



IELTS Practice Test Volume 2

Reading Practice Test 1

HOW TO USE

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Reading Passage 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 1-13, which are based on Reading Passage One.



It's Dynamite

In 1866, an American railroad company was constructing a tunnel through the Sierra Nevada mountains. They encountered particularly hard rock, and ordered three crates of the only blasting explosive that could do the job: nitroglycerine. The first of these crates arrived in a postal centre in San Francisco, and upon being accidentally dropped, promptly exploded, killing all 15 people present. The point was taken. 'Nitro' was dangerously shock sensitive. Its transportation was soon banned, and from then on, it had to be manufactured by on-site laboratories - an expensive and still quite dangerous task, as the number of deadly explosions would demonstrate.

The history of nitroglycerine is full of such sad events. It was first synthesised in 1847 by Ascanio Sobrero, an Italian chemist, and he was so frightened by his discovery that he did not immediately publish his findings. He was also the first to caution the world against its use, in both private letters and a journal article, arguing that it was impossible to handle the substance safely. However, it was soon discovered that when frozen (at about five degrees), nitro was much less sensitive to shock. The problem was then in thawing it back into liquid form, at which point it became even more unstable. Again, a mounting death toll would testify to this fact.

Yet nitroglycerine always remained in demand, being the first practical mining explosive produced. Prior to this, gunpowder was used, but this was limited and clumsy. Gunpowder is a 'low' explosive, meaning that it 'burns' from layer to layer, producing gases which expand at less than the speed of sound. Nitro is a 'high' explosive, meaning that it 'detonates' - that is, is triggered to react by the virtually instantaneous shock wave, producing gases which expand at more than the speed of sound. Gunpowder could not efficiently shatter rock (although it was

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suitable for bullets and artillery shells). Only nitro could really do the job, and a Swedish chemist, Alfred Nobel, became interested.

Nobel's companies were moving from primarily iron and steel production to the almost exclusive manufacture of cannons, armaments, and gunpowder, and he saw the commercial value in making nitroglycerine manageable. He began experimenting - at considerable cost. In 1864, his younger brother and several workers were killed in a factory explosion. Undererred, Nobel built a new factory in the remote hills of Germany, determined to find the answer. He first tried combining nitro with conventional gunpowder, marketing the final product as 'blasting oil', yet accidental explosions continued. His factory was destroyed yet again, on two occasions!

The breakthrough finally came when Nobel's company mixed liquid nitroglycerine with an inert absorbent silicate sand, known as 'diatomaceous earth'. This was produced by grinding down diatomite, a rock found around the local hills. It is similar to volcanic pumice, being very light and highly porous, yet it is actually the fossilised remains of diatoms, a hard-shelled alga. This combination immediately made nitro less dangerous to handle, and by being solid, more convenient to package and transport. Nobel patented his invention in 1867 under the name of 'dynamite', based on 'dyna' the Greek word for 'power'.

In its best-known form, dynamite was made in short paper-wrapped sticks consisting of three quarters nitro to one quarter diatomaceous earth, but it would always remain dangerous to manufacture, store, and use. Over time, the nitro can seep out, crystallising on the outside of the sticks or pooling at the bottom of storage boxes, with all the consequent instability that raw nitro possesses. Nevertheless, in an age of extensive railroad and tunnel construction, the product would earn Nobel a great fortune. Yet, while high explosives serve a commendable purpose in peacetime engineering projects, Nobel's fortune was also based on weapons of death and destruction, and the public knew it.

Nobel himself was to become greatly perturbed, especially given the events which occurred when his brother Ludvig died. The French newspapers mistakenly thought it was the death of Alfred himself, and published an obituary. Alfred happened to be in France at the time, and one can only wonder at his reaction upon reading about his own death! Yet the obituary was harsh and condemning, calling Nobel the 'merchant of death', someone who 'became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before'. It was certainly this event which influenced him, in 1895, to write a new last will and testament, one year before he died. It would astonish everyone, and change the course of history.

When Alfred Nobel died, single and childless, at age 63, he specified that, apart from some minor bequests, his vast fortune (about 200 million dollars in today's money) be set aside for the establishment of the Nobel Prizes. These would be awarded annually for those who confer the 'greatest benefit on mankind' in physics, chemistry, peace, medicine, and literature. Nobel's strategy worked, as the Nobel Prizes are now considered among the most prestigious in the

world. Few consider that all that money comes from nitroglycerine, dynamite, gunpowder, and armament manufacture, the indirect cause of incalculable human carnage.

Questions 1-5

Complete the summary of the first three paragraphs.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

Nitroglycerine could explode with even a small 1 _____, thus it was the cause of a growing 2 _____. It was able to 3 _____ since, in contrast to gunpowder, it 4 _____. When 5 _____, nitro could be handled more safely, yet deaths continued.

Questions 6-9

Answer the questions.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

What were the two products that Nobel's companies originally manufacture?

6 _____

What was the first nitroglycerine product called?

7 _____

What rock does diatomite resemble?

8 _____

In what field was dynamite used most beneficially?

9 _____

Questions 10-13

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage One?

Write

TRUE	if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE	if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN	If there is no information on this

10

Dynamite is safer than nitroglycerine.

11

his wealth.

The French newspaper condemned Alfred Nobel because of

12

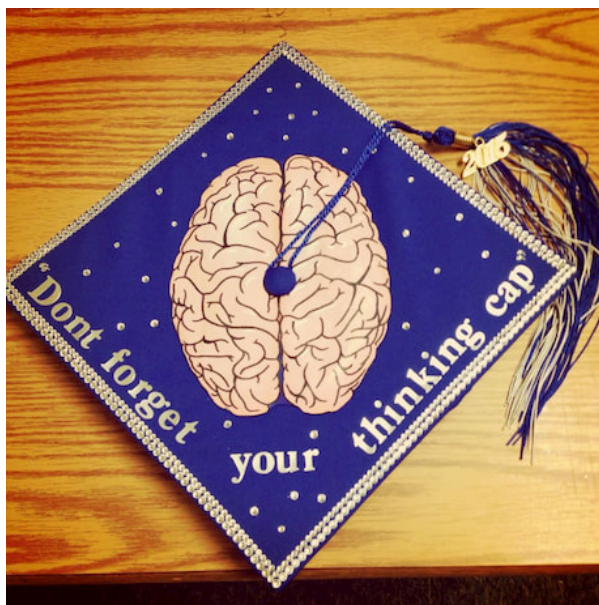
Nobel's will left some money to his friends.

13

Many now condemn Nobel for his production of weapons.

Reading Passage 2

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 14-26, which are based on Reading Passage Two.



Single-Gender Education: A Case Made?

A. All modern democracies, instilled as they are with the ethics of freedom and equality of the sexes, nevertheless offer the option of single-sex education. This separates the genders into their own classrooms, buildings, and often schools. Traditionally, women had to fight hard and long to achieve equal opportunities in education, and the single-gender controversy is mostly in relation to them. The question is whether this educational system advances or retards their cause, and there are supporters on both sides, each convinced that the case is made.

B. Given that the word 'segregation' has such negative connotations, the current interest in single-gender schooling is somewhat surprising. In the same way that a progressive society would never consider segregation on the basis of skin colour, income, or age, it seems innately wrong to do this on gender. Yet in the real world and the society in which we live, segregation of some sort happens all the time. Clubs inevitably form - for example, of clerical workers, of lawyers, of the academically gifted, and of those skilled in music or the arts. Exclusionary cliques, classes, and in-groups, are all part of everyday life. Thus, it may simply be an idealistic illusion to condemn single-gender settings on that basis alone, as do many co-educational advocates.

C. This suggests that single-gender education must necessarily be condemned on other grounds, yet the issue is complicated, and research often sinks into a morass of conflicting data. and. occasionally, emotional argument. Thus, one study comes out with strong proof of the efficacy of single-gender schooling, causing a resurgence of interest and positive public sentiment, only to be later met with a harshly-titled article. 'Single-Sex Schooling: The Myth

and the Pseudoscience', published and endorsed by several respected magazines. Similarly, the arguments on both sides have apparent validity and often accord, on the surface at least, with common sense and personal observation. What then can parents do?

D. Proponents of separating the genders often argue that it promotes better educational results, not only in raw academic scores but also behaviour. The standard support for this is the claim of innate gender differences in the manner in which boys and girls learn and behave in educational settings. Separation allows males to be taught in a 'male way' and in accordance with the 'male' developmental path, which is said to be very different to the female one. Such claims demand hard evidence, but this is difficult to come by, since statistics are notoriously unreliable and subject to varying interpretations.

E. Of course, one of the key factors that leads to superior performance at single-gender schools is often the higher quality of the teachers, the better resources at hand, and the more motivated students, often coming as they do from wealthier or more privileged backgrounds. Single-gender schools are often the most prestigious in society, demanding the highest entry marks from their new students, who, in turn, receive more deference and respect from society. When taking these factors into account, large-scale studies, as well as the latest findings of neuroscientists, do not support the claims of superior results or persistent gender differences, respectively. Those who make such claims are accused of emphasising favourable data, and drawing conclusions based more on anecdotal evidence and gender stereotyping.

F. Yet the single-sex educationalists come out with other positives. One of the most common is that girls are free from the worry of sexual harassment or negative behaviour originating from the presence of boys. Girls are said to develop greater self-confidence, and a preparedness to study subjects, such as engineering and mathematics, which were once the exclusive province of males. Conversely, boys can express a greater interest in the arts, without the possible jibe, 'That's a girls' subject'. But logically, one senses such stereotyping could equally come in single-gender settings, since it is the society outside of school, with all its related expectations, which has the greatest influence.

G. Among this welter of conflicting argument, one can, at least, fall back on one certainty - that the real world is co-gendered, and each side often misunderstands the other. Supporters of co-education argue that positive and co-operative interaction between the genders at school reduces such divisions by de-emphasising gender as a factor of concern. In theory, stereotypes are broken down, and inclusion is emphasised, providing benefits for society as a whole. But such sentiments, admittedly, do sound as if we are retreating into self-promotional propaganda. In other words, these statements are just glib and unreal assertions, rather than a reflection of what actually happens in the co-educational classroom.

H. The key point is whether the interaction in co-educational settings is indeed positive and co-operative. Some would say it could equally be the opposite, and surely it must occasionally be so (if we abandon the rosy picture painted in the previous paragraph). But I would say that that

interaction, whether good or bad, whether academically enhancing or retarding, still constitutes education, and of a vital nature. It presents exactly the same subset of challenges that students, male or female, will ultimately have to deal with in the real world. This is the most important point, and would determine my choice regarding in which educational setting I would place my children.

Questions 14-19

Reading Passage Two has eight paragraphs, A-H.

Choose the correct heading for Paragraphs B-E and G-H from the list of headings.

List of Headings	
i	Another argument in favour
ii	Conflicting evidence
iii	Negatives are positives
iv	An emotional argument
v	Does it help or not?
vi	Looking at the other side
vii	A counter-argument
viii	It's happening anyway
ix	The problems with genders
x	An argument in favour

Write the correct number, i-x, for each answer.

Example	Answer
Paragraph AV.....
Paragraph Fi..... (Example)

14 Paragraph B

15 Paragraph c

16 Paragraph D

17 Paragraph E

18 Paragraph G

19 Paragraph H

Questions 20-24

Complete the sentences with the correct ending, A-E.

Write the correct letter, A-E, for each answer.

A	have some strong views
B	think boys and girls are similar
C	often have idealistic views
D	are surprising in some ways
E	often receive much respect

20 Neuroscientists

21 The magazines

22 Students from single-gender schools

23 People in society

24 Supporters of co-education

Questions 25-26

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C, or D.

25 The author believes co-education has

- A clear statistical support.
- B less stereotyping.
- C much positive interaction.
- D generally lower-quality teaching (compared to single-gender schools).

26 The author believes

- A single-gender schooling is better.
- B co-educational schooling is preferable.
- C we cannot say which sort of schooling is better.
- D more evidence is needed.

Reading Passage 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 27-40, which are based on Reading Passage Three.



The Mother of All Languages

In 1786, William Jones, a British judge stationed in India, made what must be ranked as one of the most amazing discoveries of all time, yet it is little known outside of linguistic circles. Jones was studying Sanskrit, a long dead Indian language only used in classic or liturgical texts. Upon examining many of the words, he was struck by their similarity to the two most ancient languages known at that time: Greek and Latin. He would later write that Sanskrit has ‘a stronger affinity’ with these other languages ‘than could possibly have been produced by accident’.

Jones drew the conclusion that Greek and Latin, and even the Germanic languages (including English), were all related to Sanskrit, and thus, logically, all of them must necessarily have evolved from a single earlier language. Subsequent scholars were able to confirm this, adding to this linguistic family all of the Romance languages (French, Spanish, and others), Slavic languages (Russian, Czech, and many others), and Indo-Iranian (Persian, Afghan, and many others). There are, in fact, hundreds of languages and dialects all over Europe, Iran, and South Asia, which can now trace their ancestry to an original Indo-European language, now called Proto-Indo-European, or PIE for short.

According to linguistic theory, proto-languages are usually spoken over relatively limited geographical areas, over a short time span, and by a tightly-knit community. The implication is simple, but also stunning that some single ancient tribe which spoke this mother of languages eventually took over most of the middle and western Eurasian landmass, spreading their language with them. This subsequently evolved into many others over the course of time,

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creating a language family which now has the greatest number of speakers in the world. The big question concerns who these Proto-Indo-Europeans were, and where their ancestral homeland lay.

Archaeologists have examined many sites of European prehistory, occasionally identifying these as the homeland of the PIE population. This is often done with nationalistic overtones, raising the anger of others in this field, and there still remains controversy over each claim. It is linguistic evidence which provides, perhaps, more definite clues. The similarities in vocabulary between all PIE's daughter languages have allowed linguists to deduce a probable grammar and fairly extensive vocabulary. It is irresistible not to read into this a tentative lifestyle and location, with the quaint proviso that it remains 'at best, highly speculative'.

Looking at just one example, there are PIE words for the temperate trees of the Northern Hemisphere, but not tropical or Mediterranean varieties. This indicates a northern European location, with a cold climate. And so, with such detailed linguistic analysis, the most widely accepted theory places the PIE origin in the Caspian Steppe - a vast region of temperate grass and shrub-land north of the Black Sea, across present-day Ukraine, Southern Russia, and Kazakhstan. Their language was spoken around 4000 BC (plus or minus a millennium, since exact dates are impossible at such an early stage in European pre-history).

What then enabled this single tribe to advance outwards and take over Eurasia? Some geneticists have suggested that it was the domestication of the horse, perhaps giving that tribe a thitherto unheard-of military superiority (as would the Huns and the Mongols possess many thousands of years later). Some of them have also suggested that the discovery of farming was the impetus of this tribe's advance, as with a stable and steady food supply at hand, their numbers could increase at the expense of the other fragmented hunter-gathering tribes roaming the wilds of Eurasia. Perhaps then, PIE simply moved alongside the outward wave of the implementation of agriculture, together with a rapidly expanding and interbreeding population.

But even PIE must have evolved from some earlier language, and audacious linguists are digging deeper into the past. PIE gave birth to a large family of languages, but there exists other families, such as Afro-Asiatic (which includes Arabic), Dravidian (comprising the many languages of Southern India), and Altaic (which includes Mongolian and Japanese). It has been proposed that these themselves may all belong to a 'macro-family', sometimes called Proto-Nostratic. Most linguists maintain that, although it is theoretically possible that such an original language existed, it is next to impossible to prove, since resemblances among languages can also be due to chance, and thus they remain skeptical over such a claim.

Still, the implications are mind-boggling that perhaps almost every single language on Earth can ultimately be traced back to a single source possessed by a small group of individuals. This language is sometimes called Proto-Human, the mother of all languages. One interesting theory posited by geologists is that a huge catastrophe occurred in the not-so-distant past

some 70,000 years ago, linked to the volcanic eruption of Mount Toba in Indonesia. This reduced the world population to a small band of survivors, and theirs is the Proto-Human from which all languages subsequently evolved. If this is true, it is intriguing to think that had that catastrophe not occurred, we would all be speaking totally different languages today.

Questions 27-30

Complete the sentences.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

William Jones's findings are mostly known within 27 .

A community which speaks a proto-language is 28 .

Proto-Indo-Europeans might have come from the 29 .

Mount Toba was the site of a 30 .

Questions 31-35

Write the correct letter, A-E.

NB You can use **an answer one time only**.

A	Archaeologists
B	Geneticists
C	Geologists
D	Linguists
E	Scholars

Which people

31 believe that reliable nutrition may be the answer?

32 have categorised very many languages?

33 often face anger and controversy?

34 are skeptical about some issues?

35 have speculated about a disaster?

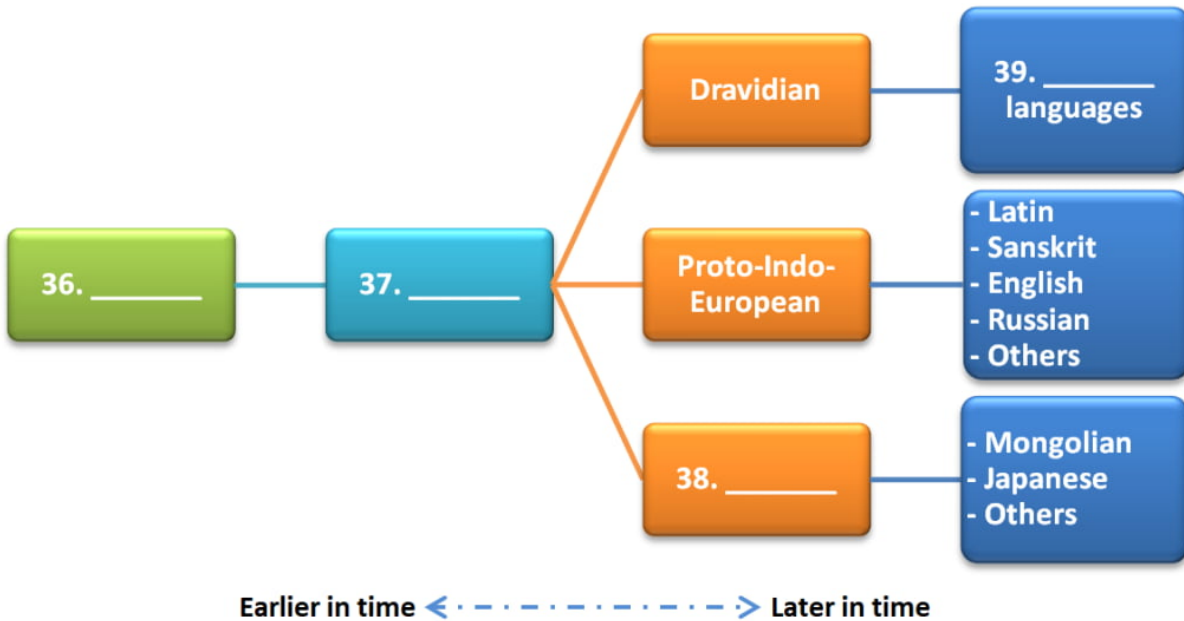
Questions 36-39

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Complete the flow chart.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

The Evolution of language



- 36 _____
- 37 _____
- 38 _____
- 39 _____

Question 40

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C, or D.

40 The author thinks the subject is

- A complicated.
- B controversial.
- C interesting.
- D fascinating.



Solution:

Part 1: Question 1 - 13

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 shock | 2 death toll |
| 3 shatter rock | 4 detonates(ed) |
| 5 frozen | 6 iron, steel |
| 7 blasting oil | 8 volcanic pumice |
| 9 engineering projects | 10 TRUE |
| 11 FALSE | 12 NOT GIVEN |
| 13 FALSE | |

Part 2: Question 14 - 26

- | | |
|---------|--------|
| 14 viii | 15 ii |
| 16 x | 17 vii |
| 18 vi | 19 iii |
| 20 B | 21 A |
| 22 E | 23 D |

24 C

25 D

26 B

Part 3: Question 27 - 40

27 linguistic circles

28 tightly knit

29 Caspian Steppe

30 volcanic eruption

31 B

32 E

33 A

34 D

35 C

36 Proto-Human

37 Proto-Nostratic

38 Altaic

39 Southern Indian

40 D