

Catch Flights, Not Feelings

A long goodbye at Dunedin Airport, in New Zealand, could land you in trouble. Last month, signs appeared outside the departures terminal warning that there is a three-minute limit on how long people can spend hugging, a polarising edict that has prompted international news coverage, debates and tongue-in-cheek commentary. Beneath an outline of two bodies locked in an embrace, the signs add: “For fonder farewells, please use the car park”.

The signage is the airport’s “way of being a little quirky and reminding people that the drop-off zone is for quick goodbyes,” said Daniel De Bono, the airport’s chief executive. “We all know that airports are hotbeds of emotion, and we just want to appeal to the common sense of passengers more than erect strict rules that threaten fines” he explained. “It’s just about being empathetic and enabling others to have their time as well. It’s also a way of avoiding traffic jams outside terminals. That’s all.”

However, De Bono tried to assuage any concerns about what the new airport policy might do to travelers’ brain chemistry. “Don’t worry, just a 20-second hug is enough to release oxytocin and serotonin, the happy hormones that boost well-being, so three minutes is plenty of time to say goodbye and get your dose of happiness,” he said. He argued that moving customers along quickly allows more people to get more hugs.

Social media users responded to the change with a mix of outrage and humour. For many commenters such a measure was “inhumane”. One writer joked about being timed in the bathroom as a possibility for the future. But, as the saying goes, one man’s meat is another man’s poison and other internet users noted that three minutes was actually a long time, maybe even awkwardly long, to show affection in public, and suggested that offenders find a more private place. “That’s generous,” one commenter said. “A hug only takes 10 seconds.”

The new rule has attracted disproportionate attention, considering how few travelers pass through Dunedin, near the southern end of New Zealand’s South Island. The airport there reported welcoming over 900,000 passengers over the last year, compared to the tens of millions of travelers — and hugs — handled annually by global hubs like Tokyo’s Haneda, New York’s J.F.K. or London’s Heathrow, where signs have been displayed in response reading, “Max hug time, unlimited”.

In an age where every second seems to be measured and monetised, even a hug can become a matter of timing. Perhaps Dunedin’s policy is a reminder that affection, like travel, often happens on borrowed time and saying goodbye gracefully is as much an art as catching the next flight. Be that as it may, when it comes to the question “Are we catching flights or feelings?” the controversy is served.

1. Answer these questions about the text. Use your own words (2 points)

- How does Mr. De Bono justify limiting the duration of hugs at the airport? (1 point)
- What does the author suggest by using the expression “one man’s meat is another man’s poison” when describing reactions on social media? (line 17) (1 point)

2. Read the statements and decide whether they are true or false. Justify your answer by quoting evidence (1 pt)

- This measure is intended to penalize anyone who exceeds the allotted hug time.
- According to the writer, it is understandable for a news story like this to generate interest worldwide.

3. Find in the text the word or group of words which match these definitions (1 pt)

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a) Hug (noun) (Paragraph 1) | c) Anger (Paragraph 4) |
| b) Penalties (Paragraph 2) | d) With ease (Paragraph 6) |

4. Choose 4 sentences and rephrase them beginning as shown (2 points)

- Hugs reduce separation anxiety and help express feelings better.

Not only.....

- I can’t wait to hug Charlotte again.

I’m looking

- I regret not giving her a hug the last time I saw her.

I wish

- “Were you able to say goodbye to your parents at the airport,” he asked me.

He asked me

- First passengers criticised the hug limit online. Then the airport explained its reasons for the rule.

By the time.....

- Travellers continued to follow airport regulations even though they disagreed with the policy.

Despite

5. Writing (4 points). Choose one option (140-180 words):

- Should airports around the world follow Dunedin’s example? Write an opinion essay.
- Write a formal email to Mr. De Bono complaining about the treatment you received from an airport employee while hugging your loved ones before departing for a year to the US.

ANSWER KEY

1a) “It’s just about being empathetic and enabling others to have their time as well. It’s also a way of avoiding traffic jams outside terminals.”

“Don’t worry, just a 20-second hug is enough to release oxytocin and serotonin, the happy hormones that boost well-being, so three minutes is plenty of time to say goodbye and get your dose of happiness,” he said. He argued that moving customers along quickly allows more people to get more hugs.

Mr. De Bono explains that the measure at Dunedin Airport is designed to encourage passengers to use good judgment and behave reasonably. It also aims to keep traffic flowing smoothly and to give everyone a chance to say goodbye. Finally, he points out that shorter hugs -he sets the limit in 20 seconds- still make people feel happy and emotionally satisfied.

(if students are more precise by using the words “oxytocin and serotonin” at any point in their answer is valid since that is the official name of those hormones. That is not considered copying from the text)

1b) For many commenters such a measure was “inhumane”. One writer joked about being timed in the bathroom as a possibility for the future. **But, as the saying goes, one man’s meat is another man’s poison** and other internet users noted that three minutes was actually a long time, maybe even awkwardly long, to show affection in public, and suggested that offenders find a more private place. “That’s generous,” one commenter said. “A hug only takes 10 seconds.”

The author suggests that people have different opinions. To illustrate this, he explains that many social media users were furious about the hug limit, but others found it appropriate. In fact, some thought that a three-minute hug was more than enough to say goodbye and could even feel uncomfortable in public.

2a) F (lines 8-9) “We just want to appeal to the common sense of the passengers **more than erect strict rules that threaten fines**”

2b) F (line 20) “**The new rule has attracted disproportionate attention** considering how few travelers pass through Dunedin”.

- 3) a) EMBRACE
b) FINES
c) OUTRAGE
d) GRACEFULLY

4) Rephrasing:

1- Not only do hugs reduce separation anxiety, but they also help express feelings better.

2- I’m looking forward to hugging Charlotte again.

3- I wish I had given her a hug the last time I saw her./ I wish I had hugged her the last time I saw her.

4- He asked me if/whether I had been able to say goodbye to my parents at the airport.

5- By the time the airport explained its reasons for the rule, passengers had (already) criticised the hug limit online.

6- Despite disagreeing (or not agreeing) with the policy, travellers continued to follow airport regulations. / Despite their disagreement with the policy, travellers continued to follow airport regulations / Despite the fact that travellers disagreed with the policy, they continued to follow airport regulations.

5. Writing: ***** This is just an **example** of how it could be done.

a) OPINION ESSAY

Hugging Loved Ones Should Never Be Timed

Airports are stressful enough without adding rules on how long you can hug your loved ones. Bearing that in mind, why make things even worse? Even though the initiative of Dunedin Airport may aim to keep traffic moving, I think it turns a personal and emotional moment into a timed task.

Saying goodbye before a journey can help people cope with separation anxiety. It might be the last time they see each other for a long period. Nobody knows the story behind a needed hug, whether it lasts three or ten minutes. We should not judge, let alone ban it. Personally, I have experienced that moment when my older sister went to Ireland to spend her last year of high school. I remember crying and hugging her before she passed through security. Had I not been able to do that, I would have left with an even emptier feeling.

In conclusion, saying goodbye to friends and family should be meaningful and not rushed. People ought to feel free to hug and kiss their dear ones without having to set a timer. Even if Dunedin's policy is well-intentioned, airports must give free rein to people's emotions.

B) FORMAL EMAIL

Dear Mr. De Bono,

I am writing to formally express my concern regarding the treatment I received from one of your staff members at Dunedin Airport on Monday, 29 September. I was saying goodbye to my family before leaving for a year in the United States when an employee approached me in a manner I found rude and unfriendly.

I understand that the airport has introduced a three-minute hug limit to manage traffic in the drop-off area, but the employee's tone was unnecessarily strict. Given the circumstances, a gentle reminder would have been sufficient. I think it is totally understandable that a

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17-year-old who will not see her family for a year needs a long hug. However, this approach turned a deeply personal and emotional moment into an uncomfortable experience that I will remember forever.

I kindly request that you review staff training regarding customer interaction, especially in sensitive situations such as farewells. A more empathetic approach would allow passengers to comply with rules while still experiencing meaningful personal moments.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

(tell students not to sign)

