

TOEFL Reading Practice Questions: 1-10

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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.

Passage 1

The ancient city of Caral, located approximately 200 kilometers north of Lima, Peru, is considered one of the oldest urban centers in the Americas. Founded around 2600 B.C., Caral flourished for over a millennium. At its zenith, the city likely housed thousands of residents for more than 60 hectares. The city was well-planned, featuring complex residential units, monumental architecture, including six large pyramidal structures, and an intricate system of irrigation for agriculture.

Caral was a significant hub in the trade networks that linked the Peruvian coast to the Andean highlands. The presence of marine shell beads and remnants of distant plants and animals indicates broad trading connections. Moreover, archaeological evidence suggests that Caral might have had a profound religious and cultural influence on surrounding regions. The discovery of musical instruments and the layout of the city, which aligns with astronomical events, underscores its cultural complexity and significance.

Despite the absence of warfare artifacts, which is unusual for pre-Columbian sites in the Americas, Caral appears to have maintained its prominence and growth through trade and a focus on cultural development. The eventual decline of Caral, around 1800 B.C., remains a topic of research, with theories pointing to environmental changes and shifts in trade routes as possible causes.

Questions:

1. What was a major factor in the growth of Caral?

- A. Extensive warfare with neighboring regions.
- B. Trade networks linking the coast and highlands.
- C. Isolation from other cultural centers.
- D. Lack of religious and cultural development.

2. Which statement is true about Caral based on the passage?

- A. The city was characterized by frequent warfare.
- B. Caral was primarily an agricultural community with little trade.
- C. The city layout suggests an alignment with astronomical events.
- D. Caral lacked any form of monumental architecture.

3. What likely contributed to the decline of Caral?

- A. Overpopulation and excessive urban sprawl.
- B. Environmental changes and shifts in trade routes.
- C. Invasion by neighboring city-states.
- D. A sudden lack of natural resources.

Answers and Explanations:

Answer: B – Trade networks linking the coast and highlands.

Explanation: The passage indicates that Caral's significant role in trade networks, especially linking the coastal and highland regions, was crucial for its growth. This is in contrast to warfare, isolation, or lack of cultural development, which were not mentioned as growth factors.

Answer: C – The city layout suggests an alignment with astronomical events.

Explanation: The passage highlights the discovery of Caral's city layout aligning with astronomical events, which indicates a sophisticated understanding of astronomy and its cultural importance, differentiating it from the other choices which are either incorrect or not supported by the passage.

Answer: B – Environmental changes and shifts in trade routes.

Explanation: The passage suggests that the decline of Caral might have been influenced by environmental changes and shifts in trade routes, which are common factors in the decline of ancient civilizations. The other options do not align with the information provided in the passage.

Passage 2

The medieval town of Cahokia, situated near modern-day St. Louis, Missouri, was once the largest and most influential urban settlement of the Mississippian culture, which thrived from about A.D. 600 to 1400. Established around A.D. 1050, Cahokia's population is estimated to have reached up to 20,000 inhabitants at its peak between the 11th and 13th centuries. The city covered over 16 square kilometers and included approximately 120 manmade earthen mounds, the largest of which, Monks Mound, covered 14 acres and was 100 feet high.

Cahokia was a major center for trade due to its strategic location near the confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois Rivers. This advantageous positioning allowed it to become a central hub for trade networks that extended across the North American continent. Goods such as copper from the Great Lakes, seashells from the Gulf Coast, and obsidian from the Rocky Mountains have been found at the site, indicating a wide trade network.

The town was also known for its sophisticated engineering and urban planning. It featured a centrally planned grid system, woodhenge sun calendars, and extensive agricultural fields that supported its large population. However, the reasons for Cahokia's sudden decline in the 14th century remain a subject of debate among archaeologists. Theories range from environmental degradation, such as deforestation and floods, to societal factors like political instability and warfare.

Questions

What is indicated by the presence of goods from distant regions in Cahokia?

- A. The town was a recipient of international aid.
- B. Cahokia was a major trading hub.
- C. The inhabitants traveled extensively across continents.
- D. Cahokia was isolated from other cultural groups.

Which feature of Cahokia reflects its advanced engineering and planning?

- A. The location near three rivers.
- B. The use of woodhenge sun calendars and a grid system.
- C. The decline in the 14th century.
- D. The presence of 120 residential buildings.

What are possible reasons for Cahokia's decline?

- A. Invasion by European settlers.
- B. Environmental and societal challenges.
- C. Lack of trade networks.
- D. Overpopulation leading to famine.

Answers and Explanations

1. Ans B – Cahokia was a major trading hub.

Explanation: The discovery of materials such as copper, seashells, and obsidian from far-flung areas of North America suggests that Cahokia was integral in extensive trade networks. This excludes it being merely a recipient of aid, inhabitants traveling extensively, or being culturally isolated.

2. Ans B – The use of woodhenge sun calendars and a grid system.

Explanation: Cahokia's advanced urban planning is evidenced by its systematic grid layout and the use of woodhenge structures for astronomical observations, showcasing sophisticated engineering capabilities that go beyond mere geographic advantages or the number of its mounds.

3. Ans B – Environmental and societal challenges.

Explanation: The passage mentions theories suggesting that Cahokia's decline could have been due to environmental issues like deforestation and floods, as well as societal factors such as political instability and possible warfare. This choice comprehensively covers the probable reasons for its decline, unlike the other options which are either too specific or not supported by the passage.

Passage 3

Paleontologists have long debated that the extinction of the dinosaurs was likely due to climatic shifts linked with the gradual changes in the position of continents and oceans driven by plate tectonics. During the Cretaceous period, the last era of the Mesozoic when dinosaurs thrived, vast shallow seas covered significant portions of the continents. Various forms of data, including geochemical markers found in seafloor sediments, suggest that the climate during the late Cretaceous was milder than it is

today, with temperate days and nights, as well as moderate summers and winters. These shallow continental seas may have helped stabilize the surrounding air temperature, maintaining it relatively constant.

At the end of the Cretaceous, geological evidence indicates these seas receded back to the major ocean basins for reasons unknown. Over about 100,000 years, as the seas receded, global climates shifted to become more severe—with hotter days and colder nights, and more extreme seasons. It's speculated that dinosaurs could not adapt to these drastic temperature fluctuations and went extinct.

However, if this theory holds, the question arises: why did cold-blooded animals like snakes, lizards, turtles, and crocodiles survive these harsh conditions? These animals depend heavily on the ambient climate for body temperature regulation. It seems puzzling that they weren't as adversely affected as the dinosaurs, especially considering that some scientists propose dinosaurs were warm-blooded. Critics of this theory also note that shallow seas had advanced and receded multiple times during the Mesozoic without causing dinosaur extinction. Therefore, the idea that mere climatic changes related to sea levels led to dinosaur extinction seems insufficient.

In pursuit of other explanations, scientists made a striking observation that led to a new hypothesis. There's a noticeable absence of many plant and animal species in the fossil record immediately transitioning from the Cretaceous to the Cenozoic era. This transition is marked by a thin layer of clay between rock layers. By analyzing the clay's iridium (Ir) content—a rare element more common in meteorites—scientists speculated about the duration of the extinctions. Despite initial estimates suggesting a million years for the clay's deposition based on iridium content, other evidence contradicted this timeframe. This anomaly suggested that the high iridium levels could have resulted from an extraordinary event.

Consequently, the hypothesis was formed that a massive asteroid impact, which led to a dust cloud that blocked sunlight for months, disrupted photosynthesis, and significantly altered the climate, might explain the swift extinction of dinosaurs and other species within a mere fifty years.

Questions

1. What was the initial hypothesis regarding the extinction of the dinosaurs according to the passage?

- A) A giant asteroid impact ended the dinosaur era.
- B) Dinosaurs could not adapt to severe temperature fluctuations.
- C) Climatic changes due to the movement of continents and seas.
- D) A sudden increase in volcanic activity.

2. Why do critics find the climate change hypothesis insufficient to explain the extinction of dinosaurs?

- A) Dinosaurs were able to survive previous climatic fluctuations.
- B) There is no evidence of climatic changes during the Cretaceous period.
- C) Cold-blooded animals would have been affected more than dinosaurs.
- D) The geological record does not show significant climatic shifts.

3. What led scientists to propose the asteroid impact hypothesis for the extinction of dinosaurs?

- A) Discovery of high levels of iridium in boundary clay.
- B) Evidence of severe volcanic activity at the end of the Cretaceous.
- C) Lack of fossil evidence for dinosaurs before the Cenozoic era.
- D) Observation of increased ultraviolet radiation from the sun.

4. How did the shallow seas of the Cretaceous period likely affect the climate according to the passage?

- A) They caused extreme weather patterns and harsh winters.
- B) They led to a decrease in global temperatures.
- C) They stabilized the temperature of the nearby air.
- D) They increased humidity and caused frequent rainfall

Answers and Explanations

Answer: C) Climatic changes due to the movement of continents and seas.

Explanation: The passage initially discusses the long-held belief that gradual climatic changes, influenced by the movement of continents and seas due to plate tectonics, were responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs.

Answer: A) Dinosaurs were able to survive previous climatic fluctuations.

Explanation: Critics argue that since dinosaurs had previously survived multiple advances and retreats of shallow seas and associated climatic changes during the Mesozoic, the hypothesis that the climatic shifts at the end of the Cretaceous alone caused their extinction seems insufficient.

Answer: A) Discovery of high levels of iridium in boundary clay.

Explanation: The passage describes how an unexpected high concentration of iridium, an element commonly found in meteorites, in the boundary clay layer led scientists to hypothesize a massive asteroid impact as the cause of rapid and widespread extinction events at the end of the Cretaceous period

Answer: C) They stabilized the temperature of the nearby air.

Explanation: The passage explains that during the Cretaceous period, extensive shallow seas covered large areas of the continents. These seas likely acted as temperature buffers for the air above them, maintaining a more constant climate that was neither too hot nor too cold, which in turn

may have made the environment more habitable for diverse forms of life, including the dinosaurs.

TOEFL Writing Practice 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

Professor: Today, we're discussing the impact of influencer marketing. Some people argue that using influencers to promote products is an effective strategy because it reaches a wide audience and builds trust. Others argue that it can be misleading and create unrealistic expectations for consumers. What's your perspective? Do you think influencer marketing is a beneficial strategy for businesses, or does it do more harm than good?

Sarah: I believe influencer marketing is beneficial. Influencers have built-in audiences who trust their opinions, making them effective at promoting products. When influencers genuinely like and use a product, their endorsements can be very persuasive. However, transparency is crucial.

Influencers should disclose paid partnerships to avoid misleading their followers. This way, influencer marketing can remain ethical and effective.

James: I disagree with Sarah. While influencer marketing can reach many people, it often sets unrealistic expectations. Many influencers present a curated, idealized version of reality that can mislead consumers about the product's true benefits. This can lead to disappointment and mistrust. Instead, businesses should focus on authentic, user-generated content to promote their products.

Your response:

I believe influencer marketing is a beneficial strategy for businesses when done ethically. Influencers have the power to reach niche audiences and create personal connections that traditional advertising cannot achieve. When influencers genuinely use and believe in a product, their recommendations can significantly impact their followers' purchasing decisions. However, transparency is key. Influencers must clearly disclose paid promotions to maintain trust with their audience. Additionally, businesses should collaborate with influencers who align with their brand values and have authentic engagement with their followers. With these practices, influencer marketing can be both effective and ethical, fostering trust and driving sales.

Question 2

Professor: Today, we're discussing the role of social media in brand reputation. Some people believe that social media is a powerful tool for building and maintaining a positive brand reputation. Others argue that it exposes brands to negative feedback and public criticism. What's your opinion? Do you think social media is beneficial or harmful to brand reputation?

Emily: I think social media is highly beneficial for brand reputation. It allows companies to engage directly with their customers, respond to feedback promptly, and showcase their values and personality. Positive interactions on social media can strengthen customer loyalty and attract new customers. While negative feedback is inevitable, how a brand handles it publicly can demonstrate their commitment to customer service and transparency.

David: I disagree with Emily. Although social media offers opportunities for engagement, it also exposes brands to constant scrutiny and potential backlash. One negative incident can quickly go viral, damaging a brand's reputation. Managing social media effectively requires significant resources and a proactive approach to mitigate risks, which not all companies can afford.

Your response:

I believe social media is a double-edged sword for brand reputation, but its benefits outweigh the risks when managed correctly. Social media offers unparalleled opportunities for brands to interact with their audience, build trust, and showcase their commitment to customer satisfaction. Negative feedback can be challenging, but it also provides valuable insights for improvement and a chance to demonstrate accountability. Brands that approach social media with transparency, responsiveness, and genuine engagement can leverage it to enhance their reputation and foster long-term loyalty.

Question 3

Professor: Today, we're discussing the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer behavior. Some people argue that celebrities can significantly influence consumers and drive sales. Others believe that celebrity endorsements are overrated and can backfire if the celebrity's image changes. What's your opinion on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in marketing?

Lisa: I think celebrity endorsements are highly effective in influencing consumer behavior. Celebrities have a large following and their endorsement can boost a brand's visibility and credibility. When a popular celebrity endorses a product, it can create a strong association and attract their fans to try the product, driving sales and brand loyalty.

Tom: I disagree with Lisa. While celebrity endorsements can increase brand awareness, they are risky. If a celebrity's image changes negatively, it can reflect poorly on the brand. Additionally, consumers are becoming more skeptical of endorsements and prefer authentic recommendations from real users or influencers who seem more relatable and trustworthy.

Your response:

I believe that celebrity endorsements can be effective in marketing, but they come with risks that need careful management. Celebrities can bring instant recognition and credibility to a brand, attracting their fan base. However, brands must choose endorsers who align with their values and image. It is also important to complement celebrity endorsements with genuine testimonials from everyday users to build trust and authenticity. Balancing celebrity influence with real user experiences can create a robust and credible marketing strategy.

Question 4

Professor: Today, we're discussing the effectiveness of loyalty programs. Some people argue that loyalty programs are essential for retaining customers and encouraging repeat purchases. Others believe they are ineffective and only attract deal-seekers with no real brand loyalty. What's your perspective on the effectiveness of loyalty programs?

Sophia: I believe loyalty programs are highly effective in retaining customers and fostering brand loyalty. They provide incentives for repeat purchases and make customers feel valued. A well-designed loyalty program can increase customer lifetime value and encourage word-of-mouth referrals, benefiting the brand in the long term.

Ryan: I disagree with Sophia. While loyalty programs can attract customers, they often appeal to deal-seekers who are not truly loyal to the brand. These programs can be costly to maintain and may not provide a significant return on investment. Instead, companies should focus on improving product quality and customer service to build genuine loyalty.

Your response:

I think loyalty programs can be highly effective if they are well-structured and provide real value to customers. These programs should go beyond just discounts and offer personalized rewards and exclusive experiences that resonate with the brand's loyal customers. By understanding customer preferences and tailoring the program accordingly, companies can foster genuine loyalty and increase customer retention. Combining a strong loyalty program with exceptional product quality and customer service can create a comprehensive strategy for long-term success.

Question 5

Professor: Today, we're discussing the ethics of competitive advertising. Some people argue that comparing your product directly with a competitor's in advertising is an effective way to highlight your advantages. Others believe it is unethical and can lead to misleading claims. What's your view? Do you think competitive advertising is a fair marketing strategy?

Anna: I believe competitive advertising is fair and effective as long as it is truthful and not misleading. It helps consumers make informed decisions by clearly outlining the differences between products. However, companies must ensure their claims are backed by factual evidence and presented honestly to maintain credibility and trust with consumers.

John: I disagree with Anna. Competitive advertising often leads to exaggerated or misleading claims that can confuse consumers. Instead of focusing on competitors, companies should highlight their unique strengths and benefits. This approach fosters a more positive image and avoids potential legal and ethical issues associated with disparaging competitors.

Your response:

I think competitive advertising can be a fair and effective marketing strategy if conducted ethically. It provides consumers with clear comparisons that can aid in their decision-making process. However, it is crucial for companies to base their claims on accurate data and avoid exaggeration or deception. By maintaining honesty and transparency, competitive advertising can enhance consumer trust and allow companies to differentiate themselves in a crowded market.

TOEFL Integrated Writing Task

1. Reading Passage (Reading time: 3 minutes)

Cooperative breeding is a behavior exhibited by some species where individuals assist in the raising of offspring that are not their own. This phenomenon is seen as an example of selflessness, as the helpers often gain no direct reproductive benefit from their efforts. In some bird species, such as the Florida scrub-jay, non-breeding individuals help to feed and protect the nestlings of their colony mates. These helpers are typically older offspring of the breeding pair, and they delay their own reproduction to assist their parents and siblings. This behavior is seen as altruistic

because the helpers increase the survival chances of their kin at the cost of their own reproductive opportunities.

Transcript of the Lecture:

Professor: In recent years, research into cooperative breeding has led to some fascinating insights that challenge our traditional understanding of this behavior. A notable study on Florida scrub-jays revealed that helpers might not be as selfless as once thought. It turns out that these helpers actually benefit in several ways from their actions. First, by staying in the natal territory and helping, they increase their chances of inheriting a territory when the breeding pair dies or relocates. This is crucial because territory is scarce and fiercely contested among scrub-jays.

Moreover, while they are helping, these individuals gain valuable parenting experience, which significantly enhances their own success when they eventually breed. Additionally, the presence of helpers tends to deter predators and rival groups more effectively, improving the overall survival rate of the nestlings in their territory, including future offspring of the helpers themselves. So, while their behavior appears altruistic, it's actually an investment in their own genetic future, as they indirectly ensure the propagation of their genes through their kin and enhance their future reproductive success.

Question: Now summarize the points made in the lecture, compose your response and clarify how they cast doubt on the points made in the reading passage.

Sample Answer: *The lecture presents compelling evidence that challenges the traditional view of cooperative breeding as purely altruistic, as described in the reading passage. The study on Florida scrub-jays illustrates that helpers benefit in multiple ways from their actions. Unlike the passage's depiction of selflessness, the lecture explains that helpers stay in their natal territory not out of selflessness, but to increase their chances of inheriting it, which is a significant advantage given the scarcity of territories. Furthermore, by assisting in the care of young, helpers gain*

valuable parenting skills that enhance their own reproductive success when they eventually breed. Additionally, their presence strengthens the group's defense against predators and rivals, indirectly benefiting their future offspring. Thus, the lecture suggests that what appears as altruistic behavior might actually be a strategic investment in their own genetic future, casting doubt on the purely selfless interpretation initially provided by the reading passage.

2. Reading Passage

The phenomenon of reciprocal altruism is seen in some species, where individuals perform acts that benefit others with the expectation that these acts will be reciprocated in the future. This is thought to evolve in social animals where repeated interactions occur among individuals. For example, vampire bats are known to regurgitate blood to feed peers who have failed to feed themselves.

Transcript of the Lecture:

Professor: Recent studies have indicated that reciprocal altruism may involve more self-serving motives than previously thought. For instance, vampire bats tend to share blood more frequently with individuals that are either relatives or have shared with them in the past, suggesting a strategic choice to enhance their own survival prospects rather than a simple altruistic impulse.

Question:

Summarize the points made in the lecture and explain how they contradict the reading passage's description of reciprocal altruism.

Sample Answer:

The lecture refutes the notion from the reading passage that reciprocal altruism in vampire bats is primarily altruistic. Instead, it reveals that these bats selectively share blood with relatives or previous benefactors, indicating a strategic approach aimed at maximizing personal benefits. This suggests that actions deemed altruistic are actually calculated

decisions to ensure personal survival and genetic propagation, thus challenging the interpretation of these behaviors as purely selfless.

3. Reading Passage

Eusociality is a form of social organization characterized by division of labor, cooperative care of young, and overlapping generations within a colony. The reading passage discusses bees as an example, highlighting how worker bees sacrifice their own reproductive capabilities to support the queen and the colony.

Transcript of the Lecture:

Professor: While it may seem that worker bees are sacrificing their own chances of reproduction out of altruism, recent research shows that these behaviors are genetically beneficial for them. Workers are closely related to the queen's offspring and therefore ensure their genetic material is passed on by supporting the colony.

Question:

How does the information in the lecture challenge the interpretation of eusocial behavior in bees as described in the reading passage?

Sample Answer:

The lecture suggests that the apparent self-sacrifice of worker bees is not purely altruistic. By assisting the queen and the colony, worker bees actually promote the survival of their own genes, as they are closely related to the queen's offspring. This self-interest component casts doubt on the reading passage's portrayal of their behavior as solely altruistic and highlights a genetic investment strategy rather than mere selflessness.

4. Reading Passage

Some animals engage in mobbing behavior, where groups of individuals collectively harass or attack a predator. This is often seen as an act of community defense and selflessness, especially in species like meerkats, where individuals risk their lives to protect the group.

Transcript of the Lecture:

Professor: Mobbing behavior in meerkats, upon closer examination, can also confer indirect benefits to the mobbers. By participating in mobbing, individuals may increase their social standing within the group and gain better access to resources and mating opportunities, thereby benefiting their own survival and reproductive success.

Question:

Explain how the points made in the lecture provide a different perspective on mobbing behavior in meerkats compared to the reading passage.

Sample Answer:

The lecture provides a different interpretation of mobbing behavior in meerkats, challenging the notion of it as purely altruistic. It suggests that meerkats who participate in mobbing might actually be seeking to improve their social standing and access to resources, which are crucial for their reproductive success. This self-beneficial angle contrasts with the reading passage's depiction of mobbing as an act of selflessness, thereby casting doubt on the altruistic interpretation of such behavior.

5. Reading Passage

The concept of warning calls among animals is typically viewed as an altruistic behavior, where individuals alert others of impending danger, often at a risk to themselves. For example, ground squirrels emit high-pitched sounds to warn their colony of nearby predators, seemingly compromising their own safety.

Transcript of the Lecture:

Professor: Although ground squirrels' warning calls might seem altruistic, recent studies suggest these calls also serve to confuse or deter predators, increasing the caller's chances of escape. Moreover, those who call frequently may be signaling their fitness to potential mates, thereby gaining a reproductive advantage.

Question:

Summarize how the lecture challenges the traditional view of warning calls as purely altruistic, as described in the reading passage.

Sample Answer:

The lecture challenges the traditional view that warning calls by ground squirrels are purely altruistic acts of self-sacrifice. Instead, it introduces the idea that these calls may also benefit the caller by confusing predators, thereby enhancing their own escape chances. Additionally, frequent callers might be using these calls as a display of fitness to attract mates, which adds a layer of personal reproductive benefit. These points suggest that what appears as altruism could actually be a complex strategy to increase personal survival and reproductive success, thus contradicting the purely selfless interpretation provided by the reading passage.