

I. COMPREHENSION - ITS IMPORTANCE

'Comprehend' means to understand or grasp mentally. Thus 'Comprehension' means the capacity for understanding the main facts and ideas contained in what one reads or listens to. Comprehension passages are set in examination to test this capacity or capability of candidates. It is the most practical aspect of language studies. Language is the means to communicate different ideas in all walks of life. Like any other form of language it requires reading skill - reading a news item, a novel, an article, a statement, a letter, an advertisement or a nonverbal item. But mere reading alone will not help. One should be in a position to reproduce the important ideas contained in what one reads. It requires practice in writing moderately good language, in sorting out what is important.

2. THE SITUATIONS

Comprehension situations are of two types - oral and written. In oral situations, the students are tested to identify the sounds and words made thereof, understanding the tone and gestures used by the speaker, and grasping the ideas in a connected speech. In a written situation the abilities of students to be tested are identifying the written words, reading silently with proper speed and grasping the meaning of words, sentences, and of the whole passage.

3. READING COMPREHENSION : UNSEEN PASSAGES

All reading comprehension tests are based on the passages selected according to the level of the students. The passages may be in the form of:

- stories
- news items
- fiction
- dialogues
- articles on any subject, etc.,

A variety of test items may be set for testing the comprehension of students.

4. TYPES OF QUESTIONS

- **True / false items :** Students judge whether the given statement is correct or wrong.
- **Multiple choice items:** A small question on one of the important aspects in the passage is asked. Three or four alternative answers are suggested. Some times all look correct. Some times there is a confusion between two options. But a thorough reading with full concentration, will help in finding the correct answer.
- **Very short answer items:** Students should answer such questions in a word, a phrase or a sentence.
- **Vocabulary testing items :** Synonyms / antonyms / meanings for a word a from passage is given. The students should choose the right connotation in which the word has been used in the passage.

5. THE KINDS OF SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES OF QUESTIONS

The testing of reading skills may be designed to develop the ability to read for plain sense of information, for interpretation, for inference and for critical thinking. The questions given for testing comprehension involve the following activities :

- a) grasping the meaning of words, phrases and sentences from the context.

- b) locating key words, phrases and sentences in the passages.
- c) getting at the central idea of the passage.
- d) inferring meaning, ideas and messages in the passage.
- e) interpreting ideas, events, traits of character etc.,
- f) identifying relationships between objects, ideas, events, facts characters etc.

6. IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION

Reading takes place on two levels - objective and subjective. First the student should get the objective facts and then subjective information. Objective facts require very little interpretation. But subjective information is to be drawn by the students on basis of choice of words and total situation.

7. HOW TO ATTEMPT AN EXERCISE ON COMPREHENSION ?

The student should

1. read the passage with full concentration to grasp
 - a) the meaning of words, phrases and sentences
 - b) the ideas conveyed in the passage
 - c) the general meaning of the passage.
2. try to understand the exact idea of the questions.
3. give the passage a second reading.
4. locate the area with which a question is related.
5. find answers or clues to the questions in different parts of the passage.
6. underline those words, phrases or sentences which may help in writing the answers.
7. pick up the exact answer and should write it in his / her own language.
8. not use ambiguous language.
9. not try to answer in a round about manner.
10. check the answers once again.

8. TO SUM UP, COMPREHENSION SKILL REQUIRES:

- (i) real understanding/grasp of the passage.
- (ii) understanding issues raised in the questions
- (iii) identifying the relevant clues
- (iv) writing answers to the point

MODEL EXERCISES

Reading the following passages carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1. *Luke was never an ice hockey fan. May be because his sports - minded dad had died when he was only three years old, and he was raised by a single mother who knew absolutely nothing about the game. That mother is me. His older brother, Jay, a diehard arts student was only interested in exposing Luke to the world of art galleries and movies than to the rough-and-tumble sport of hockey. But in spite of the influences around him, Luke avoys and one day woke up and had discovered hockey. It was 2002, and he was hooked. "Mom. I want to join a hockey league," he announced. It was a reasonable request from a young boy, but since Luke could'nt even skate, it with a heavy heart that I started looking for a team. As a matter of fact, at almost tw*

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years of age, Luke had never skated a day in his life. I asked a league if it was possible for a nonskater to join. He got the nod and was drafted into house league.

Questions :

- 1) What could be the reasons for Luke not being a hockey fan?
- 2) How many members are there in Luke's family?
- 3) What are Jay's interests?
- 4) "But in spite of the influence around him, Luke evolved..." What were the influences around him?
- 5) Why was Luke's mother worried when he said he wanted to join a hockey league?

Answers :

- 1) His sports minded dad had died when he was only three years old and he was raised by his mother who knew absolutely nothing about the game.
- 2) Three - The mother, older brother Jay and Luke.
- 3) Jay was an arts student and interested in exposing Luke to the world of art galleries and movies.
- 4) His mother knew nothing about hockey and his brother is interested in art galleries and movies.
- 5) Luke had never skated a day in his life.
- 2) *Pollution is the fouling of the environment, land, water and air by waste, smoke, chemicals and other harmful substances. The most serious pollution occurs where there are large cities and many factories. Every industrial country faces the problem of disposing waste. As factories produce new goods for people to buy, old ones are thrown out with the household rubbish. Burning this refuse pollutes the air, dumping it in rivers and seas pollutes the water. Getting rid of plastics is particularly difficult. Wood and paper decay after sometime through the action of bacteria. But plastics never decay. With millions of tonnes of rubbish being dumped into the sea, marine life is greatly harmed. Smoke from factories and gases from motor vehicles pollute the air. Carbon monoxide gas and substances called hydrocarbons from the engines of motor vehicles damage people's health. Ridding our world of pollution is an unimaginably big task.*

Question :

- 1) What is meant by pollution?
- 2) Where does serious pollution occur?
- 3) Read this sentence. "Burning this refuse pollutes the air, dumping it in rivers and seas pollutes the water". What does 'it' stand for in this sentence?
- 4) How do wood and paper decay?
- 5) How is marine life harmed?

Answers :

- 1) Pollution is the fouling of the environment, land, water and air by waste, smoke, chemicals and other harmful substances.
- 2) Where there are large cities and many factories.
- 3) Household rubbish.
- 4) Through action of bacteria.
- 5) With million tonnes of rubbish being dumped into the sea, marine life is greatly harmed.
- 3) *On the night of Friday November 13, 1998, as India and Zimbabwe clashed in the final of*

the Coca Cola Cup at Sharjah, school children who were participating in the "Shortgun Shoots" talk show over Star TV, loudly declared that their favourite cricketer was Sachin Tendulkar. It was easy to understand their choice. The Doordarshan direct telecast of the Sharjah match showed Tendulkar single-handedly annihilating the Zimbabwe players. Skitting out Zimbabwe for 196, the 'Hit Pair' of Tendulkar and Saurav Ganguly, passed that score, enabling India to register an easy ten-wicket win. Tendulkar played like a man possessed. His 124 not out, came from just 92 balls. He hit the ball as he like. Six sixers and 12 boundaries flowed from his bat. Tendulkar was the 'Man of the Match'.

- 1) Choose the correct answer.
 - a) Saurav was selected 'Man of the Match'.
 - b) Sachin single-handedly helped India to win the match against Zimbabwe.
 - c) Sachin participated in the show.
- 2) Find a word from the passage that means announced.
- 3) Find a word from the passage that means the opposite of 'disabling'.
- 4) How many runs did Sachin score by hitting over the boundary?
 - a) 124
 - b) 48
 - c) 36
 - d) 196
- 5) What is the adjectival form of the word 'loudlly'?

Answers :

- 1) (b)
 - 2) declared
 - 3) enable
 - 4) 124
 - 5) loud
4. *Some interviewers ask "puzzle questions" such as "Why are manhole covers round?" or "How would you design Bill Gates' bathroom?" instead of asking standard, technical questions. Interviewers who pose such questions say that these help to gauge the intelligence, resourcefulness or outside-the-box thinking needed in today's hypercompetitive world. The popularity of these questions is enerally attributed to Bill Gates' Microsoft Corporation. The software gaint receives over 12,000 job applications a month, so it has to be selective. The website of the company states, "We look for original, creative thinkers and our interview process is designed to find them."*

Questions :

- 1) Give one example of a "puzzle question".
- 2) Why do interviewers pose such "puzzle questions"?
- 3) Name the software company which first popularized the use of puzzle questions in interviews.
- 4) Write the adjective form of 'intelligence'.
- 5) The word 'hypercompetitive' in this context suggests (Pick the best answer):
 - a) There is very little competition.
 - b) There is a lot of competition.
 - c) There may or may not be any competition.

Answers :

- 1) Why are manhole covers round ?
- 2) These questions help gauge the intelligence, resourcefulness or outside - the - box thinking needed in today's hypercompetitive world.
- 3) Bill Gates Microsoft Corporation.
- 4) Intelligent
- 5) (b)
5. *The air was filled with the cries of survivors searching for loved ones and the means of people in pain. A father frantically called for his missing children. Over and over, the man called out their names but received no answer. People appeared from every direction, many covered in blood. Others lay where the tsunami had left them, too injured to do more than moan. Simmonds and other survivors set up a makeshift hospital on the upper floors of the Cabana Hotel. Using scraps of clothing, sheets and whatever else they could find, they bandaged those who could walk.*

Questions :

- 1) What did the survivors do?
- 2) Where was the makeshift hospital set up?
- 3) What were the bandages made of?
- 4) Name of the natural calamity mentioned in the passage.
- 5) Write the noun form of 'injured'.

Answers :

- 1) Searching for loved ones and the moans of people in pain.
- 2) On the upper floors of the Cabana Hotel.
- 3) Scraps of clothing, sheets and what else they could find.
- 4) Tsunami.
- 5) injury.

TEXTUAL EXERCISES

Passage-1

We are all aware of our rights as citizens. But we often fail to acknowledge the duty that accompanies every right. We should keep in mind what former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower said. "A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both".

Indian culture has deep-rooted family values - parents make enormous sacrifices for their children; children consider it their duty to take care of aged parents, marriage is held to be a sacred union. Unfortunately our attitude towards the community is very different from our attitude towards the family. Although we keep our homes spotlessly clean, when we go out we do not think twice before littering. We see serious problems around us but behave as if they are some one else's responsibility.

In the West individuals understand that they have to be responsible to their community. They solve societal problems proactively. This is something we should learn. Successful societies are those that harmoniously combine loyalty to the family and loyalty to the community.

The concept of Dignity of Labour is an integral part of the Western value system. In India we revere only supposedly intellectual work. For anything to be run successfully, everyone from the Chief Executive Officer to the person who serves tea must discharge his or her duties in a responsible

manner.

Another attribute we must learn from the West is accountability. Then you are held responsible for what you do irrespective of your position. In India the more 'important' you are, the less answerable you become.

The Westerns value system teaches respect for contractual obligations. In India while we consider it crucial to fulfill personal vows, we do not extend this to the public domain.

Questions and Answers:

1. What did Dwight D. Eisenhower say about rights and duties?
A. "A People that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both"
2. "Indian culture has deep-rooted family values" Give two examples from the passage.
A. Parents make enormous sacrifices for their children and marriage is held to be a sacred union
3. How should we discharge our duties?
A. Duties should be discharged in a responsible manner.
4. What does accountability imply?
A. Accountability implies responsibility
5. The author points out (Choose the best answer)
 - i) That Indians are migrating to the West
 - ii) That Indians do not care either about their family or about the community
 - iii) That Indians are dutiful towards their family but do not show adequate concern about the community
- A. That Indians are dutiful towards their family but do not show adequate concern about the community.

Passage-2

There was a Guru who had mastered the Scriptures. One day when he was teaching the Vedas to his disciples, a cat started moving around. This did not disturb the Guru, but was a distraction to some of his disciples. So the Guru instructed his disciples to get hold of the cat and tie it to pillar. As the nuisance recurred on the following days, the cat was regularly tethered to the pillar before the Guru began his teaching

Some years later the Guru died. One of his disciples became the new head. The practice of tethering the cat to the pillar continued. After a few months the cat died. When the Guru began his teaching the next day he noticed that the cat was missing. He said, "Don't you know that a cat must be tied to the pillar during my teaching? That is our tradition. Go and find a cat". The disciples immediately obeyed the order. Blindly following traditions, thus, is foolish and serves no purpose.

Questions and Answers:

1. Why were the disciples distracted?
A. The disciples were distracted by the cat
2. What was done to prevent the cat from roaming about?
A. The cat was tied to a pillar
3. Who became the new head?
A. One of his disciples became the new head
4. What practice continued after the new Guru took charge?
A. The practice of tethering the cat to the pillar continued
5. The new Guru was foolish because (Choose the best answer)

- i) He was blindly following a practice
- ii) He was fond of cats
- iii) He disliked traditions
- A. He was blindly following a practice.

Passage-3

Gifts should be chosen with care. There is no simple formula to guide you while buying gifts. It is easy to choose a gift if you know the recipient well and are aware of his tastes and needs. Flowers are frequently given as gifts. They can convey a wide range of emotions and sentiments. Red roses symbolize love; white can stand for sympathy and support yellow suggest friendship; violets beg the recipient not to forget the donor.

Money can be a suitable gift in most circumstances. From the donor's point of view it is convenient. Sometimes, however, the recipient may feel offended that you have not made any effort to find the right gift. He may also be unhappy about the amount of money that has been give. Further, money gets spent and there is no trace left of your generosity. Another gift that is greatly appreciated is a trip. Travel is a special gift because it offers new and thrilling experiences for the recipient. Memories will linger in the mind long after the trip is over.

Gift can be given on several occasions and not just on birthdays. Sometimes a gift can reduce the pain and anger of a quarrel or a break-up. An Austrian artist, Gustav Klimt, once wished to put an end to his affair with a lady. But how could he do so without hurting her? Klimt gifted her with an exceedingly beautiful fan. He painted the blank, inner side of the painting and wrote there "Better an ending with pain, than pain without end".

Questions and Answers:

1. When is it easy to choose a gift?
- A. It is easy to choose a gift if you know the recipient well and aware of his tastes and needs
2. What do flowers convey?
- A. They convey a wide range of emotions and sentiments
3. State two reasons why travel is a special gift.
- A. Travel is a special gift because it offers new and thrilling experiences for the recipient and memories will linger in the mind long after the trip is over.
4. State two other reasons why travel is a speail gift.
- A. Some times a gift can reduce the pain and anger of a quarrel or a break-up.
5. The author conveys that (Choose the best answer).
- i) We should not give gifts as the poor person is never satisfied
- ii) We should be thoughtful while selecting gifts
- iii) Any gift we give will be appreciated by the receiver
- A. We should be thoughtful while selecting gifts.

Passage-4

Do you ever worry about your memory? Perhaps you go into a room and forget what you came for, go blank on names, mislay things? Or there may be something on the tip of your tongue, but you can't get it off. Don't worry. You are perfectly normal. It is the nature of the mind to forget- and the nature of man to worry about forgetfulness.

Human beings have a prodigious memory. In a few cubic centimeters the brain stores more information that can be stored in a large computer. Today neurologists, psychologists and biologists are studying the different aspects of memory.

There are two types of memory. Short-term memory lasts only for seconds (you look up a telephone number and remember it long enough to dial). Long-term memory is stored probably for life.

Questions and Answers:-

1. Give two instances of forgetfulness in the passage.
A. You go into a room and forget what you came for and go blank on names
2. How much information can the brain store?
A. In few cubic centimetres
3. What are the two types of memory?
A. The two types of memory are Long-term memory and short-term memory
4. Give an instance of short-term memory.
A. Look up a telephone number and remember it long enough to dial
5. The author suggests that (Choose the best answer)
 - i) Human beings have a poor memory and so they are forgetful
 - ii) Human beings have a good memory and yet they are forgetful
 - iii) Human beings have a good memory, yet they are not forgetful
 A. Human beings have a good memory and yet they are forgetful.

Passage-5

The students were asked to offer an explanation about why they had been absent. One said that he had an attack of headache and therefore could not come to school. He was asked to bring a medical certificate. The second said that while he had been coming to the school on the previous day, someone had told him that there would be no school, and he had gone back home. The Head Master replied that if he was going to listen to every loafer who said there would be no school, he deserved to be flogged. Anyway, why did he not come to the school and verify? No answer. The punishment was pronounced: ten days attendance cancelled two rupees fine, and the whole day to be spent on the desk. The third said that he had an attack of headache. The fourth said that he had stomachache. The fifth said that his grandmother died suddenly just as he was starting for school. The Head Master asked him if he could bring a letter from his father. No, he had no father. Then, who was his guardian? His grandmother. But the grandmother was dead, was she not?

Questions and Answers:

1. What were the students being questioned about?
A. The students were being questioned about their absence
2. What was the first student asked to bring?
A. He was asked to bring a medical certificate
3. Why did the Head Master feel that the second student deserved to be flogged?
A. The second one said that while he had been coming to the school on the previous day, someone had told him that there would be no school and he had gone back home. The Head Master replied that if he was going to listen to every loafer who said there would be no school, he deserved to be flogged.
4. What punishment was given to the second student?

- A. Ten days attendance cancelled, two rupees fine and the whole day to be spent on the desk
5. Through this passage the author wants to show that (Choose the best answer)

- i) Students often fall ill and cannot attend school
- ii) Students make up all sorts of excuses to explain their absence from school
- iii) Students are unnecessarily punished by teachers

- A. Students make up all sorts of excuses to explain their absence from school

Passage-6

Once again Soapy was unsuccessful at getting himself arrested. He buttoned his thin coat against the chilling wind. Winter was fast approaching. As a homeless, jobless drifter, he wondered how he would survive the harsh winter. He thought wistfully about the food and shelter he would be assured of in jail, if only he could manage to get caught while committing a petty crime. But today was not his lucky day. No matter how hard he seemed to try, each attempt had ended in failure.

Suddenly he noticed a well-dressed man lighting cigar at a cigar store. His silk umbrella had been set by the door on entering. Soapy stepped inside the store, took the umbrella and sauntered off with it slowly. The man followed hastily, "My umbrella", he said sternly. "Oh, is it?" sneered Soapy. "Well, why don't you call a policeman? I took it, your umbrella! Why don't you call a cop? There stands one at the corner".

Questions and Answers:

1. What had Soapy been unsuccessful at?
A. Soapy had been unsuccessful at committing a petty crime.
2. Why did Soapy want to get arrested?
A. Soapy wanted to get arrested because he was homeless and jobless and he had to survive the harsh winter
3. What was the well-dressed man doing?
A. The well-dressed man was lighting a cigar at a cigar store.
4. Where did the man put the umbrella?
A. The man put his umbrella by the door at the entrance
5. Soapy drew the attention of the umbrella owner to a policemen because...(Choose the best answer)
i) He wanted to run away
ii) He wanted to keep the umbrella
iii) He wanted to get arrested
A. He wanted to get arrested.

Passage-7

Animal and plant species have begun dying or changing because of global warming. There are trends of animal populations moving northward if they can, of species adapting slightly because of climatic change, of plants blooming earlier, and of an increase in pests and parasites. The most noticeable changes in plants and animals have to do with the earlier cherry blossoms and grape harvests and in 65 British bird species that are laying their first eggs nearly nine days earlier than thirty five years ago. Cold-adapted species are rapidly declining in numbers. Emperor penguins have dropped from 300 breeding pairs to just nine in the Western Antarctic Peninsula. Polar Bears are dropping in numbers and weight in the Arctic; two-thirds of a certain frog species which lives on mountaintops have died. Population of animals that adapt to warmth or can move and live farther

north are adapting better than other populations of the same species.

Questions and Answers:

1. What phenomenon is causing changes in animal and plant species?
A. Global warming
2. How are bird species affected by the early onset of spring?
A. They are laying their first eggs nearly nine days earlier than thirty five years ago
3. How are polar bears affected?
A. Polar Bears are dropping in numbers and weight in the Arctic.
4. Which kind of animals are adapting better to climatic changes?
A. Population of animals that adapt to warmth or can move and live farther north are adapting better than other populations of the same species
5. In this passage the author describes (Choose the best answer)
 - i) How the animals are suffering and dying because of an increase in global temperatures
 - ii) How animals are increasing in numbers because of global warming
 - iii) How animals are dying of cold in the Arctic and Antarctic regions
- A. How the animals are suffering and dying because of an increase in global temperatures

Passage-8

We are familiar with the terms air pollution, water pollution and noise pollution. But did you ever hear of light pollution? Light Pollution refers to the artificial brightness of the sky at night, especially in urban areas where millions of street lights, office lights and neon signs are used. In heavily urbanized regions of the world it no longer ever really gets dark. In a natural sky, a person should be able to see nearly 3500 stars. But in many cities the number of visible stars has dwindled to about a few dozen.

Light at night is now being investigated as a human health hazard, a possible contributor to cancer, depression and other ailments. For many wild life species, light pollution seems to be a serious environmental threat. Lighting from office towers confuses migratory birds which fly into buildings at night and die from these crashes. In Toronto alone, skyscrapers injure or kill 24,000 birds a year. Artificial light along ocean beaches confuses millions of baby sea turtle. Even dim light is enough to blind nocturnal frogs. Light at night can thus, render an area unsuitable for wildlife and disrupt living and breeding patterns of birds and animals.

Questions and Answers:

1. What is light pollution?
A. Light pollution refers to the artificial brightness of the sky at night
2. How many stars are visible in a natural night sky?
A. Nearly 3500 stars
3. Name two diseases which may be linked to light pollution.
A. Cancer and depression
4. How are migratory birds affected by light pollution?
A. Lighting from office towers confuses migratory birds which fly into buildings at night and die from these crashes
5. The author suggests that
 - i) Light pollution is good for health
 - ii) Light pollution is beneficial for animals and birds

iii) Light pollution disturbs the living and breeding habits of animals and birds

A. Light pollution disturbs the living and breeding habits of animals and birds

Passage-9

In the first season my crop was good enough to satisfy me, especially the beans and potatoes. The next year did better still, for I dug all the land needed, about a third of an acre, with a spade. I learned from the experience of both years that if one would live simply and eat only the crop which he raised, and raise no more than he ate, then he would need to plant only a small piece of ground. Ancient poetry and old stories suggest that farming was once a holy art; but people farm today with unholy haste and thoughtlessness. Our purpose now is merely to have large farms and large crops. Today the farmer is interested only in the wealth he can obtain from the soil. By greed and selfishness, and a habit of regarding the soil as property, the face of the land is made ugly, farming is lowered in dignity and the farmer leads the meanest of lives.

Questions and Answers:

1. Which crops grew well in the first season?
A. The beans and potatoes
2. How much land did the narrator dig the next year?
A. About a third of an acre
3. What does ancient poetry suggest about farming?
A. Farming was a holy art
4. How is soil regarded today?
A. Soil is regarded as property
5. Through this passage the author suggests (Choose the best answer)
 - i) People are moving from villages to towns
 - ii) People are becoming money-minded and materialistic
 - iii) People have lost interest in farming
- A. People are becoming money-minded and materialistic

Passage-10

"This is the bottle", said the man; and when Keawe laughed, "You do not believe me?" he added. "Try then, for yourself. See if you can break it. So Keawe took the bottle up and dashed it on the floor till he was weary, but it jumped on the floor like a child's ball, and was not injured.

"This is a strange thing", said Keawe "For by the touch of it, as well as by the look, the bottle should be of glass. "Of glass it is", replied the man. Sighing more heavily than ever, "but the glass of it was tempered in the flames of hell. An imp lives in it, and that is the shadow we behold there moving or so I suppose. If any man buys this bottle the imp is at his command, and that he desires- love, fame, money, houses-all are his at word uttered".

"I have all I wish, and I am growing elderly", continued the man, "There is one thing the imp cannot do - he can't prolong life; and it would not be fair to conceal from you that there is a drawback to the bottle; for if a man dies before he sells it, he must burn in hell forever".

Questions and Answers:

1. Why did Keawe say that the bottle seemed strange?
A. Keawe took the bottle up and dashed it on the floor till he was weary, but it jumped on the floor like a child's ball and was not injured.
2. Who lived in the bottle?