Gen Z and the Startup Dream: Starting a Business Today

Name Date Class

Reading

1 It is past midnight, and you are watching someone your own age explain how a hobby became a business. She started with a laptop and a few hundred dollars, and by the end of the video you have half-planned your own launch. You are not alone. Polls by banks, software firms, and lending websites in several countries suggest that many members of Gen Z, roughly the people born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s, **gravitate** toward working for themselves. In some polls a majority say they have at least considered starting a business. Wanting to start and actually starting, though, are not the same thing.

2 The economic mood explains part of the appeal. In a large international survey of young adults, the cost of living has topped the list of worries several years in a row. Rents are high, the job market feels **precarious**, and many people wonder how artificial intelligence will reshape the entry-level work they trained for. In that climate, a side business can be less a dream than a **cushion**. Nearly three in ten Gen Z workers in the same survey had a second job, and for more than four in ten of them the main reason was financial necessity.

3 What has changed most is how cheap it is to begin. Online stores, payment apps, and AI tools let one person build a brand on a **shoestring**. Social media is both the classroom and the shop window: young founders pick up tactics from videos, then **monetize** an audience they built the same way. But there is a catch: platforms are generous only as long as your content keeps people watching, and as **gatekeepers** they can change the rules overnight. One Goldman Sachs estimate puts the share of the world's creators earning over 100,000 dollars a year at about 4 percent. The same feed that inspires you also advertises **dubious** courses. US regulators have taken action against several companies accused of selling "AI-powered" online stores with promises of passive income that, they alleged, never materialized.

4 How different is all this from earlier generations? Starting used to mean renting premises and buying stock before the first sale. Today you can test an idea over a weekend, in public, for almost nothing. Yet different does not necessarily mean more successful. Millennials were once **hailed** as a generation of founders, but a US government analysis found that they were less likely to be self-employed at 30 than Generation X or the baby boomers had been at the same age. And even if starting is easier than it used to be, a large study of US business records found that the founders of the fastest-growing start-ups were 45 years old on average, which suggests that youth is not the secret ingredient.

5 Strip away the technology and much looks familiar. Most new firms are still **bootstrapped**: in US surveys, the owner's own or family savings remain the most common source of start-up money. Many **fledgling** businesses close early. In US government data, roughly half of new business establishments are still operating five years later, although closing is not always failing, since some owners simply sell up. Provided that cash keeps coming in, a small business can survive on thin profits, but few can survive without it. Experience still counts: in that study, founders who had already worked in the industry were much more likely to succeed, so a **seasoned** insider's advice can be worth more than a thousand followers.

6 Where you live changes the story. In Canada, a bank's poll found that the high cost of living was the barrier mentioned most often, including by many young people. In many African countries, a shortage of formal jobs pushes young people toward self-employment, and one policy essay notes that most of it is informal work with low and unstable earnings. Researchers often separate necessity entrepreneurs, who start because they need a **livelihood**, from opportunity entrepreneurs, who have spotted a gap in the market. A business that begins in necessity can become **viable** over time. Even so, for many young people around the world, starting a business is less a lifestyle choice than a way to pay the bills.

7 If you are tempted, the evidence points toward a cautious route. Keep your income while you test the idea, so that you have enough **runway** to be patient. Next, **validate** the idea with a few paying customers before you chase thousands of followers. Treat any course that guarantees income as a warning sign. Unless you have savings that can cover your costs for months, quitting your job first is a gamble, not a strategy. And whether you start at 22 or at 45, one question matters more than any video can answer: what do you know that other people would pay to have solved?

Vocabulary Matching

Match each word from the reading with its meaning. Write the letter on the line.

1	**gravitate**	_____	**A**	not secure, and likely to get worse
2	**precarious**	_____	**B**	able to work and succeed in practice
3	**cushion**	_____	**C**	how long your money will last before it runs out
4	**shoestring**	_____	**D**	paid for by the founder's own money
5	**monetize**	_____	**E**	publicly praised as very good or important
6	**gatekeepers**	_____	**F**	to check that an idea is correct and worthwhile
7	**dubious**	_____	**G**	to turn something you own into income
8	**hailed**	_____	**H**	a reserve that softens the effect of a problem
9	**bootstrapped**	_____	**I**	probably not honest or trustworthy
10	**fledgling**	_____	**J**	having a lot of experience in something
11	**seasoned**	_____	**K**	the means of supporting yourself day to day
12	**livelihood**	_____	**L**	a very small amount of money to spend
13	**viable**	_____	**M**	those who control access to something
14	**runway**	_____	**N**	to be naturally drawn toward something
15	**validate**	_____	**O**	new and not yet fully established

Fill in the Blank

Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Use each word once. The words are already in the correct form.

bootstrapped	**cushion**	**dubious**	**fledgling**	**gatekeepers**	**gravitate**	**hailed**	**livelihood**	**monetize**
precarious	**seasoned**	**shoestring**	**validate**	**viable**				

1 Students often _____ toward subjects that promise stable careers.

2 Short contracts and low pay can make life feel _____ for new graduates.

3 He kept a small _____ of savings in case the café had a slow winter.

4 The festival was organized on a _____ , and volunteers did most of the work.

5 The app is popular, but the founders still cannot _____ it.

6 In the past, publishers and TV producers were the _____ of fame.

7 He made his money through _____ schemes that regulators later investigated.

8 The young singer was _____ as the voice of her generation.

9 Having _____ the company from savings, she owned all of it.

10 The council helps _____ firms with training and cheap rent.

11 A _____ negotiator rarely loses her temper in a tough meeting.

12 After the factory closed, the whole town lost its main _____ .

13 The prototype worked, but nobody knew whether the product was commercially _____ .

14 Run a small test to _____ your idea before you invest more.

Comprehension Questions

Answer in your notebook or discuss with a partner. Questions 10 to 12 are IELTS-style.

1 What do the polls suggest about Gen Z, and what caution does the writer add?

2 According to the reading, why can a side business be called a cushion for many young people today?

3 Which tools and platforms make it cheaper to begin a business, and what is the catch in depending on them?

4 What does the Goldman Sachs estimate suggest about earning a living as a creator?

5 How does starting a business today differ from starting one in earlier generations, according to the reading?

6 What do the Millennial analysis and the founder study suggest about young entrepreneurs?

7 Which parts of starting a business are familiar? Why is closing not always failing?

8 How do necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs differ, and why does it matter?

9 Why might the writer have chosen this order of ideas, and does it make the advice more convincing?

IELTS-Style Questions

10 **True, False, or Not Given:** *"The founders of the fastest-growing start-ups were, on average, under 30 years old."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

11 **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that keeping your income while you test an idea is safer than quitting your job first."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

12 **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer end with a question about what the reader knows that others would pay to have solved? Is its purpose to discourage readers from starting a business, to shift attention from age and tools to usefulness, or something else?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false) according to the reading. Write a correction for each false statement on the dotted line.

1 **T / F** The writer says that in some polls a majority of Gen Z have considered starting a business.

2 **T / F** Among Gen Z workers with a second job, more than four in ten said money was the main reason.

3 **T / F** The writer says platforms can change the rules overnight.

4 **T / F** The Goldman Sachs estimate says most creators earn more than 100,000 dollars a year.

5 **T / F** Millennials were more likely than Generation X to be self-employed at the age of 30.

6 **T / F** The founders of the fastest-growing start-ups were 45 years old on average.

7 **T / F** Bank loans are the most common source of start-up money in US surveys.

8 **T / F** In US government data, roughly half of new business establishments are still operating five years later.

9 **T / F** The writer says that all young people in Africa start businesses by choice.

10 **T / F** The writer advises you to quit your job first so that you can focus on the business.

Discussion Questions

Talk with a partner or in a small group. The questions move from personal to more abstract.

1 Have you ever sold something, such as handmade items, notes, or your time? What was it like?

2 Do you know anyone your age who has started a business or a side project? What did they do?

3 Where do you usually learn about money and work: school, family, friends, or online videos? Which source is the most useful?

4 Would you rather have a stable job with a regular salary or run your own business? Why?

5 The reading says a side business can act as a cushion. What other ways can young people protect themselves financially?

6 How much do you trust advice from online creators about money or business? What would make you trust it more or less?

7 What are the advantages and risks of depending on one social media platform to reach customers?

8 The reading suggests that youth alone is not the key to success. Which kinds of experience might matter more than age?

9 Why might personal savings remain the most common source of start-up money? What does that mean for people whose families have little to share?

10 In your country, what makes it easier or harder for a young person to start a business: laws, taxes, loans, culture, or something else?

11 Is starting a business out of necessity different from starting one by choice? How might it change how a person feels about risk?

12 Should schools teach students how to start a business? What should such a course include, and what should it warn about?

13 If AI tools make it cheap for almost anyone to start a business, who might benefit and who might lose out?

14 Who should carry the risk when a young person starts a business: the individual, the family, employers, or the government? Explain your view.

Language Focus: Conditional Connectors: Unless, As Long As, Provided That

Conditional connectors introduce a condition that must be met for something to be true or to happen. Besides if, writers use unless (if not), as long as and provided that (only if), and even if (the result stays the same despite the condition).

In the reading:

- "Platforms are generous only **as long as** your content keeps people watching…"
- "And **even if** starting is easier than it used to be, a large study of US business records found that the founders of the fastest-growing start-ups were 45 years old on average…"
- "**Provided that** cash keeps coming in, a small business can survive on thin profits, but few can survive without it."

Practice: Rewrite this sentence using *unless*: *"You should not quit your job if you have not saved enough to live on for six months."*

Activities and speed challenge
englishbridges.com/lessons/gen-z-startups

Notes