Reading Comprehension – Test 4

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: Magazine article

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

The Uses of Boredom

There was a time when boredom was simply part of the texture of daily life. Waiting for a bus, sitting in a doctor's surgery or enduring a long car journey meant confronting stretches of time with nothing in particular to fill them. Today, those empty minutes have all but vanished. A phone in the pocket ensures that any pause, however brief, can be filled instantly with news, messages or games. On the face of it, this looks like progress. Few people, after all, would claim to enjoy being bored. Yet a growing number of researchers argue that by eliminating boredom we may have discarded something of genuine value.

Their case rests on what boredom actually does to the mind. Far from being a state of mental idleness, boredom appears to be a signal: an uncomfortable nudge telling us that our current activity is failing to engage us and that we should look for something more meaningful. “Boredom is less like an empty room and more like an alarm,” says Dr Hana Lindqvist, a psychologist who studies attention. “The discomfort is the point. It pushes us to change course.” When that alarm is silenced the moment it sounds, she suggests, we lose the prompt to reflect on what we actually want to be doing.

There is also evidence that boredom can feed creativity. In one frequently cited experiment, participants who first completed a deliberately tedious task, copying numbers from a telephone directory, later came up with more inventive uses for everyday objects than those who had skipped it. The theory is that a mind deprived of external stimulation begins to generate its own, wandering freely and making unexpected connections. Daydreaming, long dismissed as a waste of time, may in fact be when some of our most original thinking takes place.

Not everyone is persuaded. Critics point out that such studies tend to be small, and that the creative benefits, where they exist, are modest. More importantly, chronic boredom, the kind experienced by people trapped in monotonous jobs or isolated by circumstance, is associated with poorer mental health, not with flashes of inspiration. Lindqvist accepts the distinction. “I'm not romanticising boredom,” she says. “Being stuck in it for months is miserable. What I'm defending is the short, everyday kind that we now rarely allow ourselves to feel.”

What, then, should we do? Few experts recommend abandoning technology altogether. Instead, they suggest small acts of resistance: leaving the phone in another room during a meal, taking a walk without headphones, or simply tolerating a few minutes of waiting without reaching for a screen. These moments may feel awkward at first, even faintly absurd. But that awkwardness, researchers argue, is exactly what we have forgotten how to sit with, and it may be worth relearning.

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1. Which statement would the writer most likely agree with?
   A Smartphones are the main reason people have become less creative.
   B Constant access to distraction has removed an experience that can be valuable.
   C Boredom should be avoided because it is linked to poor mental health.
   D People were generally more content before mobile technology existed.

2. Dr Lindqvist describes boredom as 'less like an empty room and more like an alarm'. What point is she making?
   A Boredom is more intense than most people realise.
   B Boredom is a warning that something harmful is about to happen.
   C Boredom serves a purpose by prompting us to change what we are doing.
   D Boredom is impossible to ignore once it begins.

3. According to paragraph 3, what happened to participants who first completed the tedious task?
   A They thought of more original uses for ordinary objects.
   B They found it harder to concentrate afterwards.
   C They chose to skip the second part of the experiment.
   D They remembered more numbers than the other group.

4. In paragraph 1, the phrase 'On the face of it' is closest in meaning to:
   A Without any doubt
   B In reality
   C At first sight
   D From a personal point of view

5. Why does the writer distinguish between chronic and everyday boredom in paragraph 4?
   A To show that the critics have completely misunderstood the research
   B To admit a weakness in the argument while making clear which kind of boredom is being defended
   C To suggest that people in monotonous jobs are more creative than others
   D To argue that all forms of boredom are equally harmful

6. When Dr Lindqvist says 'I'm not romanticising boredom', she means she is not…
   A presenting boredom as more appealing than it really is
   B claiming that boredom is a modern problem
   C suggesting that boredom only affects lonely people
   D criticising people who feel bored

7. What does the writer suggest about the 'awkwardness' of unoccupied moments in the final paragraph?
   A It proves that the experts' advice is unrealistic.
   B It shows that people should give up technology entirely.
   C It will disappear once people buy fewer devices.
   D It is something people can no longer tolerate and should learn to accept again.

Part 2: Short story

Read the story about a radio presenter and answer questions 8–14.

Last Call

At ten minutes to midnight, Halima Yusuf adjusted her headphones and looked at the clock above the studio door, as she had done every weeknight for nineteen years. The station's new management had been polite about it. The late-night phone-in, they explained, no longer “fitted the direction of travel”. Listeners were moving to podcasts, and the slot would be filled by an automated playlist.

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Halima had nodded throughout the meeting, said she understood, and gone home to sit in her car outside her flat for forty minutes without turning off the engine.

Tonight was the final programme, and she had promised herself she would not make a fuss. No speeches, no farewells read from a card. Just the show as it had always been: the lines open, the lamp on the desk turned low, and whoever happened to be awake.

The first caller was a lorry driver parked somewhere on the coast road, who wanted to talk about the fog. The second was a student revising for an exam she was certain she would fail. Halima reassured her, as she had reassured hundreds of others, that certainty at two in the morning was rarely reliable. Then the switchboard lit up in a way she had not seen for years.

They did not mention that it was the last night, not at first. A nurse rang to say that the programme had kept her company through a decade of night shifts. A man called Rafael explained, with some embarrassment, that he had first phoned in at seventeen, after an argument with his father, and that Halima had said something he still remembered, although he would not repeat it on air. Halima did not remember saying it. She suspected that was often the way.

By half past three, her producer, Callum, had stopped trying to keep to the running order. He simply pointed at the board and held up his fingers: four more waiting, six, nine. Halima had prepared herself for silence, for a show that ended not with a bang but with nobody listening. She had not prepared for this.

At five to four, she faded down the final song and looked at the microphone for longer than was strictly professional. Dead air, her first editor used to call it, the worst sin in radio. She let it run for three full seconds.

“Thank you for staying up with me,” she said at last. It was what she said every night. Behind the glass, Callum put his head in his hands.

Then she switched off the lamp, and for the first time in nineteen years she did not know what time it was.

8. How did Halima respond when she was told that her programme was ending?
   A She persuaded the management to delay the decision.
   B She hid her distress behind an outward show of acceptance.
   C She was relieved, as she had been planning to leave.
   D She announced the news to her listeners that same night.

9. Why is the phrase 'fitted the direction of travel' placed in quotation marks?
   A To show that Halima often used the phrase on air
   B To suggest that the programme was mainly about traffic and travel
   C To emphasise that Halima agreed with the explanation
   D To show that these were the management's impersonal words, not Halima's

10. What had Halima expected the final programme to be like?
    A Full of speeches and formal farewells
    B Busier than usual because of the station's publicity
    C Quiet, with very few people listening or calling
    D Shorter than a normal programme

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11. Halima does not remember what she said to Rafael and 'suspected that was often the way'. This suggests she believes that...
    A her words have probably affected listeners more than she realises
    B Rafael has confused her with another presenter
    C she has become forgetful after years of night work
    D callers often exaggerate what presenters have told them

12. What does Callum's behaviour at half past three show?
    A He was trying to persuade Halima to end the show early.
    B He disapproved of the way Halima was presenting the show.
    C So many people were calling that the planned schedule was abandoned.
    D Technical problems meant he could no longer speak to Halima.

13. Why is it significant that Halima lets 'dead air' run for three seconds?
    A She has forgotten what she planned to say next.
    B She deliberately breaks a rule of her profession at an emotional moment.
    C She wants to check whether anyone is still listening.
    D She is following an instruction from her producer.

14. What does the final sentence of the story imply?
    A The studio clock has stopped working.
    B Halima is too tired to read the time.
    C Halima intends to return to the station the following night.
    D Halima has lost the routine that gave structure to her life.

Part 3: Advice column

Read the letter and the reply from a workplace advice column and answer questions 15–20.

Ask Marta: Workplace Dilemmas

Dear Marta,

Last month I was promoted to team leader, which means I now manage the five people I used to sit alongside as an equal. Two of them are close friends, and one applied for the same role and didn't get it. Since the announcement, conversations stop when I walk into the kitchen, and I've been left off a lunch invitation for the first time in four years. I'm starting to wonder whether I should have turned the job down. How do I get my team back?

Jonah

Dear Jonah,

First, a word of reassurance: what you are describing is not a sign that you made the wrong decision. It is a sign that something has changed, and that everyone, including you, is still adjusting. Promotion from within a team is one of the most awkward transitions in working life precisely because nobody's role is quite what it was, and nobody has yet agreed on what it has become.

That said, I'd gently challenge the way you've framed your question. You ask how to get your team 'back', but the team you had no longer exists. You cannot go back to being one of the group while also being responsible for their workloads, their appraisals and, occasionally, their disappointments. Trying to do both is the most common mistake new managers make, and it tends to satisfy no one. Your colleagues need to know where they stand with you, and that is difficult if you keep changing hats.

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So rather than trying to restore the old arrangement, aim to build a new one. Arrange a short one-to-one conversation with each person in the next fortnight. Ask what they need from you, what frustrated them about the previous manager and what they would like to stay the same. Then, and this is the part people skip, act visibly on at least some of what you hear. Trust in a new leader is earned less through warmth than through consistency.

Your colleague who applied for the role deserves particular care. Acknowledge, privately and without condescension, that the outcome must have been disappointing, and ask about their ambitions. Resist the temptation either to overcompensate with special treatment or to avoid them altogether; both will be noticed.

As for your friends, the friendships can survive, but they will need new boundaries. You may have to accept that some conversations are no longer appropriate, and that your friends may occasionally need to complain about work without you there. That is not betrayal; it is a healthy sign that people feel able to speak freely.

Finally, about that lunch. It stings, I know. But try not to read too much into a single invitation. Give it a few months before you draw any conclusions. Many people find that once the novelty fades, the atmosphere settles of its own accord.

Marta

15. What is Jonah's main reason for writing?
    A He wants advice on how to ask for a pay rise in his new role.
    B He believes his colleague was unfairly rejected for the promotion.
    C He feels his relationships at work have got worse since his promotion.
    D He has decided to resign and wants to know how to tell his team.

16. Why does Marta challenge the way Jonah has framed his question?
    A He assumes he can return to his old relationships, which is unrealistic.
    B He has exaggerated how badly his colleagues are behaving.
    C He is blaming his colleagues for problems he has caused himself.
    D He has not explained clearly what his new job involves.

17. In the second paragraph of the reply, 'keep changing hats' refers to...
    A frequently moving between departments in the company
    B switching inconsistently between being a friend and being a manager
    C copying the management style of the previous leader
    D dressing more formally now that he is in charge

18. According to Marta, which part of the one-to-one process do people most often neglect?
    A Arranging the meetings quickly enough
    B Asking about the previous manager
    C Keeping the conversations brief
    D Taking visible action in response to what they hear

19. What does Marta advise regarding the colleague who applied for the same role?
    A Offering them extra responsibility to make up for the disappointment
    B Giving them space by keeping contact to a minimum
    C Acknowledging their disappointment privately without treating them differently
    D Discussing the recruitment decision openly with the whole team

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20. What is Marta's view of Jonah being left out of the lunch invitation?

A It is a clear sign that his team has rejected him.

B It is hurtful but probably not significant on its own.

C He should raise the matter with his colleagues immediately.

D He should organise a team lunch himself to fix the problem.

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Answer key – Reading Comprehension – Test 4

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

Explanations

1. **B** – The article argues that by filling every pause with screens 'we may have discarded something of genuine value'.
2. **C** – She explains that the discomfort 'pushes us to change course', so boredom has a useful function.
3. **A** – The text says they 'came up with more inventive uses for everyday objects' than those who had skipped the task.
4. **C** – 'On the face of it' means judging by appearances, which the writer then goes on to question.
5. **B** – The writer accepts that long-term boredom is harmful, and Lindqvist clarifies she is only defending the 'short, everyday kind'.
6. **A** – To romanticise something is to make it seem more attractive than it really is, and she immediately admits long boredom is 'miserable'.
7. **D** – The writer says it is 'exactly what we have forgotten how to sit with' and that 'it may be worth relearning'.
8. **B** – She nodded and said she understood, but afterwards sat in her car for forty minutes, which shows she was upset.
9. **D** – The quotation marks point to the management's detached business language, which keeps a distance from Halima's own feelings.
10. **C** – She 'had prepared herself for silence, for a show that ended… with nobody listening'.
11. **A** – She realises that remarks she has forgotten may have stayed with many listeners for years.
12. **C** – He 'had stopped trying to keep to the running order' and used his fingers to show the growing number of waiting callers.
13. **B** – Dead air is 'the worst sin in radio', so allowing it shows how deeply moved she is at the end of her final show.
14. **D** – For nineteen years the show organised her nights; without it, she has lost her sense of time and routine.
15. **C** – He describes conversations stopping and being left out, and asks how to 'get my team back'.
16. **A** – Marta points out that 'the team you had no longer exists', so getting it 'back' is not possible.
17. **B** – The idiom refers to trying to be 'one of the group' and their manager at the same time, which confuses colleagues.
18. **D** – She writes 'this is the part people skip' just before advising him to 'act visibly on at least some of what you hear'.
19. **C** – She recommends a private acknowledgement and warns against both special treatment and avoidance.
20. **B** – She admits 'it stings' but tells him not to 'read too much into a single invitation' and to wait a few months.

Notes for teachers: Use the three sections as a single 40-minute test or as separate lessons. Many questions target C1 skills that learners often find hard: telling an author's own view apart from a reported one, reading implied emotion in fiction, and working out idioms from context. Distractors often repeat words from the text but distort the meaning, so ask students to justify each answer with evidence from the passage. As a follow-up, students could write a reply to Jonah or a short opinion paragraph on boredom.

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