

EXAM PAPER

Reading Year 8 — Practice Paper 1

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.

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

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

PrepNest

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

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

A. Outraged

B. Humorous

C. Uncertain

D. Measured

PrepNest

Read *In Defence of Boredom* and answer questions 17 to 24.

IN DEFENCE OF BOREDOM

We have, in about fifteen years, very nearly eliminated boredom from ordinary life. Any queue, any bus trip, any gap of ninety seconds can now be filled. This is presented as progress. I think we have thrown something away without checking what it was.

Boredom is unpleasant, which is precisely its function. It is the mind's signal that current conditions are not worth attending to, and it is uncomfortable enough that we do something about it.

Historically, what we did about it was invent. Children left alone in a backyard with nothing to do will, after a period of loud complaint, build something, or make up a game with rules of forbidding complexity. The complaint is not a failure of the process. It is the process.

Researchers who ask people to sit and do nothing, and then set them a creative task, find that they perform better than people who were kept occupied beforehand. The explanation offered is that an unoccupied mind begins connecting things that have no business being connected, which is roughly a definition of an original idea.

I am not romanticising discomfort. Boredom in a hospital waiting room is not productive; it is just boredom. The claim is narrower: that the specific state of having nothing to do and no way to escape it is where a great deal of invention has historically come from, and that we are now able to escape it every single time.

What worries me is not the hour spent scrolling. It is that we no longer find out what we would have thought instead. That is not a loss anybody can measure, which is exactly why it will not appear in any argument about screen time, and why I suspect it is the important one.

17. What does the writer say we have nearly eliminated?

A. Reading for pleasure

B. Waiting in queues

C. Boredom from ordinary life

D. Original ideas

18. Why does the writer say boredom being unpleasant is "precisely its function"?

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

B. Because unpleasant feelings are always useful

C. Because boredom is a kind of illness

D. Because people enjoy complaining

19. According to the writer, what do children do after a period of loud complaint?

A. Ask an adult for a screen

B. Fall asleep

C. Give up and do nothing

D. Build something or invent a complicated game

20. "The complaint is not a failure of the process. It is the process." What does the writer mean?

A. Children should be told not to complain

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

C. Complaining prevents children from inventing

D. Adults should ignore children entirely

21. What do researchers find about people asked to sit and do nothing?

A. They become irritable and unhelpful

B. They perform better on a later creative task

C. They remember less afterwards

D. They take longer to finish the task

22. What concession does the writer make?

A. That boredom is always valuable

B. That screens have no benefits

C. That the research may be wrong

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

23. What does the writer say actually worries them?

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

B. The hour spent scrolling

C. That children complain too much

D. That researchers disagree

24. Why does the writer say this loss "will not appear in any argument about screen time"?

A. Because nobody is interested in the subject

B. Because the research is too recent

C. Because it cannot be measured

D. Because screen time is falling anyway

Read ***The Last Broadcast*** and answer questions 25 to 32.

THE LAST BROADCAST

Station 4QR went off the air at 6.02 on a Tuesday evening, which meant Ellie had about ninety seconds left of being a radio announcer.

She had known for six weeks. Everybody had. The network had sent a letter explaining that regional programming would now originate from Brisbane, and that listeners would continue to enjoy the same high standard of service, which was true in the way that a photograph of a meal is the same as the meal.

There were four hundred and eleven people in the listening area with no internet connection. Ellie knew this because she had counted them, more or less, across eleven years of taking calls. Mrs Dettmann out at Karara, who rang every Thursday to correct her pronunciation. The Baillie brothers, who had not spoken to each other since 1998 but had both, separately, requested the same song. The night nurse at the hospital, who never gave her name and always said thank you.

At 6.01 she did not read the closing statement the network had supplied. She said: "This is Ellie Nguyen at 4QR. I'm told you'll be able to hear us from Brisbane from tomorrow. I want to say that it has been the honour of my life to talk to a few hundred people who couldn't sleep, for eleven years, in the dark. Thank you for having me in your kitchens."

Then she played the Baillie brothers' song, and at 6.02 the carrier signal cut, and the room went to the particular quiet of a place that has stopped transmitting.

Her phone rang eleven minutes later. It was Mrs Dettmann, who said that Ellie had mispronounced "honour", and then did not hang up for a long time, and neither of them said anything else at all.

25. What does the writer mean by "true in the way that a photograph of a meal is the same as the meal"?

A. The network's letter contained a factual error

B. The new service will be of much higher quality

C. Listeners will not notice any difference

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

26. How does Ellie know how many listeners have no internet connection?

A. The network provided the figure

B. From eleven years of taking their calls

C. From a survey of the listening area

D. The hospital gave her a list

27. Why does the writer list Mrs Dettmann, the Baillie brothers and the night nurse?

A. To show that the audience was very small

B. To explain who complained about the closure

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

D. To show that the callers knew one another

28. What is notable about the Baillie brothers?

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

B. They founded the radio station

C. They both work at the hospital

D. They live in Brisbane

29. What does Ellie do instead of reading the network's closing statement?

A. She speaks personally to her listeners

B. She plays music without speaking

C. She criticises the network on air

D. She reads out the listeners' names

30. "the particular quiet of a place that has stopped transmitting" — what does this suggest?

A. The equipment had broken down

B. The room was soundproofed

C. A silence that feels final and unlike ordinary quiet

D. Everybody had already left the building

31. Why does Mrs Dettmann not hang up?

A. She is waiting for Ellie to correct herself

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

C. She has fallen asleep

D. She wants to request a song

32. What is the main idea of this text?

A. Regional radio is technically outdated

B. Listeners should have protested the closure

C. Ellie should have accepted the network's decision

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

YEAR 8 READING

Read each short text and answer questions 33 to 39.

33. Read: "The committee 'carefully considered' the proposal for three years before rejecting it in a five-minute meeting." The phrase "carefully considered" is likely being used:

A. To describe a scientific process

B. Ironically, to suggest the opposite was true

C. Literally, to praise the committee

D. As a direct quotation from the proposal

34. What is the primary purpose of a topic sentence in a paragraph?

A. To state the main idea the paragraph will develop

B. To conclude the paragraph

C. To provide a citation

D. To ask a rhetorical question

35. Read: "He apologised with his mouth, but his eyes never left his phone." What technique is the author using?

A. Foreshadowing a future event

B. A direct statement of the character's honesty

C. Contrasting words and actions to reveal insincerity

D. A literal description of an apology

36. A hint early in a story that suggests what will happen later is called:

A. Foreshadowing

B. Dialogue

C. Setting

D. Flashback

37. What is the central theme most likely to be in a story about a character overcoming fear to help a friend?

A. Wealth and greed

B. Courage and friendship

C. Isolation

D. Betrayal

38. An author who interrupts the present story to show an earlier event is using:

A. A cliffhanger

B. Foreshadowing

C. A flashback

D. An epilogue

39. In persuasive writing, an appeal to the reader's emotions is called:

A. Logos

B. Diction

C. Ethos

D. Pathos

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