EXAM PAPER

Reading Year 8 — Practice Paper 1

PREVIEW
This file has the first 16 of the 39 questions in this paper. The rest is locked: it comes with a PrepNest plan, or with the paper itself for VCE.

Total time: 65 minutes

SECTIONS IN THIS PAPER

- The Understudy
- What the Algorithm Wants
- In Defence of Boredom
- The Last Broadcast
- Short texts

INSTRUCTIONS

Answer every question you can. Write your working in the space provided for long-answer questions. Marking guidance and full explanations are provided in the separate answer key.

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Read ***The Understudy*** and answer questions 1 to 8.

THE UNDERSTUDY

Priya had been the understudy for nine weeks, which meant she had learned every line of a part she would never play.

She knew the blocking better than Aisha did. She knew that the pause before the third-act letter should be four beats and not two, because at two it sounded like hesitation and at four it sounded like a decision. She had told nobody this. Understudies who offer notes to the lead do not remain understudies for long; they simply stop being invited.

On the Thursday, Aisha's ankle went on the stairs outside the green room — not dramatically, not with a scream, just a wrong step and a small sound and then a long silence while everybody worked out what it meant.

The director found Priya in the corridor. He did not ask whether she was ready. He said, "Third act. The letter. What are you going to do with the pause?"

Priya said, "Four beats."

He looked at her for slightly too long. "How long have you known that?"

"Since the second week."

"And you said nothing."

It was not a question, so she did not answer it. He nodded once and walked away, and she understood that she had just been given the part and criticised in the same breath, and that both were fair.

That night she played it at four beats. In the dark beyond the lights she could hear four hundred people not moving, which is a particular kind of silence and the only review that has ever mattered to her.

Afterwards Aisha, on crutches, said the thing that Priya would still be turning over a decade later: "You were better. You were always going to be better. The difference is that now somebody else knows."

1. What does the writer mean by "she had learned every line of a part she would never play"?

A. Priya had been given the wrong script

B. Priya was not allowed to rehearse

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

D. Priya had forgotten her own part

2. Why had Priya told nobody about the four-beat pause?

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

B. She was not certain she was right

C. She wanted to use it herself one day

D. The director had told her to stay silent

3. How is Aisha’s injury deliberately described?

A. As a dramatic, shocking accident

B. As an injury nobody noticed

C. As something Aisha had faked

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

4. Why does the director ask about the pause rather than whether Priya is ready?

A. He has forgotten her name

B. He is testing whether she genuinely knows the part

C. He is trying to delay the decision

D. He wants her to refuse the role

5. "It was not a question, so she did not answer it." What does this reveal about Priya?

A. She was too nervous to speak

B. She is precise and self-controlled

C. She had not heard the director

D. She was angry with the director

6. What does Priya understand from the director’s reaction?

A. That he does not want her in the role

B. That Aisha will return the next night

C. That the pause should be two beats after all

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

7. "she could hear four hundred people not moving" — what does this convey?

A. The audience was completely absorbed

B. The audience was bored

C. The theatre was almost empty

D. The audience could not see the stage

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8. What does Aisha’s final remark mean?

A. Priya only succeeded because Aisha was injured

B. Aisha intends to give up acting

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

D. Priya should thank Aisha for the opportunity

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Read ***What the Algorithm Wants*** and answer questions 9 to 16.

WHAT THE ALGORITHM WANTS

A recommendation system has no opinion about what you should watch. It has a target, and the target is almost always the same: keep you here longer.

This sounds harmless, and often it is. If you enjoy cooking videos, a system that notices this and offers you more cooking videos has done you a small service. The difficulty begins when the system discovers, as these systems reliably do, that certain kinds of material hold attention better than others.

Content that provokes a strong reaction — outrage, alarm, indignation — is watched for longer and shared more often than content that is merely accurate. No engineer decided this. It emerged from the data, because it is true about human beings. A system optimising for watch time will therefore drift towards the inflammatory, not out of malice, but in the way water drifts downhill.

There is a second effect, subtler and harder to notice. Because the system learns from what you do rather than from what you say you want, it will often serve you a version of yourself that you do not endorse. Almost everybody will click on something they would not have chosen deliberately. Do this a few hundred times and the system has built a model of your interests out of your weakest moments.

The usual response is to blame the user for a failure of willpower. This misunderstands the contest. On one side is a person with ordinary self-control and about four seconds of attention to spare. On the other is a system running millions of experiments a day, refined continuously against the behaviour of billions of people, with no purpose other than to win exactly this exchange.

None of this requires anybody to be villainous. It requires only that a measurable target be chosen, that the target be slightly wrong, and that enormous resources be applied to hitting it.

9. What is a recommendation system’s usual target?

A. To show users accurate information

B. To reduce the time users spend online

C. To recommend only popular content

D. To keep the user engaged for longer

10. When does the writer say the difficulty begins?

A. When users watch cooking videos

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

C. When engineers change the system

D. When too many people use the system at once

11. "in the way water drifts downhill" — what does this comparison suggest?

A. The process is slow and can be stopped easily

B. The system was designed to cause harm

C. The drift is automatic and unintended rather than deliberate

D. The effect only happens in certain countries

12. What is the "second effect" the writer describes?

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

B. The system becomes slower over time

C. The system shows the same content to everybody

D. The system stops recommending accurate content

13. How does the writer respond to blaming users for weak willpower?

A. By arguing it misunderstands how unequal the contest is

B. By agreeing that users should try harder

C. By suggesting users should be fined

D. By saying willpower cannot be measured

14. Why does the writer contrast "four seconds of attention" with "millions of experiments a day"?

A. To show how quickly systems improve

B. To explain how recommendation systems are built

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

D. To suggest users should spend less time online

15. What is the writer’s main argument in the final paragraph?

A. That engineers should be punished

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

C. That recommendation systems should be banned

D. That users should choose their own content

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16. Which word best describes the tone of this text?

A. Outraged

B. Humorous

C. Uncertain

D. Measured

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23 questions locked, up to question 39.

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PREVIEW

That’s the end of the preview

You’ve seen the first 16 of the 39 questions in Reading Year 8 — Practice Paper 1. The full paper is worth 39 marks.

STILL TO COME	QUESTIONS	MARKS
In Defence of Boredom	8	8
The Last Broadcast	8	8
Short texts	7	7

The full paper comes with

- Every question, printed exactly like the ones in this preview
- The complete answer key, with the working behind every mark
- A topic report after marking, showing what to practice next

Get the full paper at
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