ESL Reading Comprehension Passages with Questions and Answers (A1–C2, PDF)

Twelve short reading passages, two for every CEFR level from A1 to C2, each followed by five questions. Answers are included: tap to reveal them online, or use the answer key at the back of the printable PDF.

A1

1. Mia's Monday · true/false and short answers

Mia is a student. She lives in a small flat with her sister. On Monday she gets up at seven o'clock. She has toast and tea for breakfast. Then she takes the bus to school. Her first class is English. She likes English because her teacher is kind. After school, Mia goes home and watches TV.

Questions
1. True or false? Mia lives with her mother.
2. What time does Mia get up on Monday?
3. How does Mia go to school?
4. Why does Mia like English?
5. What does Mia do after school?

2. The Café on Green Street · true/false and short answers

There is a small café on Green Street. It is open from eight o'clock to five o'clock, every day except Sunday. The café sells coffee, tea, sandwiches and cake. A sandwich costs four euros. A coffee costs two euros. The owner is called Tom. He has a dog, and the dog sleeps by the door. Many people go there for lunch.

Questions
1. True or false? The café is open on Sundays.
2. What time does the café close?
3. How much is a coffee?
4. What is the owner's name?
5. Where does the dog sleep?

A2

3. A Weekend in the Mountains · short answers and true/false

Last weekend, Sara and her friends went to the mountains. They left the city on Friday evening and arrived at a small hotel at nine o'clock. On Saturday the weather was perfect, so they walked for six hours. The path was steep and Sara was very tired, but the views were beautiful. In the evening they ate dinner at the hotel and played cards. On Sunday it rained, so they stayed inside, read books and drank hot chocolate. They drove home in the afternoon. Sara says it was the best weekend of the year, and she wants to go back in the summer.

Questions
1. When did the friends arrive at the hotel?
2. Why did they go for a long walk on Saturday?
3. True or false? Sara found the path easy.
4. What did they do on Sunday, and why?
5. When does Sara want to go back to the mountains?

4. Changing Jobs · short answers and true/false

Ben worked in a bank for eight years. The pay was good, but he never felt happy. He worked long hours, and he often got home after eight o'clock. Last year he decided to change his life. He took a cooking course in the evenings and, in March, he left the bank. Now he works in a small restaurant near his home. He earns less money and his new job is very tiring, but he finishes at four o'clock and he has time for his children. "I miss the money sometimes," he says, "but I don't miss the bank at all."

Questions

1. How long did Ben work at the bank?
2. Give one thing that was bad about his old job.
3. When did he leave the bank?
4. True or false? Ben earns more money now.
5. Why does Ben have more time for his children now?

B1

5. The Bike Library · multiple choice and true/false

In the town of Alderby, there is a library where you can borrow a bike instead of a book. The idea began three years ago, when a teacher called Nadia Rossi noticed that many of her students walked more than an hour to school because their families could not afford bicycles. She asked local shops to donate old bikes, and a group of retired mechanics offered to repair them for free. Today the bike library has more than 200 bicycles. Anyone under eighteen can borrow one for a month, and they only have to promise to return it in good condition. Some people were worried that bikes would be stolen, but so far only two have gone missing. Nadia says the project has taught her something important: "People usually look after things that are trusted to them."

Questions

1. Why did Nadia start the project?
   A Her students lived far from school and had no bikes.
   B She wanted to sell old bikes.
   C She used to be a mechanic.
2. Who repairs the bikes?
   A Shop owners. B Retired mechanics. C Students.
3. True or false? Adults can borrow a bike for a month.
4. What worried some people about the project?
5. What does Nadia mean by her last sentence?
   A People behave responsibly when others trust them.
   B Bikes are easy to repair.
   C Young people are afraid of losing things.

6. A Week Without a Phone · multiple choice and short answers

When Hana's phone broke last month, she decided not to replace it immediately. "I thought a week without it would be easy," she says. "I was wrong." On the first day she reached for her pocket about forty times. She missed the maps, the music and, strangely, the clock; she kept arriving at places too early or too late. But by the fourth day, things began to change. She read a whole novel on the train, spoke to the person sitting next to her, and noticed that she was sleeping better. By the end of the week, she felt calmer, though she admits that she was also lonelier because her friends could not reach her quickly. In the end, she bought a new phone, but she now turns it off for two hours every evening.

Questions

1. Why was Hana without a phone?
2. Besides maps and music, what did she miss?
3. Name two good things that happened after the fourth day.
4. What was the negative effect of having no phone?
5. Which sentence best describes Hana's feelings at the end?
   A She hates phones now.
   B She sees both good and bad sides and has changed her habits a little.
   C She will never use a phone again.

B2

7. The Four-Day Week · multiple choice and open questions

When a software company introduced a four-day working week, many of its managers expected output to fall. Employees would be paid the same salary for working thirty-two hours instead of forty, and the company would close on Fridays. After a six-month trial, however, the results surprised even the supporters of the idea. Productivity, measured by the number of projects completed, rose by eleven per cent, and staff sickness fell sharply. Several workers said they now used their Mondays to concentrate on difficult tasks because they had stopped trying to fit everything into five days.

Not everyone was convinced. Customer support staff pointed out that clients still wanted answers on Fridays, so the team had to be organised in shifts, which made the schedule more complicated. A few employees also reported feeling more pressure during the four days they did work, because meetings were shortened and deadlines stayed the same. The company has therefore decided to extend the trial for a further year before making the change permanent, and it will ask staff to complete a monthly survey about stress levels.

Questions

1. What did managers expect to happen at the start?
   A Output would fall. B Salaries would rise. C Staff would leave.
2. Which of these was NOT a result of the trial?
   A Higher productivity. B Fewer sick days. C Higher salaries.
3. Why did the customer support schedule become more complicated?
4. Why did some employees feel more pressure during the four working days?
5. Why has the company extended the trial instead of making the change permanent now?

8. Slow Looking at the Hartwell Gallery · multiple choice and open questions

The curators of the Hartwell Gallery have noticed a pattern. Visitors walk up to a famous painting, take a photograph, and move on within seconds. "They are collecting pictures of the art instead of experiencing it," says one curator, Dr Amira Haddad. In response, the gallery has launched a "Slow Looking" programme. On the first Saturday of each month, visitors are given a single painting and asked to sit in front of it for twenty minutes, without a phone and without a guide. Afterwards, they are invited to describe what they noticed.

The results have been revealing. Most participants say the first five minutes felt uncomfortable, even boring. But many then began to see details they would otherwise have missed: a figure in the background, the direction of the light, a colour that changes as they move. Critics argue that the exercise is elitist, since not everyone has a free Saturday morning, and that photographs can be a perfectly valid way of remembering a visit. Dr Haddad accepts the second point. "We are not against cameras," she says. "We simply want people to look first and photograph afterwards."

Questions

1. What problem did the curators notice?
2. What do participants in the programme have to do?
3. How did most participants feel at the start?
   A Excited. B Uncomfortable or bored. C Confused by the guide.
4. Which criticism does Dr Haddad accept?
5. Which is closest to Dr Haddad's position?
   A Cameras should be banned from galleries.
   B Photography is fine, but looking should come first.
   C Only experts should visit galleries.

C1

9. The Lost Art of Being Bored · multiple choice and open questions

There was a time, not long ago, when waiting was an unavoidable part of life. Queues, delayed trains and long afternoons with nothing planned forced the mind to wander, and few people would have described those moments as valuable. Today, the smartphone has all but eliminated them. Any gap in the day, however brief, can be filled with a stream of messages, videos and headlines.

Some psychologists argue that this constant stimulation comes at a price. Boredom, they suggest, is not merely an unpleasant state to be escaped but a signal that prompts us to look for something more meaningful to do and, in the process, to daydream, to plan and to make unexpected connections between ideas. Remove the discomfort, and you may also remove the creative impulse that comes with it.

It would be unwise, however, to romanticise boredom. The evidence for its benefits remains patchy, much of it drawn from small laboratory experiments whose results do not always transfer to everyday life. Moreover, for people who are lonely, unemployed or ill, empty time can be oppressive rather than productive. The more cautious conclusion is perhaps this: boredom is useful only when we have the freedom to choose what to do with it, and that freedom is exactly what a device in the pocket quietly takes away.

Questions

1. According to the first paragraph, what has the smartphone changed?
2. What do some psychologists claim boredom does for us?
   A It makes us more sociable. B It pushes us towards more meaningful activity and creative thinking. C It improves our concentration.
3. In paragraph 3, what does "patchy" mean?
4. Give the two reasons the writer gives for not romanticising boredom.
5. Which best describes the writer's overall position?
   A Strongly opposed to smartphones. B Cautiously sympathetic to the idea, but doubtful about the evidence. C Certain that boredom is always beneficial.

10. Translation and the Translator's Craft · multiple choice and open questions

Few professions have been told so often that their days are numbered as translation. Machine translation has improved so rapidly in the past decade that, for everyday purposes, such as reading a menu or understanding a short email, it is now perfectly adequate. It is tempting to conclude that human translators are about to become redundant.

Yet the work professional translators do rarely resembles the task these systems perform well. A legal contract, a novel or a marketing slogan is not a string of words to be converted one by one but a text with a purpose, a reader and a cultural setting. A joke that works in one language may be offensive in another; a polite phrase may sound cold when rendered literally. Deciding what to preserve and what to sacrifice is a matter of judgement, and judgement is precisely where machines remain unreliable.

This does not mean the profession is unaffected. Many translators now spend less time translating from scratch and more time correcting machine output, which is often paid at a lower rate. Whether the work becomes less skilled, or merely different, depends largely on how the industry chooses to value it. The danger is not that machines will replace translators, but that clients will decide that a text which is "good enough" is all they need.

Questions

1. For which kinds of task does the writer say machine translation is now "perfectly adequate"?
2. Why is professional translation more than converting words one by one?
3. What has changed in practice for many translators?
4. What does the writer see as the real danger?
   A Machines replacing all translators. B Clients accepting "good enough" texts. C Translators refusing to use machines.
5. In paragraph 1, what does "redundant" mean?

C2

11. The Rehabilitation of Nostalgia · multiple choice and open questions

Nostalgia has long had a bad reputation. The word itself was coined in the seventeenth century as a medical term for a kind of homesickness thought to afflict soldiers, and for generations afterwards it was treated as a mild disorder or, at best, a form of intellectual laziness: a refusal to accept the present on its own terms. To be nostalgic, in this view, was to falsify the past by editing out its hardships.

More recent research, however, has complicated the verdict. Studies in which participants are asked to recall a cherished memory tend to find that they subsequently report a stronger sense of belonging and greater optimism about the future, effects that are hard to square with the image of the nostalgic as someone in retreat. On this account, nostalgia functions less as an escape from the present than as a resource drawn on to endure it.

None of this absolves the sentiment of its political uses. A longing for a golden age that never quite existed can be harnessed to justify exclusion as readily as comfort, and the distinction between remembering fondly and remembering selectively is not always easy to draw. What the evidence suggests is not that nostalgia is harmless, but that its moral character depends on what it is used to do: it may console people or mislead them, and often it manages both at once.

Questions

1. What did the word "nostalgia" originally refer to?
2. In paragraph 2, why does the writer say research has "complicated the verdict"?
3. In paragraph 2, what does "hard to square with" mean?
   A difficult to measure against B difficult to reconcile with C easy to explain by
4. What risk of nostalgia does the third paragraph identify?
5. Which statement best sums up the writer's conclusion?
   A Nostalgia is harmful and should be discouraged.
   B Nostalgia is beneficial and should be encouraged.
   C Nostalgia is neither good nor bad in itself; what matters is how it is used.

12. Silence in Conversation · multiple choice and open questions

Conversation analysts have long observed that the gap between one speaker finishing and the next beginning is remarkably short, often a fraction of a second. So short, in fact, that listeners must begin planning their reply well before the speaker has finished, anticipating the end of the turn from grammar, intonation and context. A silence longer than this brief interval does not register as nothing; it is heard as something: hesitation, disagreement or, in some settings, deep respect.

What counts as an uncomfortable pause, though, varies between communities. In some, a gap of a few seconds after a question is read as evasion, and the questioner will rephrase or fill the space. In others, an immediate answer would seem careless, and a considered pause signals that the question has been taken seriously. Problems arise when speakers who hold different expectations meet: the one who waits is judged slow or unengaged, the one who answers at once is judged abrupt, and neither suspects that the disagreement is about timing rather than content.

For language teachers the implication is uncomfortable. Classroom discussion is often assessed by how much students say and how quickly they say it, a standard that quietly privileges one conversational style. Allowing longer thinking time is not merely a kindness to the hesitant; it may be a more accurate way to find out what they know.

Questions

1. Why must listeners start planning their reply before the speaker finishes?
2. How can a silence longer than the usual gap be interpreted?
3. In some communities, why might an immediate answer be inappropriate?
4. According to the second paragraph, what do speakers with different expectations fail to realise?
5. In the last paragraph, what does "privileges" mean?
   A gives an unfair advantage to B protects from criticism C makes more expensive

Answer key

1. 1. False. She lives with her sister.
2. At seven o'clock.
3. By bus.
4. Because her teacher is kind.
5. She goes home and watches TV.

2. 1. False. It is open every day except Sunday.
2. At five o'clock.
3. Two euros.
4. Tom.
5. By the door.

3. 1. On Friday evening, at nine o'clock.
2. Because the weather was perfect.
3. False. The path was steep and she was very tired.
4. They stayed inside, read books and drank hot chocolate, because it rained.
5. In the summer.

4. 1. Eight years.
2. Any one of: he never felt happy; he worked long hours; he often got home after eight o'clock.
3. In March.
4. False. He earns less money.
5. Because he finishes work at four o'clock.

5. 1. A. Her students walked more than an hour to school because their families could not afford bicycles.
2. B. A group of retired mechanics.
3. False. Only people under eighteen can borrow one.
4. That the bikes would be stolen.
5. A. Trusting people makes them more careful.

6. 1. Hers had broken.
2. The clock (she did not know the time).
3. Any two of: she read a whole novel, she spoke to the person next to her, she slept better, she felt calmer.
4. She felt lonelier because her friends could not reach her quickly.
5. B.

7. 1. A. Managers expected output to fall.
2. C. Salaries stayed the same.
3. Clients still wanted answers on Fridays, so the team had to work in shifts.
4. Meetings were shortened but deadlines stayed the same.
5. Because some staff reported problems (shifts, pressure), so the company wants more evidence, including a monthly stress survey, first.

8. 1. Visitors photograph a painting and leave within seconds instead of really looking at it.
2. Sit in front of one painting for twenty minutes, without a phone and without a guide, then describe what they noticed.
3. B. They said the first five minutes felt uncomfortable, even boring.
4. That photographs can be a valid way of remembering a visit.
5. B.

9. 1. It has almost removed the empty moments (waiting, gaps) that used to be part of daily life, by filling them with constant content.
2. B.
3. Incomplete or inconsistent; not strong enough to be reliable.
4. The evidence is weak (small experiments that may not apply to real life), and empty time can be harmful for people who are lonely, unemployed or ill.
5. B.

10. 1. Everyday purposes, such as reading a menu or understanding a short email.
2. Because a text has a purpose, a reader and a cultural setting, and the translator must judge what to keep and what to give up (jokes, tone and politeness differ between languages).
3. They spend less time translating from scratch and more time correcting machine output, often for less pay.
4. B.
5. No longer needed (out of a job).

11. 1. A medical condition: a kind of homesickness thought to affect soldiers.
2. Because studies suggest recalling cherished memories increases belonging and optimism, which does not fit the old view of nostalgia as a harmful retreat from the present.
3. B. difficult to reconcile with.
4. It can be used to justify exclusion, and it is hard to tell fond remembering from selective remembering.
5. C.

12. 1. Because the gap between turns is so short that they have to anticipate where the turn will end (from grammar, intonation and context).
2. As hesitation, disagreement or, in some settings, deep respect.
3. It can seem careless; a considered pause shows that the question has been taken seriously.
4. That the disagreement is about timing, not about content.
5. A.