

Daily Reading Comprehension & Critical Reasoning

Two RC passages (English-as-Language) and two CR passages (Argumentation). Read each carefully and answer based on what is stated or implied.
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PASSAGE 1 (RC) — THE PRIVATISATION OF OUTER SPACE (SCIENCE / GEOPOLITICS)

Q1-5

READ CAREFULLY AND ANSWER Q1-5 BASED ONLY ON THE PASSAGE.

For most of the twentieth century, outer space was the province of national programmes. The Soviet Union and the United States led the early decades; later, ESA, ISRO and China's CNSA joined a small club of governmental actors with launch capability. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967, signed at the height of the Cold War, framed space as a common province of humankind, forbade national sovereignty claims over celestial bodies, and quietly assumed that states would remain the principal actors in orbit and beyond.

That assumption no longer holds. Over the past fifteen years, private operators — most prominently SpaceX, but also Blue Origin, Rocket Lab and a growing cluster of Indian and European startups — have shifted from being subcontractors on government missions to running independent launch services, satellite constellations and crewed flights. SpaceX alone launched more Falcon 9 missions in 2024 than the entire Soviet space programme did in its busiest decade. Cost per kilogram to low-Earth orbit has fallen by an order of magnitude.

The legal architecture has not kept pace. The 1967 Treaty was drafted on the implicit understanding that states would license, supervise and ultimately answer for the activities of their nationals in space. The proliferation of private actors has stretched this supervisory mechanism. Two questions become acute: how should responsibility be allocated when a private satellite collides with another nation's hardware, and how should the extraction of resources — water ice from the lunar south pole, helium-3, or asteroid metals — be governed when the Treaty forbids 'national appropriation' but is silent on private appropriation under a national flag?

National jurisdictions have begun to legislate. The United States in 2015, Luxembourg in 2017 and the UAE in 2019 each granted their nationals property rights in space-extracted resources. Critics argue that such laws unilaterally rewrite the Treaty regime; defenders reply that the Treaty's silence creates permission, not prohibition.

The deeper question is whether the existing multilateral framework can be retrofitted or whether a fundamentally new architecture is required. Whatever the answer, the era in which space governance could be assumed to be state-to-state has clearly ended.

1. As used in the third paragraph, the phrase 'stretched this supervisory mechanism' most nearly means:

- A. Strained the mechanism's capacity to perform its supervisory function effectively
- B. Increased the physical reach of state regulation across orbits
- C. Replaced state oversight with multilateral oversight
- D. Made the mechanism more flexible by deliberate design

2. Which of the following can be most reasonably inferred from the passage?

- A. The rise of private commercial space activity has outpaced the multilateral legal regime designed for state actors
- B. The lunar south pole has been claimed under United States sovereignty
- C. India's commercial space sector now leads the world in launches
- D. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 has been formally repealed by the major space-faring nations

3. Which best captures the central argument of the passage?

- A. The United States and Luxembourg should withdraw their domestic space-resource legislation
- B. Private space activity has expanded rapidly while the governing legal regime, designed for state actors, faces increasing strain; whether reform or replacement is required remains contested
- C. The 1967 Treaty's prohibition on national appropriation has been formally rendered void
- D. Commercial space activity should be banned until a new treaty is concluded

4. The author's primary purpose in citing the United States, Luxembourg and UAE legislation is to:

- A. Recommend that India should follow suit and pass similar legislation
- B. Illustrate that some states have begun to legislate domestically in ways that may stretch or rewrite the Treaty regime
- C. Argue that domestic space legislation is unconstitutional under any modern legal system
- D. Show that the three named states are colluding to capture the commercial space market

5. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the author's case that the existing regime is under strain?

- A. Helium-3 mining is technically infeasible with current technology
- B. The Soviet space programme was less ambitious than is commonly remembered
- C. India recently legislated a National Space Policy framework
- D. Independent legal scholarship demonstrates that the Treaty's supervisory mechanism, supplemented by domestic licensing regimes, has successfully prevented all major commercial space disputes over the past fifteen years

PASSAGE 2 (RC) — THE DECLINE OF CURSIVE HANDWRITING IN THE DIGITAL AGE (EDUCATION / CULTURE)

Q6-10

READ CAREFULLY AND ANSWER Q6-10 BASED ONLY ON THE PASSAGE.

The deletion of cursive handwriting from school curricula has been a quiet revolution. Across more than thirty national education systems — including most American states under the Common Core framework — mandatory cursive instruction has been dropped or reduced to a few introductory lessons. Children learn keyboarding instead and, increasingly, voice-to-text dictation. The displacement seems unremarkable: cursive looks ornamental in an age when no document of consequence is composed by hand. Yet the policy choice is more contested than it appears.

Defenders of removal argue from utility. The hours formerly devoted to cursive instruction are now spent on digital literacy, coding fundamentals and core academic subjects. Cursive, they note, was itself a product of pen technology — the looped, connected hand evolved to keep ink-fed quills moving without lifting. With ink-based composition obsolete outside a few professional and ceremonial contexts, retaining cursive in primary curricula is, on their view, an artifact of nostalgia masquerading as pedagogy.

The case for retention rests on a more interesting empirical claim. Several cognitive-neuroscience studies suggest that handwriting — not typing — activates patterns of neural engagement associated with memory consolidation. A 2014 Princeton-UCLA study found that university students who took notes by hand outperformed those who typed when later tested on conceptual material, partly because handwriting forces selective compression of ideas in real time. Norwegian research has reported that cursive specifically, more than print, engages additional motor and visual circuits during letter formation. If these findings hold up — the evidence remains contested — removing handwriting altogether may carry measurable cognitive costs.

The counter-argument acknowledges the cognitive findings but contends that the relevant comparison is between handwriting and typing-with-good-pedagogy, not between handwriting and aimless keyboard use. A well-designed typing pedagogy requiring selective summarisation might reproduce the cognitive benefits the Princeton study identified, without the time cost of mastering an ornamental script.

The unresolved question is whether the cognitive benefits attributed to cursive are properties of cursive itself or of any sustained, deliberate motor composition. Until that question is settled, education policy will continue to be shaped less by evidence than by aesthetic and generational preference.

6. As used in the second paragraph, the phrase 'artifact of nostalgia masquerading as pedagogy' most nearly means:

- A. A practice retained for sentimental reasons while being defended as if educationally justified
- B. A teaching technique whose true purpose is deliberately disguised
- C. A valuable tradition supported by independent educational research
- D. A historical relic that ought to be preserved chiefly in museums

7. Which of the following can be most reasonably inferred from the passage?

- A. Voice-to-text dictation has fully replaced typing in modern classrooms
- B. The Princeton-UCLA study's findings have been universally accepted
- C. Norwegian schools have officially adopted mandatory cursive instruction
- D. The author treats the empirical question of cursive's cognitive benefits as unresolved

8. Which best captures the central argument of the passage?

- A. Education policy should be made entirely on cognitive-neuroscience grounds
- B. Cursive handwriting should be re-instated in primary school curricula across the world
- C. The removal of cursive appears unremarkable but its cognitive consequences remain empirically contested, and the deeper question — whether benefits are properties of cursive or of deliberate motor composition generally — is unresolved
- D. Typing is cognitively superior to handwriting on all measured dimensions

9. The author's primary purpose in the fourth paragraph (the counter-argument) is to:

- A. Present a thoughtful counter to the retention case — that the relevant comparison is handwriting versus well-designed typing pedagogy — and thereby qualify rather than reject the prior paragraph's argument
- B. Establish that the cognitive evidence in favour of cursive has been definitively disproven
- C. Attack the credibility of the Princeton-UCLA researchers
- D. Argue that ornamental cursive should be replaced with print handwriting in all schools

10. Which of the following best describes the tone of the passage?

- A. Nostalgic, mourning the loss of fountain pens and inkwells
- B. Analytical and balanced, presenting both cases and identifying the unresolved empirical question
- C. Strongly polemical, urging a return to compulsory cursive instruction
- D. Sceptical, dismissing the cognitive-science evidence as pseudoscience

PASSAGE 3 (CR) — SHOULD INDIA ADOPT A SUGAR TAX? (PUBLIC HEALTH / FISCAL POLICY)

Q11–15

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q11–15.

A leading public-health columnist has recently argued that India should introduce a graduated sugar tax on sweetened beverages and packaged foods. The argument is structured as follows.

First, the author observes that India is now the diabetes capital of the world, with an estimated 101 million adults living with diabetes and roughly twice that number in the pre-diabetic range. Healthcare expenditure on diabetes and its complications, the author notes, exceeds two per cent of GDP and is rising. Reducing population-level sugar consumption, therefore, would yield substantial fiscal as well as health benefits to the country.

Second, the author argues that price interventions are the most effective tool. Citing the Mexican experience after the 2014 sugar-sweetened-beverage tax, the author notes that beverage consumption fell by roughly eight per cent in the first year, with the steepest reductions in lower-income households who carry the highest diabetes risk. Similar effects, the author projects, would arise in India.

Third, the author claims that a graduated tax — higher rates on beverages with more grams of added sugar per 100 millilitres — would create stronger reformulation incentives than a flat tax. Manufacturers in the United Kingdom, where a graduated tax was introduced in 2018, reformulated more than half of their products to fall below the higher-tax threshold within two years. The author argues that India could replicate this manufacturer response.

Fourth, the author addresses the distributional concern that consumption taxes are regressive. The author replies that the health and fiscal benefits to lower-income households — through reduced diabetes incidence and reduced out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure — would more than offset the tax burden, making the policy effectively progressive.

For these reasons — health, fiscal, reformulation and distributional — the author concludes that India should introduce a graduated sugar tax in the next Union Budget.

11. Which of the following best captures the conclusion of the author's argument?

- A. Sugar consumption should be banned in school meals across India
- B. India should introduce a graduated sugar tax on sweetened beverages and packaged foods in the next Union Budget
- C. The Mexican and United Kingdom sugar-tax experiences cannot be replicated in India
- D. The Indian healthcare system should be reformed to reduce per-capita expenditure

12. Which of the following is an unstated assumption on which the author's core argument depends?

- A. The Indian Government will introduce all four of the author's measures simultaneously
- B. The Indian beverage and packaged-food market is sufficiently similar to the Mexican market for the consumption response to be replicable
- C. Diabetes is the only major non-communicable disease worth addressing through tax policy
- D. Indian manufacturers will reduce prices voluntarily without any fiscal intervention

13. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the author's argument?

- A. India already collects GST on sweetened beverages at 28 per cent
- B. The Mexican beverage industry lobbied vigorously against the 2014 tax before its passage
- C. Some packaged-food manufacturers in India have voluntarily reduced added-sugar content over the past two years
- D. Independent studies in two large emerging economies broadly similar to India have shown that sugar-tax-induced reductions in beverage purchases were fully offset by substitution to untaxed, equally calorific informal-sector sweets, with no net reduction in sugar intake

14. Which of the following, if true, would most **STRENGTHEN** the author's reformulation claim?

- A. A peer-reviewed evaluation of the United Kingdom graduated tax finds that manufacturer reformulation accounted for over seventy per cent of the total population sugar-intake reduction attributed to the policy, exceeding the direct price-response effect on consumers
- B. United Kingdom consumers have higher disposable incomes than Indian consumers do
- C. Sugar prices in India are subsidised by the Government for fair-price shops
- D. Mexico's 2014 sugar tax was flat, not graduated

15. Which of the following best identifies a flaw in the author's distributional argument?

- A. It assumes that the lower-income households whose consumption falls would have otherwise developed diabetes, ignoring the possibility that the same households cut consumption to make ends meet while continuing to be at high diabetes risk because of other factors such as low physical activity and refined-staple diet — producing tax burden without proportional health benefit
- B. It assumes that packaged foods are consumed by all income groups equally
- C. It ignores the additional tax revenue generated by the policy
- D. It cites Mexican data instead of Argentinian data

PASSAGE 4 (CR) – THE CASE AGAINST PRE-ELECTION OPINION POLLS (DEMOCRACY / MEDIA)

Q16–20

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q16–20.

A senior election-law counsel has argued in a recent legal commentary that India should statutorily ban the publication of opinion polls in the four weeks preceding a general election. The argument proceeds as follows.

First, the author notes that several democracies — including France, Brazil and Singapore — already impose blackout periods on pre-election polling, ranging from twenty-four hours to several weeks. The Indian Election Commission, the author observes, has long advocated a forty-eight-hour blackout, but has lacked the statutory authority to impose anything longer.

Second, the author argues that polls in the final weeks shape voter behaviour rather than merely measure it. The 'bandwagon effect' — voters drifting toward the perceived front-runner — and the 'underdog effect' — voters rallying to the perceived loser — have both been documented in psephological literature. Whichever effect dominates in a given election, the author argues, the publication of polls is an act of intervention rather than of neutral observation.

Third, the author points to the credibility deficit of Indian pre-election polling. The 2014 and 2019 general elections, the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election and the 2024 Lok Sabha election each showed substantial divergences between pre-election poll predictions and actual outcomes. If polls are systematically inaccurate, the author argues, the harm of their influence on voter behaviour is compounded: voters are being nudged by demonstrably inaccurate signals.

Fourth, the author argues that the constitutional concern — that a ban interferes with the freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) — is overstated. The Supreme Court has consistently upheld reasonable restrictions on speech in the interest of free and fair elections under Article 19(2). A four-week polling blackout, the author maintains, falls comfortably within this category.

For these reasons — international precedent, behavioural influence, demonstrated inaccuracy and constitutional permissibility — the author concludes that India should statutorily ban the publication of opinion polls in the four weeks preceding a general election.

16. Which of the following best captures the conclusion of the commentary?

- A. Opinion polling itself should be banned permanently in India, including post-election polls
- B. India should statutorily ban the publication of opinion polls in the four weeks preceding a general election
- C. The 2014, 2019 and 2024 Indian elections were illegitimate because of inaccurate pre-election polling
- D. The Election Commission of India should be granted broader regulatory powers in general

17. Which of the following is an unstated assumption on which the commentary's case depends?

- A. Pollsters in France and Brazil are more methodologically honest than Indian pollsters
- B. The behavioural influence of polls (bandwagon or underdog) is sufficiently strong and one-directional that suppressing their publication will produce a meaningfully different electoral outcome than allowing publication would have produced
- C. The Election Commission of India enjoys unanimous public support across all states
- D. Election outcomes should always match the predictions of the most recent opinion polls

18. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the commentary's argument?

- A. France's blackout period is shorter than the four weeks the author proposes
- B. Some Indian voters do not regularly read newspapers or follow polling coverage
- C. A large empirical study of forty-two general elections across twenty democracies finds that the bandwagon and underdog effects each operate, are roughly equal in magnitude, and on average cancel out at the aggregate level — leaving final vote shares effectively unaffected by the publication or suppression of pre-election polls
- D. Pre-election polls in 2024 generally underestimated the BJP's seat performance

19. Which of the following, if true, would most **STRENGTHEN** the author's inaccuracy claim?

- A. The Election Commission publishes its own provisional counts within twenty-four hours of polling close
- B. The 2024 Lok Sabha election saw high voter turnout
- C. An independent meta-analysis finds that Indian pre-election polls in the 2019-2024 cycle had an average absolute prediction error of eight percentage points in seat-share — more than three times the average error of polls in mature democracies — and consistently in the same direction
- D. Some Indian pollsters publish their sampling methodology openly

20. Which of the following most fairly identifies a flaw in the commentary's constitutional argument?

- A. Article 19(2) does not mention elections by name
- B. The constitutional argument is not the principal thrust of the commentary
- C. The argument assumes that any restriction on speech which meets the 'reasonable restriction' threshold is constitutionally permissible, ignoring the further requirement that the restriction must also be necessary and proportionate — and the corresponding burden of showing that a less restrictive alternative (such as a forty-eight-hour blackout combined with mandatory disclosure of pollster methodology) would not achieve the same end
- D. The argument relies on Supreme Court precedent rather than High Court precedent

SECTION C — RAPID-FIRE GK & CURRENT AFFAIRS

Q21–31 · 11 Marks

Standalone questions on current affairs, static GK, vocabulary in context and idiom usage. No passage required.

21. Which Article of the Indian Constitution empowers Parliament to form new States or alter the boundaries of existing States?

- A. Article 2
- B. Article 1
- C. Article 3
- D. Article 4

22. The 'PM Vishwakarma' scheme, launched in September 2023, primarily provides support to:

- A. Traditional artisans and craftspeople in eighteen specified trades
- B. Researchers in the IIT system
- C. Farmers across India
- D. Urban informal-sector workers only

23. Choose the word most nearly **OPPOSITE** in meaning to 'GREGARIOUS':

- A. Sociable
- B. Convivial
- C. Reclusive
- D. Garrulous

24. The idiom 'a wild goose chase' most nearly means:

- A. A long and scenic walk in the countryside
- B. A risky financial investment
- C. A futile pursuit with little chance of achievement
- D. A successful and difficult hunt

25. Which Supreme Court judgment is most closely associated with the doctrine that the 'basic structure' of the Constitution cannot be amended by Parliament?

- A. Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala
- B. Indira Gandhi v. Raj Narain
- C. Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan
- D. A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras

26. The Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour in India, is conferred by:

- A. The Ministry of Culture
- B. The Bharatiya Jnanpith Trust
- C. The President of India
- D. The Sahitya Akademi

27. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, India's medal tally consisted of:

- A. One gold and five silver
- B. Two silver and four bronze
- C. Three silver and three bronze
- D. One silver and five bronze

28. Choose the word most nearly **SIMILAR** in meaning to 'UBIQUITOUS':

- A. Ancient
- B. Conspicuous
- C. Rare
- D. Omnipresent

29. Choose the word that best fills the blank: 'The lecturer's _____ explanation left the students more confused than enlightened.'

- A. Pellucid
- B. Cogent
- C. Lucid
- D. Abstruse

30. Which Article of the Indian Constitution provides for the appointment and powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India?

- A. Article 165
- B. Article 280
- C. Article 124
- D. Article 148

31. Choose the word most nearly **OPPOSITE** in meaning to 'PROLIX':

- A. Tangential
- B. Tedious
- C. Succinct
- D. Verbose