

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

Speed Readings for ESL Learners

500 BNC

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**English Language Institute
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Introduction

Speed Readings for ESL Learners 500 BNC was written at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. The programme contains twenty 300 word passages, each with eight comprehension questions. The readings are world stories and are written within the British National Corpus 500 (VP-Kids) 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

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 300 words long and the vocabulary is controlled 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.

Speed Readings for ESL Learners 500 BNC

1. Peach Boy
2. How Māui slowed the sun
3. The tortoise and the hare
4. The king's new clothes
5. A man, his son and a donkey
6. The Christmas presents
7. Stone soup
8. The boy who cried wolf
9. The 1001 nights
10. The fox and the crow
11. Tom and the fence
12. The rat catcher
13. The man who worried too much
14. Going home
15. Ondal and the king's daughter
16. Frida and the animals
17. The party
18. Where did coffee come from?
19. Beautiful men
20. The last straw that broke the camel's back

1. Peach Boy

A long time ago in Japan, an old man and an old woman lived in a little house by a river. They were happy except for one thing. They didn't have any children.

One day the old man said, "I'm going to cut down a tree for the fire". The old woman said, "I'm going to the river to wash the clothes".

While the old woman was washing the clothes, she saw a big peach coming down the river. The old woman thought the peach would be very good to eat so she caught it and took it home. When the old people cut the peach open, a little boy jumped out of the middle. They were happy and they called him Peach Boy.

Peach Boy was a happy child and the family lived together for many years. One day the old woman said, "Our boy is now a man".

Some bad people lived a long way from the little town. Every year, they came and took all the money from the people. The people were very scared of them.

Peach Boy thought to himself, "I'm going to kill the bad people". He left home with some food his mother made for him. On the way he saw a dog. The dog said, give me some food and I'll help you kill the bad people. So he did. Next he saw a monkey and the same thing happened. Then they saw a bird. Peach Boy gave the bird some food and they all started on their way to find the bad people.

When they got there, the bad people fought hard, but the four friends were very smart and in the end, they killed them all. The friends took all the money back to the people and everyone was happy.



1. Peach Boy

1. The old people lived in a:
 - a. little house
 - b. big house
 - c. a very big house
2. They were unhappy about:
 - a. one thing
 - b. two things
 - c. many things
3. The old woman was washing:
 - a. her hands
 - b. clothes
 - c. children
4. She saw a big:
 - a. apple
 - b. peach
 - c. fish
5. Who made the food for Peach Boy?
 - a. His mother
 - b. His father
 - c. His mother and father
6. Peach Boy saw:
 - a. a bird and a dog
 - b. a dog and a monkey
 - c. a bird, a dog and a monkey
7. What did the bad people take?
 - a. Animals
 - b. Children
 - c. Money
8. How many friends fought the bad people?
 - a. 2
 - b. 4
 - c. 6

2. How Māui slowed the sun

One day, Māui and his brothers were making their food. Then everything was black because the sun went away. They couldn't see what they were doing. Māui was not happy. He said "Why does the sun move so fast? We don't have time in the day to do all our work. I'm going to catch the sun and teach it how to go across the sky slowly".

His brothers said he couldn't catch the sun because it was too big and too hot. Māui said "I have done many hard things and I can do this thing too." The people thought about this and they all said they would help him.

The next day all the people made a lot of big ropes. Then they started to go to where the sun first gets up in the morning. After 12 days they saw a very big hole in the ground. It was night and they saw that the sun was sleeping in the hole. They got the ropes and said, "Soon we will catch the sun and make it slow down."

The next morning, when the sun tried to climb up into the sky, all the people caught it in the ropes and wouldn't let it go. The sun was very hot and very unhappy but Māui told the sun to slow down. At first the sun would not slow down and tried to go faster, but in the end, Māui hit it with his stick many times and the sun slowed down. The sun went slowly up into the sky and from that day the sun moved slowly across the sky and the days were longer. The people had time to do all their work and they were happy.

This is the story of how Māui slowed the sun.



2. How Māui slowed the sun

1. Who were making food?
 - a. The women
 - b. The men
 - c. Everyone
2. What went away?
 - a. The sun
 - b. The people
 - c. The food
3. The sun:
 - a. moved too slowly
 - b. didn't move
 - c. moved too fast
4. Who helped him?
 - a. Some people
 - b. All the people
 - c. Nobody
5. They made:
 - a. a lot of ropes
 - b. a lot of suns
 - c. a lot of food
6. How many days did it take to find the sun?
 - a. 6
 - b. 12
 - c. 18
7. They found the sun:
 - a. in the sky
 - b. in the water
 - c. in a hole
8. In the end, the days were:
 - a. longer
 - b. shorter
 - c. the same

3. The tortoise and the hare

Many years ago there was a very fast hare. His name was Hare. Hare was always talking about how fast he could run. He talked about himself so much that all the other animals got tired of his talking.

There was a very slow tortoise too. The tortoise's name was Slow and Steady. One day Slow and Steady got tired of Hare's talking and said to him, "Let's have a race." Then Hare said, "How can you run faster than me? I am the fastest animal. It will be nothing for me to win the race." Slow and Steady said, "I will do my best."

On the day of the race, all the animals came to watch. They were interested to see who would win the race.

Hare and Slow and Steady stood in line and somebody said, "Go!"

Hare started running very fast. He ran hard and soon he couldn't see the tortoise. After a short time, Hare started to get sleepy so he stopped. He said to himself, "I can run much faster than Slow and Steady. I'm going to have a sleep." He lay down and went to sleep.

Slow and steady walked and walked. She walked and walked and she never stopped walking until she got to the end of the race. All the animals were very happy. They ran to Hare and said, "Get up! Get up!"

Hare got up and started running, but he was too late. Slow and Steady had already won the race.

Hare was very unhappy and said to himself, "I will never talk about how fast I can run again."

This story tells us that slow and steady wins the race. This means that if you keep going and never give up, you will do what you want to do.



3. The tortoise and the hare

1. The story happened:
 - a. 2 years ago
 - b. 10 years ago
 - c. many years ago
2. Who talked and talked all the time?
 - a. Hare
 - b. Slow and Steady
 - c. Another animal
3. Hare could run:
 - a. not very fast
 - b. very slowly
 - c. very fast
4. The tortoise could:
 - a. run fast
 - b. run slowly
 - c. not run
5. Who said they would have a race?
 - a. Hare
 - b. The tortoise
 - c. The people
6. After Hare ran for a short time, he started to get:
 - a. happy
 - b. hungry
 - c. sleepy
7. Who was unhappy?
 - a. Slow and Steady
 - b. Hare
 - c. The people
8. The story means:
 - a. run fast
 - b. have a sleep
 - c. never give up

4. The king's new clothes

A long time ago, there was a king who loved to have beautiful new clothes. Every day he wore different new clothes and he used all his money to buy new clothes.

One day two bad men came to the town. They saw how much the king loved clothes and they thought they could get a lot of money. They told the king that they could make very beautiful clothes. Not only were the clothes beautiful, but they were magic too. The magic was this. Only good people could see the clothes. Bad people could not see them.

The bad men could not really make magic clothes and they didn't make any clothes at all. But, the king thought they were telling the truth. He was very happy. He thought to himself, "This is very good. Now I can find out which of my people are good and which of my people are bad".

The two bad men said they were working very hard day and night. They always needed more money to buy everything for the magic clothes.

After many days of waiting, the clothes were done. But when the bad men showed the king his new clothes, he couldn't see anything.

"Oh, no, this is not good!" he thought to himself. "I really am a very bad person."

But he didn't want anyone to know he was a bad person so he said, "Oh, my new clothes are very beautiful!"

Then the king had to put on his beautiful new clothes and go and talk with all his people. First, all the people said how beautiful the clothes were. Then a very little girl called out. "The king isn't wearing any clothes." Then everyone started calling out, "The king hasn't got any clothes on."

And they were right.



4. The king's new clothes

1. The king didn't like:
 - a. new clothes
 - b. old clothes
 - c. beautiful clothes
2. How many bad men came to town?
 - a. One
 - b. Two
 - c. Three
3. They said, the clothes were:
 - a. beautiful
 - b. new
 - c. magic
4. If you could not see the clothes you were:
 - a. a good person
 - b. a bad person
 - c. a smart person
5. How long did it take to make the clothes?
 - a. One day
 - b. Two days
 - c. Many days
6. What did the people say when they first saw his new clothes?
 - a. They are beautiful.
 - b. They are new.
 - c. Nothing
7. What was the king wearing when he talked to his people?
 - a. New clothes
 - b. Magic clothes
 - c. No clothes
8. Who called out first?
 - a. A little girl
 - b. The bad men
 - c. All the people

5. A man, his son and a donkey

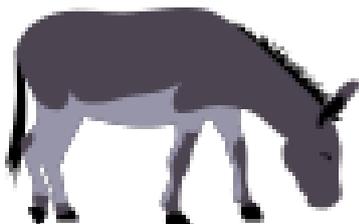
One day, a man and his son were taking their donkey to the town close to their house. They were going to sell the donkey in the town. As they were walking to the town, a person said to them, “Why don’t you ride on the donkey”. So the man put his boy onto the donkey and they started walking again.

Soon, they came to some more people and they said, “What a bad boy! He lets his father walk while he is riding the donkey.” So the man made the boy get down and he climbed onto the donkey’s back and they started walking again.

Soon they came to some more people who said, “Look at that bad man! He makes his son walk while he rides.” The man didn’t know what to do. After thinking for a long time he said to the boy, “Get up on the donkey with me. We will both ride to town on the donkey.”

When they came to the town, a lot of people saw them and said, “Look at those big people riding on the back of the little donkey.” So the man and his son got off the donkey and sat down to think about what to do. At last they thought they would carry the donkey so they got some rope and put it around the donkey’s feet. The man and the boy started to carry the donkey. At the time they were walking by a river. The donkey was too much for them and it fell into the river and died. Both the man and the boy were very unhappy. They had to go home with no donkey and no money.

The meaning of the story: If you try to make everybody happy, you will make nobody happy.



5. A man, his son and a donkey

1. Where was their house?
 - a. Close to the town
 - b. Far away from the town
 - c. Close to the river
2. Where were they taking the donkey?
 - a. To the river
 - b. To the town
 - c. Home
3. Why were they taking it?
 - a. To sell
 - b. To ride
 - c. To carry
4. Who rode the donkey first?
 - a. The man and the boy
 - b. The man
 - c. The boy
5. Who rode on the donkey next?
 - a. The man and the boy
 - b. The man
 - c. The boy
6. Then who rode on the donkey?
 - a. The man and the boy
 - b. The man
 - c. The boy
7. The donkey:
 - a. swam in the river
 - b. died
 - c. was sold
8. What is the meaning of the story?
 - a. Don't ride donkeys.
 - b. Don't carry donkeys.
 - c. Don't try to make everyone happy.

6. The Christmas presents

A young man and a young woman lived in New York. They were in love and they got married. The young woman had beautiful long hair. The young man loved her beautiful long hair and every day he looked at it and thought how beautiful she was.

The young man owned an old watch which his father had given him many years ago. The young man loved his father's watch. It was his favourite thing.

The young people were very happy but they didn't have very much money.

It was the day before Christmas and the young woman was unhappy because she had no money to buy her man a Christmas present. She knew he loved his watch but he couldn't wear it because the strap was broken.

"What can I do?" she thought. After thinking for a long time she said to herself, "I know. I will cut off my hair and sell it. I can get a lot of money for my hair. Then I can buy a new strap for his watch."

She cut off her hair and took it to a woman who bought it. Then she bought the watch strap for her man. She went home and waited for him to come home from work. She didn't want him to be unhappy when he saw her.

She heard the door open and he said "Happy Christmas." He was very surprised to see her short hair.

They gave each other their Christmas presents. When they saw the presents they looked at each other. He had sold his watch to buy a beautiful comb for her hair. She had cut off her hair and sold it to buy a strap for his watch.

They were both so happy because they knew how much they loved each other.



6. The Christmas presents

1. They lived in:
 - a. New York
 - b. London
 - c. Tokyo
2. The woman's hair was:
 - a. short
 - b. very short
 - c. long
3. The young man owned:
 - a. a dog
 - b. a lot of money
 - c. a watch
4. Who gave him this thing?
 - a. His mother
 - b. His father
 - c. His brother
5. The two young people:
 - a. were unhappy
 - b. were in love
 - c. had a lot of money
6. They had:
 - a. a lot of money
 - b. not much money
 - c. not much food
7. When he saw her short hair he was:
 - a. happy
 - b. unhappy
 - c. surprised
8. In the end, they were both:
 - a. very happy
 - b. very unhappy
 - c. very hungry

7. Stone soup

A long time ago, two friends were walking to the next little town. They had been walking and looking for work for a long time. It was hard to find work in those times. They were hungry and they didn't have any money or any food. They were tired and they didn't have a place to sleep.

At night, they came to the little town but they couldn't see any people. All the people of the town were sleeping in their beds. The two friends found a place in the middle of the town and lay down and went to sleep. In the morning they were very hungry so they took out their cooking pot, and put water into it and put it on the fire. They put some stones in the cooking pot and they waited. Soon the people of the town got out of their beds and came outside. They looked at the two people and their fire.

“What are you cooking?” someone asked.

“Stone soup” they said. “It will be very good, but . . . it would be better if it had some chicken.”

One of the women said, “I've got some chicken.” And she ran to her house to get it. The two friends put the chicken into the soup and then they tried a little of the soup.

“Much better.” They said. “But . . . it would be better if it had some potatoes.”

Someone said, “I've got three potatoes”, and ran off to get the potatoes.

Slowly all the people thought of something they could put into the soup and they all ran back to their houses to get more food.

In the end, there was soup for all the people of the town as well as the two hungry happy friends.



7. Stone soup

1. How many friends were walking?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3

2. What were they looking for?
 - a. Work
 - b. A town
 - c. Soup

3. How many people did they see in the town that night?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Not many
 - c. None

4. They slept:
 - a. in the middle of the town
 - b. outside the town
 - c. by a river

5. In the morning, they were:
 - a. tired
 - b. hungry
 - c. happy

6. What did they put in their cooking pot first?
 - a. Chicken
 - b. Water
 - c. Potatoes

7. They were making:
 - a. potato soup
 - b. chicken soup
 - c. stone soup

8. Who ate the soup?
 - a. The two friends
 - b. The people of the town
 - c. The two friends and the people of the town

8. The boy who cried wolf

A long time ago, there was a boy. His work was to look after the sheep every day. All the children had to look after the sheep every day. This boy really didn't like his work because all day long, he had to sit and watch the sheep. If he didn't watch them, they ran away and got lost. Day after day he sat and watched the sheep. He thought, "I want something interesting to happen to me. I'm tired of doing the same thing every day."

One day he thought to himself, "I know what I'll do. I'll tell all the other children that I can see a very big wolf, and I'll say that the wolf is going to eat my sheep."

He stood up and cried out, "Help! Help! There is a big wolf and it's going to eat all my sheep". All the other children left their sheep and ran over to help the boy. But there was no wolf. The other children were very angry with him. They said, "Don't tell lies." They went back to look after their sheep.

The next day, the same thing happened. "Help! Help!" cried the boy. All the other children ran to him as fast as they could. Again they saw that the boy had told them a lie. There was no wolf.

The next day, the boy was sitting looking at his sheep. He looked up and saw a big hungry wolf running at him.

"Help! Help!" he cried out. "There is a wolf and it is going to eat me!"

He called and called but nobody came. They all thought he was telling lies again.

The wolf ate the boy and that is the end of the story.

The meaning of the story is: Don't tell lies!



8. The boy who cried wolf

1. Who had to look after the sheep?
 - a. Boys
 - b. Girls
 - c. Boys and girls

2. The boy:
 - a. liked his work a lot
 - b. liked his work a little
 - c. didn't like his work

3. Every day he did:
 - a. different things
 - b. the same things
 - c. new things

4. The first time, the children:
 - a. helped him
 - b. didn't help him
 - c. didn't hear him

5. They were:
 - a. unhappy
 - b. angry
 - c. hungry

6. On the third day, the boy saw:
 - a. a wolf
 - b. a lot of angry children
 - c. a lot of hungry sheep

7. Which is right?
 - a. The wolf ate the children.
 - b. The wolf ate the sheep.
 - c. The wolf ate the boy.

8. What is the meaning of the story?
 - a. Don't help people.
 - b. Don't eat sheep.
 - c. Don't tell lies.

9. The 1001 nights

A long time ago there was a king and queen in Arabia. For some time, they were happy but one day the queen ran away with another man. The king was very angry. He caught the queen and the man and killed them both. After that, he married a different woman every day. The next day she was killed, and he married another woman.

He had killed 1000 woman before he found Scheherazade. At first, her father said, "No. You will not marry the king because the next day you will die and I will never see you again." But Scheherazade was a very smart woman. She said she would stay with the king for one night.

When that night came, she asked the king if her sister could stay with them because she wanted to say her last goodbye to her and to tell her a story. The king said yes.

That night, Scheherazade, started to tell her story. It was a very interesting story and a very long story. The king and her sister listened all night, but then they saw it was morning. Scheherazade stopped before she got to the end of the story. The king said, "Please don't stop your story", but she said there was no time because the king had to kill her.

The king really wanted to hear what happened at the end of the story so he said he wouldn't kill her until the next day. That night Scheherazade told the end of the first story, and started the second story. By morning, she had only told half the story so the king had to let her live for another day.

After 1001 stories and 1001 nights, the king fell in love with Scheherazade and they lived happily together for many years.

9. The 1001 nights

1. The king and queen were in:
 - a. Arabia
 - b. France
 - c. Japan
2. At first, they were:
 - a. unhappy
 - b. happy
 - c. angry
3. The king killed:
 - a. the queen
 - b. the man
 - c. the queen and the man
4. How many woman did he kill before he knew Scheherazade?
 - a. 100
 - b. 1,000
 - c. 10,000
5. Why did Scheherazade **really** want her sister to stay with them?
 - a. To say good bye
 - b. To help her start her stories
 - c. Because she was scared
6. The first night, she told:
 - a. half a story
 - b. one and a half stories
 - c. two and a half stories
7. Why did she stop telling the story?
 - a. It was morning
 - b. They were sleeping
 - c. The king killed her
8. In the end, the king:
 - a. fell in love with Scheherazade
 - b. fell in love with her sister
 - c. fell asleep

10. The fox and the crow

One morning, a fox was walking through the trees looking for something to eat for her breakfast. She was very hungry but she couldn't find any food. As she was walking, she looked up and saw a crow sitting in a tree. The crow had a piece of cheese in his mouth.

"Yes!" said the fox. "Here is my breakfast."

"Good morning, beautiful crow", she said. The crow looked at the fox but he did not open his mouth. He did not let go of the little bit of cheese.

"What a beautiful black colour you are", she said. "What beautiful black eyes you have." The crow did not open his mouth because he did not want to lose his breakfast.

"You are the most beautiful bird in the land", said the fox. "You are the king of the land." The crow really wanted to be the king of the land, but he really wanted to eat his piece of cheese, so he didn't open his mouth.

The fox sat down and thought. Then she said. "I know you are beautiful, but I don't know if you have a beautiful song." When the fox said this, the crow opened his mouth to sing. He wanted to show the fox that he could sing a beautiful song. The piece of cheese fell out of his mouth and into the open mouth of the fox waiting under the tree.

The fox ate the cheese and said "Thank you very much, Crow. You are not really beautiful and you are not very smart". The crow was very unhappy and hungry because he had lost his breakfast.

The meaning of the story is: Don't listen to people who say nice things about you, when they really only want to take something away from you.



10. The fox and the crow

1. The fox was walking through the trees:
 - a. in the morning
 - b. last week
 - c. at night
2. She was looking for:
 - a. cheese
 - b. food
 - c. a crow
3. The fox said the crow had:
 - a. beautiful black hair
 - b. a beautiful black head
 - c. beautiful black eyes
4. Why didn't the crow open his mouth?
 - a. He didn't want to lose his breakfast.
 - b. He didn't want to talk to the fox.
 - c. He didn't hear the fox.
5. The crow did not want:
 - a. to be king of the land
 - b. to be hungry
 - c. to look beautiful
6. The crow lost the cheese when he:
 - a. talked
 - b. sang
 - c. fell from the tree
7. Who was hungry at the end?
 - a. The fox
 - b. The crow
 - c. The king
8. What is the meaning of the story?
 - a. Everything you hear isn't always true.
 - b. Don't eat cheese for breakfast.
 - c. Don't try to sing beautiful songs.

11. Tom and the fence

A long time ago in America, there was a boy called Tom. He lived with his aunt in a very little town by a very big river. One day, his aunt said, "Tom, please go and do your work? Tom said, "I don't want to do my work. I want to go to the river with my friends". His aunt said, "Please do your work now!" She was starting to get angry.

Tom's work was to paint the fence. He really didn't want to do it, but he really didn't want to make his aunt angry. Tom went outside and sat down next to the fence. After a while he got up and started painting the fence. He worked as hard as he could. He tried to look happy and he sang a happy song.

Soon one of his friends came by. He said, "Ha ha! Tom has to paint the fence!" Tom said, "HAVE to paint the fence? No! I LOVE painting the fence. It is my favourite thing. Only really smart people can paint a fence". He went on painting the fence singing happily to himself.

"Can I try?" said his friend. "Oh no" said Tom. "You are not smart. You couldn't do it"

"Please let me try. Please. Please. Please! I'll give you my apple."

Tom took the apple and sat down while his friend worked as hard as he could. Soon their other friends came by, and they all wanted to paint the fence.

When Tom's aunt came outside, she saw that the fence had been painted three times. She was surprised, but she said, "You are a good boy, Tom. I will make your favourite - apple pie - for dinner."

Tom thought about the five apples he had eaten that day. He wasn't hungry.



11. Tom and the fence

1. Tom and his aunt lived in:
 - a. New Zealand
 - b. Australia
 - c. America

2. They lived in:
 - a. a little town by a big river
 - b. a big town by a big river
 - c. a big town by a little river

3. Tom wanted to:
 - a. go to the river
 - b. eat apples
 - c. play computer games

4. Tom was:
 - a. an angry boy
 - b. a smart boy
 - c. a hungry boy

5. Tom said his favourite thing was:
 - a. singing songs
 - b. eating apples
 - c. painting fences

6. Where did Tom sit down?
 - a. Next to the fence
 - b. By the river
 - c. In the house

7. How many times did they paint the fence?
 - a. One
 - b. Two
 - c. Three

8. How many apples had Tom eaten that day?
 - a. Three
 - b. Five
 - c. Seven

12. The rat catcher

It was 1842 in a little town by a river in Germany. There were many rats in the town and people were getting sick and dying because of the rats. The people of the town didn't know what to do. One day, a man came to the town. He said he could make all the rats run after him by playing music. The people of the town were happy and they said they would give him a lot of money.

He started playing music and all the rats came out of the houses and ran after him to the river. When they came to the river, all the rats jumped into the water and died.

At first, the people of the town were very happy, but when the rat catcher asked them for the money, they were not so happy. They talked about what to do for a long time and in the end they said they would only give the rat catcher half of his money. The rat catcher was very angry and said, "You will all be very unhappy!"

The rat catcher left the town, but the next day he came back. There were no people in the streets. All the mothers and fathers were in church. He started playing his music again, but this time all the children ran after him to the river. Only three children didn't go with him. One child had a bad foot and couldn't walk, one could not hear the music. The other couldn't see so she couldn't go with them. When the people came out of the church, the three children told them the story. All the people cried out and started looking everywhere for their children. They couldn't find them. The children and the rat catcher were never seen again.



12. The rat catcher

1. The little town was in:
 - a. England
 - b. France
 - c. Germany

2. People were dying because:
 - a. of the cold
 - b. of the rats
 - c. they had no food

3. The people of the town said they would give the rat catcher:
 - a. a lot of money
 - b. a good dinner
 - c. three children

4. All the rats:
 - a. jumped into the river
 - b. stayed in the town
 - c. ran to the church

5. The angry rat catcher said, "You will be very:
 - a. happy."
 - b. unhappy."
 - c. angry."

6. Who went to church the next day?
 - a. The children
 - b. The mothers and fathers
 - c. The rat catcher

7. How many children didn't go with the rat catcher?
 - a. 3
 - b. 2
 - c. 1

8. In the end:
 - a. the people found the children
 - b. the people found the rat catcher
 - c. no one found anyone

13. The man who worried too much

A long time ago in China, there was a man called Yoyo who worried about everything. He worried that he didn't have a lot of money. He worried that his children wouldn't study hard. He worried that his family would not have any food and that they would get sick. He worried there would not be any water and everything would die. He worried about his animals and about his work. He worried that his house would catch fire. Yoyo worried about everything and he couldn't stop worrying.

One day, after he had eaten a good dinner with his family, he was sitting outside his house. He looked up into the sky and saw the stars. He started to get worried that the stars would fall down on his head. The stars were so big! How could they stay up in the sky? Why didn't they fall down onto his head? The man sat and looked at the night sky and he got more and more worried.

He called out to his friends and family.

"Come here! Come here!" he said, "The stars are going to fall down on my head! Please, help me. What can we do?"

All his friends and family came to him. They all tried to talk to him and tell him that there was nothing to worry about. The stars had been in the sky for many years. They were not going to fall from the sky.

The man could not stop himself worrying. He worried and worried. There was nothing his friends could do to help him. In the end, he got very sick from all his worrying and died.

The meaning of the story is: Don't worry too much. Life isn't all about bad things. Don't worry about things that will never happen.



13. The man who worried too much

1. This story happened in:
 - a. Japan
 - b. China
 - c. Korea
2. Yoyo worried about:
 - a. everything
 - b. nothing
 - c. most things
3. He worried that his children wouldn't:
 - a. study hard
 - b. eat their dinner
 - c. look after the animals
4. He worried that his house:
 - a. would fall down
 - b. would catch fire
 - c. was too little
5. Yoyo sat outside:
 - a. before dinner
 - b. in the morning
 - c. after dinner
6. He looked:
 - a. at the trees
 - b. at the house
 - c. at the sky
7. Who came to talk to him?
 - a. His friends
 - b. His family
 - c. His friends and family
8. What is the meaning of the story?
 - a. Life isn't all bad.
 - b. Life is always good.
 - c. Don't look up at the sky.

14. Going home

In 1961, Sheila Burnford wrote a book about three animals that walked almost 500 kilometres to get back to their old home. In 1963, it was made into a movie.

The story happened in Canada. Two dogs and a cat lived happily with their family for many years. One day the family had to go away for three months. While they were away, the animals stayed with a good friend of the family, John, who lived in a little town about 500 kilometres away.

The three animals liked living with John, but one day he had to go away so he asked his friends to look after them. Soon after John went away in his car, the animals started their long walk home.

Many bad things happened to them on their way home. A fast car almost ran them over. The old dog got tired and slowed down, so they always had to stop to sleep. The young dog took some food from some people who got very angry and chased them. After that, they only walked at night and slept in the day so no one would see them. Then they came to a river. The two dogs swam across but the cat fell into the river. The dogs thought the cat had died but a week later they found her next to the river. She was very cold and sick. After she got better, they started walking again.

When the family came home three months later, they were very unhappy. But a week later, they heard something outside. They went outside and saw their three lovely animal friends.

This is not a true story, but if you look on the internet you can see many true stories about animals that have walked a long way to get home.

14. Going home

1. When was the book written?
 - a. 1921
 - b. 1961
 - c. 2001
2. How many kilometres did the three friends walk?
 - a. 5
 - b. 50
 - c. 500
3. The story happened in:
 - a. Canada
 - b. Cuba
 - c. Cambodia
4. The friend of the family was called:
 - a. Peter
 - b. John
 - c. Susan
5. Who got angry?
 - a. The cat
 - b. The old dog
 - c. Some people
6. The three friends:
 - a. walked at night and slept in the day
 - b. slept at night and walked in the day
 - c. walked in the day and slept at night
7. Who fell into the river?
 - a. The old dog
 - b. The young dog
 - c. The cat
8. This story:
 - a. is true
 - b. could not be true
 - c. is not true

15. Ondal and the king's daughter

A long time ago in Korea, there was a man called Ondal. He lived with his mother. Everyone thought he was not very smart. Children called him bad names. No one wanted to marry him. But he was a good kind man and he was big and strong.

The king had a beautiful daughter. When she was young she was sometimes a bad girl and didn't do what her mother and father told her. When she was bad, her father said, "If you are a bad girl, I will make you marry Ondal when you are older."

Many young men wanted to marry her but she always said no. One day her father asked her why she always said no to the young men. She said. "When I was young, you always told me that I would marry Ondal, so I will marry him."

The king was very angry with his daughter and said, "You can't marry Ondal!" But the girl said, "You told me I would marry Ondal and I will marry him."

The king told her to leave his house.

She went to look for Ondal. She lived with Ondal and his mother. No one knew she was the king's daughter. After some time they got married. They loved each other very much. She taught him to read and write and how to ride a horse and fight.

One day the king was looking for a big, strong, smart man to help him. Many men wanted to help the king but the king liked one man. Later he found out that the man was Ondal. The king was very happy and asked his daughter, Ondal and his mother to come and live with him.

Ondal was known as the biggest, strongest, smartest and kindest man in the land.

15. Ondal and the king's daughter

1. The story happened:
 - a. 10 years ago
 - b. 50 years ago
 - c. many years ago
2. Ondal lived with:
 - a. his mother
 - b. his father
 - c. his family
3. The king's daughter was:
 - a. always good
 - b. always bad
 - c. sometimes bad
4. How many men wanted to marry her?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Not many
 - c. One
5. The king said:
 - a. You can marry Ondal.
 - b. You can't marry Ondal.
 - c. You have to marry Ondal.
6. Who left the house?
 - a. The king
 - b. His daughter
 - c. Ondal
7. Who came to live with the king?
 - a. His daughter
 - b. His daughter and Ondal
 - c. His daughter, Ondal and his mother
8. In the end, the king was:
 - a. happy
 - b. angry
 - c. hungry

16. Frida and the animals

Not so long ago, there was a little girl called Frida. She lived in a big town with her two mothers called Jenny and Olivia. When Frida was a little girl, she loved animals. She had a lovely black and white cat and a lovely little dog. Every day she looked after them. She gave them their food and she took her little dog for a walk while her cat slept on her bed. When Frida was 12 years old, she said to her mothers, “I love animals so much I want to be an animal doctor when I am older”. Her mothers were very happy when they heard this because they loved animals too.

Frida studied hard every day because only the very best students could be animal doctors. By this time, Frida’s lovely cat and lovely dog were getting very old. One day when she came home from school, she saw her lovely dog lying very still with the cat very close to her. That night she cried herself to sleep. The next morning, her cat had died too. All the family cried together, but it made Frida want to be an animal doctor more than ever.

After she left school, she had to study hard for another six years. She studied and studied and at last she was an animal doctor.

Frida started her work. Every day she helped many cats and dogs and other animals too. Soon she was well known in the town.

One day, someone from TV came to talk to Frida. She wanted to show everyone about Frida’s work. Frida was surprised and happy.

Now Frida lives in a beautiful little house with her new cat. Every Saturday, Jenny and Olivia come over for dinner and they all watch Frida on TV together.



16. Frida and the animals

1. The little girl's name was:
 - a. Frida
 - b. Olivia
 - c. Jenny

2. How many mothers did she have?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3

3. How old was she when she said she loved animals?
 - a. 10
 - b. 12
 - c. 14

4. Was she a good student?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes

5. Her lovely cat and dog died when she was:
 - a. a very young child
 - b. a student
 - c. an animal doctor

6. After she left school, how many more years did she study?
 - a. 2
 - b. 4
 - c. 6

7. She helped:
 - a. cats
 - b. cats and dogs
 - c. cats and dogs and other animals

8. Who watches her on TV on Saturday night?
 - a. Frida
 - b. Frida and Olivia
 - c. Frida, Olivia and Jenny.

17. The party

Last Saturday, I went to a party. My friends' daughter, Betty, and her boyfriend, John, are going to get married. I have known Betty from when she was born 26 years ago and I have been friends with her parents for a lot longer than that. Betty and John have been going out together for about three years. They held a big party for all their friends and family. They had a BBQ and everyone brought their favourite food to eat with everyone. Some people brought food from their own countries for everyone to try. Everyone brought their own drinks as well.

The party was held at John's house. He bought the house about six months ago. It is an old house and needs a lot of work, but he is a builder so he can do everything. His builder friends are going to help him.

At the party there were many different people to talk to. Betty's parents aren't married. They don't eat meat so they couldn't have any BBQ. Betty's sister couldn't come because she is away studying in another town. Betty is a teacher so her teacher friends came and her Church friends were there too. John's mother, who lives close to his house, came to the party but his father couldn't come because he lives in America now with his new family. But *his* parents, John's grandparents, came. All his work friends were there. There were lots of aunties and uncles and even a little dog.

The party started at 4 and ended late. I don't know what time it ended because the older people left at about 8. The young ones stayed till . . .

Betty and John are going to get married in six months. That will be a very good party too.



17. The Party

1. How old is Betty?
 - a. 16
 - b. 26
 - c. 36
2. Her boyfriend's name is:
 - a. Jack
 - b. John
 - c. Chris
3. How long have they been going out?
 - a. 1 year
 - b. 2 years
 - c. 3 years
4. Betty is a:
 - a. teacher
 - b. doctor
 - c. builder
5. Her parents don't eat:
 - a. potatoes
 - b. apples
 - c. meat
6. When did John buy his house?
 - a. 6 weeks ago
 - b. 6 months ago
 - c. 6 years ago
7. The story writer:
 - a. was young
 - b. was older
 - c. didn't like the party
8. What time did the party end?
 - a. 8
 - b. 10
 - c. We don't know.

18. Where did coffee come from?

A long long time ago in a country called Ethiopia there was a man who had a lot of goats. He got up at 5 every day and he took his goats to the hills to find food. One day, some of the goats started eating something from some trees. The man saw that these goats looked happier than the other goats, and they were running around a lot and playing. He looked at the happy goats and he looked at the trees. There were little red berries on the trees. He thought, "I'm going to eat one of those red berries". He ate one berry and then another and another. Soon, the man started to feel happy and he didn't feel tired anymore. He put a lot of the berries into a little box and took them back to the people of his town. They all tried the little red berries and soon they started to feel very happy too. "Now, I don't feel tired at all", they said.

The people of the town said, "If we cook the berries in water they might be even better." They got some water and put some berries into the water and then they put the cooking pot onto the fire. Soon they started to smell a very good smell. They drank the water and it was very good. Everyone in the town wanted to try the new drink.

That was the first time anyone drank . . .

"We need a name for the new drink. What will we call it?" the people said. Someone said, "The name of our town is Kaffa. Let's call the new drink Kaffa! So they did. That was many years ago and now we call the drink coffee and it is loved by people everywhere.



18. Where did coffee come from?

1. This story happened:
 - a. many years ago
 - b. some years ago
 - c. 100 years ago

2. The man had a lot of:
 - a. pigs
 - b. goats
 - c. horses

3. The berries were:
 - a. red
 - b. white
 - c. blue

4. The animals were:
 - a. unhappy and tired
 - b. unhappy and not tired
 - c. happy and not tired

5. The man ate:
 - a. one berry
 - b. some berries
 - c. no berries

6. The people put the berries into:
 - a. very hot water
 - b. cold water
 - c. very cold water

7. They had:
 - a. a funny smell
 - b. a bad smell
 - c. a good smell

8. Today, coffee is loved:
 - a. only in Ethiopia
 - b. only in Kaffa
 - c. everywhere

19. Beautiful Men

A long time ago, there was a little town on an island in the Pacific. The town didn't have many men. The women of the town wanted to find more men but they didn't know how they could do it.

Every day, the young women got up at 6. They got into their boats and went to catch fish. An old woman lived by the boat place. When she saw the young women, she said "Stop and talk with me. I will give you food". But the young women would not stop and talk with her. Every day was the same.

One day, some different young women walked by. "Come and eat with me", the old woman said. These women stopped to talk. While they were eating, the old woman asked, "Why are you so unhappy?" The young woman told her their story.

"I will help you", she said. "When you go out in your boat, take some of the new leaves from this tree. When you get to the fishing place turn the boat over. You will get a surprise."

The young women did what she said and they were very surprised because when they looked at the boat, they saw some beautiful young men. They were all very happy.

The other unkind young women of the town were not happy at all. They ran to the old woman and said, "Tell us what to do now!"

The old woman told them to pick some old leaves from the tree and put them into their boat. They did what she said, but when they looked at their boat they saw a lot of very old men. They were very angry with the old woman, but the kind women lived happily with their beautiful men and had lots of children.



19. Beautiful Men

1. The little town was:
 - a. by a river
 - b. on a hill
 - c. on an island

2. There were:
 - a. too many men
 - b. not many men
 - c. no men

3. The young women got up at:
 - a. 5
 - b. 6
 - c. 7

4. They started:
 - a. cooking
 - b. fishing
 - c. washing

5. What did the old woman want to give them?
 - a. Food
 - b. Drink
 - c. Fish

6. What did the women put in their boats?
 - a. Food
 - b. Leaves
 - c. Water

7. What happened at the end of the story?
 - a. The kind women were happy.
 - b. The unkind women were happy.
 - c. The kind women were angry.

8. What is the meaning of the story?
 - a. Don't get old.
 - b. Don't go fishing.
 - c. Be nice.

20. The last straw that broke the camel's back

A long time ago in Arabia, a family had a camel. It was a big strong camel and it could carry a lot of things on its back. It could walk a long way and didn't need to drink water all the time. The camel worked very hard and the family loved it and looked after it very well.

One day the family had to go to a little town far from their home. Two of the young people in their family were getting married.

The man said, "Our big strong camel can carry everything and we can all walk by its side".

The big day came. It was very hot. The family put everything they wanted to take in one place. They cooked food to eat on the way and they had a lot of things to give to the young people.

When they saw how much stuff there was they looked at each other. "Can our camel carry all our things?" they said.

They started to put things on the camel's back. First they put on some straw. This was food for the camel on the way. Then they put on their clothes, their food and all the other things. The camel stood very still and waited but it was getting hard for it to keep standing. More and more things went onto its back. The camel thought it would fall over if one more thing was put on.

When everything was on the camel's back, it could not move at all.

Then the man saw a very little piece of straw on the ground. He picked it up and put it on the camel's back.

It was too much! The camel cried out and fell over dead.

It was the last straw that broke the camel's back.



20. The last straw that broke the camel's back

1. The story happened in:
 - a. Australia
 - b. Arabia
 - c. America
2. The camel was:
 - a. little and funny
 - b. big and strong
 - c. little and strong
3. Did the family love their camel?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not much
4. The family go to the other town:
 - a. to buy food
 - b. to work
 - c. to see people get married
5. The family were going to:
 - a. ride the camel
 - b. sell the camel
 - c. walk next to the camel
6. What is straw?
 - a. Food for the camel
 - b. Food for the people
 - c. A kind of drink
7. What made the camel fall over?
 - a. The first thing
 - b. The next thing
 - c. The last thing
8. The camel was:
 - a. sleeping
 - b. eating
 - c. dead

Speed Readings for ESL Learners

500 BNC

Answers

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