

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 STRANGE PERSISTENCE OF THE QWERTY KEYBOARD (TECHNOLOGY / HISTORY) Q1-5

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

The keyboard on which most of the world's prose is typed was designed, the legend goes, to be deliberately awkward. Christopher Latham Sholes patented the QWERTY layout in the 1870s, and a popular account holds that its scattered letters were meant to slow typists down so that the mechanical arms of early typewriters would not jam. Whether or not that story is wholly accurate, the layout's survival into an age of touchscreens and predictive text is genuinely odd. The original engineering problem vanished more than a century ago, yet the arrangement endures, copied faithfully onto devices Sholes could never have imagined.

Economists call this phenomenon path dependence: the idea that history matters, that an early and possibly arbitrary choice can lock a society into a standard from which escape becomes prohibitively costly. Once millions of people had trained their fingers on QWERTY, once factories had tooled themselves to produce it, the keyboard acquired an inertia that had nothing to do with its merits. A demonstrably faster alternative, the Dvorak layout, was introduced in the 1930s. By most measures it should have triumphed. It did not. The reason is not that consumers are foolish but that they are rational in a narrow, individual sense. No single typist gains much by mastering Dvorak if every employer, every shared computer, and every colleague still speaks QWERTY. The cost of switching is borne privately; the benefit, were it ever to arrive, would be collective and distant. Coordination, not quality, governs the outcome.

There is a cautionary lesson here that reaches well beyond keyboards. We like to believe that markets reliably reward the best product, the cleanest code, the most elegant standard. The QWERTY story suggests a humbler truth: that what survives is often merely what arrived first and grew entrenched. To mistake persistence for superiority is to misread history itself.

1. As used in the passage, the word "inertia" most nearly means:

- A. a sudden burst of energy that propels rapid and widespread adoption
- B. a measurable defect in the keyboard's underlying mechanical design
- C. a deliberate corporate strategy designed to suppress rival products
- D. a resistance to change that keeps an established pattern in place

2. Which of the following best captures the central idea of the passage?

- A. Early typewriter engineers were uniquely clever in anticipating future technological needs
- B. The Dvorak keyboard failed solely because consumers were irrational and very poorly informed
- C. Inferior standards can persist because switching costs and coordination outweigh their flaws
- D. Touchscreens have finally rendered the QWERTY layout obsolete and ready for full replacement

3. It can be inferred from the passage that a superior technical standard will most likely fail to displace an entrenched one when:

- A. the benefits of adoption depend on many users switching together
- B. its original inventor lacks a valid patent on the underlying design
- C. it happens to be introduced during a period of rapid technological change
- D. government regulators repeatedly decline to mandate its widespread use

4. The author's attitude toward the belief that markets reliably reward the best product can best be described as:

- A. enthusiastically affirming, citing QWERTY as clear proof of efficient markets
- B. gently skeptical, treating it as a comforting belief the evidence undercuts
- C. bitterly contemptuous, condemning consumers for their wilful and lasting ignorance
- D. rigidly neutral, carefully declining to take any firm position on the matter

5. Which finding, if true, would most WEAKEN the author's argument about why QWERTY persists?

- A. Many schools once taught typing to beginners exclusively on the QWERTY layout
- B. Controlled trials show Dvorak offers no meaningful speed advantage over QWERTY
- C. Early typewriter manufacturers all adopted the QWERTY layout within a single decade
- D. Touchscreen devices faithfully reproduce the traditional QWERTY keyboard arrangement

PASSAGE 2 (RC) — WHAT OCTOPUSES TEACH US ABOUT INTELLIGENCE (SCIENCE / PHILOSOPHY) Q6-10

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

When we imagine an intelligent creature, we tend to picture something like ourselves: a brain housed neatly in a skull, directing a body that obeys. The octopus quietly demolishes this assumption. Of its roughly five hundred million neurons, only a minority reside in the central brain; the majority are distributed along its eight arms, each of which can taste, touch, and even improvise solutions to small problems without consulting headquarters. An octopus does not so much command its limbs as negotiate with them.

This arrangement unsettles our tidy picture of cognition. We are accustomed to thinking of a mind as a single, unified seat of control, a captain on the bridge of a ship. But an octopus suggests that intelligence might be better understood as something dispersed, emerging from the interaction of semi-autonomous parts rather than issuing from a central throne. If a creature can solve problems with arms that partly think for themselves, then the equation of mind with a unified self begins to look parochial, a generalisation from the single, peculiar case of the vertebrate brain.

The philosophical provocation runs deeper still. Octopuses are mollusks, closer in ancestry to clams than to us; the last common ancestor we shared was a flattened, brainless worm. Whatever intelligence they possess evolved entirely independently of our own. They are, in a meaningful sense, the closest thing to an alien mind we are ever likely to meet, and they did not need our blueprint to become clever.

This should make us cautious. When we test other animals, we typically measure how well they perform tasks designed around human capacities, and then pronounce them clever in proportion as they resemble us. The octopus invites a more humbling question. Perhaps intelligence is not a single ladder with humanity perched conveniently at the top, but a sprawling landscape with many summits, most of which we have scarcely begun to map.

6. As used in the passage, the word "parochial" most nearly means:

- A. narrowly limited by one's own restricted frame of reference
- B. religiously devout in a quiet, traditional, and unquestioning manner
- C. carefully reasoned from a wide and balanced range of evidence
- D. deliberately deceptive and evasive about its true underlying motives

7. The main point the author is making about the octopus is that it:

- A. is far more intelligent than any other vertebrate, including human beings themselves
- B. proves that all known forms of intelligence ultimately evolved from one common ancestor
- C. cannot truly be considered intelligent because its neurons lie outside a central brain
- D. challenges the assumption that a mind must be a single, unified centre of control

8. It can be inferred from the passage that the author regards human-designed animal intelligence tests as:

- A. potentially biased because they reward resemblance to human abilities
- B. the single most objective method science currently has for ranking species
- C. useless, since virtually no animal can ever complete a human-style task
- D. valuable chiefly for what they happen to reveal about octopus arm autonomy

9. The author's tone in discussing human assumptions about intelligence is best described as:

- A. dismissive and openly mocking toward nearly all prior scientific work
- B. anxious and deeply alarmed about the threat octopuses might pose to humans
- C. thoughtfully questioning, urging humility about human-centred views
- D. detached and clinical, carefully avoiding any evaluative stance whatsoever

10. Which finding, if true, would most STRENGTHEN the author's claim that intelligence need not depend on a single central brain?

- A. Octopuses with larger central brains consistently outperform those with smaller ones
- B. An octopus's severed arm, isolated from its brain, can still solve a simple maze
- C. Vertebrates and octopuses share a recent common ancestor with a complex brain
- D. Most octopus problem-solving stops entirely when the central brain is impaired

PASSAGE 3 (CR) — SHOULD CITIES BAN PRIVATE CARS FROM THEIR CENTRES? (URBAN / ENVIRONMENT)

Q11-15

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q11-15.

City centres were never designed for the volume of private vehicles that now choke them. A single bus carrying fifty passengers occupies the road space of perhaps three cars, yet on most days that bus crawls behind a queue of nearly empty sedans. The arithmetic is damning: private cars are the least efficient way to move people through dense urban cores, and the cores are precisely where land is scarcest and most valuable. For this reason, a growing number of planners argue that the centres of large cities should simply be closed to private cars altogether.

The case rests on three premises. First, congestion imposes enormous economic costs through wasted hours, idling fuel, and unreliable delivery schedules. Second, tailpipe emissions concentrated in pedestrian-heavy zones are a direct public-health hazard, linked to respiratory illness in the very people who walk those streets daily. Third, every square metre surrendered to parking and traffic lanes is a square metre denied to footpaths, cycle tracks, greenery, and the small commerce that thrives where people linger on foot. Cities that have pedestrianised their cores, the argument continues, report cleaner air, livelier high streets, and higher retail spending per visitor.

From these premises the conclusion follows that banning private cars from city centres would make those centres healthier, wealthier, and more humane. Critics protest that such bans punish the elderly, the disabled, and small traders who depend on vehicle access. But, the planners reply, a well-designed ban carves out exemptions for these groups while excluding the discretionary commuter who could just as easily take a train. The convenience of the few who insist on driving cannot outweigh the wellbeing of the many who must breathe the air and cross the road. The centre, after all, belongs to everyone who uses it, not merely to those who arrive behind a steering wheel.

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

- A. Banning private cars from city centres would make them healthier, wealthier, and more humane.
- B. A single city bus consistently uses far less valuable road space than an equivalent number of private cars.
- C. Concentrated tailpipe emissions in busy pedestrian zones are directly linked to respiratory illness in residents.
- D. Pedestrianised city centres consistently tend to report meaningfully higher retail spending per individual visitor.

12. The argument depends on which unstated assumption?

- A. Virtually all city centre residents personally own at least one private motor car for daily travel.
- B. City buses run almost always punctually even during the worst peak congestion hours every day.
- C. Most people currently driving into the centre have a viable alternative such as public transport.
- D. Retail spending figures are the single only valid measure of a genuinely healthy city centre.

13. Which finding, if true, would most weaken the argument?

- A. A few high-end luxury retailers strongly prefer wealthy customers who arrive at the centre by private car.
- B. Newly built pedestrian zones turn out to be slightly more expensive to maintain than ordinary city roads.
- C. Banned traffic simply diverts to residential streets, worsening total congestion and emissions citywide.
- D. Some impatient cyclists occasionally ignore posted traffic signals while riding within the pedestrianised areas.

14. Which finding, if true, would most strengthen the argument?

- A. A single distant foreign city once briefly tried a similar private car ban and later quietly reversed it.
- B. Controlled studies show car-free cores cut pollution and raise footfall without diverting traffic.
- C. Many regular commuting drivers openly say that they genuinely enjoy listening to music while they commute.
- D. City planners proposing these bans generally hold advanced postgraduate degrees in modern urban design.

15. The reasoning is most vulnerable to which criticism?

- A. It carelessly cites essentially no relevant statistics whatsoever to genuinely support any of its central claims.
- B. It quietly defines the ordinary everyday word 'congestion' in a peculiarly narrow and idiosyncratic way throughout.
- C. It treats driver convenience and the wellbeing of others as a strict either/or, ignoring middle-ground measures.
- D. It relies almost entirely on the unsupported personal opinion of a single named urban-planning expert.

PASSAGE 4 (CR) — SHOULD MUSEUMS RETURN ARTEFACTS TO THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN? Q16–20 (CULTURE / ETHICS)

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q16–20.

Walk through the great encyclopaedic museums of Europe and you will find the carved gods, royal regalia, and sacred bronzes of dozens of distant civilisations, many of them removed during periods of conquest or colonial rule. For more than a century the institutions that hold these objects have defended their possession with a familiar argument: that they are universal museums, custodians of a shared human heritage, displaying world culture under one roof for the benefit of all. Increasingly, however, the countries from which these artefacts were taken are demanding their return, and the demand deserves to be honoured.

The case for repatriation proceeds from a few clear premises. First, a great many of these objects left their homelands through plunder, coercion, or grossly unequal transactions; possession obtained through such means carries no legitimate moral title. Second, the artefacts are not merely aesthetic curiosities but living elements of cultural and religious identity, and their absence is felt as a continuing wound by the communities that created them. Third, modern source nations now possess museums, conservators, and security entirely capable of caring for what is theirs. Given these premises, the conclusion is that the objects should be returned to their countries of origin.

Defenders of the status quo raise familiar objections. They warn that repatriation would empty the world's great collections and deny global audiences access to the breadth of human achievement. They suggest that source countries may lack the resources to preserve fragile works. And they invoke the passage of time, arguing that wrongs committed generations ago should not bind the present. Yet access can be preserved through loans, digital reproduction, and travelling exhibitions; the preservation worry is increasingly outdated and, in any case, paternalistic; and the mere passing of years does not convert stolen property into rightful possession. To keep what was wrongfully taken, simply because keeping it is convenient and one's grip has lasted long enough, is to dress self-interest in the language of universal benefit. Justice, not custody, should settle the question.

16. Which of the following best expresses the central conclusion of the passage?

- A. Universal encyclopaedic museums responsibly display the breadth of world culture under one roof for everyone's benefit.
- B. Artefacts taken through plunder or coercion should be returned to their countries of origin.
- C. A great many of these contested artefacts left their distant homelands during periods of conquest or colonial rule.
- D. Modern source nations now have skilled conservators and security entirely capable of caring for their heritage.

17. The argument assumes which of the following?

- A. Every single artefact held in every European museum collection was originally acquired illegitimately.
- B. How an object was originally acquired remains morally relevant to who should hold it today.
- C. High-quality digital reproductions are clearly aesthetically superior to the original artefacts they copy.
- D. No source nation has ever once neglected or mistreated a single cultural object returned to it.

18. Which statement, if true, would most weaken the argument for repatriation?

- A. Independent records show most contested objects were acquired through documented, fair purchase, not plunder.
- B. A small handful of senior museum curators now personally favour returning at least some of the disputed objects.
- C. Some busy museum gift shops routinely sell cheap mass-produced replicas of the most contested artefacts on display.
- D. A few hurried visitors complain that the original display galleries are rather poorly lit and hard to view.

19. Which statement, if true, would most strengthen the argument for repatriation?

- A. One small regional museum once quietly returned a single object and afterwards received polite written thanks.
- B. The great European encyclopaedic museums reliably attract very large numbers of international tourists every year.
- C. General conservation and restoration techniques have steadily improved right across the entire global museum sector.
- D. Returned artefacts have revived cultural practices while remaining safe and publicly accessible at home.

20. The author's reply to the 'passage of time' objection is most similar in reasoning to which of the following?

- A. An old historic building ought to be demolished simply because newer modern ones are far more efficient.
- B. A signed contract is genuinely valid only if both contracting parties sign it before an independent witness.
- C. A living spoken language inevitably changes in natural ways over many successive generations of its speakers.
- D. A thief cannot gain ownership of a stolen painting merely because decades have elapsed since the theft.

SECTION C — RAPID-FIRE GK & CURRENT AFFAIRS

Q21–30 · 10 Marks

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

21. Under the Indian Constitution, which Article empowers the President to declare a national emergency on grounds of war, external aggression, or armed rebellion?

- A. Article 356
 B. Article 352
 C. Article 360
 D. Article 368

22. The currency of Switzerland is the:

- A. Euro
 B. Swiss Franc
 C. Krona
 D. Schilling

23. Choose the word most nearly OPPOSITE in meaning to 'EPHEMERAL'.

- A. Fleeting
 B. Transient
 C. Brief
 D. Permanent

24. The idiom 'to bury the hatchet' means to:

- A. Hide a weapon
 B. Abandon a plan
 C. Make peace
 D. Dig for treasure

25. In which landmark case did the Supreme Court of India propound the 'Basic Structure Doctrine'?

- A. Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India
 B. Golaknath v. State of Punjab
 C. Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala
 D. Minerva Mills v. Union of India

26. Who authored the celebrated novel 'The God of Small Things'?

- A. Arundhati Roy
 B. Kiran Desai
 C. Anita Desai
 D. Jhumpa Lahiri

27. The scientific principle that a body immersed in a fluid experiences an upward buoyant force equal to the weight of the fluid displaced is known as:

- A. Pascal's Law
 B. Bernoulli's Principle
 C. Boyle's Law
 D. Archimedes' Principle

28. Select the option that correctly completes the sentence: 'The committee was determined to ____ the controversial proposal despite public criticism.'

- A. push through
 B. push over
 C. push off
 D. push back

29. The Tunis-based Nobel Peace Prize-winning organisation, and the Olympic Games host city for 2024, were respectively associated with which country?

- A. Tunisia and France
 B. Egypt and Japan
 C. Tunisia and Greece
 D. Morocco and France

30. Which constitutional Article guarantees the Right to Constitutional Remedies, famously called the 'heart and soul' of the Constitution by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar?

- A. Article 19
 B. Article 21
 C. Article 14
 D. Article 32