

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

Speed Readings for ESL Learners

4000 BNC

Sonia Millett

**English Language Institute
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VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
TE WHARE WĀNANGA
O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI



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Introduction

Speed Readings for ESL Learners 4000 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 4000 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 them 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 4000 BNC

1. Sugar
2. Cats
3. Kimchi
4. Sign Language
5. Tattoos
6. MSG
7. History of Tourism
8. Ramadan
9. Pieces of Eight
10. Sleep Problems
11. $E=mc^2$
12. News Media
13. Dates
14. ELF
15. Netsuke
16. Silk
17. Alternative Medicine
18. Fair Trade Coffee
19. Salt
20. Music and Maths

1 Sugar

Sugar was first domesticated in Papua New Guinea and India in ancient times. Sugar comes from sugarcane which belongs to the grass family.

In the beginning, sugar was not cheap or plentiful and honey was more common as a sweetener. Sugar didn't gain importance as a crop until about 500 AD. At that time, the process of turning sugarcane juice into sugar crystals was discovered in India. Sugar crystals are sugar as we know it today. Sugar in crystal form was much easier to store and to transport and Indian sailors and merchants started trading sugar along the well-established trade routes.

In the 7th century, travelling Buddhist monks took sugar and the method of crystallisation to China where sugar cultivation was established. The Arab world is credited with setting up the first sugar plantations, or large farms, and the first sugar factories. Throughout South Asia, China and the Middle East sugar became an important part of cooking.

In the 12th century, Europeans first encountered 'sweet salt' while fighting wars in the Middle East and brought it home with them. In the same century, Italy set up sugar plantations and began exporting sugar around Europe. At this time, sugar became more popular than honey.

During the 15th century, many new products entered Asia and Europe from the newly discovered Americas: chillies, potatoes and tomatoes to name a few. However, sugar went the other way. Christopher Columbus introduced sugar to the New World.

While sugar was not native to the New World, it grew very well there and enormous plantations were established to produce the 'white gold'. The Caribbean became the world's largest producer of sugar. As with other profitable crops and resources that were highly sought after by colonial authorities, many people were needed to work the labour intensive crop. First Native Americans were forced to work on the sugar plantations. Later African slaves were transported to the new world and provided most of the labour for the sugar industry for the next 350 years.

During the 18th century, sugar became enormously popular and completely altered eating habits. Chocolate and candy became popular and sugar was added to coffee and tea. The rise in popularity of sugar couldn't be stopped and today consumption has reached over a kilogram per week per person in some countries. What was once a luxury is now a health risk. Too much of a good thing . . .

1 Sugar

1. Sugar was first domesticated in:
 - a. Papua New Guinea
 - b. India
 - c. Papua New Guinea and India

2. Which sweetener was more common at first?
 - a. sugar juice
 - b. sugar crystals
 - c. honey

3. Sugar crystals look like:
 - a. sugar today
 - b. sugarcane
 - c. sugarcane juice

4. Which is easiest to transport?
 - a. sugarcane
 - b. sugar juice
 - c. sugar crystals

5. Who took sugar to China?
 - a. Buddhist monks
 - b. Arab traders
 - c. Indian merchants

6. Europeans first encountered 'sweet salt' in:
 - a. India
 - b. the Middle East
 - c. the New World

7. Which sentence is true?
 - a. Chillies were introduced to the New World.
 - b. Sugar was introduced to the New World.
 - c. Tomatoes were introduced to the New World.

8. In the Caribbean, sugar was known as:
 - a. sweet salt
 - b. sweet gold
 - c. white gold

9. Slaves were brought to work the sugar plantations by:
 - a. Native Americans
 - b. colonial authorities
 - c. not mentioned

10. Too much of a good thing is:
 - a. bad for you
 - b. a luxury
 - c. sugar

2 Cats

The domestication of cats has a very long history which is closely tied to the history of rats and mice. The relationship between cats and people may have started with the ancient Egyptians around 4000 years ago, although evidence suggests that cats were also tamed throughout the Middle East when people settled down and became farmers. A French study in 2004 uncovered a burial site which was 9500 years old containing both human and cat remains. This indicates that the connection goes back further than previously thought.

As people began to cultivate and store grain, rats and mice were attracted to the store houses. These in turn attracted wild cats which hunted, killed and ate them. Thus began a mutually beneficial arrangement between cats and humans. Cats took up residence in Egyptian houses and over time they came to be regarded as gods. For example, the Egyptian fertility goddess was represented as a cat. At one time, it was illegal to kill a cat and the punishment was death.

The practice of keeping cats for agricultural purposes spread across India and into China. They were introduced into Europe by the Romans and Greeks and the idea of keeping cats as household pets became popular. However, they were still valued for their hunting ability, especially when the plague struck Europe in the 14th century. This disease, also known as the Black Death, killed hundreds of thousands of people. As the disease was spread by rats and mice, it was essential to keep the cat population high to rid the towns and cities of these animals.

Despite the excellent hunting work that cats did, the 15th to 18th centuries were terrible years for cats. They became associated with devil worship, witchcraft and magic. In the Middle Ages people, usually women, who kept cats were suspected by the church of being witches and were put to death along with their cats. When the witch hunt madness stopped, cats began to regain their rightful place as beloved household pets. In the late 19th century, cats became very popular as companion animals, or pets. Many new breeds such as Siamese or Persian cats were developed and cat shows gained popularity.

The American Veterinary Medical Association estimates that nowadays around 35% of U.S. households keep a cat as a pet. Sometimes these are fancy pure bred cats, but usually they are just plain ordinary lovable cats.

2 Cats

1. The domestication of cats has:
 - a. a short history
 - b. a long history
 - c. a medium history

2. Domesticating means:
 - a. taming
 - b. farming
 - c. burial

3. The history of cats is related to the history of:
 - a. dogs
 - b. mice
 - c. birds

4. The practice of keeping cats was introduced into Europe by:
 - a. the Egyptians and French
 - b. the Indians and Chinese
 - c. the Romans and Greeks

5. The punishment for killing a cat in ancient Egypt was:
 - a. prison
 - b. death
 - c. beating

6. The plague was:
 - a. a disease
 - b. a devil
 - c. magic

7. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, cats were associated with:
 - a. devil worship
 - b. diseases
 - c. breeds

8. The people who were killed as witches were usually:
 - a. men
 - b. women
 - c. men and women

9. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. In the late 19th century, cat shows gained popularity.
 - b. In the late 19th century, there were a lot of new breeds of cats.
 - c. In the late 19th century, cats were treated terribly.

10. What percent of people in the U.S. have pet cats nowadays?
 - a. 55%
 - b. 45%
 - c. 35%

3 Kimchi

Kimchi is the most well-known Korean dish. It is served as a side dish to accompany Korean meals which usually include the main dish plus several small extra dishes to enhance the flavour. It is also the main component of some popular Korean dishes such as kimchi soup and kimchi fried rice.

Kimchi is a spicy hot mixture of cabbage, onions and sometimes dried fish, with the addition of garlic and red chillies. These are common ingredients, but many other ingredients are used to make hundreds of different regional and seasonal varieties.

There are two main kinds of kimchi. Seasonal kimchi is made with fresh vegetables available in the local markets. It tends to be fermented for a short period of time and it is lighter and less spicy. Fermentation is the process whereby over a period of time, the vegetables react with salt, alcohol is formed, and all the tastes mix together. Seasonal kimchi is particularly popular in summer as it is served cold.

The other kind is made in autumn in large quantities and fermented for a longer period over winter. It is generally hotter and spicier than seasonal kimchi. Interestingly, kimchi was not originally a spicy dish. Red chillies were unknown in Korea until they were introduced in the late 16th century.

Kimchi is prepared in the following way. First, the vegetables are cleaned and sliced. Then garlic, onion and red chillies are added to the vegetables. The mixture is put into large containers which are filled with a liquid made of salt and water. The containers are stored in a cold dark place. Traditionally, this was a room specially constructed for the purpose under the ground, although, nowadays, there are special kimchi refrigerators which maintain a constant temperature. At the end of the fermentation period, the kimchi is ready to eat.

Because Korea is a long thin country, there are considerable differences between the north and south, for example, kimchi from the south is generally saltier and spicier than kimchi from the north.

Kimchi is very healthy. Health, an American magazine, placed kimchi in its list of the top five healthiest foods in the world. It is low in fat, high in fibre and studies have indicated that it may be effective in the prevention of some diseases. As people around the world adopt healthier eating habits, kimchi is increasingly appearing on international dining room tables.

3 Kimchi

1. Kimchi is usually:
 - a. a main dish
 - b. a side dish
 - c. a soup

2. Korean meals usually comprise:
 - a. one main dish
 - b. several small dishes
 - c. both of the above

3. ingredient means:
 - a. component
 - b. greedy
 - c. vegetable

4. How many varieties of kimchi are there?
 - a. dozens
 - b. hundreds
 - c. thousands

5. Chillies were introduced into Korea in the:
 - a. 11th century
 - b. 16th century
 - c. 20th century

6. Traditionally, kimchi was fermented:
 - a. under the ground
 - b. in a refrigerator
 - c. in a cupboard

7. Korea is:
 - a. a wide country
 - b. a flat country
 - c. a long country

8. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Kimchi is the same in the north and south.
 - b. Kimchi is popular in the north and south.
 - c. Kimchi is different in the north and south.

9. Health magazine placed kimchi in its list of the top _____ healthiest foods.
 - a. five
 - b. ten
 - c. twenty

10. Kimchi may be effective in:
 - a. curing some diseases
 - b. preventing some diseases
 - c. causing some diseases

4 Sign Language

Deaf people can't hear, so wherever there are communities of deaf people, sign languages develop so people can communicate with each other.

Simultaneous is an important word in discussing sign language. Simultaneous means happening at the same time. With oral (spoken) languages, people rely mainly on one thing, sound, whereas with sign language many things are going on at the same time. Sign language simultaneously combines hand shapes and movements, body language and facial expression to communicate. Sign languages exhibit the basic properties that exist in every language. They are equally as complex and rich as any other language and they can be used to discuss any topic from simple ideas to abstract concepts.

There are hundreds of sign languages in use throughout the world. They range from home sign, which a single family uses for communication within the home, to nationally recognised sign languages. The status of the latter varies from country to country. In some countries, sign languages have gained legal recognition. In New Zealand for example, New Zealand Sign Language is one of three official languages. In some countries, sign languages are not recognised at all.

Signed languages are not new. They have been used throughout history. Plato made the first recorded reference to signing in the 5th century BC, and a manual alphabet (finger spelling) was published in the 17th century. This was further developed in the 18th century and has survived virtually unchanged to the modern day as a component of French and North American sign languages. Sign languages have often evolved around schools for the deaf. An example of this is the first school for deaf children established in Paris in 1755.

People often imagine that sign languages are similar to the spoken languages of the country where they are used, but this isn't true. For example, the sign languages of Mexico and Spain are different even though Spanish is the main language of both countries. Sign languages do not have a written form. Many deaf signers are bilingual. They read and write the language of their country as well as sign in their own language.

Sign language is gradually becoming more visible in the wider community. Some television programmes provide a sign language interpreter and there is new television technology emerging which allows a viewer to turn on a signer, in the same way they can turn on subtitles for a foreign movie.

4 Sign Language

1. Deaf means that someone:
 - a. can't hear
 - b. can't see
 - c. can't speak
2. Simultaneous means:
 - a. happening at different times
 - b. happening at the same time
 - c. happening at regular intervals
3. Oral means:
 - a. spoken
 - b. written
 - c. heard
4. Sign languages can:
 - a. express complex concepts
 - b. communicate simple ideas
 - c. both of the above
5. How many different sign languages are there?
 - a. dozens
 - b. hundreds
 - c. thousands
6. How many official languages are there in New Zealand?
 - a. one
 - b. two
 - c. three
7. The first recorded reference to signing was in:
 - a. the 5th century BC
 - b. the 5th century AD
 - c. the 17th century AD
8. Sign languages have often evolved in:
 - a. schools
 - b. universities
 - c. Paris
9. Sign languages are:
 - a. similar to country languages
 - b. independent of country languages
 - c. related to world languages
10. Sign language is:
 - a. becoming less visible in the wider community
 - b. becoming more visible in the wider community
 - c. staying about the same

5 Tattoos

A tattoo is an image which is permanently marked on the skin and is created by inserting ink under the skin. The word tattoo was introduced into English from the Polynesian languages of the Pacific region. English sailors first encountered the word and the practice during their ocean voyages in the 18th century.

Tattooing has an ancient history that may go back to the New Stone Age which began about ten thousand years ago. Otzi the Iceman, a perfectly preserved human body dating back approximately five and a half thousand years, had 57 small dots tattooed on his body. Tattooing in Japan goes back even further and tattoos were common throughout Europe in pre-Christian times according to historical accounts.

In some tribal societies, tattoos were created by cutting designs into the skin and then rubbing ink or ashes into the wound. Some cultures followed a process of tapping the ink into the skin with sharpened sticks or bones, or more recently, metal needles. Nowadays, electric tattoo machines are the most common method of inserting ink into the skin layers.

People have tattoos for many reasons: for body beautification or as a fashion statement, for religious purposes, to mark important stages in life or to display membership of a group.

Tattoos have negative associations in many cultures and are often linked to criminality. In Japan full body tattoos are associated with organised crime groups called Yakuza, and in the U.S., prisoners and criminals use distinctive tattoos to indicate criminal behaviour. For example, tear drops tattooed on the face show how many people a person has murdered.

In some cultures, the practice of tattooing virtually died out when the country was colonised. In recent times, indigenous people have begun to re-claim their rights by returning to their old customs. An example is New Zealand where the traditional Maori art of tattoo is undergoing a revival.

In recent decades, tattoos have become a popular part of global fashion. The practice is common among men and women, all economic groups and age groups ranging from teens to middle age. Pop stars and famous sports people proudly display tattoos.

It is not impossible to remove a tattoo but it is difficult and expensive. The removal process can be painful and often only partially successful. The best advice is to be absolutely sure that you love your design. You will probably have it for life.

5 Tattoos

1. A tattoo is:
 - a. a picture drawn on the skin
 - b. ink inserted under the skin
 - c. small dots on the skin

2. A tattoo is:
 - a. permanent
 - b. temporary
 - c. continuous

3. The word tattoo was introduced into English from:
 - a. Japan
 - b. Europe
 - c. Polynesia

4. Otzi the Iceman was:
 - a. an English sailor
 - b. a preserved body
 - c. a member of the Yakuza

5. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Traditionally tattoos were done by cutting the skin and rubbing in ink.
 - b. Traditionally tattoos were done by tapping ink into the skin.
 - c. Traditionally tattoos were done by using metal needles.

6. Nowadays, the most common tattoo method is:
 - a. a machine
 - b. a needle
 - c. a laser

7. Tear drop tattoos mean:
 - a. the number of murders committed
 - b. group membership
 - c. religious membership

8. Maori tattooing is undergoing a:
 - a. preservation
 - b. removal
 - c. revival

9. Removing a tattoo is:
 - a. impossible
 - b. difficult and expensive
 - c. easy with modern techniques

10. Negative associations include:
 - a. crime groups
 - b. fashion statements
 - c. religious purposes

6 MSG

MSG stands for monosodium glutamate. Monosodium glutamate is a naturally occurring amino acid (a building block of protein in the body). For example, there is natural MSG in tomatoes, cheese and some kinds of beans. The product MSG is an artificially produced chemical. It is a white substance that looks like salt or sugar, and it works like salt to make food taste better. The potential of MSG to make food taste better was discovered in Japan in 1909. By 1957, a process of manufacturing MSG had been invented, and large scale production began.

MSG is a controversial product. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the European Food Safety Authority recognise MSG as safe for the general population but state that certain individuals may have an increased sensitivity to it. Those against MSG say it has never been scientifically tested. They believe that MSG causes headaches, heart conditions, high blood pressure, depression, chest pains, behavioural problems in children and risks for the elderly. In addition, studies on rats have linked MSG to weight gain.

MSG is recognised as a trigger for migraines, a particularly severe kind of headache. Migraines have a number of triggers, things that set off an attack. Apart from MSG, the list includes chocolate, bananas and strong cheeses.

China is the largest producer and consumer of MSG, but it is widely used throughout Asia. In the West, MSG is found in most supermarket products that have a salty taste. Think of snack foods, cup noodles, soups, sauces, bread, frozen food and cooked meats to name a few.

If you want to know if the product you are buying contains MSG, look at the list of ingredients on the label. If you see the number 621, the product contains MSG. You should also be careful about anything that says flavour or flavour enhancer because producers can hide MSG related products by using names like this.

That is one of the problems with MSG. Producers want to use it because if they don't, their products won't taste so good and people won't buy them. On the other hand, as people become more health conscious, they won't buy food full of chemicals. Therefore producers like to say 'MSG free'. They solve this problem by calling MSG something else and then labelling the product MSG free. It's not very honest, but it helps to sell the product and that's business.

6 MSG

1. An amino acid is:
 - a. a building block of protein
 - b. an artificially produced chemical
 - c. a white substance that looks like salt

2. MSG:
 - a. looks like a protein
 - b. makes food taste better
 - c. works like sugar

3. MSG was discovered in:
 - a. 1859
 - b. 1909
 - c. 1957

4. Controversial means:
 - a. people agree strongly
 - b. people disagree strongly
 - c. people agree and disagree strongly

5. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration thinks MSG is:
 - a. safe for all people
 - b. safe for most people
 - c. safe for some people

6. In this passage, trigger means:
 - a. something that starts something
 - b. something that stops something
 - c. something that kills people

7. A migraine is a:
 - a. very severe headache
 - b. very severe chest pain
 - c. very severe backache

8. Nowadays, the largest producer of MSG is:
 - a. Japan
 - b. China
 - c. the West

9. Which number means MSG?
 - a. 421
 - b. 521
 - c. 621

10. One problem with MSG is:
 - a. it is full of chemicals
 - b. it makes food taste better
 - c. it is hidden in food products

7 History of Tourism

Tourism is the act of paying money to visit interesting places and it has been popular amongst the very rich and the very adventurous for centuries.

People have travelled for trade since the beginning of civilisation, but the earliest form of travel for leisure can be traced back to 600 BC. There are records from this time describing travel to the cities of the Egyptian Empire to visit art works and buildings.

Religious travel was also common from this time. Pilgrimages were made to religious festivals and temples, and to sacred sites to be cured of illnesses. As travel became more common, inns were established to accommodate travellers, and the first travel writer, Herodotus, wrote the first guidebook in the 4th century.

During the Roman Empire, excellent roads were built and these promoted the growth of travel. This era could be thought of as the golden age of travel. Beach and mountain holiday towns were built for the wealthy and also for the less well-off sections of the community. The period of a thousand years between the 5th and the 15th centuries was known as the Middle Ages. During this time, travel became difficult and dangerous. People mainly travelled for business and trade or to seek fame and fortune. Great European explorers discovered the New World and Christian missionaries travelled to far away countries to try to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity. From the 17th century, sea water became associated with health benefits and seaside holiday towns became fashionable.

In the 19th century, migration to the cities speeded up with the Industrial Revolution, and travel became a means of escape from the overcrowded cities. With the invention of the steam engine, trains and ships provided a more convenient and comfortable travel experience for larger numbers of people. Photography was invented so people could enhance their status by showing pictures of their adventures to friends and family. In addition, package tours were organised by companies such as Thomas Cook.

In the 20th century, tourism exploded. The introduction of the 40-hour work week and paid holidays gave ordinary people the chance to have annual holidays and this increased domestic tourism. The major influence on international tourism in the last century was the introduction of cheap air travel and the corresponding growth in the hotel industry. Nowadays, mass tourism is common and income from tourism plays a major role in the global economy.

7 History of Tourism

1. Tourism is:
 - a. paying money to visit interesting places
 - b. visiting religious sites
 - c. travelling to seek fame and fortune
2. Trade travel started:
 - a. in the year 600 BC
 - b. in the Middle Ages
 - c. at the beginning of civilisation
3. A pilgrimage is:
 - a. religious travel
 - b. leisure travel
 - c. interesting travel
4. Inns are:
 - a. a means of transport
 - b. places of accommodation
 - c. museums
5. Excellent roads were built:
 - a. at the beginning of civilisation
 - b. during the Roman Empire
 - c. during the Industrial Revolution
6. The Middle Ages lasted for:
 - a. about a thousand years
 - b. about a hundred years
 - c. about fifty years
7. Seaside holiday towns became fashionable because:
 - a. people associated sea water with health
 - b. photography was invented
 - c. international travel became difficult
8. Migration to cities increased in the:
 - a. 6th century
 - b. 17th century
 - c. 19th century
9. Thomas Cook was a:
 - a. guide book writer
 - b. travel company
 - c. Christian missionary
10. Mass tourism started in the:
 - a. 18th century
 - b. 19th century
 - c. 20th century

8 Ramadan

Ramadan is a significant month for more than one billion Muslims throughout the world. During this month, Muslims fast between the hours of sunrise and sunset. Fasting means not eating or drinking, but for Muslims, the fast is more than just a physical responsibility. The Arabic word, *sawm*, means to refrain (to cease or avoid). It means not only refraining from food and drink but also refraining from evil behaviour, thoughts and words.

Fasting symbolises total commitment to purifying the body and the soul. Ramadan is a time for Muslims to re-evaluate their lives and refocus attention on worshipping God. It is a time to make peace and solve problems with people, strengthen relationships with family and friends and get rid of bad habits. Fasting is also a way of experiencing hunger and in this way, developing sympathy for people who are less fortunate, and experiencing thankfulness and appreciation for God's gifts.

Ramadan occurs in the ninth month of the lunar calendar. The lunar calendar is based on cycles of the moon. Because each lunar month is only 28 days, every year the lunar calendar moves eleven or twelve days away from the solar calendar with the result that Ramadan doesn't always occur in the same season, as for example, Christmas does.

Ramadan commences at the first sight of the new moon. This will vary at different locations around the world so it is impossible to determine exactly when Ramadan will start in advance. The traditional way of calculating the start of Ramadan is to look at the sky and sight the new moon. Ramadan starts the day after the new moon is sighted. Ramadan ends when the next new moon appears in the sky 28 days later.

Because the fast is for daylight hours, Muslims eat before the sun comes up and then again after the sun has set. Ramadan stresses community values so people often share their evening meal with family and neighbours and special Ramadan dishes are served.

At the end of Ramadan there is a three-day festival called Eid ul-Fitr. During this time certain customs are observed. People attend special community prayers and pay a religious tax to help the poor and disadvantaged. People dress in their best clothes and visit friends and relatives. In some places children are given gifts or money by their relatives. Ramadan is the greatest religious observance in the Islamic year.

8 Ramadan

1. How many Muslims are there in the world?
 - a. over a billion
 - b. a billion
 - c. under a billion

2. Ramadan lasts for:
 - a. one week
 - b. one month
 - c. one year

3. Ramadan is concerned with:
 - a. the body
 - b. the soul
 - c. the body and the soul

4. During Ramadan, Muslims fast:
 - a. for 12 hours a day
 - b. from sunrise to sunset
 - c. from sunset to sunrise

5. Refrain means:
 - a. to stop
 - b. to start
 - c. to continue

6. Breakfast means:
 - a. to stop eating
 - b. to start eating
 - c. to continue eating

7. Which sentence is true?
 - a. The lunar calendar is longer than the solar calendar.
 - b. The solar calendar is longer than the lunar calendar.
 - c. The lunar calendar and the solar calendar are the same.

8. Which sentence is true?
 - a. Christmas is always in different seasons.
 - b. Ramadan is always in the same season.
 - c. Ramadan is not always in the same season.

9. The traditional way to determine when Ramadan starts is:
 - a. to use a calendar
 - b. to look at the moon
 - c. to use a calculator

10. Eid ul-Fitr lasts for:
 - a. a month
 - b. a week
 - c. three days

9 Pieces of Eight

Pieces of eight is the name of the coins which formed the basic unit of the world's first global economy. The name comes from the fact that the coins were made up of eight reals, the Spanish currency of the time. Pieces of eight were very large coins. They were about five centimetres across and could be cut into pieces to form smaller amounts. In the year 1600 one of the coins was equivalent to \$US100 today.

The 15th to 17th centuries were a time of European expansion into New World colonies. Spain was attracted to South America by wonderful stories of streets covered with gold. However, it was silver that allowed Spain to become the dominant global power at the end of the 16th century.

The Spanish first discovered silver in Mexico, but it was in a place called Potosi in Bolivia where silver was found in quantities large enough to have global influences. In Potosi, there was a mountain of silver. Mining of the mountain started in the 1520s. From the 1520s to the 1590s silver production at Potosi increased from 148 kilograms to three million kilograms per year. This growth saw the population of Potosi rise to 200,000, making it one of the largest cities of the Americas and of the world.

The silver was originally transported across the high mountains to the ocean where it was loaded into ships and transported to Spain. The Spanish ships that brought the silver to Spain were often the target of pirates who stole the silver. Today this era is remembered in movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

In 1672 a mint was established in Potosi to manufacture pieces of eight. Coins from the Potosi mint have been found wherever merchants traded: Europe, India, the Americas and Asia. Not only were pieces of eight used for trade, but countries as diverse as China, India and Australia altered the coins to use as their own currency.

While pieces of eight initiated the first world economy, it came about at a terrible cost in human life. First local people, then African slaves, were forced to labour in the mines under terrible conditions and tens of thousands died every year. Today, observers have noted that conditions for miners are as bad now as they were 400 years ago. Potosi, once acknowledged as a colonial jewel, is now described as a city of poverty.

9 Pieces of Eight

1. Pieces of eight was the name of:
 - a. a real
 - b. a coin
 - c. a currency
2. Pieces of eight were:
 - a. small
 - b. medium
 - c. large
3. Spain was first attracted to South America by:
 - a. silver
 - b. gold
 - c. pirates
4. The Spanish first discovered silver in:
 - a. Mexico
 - b. Potosi
 - c. Spain
5. In Potosi, there was a:
 - a. silver hill
 - b. silver mountain
 - c. silver valley
6. Spanish ships were the target of:
 - a. pirates
 - b. merchants
 - c. local people
7. A mint is a place where:
 - a. silver is mined
 - b. money is made
 - c. money is traded
8. The silver mines of Potosi were:
 - a. good places to work
 - b. bad places to work
 - c. terrible places to work
9. In the 16th century Potosi was:
 - a. one of the largest cities in the world
 - b. a small mining town
 - c. a large city in Mexico
10. Now, Potosi is:
 - a. a colonial jewel
 - b. a poor city
 - c. a major silver producing town

10 Sleep Problems

It is difficult to define sleep. Sleep is not just turning off the brain. It is not the opposite of being awake. Sleep is a complex system on its own.

It is easier to think about why people need sleep. Sleep is a time for the brain to process all the input accumulated during the day, to organize what it needs to retain and delete what is not necessary. Sleep is absolutely essential. If we don't get enough sleep, our brains don't function properly, we become more emotional and we feel pain more severely. However, the amount of sleep each person needs is genetically determined. Some people just don't need as much sleep as others.

Sleep problems may be mild or serious. Most people occasionally experience a night when they just can't go to sleep; it's too hot or they can't stop thinking about something at school or work. Others experience insomnia (sleeplessness) on a regular basis. For others, where insomnia is caused by serious medical or mental dysfunction, specialist treatment may be required.

For people in the middle group who might be described as having poor sleep habits, the most common causes of sleep problems are depression, anxiety and stress. For these people, there are techniques that may help. Relaxation or meditation before bed can help us get into the right frame of mind for sleeping. Cut down on stimulants like coffee and energy drinks. Their purpose is to keep you stimulated and awake. Exposure to light affects sleep patterns. We are biologically programmed to wake up when it gets light and close down when darkness comes so make sure your bedroom is dark. Invest in thick curtains. Turn off the monitor if your computer is near the bed. Don't look at a bright computer screen or E-reader before going to sleep. Bright light signals the brain it's time to wake up.

One successful technique recommended by sleep therapists is don't go to bed early. Go to bed one or even two hours later, but get up at the usual time the next morning. Try to get into a regular pattern with the light/dark cycle.

The worst thing is to start worrying about being unable to get to sleep. If you can relax and accept that you may not have much sleep that night, you will stay calmer. Resting quietly will be more beneficial than getting angry and upset.

10 Sleep Problems

1. Sleep is:
 - a. turning off the brain
 - b. the opposite of being awake
 - c. a complete system on its own

2. Sleep is:
 - a. a time to delete all input
 - b. a time to process all input
 - c. a time to remember all input

3. Lack of sleep makes us:
 - a. feel pain more severely
 - b. feel pain less frequently
 - c. feel pain more often

4. The amount of sleep a person needs is determined by:
 - a. genetics
 - b. emotions
 - c. our environment

5. Do most people occasionally have trouble going to sleep?
 - a. not mentioned
 - b. no
 - c. yes

6. Insomnia means:
 - a. sleeplessness
 - b. feeling tired
 - c. sleep patterns

7. Sleep therapists recommend:
 - a. going to bed earlier
 - b. going to bed later
 - c. going to bed before 10pm

8. Sleep therapists recommend getting up:
 - a. earlier
 - b. later
 - c. at your usual time

9. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Exposure to light affects sleep patterns.
 - b. It's good to work on your computer before going to bed.
 - c. Thick curtains may help you sleep.

10. According to the passage, the worst thing to do is:
 - a. try to relax
 - b. drink coffee
 - c. start worrying

11 $E=mc^2$

$E=mc^2$ is a famous equation which states that energy (E) and matter (m) are different forms of the same thing. The speed of light (c) is a huge number and therefore a very small amount of matter is equal to an enormous amount of energy.

Energy is like effort. How much energy does it take to run a kilometre? It can't be seen but it can be experienced. Matter is a substance or material. It is something physical that can be seen and touched. The speed of light is approximately 300,000,000 metres per second. It is extremely fast. It is the fastest speed that anything can travel in the universe.

The important thing is that matter can be turned into energy and energy can be turned into matter. Both of these processes can be demonstrated in scientific experiments in a laboratory. One of the most unbelievable things is that the equation $E=mc^2$ can tell us exactly how much energy is contained in a given amount of matter.

All matter originated from energy at the beginning of the universe according to the Big Bang theory. It then took about 700,000 years for all the matter in the universe to be created out of energy. Since then, this matter has slowly been changing back into energy and this is why we see stars shining in the sky.

The man who invented the equation $E=mc^2$ was one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century. Albert Einstein was born in Germany in 1879 and died in 1955 in the United States where he had settled after Hitler came to power in Germany. His work revolutionised the field of physics and he was known as the father of modern physics. He won the Nobel Prize for his work in 1921.

Albert Einstein was a peaceful man but during the Second World War he joined a group of scientists urging the President of the United States to fund research into the nuclear bomb. Their goal was to develop the bomb before Germany or Japan. They were successful and the result was a nuclear bomb which destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and thus ended WW2. The nuclear bomb was the first practical demonstration that $E=mc^2$ worked.

$E=mc^2$ gave rise to non-military developments as well. By the mid 1900s nuclear power stations began supplying electric power for industrial and domestic use in the USA.

11 $E=mc^2$

1. $E=mc^2$ is:
 - a. an equation
 - b. an effect
 - c. a bomb
2. The speed of light is represented by the letter:
 - a. m
 - b. E
 - c. c
3. The speed of light is approximately:
 - a. 300,000,000 metres per hour
 - b. 300,000,000 metres per minute
 - c. 300,000,000 metres per second
4. $E=mc^2$ tells us:
 - a. the weight of energy
 - b. the amount of energy in matter
 - c. the speed of light
5. The Big Bang theory is a name for:
 - a. the nuclear bomb
 - b. the end of the universe
 - c. the beginning of the universe
6. Which came first?
 - a. matter
 - b. energy
 - c. the universe
7. Albert Einstein was born in:
 - a. Germany
 - b. the USA
 - c. Japan
8. His work revolutionised the field of:
 - a. physics
 - b. chemistry
 - c. biology
9. He died in:
 - a. 1855
 - b. 1900
 - c. 1955
10. Germany:
 - a. was trying to develop a nuclear bomb
 - b. was first to develop a nuclear bomb
 - c. was not trying to develop a nuclear bomb

12 News Media

One definition describes news as ‘the communication of selected information on current events which is presented by print, broadcast, Internet, or word of mouth to a third party or mass audience’.

During the Middle Ages, town criers were the chief means of communicating important information to people in the towns. Most people couldn’t read so the town crier walked through the town ringing a bell and crying out public announcements. These could include new laws and regulations, important events, advertisements and even bad news such as tax increases.

About 500 years ago in Europe, handwritten news sheets were circulated among merchants. These contained current information about economic conditions and wars, as well as local interest stories. These first news sheets were for special interest groups. Germany was the first country to have printed news sheets which were distributed to the general public. In the 15th century, a German man called Johann Gutenberg came up with the idea of a printing press which could turn out multiple copies easily and quickly. The Gutenberg Press was one of the greatest inventions of the 15th century and was a vast improvement on copying by hand. This early printing press enabled the publication and mass distribution of books and newspapers on a large scale.

In the 17th century, Britain began to have regular weekly news sheets and in the 18th century, further improvements to the Gutenberg Press came with the introduction of continuous rolls of paper and steam powered presses. These innovations meant the cost of production could be significantly reduced. In 1833, Benjamin Day dropped the price of the *New York Sun* to a penny a copy. The *Penny Press* is acknowledged as the first example of mass media.

The word media came into use in the 1930s. Until that time distribution of news was mainly through newspapers, but then radio and television made an appearance. During the late 20th century the Internet took over as the preferred method of distributing and receiving information, especially among young people. While radio and television significantly increased audience size, the Internet greatly increased the amount of information that was available.

In the 21st century, newspapers are in crisis. Online alternatives are more convenient, more thorough, faster and cheaper as well as more environmentally friendly. Nowadays, newspapers are becoming irrelevant. The print era has passed. If news institutions want to survive, the Internet is the way forward.

12 News Media

1. Town criers:
 - a. read the news
 - b. spoke the news
 - c. wrote the news

2. The first news sheets were for:
 - a. everyone
 - b. families
 - c. special groups

3. Which country had general news sheets first?
 - a. Germany
 - b. Britain
 - c. the USA

4. In what century was the Gutenberg Press invented?
 - a. 13th
 - b. 15th
 - c. 17th

5. Innovations like the steam powered press meant production prices:
 - a. increased
 - b. decreased
 - c. stayed the same

6. In this passage press means:
 - a. push
 - b. newspapers
 - c. pressure

7. The word media came into use in:
 - a. the 1950s
 - b. the 1940s
 - c. the 1930s

8. Radio and television:
 - a. greatly increased the audience
 - b. increased the audience slightly
 - c. didn't increase the audience much

9. Newspapers are in crisis because:
 - a. their market is disappearing
 - b. the prices are going up
 - c. there is too much news

10. The only way forward for the news is:
 - a. not mentioned
 - b. town criers
 - c. the Internet

13 Dates

Dates are small finger-shaped fruit with a large hard seed in the middle. In fact, the name date comes from the ancient Greek word for finger. When dried they are black or brown, but before they ripen the colour ranges from red to yellow. Dates grow on a kind of tree called a palm which can reach a height of 25 metres. There are male and female plants but only the females bear fruit.

Dates are very sweet to taste and in the West they are usually used in cakes and sweet cookery. However, in the countries where they originated they are cooked with meat and rice, made into sweets, served throughout the day with tea and coffee and eaten on their own as a snack. Traditionally, dates have a special significance for Muslims because they are the first thing that is eaten to break the fast after the sun has set during Ramadan, the most important religious observance in the Muslim calendar.

Since the beginning of recorded history, dates have been linked to the Middle East. They are thought to have originated around the Persian Gulf and there is evidence that they were cultivated 6000 years ago. They are a common crop throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa where the desert climate alternates between extended periods of hot dry weather and heavy rainfall during the wet seasons.

The date palm is a wonder plant. Virtually every part of the plant has a use. From ancient times, dates provided a concentrated energy food that was used on long journeys across the desert. In addition to the fruit being used in cookery as mentioned above, young leaves can be cooked and used as a vegetable and the flowers can be used as a salad ingredient. Sweet juice is extracted from the palm tree and made into sugar or alcohol, and the oil is used to manufacture soap. In times of scarcity, the seeds were used as animal feed. Traditionally, the mature leaves were used as building materials and to make baskets, and the fibres were used to make rope. Dates are believed to have medical powers and are used to cure sore throats and to relieve fever.

Date cultivation remained the most important economic activity throughout the Middle East until the 1940s when it was overtaken by oil production. Not even dates could compete with oil as a revenue earner.

13 Dates

1. The name date comes from the word for:
 - a. seed
 - b. finger
 - c. brown

2. A palm is:
 - a. a kind of tree
 - b. a kind of crop
 - c. a kind of food

3. Dates grow on:
 - a. male plants
 - b. male and female plants
 - c. female plants

4. Dates have a special significance for:
 - a. Christians
 - b. Muslims
 - c. Buddhists

5. Dates are thought to have originated around:
 - a. Northern Africa
 - b. the Persian Gulf
 - c. the Middle East

6. Dates grow well in regions which are:
 - a. hot and dry
 - b. hot and wet
 - c. hot and cold

7. In this passage, 'virtually' everything' means:
 - a. almost everything
 - b. everything
 - c. hardly anything

8. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Dates are believed to have medical powers.
 - b. You can make sugar from the date palm.
 - c. You can make car oil from the date palm.

9. Dates are believed to cure:
 - a. sore throats and fever
 - b. headache and back pain
 - c. coughs and colds

10. Date cultivation was the biggest economic earner in the Middle East until:
 - a. agricultural practices improved
 - b. climate change
 - c. oil production took over

14 ELF

ELF stands for English as a lingua franca. Wikipedia defines lingua franca as ‘an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages’.

English has become the most important global language. Why is this when only approximately four hundred million people speak English as their first language while Chinese is the first language of over a billion people? The important thing is not the number of people who use English as a first language but the number of people who use it as a second, foreign, business, legal or educational language. Over the last forty years English has gained dominance in all these areas.

A further development is that English is increasingly used even when there are no native English speakers in the conversation. The idea has been explained in terms of circles. In the inner circle are the people who use English as a first language. This includes New Zealand, Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. In the middle circle there are about 500 million people in countries like India, the Philippines, Singapore and Kenya who use English at work and school, but may speak a different language at home. Everyone else is in the expanded circle, which has no history with English. This includes places like Russia, China, Brazil, Indonesia and Mexico. However, no matter where you are from, you are probably using ELF to communicate with people who don't speak your language. It is estimated that up to 80% of English is spoken by non-native speakers of English.

With so much English being spoken by people for whom English is not their first language, what is happening to English? English is developing into a wide variety of World Englishes, or ELF's.

A characteristic of ELF is that it concentrates on function rather than form. That means getting the message across is more important than accuracy. Some linguists claim that ELF is just bad English, but many reject the notion that ELF is a deficient form of English. ELF does, however, present implications for English teaching. The convention has been to teach standardised native speaker English, often perceived as preferable and desirable. However, is this best practice, especially in, say, Malaysia, where English will be used amongst Malaysians of Malay, Chinese and Indian background? English has become the global lingua franca presenting challenges about how to teach it effectively.

14 ELF

1. A lingua franca is spoken between:
 - a. native speakers and a non-native speakers
 - b. native speakers
 - c. non-native speakers
2. About how many people speak English as a first language?
 - a. 100,000,000
 - b. 400,000,000
 - c. 1,000,000,000
3. About how many people speak Chinese as a first language?
 - a. 100,000,000
 - b. 400,000,000
 - c. 1,000,000,000
4. English has become a global lingua franca over the last:
 - a. twenty years
 - b. fifty years
 - c. hundred years
5. Five percent of English spoken today is between:
 - a. native speakers
 - b. non-native speakers
 - c. native and non-native speakers
6. Twenty five percent of English spoken today is between:
 - a. native speakers
 - b. non-native speakers
 - c. native and non-native speakers
7. Seventy five percent of English spoken today is between:
 - a. native speakers
 - b. non-native speakers
 - c. native and non-native speakers
8. What is English becoming?
 - a. a second language
 - b. an educational language
 - c. a lingua franca
9. The main characteristic of ELF is:
 - a. correct grammar
 - b. good communication
 - c. excellent pronunciation
10. ELF presents challenges about:
 - a. teaching methods
 - b. how to stop English changing
 - c. how to correct bad English

15 Netsuke

In old times, Japanese clothes, kimono, didn't have any pockets. Sometimes the wide sleeves of kimono were used to store things that people needed to carry around with them. However, men also used small bags to carry their personal belongings, such as money, pipes or medicine.

The problem was how to attach a small bag to the obi, the wide belt that held the kimono closed. The problem was solved by attaching the bag to a piece of string, passing the string under the belt, and then attaching the string to a small object that sat securely at the top of the belt and couldn't slip out. These small objects were called netsuke.

Netsuke are finely made carvings that are small enough to fit into your hand. They were invented in the 17th century and they were used to fasten a bag made of cloth or a small wooden box to the wide belt of a kimono. Hidden on the back of the netsuke were two small holes which the string passed through.

At first, netsuke had a practical function but over time they became very small works of art. Traditionally, netsuke were made of ivory from elephants, but they were also made out of wood, bone or the teeth of wild pigs or whales. Because of the fine, delicate nature of netsuke they could take months to carve. Gradually, artists began to specialise in creating them and many old netsuke that survive today have the artist's signature carved onto them.

The range of designs and styles of netsuke is almost limitless. There are animals, especially cows, cats, rats, deer and monkeys; people such as farmers, scholars, soldiers and children; food items, for example fruit, rice baskets and plants; or religious themes such as priests or monks. If you search on the Internet, you will find thousands of pictures of netsuke that are in collections or for sale today.

From the late 19th century, when Japan was first opened up to the world, Japanese culture became very popular in the West. Japonisme, as it was called, greatly influenced Western art, and Japanese painting, silk materials and netsuke were very highly prized by private collectors, museums and art galleries. High prices were paid for the charming small treasures. To buy a fine old netsuke today could cost thousands of dollars. Fortunately, cheap but nice reproductions are available in Japanese souvenir shops.

15 Netsuke

1. In old times, Japanese clothes didn't have any:
 - a. sleeves
 - b. belts
 - c. pockets
2. The obi was a:
 - a. belt
 - b. kimono
 - c. string
3. The holes on a netsuke were on:
 - a. the front
 - b. the back
 - c. the bottom
4. Netsuke were invented in the:
 - a. 17th century
 - b. 19th century
 - c. 20th century
5. At first, netsuke were:
 - a. decorative
 - b. artistic
 - c. functional
6. Netsuke were made of:
 - a. wood and bone
 - b. whales' teeth and ivory
 - c. all of the above
7. In the 19th century, Western art was greatly affected by:
 - a. netsuke
 - b. Japonisme
 - c. private collectors
8. The range of designs of netsuke was:
 - a. narrow
 - b. medium
 - c. wide
9. Choose the correct sentence.
 - a. All old netsuke have the artist's signature on them.
 - b. Many old netsuke have the artist's signature on them.
 - c. Hardly any old netsuke have the artist's signature on them.
10. Choose the correct sentence.
 - a. Old netsuke are usually valuable.
 - b. New netsuke are usually expensive.
 - c. Old netsuke are available in souvenir shops.

16 Silk

According to legend, the Chinese Empress Leizu, wife of the mythical Yellow Emperor, discovered silk around 2500 BC. In one account, Leizu was drinking tea under a mulberry tree when a silkworm cocoon dropped into her tea cup. In the hot liquid, a fine silk thread separated from the cocoon and Leizu started to unwrap the thread and wind it around her finger.

Leizu realised the significance of her discovery and persuaded her husband to allow her to plant the mulberry trees that the silkworms lived on. The cultivation of silk had begun. Leizu is also credited with inventing the loom used to weave the silk thread into the fine smooth cloth known as silk.

Whether the legend is true or not, historians believe that China was the first civilisation to manufacture silk, and Leizu is still referred to as Silk Mother in China. Originally, silk was reserved for the exclusive use of the Emperor and his family, but gradually the use of silk spread throughout the length of China and to all sections of the population. Even the common people wore silk for special occasions.

As Chinese merchants began to trade silk outside China, demand grew rapidly, and silk was traded across India, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. For centuries, the Emperors of China attempted to maintain a trade monopoly on silk by keeping methods of silk cultivation a secret. However, by the first century AD China's dominance was broken and countries as far away as India began to cultivate silk.

Silk was highly sought after and as the trade in silk expanded, a network of interlinking routes was established across the countries between China and Europe. This network was known as the Silk Road. Silk was not the only thing that was traded on the Silk Road. Each country contributed its own specialities. India, for example, traded elephant ivory, textiles and spices, and the Roman Empire traded gold, silver, glass and wine. Possibly one of the most important commodities to travel along the Silk Road was religion. Indian monks brought Buddhism to China. Later Christianity, which had been prohibited in Europe by the Romans, reached China via the Silk Road.

Today, despite the invention of artificial fibres and the popularity of other natural materials such as cotton, silk is still regarded as a superior textile and China remains the major silk producing country in the world.

16 Silk

1. According to legend, silk was discovered in:
 - a. 3500 BC
 - b. 2500 BC
 - c. 1500 BC
2. What dropped into the tea cup?
 - a. a mulberry leaf
 - b. a silkworm cocoon
 - c. a tea leaf
3. Leizu invented:
 - a. the silk loom
 - b. tea
 - c. trade
4. Leizu was known as:
 - a. Silk Mother
 - b. Silk Queen
 - c. Silk Empress
5. At first, silk could only be used by:
 - a. common people
 - b. the Emperor's family
 - c. priests
6. The Chinese Emperors wanted to:
 - a. keep silk cultivation techniques a secret
 - b. share their knowledge
 - c. establish a trade route
7. China's silk monopoly was broken in:
 - a. 1000 BC
 - b. 100 BC
 - c. 100 AD
8. The Silk Road was:
 - a. a trade route
 - b. a network of trade routes
 - c. an area of China
9. Possibly one of the most important things that travelled along the Silk Road was:
 - a. gold
 - b. wine
 - c. religion
10. Which country produces the most silk today?
 - a. India
 - b. Europe
 - c. China

17 Alternative Medicine

Over the last century, the life expectancy of people in every country has increased. In developed countries people can expect to live to be over eighty. One hundred years ago the situation was very different. At that time, the average life expectancy was fifty, and a thousand years ago it was only twenty five. People are always searching for ways to be healthier and live longer.

One of the major factors which influences the quality and length of life is medicine. There have been remarkable developments in medical practice over the last hundred years. Events like the discovery of penicillin eliminated some diseases overnight. There have been extraordinary innovations in medical genetics and in surgery, such as heart transplants. The principle underlying conventional medicine is scientific evidence, and drugs and surgical intervention form a significant part of the treatment practices.

However, this is not the only kind of medicine. Alternative, or complementary medicine, includes a wide range of healing practices which are based on traditional wisdom and natural procedures, and which take into account the spiritual nature of each individual. Alternative medicine takes a holistic approach. This means practitioners are concerned with the whole person. The focus of alternative medicine is on preventing illness and maintaining health. Rather than defining health as an absence of disease, alternative medicine sees health as a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being.

Two examples of alternative Western medicine will illustrate some underlying principles. Chinese medicine pre-dates modern medicine by thousands of years. It is based on a concept of balance both within the body, and between the body and the outside world. Treatments include herbal remedies, massage, exercise and diet. Chinese medicine is widely practised throughout the world. Osteopathy recognises the inter-relationship between bodily structure and function. Structure consists of bones, especially the spine (the backbone), muscles and nerves. Illness occurs when something goes wrong with function. Treatment consists of exercise by the patient and manipulation by the practitioner to allow the structure to function efficiently again.

Medicine is a controversial topic. Some people say alternative medicine is a waste of time because it can't be scientifically proven. Others argue that scientific medicine is only concerned with giving out drugs and supporting the multi-national drug companies. Neither of these attitudes is helpful. Many medical practitioners combine aspects of both conventional and alternative medicine to achieve the best outcome for their patients.

17 Alternative Medicine

1. Over the last hundred years, life expectancy has:
 - a. increased
 - b. decreased
 - c. stayed the same

2. Nowadays people in developed countries can expect to live to:
 - a. over 80
 - b. 80
 - c. under 80

3. One hundred years ago, the average life expectancy was:
 - a. 25
 - b. 50
 - c. 75

4. Conventional medicine is based on:
 - a. natural procedures
 - b. traditional wisdom
 - c. scientific evidence

5. Penicillin:
 - a. led to developments in genetics
 - b. eliminated some diseases overnight
 - c. resulted in heart transplants

6. Alternative medicine treats:
 - a. the mind
 - b. the body
 - c. both of the above

7. Chinese medicine pre-dates modern medicine by:
 - a. hundreds of years
 - b. thousands of years
 - c. tens of thousands of years

8. Chinese medicine is practised:
 - a. throughout China
 - b. throughout Asia
 - c. throughout the world

9. Osteopathy is based on the relationship between the:
 - a. structure and function of the body
 - b. nerves and muscles
 - c. practitioner and patient

10. Controversial means:
 - a. people strongly agree
 - b. people strongly disagree
 - c. people strongly agree and disagree

18 Fair Trade Coffee

Nowadays, people are becoming increasingly concerned about the food they buy. There are health concerns about the chemicals used to grow food. There are environmental concerns about the distance food has to be transported from the farm to reach consumers. There are ethical issues such as the conditions that animals are raised in. People are prepared to pay more for free range eggs, rather than purchase cheaper eggs from birds that are kept in shocking conditions.

A very important ethical question concerns the people who produce our food. When we buy a cup of coffee, we want to know that a reasonable proportion of the price we pay goes to the agricultural workers who cultivate the coffee beans. The idea of Fair Trade is that you pay a bit more, but more of the money you pay goes to producers. The producers can then use the money to pay the workers a reasonable wage and invest money in their businesses. Fair Trade aims to develop sustainable farming for producers, especially for crops like coffee which are often grown by poor farmers.

Throughout the 1960s and 70s there were several attempts to promote Fair Trade, but it wasn't until the late 80s that Fair Trade practices became more widespread. A Dutch organisation was established to make Fair Trade coffee from Mexico available in supermarkets. For the first time, Fair Trade goods were available to the wider consumer market, rather than being confined to small specialist trade outlets.

In 2002, the International Fair Trade Certification Mark was initiated. The idea was to make Fair Trade goods easier for the general public to identify. It has been very successful and today an increasing range of products carries the label.

To carry the Fair Trade label, goods must meet strict standards. The main standard is that producers are paid a fair price. In addition, producers have long term contracts so they can have security and plan ahead. Producers can join unions or other organisations that protect their rights and ensure fair working conditions. Child labour must not be used in production of the goods, and methods of production must be environmentally friendly, sustainable and free from harmful chemicals.

Fair Trade goods often cost more, but in developed countries people can afford to pay that little bit extra. Increasingly consumers are prepared to do so to enjoy a cup of coffee with a clearer conscience.

18 Fair Trade Coffee

1. Nowadays, how do people feel about the food they buy?
 - a. happy
 - b. ethical
 - c. concerned

2. Compared with most eggs, free range eggs are:
 - a. cheaper
 - b. more expensive
 - c. the same price

3. Ethical issues are concerned with:
 - a. right and wrong
 - b. quality and quantity
 - c. rich and poor

4. If you buy Fair Trade coffee, you will probably pay:
 - a. the same amount
 - b. less
 - c. more

5. If you buy Fair Trade coffee, the grower will receive:
 - a. the same amount
 - b. more
 - c. less

6. In the 1980s, Fair Trade products became available:
 - a. more cheaply
 - b. more widely
 - c. not mentioned

7. Child labour:
 - a. must not be used
 - b. should not be used
 - c. may not be used

8. Fair Trade production methods must be:
 - a. useful
 - b. strict
 - c. sustainable

9. Which sentence is not true?
 - a. Fair Trade means growers are paid a fair price.
 - b. Fair Trade means growers have short term contracts.
 - c. Fair Trade means growers can join unions.

10. In developed countries:
 - a. all people buy Fair Trade coffee.
 - b. most people buy Fair Trade coffee.
 - c. some people buy Fair Trade coffee.

19 Salt

Salt is a mineral composed predominantly of sodium chloride. It is best known as a flavour enhancing food additive. However, salt doesn't only make food taste better, it is essential in small quantities for human and animal life as it regulates the water content of the body. No living creature can survive without salt and because of this property salt has been regarded as one of the most valuable commodities throughout the history of humans.

Notwithstanding the benefits of salt, it is a poison if too much is consumed. Recently, health professionals have become aware of the risks associated with high levels of salt intake. High blood pressure and heart disease are two diseases linked to excess salt in the diet.

Salt has another property that has significantly influenced human development. It preserves food. In the countries along the ancient trade routes, food, particularly meat and fish, was salted so that it could be transported and traded across long distances and used over long periods of time. Salted meat was the primary food for sailors during the sea voyages of discovery during the 18th century. Often these voyages lasted months before supplies of fresh food could be found.

Salt has influenced human existence virtually from the beginning. Evidence indicates that as far back as 6,500 BC people were extracting salt from water and harvesting salt from lake surfaces. Over centuries, salt has been mined and manufactured by boiling sea water or by exposing salty water to the sun's rays.

After the raw salt is harvested, it is refined to remove impurities. After that, it is fit for human consumption and is called table salt. However, sometimes other things are added to salt. As it is so widely consumed, salt is an ideal way of ensuring that essential chemical elements are included in the diet. The most common additive is iodine. It is estimated that iodine deficiency affects a third of the world's population and it is a leading cause of mental disorders. The practice of adding a tiny amount of iodine to salt began in 1924 and is credited with significantly reducing the incidence of iodine deficiency disorders.

Only about 20% of the salt produced is refined for human consumption. The other 80% is put to industrial use such as the manufacture of soaps and cleaning products, the production of paper and in the use of dyes to colour textiles.

19 Salt

1. Salt is composed of:
 - a. only sodium chloride
 - b. mostly sodium chloride
 - c. partly sodium chloride
2. Salt is best known as:
 - a. a flavour enhancer
 - b. a water regulator
 - c. a food preserver
3. How much salt is needed to sustain human life?
 - a. a lot
 - b. not much
 - c. none
4. According to the passage, how long did sailors sometimes have to wait before they got fresh food?
 - a. weeks
 - b. months
 - c. years
5. Humans first started harvesting salt:
 - a. 2,500 years ago
 - b. 5,000 years ago
 - c. 8,500 years ago
6. The salt that people usually eat is called:
 - a. table salt
 - b. raw salt
 - c. sun dried salt
7. The practice of adding iodine to salt stated in:
 - a. 1724
 - b. 1824
 - c. 1924
8. According to the passage, iodine deficiency causes:
 - a. brain problems
 - b. heart disease
 - c. high blood pressure
9. How much of the salt produced is used for human consumption?
 - a. about 80%
 - b. about 50%
 - c. about 20%
10. The remaining amount is used for:
 - a. animals
 - b. industry
 - c. preserving food

20 Music and Maths

When you think of music, you might think about your favourite music or music for a special event such as a religious service. Music can cause strong feelings or emotions or bring back memories. Music is a language of emotions.

Maths is concerned with sequences, patterns, ratios and relationships. It is a scientifically based system of numbers and relations that seems the opposite of music. However, there is a connection between maths and music.

Pythagoras was the first person to write about this connection, although before him ancient Egyptian, Indian and Chinese scholars had studied numerical patterns in music. Pythagoras was a philosopher who lived in the 5th century BC. He thought that everything in nature could be explained by numbers and how they related to each other. Pythagoras discovered that the most important intervals in music – the octave, fourth and fifth could be created by playing strings whose lengths were in simple ratios like 2:1, 4:3 and 3:2.

Musical phenomena, like octaves and harmony, are all based on relationships between numbers. Complex number systems can provide a way to understand, describe and explain music. Numbers also provide a system which enables musicians to play music composed by another musician and thus make music transferable over time and space.

An example of how music and numbers are connected is harmony. Generally, harmony means things that go together in a pleasing way. In musical terms, harmony is achieved by playing or singing several notes (sounds) or chords at the same time to create sounds which are pleasing to the ear.

To start to explain harmony we need to understand the words, scale and chord. A scale is a sequence of 8, 6 or 13 notes where each note is higher than the preceding note. A chord is a combination of at least two notes performed at the same time. Harmony is formed by combining different notes of a scale. The two most fundamental scales in Western music are the major and minor scales. Small differences in the intervals between the notes change a scale from major to minor, and with it, the mood of the music from happy to sad.

This example helps to illustrate how music is both complex and simple at the same time, and how a system of numbers can help to explain it. The scientific language of mathematics is essential to understand the emotional language of music.

20 Music and Maths

1. According to the passage, music is a language of:
 - a. love
 - b. emotion
 - c. religion

2. According to the passage, there is a connection between:
 - a. numbers and emotions
 - b. feelings and science
 - c. maths and music

3. Pythagoras lived in the:
 - a. 10th century BC
 - b. 5th century BC
 - c. 5th century AD

4. He thought that everything in nature could be explained by:
 - a. numerical relationships
 - b. scientific discoveries
 - c. musical theories

5. A scale is a sequence of:
 - a. notes
 - b. octaves
 - c. harmonies

6. Generally, harmony means:
 - a. pleasing
 - b. feeling
 - c. playing

7. Sounds on a scale are:
 - a. higher than the next one
 - b. lower than the next one
 - c. both of the above

8. A chord is a combination of:
 - a. more than one note
 - b. more than two notes
 - c. more than three notes

9. How many fundamental scales are there in Western music?
 - a. one
 - b. two
 - c. three

10. Mathematics is a language of:
 - a. Pythagoras
 - b. octaves
 - c. science

Speed Readings for ESL Learners BNC 4000

Answer Key

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

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	
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	
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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