

Reading Comprehension – Test 1



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

Part 1: Reflective essay

Read the essay about repairing everyday objects and answer questions 1–7.

There is a drawer in my kitchen that my children call, not unkindly, the museum of lost causes. It contains a radio without a dial, a pair of reading glasses missing one arm, three phone chargers of uncertain allegiance and a ceramic jug that broke into four tidy pieces two summers ago. Every so often someone suggests that the drawer be emptied into a bin, and every so often I resist, though I would struggle to defend my position in court. Each object, I tell myself, is merely waiting.

What it is waiting for, of course, is me – or rather the version of me who has the time, the glue and the patience that the actual me so conspicuously lacks. And here lies the quiet paradox of repair in an age of abundance. We have never had more information about how to fix things: tutorials for every hinge and zip, forums where strangers diagnose a faulty kettle from a single blurred photograph. Yet we have rarely been less inclined to act on it. Replacement is not merely cheaper; it is frictionless, and friction, it turns out, is precisely what most of us have been trained to avoid.

The manufacturers are not blameless. Many devices are now sealed with adhesives rather than screws, their components fused so that a single failure condemns the whole. But it would be too comfortable to lay the entire problem at the door of industry. The deeper shift is in our expectations. We have come to regard objects as services: things that should simply work, invisibly, and whose failure is an affront rather than an invitation. A broken toaster is no longer a puzzle to be solved but a minor betrayal to be punished by disposal.

Those who still repair tend to speak of it in terms that sound almost devotional. A woman who runs a monthly repair café in my neighbourhood – a room in the library where volunteers mend whatever residents bring – told me that what people value most is not the saving of money but the conversation. 'They stand beside you while you work,' she said, 'and you can watch them change their minds about the thing. It stops being rubbish and becomes theirs again.' I found this persuasive, if a little rosy. Not every lamp deserves resurrection, and there is a kind of sentimentality about mending that can tip into hoarding, as my own drawer attests.

Still, I think she has identified something the economists miss. To repair an object is to accept that it has a history, and that its flaws are part of that history rather than a departure from it. The mended jug, its seams visible, makes no pretence of being new. It is, if anything, more honest than it was before it fell. In a culture that prizes the seamless – the flawless surface, the update that installs overnight while we sleep – there is something mildly subversive about an object that wears its damage openly.

None of this means I will be emptying the drawer onto a workbench this weekend. I am too much a creature of my time for that. But I have begun, at least, to stop apologising for it. The museum of lost causes, I have decided, is not an archive of failure. It is a list of promises I have not yet broken, merely postponed.

1. What is the writer's main purpose in the essay?
 - A To persuade readers to attend their local repair café
 - B To explore why repair has become less common and what it may still offer
 - C To criticise manufacturers for making products that cannot be fixed
 - D To explain practical techniques for mending household objects
2. The phrase 'three phone chargers of uncertain allegiance' humorously suggests that the chargers...
 - A are of poor quality and likely to be unsafe
 - B were borrowed from other members of the family
 - C can no longer be matched with the devices they belong to
 - D have been damaged beyond any possibility of repair
3. What is the 'quiet paradox' described in the second paragraph?
 - A Information about repairing things is widely available, yet people rarely use it.
 - B Repairing objects has become more expensive than replacing them.
 - C Online repair tutorials frequently give misleading advice.
 - D People want to repair things but cannot obtain the necessary tools.
4. How does the writer view the role of manufacturers?
 - A They are entirely responsible for the decline of repair.
 - B They have no real influence on how consumers behave.
 - C They contribute to the problem, but changing attitudes matter more.
 - D They have recently started making products easier to repair.
5. When a broken object is described as 'an affront rather than an invitation', the writer means that people tend to...
 - A feel insulted by its failure instead of seeing a chance to engage with it
 - B invite friends and neighbours to help them repair it
 - C complain formally to the company that produced it
 - D feel guilty about the waste involved in throwing it away
6. How does the writer respond to the repair café organiser's comments?
 - A The writer dismisses them as naïve and unrealistic.
 - B The writer finds them largely convincing but somewhat idealised.
 - C The writer agrees completely and decides to become a volunteer.
 - D The writer suspects she is exaggerating to promote the café.
7. What does the final paragraph reveal about the writer?
 - A The writer has finally decided to repair everything in the drawer.
 - B The writer feels increasingly ashamed of keeping broken objects.
 - C The writer has accepted the habit without actually changing it.
 - D The writer intends to throw away the contents of the drawer.

Part 2: Literary fiction

Read the extract from a short story and answer questions 8–14.

The key was where Marguerite had always known it would be, under the third flowerpot from the left, though the pot itself had cracked and the geranium it once held had long since given up. She stood for a moment with the key cold in her palm, aware of how absurd it was to hesitate on the doorstep of a house in which she had learned to walk.

Inside, the hallway smelt of dust and, faintly, of the pipe tobacco her father had sworn he gave up in the nineties. She smiled despite herself. He had been a man of small, stubborn deceptions, none of them cruel, all of them transparent to everyone but him. The coat stand still held his raincoat, its pockets, she discovered, still holding a bus ticket, a pencil stub and a list in his cramped hand: 'bread, batteries, ring Marguerite'. She read the last item three times before folding the paper and putting it in her own pocket, where it seemed to weigh far more than paper should.

Her brother had offered to come. More accurately, Tomasz had offered in the tone people use when they are confident of being refused, and she had refused, partly to spare him and partly, if she was honest, to spare herself his efficiency. Tomasz would have arrived with boxes already labelled. He would have had the kitchen cleared by noon and a valuation for the piano by teatime, and he would have been right to do so, and she would have hated him for it in a way neither of them would ever mention.

The workshop was at the back, beyond the kitchen, down two steps that had always been one step too many for visitors, who stumbled with dependable regularity. Her father had refused to fix them. 'It keeps people humble,' he would say, which was the sort of thing he said instead of admitting he had simply never got round to it. She took the steps carefully now, as if he might be watching, ready to be pleased.

The room was exactly as he had left it, and that was the difficulty. A clock lay open on the bench, its innards arranged on a cloth in an order that would have meant something to him and meant nothing to her. A magnifying lamp was still angled over the work, as though he had stepped out to put the kettle on and might return at any moment to resume. She understood, with a clarity that felt almost physical, that whatever she did next would be the first decision in this room that was not his.

She had come intending to be practical. She had a notebook and a list of her own, and a vague plan involving charity shops. Instead she sat down on his stool, which was too low for her, as it had always been, and looked at the clock for a long time. She did not know how to repair it. She did not know, either, how to put the pieces in a box and carry them out to the car, which would at least have had the merit of being an ending.

Outside, a neighbour's dog began to bark and then thought better of it. Marguerite switched off the lamp. Then, after a moment, she switched it on again.

8. What does the detail of the cracked flowerpot and the dead geranium mainly suggest?
- A** Marguerite's father had never liked gardening.
 - B** Someone had recently moved the key.
 - C** Marguerite was unsure whether she had come to the right house.
 - D** Things at the house had gone uncared for in recent times.
9. Her father's deceptions were 'transparent to everyone but him'. This means that he...
- A** told lies deliberately in order to hurt people
 - B** believed his pretences were convincing, although others easily saw through them
 - C** was honest about everything except his own health
 - D** was often deceived by other people without noticing
10. Why does the list seem to 'weigh far more than paper should'?
- A** It reminded her of jobs she still had to do in the house.
 - B** The handwriting was so cramped that it was hard to read.
 - C** It showed that her father had been planning to contact her.
 - D** It proved that her father had started smoking again.

11. What can be inferred about Marguerite's relationship with Tomasz?
- A They argue openly whenever they meet.
 - B There is an unspoken tension beneath their politeness.
 - C She depends on him to make practical decisions for her.
 - D He resents her for having been their father's favourite.
12. What does the father's comment about the steps reveal about his character?
- A He wanted to stop visitors from entering his workshop.
 - B He was physically unable to carry out the repair.
 - C He genuinely believed that his visitors were arrogant.
 - D He used a witty remark to hide the fact that he had never done the job.
13. The room was exactly as he had left it, 'and that was the difficulty'. Why was this difficult for Marguerite?
- A Any action she took would be the first change made without him.
 - B The tools on the bench were too complicated for her to use.
 - C She could not find the notebook she had brought with her.
 - D The room was too untidy to clear in a single day.
14. What does the final action of switching the lamp off and on again most likely suggest?
- A She has decided to stay the night in the house.
 - B She is nervous about the dog barking outside.
 - C She is not yet ready to bring her father's work to an end.
 - D She intends to finish repairing the clock herself.

Part 3: Book review

Read the review of a history book and answer questions 15–20.

There is a particular kind of book that seems to have been written in reverse: the author arrives at a dazzling conclusion and then works backwards, assembling whatever evidence will carry the reader there. Ravi Anand's *Edges of the Known*, an ambitious study of how mapmakers have handled the unknown, is not quite that book, but it occasionally keeps uncomfortable company with it.

Anand's central argument is elegant and, at first glance, counter-intuitive. The blank spaces on old maps, he contends, were not admissions of ignorance so much as acts of intellectual honesty – a refusal to invent what could not be verified. The decline of the blank, which he traces from the eighteenth century onwards, therefore represents not simply the triumph of exploration but a gradual loss of tolerance for uncertainty. By the time every coastline had been charted, we had also, he suggests, forgotten how to live comfortably with not knowing.

It is a seductive thesis, and Anand pursues it with considerable flair. His chapters on early survey expeditions are vivid without being breathless, and he has a gift for the telling detail: the surveyor who marked a mountain range 'conjectural' in such small letters that later copyists omitted the word entirely, thereby turning a guess into geography. Such episodes illustrate his point beautifully, and he is at his best when he lets them speak for themselves.

The trouble begins when he does not. In the book's second half, Anand extends his argument from cartography to culture at large, and the leaps become harder to follow. A chapter linking the disappearance of blank spaces to the modern appetite for instant answers is lively but thinly sourced, relying more on assertion than demonstration. One senses an author who has grown so fond of his metaphor that he is reluctant to let it rest. By the time he is applying it to online search

engines and the design of shopping centres, the blank space has become less an idea than a skeleton key, expected to open every door.

It would be unfair, however, to dismiss the book on these grounds. Even its overreaching chapters are more stimulating than many more cautious studies, and Anand writes with a lucidity that historians of his field have not always managed. His prose is rarely ornamental; when it is, the ornament usually earns its place. Readers with no particular interest in maps will find themselves, perhaps to their surprise, lingering over reproductions of seventeenth-century coastlines – and the book's generous illustrations deserve credit here.

There is, too, a certain irony in the book's weaknesses. A work that celebrates the courage to leave things unsaid might itself have benefited from a little more restraint. Had Anand trusted his readers to draw the wider conclusions themselves, he would have written a shorter book and, I suspect, a more persuasive one. As it stands, *Edges of the Known* is an uneven but genuinely original contribution: a book to argue with, which is not the least of compliments.

15. In the first paragraph, the reviewer suggests that Anand's book...
- A** is written in an unusually complicated style
 - B** at times appears to select evidence to support a conclusion already reached
 - C** confuses readers by placing its conclusions before its evidence
 - D** ignores the work of earlier historians in the field
16. What is Anand's central argument?
- A** Blank spaces on old maps reflected a refusal to present what could not be confirmed.
 - B** Early mapmakers left spaces blank because they lacked the skill to fill them.
 - C** Maps became steadily less accurate as exploration increased.
 - D** Modern maps contain more invented details than older ones.
17. What does the anecdote about the surveyor mainly illustrate?
- A** Early surveyors rarely admitted any uncertainty in their work.
 - B** Copyists deliberately falsified maps for their own benefit.
 - C** Mountain ranges were the most difficult features to survey.
 - D** A cautious guess could accidentally come to be treated as established fact.
18. The reviewer says the blank space has become 'a skeleton key, expected to open every door'. This means that...
- A** the idea finally reveals the hidden meaning of the book
 - B** Anand's argument is deliberately secretive and obscure
 - C** the metaphor is being used to explain too many unrelated things
 - D** the concept is too simple for such a complex subject
19. What does the reviewer mean by 'the ornament usually earns its place'?
- A** Anand's writing is generally too decorative.
 - B** When his style becomes elaborate, it is generally justified.
 - C** The illustrations are the most valuable part of the book.
 - D** He avoids ornate language because he lacks the skill to use it.
20. What irony does the reviewer identify in the final paragraph?
- A** A book about unknown places was written by an expert who knows them well.
 - B** A book about maps contains surprisingly few illustrations.
 - C** A book that criticises certainty is itself full of doubt.
 - D** A book that praises restraint is itself insufficiently restrained.

Answer key – Reading Comprehension – Test 1

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

Explanations

- B** – The essay reflects on the decline of repair and its wider value; the café and manufacturers are only parts of this broader reflection.
- C** – 'Uncertain allegiance' playfully means it is unclear which devices the chargers 'serve' or belong to.
- A** – The writer says we have never had more repair information, 'yet we have rarely been less inclined to act on it'.
- C** – The writer says manufacturers are 'not blameless' but that 'the deeper shift is in our expectations'.
- A** – An 'affront' is an insult; an 'invitation' would be an opportunity to solve the problem, which people no longer see.
- B** – The writer calls her view 'persuasive, if a little rosy', and then adds reservations about sentimentality and hoarding.
- C** – The writer will not start repairing but has 'begun... to stop apologising', reframing the drawer as promises 'merely postponed'.
- D** – The cracked pot and the plant that had 'long since given up' point to a period of neglect.
- B** – 'Transparent' here means easy to see through; only he failed to realise this.
- C** – The item 'ring Marguerite', which she reads three times, carries a heavy emotional significance.
- B** – His insincere offer and the resentment 'neither of them would ever mention' point to a hidden tension.
- D** – The text says it was what he said 'instead of admitting he had simply never got round to it'.
- A** – She realises that 'whatever she did next would be the first decision in this room that was not his'.
- C** – Turning the lamp back on reverses a symbolic 'ending' and shows she cannot yet let go.
- B** – The book 'keeps uncomfortable company' with works that assemble evidence backwards from a chosen conclusion.
- A** – He contends the blanks were 'acts of intellectual honesty – a refusal to invent what could not be verified'.
- D** – When copyists dropped the word 'conjectural', a guess was turned 'into geography'.
- C** – A skeleton key opens many locks; here the metaphor is stretched to cover search engines and shopping centres.
- B** – To 'earn its place' means to justify being there, so his occasional decorative style is worthwhile.
- D** – The book 'celebrates the courage to leave things unsaid' but 'might itself have benefited from a little more restraint'.

Notes for teachers: Allow about 40 minutes, or set each section as a separate 12–15 minute task. Many distractors reward a literal or partial reading, for example taking 'written in reverse' at face value or confusing a writer's reservations with outright rejection. Students should justify their answers by pointing to the exact phrase in the text. For follow-up work, ask students to write a 150-word response to one of the texts, such as a reply to the essay or a continuation of the story.