

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 QUIET COLLAPSE OF URBAN BIODIVERSITY

Q1-5

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

In every Indian metro, an unseen extinction is unfolding under the cover of greenery. The lawns of new gated colonies, the manicured medians of urban expressways, and the ornamental flowerbeds of city parks are designed to look lush. They are also, by ecological measure, deserts. Native sparrow populations in Mumbai and Bengaluru have fallen by an estimated forty per cent over two decades. Honeybees, which once nested freely in older neighbourhoods, are increasingly confined to the margins of cities. The decline is not driven by the obvious culprits of pollution or temperature alone. It is, in large part, a quieter consequence of choices made by landscape designers, resident welfare associations and municipal horticulturists.

Native species coexist with native vegetation through a long evolutionary handshake. Sparrows feed on the seeds of millets, weeds and indigenous grasses that thrive in unswept corners and untrimmed verges. Bees forage on the staggered flowering of jamun, neem and indigenous wildflowers, which provide nectar across seasons rather than in a single decorative burst. When a residential complex replaces its older trees and weedy edges with imported palm species, manicured Bermuda lawns and seasonal petunias, it offers no food and no nesting niche to the species that grew up alongside the city.

A further problem is the rise of what ecologists call ecological theatre — green spaces that perform the appearance of nature without its function. Vertical gardens irrigated through drip systems support little beyond the plants on their grids. Imported topiary, much of it requiring weekly trimming, denies birds the messy interiors in which they nest. Each cycle of beautification, undertaken with civic pride, withdraws a little more habitat from the urban commons.

The loss is rarely registered until it is too late, because what is replaced is rarely missed. Few residents notice the absence of a sparrow or the silence of bees in spring.

1. Which of the following best captures the central argument of the passage?

- A. Pollution and temperature rise are the principal drivers of urban biodiversity loss.
- B. Vertical gardens and topiary should be legally banned across all civic spaces.
- C. Resident welfare associations failing to plant native species should be penalised.
- D. Urban biodiversity is collapsing because landscaping choices destroy native habitat.

2. In the passage, the phrase 'ecological theatre' is used to refer to:

- A. Street plays staged in city parks to raise conservation awareness.
- B. Elaborate municipal tree-plantation drives covered widely by the press.
- C. Designed green spaces that look like ecosystems but offer little habitat.
- D. Museum programmes that simulate forests using imported plant species.

3. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the author's claim that landscaping choices are a significant driver of urban biodiversity loss?

- A. Sparrows have declined equally in remote forests with no human landscaping.
- B. Some metros have amended bye-laws to require native species in landscaping.
- C. Resident welfare associations continue heavy annual spending on greenery.
- D. Honeybee colonies have recovered where weedy verges have been restored.

4. The tone of the passage can best be described as:

- A. Polemical and accusatory, openly blaming named municipal authorities.
- B. Reflective and gently admonitory, drawing attention to an overlooked loss.
- C. Celebratory and optimistic about recent municipal restoration initiatives.
- D. Detached and purely statistical, offering only aggregate population data.

5. Which of the following is closest in meaning to the word 'inversion' as used in the final paragraph of the passage?

- A. Complete elimination of one of the two contrasted aesthetic preferences.
- B. A formal legislative enactment prohibiting one of the two preferences.
- C. A reversal of relative valuation favouring previously disfavoured options.
- D. A statistical correlation between the two preferences and biodiversity loss.

PASSAGE 2 (RC) — THE ECONOMICS OF ATTENTION

Q6-10

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

When access to information was scarce, the price of information was its principal economic measure. Newspapers, books and broadcast minutes commanded payment in cash, and those who could not pay simply did without. In a world drowning in information, the calculus has reversed. Attention, not information, is now the scarce resource, and a vast economy has emerged whose central transaction is the harvesting of attention from individuals who often do not realise they are paying it.

The arithmetic of this economy is unforgiving. A platform that earns a fraction of a rupee per minute of attention captured must, to sustain itself, capture an enormous number of minutes. It will therefore tend, by the logic of its incentives rather than by the malice of its designers, to favour content that holds attention longest. What holds attention longest is not always what informs best. Outrage, novelty, intimate disclosure and parasocial intensity outperform measured analysis on almost every engagement metric, and so the architecture of feeds rewards them by default.

The individual user, equipped with neither the time nor the analytical apparatus to compute the trade, enters into a transaction whose terms are profoundly asymmetric. The platform knows, with statistical precision, the user's vulnerabilities — the topics that agitate, the videos that linger, the times of day at which restraint is weakest. The user, in turn, knows almost nothing about the platform's logic except its surface affordances. The bargain therefore resembles less a fair exchange and more an extraction.

It is tempting to blame either the users for their weakness or the platforms for their cynicism. Neither framing is quite adequate. The platforms operate within an incentive structure they did not invent. The users operate within a cognitive architecture older than the alphabet. What is required, instead, is a recognition that markets in attention, like markets in any scarce resource, may need regulatory architecture analogous to that which governs markets in money, food or medicine — disclosure, friction, and limits on extractive design.

6. Which of the following best states the principal argument of the passage?

- A. Digital platforms have intentionally designed feeds to manipulate users.
- B. Outrage and novelty should be excluded from feeds through strict regulation.
- C. Information has become so abundant that newspapers are no longer viable.
- D. Attention is now a scarce resource extracted under asymmetric terms.

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

- A. At least one party to an attention transaction has materially less information.
- B. Every digital platform earns exactly a fraction of a rupee per attention minute.
- C. All users would, given an objective choice, prefer measured analytical content.
- D. Existing regulatory architecture for money or food is already perfectly designed.

8. Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the author's call for regulatory architecture in the attention economy?

- A. Some platforms have voluntarily added safety features in response to public concern.
- B. Users who attempt to limit their own time on digital platforms typically fail.
- C. Fractional revenue per attention minute captured has steadily declined recently.
- D. Newspapers and book publishers continue earning from a small loyal paying base.

9. The author uses the phrase 'neutral mirror of consumer choice' in the final paragraph in order to:

- A. Endorse digital platforms as faithful reflectors of user preferences.
- B. Describe a disclosure framework the author considers adequate as a remedy.
- C. Identify a platform self-image which the author considers inaccurate.
- D. Praise traditional newspapers for serving as a neutral mirror of choice.

10. Which of the following best captures the meaning of the word 'extraction' as it is used in the third paragraph?

- A. A consensual exchange of goods between parties on symmetric terms.
- B. Removal of value from one party under terms it did not fully understand.
- C. A purely technical operation by which data is removed from a source.
- D. A formal regulatory inquiry into the conduct of digital platforms.

PASSAGE 3 (CR) — THE CASE FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Q11-15

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q11-15.

Across the major economies of the world, the structural displacement of human labour by intelligent automation is no longer a speculative concern but an empirically measurable trend. Routine work in logistics, customer service, paralegal review and clinical diagnosis is already being absorbed by machine systems whose marginal cost approaches zero. The pace of this displacement is uneven, but its direction is not in serious doubt among labour economists who have studied the relevant data over the past two decades.

The traditional response to displacement has been retraining. Workers displaced from one occupation are expected to acquire skills suited to another. This response made sense when the cycles of displacement and absorption operated over generational time and when the destination occupations themselves were stable. Neither condition holds today. Displacement now occurs within a single working life, and the destination occupations are themselves vulnerable to the next wave of automation. A worker retrained at fifty for a role that disappears at fifty-five has gained nothing of lasting value from the retraining.

The alternative is a universal basic income — a periodic, unconditional cash transfer paid to every adult citizen, regardless of employment status, sufficient to meet a basic standard of living. Pilot programmes in Finland, Kenya and parts of the United States have shown that such transfers do not produce mass withdrawal from the labour market, as critics fear. Recipients continue to work, but with greater autonomy in choosing the kind of work they undertake. Mental health improves, entrepreneurship modestly rises, and the most extreme forms of poverty disappear.

A universal basic income is also administratively simpler than the patchwork of conditional welfare schemes it would replace. Conditional schemes require costly verification machinery, generate large exclusion errors among the poorest, and trap recipients in earnings cliffs that punish small increases in income. An unconditional transfer eliminates all of these distortions in a single design move.

11. Which of the following best states the conclusion of the argument?

- A. Retraining programmes for displaced workers should be expanded immediately.
- B. Universal basic income is the most realistic response to automation-driven displacement.
- C. Pilots in Finland, Kenya and the US conclusively prove UBI works at scale.
- D. Conditional welfare should be retained but topped up by a modest cash transfer.

12. Which of the following is an assumption on which the argument for a universal basic income most centrally depends?

- A. Every worker displaced by automation will be unable to find any meaningful work.
- B. The pilot programmes have run long enough to settle every empirical question.
- C. Conditional welfare schemes have so far been administered very poorly.
- D. Automation will displace labour faster than stable new occupations can emerge.

13. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the argument for a universal basic income?

- A. A study shows that the administrative cost of one conditional scheme has risen.
- B. Finnish pilot recipients reported a moderate improvement in mental health.
- C. Long-running pilots show unconditional transfers cause significant labour withdrawal.
- D. A few retrained workers have retained renewable-energy sector positions.

14. Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the argument for a universal basic income?

- A. One major economy has run conditional welfare with relatively low exclusion errors.
- B. A long study shows retraining works for fewer than 15 per cent of displaced workers.
- C. Pilot programmes show UBI is broadly popular with the recipients of the transfer.
- D. Some workers in major economies have voluntarily withdrawn from the labour market.

15. Which of the following most accurately describes a flaw in the argument as presented?

- A. The argument relies on small pilots and ignores the risks of scaling to a universal scheme.
- B. The argument fails to consider whether retraining could be administered by public bodies.
- C. The argument assumes that automation systems have a marginal cost near zero.
- D. The argument cites pilots but does not specify the precise transfer amount used.

PASSAGE 4 (CR) — AGAINST A MANDATORY DEATH PENALTY

Q16–20

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q16–20.

In several jurisdictions, certain offences continue to carry the death penalty as the only sentence available to the trial court on conviction. A mandatory death sentence forecloses any inquiry by the sentencing judge into the circumstances of the offence, the antecedents of the offender, or the prospects of reformation. It treats the death of the offender as the necessary consequence of the offence itself, regardless of any consideration that might mitigate the gravity of the act in the eyes of a reasonable sentencing judge.

The mandatory death sentence is constitutionally indefensible on at least three grounds. First, it violates the principle of individualised sentencing, which has been recognised across jurisdictions as a basic element of substantive due process in the determination of criminal punishment. A sentence imposed without regard to the offender as an individual is, by definition, arbitrary in a constitutional sense. Second, it violates the principle of proportionality, since it equates every offender convicted of the offence with every other, regardless of the differing degrees of culpability that empirical analysis of any large sample of cases will reveal. Third, it violates the right against cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, since the foreclosure of any prospect of mitigation imposes on the offender a sentence whose severity is, in many cases, plainly disproportionate to the gravity of the act committed.

Defenders of the mandatory death sentence advance two principal arguments. The first is deterrence — that the certainty of execution will deter the offence more effectively than a discretionary sentence. The empirical evidence for this proposition is, however, equivocal at best, and a substantial body of comparative criminological research finds no statistically significant deterrent effect attributable specifically to the mandatory character of the sentence. The second argument is retribution — that the offence is so grave that nothing short of death adequately expresses society's condemnation.

16. Which of the following most accurately states the principal conclusion of the argument?

- A. Capital punishment in every form should be abolished by every constitutional order.
- B. Mandatory death sentences cannot survive scrutiny in an order valuing individualised sentencing.
- C. Retribution and deterrence are illegitimate aims of criminal punishment everywhere.
- D. Discretionary death sentences should be replaced by mandatory life imprisonment.

17. Which of the following is an assumption on which the argument most centrally depends?

- A. The relevant constitutional order is committed to individualised sentencing and proportionality.
- B. Every offender convicted of the offence would receive a less severe discretionary sentence.
- C. Deterrence has been conclusively shown to be wholly irrelevant to criminal punishment.
- D. Capital punishment is inherently disproportionate to every offence presently carrying it.

18. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the argument against a mandatory death sentence?

- A. Orders with discretionary death sentences show slightly higher offence rates.
- B. Empirical samples show culpability among offenders is essentially uniform.
- C. Strong evidence emerges that mandatory execution has a large deterrent effect.
- D. Some jurisdictions have retained the mandatory sentence on retributive grounds.

19. Which of the following best identifies a flaw in the argument as presented?

- A. It treats individualised sentencing as established by mere comparative consensus.
- B. It fails to consider whether the offences might be statutorily reclassified.
- C. It cites comparative research without specifying the exact number of jurisdictions.
- D. It relies on proportionality without specifying the rupee value of the harm.

20. The author's response to the retributive argument for a mandatory death sentence is best characterised as the claim that:

- A. Retribution is wholly illegitimate as an aim of criminal punishment anywhere.
- B. The retributive argument is unanswerable but outweighed by other considerations.
- C. The retributive argument is empirically equivocal in the criminological evidence.
- D. Retribution wrongly conflates judgement of the offence with judgement of the offender.

SECTION C — RAPID-FIRE GK & CURRENT AFFAIRS

Q21–28 · 8 Marks

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

21. Which is the capital of the country of Kazakhstan, formerly known as Astana, having been renamed in March 2019 to honour the country's first president before partially reverting subsequently?

- A. Almaty, the former capital and largest city of Kazakhstan.
- B. Bishkek, the capital of neighbouring Kyrgyzstan south of Kazakhstan.
- C. Tashkent, the capital of neighbouring Uzbekistan south-west of Kazakhstan.
- D. Astana, renamed Nur-Sultan in March 2019 and later restored to Astana.

22. The Jnanpith Award is given annually for outstanding contribution to literature in any of the languages listed in which Schedule of the Constitution of India together with English?

- A. The Seventh Schedule, listing Union and State legislative subjects.
- B. The Eighth Schedule, listing the recognised languages of the country.
- C. The Ninth Schedule, listing enactments protected from judicial review.
- D. The Tenth Schedule, listing provisions on anti-defection disqualification.

23. The book 'The Discovery of India' was written by which of the following authors during a period of his political imprisonment between 1942 and 1946?

- A. Jawaharlal Nehru, written during his Ahmadnagar Fort imprisonment.
- B. Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian national movement.
- C. B R Ambedkar, principal architect of the Constitution of India.
- D. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first Deputy Prime Minister of India.

24. The Reserve Bank of India recently set its policy repo rate at which of the following levels following its bi-monthly Monetary Policy Committee meeting reported in the financial press across the country during the relevant period?

- A. 8.50 per cent, reflecting a sharp pre-emptive monetary tightening.
- B. 2.50 per cent, an extraordinarily accommodative monetary policy stance.
- C. 4.00 per cent, the pandemic-era accommodative monetary policy stance.
- D. 6.50 per cent, a calibrated stance balancing inflation and growth.

25. The Indian Space Research Organisation's first dedicated solar observation mission launched in 2023 was named in honour of the Sun god in the Hindu tradition. The mission was named:

- A. Chandrayaan-3, the third mission in ISRO's lunar exploration programme.
- B. Aditya-L1, ISRO's first dedicated solar observation mission of 2023.
- C. Mangalyaan-2, the planned second mission in ISRO's Mars programme.
- D. Gaganyaan, the planned crewed orbital spaceflight mission of ISRO.

26. Which of the following sites was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in recent years for its outstanding architectural, archaeological and cultural significance located in the state of Karnataka in southern India?

- A. The Hoysala Temples of Belur, Halebid and Somanathapura in Karnataka.
- B. The Ramappa Temple, a thirteenth-century Hindu temple in Telangana.
- C. The Dholavira Harappan Site, an ancient Harappan site in Gujarat.
- D. The Santiniketan cultural site in West Bengal, associated with Tagore.

27. Identify the word that is most nearly the SYNONYM of the word 'ephemeral' as it is used in standard written English of an academically rigorous register across the relevant publications:

- A. Perpetual, indicating something that continues without interruption.
- B. Transient, indicating something that lasts for only a short period.
- C. Substantial, indicating something of considerable size or importance.
- D. Reticent, indicating someone reluctant to speak about their feelings.

28. Identify the word that is the closest ANTONYM of the word 'ubiquitous' as it is used in standard written English of an academically rigorous register across the relevant publications:

- A. Pervasive, indicating something that spreads widely throughout an area.
- B. Omnipresent, indicating something present everywhere at the same time.
- C. Scarce, indicating something insufficient or limited in supply.
- D. Eminent, indicating someone of high rank, station or quality.