

Reading Sample Test

Answer Key

For rail journeys up to and including 14th May, with the exception of 8th May, book online. Otherwise, check journey status nearer to the time of travel.

1. What does this notice say?

A There is no information yet available about travel after May 14th.

B Passengers may only reserve tickets from May 8th to May 14th.

C No online train information will be available on May 8th.

2. One of the drawbacks of fame is being constantly in the public ____.

A sight **B** notice **C** eye **D** attention

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My Favourite Newspaper

I've read the same weekend newspaper for years. I make sure I manage to read it every week, or I feel out of touch. I started reading my favourite paper a couple of years **(3)** ____. **(4)** ____ I agree with many things in it, the paper also challenges me. It makes me look at things in **(5)** ____ different way. I usually find the reviews interesting - but I must admit some weeks I can't bear them as they've **(6)** ____ written in a very sarcastic style. The regular writers have made me shake my head with anger too, on occasions, or smile **(7)** ____ complete agreement. I've even posted comments on the site - something I thought I'd never do.

3. ago / back
4. Although / While/ Though / Whilst
5. a
6. been
7. in / with

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Toddlers can learn verbs even in non-social contexts

Language acquisition has traditionally been considered a social, interactive process. However, new research **(8)** ____ that toddlers are able to acquire the meanings of some words even in contexts where social or visual information is absent.

This research **(9)** ____ upon previous studies carried out by the same team. It demonstrates that, by age two, toddlers can extract information about a new verb from its syntactic context **(10)** ____ without viewing a relevant event, and without discourse context or visual access to the speakers.

The team presented sentences as ambient noise, meaning toddlers did not have to pay attention to them. Findings indicate that toddlers can learn some **(11)** ____ of word meaning from contexts in which they are not directly attending to the conversation around them, without observational or social information for cues.

These results **(12)** ____ light on the way toddlers acquire aspects of verb meaning by overhearing conversations in which they are not directly involved.

8.	**A** emerges	**B** uncovers	**C** reveals	**D** appears
9.	**A** develops	**B** builds	**C** grows	**D** increases
10.	**A** just	**B** singularly	**C** alone	**D** solitarily
11.	**A** aspects	**B** factors	**C** items	**D** portions
12.	**A** spread	**B** provide	**C** offer	**D** shed

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Why you should play sport

Playing sport has much more than physical benefits. This is especially so when sports activities become an important part of a young person's life. Studies have shown that there is a direct link between physical activity and academic performance. For example, a University of Kansas study showed that 97% of student athletes graduated high school, which is 10% higher than students who did not participate in sports. The student athletes were also shown to have better outcomes at university level than non-athletes.

This might have to do with the increased mental ability that comes from playing sports. Physical activity naturally increases blood flow to the brain and activates endorphins, which are chemicals that are released in the body during exercise. Endorphins can impact your mood and work performance, meaning athletes may be more willing and capable of tackling that next big obstacle or issue. What's more, research published by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute suggests that exercise can lead to a unique state of relaxation. This relaxation can promote increased concentration, better memory, enhanced creativity, and an improved mood – all benefits that will extend into the classroom.

13. What does the writer say about the University of Kansas study?

A Participating in it helped sports students to achieve higher scores than expected.

B It found that doing sport brings educational rewards that are not just short-term.

C Evidence from it was used to encourage more high school students to take up sport.

D It revealed the main reasons why students who play sport do better at school.

14. According to the second paragraph, playing sports is beneficial because it

A enables people to study for longer.

B encourages parts of the brain to grow.

C raises people's problem-solving abilities.

D reduces the chances of people getting bored.

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Polar Bear trip
by Sarah Lane

I recently had a fantastic trip with my friends – going to watch polar bears in Canada! We stayed in a small building in a very deserted location in northern Canada. We were in an area where there were no towns and very few people, but good numbers of polar bears, black bears, eagles, snow geese and other wildlife. We were told that because the polar bears had less contact with people there, we'd be able to watch them in natural surroundings. And it was amazing, walking across the rocky, muddy ground or along the beach towards polar bears!

In fact, the bears we saw weren't very active. We were told that although they needed to find food for their cubs, there wouldn't be much food available until the ice froze again in winter and they could go hunting in the sea, so they were tending to rest. We saw quite a few bears from a distance, but we were also able to get closer to two polar bears and a black bear, and see about ten others during the tour. And one bear was so comfortable with us, she cleaned her nails, took a nap and even posed for the cameras!

Our two guides, Sam and Andy, were highly trained in how to survive in cold Arctic conditions. They also made us feel safe as we got to the bears. They taught us a very gentle and respectful approach towards the polar bears, so that the bears didn't notice too much that we were there. And even though our guides weren't originally from northern Canada, they obviously loved the Arctic environment and shared so much with us. They not only looked out for our safety, but for the well-being of the polar bears as well.

We were really lucky on the tour as we had a professional photographer with us, and we were all given tips on how to get the best photos. In my case, I finally learnt how to use some of the complicated equipment I'd brought along. However, while we were there, we had to deal with everything from bright sunshine to thunderstorms, so sadly we weren't always able to benefit from his advice on taking great photos, as the conditions were so unsuitable for photography.

As for our accommodation, it was a bit basic. But although it was lacking in luxury, the staff offered great service and delicious local food. They were continually improving it, too – they'd just built a new reception area that was really beautiful, and a great place to spend time when we weren't out looking for bears! It was a trip I'll remember for years to come.

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15. The writer explains that the place she stayed in

A had special buildings for people to watch polar bears safely.

B had more polar bears than other types of wildlife.

C was far from the areas where local people lived.

D was sometimes difficult to get around on foot.

16. What does the writer tell us about the polar bears in the area?

A They were often accompanied by their babies.

B They needed to save their energy until the coming winter.

C They were more comfortable around visitors than other bears were.

D They could be seen out hunting on the frozen ice.

17. What does the writer say about the guides?

A They had had a lot of training in polar bear behaviour.

B They put the safety of their visitors above everything else.

C They had been brought up in the local area.

D They understood the need to protect the bears from being disturbed.

18. How did the writer feel about having a photographer with them on the trip?

A disappointed when poor weather prevented her from using his tips

B pleased at how much better her photos were after getting his advice

C discouraged to find that she didn't know as much as she'd thought

D grateful to be able to borrow advanced equipment from him

19. What did the writer think of the accommodation she had?

A It needed to have more building work done on it.

B It offered great international cooking.

C It was run by some very helpful people.

D It seemed a bit too basic for the price she'd paid.

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Studying and swimming
by Sara Overmars, aged 16

I first went swimming when I was only three years old. It was good to start when I was so young because at that age you are less likely to be frightened of getting in the water. **(20) C** That's probably why it's always seemed fun to me. Now I swim every day and I find that it gives me time to think and it helps me to relax.

Each time I swim, I try to go faster than last time. I think I'm succeeding because last year, when I was 15, I became the 400m champion in my region. **(21) H** For example, swimming practice takes two hours every night, and I go twice every Saturday. I also have to do workouts in the gym every day. Another thing that takes up my time is competitions as there are races every week from September to the end of July.

After training, it's hard to do any studying because I'm so tired. **(22) D** The way I do it is by writing down all the schoolwork I have to do and all my training times into a weekly timetable, which I have to follow. It's normal for me now, but it does mean I don't have much free time. I just try to do my schoolwork as soon as I get it. And I go out with my friends whenever I can find a free moment. **(23) F** That's something my grandmother taught me to do before I did so much swimming.

My sport has taken me all over Europe for competitions. **(24) B** I'm really excited about that. I'd also like to study at university, maybe in the USA, but for now, I just have to think about getting faster in the pool.

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A I don’t know when it’ll happen, but I want to be ready.

B My next one is the World Swimming Championships in Japan.

C I think swimming feels more like a game.

D People often ask me how I find time for both.

E It was in France, where I went with my high school.

F As well as all that, I enjoy playing the piano.

G That’s a skill I never have to practise.

H But doing well in this sport is not easy.

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'Brain training'

Many of us dream of being smarter, but is it really possible to make your brain work better?

Have you ever thought about why some of us excel in sports, whereas others are better at playing the guitar or performing mathematical calculations? For many years, scientists have tried to find out which parts of our talents and abilities are determined by our genes and which parts are influenced by the environment.

(25) D

Many of us look for ways to harness the full potential of our brains, and the internet is full of tips encouraging us to do so. Advice includes sleeping well, eating healthy food, and exercising. But there is also a technique called brain training. After doing just a few minutes of daily brain exercises, users report impressive changes, ranging from improved concentration to getting higher scores on computer games.

(26) F

We know that doing everyday tasks like these helps shape your brain, and we also know that the potential to train your brain exists. Unfortunately, researchers are still trying to understand how to achieve this. Would you take the risk and potentially waste your time ‘brain training’, or would you rather spend your time doing something fun, like playing basketball with your friends?

(27) C

In addition to this, by remembering new words and information, connections are built in the brain and existing ones are strengthened. So, the more knowledge you have, the easier it becomes to concentrate. Have you ever noticed how the rest of the world seems to disappear when you are absorbed in reading a story? This is possible because your brain is actually hard at work.

(28) A

Without the use of either of these capabilities, you would not understand the words that are used nor could you create a full story in your mind. Research has shown that these are skills which can be improved upon by simply enjoying stories. For example, trying to understand and remember what’s happening in a story is ‘brain training’ in itself.

(29) E

Even though developing brains are flexible, and it should be possible to make yourself smarter, the evidence that ‘brain training’ will help you do so is mixed at best. If you want your brain to function at its optimal level, put it to work and keep on learning new things.

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A However, few of us realise the complexity of the task. When you engage with a book, you need to keep track of different characters, their goals, and details about their personalities and behaviour. Moreover, you frequently need to read between the lines to understand what the writer means. To accomplish this, you apply both your general knowledge and your executive functions.

B In contrast, some people noted a difference and were keen to incorporate these tasks into their routines. Although few of them were able to quantify or clearly articulate how their lives had changed as a result of 'brain training', they believed their actions would help them in the long run.

C You'd probably choose the latter, and research shows that physical activity is not only good for your body, but also for your brain. Done regularly, it's proven to be beneficial for school performance. Similarly, reading books appears to have a significant influence on your thinking skills. Studies suggest that regular reading helps make you smarter by building your vocabulary and increasing your general knowledge.

D It turns out there is no simple answer to the question, because these two factors always work together. Although the traits we inherit may influence our capacity to learn, our surroundings determine the rate of development. Thus, there is some built-in flexibility in the way the brain develops which helps us adjust to the circumstances that we grow up in.

E Besides increasing your memory and comprehension abilities, reading might also encourage readers to take the perspective of and sympathise with different characters. These are important skills for real life, but it seems highly unlikely that they could be acquired or even practised using the kinds of techniques used in 'brain training'.

F Despite the claims, 'brain training' is just practising the brain's executive functions by performing complex mental tasks. Although research has shown that this can result in changes in the brain, that is less impressive than it sounds. In fact, everything you do makes small changes in your brain, whether it is doing your homework, meeting friends, or reading this article.

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The Red Balloon

Four reviewers comment on the classic French 1956 movie.

Reviewer A

The timeless tale of Albert Lamorisse's short film, The Red Balloon, tells the story of the balloon as it follows a lonely schoolboy around the city of Paris, making itself his companion. The visual power of the balloon is essential to the film's effect, and the red balloon becomes a true character, in fact the star of the movie, fondly remembered by many since they first enjoyed it as a child. Filmed in simple language, the story follows the deepening relationship between the two. The final scene, as wondrous a finale as ever has been put to film, suggests promise, although Lamorisse employs subtlety. This is a film for grown-ups too, and perhaps it is nostalgia that allows us to overlook the clichéd dialogue and the wires keeping the balloon afloat on screen.

Reviewer B

In defence of both the film and myself, I was only seven or eight when I first saw it. I was enchanted by it then as only a kid can be, and on reflection, it really is a film just for that age group. I appreciate that the movie's brilliance is its simplicity, but my adult sensibilities left me wanting more as the film drew to a close. This is no fault of the film but more in the casting of the director's son in the starring role. There are a few moments that call for more of a theatrical response, but he is clearly a novice and is never convincing. Perhaps the most innovative element of The Red Balloon is its method of telling a story with practically no dialogue. Instead, music ties it all together in place of a narrator, who might more bluntly interpret the layers of meaning for viewers.

Reviewer C

The key to The Red Balloon's lasting endurance is its simplicity - it's a fantastical story that conveys a timeless message. Lamorisse captures the events through an innocent's eyes, with his son in the leading role. He uses visual imagery that appeals to younger viewers; even its darkest moments are communicated in a way that young children will comprehend with ease. And he does all of this without ever talking down to the audience, which is why it remains appreciated by fans as they grow old – not out of mere nostalgia, but out of true respect for a marvellous work of art. As the story reaches its unexpected yet satisfying conclusion, the director's lack of embellishment and his son's superb delivery create an enduring fable.

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Reviewer D

There's a certain power to the way in which The Red Balloon tells the classic tale of the human spirit triumphing over hardship and injustice through the eyes of a child, expertly communicating this valuable, timeless message without resorting to unnecessary detail and lengthy explanations. Making his debut at the tender age of six, Pascal Lamorisse, the exceptional young actor, coincidentally the son of director Albert, shares the starring role with the balloon and manages to deliver the very few scripted lines with true emotion. It's difficult to imagine anyone else in the role. There's no denying that the film's a masterpiece, which for decades has delighted viewers, from youngsters to grandparents, and everyone in between, many of whom return to it time and again. I distinctly recall first watching in awe as the film reached its climax and the boy finally floated away. For the more mature viewer, there's a slight sense of inevitability regarding what's about to happen, which somewhat takes the shine off that moment, but the film still remains one of my all-time favourites.

30.	Which reviewer has a different opinion from Reviewer C on the quality of acting in the movie?	**Reviewer B**
31.	Which reviewer shares an opinion with Reviewer A regarding the success of the movie's ending?	**Reviewer C**
32.	Which reviewer expresses a different view from the other three reviewers on who the movie is suitable for?	**Reviewer B**
33.	Which reviewer shares an opinion with Reviewer B on how effective the use of language is in the movie?	**Reviewer D**

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