

TOEFL Reading Section Practice Questions

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DIRECTIONS: Each passage or pair of passages below is followed by several questions. After reading each passage or pair, choose the best answer to each question based on what is stated or implied in the passage or passages (1-10)

Passage 1: The Development of Writing Systems

The evolution of writing is as old as history itself. The earliest forms of written communication originated in Sumer, located in southern Mesopotamia, around 3500 BCE. Initially, this writing began as a system of pictographs. Over time, the pictorial representations became simplified and more abstract. Writing systems evolved to include symbols that represented sounds as well as ideas and objects. Such systems are known as phonograms.

Among the early writing systems, Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Mesopotamian cuneiform are the most renowned. Hieroglyphs were used primarily for monumental inscriptions. They consisted of several hundred characters that could represent both the sounds of the Egyptian language as well as broader concepts or ideas. Cuneiform, on the other hand, began as pictographs and gradually evolved into a complex system of wedge-shaped signs drawn on clay tablets with a blunt reed for a stylus.

These early scripts were vital in maintaining the economic and religious life of the time, allowing for the recording of transactions, historical events, and spiritual texts. Moreover, as the writing systems spread, they adapted to different languages and cultures, underlining their versatility and impact on communication across ancient civilizations.

Questions and Answers

1. What was one of the primary uses of early writing systems?

- A) To create complex fictional stories
- B) To record economic transactions and historical events
- C) To serve as artistic decoration

Correct Answer: B) To record economic transactions and historical events

Explanation: The passage notes that early scripts were crucial for “maintaining the economic and religious life of the time,” specifically highlighting the recording of transactions and historical events.

2. How did cuneiform script differ from Egyptian hieroglyphs?

A) Cuneiform symbols were based on abstract ideas, while hieroglyphs were purely phonetic.

B) Hieroglyphs were used mainly for religious texts, while cuneiform was used primarily for public inscriptions.

C) Cuneiform involved wedge-shaped signs and was initially pictographic before becoming more abstract.

Correct Answer: C) Cuneiform involved wedge-shaped signs and was initially pictographic before becoming more abstract.

Explanation: The passage describes cuneiform as starting from pictographs and evolving into wedge-shaped signs, contrasting with hieroglyphs which were used mainly for monumental inscriptions and represented sounds and ideas.

3. What does the passage imply about the adaptability of early writing systems?

A) They were rigid and could not be adapted to different languages.

B) They were primarily used within the civilizations they were created and not outside.

C) They adapted to different languages and cultures, showing their versatility.

Correct Answer: C) They adapted to different languages and cultures, showing their versatility.

Explanation: The passage states that as writing systems spread, they “adapted to different languages and cultures,” indicating their flexibility and widespread impact.

Passage 2: The Role of Fire in Human Evolution

Fire has played a pivotal role in human evolution, influencing various aspects of human development and culture. The controlled use of fire by humans dates back nearly 400,000 years, according to archaeological evidence. This mastery of fire provided warmth in cold climates, protection from predators, and a new method for cooking food, which had profound effects on human nutrition and social dynamics.

Cooking with fire led to more easily digestible and nutritious food, which contributed to the development of larger human brains. The social aspect of gathering around a fire likely facilitated language development and cultural practices, establishing the rudiments of society. Additionally, the ability to sustain fire through the night extended the day, providing more time for social interactions and the development of tools and skills.

Fire also enabled humans to move into new, colder territories, as it provided a reliable source of warmth and a means to create more habitable environments. This capability not only allowed human populations to survive in diverse climates but also facilitated a spread across different geographical landscapes, increasing the species' overall adaptability.

Questions and Answers

1. What was one of the significant impacts of the controlled use of fire on human diet?

A) It led to a decrease in the variety of available foods.

B) It made food more nutritious and easier to digest.

C) It increased the time required to prepare food.

Correct Answer: B) It made food more nutritious and easier to digest.

Explanation: The passage explains that cooking with fire “led to more easily digestible and nutritious food,” which directly influenced the development of larger brains and advanced human evolution.

2. How did fire contribute to human societal development according to the passage?

A) By causing frequent migrations to avoid wildfires.

B) By facilitating gatherings that likely supported language and cultural practices.

C) By increasing reliance on natural sunlight.

Correct Answer: B) By facilitating gatherings that likely supported language and cultural practices.

Explanation: The passage states that gathering around a fire “likely facilitated language development and cultural practices,” underlining the role of fire in enhancing social interactions and the establishment of early societal structures.

3. What role did fire play in human geographical expansion?

- A) It discouraged movement into new territories due to the risks of forest fires.
- B) It enabled humans to inhabit colder regions by providing warmth and creating habitable environments.
- C) It limited human populations to specific climates that were naturally warm.

Correct Answer: B) It enabled humans to inhabit colder regions by providing warmth and creating habitable environments.

Explanation: According to the passage, fire allowed humans to “move into new, colder territories” and “provided a reliable source of warmth,” facilitating adaptation to diverse climates and geographical expansion.

Passage 3: The Megalithic Temples of Malta

[1] On the small Mediterranean island of Malta, visitors and archaeologists alike marvel at the ancient megalithic temples that dot the landscape. These structures are considered among the oldest free-standing buildings in the world, with some dating back to over 5000 years ago, predating even the pyramids of Egypt. Built from large limestone blocks, each temple showcases a unique architectural layout, typically featuring semi-circular chambers connected by a central corridor. The most renowned among these are Ħaġar Qim and Mnajdra.

[2] The temples were likely places of worship and ritual, possibly dedicated to a form of fertility goddess or the worship of ancestors. This theory is supported by the numerous figurines and statuettes discovered in the vicinity, depicting ample-bodied figures that suggest a reverence for fertility and motherhood. Archaeological findings, including animal bones and pottery, suggest that offerings and feasts might have been a regular practice within these compounds.

[3] The construction techniques of these temples are a marvel of prehistoric engineering. The builders of these temples used tools made of antler and stone to carve the limestone blocks from local quarries. Transporting these massive stones was no small feat; historians believe that logs and rounded stones might have been used as rollers, a method supported by the wear patterns found on some of the remaining limestone pathways leading to the sites.

[4] Various attempts have been made to replicate the building and transportation techniques believed to have been used. In one experiment, a group of archaeologists managed to transport a small limestone block using traditional methods over a short

distance, though the effort required was substantial. This has led some researchers to hypothesize that the building of these temples required not only advanced planning and community effort but also a well-organized societal structure capable of supporting such ambitious projects.

[5] Despite the robust construction, many of the temples are in a state of disrepair today, mainly due to natural erosion and past human activity. Efforts to preserve these sites have increased in recent years, with both local and international teams working to restore and protect these ancient monuments, recognizing their significance not just to Malta but to the world's cultural heritage.

Questions and Answers:

Question 1: What is the primary material used in the construction of the megalithic temples in Malta?

- A) Gold
- B) Limestone
- C) Wood
- D) Granite

Answer: B) Limestone

Explanation: The passage mentions that the temples were built from large limestone blocks, indicating that limestone is the primary material used.

Question 2: According to the passage, what was the likely purpose of the megalithic temples?

- A) Military fortifications
- B) Residential complexes
- C) Places of worship and ritual
- D) Commercial centers

Answer: C) Places of worship and ritual

Explanation: The passage suggests that the temples were used for worship and rituals, particularly focusing on fertility and the worship of ancestors.

Question 3: What technique is hypothesized to have been used to transport the massive stones to the temple sites?

- A) Floating them on water

- B) Carrying them by hand
- C) Using rollers and logs
- D) Levitation through ancient technology

Answer: C) Using rollers and logs

Explanation: Historians believe logs and rounded stones were likely used as rollers to transport the massive stones, as supported by wear patterns on limestone pathways.

Question 4: What challenge is currently faced by the megalithic temples in Malta?

- A) Overcrowding by tourists
- B) Natural erosion and past human activity
- C) Complete reconstruction
- D) Legal ownership disputes

Answer: B) Natural erosion and past human activity

Explanation: The passage indicates that the temples are mainly threatened by natural erosion and the effects of past human activity, necessitating preservation efforts.

TOEFL Writing Section Questions

Both integrated and autonomous writing assignments are included in the TOEFL writing section. The TOEFL writing for an academic debate task has taken the place of the solo writing work in the exam syllabus. It's crucial to regularly practise with the most recent TOEFL writing samples in order to get ready for the new exam format.

TOEFL Writing Academic Discussion

General guidelines:

In your response, you should do the following –

- Express and support your opinion.
- Contribute to the discussion in your own words.

An effective response will contain at least 100 words.

Question 1

The Role of Technology in Education

Professor: Today, we're discussing the role of technology in education. Some educators believe that integrating technology into the classroom enhances learning and accessibility. Others argue that it distracts students and undermines traditional learning methods. What's your perspective? Do you think technology is enhancing education, or is it creating more problems?

Michael: I believe that technology significantly enhances education. It provides students with access to vast resources and interactive tools that support diverse learning styles. Technologies like virtual reality can bring abstract concepts to life, making learning more engaging and effective. However, it's crucial to use technology appropriately and ensure it complements traditional teaching methods rather than replacing them.

Linda: I see the drawbacks of technology in education. While it offers many tools, it can also be a major distraction. Students often use technology for social media and entertainment during class, which hinders their learning. Furthermore, over-reliance on technology might impair basic skills like handwriting and mental arithmetic.

Your response: I think technology is a valuable tool in education when used responsibly. It offers unmatched flexibility and accessibility, allowing students to learn at their own pace and access materials anytime and anywhere. However, the key is balance. Educators should integrate technology to enhance learning while maintaining traditional educational values and teaching methods. Proper training and guidelines can help maximize the benefits of technology in education while minimizing its potential distractions.

Question 2

The Impact of Globalization on Local Cultures

Professor: Let's discuss globalization's impact on local cultures. Some argue that globalization promotes understanding and unity by spreading cultural awareness. Others believe it threatens traditional cultures and leads to cultural homogenization. What are your views on this? Is globalization enriching local cultures or diminishing them?

Anna: *I think globalization enriches local cultures. It introduces people to new ideas, foods, and customs, which can lead to greater tolerance and appreciation for diversity. Globalization also provides local artists and craftsmen with a broader market for their traditional products, potentially revitalizing cultural practices that might otherwise decline.*

Tom: *Conversely, I believe globalization is harming local cultures. It often results in cultural homogenization where dominant cultures overshadow local traditions, leading to a loss of diversity and identity. Local crafts and traditions are undervalued and replaced by global, often Western, influences.*

Your response: *In my view, globalization has a dual impact on local cultures. While it can lead to cultural homogenization, it also offers opportunities for cultural exchange and appreciation. The key is to foster a global environment that respects and protects local identities while encouraging intercultural exchange. Policies should be implemented to preserve traditional practices and promote sustainable and equitable cultural exchanges.*

Question 3

The Future of Work: Automation and Jobs

Professor: *Today, we'll discuss automation's impact on the job market. Some experts believe automation will create new job opportunities and increase productivity. Others fear it will lead to significant job losses and increased inequality. What's your take on this? Does automation represent a threat or an opportunity for workers?*

Rebecca: *I see automation as an opportunity. It can eliminate tedious, dangerous jobs and free up humans to engage in more creative and fulfilling work. Automation also leads to new industries and job categories, requiring new skills and offering fresh opportunities.*

David: *I'm concerned about automation. While it introduces efficiency, it also threatens many jobs, especially in sectors like manufacturing and transportation. There's a real risk of job displacement that could outpace the creation of new jobs, leading to unemployment and social unrest.*

Your response: *Automation presents both challenges and opportunities. The key to leveraging automation positively is through education and training. We need to prepare the workforce for the changes by providing them with the skills needed for new jobs created by automation. Furthermore, there should be policies in place to support those*

displaced by automation through retraining programs and social safety nets. With the right approach, automation can be a tool for progress.

Question 4

Renewable Energy and Its Challenges

Professor: Let's discuss renewable energy's challenges and potential. Some argue that renewable energy sources like wind and solar are the key to combating climate change. Others point out the limitations, such as their inconsistency and the high costs associated with technology. What are your thoughts? Can renewable energy realistically replace fossil fuels?

Charles: I believe renewable energy is our best option for a sustainable future. Technologies like solar and wind are rapidly advancing, reducing costs and improving efficiency. Although they currently face challenges like energy storage and weather dependency, ongoing research is addressing these issues.

Evelyn: However, the transition to renewable energy isn't straightforward. The initial investment is high, and the infrastructure for fossil fuels is deeply integrated into our economies. Also, renewables require significant land for infrastructure, which can disrupt local ecosystems.

Your response: Renewable energy is essential for sustainable development, but its implementation must be strategically planned. Overcoming the challenges of renewable energy requires not only technological advancements but also strong policy support and financial incentives. A gradual transition that includes improving the grid infrastructure and investing in energy storage technologies can make renewable energy more reliable and cost-effective. By addressing these challenges, renewable energy can become a viable alternative to fossil fuels.

Question 5

The Ethics of Genetic Engineering

Professor: Today, we're examining the ethics of genetic engineering. Some view genetic engineering as a breakthrough that can prevent diseases and improve quality of life. Others are concerned about the ethical implications, such as potential inequality and unforeseen consequences. What are your opinions on genetic engineering? Is it a promising advancement or a dangerous path?

Rachel: Genetic engineering holds incredible potential for good. It could eradicate hereditary diseases and improve crop resistance, which is crucial in addressing global food security. However, strict ethical guidelines and transparency are essential to ensure these advancements benefit everyone equally.

Mark: The risks of genetic engineering are too great. It could lead to a new form of inequality where only the wealthy can afford genetic enhancements. There's also the concern of unintended consequences, as altering one part of the genome might affect another unexpectedly.

Your response: Genetic engineering offers profound benefits, but it must be approached with caution. The focus should be on using this technology for universally beneficial purposes, such as disease prevention and food security, rather than for enhancement or cosmetic purposes. Robust ethical frameworks and international cooperation are necessary to monitor and guide the development and application of genetic engineering to ensure it serves the common good without compromising our natural genetic diversity.

TOEFL Integrated Writing Task

Passage 1

Brood parasitism is a behavior observed in certain bird species like the cuckoo, where they lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. This behavior is often seen as purely exploitative since the host birds invest their energy in raising offspring that are not genetically related to them.

Transcript of the Lecture: Professor: Recent studies provide a more nuanced view of brood parasitism. It has been observed that some host species may actually benefit from raising parasitic eggs. For example, parasitic chicks often mature faster and can help in deterring predators by their louder calls. Additionally, there is evidence suggesting that parasitic birds sometimes target those host species which have a higher survival rate, indirectly increasing the survival chances of the host's own offspring.

Sample Answer: The lecture offers insights that modify our understanding of brood parasitism, traditionally seen as purely exploitative as per the reading passage. Contrary to the reading, the professor points out that host birds might benefit from raising parasitic chicks. These chicks mature quickly and their louder calls can deter predators, which could also protect the host's biological chicks. Furthermore, by being targeted by parasitic birds, host species with higher survival rates could see an indirect benefit to their own offspring's survival chances. This complexity suggests that brood parasitism may have mutual advantages, challenging the notion of it being solely exploitative.

Passage 2

Antarctic krill form large swarms that can include millions of individuals, primarily as a defense mechanism against predators. This behavior is thought to make it difficult for predators to isolate and attack individual krill.

Transcript of the Lecture: Professor: While it's true that swarming in Antarctic krill provides a defense mechanism, recent research shows other significant benefits. These swarms actually facilitate mating and ensure genetic diversity. Swarming also helps in locating food sources more efficiently as the collective movement stirs up nutrients from deeper water layers.

Sample Answer: The lecture expands on the benefits of Antarctic krill swarming beyond just predator defense, as described in the reading passage. The professor explains that swarming not only protects krill from predators but also enhances their mating opportunities, promoting genetic diversity. Additionally, swarming aids in food discovery by mixing water layers and bringing nutrients up, which supports krill sustenance. These points suggest that the behavior of swarming serves multiple functional benefits, challenging the simplistic defense-only interpretation provided by the reading passage.

Passage 3

Many plant species rely on wind for pollination, which is viewed as a passive and random process dependent solely on the wind patterns.

Transcript of the Lecture: Professor: The idea that wind pollination is merely passive is increasingly being questioned. Plants have evolved specific features like the positioning of their stamens and pistils to enhance the capture of pollen carried by the wind.

Furthermore, some species release pollen only under optimal wind conditions, which maximizes the likelihood of pollen reaching other plants.

Sample Answer: The lecture provides a different perspective on wind pollination, traditionally seen as a passive process in the reading passage. According to the professor, plants exhibit evolutionary adaptations such as strategically positioned reproductive organs, which actively increase the efficiency of pollen capture. Additionally, the selective release of pollen during favorable wind conditions demonstrates a level of strategic behavior in maximizing pollination success. These insights challenge the view that wind pollination is entirely passive and random.

Passage 4

Bioluminescence in deep-sea creatures is primarily thought to be used for attracting prey or mates in the dark depths of the ocean.

Transcript of the Lecture: Professor: While attracting prey and mates is a significant function of bioluminescence, recent studies have shown that it's also used defensively. Some species use bioluminescence to confuse or deter predators. Others use it to illuminate the area around them and spot incoming threats.

Sample Answer: The lecture adds depth to our understanding of bioluminescence in deep-sea creatures, which the reading passage suggests is used mainly for attraction purposes. The professor highlights that, besides attraction, bioluminescence serves a defensive role. It can confuse predators or even help in predator detection by illuminating the surroundings. These points illustrate that bioluminescence has multifunctional uses in the deep sea, challenging the limited view presented in the reading passage.

Passage 5

Desert plants are often viewed as isolated entities fighting for survival in harsh conditions, mainly relying on storing scarce water to endure the dry seasons.

Transcript of the Lecture: Professor: This view of desert plants as solitary survivors is somewhat misleading. Research shows that many desert plants have symbiotic relationships with underground fungi, which help them absorb water and nutrients more effectively. These relationships are crucial for survival and growth in arid environments.

Sample Answer: *The lecture challenges the traditional view of desert plants as isolated survivors, as stated in the reading passage. The professor discusses the crucial symbiotic relationships these plants often form with fungi, enhancing their ability to absorb water and nutrients. This cooperation is vital for their survival and not merely a fight for individual survival. By highlighting these relationships, the lecture casts doubt on the simplistic view of desert plants as solely independent entities, suggesting a more interconnected survival strategy.*