents both opportunity and challenge. It's innovative, flexible, and efficient—but also precarious, opaque, and, in many cases, exploitative. As this model continues to expand, it's essential that we ask critical questions about what fair work looks like in the 21st century. How can we ensure dignity, security, and justice for all workers—regardless of how their jobs are delivered?

Thanks for your attention, and we'll continue this conversation in next week's seminar, where we'll compare labor policies in different countries.

Answer Key

1. short-term contracts
2. apps / websites (either is acceptable)
3. flexibility
4. paid leave
5. deactivate
6. intermediate
7. C
8. C
9. C
10. B