

Reading Year 8 — Practice Paper 1 — Answers & Explanations

For a parent, tutor, or the student to mark the exam paper against.

The Understudy

1. C. Priya had prepared completely for something she expected never to perform

The sentence sets total preparation against no expectation of performing, which establishes both her diligence and the apparent pointlessness of it.

2. A. Understudies who give notes to the lead lose their position

The text explains the unwritten rule: such understudies "do not remain understudies for long; they simply stop being invited".

3. D. As something undramatic — a wrong step and a small sound

The writer explicitly rules out drama — "not dramatically, not with a scream" — so that the moment which changes everything is almost unnoticeable.

4. B. He is testing whether she genuinely knows the part

A single specific question about an interpretive choice reveals far more than a yes-or-no about readiness, and her instant, exact answer passes the test.

5. B. She is precise and self-controlled

Noticing that "And you said nothing" is a statement rather than a question, and declining to fill the silence, shows the same exactness she brings to the four-beat pause.

6. D. That she has been given the part and criticised at the same time

The text says she understood "she had just been given the part and criticised in the same breath, and that both were fair".

7. A. The audience was completely absorbed

Describing silence as something audible, and as the absence of movement from a specific number of people, conveys total attention more vividly than applause would.

8. C. Priya's ability was always there; only its recognition has changed

Aisha says "You were always going to be better" and locates the change entirely in the fact that "now somebody else knows", not in Priya's ability.

What the Algorithm Wants

9. D. To keep the user engaged for longer

The opening paragraph states the target directly: "keep you here longer".

10. B. When the system finds that some material holds attention better than the rest

The text marks this as the turning point: the difficulty begins "when the system discovers... that certain kinds of material hold attention better than others".

11. C. The drift is automatic and unintended rather than deliberate

Water does not choose to run downhill; it follows the shape it is given. The comparison makes the drift a consequence of the system's design rather than anyone's intention, which the writer states in the same sentence: "not out of malice".

12. A. The system learns from behaviour rather than stated preferences, building a model from weak moments

The writer explains that because the system learns "from what you do rather than from what you say you want", repeated careless clicks become the basis of its model of you.

13. A. By arguing it misunderstands how unequal the contest is

The writer answers "This misunderstands the contest", then sets one distracted person against a system running millions of experiments a day.

14. C. To show how mismatched the user and the system are

Placing the two figures side by side makes the imbalance concrete, which is the evidence for the claim that blaming willpower misses the point.

15. B. That harm can arise without anyone intending it, from a slightly wrong target pursued with vast resources

The closing paragraph explicitly removes villainy from the explanation and lists the three conditions that are sufficient on their own.

16. D. Measured

The writer repeatedly concedes points, rules out blame, and builds the argument step by step rather than through emotive language, which is a measured tone.

In Defence of Boredom

17. C. Boredom from ordinary life

The opening sentence states it: "We have, in about fifteen years, very nearly eliminated boredom from ordinary life."

18. A. Because the discomfort is what makes us act on it

The writer explains that boredom is "uncomfortable enough that we do something about it", so the unpleasantness is the mechanism, not a side effect.

19. D. Build something or invent a complicated game

The text says they "build something, or make up a game with rules of forbidding complexity".

20. B. The discomfort is a necessary stage rather than a sign something is wrong

The writer reframes the complaint as part of how invention happens, so relieving it immediately would interrupt the very thing that produces the invention.

21. B. They perform better on a later creative task

The text reports that such people "perform better than people who were kept occupied beforehand".

22. D. That boredom is not always productive, such as in a hospital waiting room

The writer says "I am not romanticising discomfort" and gives the waiting-room example, which narrows the claim and makes it harder to dismiss.

23. A. That we never find out what we would have thought instead

The final paragraph draws this distinction explicitly: "What worries me is not the hour spent scrolling. It is that we no longer find out what we would have thought instead."

24. C. Because it cannot be measured

The writer says it is "not a loss anybody can measure, which is exactly why it will not appear", and then argues that being unmeasurable is why it gets overlooked rather than why it is unimportant.

The Last Broadcast

25. D. The replacement service is technically similar but lacks what actually mattered

A photograph accurately represents a meal while being useless as food. The comparison concedes the network's claim is literally true and denies that it means anything.

26. B. From eleven years of taking their calls

The text says "she had counted them, more or less, across eleven years of taking calls".

27. C. To make the audience concrete and personal rather than a statistic

The writer moves straight from a number, four hundred and eleven, to three specific people, which converts an abstraction into individuals the reader can care about.

28. A. They have not spoken since 1998 but requested the same song

The text gives exactly this detail, which quietly suggests how much the two men still have in common despite the estrangement.

29. A. She speaks personally to her listeners

The text says she "did not read the closing statement the network had supplied" and then gives her own words, which thank the listeners directly.

30. C. A silence that feels final and unlike ordinary quiet

The word particular insists this is a specific kind of silence, distinguishing the permanent ending of transmission from a room simply being quiet.

31. B. The call is really about connection and farewell, not pronunciation

The pronunciation complaint is the excuse for the call; the long silence that neither of them fills is what the call is actually for.

32. D. Something valuable has been lost that a technically equivalent service cannot replace

Every element — the photograph comparison, the named listeners, the unscripted farewell, the final call — works to show what the Brisbane broadcast will not carry.

Short texts

33. B. Ironically, to suggest the opposite was true

The contrast between three years of "careful" consideration and a five-minute rejection signals irony.

34. A. To state the main idea the paragraph will develop

A topic sentence introduces the main idea that the rest of the paragraph explains or supports.

35. C. Contrasting words and actions to reveal insincerity

Placing the spoken apology next to the distracted action reveals that the apology was not sincere.

36. A. Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing gives the reader clues about future events in the story.

37. B. Courage and friendship

A story about overcoming fear to help someone centres on courage and friendship as its theme.

38. C. A flashback

A flashback interrupts the current timeline to show events from earlier.

39. D. Pathos

Pathos is the rhetorical appeal to emotion, as opposed to logos (logic) or ethos (credibility).