

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

Speed Readings for ESL Learners

3000 BNC

Sonia Millett

**English Language Institute
Occasional Publication No. 26**

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VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
TE WHARE WĀNANGA
O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI



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School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Wellington
New Zealand
<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals>

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Introduction

Speed Readings for ESL Learners 3000 BNC was written at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. The programme contains twenty 400 word passages, each with ten comprehension questions. The readings are on general topics and are written within the British National Corpus 3000 most frequently used words of English. Exceptions are words that are explained in the text, titles of passages, content words like country names and animal names, and some common words like television, cell phone and internet.

Principles of a speed reading programme

A speed reading programme should isolate the skill that is being practised which is increasing the speed of a student's reading. It is important not to confuse the purpose of the exercise with increasing vocabulary, improving reading comprehension or anything else. A speed reading programme is only a small part of an overall reading programme and while success with the programme may lead to benefits such as increasing confidence and the effectiveness and enjoyment of reading, the focus is speed.

1. The focus is speed. While reading without understanding would be pointless, the goal of speed reading is not to achieve perfect accuracy in answering the questions. If students are getting all the answers right, they are reading too slowly. The goal is the fastest time with about 70 percent accuracy.
2. The readings should be easy. There should be very little unknown vocabulary and the grammar should be straightforward. There should be nothing to stop the readers in their tracks. Similarly the questions should test general understanding rather than detailed knowledge. Questions about specific details slow down reading.
3. The method of reading is important. Students should not use their fingers or pens to trace the words as this encourages slow word-by-word reading. By reading quickly, students are training their eyes to process meaning chunks.
4. Gaining confidence is an important aspect of the programme. A lot of learning is getting past the 'I can't do it' barrier. A speed reading programme can push the student through this barrier. Teachers can help by setting individual and class goals and time limits. Success in speed reading engenders confidence, and confidence leads to enjoyment, motivation and more success. The virtuous circle. (Nuttall, 1996).
5. A speed reading programme should be intensive. Complete the twenty readings by doing one every day for four weeks.

6. Speed reading should be an isolated activity. Don't plan a follow up activity with the readings. When students realise they will be doing a follow-up activity, they will concentrate on comprehension and slow down.
7. Recording the time and score is important as seeing daily progress is a very effective motivator for students. It is also a good way for the teacher to monitor progress, give feedback and encouragement, and set individual and class goals.

Instructions for teachers

Determine the level of vocabulary knowledge of the class by administering a vocabulary levels test, for example Schmitt et al. (2001).

Photocopy class sets of the readings. These can be put into plastic sleeves to prolong life. The readings can be done in any order so that it is not necessary for all students to be working on the same reading. You could make a few sets and then have students choose a reading they haven't done yet.

Introduce the programme to the class by explaining the procedure and the reasons for doing a speed reading programme:

Over the next month you will be doing a daily speed reading exercise which involves reading a short passage and answering 10 comprehension questions.

Speed reading is only one of the many ways that the class will be studying reading. The focus of the speed reading programme will be to increase reading speed. Accuracy in answering the questions is not the main consideration. Aim for the fastest time with about 70 percent accuracy.

Reading quickly is an important skill for native and non-native speakers and most people can double their reading speed with practice (Nation, 1991). This skill will be necessary at university to cope with heavy reading requirements and for tests. In addition, the faster you read, the more effective and enjoyable it will be. Research suggests that an improvement in reading leads to benefits across all other language skills. An example is the Fiji book flood (see Elley & Mangubhai, 1979).

The passages are all 400 words long and the vocabulary is controlled. The topics relate to New Zealand and the passages and questions are not supposed to be difficult.

While reading, don't use a pointer or your finger to trace each word because this will make you read slowly word-by-word. Try to read in meaning chunks.

Answer the questions from memory. Don't turn back and look at the passage.

Instructions to students

1. Give out the answer sheet and the graph for recording times and comprehension scores.
2. Display an online stopwatch so that students can time themselves.
3. Give out the readings and say START.
4. Students read as quickly as they can.
5. When they reach the end of the passage, they look up and note down their time.
6. They then turn over the paper and answer the questions without turning back to the passage.
7. When they finish answering the questions, they check their answers.
8. They record their time and comprehension score on the graph.

As students finish recording their times and scores on their graphs, the teacher can walk around to check progress and collect the readings. If a student is scoring 8, 9 or 10 on the comprehension questions, encourage them to read faster next time. You can set individual goals by drawing a line on a student's graph.

After about half the readings have been completed, it is time to start reducing the maximum time allowed from 3 minutes to 2.50 to 2.40. While many students will already be reading more quickly than this, there will be some who take as long as they are given and these students can be helped to push through the barrier. If a student does not finish reading the passage in the time allowed, they should still turn over and try to answer the questions. Their goal is to finish in the time allowed the next day.

Once students see their graphs going up, they are motivated to read faster each day. By looking across to the right-hand side they can see their words per minute. If a student makes no improvement in time and continues to score below 6 correct answers, this is a signal to the teacher that they need additional reading help.

Speed Reading Booklets

Asian and Pacific Speed Readings for ESL Learners (1000)

New Zealand Speed Readings for ESL Learners 1000 Word List

New Zealand Speed Readings for ESL Learners, Book One (2000)

New Zealand Speed Readings for ESL Learners, Book Two (2000 plus AWL)

Speed Readings for ESL Learners 500 BNC (World stories)

Speed Readings for ESL learners 3000 BNC (General topics)

Speed Readings for ESL learners 4000 BNC (General topics)

Available from: <http://www.vicbooks.co.nz> and
<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/sonia-millett>

A model of a daily fluency programme incorporating speed readings

A daily fluency programme attends to the fluency component of Nation's four strands of a successful English programme (2007). Students use and practise the four skills of English: writing, speaking, reading and listening, by accessing the language they have stored in their heads. The focus is fluency so feedback on accuracy is not given.

Each student buys a small exercise book (ideally size 1B4). They tape the speed reading answer key and graph to the inside back cover for daily use. They bring the exercise book to class every day and the teacher collects it once a week.

1. Quickwrite

Five to ten minutes writing on a topic generated by the students with emphasis on fluency and flow of ideas. The goal is to write as much as possible without the use of an eraser or dictionary. Students write in the back of their journals. The topics might include: myself, my family, my home town, my best friend, weather, cats, studying English, a graded reader, a media story, independent study and so on. The topics start at a very easy level and become more sophisticated over the course of the programme. The students demonstrate an increasing willingness to tackle any topic.

2. Quickspeak

Three to five minutes of speaking without pauses to a listening partner on the quickwrite topic. Then students change roles. It is good to number off students to form pairs as this ensures a different partner every day. It is also a good idea to have the students stand up while they are speaking. They should be speaking as fluently as they can and they shouldn't be reading their quickwrites.

3. Quickread

Speed reading

4. Quicklisten

Each day students listen to a chapter (five to ten minutes) of the audio recording of a graded reader and simultaneously answer quick questions. Examples of quicklistens and worksheets are available from <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/sonia-millett>

These activities should take about 40 minutes and may be combined with a weekly fluency journal depending on the level and needs of the students.

5. Fluency Journals

Students write three pages of free writing every week. They are encouraged to treat their journals as a quickwrite exercise and take not more than 20 minutes per page. Topics can be set by the teacher or students can choose their own topics. Examples might be: one page about their independent learning, one about their extensive reading and the third page on their own topic. It can be helpful to start the programme with a brainstorm of possible topics. Journals are collected once a week, read and commented on for content, not accuracy, by the teacher and returned to students.

Readings for ESL Learners 3000 BNC

1. The Common Cold
2. Relationships
3. Damper
4. Ethiopian Coffee
5. Robots and Cows
6. Slavery
7. Smiley Face
8. Chillies
9. Motorbikes in Ho Chi Minh City
10. Cat People and Dog People
11. Worm Farms
12. Malaria
13. Insurance
14. Acupuncture
15. SAD
16. Spam
17. Jeans
18. Batik
19. The Sahara Desert
20. Wine

1 The Common Cold

Every winter people start coming down with colds. There is no cure for the common cold but since ancient times, people have developed ways to ease the aches and pains, sore throat and coughing, headache, high temperature and runny nose that go with the illness. The serious part of a cold is usually over in three days. That's the infectious time when other people can catch your cold. After this infectious period, the cold may last up to three weeks, although sometimes a cough may stay around for months.

The common cold got its name from, well, being physically cold. However, there is some doubt that low temperatures cause colds. According to scientific studies, colds are caused by viruses, small infectious agents that can cause disease in any living thing. There are millions of viruses. However, since 1898, when the first virus was discovered by Martinus Beijerinck, approximately 5,000 have been named and described. The cold virus was identified in the 1950s.

The common cold virus is believed to be transmitted from one person to another by coming into contact with infected droplets of water from the nose. It can also be transmitted by physical contact with an infected person or something they have touched such as food or a door handle. From there, the virus is quickly transferred to the eyes and nose of the new host where the cycle begins again.

While the common cold may not be directly caused by getting cold, the reason why colds are more common in winter is that when it's cold, people stay inside close together and this increases the risk. The best example is school where many children are sitting close together. This is the perfect condition for the virus to spread. The children then go home and pass on colds to other family members. According to Wikipedia, the common cold "is the most frequent infectious disease in humans with the average adult contracting two to three colds a year and the average child contracting between six and twelve".

Each culture has developed its own treatment for colds. In the West, hot lemon honey drinks, staying in bed and keeping warm, drinking plenty of water, taking vitamin C and eating healthy food are believed to be effective.

You can help prevent the spread of colds by washing your hands thoroughly and frequently, and covering your mouth and nose when you cough.

1 The Common Cold

1. Colds are more common in:
 - a. summer
 - b. autumn
 - c. winter
2. Which of the following is not linked to colds?
 - a. sore throat and cough
 - b. stomach ache and heart attack
 - c. runny nose and high temperature
3. Colds are caused by:
 - a. cold
 - b. viruses
 - c. vitamin C
4. Infectious means:
 - a. spreading from person to person
 - b. coming into contact
 - c. staying close together
5. The infectious period of a cold is about:
 - a. three months
 - b. three weeks
 - c. three days
6. Colds frequently occur in winter because of:
 - a. cold temperatures
 - b. people being close together inside
 - c. people touching door handles
7. Where are you most likely to catch a cold?
 - a. school
 - b. home
 - c. swimming pool
8. According to Wikipedia, adults contract colds:
 - a. more often than children
 - b. less often than children
 - c. about the same
9. Which of the following is not recommended for a cold?
 - a. staying in bed
 - b. drinking a lot of water
 - c. getting plenty of exercise
10. How are colds spread?
 - a. covering your mouth when coughing
 - b. washing hands frequently and thoroughly
 - c. not doing the above

2 Relationships

In 1624, an English writer called John Donne said “No man is an island”, meaning that no one lives entirely by themselves. There are many kinds of relationships. While friendship, marriage and family relationships exist in all cultures, they may vary greatly according to the culture, law, religion and history of each society.

In the middle of the 20th century, psychologists became interested in the scientific study of the nature of love. One theory put forward to explain love was attachment theory.

Originally based on the parent-child link, it was later extended to include relationships between adults. Attachment theory describes long-term inter-personal relationships and emphasises that our strongest emotions are the product of beginning, maintaining and ending relationships.

In Western cultures the beginning stage of an adult romantic relationship might be described as falling in love. For many people, romance, the pleasurable feeling of excitement and mystery associated with falling in love, is the best feeling in the world. Marriage has traditionally been the relationship which recognises the maintenance of love between a man and a woman. However, as the importance of religion weakens, many people feel that a religious marriage is irrelevant, and many couples are quite happy to live together in a committed partnership without recognition from church or law. On the other hand, some couples are choosing to have a non-religious but legalised relationship called a civil union. Same sex marriage is recognised by nearly twenty countries in the world and the number is growing. The ending of a relationship is described as separation or divorce. Almost every country in the world has some form of divorce arrangement. It is estimated that over 40% of marriages in Western countries end in divorce.

Other cultures have different customs. For example a man may have more than one wife, or a woman may have more than one husband, and marriage may not be based on romantic love but arranged by the family for religious or economic reasons.

An increasing proportion of the population is single by choice or circumstance. It is estimated that in America there are more single people, including people who are divorced and widowed, than married people. For single people, friends play an important relationship role. In the middle of the 19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson famously said, “A friend might well be reckoned the master-piece of nature.” What would he have said about Internet friends?

2 Relationships

1. John Donne said:
 - a. No man is a country.
 - b. No man is a river.
 - c. No man is an island.
2. Which sentence is true?
 - a. Relationships exist in all cultures.
 - b. Relationships are the same in all cultures.
 - c. Relationships are different in all cultures.
3. Psychologists became interested in:
 - a. love
 - b. marriage
 - c. emotions
4. Attachment theory describes:
 - a. falling in love and marriage
 - b. marriage and divorce
 - c. all of the above
5. Who thinks falling in love is the best feeling in the world?
 - a. everyone
 - b. many people
 - c. nobody
6. A civil union is:
 - a. a traditional relationship
 - b. a religious relationship
 - c. a legal relationship
7. In about how many countries is same sex marriage recognised?
 - a. 20
 - b. 50
 - c. 100
8. Divorce exists in:
 - a. every country
 - b. almost every country
 - c. some countries
9. What is the rate of divorce in Western countries?
 - a. 20%
 - b. 40%
 - c. 60%
10. In America, there are more:
 - a. married people
 - b. single people
 - c. widowed people

3 Damper

Damper is the name of a traditional kind of Australian bread. It is a very basic bread which was originally made with just flour and water and cooked in an open fire.

Where did damper originate? The original people of Australia are called Aborigines. Scientific testing of human remains provides evidence of aboriginal existence 45,000 years ago, making them one of the oldest continuous populations on the earth. Over thousands of years, Aborigines developed a life style which enabled them to live in the extreme desert conditions of outback Australia. There is historical evidence that the ancient Aborigines used seeds and grains from the desert plants to make a kind of bread that was similar to damper. The seeds were ground into flour and mixed with water. This was formed into a round shape, then flattened and placed in a dying fire to cook.

Damper was a basic part of the diet of stockmen, the men, and occasionally women, who looked after the stock, cows and sheep, which formed the main kind of farming in outback Australia. The Australian outback is the huge area of land that stretches from the cities of the East coast to the West coast approximately 3,500 kilometres away. In early times, the only way for the stockmen to travel around the outback was on horses. Sometimes, they would be away from home for months on end, travelling with the huge groups of animals, sometimes numbering thousands, to find grass for them to eat or to deliver them to markets. The stockmen had to carry all their food with them and flour was convenient to carry and provided fresh daily bread. To gain an understanding of the lives of stockmen and their animals, check out the movie 'Australia' set in the outback in the 1930s.

Almost every society has invented some kind of bread, and damper could be a simplified version of the bread brought from the old countries where the early farmers originally came from, or it could have more ancient beginnings with the Aborigines.

Today, damper has become fashionable as a part of Australian cooking. Salt, eggs, oil, milk and baking powder to make the bread rise, are added to improve the taste and appearance. You can find damper in restaurants where it is served with steak and salad, or any dish that is improved by a piece of freshly baked bread and butter.

3 Damper

1. Originally damper was made of:
 - a. flour
 - b. flour and water
 - c. flour, water and salt
2. Aborigines were in Australia:
 - a. at least 15,000 years ago
 - b. at least 45,000 years ago
 - c. at least 100,000 years ago
3. Originally Aborigines cooked their bread:
 - a. in the hot sun
 - b. in a dying fire
 - c. not mentioned
4. Living conditions in the outback are:
 - a. difficult
 - b. easy
 - c. medium
5. Stockmen looked after:
 - a. the outback
 - b. the desert
 - c. animals
6. Approximately how wide is Australia?
 - a. 350 kilometres
 - b. 3,500 kilometres
 - c. 35,000 kilometres
7. Stockmen travelled:
 - a. on horses
 - b. in trucks
 - c. by motorbike
8. They were away from home for:
 - a. days on end
 - b. weeks on end
 - c. months on end
9. Is damper popular nowadays?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. not mentioned
10. What is added to improve the taste?
 - a. fruit
 - b. salt
 - c. sugar

4 Ethiopian Coffee

According to old Ethiopian stories, coffee was discovered 1,000 years ago by a farmer called Kaldi. One day Kaldi noticed that his animals were very lively and excited. He realised that they were eating the small red fruit growing on the trees on the hillside. He decided to try them himself, and when he did he liked the taste and the good feeling of energy that followed. He put some of them in his pocket and went home to tell his wife. She said the beans must have been sent from heaven and that Kaldi must take them to the monks in the temple. The monks said the beans were the work of the devil, and threw them into the fire. Soon the wonderful smell of roasting coffee beans filled the temple. The roasted beans were rescued from the fire and the monks poured boiling water over them to stop the smell. That night the monks sat up late, drinking the wonderful liquid that they had discovered.

Another version of the story is that the monks used to eat the beans to keep awake during their long nights of prayer. Kaldi and the monks lived in an area of Ethiopia called Kaffa and that is where the name coffee originated.

Today coffee is the world's second most popular drink after tea and Ethiopia continues to produce some of the finest coffee beans in the world. Today in Kaffa, a large proportion of the coffee grows wild in the forests and on the hills and the coffee industry employs over twelve million people.

As well as being an export earner for Ethiopia, making and drinking coffee is an important social custom when entertaining guests in an Ethiopian home. The process starts with the dried green beans. These are roasted over a small wood fire, continuously stirred by the woman of the house and giving off a delicious smell. After the beans turn a very dark brown, they are ground and the coffee is prepared in a special coffee pot. The coffee is served in small cups with sugar or sometimes salt. It is traditional to be served three small cups.

Coffee prepared this way is absolutely delicious but it's not only the taste that is important. It is the occasion. Coffee is the time for talking, relaxing, forgetting about the worries of life or discussing them with friends, neighbours and family.

4 Ethiopian Coffee

1. Coffee was discovered about:
 - a. 10,000 years ago
 - b. 1,000 years ago
 - c. 100 years ago

2. Kaldi was a:
 - a. farmer
 - b. monk
 - c. the devil

3. Kaldi's wife said the beans came from:
 - a. hell
 - b. the mountains
 - c. heaven

4. At first, the monks thought the beans were:
 - a. evil
 - b. interesting
 - c. useful

5. Did the monks like the drink they had made?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. not mentioned

6. Coffee is named after the:
 - a. area where it was found
 - b. man who found it
 - c. temple where it was made into a drink

7. What is the most popular drink in the world?
 - a. coffee
 - b. tea
 - c. water

8. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Coffee is an important export earner for Ethiopia.
 - b. Coffee drinking is an important social custom in Ethiopia.
 - c. Coffee is important for use in temples.

9. Dried coffee beans are:
 - a. red
 - b. green
 - c. dark brown

10. Which sentence is true?
 - a. Ethiopian coffee is never served with salt.
 - b. Ethiopian coffee is usually served with salt.
 - c. Ethiopian coffee is sometimes served with salt.

5 Slavery

Slavery may be defined as a system where people can be owned as property by other people and forced to work. Slaves can be bought and sold, or captured as prisoners during war. The children of slaves automatically become slaves at birth. Slaves have no human rights, they cannot leave their owners and they don't get paid for their labour.

Slavery has existed since ancient times. It pre-dates historical records and was legally recognised in almost every society since people started to settle in one place and engage in farming. These ancient civilisations include India, China, Africa, Greece, the Roman Empire, Arabia and South America. Religions recognised slavery. Slavery is mentioned in the Bible which is the Christian holy book, the Koran, the holy book of Islam, and in Buddhist writings.

In more recent times, slavery has been associated with the enslavement of black Africans by white Europeans. It is estimated that from the 16th through to the 19th centuries, twelve million Africans were sold to European slave traders who operated ships to transport the slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. In North and South America, the African slaves were forced to labour on the cotton, coffee and sugar farms or work in the gold and silver mines.

From the 16th century, groups opposed to slavery started a movement to set the slaves free. The American Civil War which lasted from 1861 to 1865 was between Americans who wanted to end slavery and those who wanted to keep it because their way of life depended on the free labour that slavery provided.

It was not until December 1865 that slavery finally became illegal in America. In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Declaration of Human Rights which states that, no one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave trade shall be stopped in all their forms.

In the 21st century, the practice of slavery is illegal in almost all countries. However, it is still common under the names of forced labour, child labour and sex slavery. It is estimated that globally there may be 25 million slaves, mainly women and children. The most common form of slavery today is debt slavery where a person borrows money which they cannot pay back. The debt may pass from one generation to the next creating a never ending cycle of slavery.

Slavery, the owning of human beings, is big business even today.

5 Slavery

1. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Slaves are owned by other people.
 - b. Slaves can be bought and sold.
 - c. Children of slaves are not slaves.
2. Slaves don't get paid for their work.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
3. Slavery has existed since:
 - a. modern times
 - b. ancient times
 - c. the Middle Ages
4. Slavery is mentioned in:
 - a. the Bible and the Koran
 - b. the Koran and Buddhist writings
 - c. all of the above
5. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Europeans enslaved Africans.
 - b. The slaves were transported on ships.
 - c. Twenty million slaves were transported to America.
6. The American Civil War was about:
 - a. freeing the slaves
 - b. not freeing the slaves
 - c. both of the above
7. Today slavery is illegal in:
 - a. all countries
 - b. most countries
 - c. some countries
8. It is estimated that today there may be:
 - a. 25 million slaves
 - b. 50 million slaves
 - c. 100 million slaves
9. Most slaves today are:
 - a. women and children
 - b. women and men
 - c. men and children
10. Which sentence is true?
 - a. The most common form of slavery today is debt slavery.
 - b. Slavery is not common in the world today.
 - c. Slavery is legal in the USA.

6 Robots and Cows

A robot may be defined as a machine that can be programmed to perform acts automatically. With the increase in high technology, robots are taking over boring or inconvenient work in many areas of life.

One area where robots are making an appearance is farming. There is a robotic revolution going on in the milking industry, and cows, as well as farmers are experiencing the benefits. The advantage for the cows is they can choose when and how many times a day they want to be milked. On the other hand, farmers no longer have to get up at 4am every day to go to the milking sheds and this makes a huge difference to their way of life.

In traditional farming, cows are milked twice a day, in the morning and the evening, mainly because this is the most convenient way for farmers to get two milking sessions completed in one day. However, this is not necessarily the best way for each individual cow. Because the robots are programmed to milk the cows whenever they arrive, the cows can be milked once, twice or even four times a day. It is an entirely voluntary system for the cows. They decide. Farmers report that midnight is a particularly busy time at the milking shed.

Robotic milking was first tried in the 1980s in Europe, usually on farms where the animals were housed inside huge barns. A challenge for farms where the cows live outside in fields is to train the cows to go to the milking facility when they want to be milked. Farmers who operate this system say the training may take about three weeks. The interesting thing is the cows like the system once they get used to it. Farmers report that milk production increases, the cows live longer and they seem far more relaxed.

The computerised robotic system is entirely automatic. As the cows enter the facility, they are weighed, milked and productivity and health checks are carried out. The facility cleans itself at regular intervals and if there is a problem, the robot sends the farmer a message.

Equipping a farm with robots is not cheap. However, farmers who have installed the robotic milking sheds, say they would never go back to the old system. The commonly reported sight of cows queuing patiently in front of their favourite robot must mean the cows like it too.

6 Robots and Cows

1. What kind of work do robots do?
 - a. interesting
 - b. boring
 - c. convenient
2. Robots are:
 - a. assisting farmers
 - b. replacing farmers
 - c. replacing cows
3. Who are experiencing the benefits?
 - a. cows
 - b. farmers
 - c. cows and farmers
4. Traditionally, cows were milked:
 - a. once a day
 - b. twice a day
 - c. three times a day
5. Under this system, cows can be milked:
 - a. once a day
 - b. four times a day
 - c. whenever they like
6. Farmers used to get up at:
 - a. 2 am
 - b. 4 am
 - c. 6 am
7. What time are milking sheds busy?
 - a. midnight
 - b. midday
 - c. morning
8. Where was robotic milking tried first?
 - a. Europe
 - b. America
 - c. Australia
9. How long does it take to train cows to use the robotic system?
 - a. one week
 - b. two weeks
 - c. three weeks
10. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. The robotic system is voluntary for cows.
 - b. The robotic system is entirely automatic.
 - c. Equipping a farm with robots is cheap.

7 Smiley Face

There is disagreement about the origin of the smiley face. An early sighting of a happy face on a movie poster was recorded in 1948. However, some people place the origin of the design much later. In 1963, a smiley face appeared on The Funny Company, a popular children's TV programme, and at about the same time, Harvey Bell, a commercial artist from Massachusetts, USA, designed a smiley face for a company advertisement. He received \$45 for his work, but neither Bell nor the company registered the design legally so this claim can't be proved. Perhaps the simple design has always been around as a children's picture for happiness and nobody owns it.

What is certain is that in the 1970s, the popularity of the smiley face exploded. Two Philadelphia brothers, Bernard and Murray Spain, designed the classic, perfectly round yellow face with stylised black features, added the words 'Have a Happy Day', and sold over 50 million smiley badges in 1972 alone. All of a sudden, the smiley face was everywhere: T-shirts, picture books, coffee mugs, bumper stickers, fridge magnets and popular music record covers. The smiley face made an appearance in the popular movie Forrest Gump.

Eventually, the smiley face was adopted by the Internet where it went through multiple variations to become the basis for emoticons, the faces that show emotions. How many feelings apart from happiness are now represented by the familiar yellow face? Well, sadness, confusion, love, dislike, anger, boredom, sleepiness, surprise and tears to mention just a few. The most popular emoticons can be created simply by typing a few letters, for example, happy and sad faces.

Emoticons have become absolutely necessary for text messages, and there seems an endless supply of new forms. With very short messages and no facial expressions or body language to show your true feelings, a text message such as GAL (Get a life!) could be very upsetting for the person receiving the message, unless there was also a smiley face that showed that the sender was making a joke.

It seems that there is no end to the uses of the smiley face. Recently, the China Daily newspaper reported that the government was considering judging restaurants by using smiley or sad faces to determine standards of food safety. Maybe it is a good idea. Who would eat at a restaurant with a sad face displayed in the window?

7 Smiley Face

1. An early sighting of a happy face was on:
 - a. a concert poster
 - b. a movie poster
 - c. a travel poster

2. How much did Harvey Bell receive for his design?
 - a. \$45
 - b. \$450
 - c. \$4500

3. When did the smiley face get really popular?
 - a. the 1940s
 - b. the 1960s
 - c. the 1970s

4. The Spain brothers added the words:
 - a. Have a nice day.
 - b. Have a happy day.
 - c. Have a smiley day.

5. Emoticons show:
 - a. good feelings
 - b. bad feelings
 - c. both of the above

6. Emoticons are absolutely essential for:
 - a. texts
 - b. emails
 - c. phone calls

7. GAL has:
 - a. a good meaning
 - b. a bad meaning
 - c. not mentioned

8. Text messages show:
 - a. emotions
 - b. body language
 - c. basic information

9. Smiley faces have an almost endless number of uses.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned

10. The Chinese Government might use smiley and sad faces to judge:
 - a. supermarkets
 - b. restaurants
 - c. movies

8 Chillies

Chillies come in many shapes and sizes, from the tiny bird's eye chillies which are hot enough to burn your mouth, to larger milder varieties. A good rule is the smaller the hotter. Be careful of the chillies that are bright red and only one or two centimetres long.

Chillies are the fruit of plants which belong to the Capsicum family. They originated on the American continent where they have been an important part of the diet for approximately 9,500 years. Chillies may have been the first crop to be grown for human consumption in Central and South America, according to evidence from pre-historic sites in Ecuador that date back 6,000 years.

When Christopher Columbus arrived in America in 1492, he came across the fruit and called them chilli peppers because they were hot to the taste like the black and white pepper already known in Europe. Unlike the pepper used in Europe, however, chilli peppers were cheap. In 15th century Europe, black pepper was so expensive it was used as money in some countries. After Christopher Columbus introduced chillies to Europe they became highly prized for flavouring food. They were also used in medicines, especially for the relief of pain.

Chillies gradually spread along the established trade routes to Asia, India and South East Asia, transported by Portuguese and Arab traders.

Nowadays, there are probably 400 different kinds of chillies produced around the world with India being the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter. This is not surprising for anyone who has eaten a hot Indian curry. However, India is not necessarily, the home of the hottest chilli. The title of hottest chilli ever grown is hotly contested by many countries such as Britain, Mexico and Trinidad as well as India.

But how can the hotness of chillies be accurately measured? In 1912, an American chemist called Wilbur Scoville invented a scale which measures the concentration of heat producing chemicals in chillies. He originally developed the scale by tasting, but now computers can do the job more accurately. The mildest chilli, the sweet green pepper used in salads is rated as 1 unit. In 2012, the hottest chilli ever recorded was rated at over 2,000,000 Scoville units. Chillies of this strength cannot be eaten. They are classed as weapons-grade and they are used in the pepper sprays that police use to fight crime, control violent crowds and stop criminals.

8 Chillies

- Which statement is true?
 - the hotter the better
 - the bigger the hotter
 - the smaller the hotter
- Where did chillies originate?
 - the American continent
 - the Asian continent
 - the African continent
- People have been eating chillies for about:
 - 2,000 years
 - 5,000 years
 - 10,000 years
- Christopher Columbus called them chilli peppers because they:
 - looked like black and white pepper
 - tasted like black and white pepper
 - were popular in some countries
- Which sentence is true?
 - White pepper was cheap.
 - Chilli pepper was expensive.
 - Black pepper was expensive.
- Which sentence is not true?
 - Chillies were used for flavouring food.
 - Chillies were used for medicine.
 - Chillies were used as money.
- Are there many varieties of chillies today?
 - yes
 - no
 - not mentioned
- Curry probably originated in:
 - Europe
 - India
 - South America
- Scoville invented a scale to measure:
 - the weight of chillies
 - the hotness of chillies
 - the taste of chillies
- The hottest chillies are used:
 - in weapons
 - in curries
 - in medicines

9 Motorbikes in Ho Chi Minh City

If you ever go to Ho Chi Minh City, the largest city in Vietnam, you will be amazed by the number of motorbikes. It seems as if everyone in the city is riding one, and this is not so far from the truth. The population of Ho Chi Minh is around ten million and the number of motorbikes is estimated at approximately four million. The city's population is expected to be over 14 million by 2025. How many motorbikes will there be then?

While Ho Chi Minh has a variety of public transport including buses, trains and taxis, motorbikes are the most popular way of getting around. The city wasn't designed for cars so motorbikes remain the most convenient means of transportation through the narrow streets.

In fact, many taxis are motorbikes. Xe om, literally means 'hug vehicle', and the passenger sits on the back of a speeding bike "hugging" or holding on to their driver as they negotiate their way through the heavy traffic. Xe om are everywhere in the city, and except in rush hour it is easy to wave down a driver, negotiate a price for the trip and climb on the back.

Another interesting thing about motorbikes in Ho Chi Minh is that they are often used for family transport. It is not unusual to see a family of mum, dad and children, or three or four friends together all balanced on one motorbike.

Ho Chi Minh is usually hot and sunny, and riders protect themselves from the sun by wearing shoulder length gloves, wide hats, sunglasses and face masks. In the six week rainy season, however, it is a different story. With heavy rain occurring for part of every day, motorbike riders wear a special kind of long plastic rain coat that covers them from head to foot. These can be bought cheaply from road-side stalls.

While motorbikes have advantages in the crowded city, they also have disadvantages and the main one is pollution. The air is often filled with the exhaust of millions of motorbikes, not to mention the noise. Another problem is the traffic jams that they cause during the busiest times of the day. A further problem is that motorbikes can be dangerous and accidents happen.

The local government is looking into ways to reduce the number of motorbikes and other vehicles on the road and replace them with efficient public transport.

9 Motorbikes in Ho Chi Minh City

1. Ho Chi Min City is:
 - a. the largest city in Vietnam
 - b. the capital of Vietnam
 - c. neither of the above
2. The population of Ho Chi Minh is around:
 - a. 1,000,000
 - b. 10,000,000
 - c. 100,000,000
3. Approximately how many motorbikes are there in Ho Chi Minh?
 - a. 4 million
 - b. 40 million
 - c. 400 million
4. According to the passage, motorbikes are popular because:
 - a. the streets are narrow
 - b. they are cheap to run
 - c. they are safe
5. Xe om means:
 - a. 'speed' vehicle
 - b. 'hold' vehicle
 - c. 'hug' vehicle
6. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. One motorbike may carry a whole family.
 - b. Groups of friends may travel on one motorbike.
 - c. All the taxis are motorbikes.
7. Ho Chi Minh is usually:
 - a. hot and wet
 - b. sunny and hot
 - c. wet and sunny
8. During the rainy season:
 - a. it rains all day
 - b. it rains most of the day
 - c. it rains part of each day
9. According to the passage, motorbikes have disadvantages such as:
 - a. noise and traffic jams
 - b. exhaust and accidents
 - c. all of the above
10. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. The government wants to reduce the number of cars.
 - b. The government wants to increase bike numbers.
 - c. The government wants to have an efficient public transport system.

10 Cat People and Dog People

Are you a cat person or a dog person? There have been many claims about the significance of the choice of a pet. Some people say pet owners look like their pets. Or is it that pets look like their owners? Other people suggest your choice of pet can provide an understanding into your personality. According to research carried out by the University of Texas at Austin, USA, in 2013, there may be some truth to these ideas. The online survey first asked people to state whether they preferred cats or dogs. The questions which followed were designed to find out about their personality. Here are some of the findings of the survey.

First, let's look at the numbers. The survey showed that 46% of the people who responded preferred dogs, while only 12% said they preferred cats. To round out the figures, 28% liked both and 15% liked neither.

What are typical dog people? Dog people have a strong sense of duty and responsibility. They are enthusiastic, positive and have a lot of energy. Dog people are trusting, kind, affectionate and social. Dog people were approximately 12% more likely than cat people to have this kind of personality. Dogs love human contact. They may well live up to their name as man's, or even woman's, best friend. On the down side, dogs bark, bite, jump up, need to be washed and don't always do what they are told. They need training and a lot of care.

Typical cat people, on the other hand, like to spend time on their own, and are always willing to try something new. Cat people were 11% more likely to be curious, creative, artistic and non-traditional than dog people. However, cat people are easily stressed and worry a lot. This may be why they prefer a pet which is low-maintenance and independent. Cats don't need to be taken for walks, they are happy on their own and they love to get close to their owners. Researchers have recorded reduced levels of stress and blood pressure in people who can hold a soft, warm, furry, contented cat in their arms.

The author of the survey, psychologist Dr Sam Gosling, is quick to point out that the differences between the two groups are small but significant. And if you come into the 15% of people who don't like either, there are always fish, birds, mice, rabbits . . .

10 Cat People and Dog People

1. The research was carried out in:
 - a. America
 - b. Europe
 - c. Japan
2. Which sentence is true?
 - a. There are more cat people than dog people.
 - b. There are more dog people than cat people.
 - c. neither of the above
3. Which sentence is true?
 - a. More people prefer both than neither.
 - b. More people prefer neither than both.
 - c. neither of the above
4. Which is the best answer?
 - a. Some people look like their pets.
 - b. Some pets look like their owners.
 - c. both of the above
5. Which group is more enthusiastic?
 - a. cat people
 - b. dog people
 - c. not mentioned
6. Which group likes to spend time alone?
 - a. cat people
 - b. dog people
 - c. not mentioned
7. Who are known as man's or woman's best friend?
 - a. people
 - b. cats
 - c. dogs
8. According to the passage, which sentence is true?
 - a. Cats can reduce stress.
 - b. Dogs can reduce stress.
 - c. Both can reduce stress.
9. The author thinks the differences between cat and dog people are:
 - a. large and significant
 - b. small but significant
 - c. small and insignificant
10. What percentage of people doesn't like either?
 - a. 25%
 - b. 15%
 - c. 5%

11 Worm Farms

Nowadays, many people are concerned about the chemicals that go into producing food. All kinds of chemicals are added to crops and fed to animals to make them grow faster and bigger, be more productive and become more resistant to diseases. Because of this, organic or natural food is becoming more popular. There is an increasing range of organic vegetables, meat, eggs and fruit available in stores and supermarkets. However, it can be expensive, so a good solution is to grow your own fruit and vegetables. Organic farming and gardening uses a minimum of chemical additives and relies instead on natural material to keep the soil healthy and productive.

For the home gardener, one way to maintain a productive garden is to use compost. Compost is made from household food waste, garden waste and any other natural material that can be broken down, composted or rotted, and returned to the soil to make it rich and productive. An inexpensive and efficient way to do this is by having a worm farm in your back garden.

This is how to do it. First, you need some suitable containers. Plastic bins with lids work well. Buy bins that stack together because when the first bin is full, another will be added to the top. The idea is that the worms will move up to the bin on top leaving the lower bin full of rich worm compost. The lid is important because the worms like the dark, but make sure you make some holes so that they can breathe. Put some wet newspaper at the bottom of the bin and on top of this add some soil from the garden. Everything should be kept damp but not wet or the worms will drown. Then add the worms. These can be purchased at a garden centre or obtained from a friend with an established worm farm.

Feed the worms on scraps from the kitchen. They don't like meat or milk products, and they will only eat limited amounts of acidic food like orange skins, coffee and tea-bags. You can balance the acidity with egg shells.

Worms eat half their body weight every day, and after they eat the scraps, their natural body processes get to work and before you know it, you will have a lot of lovely worm compost to add to your garden and grow the best vegetables in the neighbourhood.

11 Worm Farms

1. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Chemicals make plants grow faster.
 - b. Chemicals make animals grow bigger.
 - c. Chemicals make food healthier.
2. Organic means:
 - a. natural
 - b. productive
 - c. popular
3. Nowadays the range of organic food is:
 - a. increasing
 - b. decreasing
 - c. staying about the same
4. Compost can be made of:
 - a. worms
 - b. food scraps
 - c. chemicals
5. Worm farms are:
 - a. inexpensive and efficient
 - b. expensive and inefficient
 - c. cheap and ineffective
6. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Worms like the dark.
 - b. The bin lids should have some holes.
 - c. Keep your worm farm wet.
7. Can you buy worms online?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. not mentioned
8. Worms don't like:
 - a. meat
 - b. vegetables
 - c. apples
9. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Worms like milk.
 - b. Worms occasionally eat tea-bags.
 - c. Egg shells help to balance the acidity.
10. How much do worms eat every day?
 - a. $\frac{1}{4}$ of their body weight
 - b. $\frac{1}{2}$ of their body weight
 - c. $\frac{3}{4}$ of their body weight

12 Malaria

Malaria is a disease that is common throughout tropical and sub-tropical areas of the world. It occurs in a wide band around the equator which includes sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Central and South America. While malaria has been in existence for 50,000 to 100,000 years, the origin of the disease in humans is associated with the development of farming about 10,000 years ago when humans first formed settlements. The disease is mentioned at the beginning of recorded history, for example in 2,700 BC in China, and in the Roman Empire.

The name malaria was made from two old words: mal meaning bad and aria meaning air. However, malaria is more associated with water than air because it is carried by mosquitoes which breed on the surface of water. When an infected female mosquito bites a person or an animal, malaria is introduced into the blood. It then travels throughout the body where it matures and begins to reproduce. About eight days after infection, the symptoms of high temperature and headache begin. The typical malaria symptoms are sudden coldness and shaking followed by very high temperatures and sweating over a two day cycle.

There are medicines to treat malaria, and if these are taken early they are effective in non-severe cases and the patient can expect a complete recovery. Without treatment and in very severe cases malaria is often fatal.

The World Health Organisation estimated that there were approximately 220 million cases of malaria, and 650,000 deaths in 2010. This means about 2,000 people die of the disease every day. Other studies have found that the disease is even more common. The majority of these fatalities (65%) occur in children under the age of 15, and 90% of the cases occur in Africa.

The fight against malaria has three main fronts. First, the use of chemicals to get rid of the breeding grounds of the mosquitoes and increased use of screens and nets to keep the mosquitoes away from their victims. Second, the use of drugs to control the disease in infected people. The third strategy is the development of a medicine to protect people from getting the disease in the first place. While there is no such medicine yet, there are medicines that people can take which prevent the mosquito poison from having any effect.

Malaria no longer occurs in many areas of the world where it was once common.

12 Malaria

1. Where is malaria common?
 - a. in hot areas
 - b. in cold areas
 - c. both of the above
2. Malaria has existed:
 - a. for a short time
 - b. for a long time
 - c. since ancient times
3. People started getting the disease:
 - a. when humans began
 - b. when mosquitoes began
 - c. when farming began
4. The word malaria came from:
 - a. one old word
 - b. two old words
 - c. three old words
5. Malaria is more associated with:
 - a. air than water
 - b. water than air
 - c. not mentioned
6. Malaria is carried by:
 - a. mosquitoes
 - b. water
 - c. air
7. Are there any medicines to treat Malaria?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. not mentioned
8. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Very severe cases of malaria are often fatal.
 - b. In mild cases a complete recovery can be expected.
 - c. There is a medicine to prevent malaria.
9. In 2010, how many people died of malaria every day?
 - a. about 1,000
 - b. about 2,000
 - c. about 5,000
10. Nowadays malaria is:
 - a. more common than before
 - b. less common than before
 - c. about the same

13 Insurance

You can insure your car, your personal belongings and your house. You can take out travel insurance, health insurance and life insurance. Basically, insurance is a group of people making an agreement to help each other if one member of the group falls into financial difficulty. It is a way of spreading risk across large numbers of people and has been practised since humans began to live together in groups.

The formal concept of insurance dates back to 1772 BC. It was one of the 282 laws set out in the Code of Hammurabi used to govern the Babylonian state, one of the richest states in the ancient world. The first insurance laws dealt with trade. If a trader took out a loan to finance a shipment of goods, the lender would charge a little more, and if the shipment was lost at sea or stolen, the lender would cancel the loan.

In Europe during the Middle Ages (500 AD to 1500 AD) groups of manufacturers and trades people called guilds were set up to look after the interests of their members. One duty of the guilds was to train new workers in the skills of the trades. Another was to provide insurance. If a member's property was damaged, stolen or lost in an accident, the guild helped them to begin again. The guild not only helped their members in times of trouble. If a member died, the guild supported their family as well.

Fire was a major risk during this time when most of the houses were built of wood and were easily destroyed by fire. In the Great Fire of London of 1666, 14,000 houses were destroyed. At this time fire insurance became common along with trade insurance.

Nowadays, insurance companies make a profit from investing the fees their customers pay. When something goes wrong, the insured person receives money from the insurance company. It is a very good system until there is a major disaster like an earthquake or flood. When there is a huge amount of damage to private and public property, the insurance companies cannot afford to cover all the losses. The government may step in to help in the recovery. Sometimes insurance companies go out of business. Sometimes people lose everything.

Insurance policies may exclude Acts of God, unpredictable natural disasters beyond human control, or war or nuclear accidents. Always read the small print.

13 Insurance

1. Insurance is:
 - a. groups of people helping each other
 - b. spreading risk across large groups of people
 - c. both of the above

2. Insurance is:
 - a. a new idea
 - b. an old idea
 - c. an ancient idea

3. Babylon was:
 - a. a very rich state
 - b. a very poor state
 - c. not mentioned

4. The first insurance dealt with:
 - a. trade
 - b. fire
 - c. travel

5. If a shipment was lost, the lender would:
 - a. cancel the loan
 - b. charge a little more
 - c. not mentioned

6. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. A guild teaches trade skills.
 - b. A guild offers insurance.
 - c. A guild is a trading business.

7. How many houses were destroyed in the Great Fire of London?
 - a. 4,000
 - b. 14,000
 - c. 140,000

8. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Insurance companies make a profit from investing clients' fees.
 - b. Fire insurance became common after the Great Fire of London.
 - c. Guilds only helped their members.

9. Insurance covers:
 - a. all risks
 - b. most risks
 - c. some risks

10. Acts of God are:
 - a. unpredictable natural disasters
 - b. war
 - c. nuclear accidents

14 Acupuncture

Acupuncture is one field of traditional Chinese medicine and is believed to be one of the oldest medical practices in the world. It is a method of treatment and healing that involves lightly pushing fine sharp needles into the skin at certain pressure points throughout the body. Putting acupuncture needles into the skin at these pressure points allows chi, sometimes defined as life energy or life force, to flow along channels which link the organs of the body, such as the heart, the stomach, the skin and the brain. There are twenty channels connecting 400 acupuncture points.

Chi promotes health and energy in all bodily organs and therefore acupuncture is useful in the treatment of conditions occurring all over the body. While acupuncture has mainly been used in the treatment of physical conditions such as pain and muscle tension, it is also used for the treatment of mental problems such as sleeplessness and depression. Acupuncture specialists claim it is beneficial for a wide range of conditions such as constant worrying, inability to relax, sexual problems, skin problems, drug and cigarette addiction and difficulty in pregnancy.

The exact date of the invention of acupuncture is unknown but it may have started in the Stone Age, 4500 to 2000 BC. Sharpened stones can be seen in drawings as early as the Shang Era (1600 to 1100 BC) and later, needles made from bone were recorded. However, it was not until approximately 200 BC that the first written references to metal acupuncture needles appeared. While approximately ninety works on acupuncture were written before the 11th century AD, after that time, it became less popular. Acupuncture was replaced by treatments relying on medicines from plants and acupuncture became associated with the lower classes. However, while the practice was losing popularity in China, it gradually spread throughout Asia and in the 16th century Portuguese traders took the technique to Europe where it met with mixed reactions which continue to the present day.

In the mid 20th century, acupuncture once again became a respected treatment method in China but the western medical tradition is divided on its benefits. Acupuncture has been the subject of scientific research since the end of the 20th century. It is recognised as an alternative treatment for certain conditions such as pain relief, but is not fully accepted due to lack of scientific evidence to support the benefits claimed by acupuncture specialists.

14 Acupuncture

1. Acupuncture:
 - a. is one of the oldest methods of treatment
 - b. is relatively modern
 - c. was invented in the Middle Ages
2. Chi is not:
 - a. life force
 - b. life energy
 - c. life points
3. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. There are 4,000 acupuncture points.
 - b. Chi flows along channels.
 - c. Channels link organs of the body.
4. Acupuncture is used for healing:
 - a. the skin, heart and brain
 - b. some parts of the body
 - c. all of the body
5. Acupuncture is used to treat:
 - a. physical conditions
 - b. mental problems
 - c. both of the above
6. Which condition is not mentioned in the passage?
 - a. sexual problems
 - b. broken bones
 - c. drug addiction
7. Acupuncture may have started in the Stone Age.
 - a. false
 - b. true
 - c. not mentioned
8. Which sentence is not true about 11th century China?
 - a. Acupuncture was associated with the upper classes.
 - b. Acupuncture became less popular.
 - c. Acupuncture was replaced by plant cures.
9. Scientific research has been carried out on acupuncture.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
10. Acupuncture is fully accepted in the West.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned

15 SAD

SAD stands for Seasonal Affective Disorder. It is a condition that affects people in winter when there is very little sunshine and light. SAD can have many different symptoms such as depression, sleep problems, lack of energy, over-eating, feeling worried and mood changes.

The SAD Association (SADA) of Great Britain is a voluntary organisation which advises patients, supports health professionals and informs the public about the condition. SADA, which has a membership of around 1000, estimates that SAD affects approximately 7% of the population during the winter, particularly in the months of December, January and February. That's in the Northern hemisphere. In the Southern hemisphere people suffer from SAD during June, July and August.

In 1984, Norman Rosenthal at the National Institute of Mental Health first described SAD as a medical condition. While initially some experts didn't take the condition seriously, SAD is now a recognised illness. It appears to become more common as the distance from the equator increases. In the far north countries of Scandinavia where the winter days are very short and the nights very long, there is a higher rate of SAD.

There are several different treatments available for SAD. Because SAD is mainly caused by not getting enough sunlight, sufferers can supplement the amount of light they are exposed to with bright lights, light boxes or lamps that send out specific kinds of light. You can buy special glasses which provide extra brightness. Some drugs have proved beneficial in the treatment of depression caused by SAD, and talking with a trained behavioural therapist can help. A further treatment is supplementing your diet with melatonin. Melatonin is not a drug. It is a naturally occurring chemical found in plants and animals. Humans produce melatonin in their bodies but sometimes there is an imbalance in the melatonin levels which can cause SAD. Getting regular outside physical exercise is also helpful because being outside increases exposure to the sun's rays. When it is combined with another form of treatment, physical exercise has been found to be particularly beneficial.

According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, some people experience a serious mood change whenever the season changes. The symptoms may be severe but they usually disappear when there is another change in the weather. They also note that the condition can occur in summer as well as in winter. In summer SAD is mainly characterised by increased worrying.

15 SAD

1. SAD is caused by:
 - a. lack of light
 - b. lack of sleep
 - c. lack of physical exercise
2. SAD has:
 - a. one main symptom
 - b. a few symptoms
 - c. many symptoms
3. SAD gets more common:
 - a. near the equator
 - b. far from the equator
 - c. not mentioned
4. There is a high rate of SAD in Scandinavia.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
5. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. In the Southern hemisphere, SAD is common in July.
 - b. In the Northern hemisphere, SAD is common in January.
 - c. In the Northern hemisphere, SAD is common in July.
6. You can treat SAD with:
 - a. drugs and light
 - b. physical exercise and behavioural therapy
 - c. all of the above
7. Melatonin is:
 - a. a drug
 - b. a chemical
 - c. unnatural
8. Melatonin is found in:
 - a. plants
 - b. animals
 - c. both of the above
9. Exercise works better:
 - a. by itself
 - b. with another treatment
 - c. not mentioned
10. SAD always affects people in winter.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned

16 Spam

Spam is what meets most people when they open their email in the morning, a lot of unwanted, annoying emails that they have to spend several minutes getting rid of. Spam is the mass distribution of unwanted commercial emails. It may be advertising a product, trying to get you to invest money in a project or urging you to send money to a prince in Nigeria to secure an inheritance from a long lost relative that you didn't know existed.

The history of the word spam goes back to Britain after the Second World War when food was in short supply and expensive. There was a brand of tinned meat called spam which was tasteless and unpopular. It was, however, cheap and available everywhere so that's what people ate. While spam the food was an annoying fact of life in the 1940s and 50s, electronic spam is an annoying fact of life in the modern electronic world.

How do spammers get away with it and why do they do it? First, it is almost impossible to control spammers. Spammers hide behind Internet sites that are nameless; they can't be found. Second, the cost-benefit analysis of spamming is positive. Apart from managing the site, there are almost no operating costs, and distribution lists are huge. In 2011, an estimated 7,000,000,000 spam messages were sent. Even if only one person responds to the email and buys the product or sends money, the spammer can cover their costs.

Apart from advertising which may seem reasonably okay, there is 'joke' spam such as filling up your inbox with rubbish, or spam which introduces computer viruses that destroy whole computer systems. It seems as if some people enjoy destroying things.

Equally serious is criminal spam, or fraud. Here the spammer tries to trick unsuspecting people into sending money or their bank account details by offering huge returns on small investments. There are regular reports in the news media about people who have lost their life savings to fraud spammers. A good rule is: if something looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Spam is not limited to email. Spammers attack all electronic media such as social networks, cell phones and instant message sites. Many institutions and organisations have installed filters to keep spam out. However, as soon as spam barriers are installed, spammers invent new ways of getting their unwanted annoying messages through.

16 Spam

1. Spam is not:
 - a. unwanted emails
 - b. wanted messages
 - c. annoying emails
2. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Spammers want your money.
 - b. Spammers want your bank details.
 - c. Spammers want your advertising.
3. Spam was originally:
 - a. a kind of food
 - b. a kind of email
 - c. neither of the above
4. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. It is almost impossible to control spammers.
 - b. Spammers are nameless.
 - c. Spammers are easily found.
5. Which sentence is true?
 - a. The cost-benefit is negative.
 - b. There are high operating costs.
 - c. The distribution lists are huge.
6. According to the passage, some people enjoy:
 - a. getting spam
 - b. destroying things
 - c. sending money
7. According to the passage, which kind of spam may be okay?
 - a. joke spam
 - b. advertising spam
 - c. computer viruses
8. Fraud spammers:
 - a. offer huge returns on investment
 - b. try to get your bank details
 - c. do both of the above
9. If something looks too good to be true, it probably is.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
10. Which sentence is true?
 - a. Spam is limited to emails.
 - b. Many institutions have installed spam filters.
 - c. It's possible to stop spam.

17 Jeans

Jeans are a kind of trousers made of a heavy strong cotton material called denim. Jeans had to be strong and hard-wearing because they were initially worn by workers in the factories, mines, ports and building sites of the USA in the 1880s. They were also worn by cowboys. Jeans had to be tough.

Similar work trousers were made in Genoa, Italy, in the mid 1800s from denim obtained from a French city called Nimes. In fact, the word 'jeans' comes from Genoa, and the word denim comes from Nimes. Jeans, as we know them today, were invented by Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis in 1872. The defining difference was the metal rivets, small pieces of metal that strengthened the points of stress such as on the pocket corners or at the bottom of the zipper. Zippers had been invented in 1851 and were originally called automatic continuous clothing closings.

Jeans have enjoyed continuous popularity as a work 'uniform' ever since. However, at the beginning of the rock and roll era in the 1950s, jeans became a symbol of American youth culture. They also became a symbol for youth rebellion when James Dean wore them in the classic movie, 'Rebel without a Cause'. Since that time jeans have remained a popular item of casual fashion clothing. Do you know anyone who has never owned a pair of jeans?

According to market research, North America is the most popular place for jeans, accounting for 39% of world-wide purchase in 2011. That amounted to \$14,000,000,000. Next was Europe with 20%, followed by Korea and Japan at 10% each. The average American owns seven pairs of jeans.

From simple beginnings as work trousers, jeans have gone through many changes. At first women's jeans had the zipper at the side. It wasn't until the 1960s that both men's and women's jeans had front opening zippers. Initially jeans were loose and shapeless because they were made for comfort and ease of movement. Nowadays you can get loose fitting, high cut, low cut, boot cut and jeans that are so tight you wonder how people can get into them. You can get jean shirts, jean jackets, work jeans, designer jeans and jeans for children and babies.

Along with Coca-Cola, McDonald's hamburgers, the Statue of Liberty, Disney movies and the Stars and Stripes, jeans must be one of the most common symbols of American global cultural influence.

17 Jeans

1. Originally jeans were not worn:
 - a. on building sites
 - b. in factories
 - c. in hospitals
2. Originally jeans were:
 - a. hard-wearing
 - b. uncomfortable
 - c. fashionable
3. Similar work trousers were first worn in:
 - a. Italy
 - b. France
 - c. Germany
4. Who invented jeans?
 - a. Nimes and Genoa
 - b. Strauss and Davis
 - c. James Dean
5. The main difference between old work trousers and jeans was:
 - a. use of rivets
 - b. use of zippers
 - c. neither of the above
6. Which sentence is true?
 - a. Originally men's jeans had zippers at the side.
 - b. Originally women's jeans had zippers at the side.
 - c. Originally women's jeans had zippers at the front.
7. When did jeans become a symbol of American youth culture?
 - a. in the 1900s
 - b. in the 1950s
 - c. in the 2000s
8. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Jeans have always been a work uniform.
 - b. James Dean wore jeans in 'Rebel without a Cause'.
 - c. Jeans have always been fashionable.
9. The average American owns:
 - a. seven pairs of jeans
 - b. two pairs of jeans
 - c. twelve pairs of jeans
10. Nowadays you can get jeans for babies.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned

18 Batik

Batik is the traditional cloth of Indonesia. It is made by using a technique called wax-resist hand-dyeing. Wax is a kind of oily substance that sets hard at room temperature. Think of candle wax, or the wax that bees make to store their honey. First, a design is painted onto cloth with hot wax. The cloth should be a natural material such as cotton or silk so that the wax sticks to it easily. When the wax is cold, the cloth is dyed. The dye colour is taken up by the parts of the cloth where there is no wax, but the waxed parts remain colourless. This is the first step. After the cloth has dried, the second layer of wax is applied to build up the pattern. For some complex patterns, the process is repeated three or four times, with more detail and a different colour added each time. After all the colours have been applied, the cloth is washed in boiling water to remove the wax, and the result is the beautiful hand-made cloth that we associate with Indonesia. Often there is still a faint pleasant smell of wax many years later.

Areas of Indonesia have their own traditional patterns, often handed down from generation to generation. Batik from Yogyakarta and Surakarta show the traditional concepts of how the world began while batik from Kalimantan in Borneo is characterised by bright colours. Other areas have their own styles which may include flowers, nature, birds, animals or aspects of everyday life. Religious customs and festivals provide further designs.

Blue, cream, brown and black are traditional batik colours, probably because these dyes occur in the natural environment. Originally, some designs were reserved for the royal family, for example wide stripes. It was possible to tell who belonged to high-ranking families by looking at the width of the stripes; the wider the stripes, the higher the rank.

A fine batik cloth made by hand in the traditional way may take several months to complete and cost several thousand dollars to buy. A cheaper quicker method was invented in the mid 19th century which involved applying the wax with a kind of stamp which could cover a large area of cloth quickly. In this way batik became affordable for everyone.

Nowadays, Indonesian designers are promoting batik on the fashion scene so the traditional art of batik is being extended into new areas.

18 Batik

1. Batik comes from:
 - a. Iceland
 - b. Indonesia
 - c. Italy
2. Originally batik was made:
 - a. by hand
 - b. by a kind of stamp
 - c. by machine
3. The cloth should be a natural material:
 - a. so that the wax sticks easily
 - b. because it's more traditional
 - c. because it's easier to wash
4. For complex patterns, the process is repeated:
 - a. once or twice
 - b. three or four times
 - c. not mentioned
5. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Patterns are handed down from generation to generation.
 - b. Batik may still have a pleasant wax smell many years later.
 - c. The cloth is washed in cold water to remove the wax.
6. Why are blue, cream, brown and black the traditional colours?
 - a. They are cheap to buy.
 - b. They occur in the natural environment.
 - c. not mentioned
7. Wide stripes were originally reserved for:
 - a. religious use
 - b. the royal family
 - c. farmers
8. How long does it take to make a fine batik cloth?
 - a. several days
 - b. several weeks
 - c. several months
9. A fine cloth may cost:
 - a. several hundred dollars
 - b. several thousand dollars
 - c. several million dollars
10. Nowadays, batik is:
 - a. affordable for everyone
 - b. affordable for rich people
 - c. affordable for the royal family

19 The Sahara Desert

The Sahara Desert covers most of the north of Africa and is the largest hot desert in the world. At more than 9 million square kilometres, it occupies approximately 30% of the African continent and is roughly the same size as China or the United States of America. There are two larger deserts on the earth but these are the cold deserts at the North and South Poles. The Sahara is one of the hottest places on earth with average temperatures of 30 degrees. Temperatures above 50 degrees are not uncommon during the hottest times of the year, although in the winter months temperatures may drop below freezing.

As well as being hot, the desert is extremely dry and windy. The region experiences only about three inches of rain annually, but this is irregular and it varies from place to place. When the dust-filled winds blow across the desert, it seems even hotter and dryer.

The Sahara covers parts of several African countries and has a varied geographical make up. Many of the land formations have been shaped over time by wind which is constantly altering the landscape. About 25% of the region is formed by shifting sand hills and because of this the Sahara is sometimes called the Sea of Sand. In addition, there are high flat stony regions, large dry flat areas, salt lakes and several high mountain ranges.

There is only one permanent river running through the desert. The Nile River starts in central Africa and flows to the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile is the longest river in the world and flows for 6695 kilometres from the source to the sea. Along its banks there are small towns and cities. The only other water found in the desert is underground and where it reaches the surface, the land is fertile and small settlements, called oases, are found.

Only about four million people live in the Sahara Desert and most of them are nomads. That means they do not live in one place. Instead, they travel from place to place with their animals, sheep and goats, using camels for transportation, searching for better living conditions.

The hot dry climate of the Sahara is relatively recent on an evolutionary scale. Five thousand years ago much of the region had adequate rainfall and plant life. Currently, the Sahara Desert is increasing in area as the effects of global warming increase.

19 The Sahara Desert

1. Which continent is the Sahara Desert in?
 - a. Europe
 - b. Asia
 - c. Africa

2. It is about the same size as:
 - a. China
 - b. the South Pole
 - c. not mentioned

3. The Sahara is the biggest desert in the world.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned

4. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. The Sahara is one of the hottest places on earth.
 - b. The Sahara never gets cold.
 - c. The Sahara is very windy.

5. The Sahara is not:
 - a. hot and dry
 - b. dry and windy
 - c. windy and wet

6. Which sentence is true?
 - a. The Sahara is constantly changing.
 - b. The Sahara stays the same.
 - c. not mentioned

7. The Sahara is called:
 - a. the Sea of Desert
 - b. the Sea of Wind
 - c. the Sea of Sand

8. Which sentence is true?
 - a. There are two permanent rivers in the Sahara.
 - b. The Sahara has no mountains.
 - c. The Nile is the longest river in the world.

9. A nomad is a person who:
 - a. does not live in one place
 - b. does not travel from place to place
 - c. does not look after animals

10. Currently the Sahara Desert is:
 - a. increasing in area
 - b. decreasing in area
 - c. staying the same

20 Wine

Wine is an alcoholic drink made from grapes. Different kinds of grapes produce different varieties of wine. The basic categories are red and white, but this is just the beginning. Within each broad category there are a lot of sub-varieties depending on the climate, the soil, the region and the method of production. The alcohol content of wine varies between 9% and 16%, but the usual range for table wines is 12% to 14%.

Wine is sometimes called the drink of the Gods. The saying originated in ancient Greece where wine was honoured in religious festivals. In the Greek and the Roman empires, people prayed to Dionysus and Bacchus, the Gods of wine. Wine was believed to restore health, lengthen life and even bring people back from death. Historical evidence suggests that wine was first produced in Georgia at least 8,000 years ago. Trade in wine was centred on Lebanon in the Middle East in 2,500 BC. The discovery of a shipwreck dating back to 750 BC provides evidence of the early trade in wine. Surprisingly, after 2,750 years the wine was still in good condition.

Wine is traditionally consumed with European style meals, and is associated with conventions such as drinking certain kinds of wine with certain foods, white wine with fish for example. In countries such as France, drinking wine with meals is a way of life and children may be introduced to wine mixed with water. Wine is used in cooking to add flavour and interest, and recently a culture of wine bars has become popular. People can enjoy a glass of wine or two while relaxing with friends in pleasant surroundings after a hard day's work.

Wine is traditionally a European drink. However, countries such as South Africa, Argentina, Chile, the USA, Australia and New Zealand now produce, consume and export high quality wines. However, France remains the greatest wine drinking country with the highest per head consumption. According to the World Health Organisation, of the top ten wine consuming countries, nine are European.

Drinking too much alcohol is not good for your health. However, studies show that reasonable consumption of wine may be helpful in reducing heart disease. But is it the wine, or is it the way of life of wine drinkers? Researchers have also found that the typical wine drinker is better educated, more health conscious, richer and exercises more than non-wine drinkers.

20 Wine

1. What are the two basic categories of wine?
 - a. red and white
 - b. white and rose
 - c. not mentioned
2. The alcoholic content of table wines is approximately:
 - a. 5%
 - b. 13%
 - c. 20%
3. Wine is sometimes called:
 - a. the drink of the grapes
 - b. the drink of the Gods
 - c. the drink of the Kings
4. Wine was used in religious festivals.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
5. In ancient times, people believed that wine could bring people back to life.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
6. In 2,500 BC the wine trade was centred in:
 - a. Greece
 - b. Rome
 - c. the Middle East
7. According to convention, fish and red wine go together well.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
8. Wine is traditionally served with European food.
 - a. true
 - b. false
 - c. not mentioned
9. Which is the top wine drinking country?
 - a. Spain
 - b. Germany
 - c. France
10. Which sentence is true?
 - a. In France children drink wine with water.
 - b. All of the top ten wine consuming countries are in Europe.
 - c. Reasonable consumption of wine is not good for your health.

3000 BNC Speed Readings for ESL Learners

Answer Key

1.	1.c	2.b	3.b	4.a	5.c	6.b	7.a	8.b	9.c	10.c
2.	1.c	2.a	3.a	4.c	5.b	6.c	7.a	8.b	9.b	10.b
3.	1.b	2.b	3.b	4.a	5.c	6.b	7.a	8.c	9.a	10.b
4.	1.b	2.a	3.c	4.a	5.a	6.a	7.b	8.c	9.b	10.c
5.	1.c	2.a	3.b	4.c	5.c	6.c	7.b	8.a	9.a	10.a
6.	1.b	2.a	3.c	4.b	5.c	6.b	7.a	8.a	9.c	10.c
7.	1.b	2.a	3.c	4.b	5.c	6.a	7.b	8.c	9.a	10.b
8.	1.c	2.a	3.c	4.b	5.c	6.c	7.a	8.b	9.b	10.a
9.	1.a	2.b	3.a	4.a	5.c	6.c	7.b	8.c	9.c	10.b
10.	1.a	2.b	3.a	4.c	5.b	6.a	7.c	8.a	9.b	10.b
11.	1.c	2.a	3.a	4.b	5.a	6.c	7.c	8.a	9.a	10.b
12.	1.a	2.c	3.c	4.b	5.b	6.a	7.a	8.c	9.b	10.b
13.	1.c	2.c	3.a	4.a	5.a	6.c	7.b	8.c	9.b	10.a
14.	1.a	2.c	3.a	4.c	5.c	6.b	7.b	8.a	9.a	10.b
15.	1.a	2.c	3.b	4.a	5.c	6.c	7.b	8.c	9.b	10.b
16.	1.b	2.c	3.a	4.c	5.c	6.b	7.b	8.c	9.a	10.b
17.	1.c	2.a	3.a	4.b	5.a	6.b	7.b	8.c	9.a	10.a
18.	1.b	2.a	3.a	4.b	5.c	6.b	7.b	8.c	9.b	10.a
19.	1.c	2.a	3.b	4.b	5.c	6.a	7.c	8.c	9.a	10.a
20.	1.a	2.b	3.b	4.a	5.a	6.c	7.b	8.a	9.c	10.a

Progress Graph

Put an **X** in one of the boxes to show your reading time and words-per-minute reading rate.
Then write your score in the box under the number.

time																					wpm
1.00																					400
1.10																					345
1.20																					300
1.30																					265
1.40																					240
1.50																					220
2.00																					200
2.10																					185
2.20																					170
2.30																					160
2.40																					150
2.50																					140
3.00																					135
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
score																					

Progress Graph

Put an **X** in one of the boxes to show your reading time and words-per-minute reading rate.
Then write your score in the box under the number.

time																					wpm	
1.00																					400	
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2.00																					200	
2.10																					185	
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2.40																					150	
2.50																					140	
3.00																					135	
3.10																					125	
3.20																					120	
3.30																					115	
3.40																					110	
3.50																					105	
4.00																					100	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
score																						

Progress Graph

Write the number of the passage under the #.

Put an **X** in one of the boxes to show your reading time and words-per-minute reading rate.

Then write your score in the box under the number.

time																				wpm
0.40																				540
0.50																				465
1.00																				400
1.10																				345
1.20																				300
1.30																				265
1.40																				240
1.50																				220
2.00																				200
2.10																				185
2.20																				170
2.30																				160
2.40																				150
2.50																				140
3.00																				135
	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	
score																				

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