

General comments

When approaching the passages and questions in the test, you should bear in mind that there will be a range of material of different lengths, covering a variety of topics. The correct answers do not form a pattern so you should not assume that there is an equal proportion of a) to e). Nor must you assume that familiarity with the topic will be an advantage. All the information you need to select the right answer is within the passage itself. You may, however, be asked to apply the understanding you have gained from reading one passage to another example, unrelated by subject to the original material. There is no set sequence of questions, and you must expect a variety of approaches.

There are two alternative strategies which can be used when answering multiple-choice questions. Some people prefer to read the text first and then look at the questions and possible answers; other people prefer to look at the questions first and then bear them in mind as they read the text. Since answering the questions used in this test depends on your understanding of the whole passage, or a substantial named part of it, it will usually be best to start by at least skim reading each passage first. Whether you then choose to read the text again more thoroughly before looking at the questions, or prefer to look at the questions at this stage and then try to bear them in mind when re-reading the passage, will probably depend on how much you understand each passage.

When it comes to selecting one of the possible options as an answer to each question, there are again, essentially, two possible strategies.

The first is simply to try to answer the question without looking at the given options. Once you have decided what you think the answer is, you can then see if it (or something similar) is listed among the options provided. If it is there, then your answer has been validated. If it is not there, you have at least started to think about the meaning of the passage and formed some preliminary views. The second strategy is to take each option in turn and see whether it 'fits', or whether it can be eliminated. Eliminating wrong answers can often work very well in a multiple-choice test since, once all the wrong answers have been eliminated, whatever is left must be correct. This process is used several times in the commentaries which follow, often with a confirmatory check of the last option against the question and the passage.

For all the questions it is useful to follow the progress of the main argument and its structure as it goes through various stages, noting how points follow on from one another and how they are linked. The way the writer uses paragraphs is one clear example. A writer might also, as it were, pause in the presentation of an argument to provide illustrative material such as analogies, metaphors, similes or any kind of comparison, as well as giving specific examples in order to convince, persuade or clarify. You will find the ability to identify the stages or steps of an argument a useful skill. It is also helpful to be able to identify where a writer moves from the specific to the general, or vice versa, and to distinguish between a statement of fact and an assertion of opinion.

You should also be alert, in every question, to the significance of the context of the passage. You may be asked about the writer's purposes within a particular passage by a question which begins for example, with 'because' followed by a series of statements. You will need to look closely at the part each statement plays in the argument of the piece, not their absolute truth or otherwise. It is also important that you are selective, not only in the sense of choosing the right option and discarding the wrong ones quickly, but also in discarding sections of the passage which are not relevant to that particular question. You may find, however, that answering one question helps you answer the next, not least for the purposes of elimination as well as general understanding of the subject matter and the structure of the main and subsidiary arguments.

What follows is a discussion of at least one question from each of the passages in the sample test, chosen to exemplify a range and variety of questions and approaches to solving them. There are more detailed comments to help develop your skills of close reading and reasoning.

Top Civil Servants

Question 1

This question directs you to the first and third paragraphs of the passage. However, even if you start by looking at the questions, a skim through the whole passage sets the context and also allows you to pick up the italicised words in the first paragraph and the inverted commas in the third paragraph.

In the left-hand column (a) is repeated at (e) and (c) is repeated at (d), so you are better off considering the statements in the right-hand column. Here you are not being asked about a definition of how punctuation is used; rather you should look closely at how the writer in this passage is using inverted commas. Be careful of choosing an option based on what you think you know about inverted commas.

You can eliminate (b), as the sentences containing the italicised words make perfectly good sense. The words are not being used colloquially so (c) is incorrect. Inverted commas are often used to contain quotes or to draw attention to words which are perhaps being used in a technical sense. The right-hand column does not offer quotes as an answer, and to suggest emphasis (e) is hardly justified here. The writer is concerned with class and social status, and the last option (d) in the right-hand column strongly supports his mocking or ironic reference to the 'official reason' for the selection of civil servants.

Looking now at the left-hand column, you can separate the closeness in meaning between the two repeated responses, as one of them lines up with the ironical response in the right-hand column. So the answer is (d).

The Future of Work

Question 2

To answer question 2 you obviously need to locate each of the four quotations in the question. However, more significantly, you must appreciate their contexts and keep in mind the writer's conclusion: that the future of work is linked intimately to the nature of the next generation of computers. Thus (a), a straightforward scientific statement, leads the writer to predict the need for a new future technology. The answer could be (a). Also (b), though the writer's quote refers to the late 20th century's human resources industry, again supports the argument by describing what 21st century work patterns might look like. So (b) could also be the answer.

By this stage, or when you have considered two of the quotes (a) to (d), you might be tempted to settle for (e) as the answer. Perhaps the strongest single quote is (d), combining both the computer and work patterns. If (d) is the answer, then you must judge that neither (a) nor (b) develop the writer's argument.

It only remains to check that (c) helps to develop the argument. It does, as the writer believes that IT as we know it is doomed, opening the way for the new technology of the future.

Yes, the answer is (e).

Faith and the Theologian

Question 2

Question 2 asks you to consider where an emotional attachment to one subject may lead, or rather, where the writer contends or argues it may lead. This distinction is crucial here as in other questions. The writer is concerned with 'matters of profound human concern' and it is easy to eliminate (c), which has no place in the long third paragraph. Even if the move from attachment to detachment is tempting, (e) can be eliminated as the writer is careful not to use the word 'truth' at any point in the discussion of religious faith.

Of the three remaining possibilities, (a) and (b) have a similar ring. This is precisely why neither can be the answer, for if you chose (a), why should you reject (b)? The writer is, however, clear that being too involved in your subject (too much love) may prevent you seeing the subject's difficulties, so (d) is the correct answer.

Right and Wrong Language

Question 1

This question asks about the use of inverted commas and is therefore directing you to a particular point of usage. You are not being asked about a definition of punctuation; rather you should look closely at how this writer is using inverted commas in this passage. Unless you are answering very casually, based on the prime function of inverted commas in writing, you will realise that the writer isn't quoting which means that (c) is not correct. To suggest emphasis (e) is a loose kind of response, taken out of the context of the passage. You can see from the structure of the passage that the brief opening paragraph is establishing the writer's subject and his approach to it; you should, therefore, read the whole of the passage to see what significance these particular words have. Option (b) can be eliminated on the grounds that rather than using them in an unusual way, the writer is tackling the subject of how we make judgements about what can readily be considered to be right and wrong speech, demonstrated by words such as 'very ordinary' and 'everyday' following immediately after the opening paragraph.

You are now left with a choice between (a) and (d). You can see that (d) is very similar to the already eliminated (e) and does not stand up to a closer scrutiny of the significance of these words in the passage as a whole. Therefore (a) is the correct answer.

Question 2

You are asked here to decide on the writer's purposes in making a comparison, and again it is important to look at this comparison in its context within the passage. You should also be alert to how the writer develops the ideas contained within the comparison. Look carefully at where the comparison occurs and how it is introduced. Since the writer is obviously contrasting breaking the law and its sanctions with the rules which might be applied to speech and writing he is not suggesting they are similar. In fact he says 'Obviously not' when asking if these rules are legally enforceable. In other words, he is stressing the differences not the similarities, and it is therefore easy to eliminate (a) and (b). The emphasis of 'Obviously not' demonstrates that he is not debating the point, and he goes on to stress the extreme unlikelihood of such a proposition. He is in fact ruling out the possibility, and option (c) can also be ruled out.

You are now left with a choice between (d) and (e). There is a plausibility to (e) in that the writer does show that there is no authority, but the question asks, in effect, what the writer's purpose is by this comparison. Therefore you need to look carefully at the part this comparison plays in the context of the writer's argument and the correct choice is (d).

Mechanics' Institutions

Question 3

This question requires you to identify the main idea in one section of the passage, so your first task should be to locate the relevant section of the text. However, you will also need to be alert to the argument in the passage as a whole, since the particular section is going to be linked to other ideas in the passage and it is unlikely that the question can be answered correctly by considering this particular section alone. You can see here that what Sir Benjamin Heywood says 'in defence of Mechanics' Institutions' is in response to earlier criticisms. The earlier, focused reading you have done in order to answer questions 1 and 2 will be useful here because it will have given you knowledge of the subject matter and a context for Sir Benjamin Heywood's comments. You will be aware of a certain ambivalence in attitudes towards Mechanics' Institutions and this will help you to understand the various points of view.

Option (e) can be readily eliminated since Sir Benjamin Heywood is separating out the status of England from the 'working classes' and he is not commenting on workmen and how they do their jobs, which removes (a) as a possibility. He also specifically states that the working classes will not be given 'an undue elevation' since he is 'at a loss' to think how that might be inferred. This therefore rules out (b). He uses the word 'superstructure' and you might be tempted to see (d) as the correct choice, but he is talking hypothetically, saying 'if the superstructure be renewed', not that it is or has been. You are therefore left with (c) which fits with the idea, developed in the second paragraph, of the perceived threat from Mechanics' Institutions which Sir Benjamin Heywood had to address.

The Myth of Mars and Venus

Question 2

This is an example where you are being asked to select evidence from more than one passage. Additionally, there are a number of different views with writers responding to the theories and ideas of others. One of your tasks, in this situation, is to sort out who is actually claiming what, and whether they agree or disagree with the ideas they discuss. This gives you two levels of information to sift, and it may be that the best approach is via elimination once you have established what the key idea is. In this case the statement in the question is 'women speak less effectively than men', and you need to be alert to the fact that the statement itself will need testing against the views of different writers in the passages. You will have to consider each option before you decide.

Simon Baron-Cohen is the first choice, and he is mentioned in the second extract in which the writer assesses Deborah Cameron's view of Simon Baron-Cohen; you will need to weigh up his ideas to see if they correspond to the theory that women speak less effectively than men. His position is to distinguish between male and female brains, arguing that each is suited to a different job because of their different natures, not that women are less effective speakers, and thus option (a) is not correct. John Gray and *Glamour* both base their arguments not on the 'deficit model' but on the theory that there are differences between men and women: the 'cross-cultural approach'. You can, therefore, safely ignore options (c) and (e).

We know from evidence in both passages that Deborah Cameron is sceptical of all such claims about male and female speech and would not endorse the view that women speak less effectively. By a process of elimination (d) is the right choice, and this can be confirmed by the first sentence of the fourth paragraph of the first extract.

Traditional vs Progressive Education

Question 3

This is a different kind of question in that it asks you to use what you have understood from the passage and apply it more generally. You are in effect extrapolating from the evidence you have read as well as demonstrating close reading and understanding of the material. The phrase 'based on the passage' indicates that you are not being asked to generalise but to ground your answer in the passage itself. You need to show that you have grasped the concepts of 'traditional and progressive education' and their implications. You also have to bear in mind that you are being asked what would **not** be characteristic, not what is.

Most of the passage is concerned with the characteristics of traditional rather than progressive education, so one way of answering this question is to take each option and test it against the writer's description of traditional education. If it does not fit, then it is likely to be a feature of progressive education, since the writer is drawing a firm distinction between the two philosophies. He focuses on the passivity of traditional education, as well as its imposed nature, commenting particularly on the lack of regard paid to the capacities and experiences of young learners. He also stresses the need for conformity in such a system. Therefore, it is possible to eliminate (a), (c), (d) and (e). You can confirm that (b) is correct by double-checking 'devices of art' which is a quotation from the passage, and does superficially seem to suggest creativity which might suggest progressive rather than traditional. In fact, the writer is arguing that these 'devices of art' have to be employed by teachers to help both enforce and mitigate the effects of the kind of education he terms 'traditional'.

A New Strange Mask for Science

Question 3

In question 3 you are asked to consider the link (in the penultimate paragraph) between a scientific advance and its moral consequences. You should be able to interpret the word 'quandary' in the passage as 'embarrassment' or perhaps 'dilemma'. Firstly you should judge whether the initial phrase in each answer describes a scientific, technological or some other (for example political) development or initiative. You can see that (a) (b) and (d) all describe a technological advance and not the hard science that splitting the atom involved. That each then contributes to unpleasant outcomes which are debated in moral terms does not mean any of (a), (b) or (d) can be the answer.

Turning then to (c), the development of a new drug would certainly involve a scientific breakthrough, but this option talks simply of the launch of the drug. Option (c) would have linked closely to the example in the passage had the marketing element not been to the fore. So (c) is not the answer.

You are now left with (e). Does it stand both tests? Yes: the discovery of DNA is a scientific breakthrough and the very idea of human cloning presents us with a moral quandary or dilemma. So (e) is the answer.

Classic Books

Question 3

Some 'passages' in fact consist of shorter pieces from a number of different writers, and it is likely that you will be asked to extract information from each of them, comparing and contrasting and seeing where they, implicitly or explicitly, agree or differ. Question 1 is an example. Other questions, such as this one, narrow down the material you need to use, so that you can focus closely on a shorter piece of writing.

When a question asks you to consider the purpose of a comparison, an analogy or a specific example, you still need to examine the structure of the writer's argument and what part this plays in its presentation. In this case, you have to look at another discussion of a 'classic' book, and the question includes 'mainly', suggesting that some of these options might have validity. It is your task to grade them, in effect, so that you select the most significant.

You might be tempted by (a) because of the word 'arbitrary', but the writer is actually reflecting on the arbitrary nature of the length of the 'test of time' rather than distinctions between writers. Remember your specific focus is the comparison between writers, not the broader definition of a 'classic novel'. It might be implicit that the critical judgements are subjective, but again it's not precisely on target, so (b) can be eliminated. It is easier to dismiss (d) and (e) since the writer is not in fact making any judgements about the worth of these writers: in many ways this is the opposite of what she is trying to do. Her purpose is neutral as she points out that Hamilton and Green meet her criteria, mentioned in the first sentence, and Cary does not. Therefore (c) is the right choice.