Reading Comprehension – Test 3

Name: Class: Date: Score: / 20

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Read each text carefully and choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each question.

Part 1: Popular science article

Read the article about memory and answer questions 1–7.

The Unreliable Archive

Ask a group of friends to describe a holiday they shared ten years ago and you are likely to hear several versions of the same week. One person remembers the storm on the second night; another is certain it came at the end. Each account is delivered with equal confidence, and each, quite possibly, is partly wrong. This is not a sign of carelessness. According to a growing body of research, it is simply how memory works.

For much of the twentieth century, the dominant metaphor for memory was the filing cabinet: experiences were stored intact and retrieved when needed. Psychologists now favour a rather less reassuring model. Every time we recall an event, we do not so much replay it as rebuild it, drawing on fragments of the original experience alongside our present knowledge, mood and expectations. The memory is then stored again, subtly altered by the act of remembering. In other words, the memories we revisit most often may be the ones that have drifted furthest from what actually happened.

Dr Helena Vásquez, who studies autobiographical memory, points out that this flexibility is not a design flaw. "A memory system that recorded everything perfectly would be enormously costly and not particularly useful," she explains. "What we need is the gist: enough to recognise danger, maintain relationships and plan ahead. Precision about the colour of someone's coat is a luxury evolution had little reason to pay for."

The consequences, however, can be serious. Studies have shown that people can be led to "remember" events that never took place simply by being asked suggestive questions or shown doctored photographs. In one well-known experiment, a significant minority of participants came to recall, sometimes in vivid detail, a childhood incident that the researchers had invented. Such findings have prompted courts in several countries to treat eyewitness testimony with greater caution than they once did.

Yet Vásquez is wary of the conclusion, popular in some media coverage, that memory is fundamentally untrustworthy. "Most of the time, our memories are accurate enough for the purposes we use them for," she says. "The problem arises when we demand from memory a kind of accuracy it was never built to provide, and then treat our confidence as proof."

That last point may be the most practical lesson. Confidence, research suggests, is a poor guide to accuracy: a vivid, emotionally charged memory feels true, but feeling true is not the same as being true. For those of us who are not witnesses in court, the implication is modest but worth holding on to. The next time a disagreement about the past threatens to spoil a family dinner, it may be worth remembering that both parties could be sincere, and both could be mistaken.

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1. Which of the following best expresses the central idea of the article?
   A Memory is so unreliable that personal recollections should generally be disregarded.
   B Memory is designed to capture the general meaning of events, so it is usually adequate but unreliable in precise detail.
   C Memories stay fixed once they are formed, but people often retrieve them incorrectly.
   D Emotional memories are more accurate than everyday ones because they are more vivid.

2. According to paragraph 2, why might the memories we recall most often be the least accurate?
   A They are stored in a separate part of the brain that fades quickly.
   B People tend to exaggerate them on purpose when telling others.
   C Each time they are recalled, they are rebuilt and stored again with small changes.
   D They are more likely to be confused with other people's memories.

3. In paragraph 4, the word 'doctored' in 'doctored photographs' is closest in meaning to:
   A altered in order to deceive
   B taken by medical professionals
   C old and badly damaged
   D carefully selected for an experiment

4. What does Dr Vásquez imply with her remark about 'the colour of someone's coat'?
   A People pay little attention to clothing when they first meet someone.
   B Humans have lost an ability to remember colours that they once had.
   C Accurate memory is only possible for people with special training.
   D Remembering precise details offered too little benefit to be worth the cost.

5. Why does the writer mention courts in paragraph 4?
   A To show that research on memory has had practical consequences beyond the laboratory.
   B To argue that most eyewitnesses deliberately lie in court.
   C To suggest that courts organised the false-memory experiments.
   D To prove that suggestive questions are now banned in all trials.

6. How does Dr Vásquez respond to the claim that memory is fundamentally untrustworthy?
   A She fully accepts it and believes the media have understated the problem.
   B She rejects it because she believes false memories almost never occur.
   C She thinks it exaggerates, since memory usually serves its everyday purposes well.
   D She refuses to give an opinion until more research has been done.

7. What does the writer suggest in the final paragraph?
   A Family arguments about the past can be settled by checking whose memory is more vivid.
   B People who remember a shared event differently may both be honest and yet both be wrong.
   C The person who feels most confident about a memory is usually right.
   D It is best to avoid discussing past events with relatives.

Part 2: Short story

Read the story and answer questions 8–14.

The Ridge

Maren had agreed to the walk mainly because refusing would have required an explanation. Her brother Teodor had suggested it in a message so brief it felt almost rehearsed: Saturday, the old ridge path, early start. They had not spent a whole day together since their father's house was sold, and the sale (who had wanted it, who had handled it, who had been consulted too late) still sat between them like a third walker neither of them acknowledged.

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The first hour passed in safe topics. The weather, which was holding. His new job, which he described in more detail than she needed. Her daughter's exams. Teodor walked ahead, as he always had, setting a pace that was just slightly too fast, and Maren found herself irritated by how familiar the view of his back was.

Near the cairn at the halfway point, the path narrowed and the wind picked up. Teodor stopped to retie a lace that did not need retying. "Dad used to make us stop here," he said, without looking up. "He'd give us each a square of chocolate and tell us the worst part was over."

"It never was," Maren said. "The scramble at the end was always worse."

"I know. I think that was the point." He straightened. "He wasn't lying, exactly. He just knew we'd keep going if we thought the hard bit was behind us."

She considered this. It was the kind of observation she would have expected from herself rather than from him, and it unsettled her slightly, as if he had borrowed something without asking.

They reached the scramble an hour later. It was shorter than she remembered, but steeper, and halfway up Maren's foot slipped on a loose stone. Before she could steady herself, Teodor's hand was there, gripping her wrist with a firmness that surprised them both. Neither spoke until they had reached the top.

At the summit, he produced a bar of chocolate from his pocket and broke off two squares with exaggerated ceremony. Maren laughed despite herself.

"I should have asked you," he said suddenly. "About the house. Before I signed anything. I told myself there wasn't time, but that wasn't really it."

It was not quite an apology, and a year ago she would have pointed that out. Instead she took the chocolate and looked down at the path they had come up, which from here seemed far gentler than it had felt.

"The worst part's over," she said.

He glanced at her, uncertain whether she meant the climb. She was not entirely sure herself.

8. Why did Maren agree to go on the walk?
   A She had always enjoyed walking with her brother.
   B She wanted to tell him how she felt about the sale of the house.
   C Her brother had insisted that she come.
   D Saying no would have meant explaining why she did not want to go.

9. The sale of the house sat between them 'like a third walker neither of them acknowledged'. This suggests that the sale was...
   A an unresolved issue that both were aware of but neither wanted to discuss.
   B a decision their father had made while he was still alive.
   C a topic they had already discussed and settled.
   D something only Maren knew about.

10. What is suggested by the fact that Teodor 'stopped to retie a lace that did not need retying'?
    A He was tired and needed an excuse to rest.
    B His boots were not suitable for the narrow path.
    C He was finding a moment to raise something difficult.
    D He wanted Maren to walk ahead of him for a while.

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11. What has Teodor come to understand about his father's words at the cairn?
    A His father truly believed that the rest of the walk was easy.
    B His father said them to keep the children going, not because they were true.
    C His father used the chocolate to punish slow walkers.
    D His father had never really stopped at the cairn.

12. At the summit, Teodor breaks off the chocolate 'with exaggerated ceremony'. This means he does it...
    A carefully, so that none of it is wasted.
    B quickly, without thinking about it.
    C reluctantly, as if it were a sacrifice.
    D in a deliberately formal, almost theatrical way.

13. 'It was not quite an apology, and a year ago she would have pointed that out.' What does this sentence imply about Maren?
    A She is now more willing to accept his words than she would once have been.
    B She has forgotten why she was upset about the house.
    C She believes his apology is complete and perfect.
    D She plans to criticise him once they get home.

14. What is the effect of the story's final lines?
    A They show that Teodor is annoyed with Maren for copying their father.
    B They reveal that Maren is certain the way down will be easy.
    C They suggest that Maren's words could refer both to the climb and to the conflict between them.
    D They indicate that Maren has decided to stop seeing her brother.

Part 3: Letter to the editor

Read the letter to a newspaper and answer questions 15–20.

Dear Editor,

I read Daniel Forsythe's article "Time to Let the Pen Go" (14 March) with interest, and with some sympathy for its central frustration. Anyone who has watched a class of ten-year-olds labour over joined-up letters while the clock ticks towards lunch will understand the appeal of his argument: that in an age of keyboards and voice recognition, schools should stop devoting precious hours to a skill most adults barely use. I would, however, urge readers to treat his conclusion with considerable caution.

Mr Forsythe presents handwriting as a purely mechanical skill, a means of putting words on paper that can be replaced by a faster, tidier alternative. This is where his case is weakest. A considerable body of research suggests that forming letters by hand engages the brain differently from pressing keys. Students who take notes by hand, for instance, tend to write less than those who type, yet they often recall and understand the material better, apparently because the slower pace forces them to summarise rather than transcribe. Handwriting, in other words, may be less about the page than about the thinking that happens on the way to it.

Nor is it obvious that the time saved would be well spent. Mr Forsythe suggests that the hours freed up could go to coding or digital literacy. Both are valuable, but they are not substitutes for the fine motor control, patience and attention to detail that handwriting practice develops, particularly in younger children. As an occupational therapist who works with primary schools, I see every week the difficulties faced by children whose hands have had too little practice at precise, controlled movement, and these difficulties extend well beyond writing.

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None of this means that schools should cling to every traditional practice. The insistence on a single, uniform style of joined-up writing, for example, seems to me far less defensible than the teaching of legible handwriting in general, and I would happily see it relaxed. Equally, there is no reason why pupils should not become fluent typists as well; the two skills are complementary rather than competing.

What concerns me most is the article's underlying assumption that if a technology can perform a task, the human skill behind it has become obsolete. Calculators did not make mental arithmetic worthless, and spell-checkers have not made spelling irrelevant. We should be wary of discarding a skill before we fully understand what else it was quietly teaching us.

Yours faithfully,

Grace Mbeki

Occupational therapist

15. Why has Grace Mbeki written to the newspaper?
    - **A** To support the article and suggest how its proposal could be put into practice.
    - **B** To question the article's conclusion while recognising why its argument is attractive.
    - **C** To complain that the newspaper published inaccurate research figures.
    - **D** To argue that schools should stop teaching typing and focus only on handwriting.
16. In paragraph 4, the writer says handwriting and typing are 'complementary rather than competing'. This means that the two skills...
    - **A** support each other, and each adds something the other lacks.
    - **B** are both free for schools to teach.
    - **C** are equally difficult for children to learn.
    - **D** will eventually replace each other.
17. According to the letter, why do students who take notes by hand often understand the material better?
    - **A** They write down more words than students who type.
    - **B** Handwritten notes are easier to read later.
    - **C** Teachers check handwritten notes more carefully.
    - **D** The slower pace makes them summarise ideas instead of copying everything.
18. Why does the writer mention that she is an occupational therapist who works with primary schools?
    - **A** To suggest that Mr Forsythe is not qualified to write about education.
    - **B** To advertise her services to local schools.
    - **C** To show that her views are based on direct experience with children.
    - **D** To explain why she has no interest in new technology.
19. Which traditional practice would the writer be happy to see changed?
    - **A** The requirement that all pupils use one uniform style of joined-up writing
    - **B** The teaching of legible handwriting in general
    - **C** Typing lessons in primary schools
    - **D** Activities that develop fine motor control
20. Why does the writer refer to calculators and spell-checkers in the final paragraph?
    - **A** To argue that both should be banned from classrooms.
    - **B** To show that a machine doing a task does not make the related human skill worthless.
    - **C** To prove that technology has damaged children's abilities.
    - **D** To predict that handwriting will disappear just as mental arithmetic has.

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Answer key – Reading Comprehension – Test 3

1 B	2 C	3 A	4 D	5 A	6 C	7 B	8 D	9 A	10 C
11 B	12 D	13 A	14 C	15 B	16 A	17 D	18 C	19 A	20 B

Explanations

1. **B** – The article argues that memory reconstructs the gist of events, which is usually good enough but not precise.
2. **C** – The text says each act of recall rebuilds the memory, which is then stored again 'subtly altered'.
3. **A** – 'Doctored' means changed dishonestly, here so that people believe something false.
4. **D** – She calls such precision 'a luxury evolution had little reason to pay for', meaning it was not useful enough for survival.
5. **A** – The courts' increased caution shows that the findings have affected real-life practice.
6. **C** – She says that most of the time our memories are 'accurate enough for the purposes we use them for'.
7. **B** – The writer concludes that 'both parties could be sincere, and both could be mistaken'.
8. **D** – The first sentence says she agreed 'mainly because refusing would have required an explanation'.
9. **A** – Like an ignored companion, the issue was present and noticed but deliberately not mentioned.
10. **C** – The unnecessary action, followed by him speaking 'without looking up', shows awkwardness before an emotional topic.
11. **B** – Teodor says their father 'knew we'd keep going if we thought the hard bit was behind us'.
12. **D** – 'Exaggerated ceremony' describes a playfully over-formal performance, here imitating their father's ritual, which makes Maren laugh.
13. **A** – She notices that the apology is incomplete but chooses not to object, which shows her attitude has softened.
14. **C** – Neither sibling is sure whether 'the worst part' means the climb or their disagreement, so the words have a double meaning.
15. **B** – She admits 'some sympathy' for the article's frustration but urges readers to treat its conclusion 'with considerable caution'.
16. **A** – 'Complementary' describes things that work well together and complete each other, the opposite of competing.
17. **D** – The writer says the slower pace 'forces them to summarise rather than transcribe'.
18. **C** – She uses her weekly professional experience as evidence for her point about fine motor skills.
19. **A** – She calls the insistence on a single uniform style 'far less defensible' and says she 'would happily see it relaxed'.
20. **B** – The examples challenge the assumption that a skill becomes obsolete once technology can perform the task.

Notes for teachers: Use this test as a timed exam practice task or work through one text per lesson. The questions target typical C1 weaknesses: choosing an answer because it repeats words from the text, reading figurative language literally, and confusing the writer's opinion with views the writer reports. Afterwards, ask students to underline the exact evidence for each answer. As a follow-up, students could write their own letter replying to Grace Mbeki or continue the story from Teodor's point of view.

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