

Frequently Asked Questions About the American Time Use Survey (ATUS)



Why is it important that I participate?

People use their time differently depending on their age and circumstances. This survey asks a wide variety of people how they use their time: students, retirees, workers, parents, men, and women. Your participation in this survey ensures we provide accurate data on the time use and quality of life of all people aged 15 and over living in America. You are an important part of this survey.



When will I be interviewed?

To capture a full picture of time use on all days of the week, we assigned you a specific day of the week as your interview day. If you are unavailable at the time of the interview, we would be happy to call you on the same day the following week. You can always call to schedule a time for the interview that is more convenient for you. **Your time is very important**—we know because we study it.



Who is conducting the ATUS?

The U.S. Census Bureau collects and processes the data. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) analyzes and publishes the information. The Census Bureau removes all confidential information from the data files, such as name and address, before the BLS reviews the data.

I don't have time to complete the survey. Can someone else in my household participate instead?

You were carefully selected to represent thousands of other people in households similar to yours. Unfortunately, we cannot interview other members of your household, but we can work with you to set up a convenient interview time.



What happens during the interview? What will you ask me?

This one-time survey takes **15–20 minutes** to complete, from the moment you pick up the phone. We interview just one person from each household. After confirming some information about your household, the interviewer will ask you to recall how you spent the past 24 hours and then follow up with a few questions related to your time use.



I just participated in the Current Population Survey. Why are you contacting me again?

When we interview you for the ATUS, we save time and money because we don't have to ask many of the background questions that were already asked in the Current Population Survey (CPS). This shortens the time required to complete the ATUS and allows us to conduct interviews with more people. Unlike the CPS, the ATUS is a one-time only survey.



Are my answers confidential?

Yes. You are protected by United States Code, Title 13, Section 9, which requires all information about you and your household to be kept strictly confidential and used only for statistical purposes. In compliance with this law, the Census Bureau cannot release any information that could identify you or your household to anyone, including market research firms, political campaigns, or other government agencies.



I'm still in high school. Why was I selected?

We interview people of all ages, including teenagers. How teenagers balance school, work, and time with family and friends is an important topic for educators, health professionals, and others. If you are under 18 and selected to represent your household in this survey, a parent or guardian is welcome to be on the line with you during the interview.




How can I learn more about the ATUS?

Please visit our respondent website for more information:
www.bls.gov/respondents/tus

You can also check out some charts and tables with ATUS data:
www.bls.gov/tus/charts
and
www.bls.gov/tus/tables.htm


ATUS Data Show How We Spend Our Time

On an average weekday, adults spend 1 hour and 15 minutes traveling by car, train, bus, bike, or by some other means.



1 HR 15 MIN

Between 5-6 p.m. on weekdays, 34% of adults spend some time in transit.



34%

Women spend about 34 minutes preparing food and drinks on an average day...




34 MIN

...while men spend 14 minutes doing so.




14 MIN

On days they do housework—dusting, vacuuming, washing clothes, and similar activities—women spend about 1 hour and 48 minutes on these chores.




1 HR 48 MIN

On days they do lawn care, men spend about 2 hours and 20 minutes caring for their lawns.




2 HR 20 MIN

Parents of a child under age 3 spend about 2 hours and 12 minutes per day providing childcare as a main activity...



2 HR 12 MIN

...while parents whose youngest child is older than 12 spend about 21 minutes per day providing this care.



21 MIN

At 7 a.m. 64% of full-time college students are asleep...




64%

...but at the same hour, only 32% of full-time workers are still asleep.




32%

On an average school day, high school students spend about 1 hour and 33 minutes watching TV...



1 HR 33 MIN

...and about 57 minutes doing homework.



57 MIN

The American Time Use Survey

A survey about how people spend their time

How much time do Americans spend working? Sleeping? In transit?

What is the quality of life like in the United States, and how does it compare to other countries?

What is the value to the country of volunteer work?

Time is a resource—just like money—and knowing how people spend their time helps answer important questions

How do people spend their time when they retire?

Do men and women spend their time differently?

How much time do people spend taking care of children and elderly parents?

How often do people exercise, and what sorts of activities do they do for exercise?

How much time is spent in education or training? Is this increasing or decreasing?