Daily Reading Comprehension & Critical Reasoning

Rotated-genre RC passages and real-argument Critical Reasoning — CLAT-2026 grade. Read each passage and answer from the passage only.
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SECTION — READING COMPREHENSION

READING COMPREHENSION — POPULAR SCIENCE · THE CELL THAT FOUND THE EXIT (Q1–Q5)

Place a yellow slime mould at the entrance of a maze, put food at the two exits, and within hours it will have withdrawn from the dead ends and stretched a single thick tube along the shortest route between the food sources. The organism, Physarum polycephalum, has no brain and no neurons; in its foraging form it is one enormous cell containing many nuclei. When Japanese researchers reported the maze result at the turn of this century, headlines asked whether a blob could think. The question is understandable, but it points us in the wrong direction.

Consider how the feat is achieved. The mould's body is a network of tubes through which its fluid interior sloshes back and forth in rhythmic pulses. Tubes that carry more flow grow thicker; tubes that carry little flow thin out and are eventually abandoned. A tube on the short path between two food sources carries the most traffic, so it is reinforced, while the long detours and dead ends starve. Nothing in the cell compares routes or represents the maze. The solution is not computed and then executed; it is simply what remains when a feedback rule has run long enough.

The same rule explains a later and more striking demonstration. When oat flakes were laid out in the pattern of the cities around Tokyo, the mould grew a network linking them that resembled, in its balance of efficiency and resilience, the region's actual rail system, a design refined by engineers over decades. It is tempting to conclude that the mould is a better planner than the engineers. The fairer conclusion is that both were solving the same physical problem, and that a well-tuned feedback rule can reach a good answer without anyone holding the problem in mind.

This is why "intelligence" is the wrong word, and also why the discovery matters. Calling the slime mould clever flatters it with a capacity it does not need, and in doing so hides the real lesson: that some problems we associate with minds can be solved by processes that are mindless yet not random. Computer scientists have already borrowed the rule to write algorithms for designing networks. The surprise of the maze, then, is not that a cell can think, but how much can be done without thinking at all.

1. Which of the following best states the central claim of the passage?

- ◯ **A.** The maze result proves that a single cell can reason about routes as well as trained engineers
- ◯ **B.** Slime moulds deserve to be called intelligent, since their networks rival designs refined over decades
- ◯ **C.** The rail experiment matters more than the maze because it showed the mould beating human planners
- ◯ **D.** The mould solves routing problems by a mindless feedback rule, showing how much needs no mind

2. According to the passage, a tube on a dead-end branch of the maze is eventually abandoned because it

- ◯ **A.** carries little of the pulsing flow and so is never reinforced by the feedback rule
- ◯ **B.** is recognised by the cell as leading away from food and is then deliberately cut off
- ◯ **C.** holds fewer nuclei than the tubes on the main route and so cannot keep growing
- ◯ **D.** is compared with the shorter route and is rejected once that comparison is made

3. The author's treatment of the Tokyo rail demonstration in the third paragraph serves mainly to

- ◯ **A.** show that the slime mould plans transport networks better than professional engineers do
- ◯ **B.** concede that the maze result on its own was too weak to support any claim about the mould
- ◯ **C.** extend the feedback explanation to a harder case while declining a flattering comparison
- ◯ **D.** argue that the design of future rail networks should be handed over to living organisms

4. As used in the second paragraph, the word 'starve' most nearly means that the detours and dead ends

- ◯ **A.** die because nutrients from the food stop reaching the many nuclei inside them
- ◯ **B.** receive too little flow, weaken and are in time given up by the organism
- ◯ **C.** are deliberately denied food by a cell that has chosen the shorter route
- ◯ **D.** fail to reach any food source placed at the exits of the laboratory maze

5. Which finding, if true, would most weaken the author's explanation of how the mould solves the maze?

- ◯ **A.** The mould needs several hours, rather than a few minutes, to settle on the shortest maze route
- ◯ **B.** Some other single-celled organisms without neurons cannot solve mazes of similar difficulty
- ◯ **C.** The engineers who built the Tokyo rail system relied on trial and error more than on planning
- ◯ **D.** Tubes on the shortest route thicken before they carry more flow than the other tubes in the maze

READING COMPREHENSION — PSYCHOLOGY & MIND · THE TUNE IN THE TAPPER'S HEAD (Q6–Q10)

Ask someone to tap out the rhythm of a well-known song on a table and then predict how many listeners will name it, and you will usually hear a confident estimate. In a much-cited study at Stanford in 1990, tappers expected their listeners to succeed far more often than they did; the listeners, hearing only knocks, identified very few of the songs. The tappers were not careless. They could hear the melody in their heads while they tapped, and they could not imagine hearing the knocks without it.

Psychologists call this the curse of knowledge: once we know something, we find it hard to simulate the mind of someone who does not. The term is usually invoked to explain bad teaching and impenetrable manuals, and the usual remedy is the advice to put yourself in the reader's shoes. The advice is sound in spirit but weak in practice, because the curse operates precisely on our ability to do this. Experts asked to imagine a novice's confusion tend to imagine a slightly less informed version of themselves, and merely being warned about the bias often does little to remove it.

What works better is not empathy but evidence. A writer who watches a real reader stumble over a paragraph learns more in te
than in hours of imagining. Teachers who ask students to explain a concept back in their own words, rather than asking

everything is clear, discover gaps that no amount of self-scrutiny would have revealed. The point is that the curse is a failure of simulation, and the cure for a failed simulation is to stop simulating and observe.

There is a further irony. The more thoroughly someone has mastered a subject, the more of it has become automatic, and the less of it they can see. Steps that once required effort are now taken without notice, and so they drop out of the explanation without the explainer realising that anything is missing. Expertise, in other words, does not merely coexist with the curse; it feeds it. This does not mean that experts should not teach. It means that their confidence that an explanation is clear is the one judgement about it they should trust least.

6. Which of the following best states the main point of the passage?

◯ **A.** Experts should not teach novices, because their knowledge makes clear explanation impossible
◯ **B.** The tapping study shows that most people greatly overrate their own sense of musical rhythm
◯ **C.** Since the curse distorts our simulation of other minds, observing real learners is the better cure
◯ **D.** Carefully imagining a reader's confusion is the most reliable way for writers to beat the curse

7. The passage attributes the tappers' overconfidence mainly to

◯ **A.** their inability to imagine the knocks without the melody they were hearing
◯ **B.** their carelessness in tapping the rhythms too fast for listeners to follow
◯ **C.** the listeners' lack of familiarity with the particular songs that were chosen
◯ **D.** their wish to appear more musically gifted than the listeners in the study

8. The author would most likely regard which practice as the best check on whether a lecture was clear?

◯ **A.** Asking several students to restate its central idea in their own words afterwards
◯ **B.** Asking the whole class at the end whether anything in the lecture had been unclear
◯ **C.** Having the lecturer reread the notes while imagining being a first-year student
◯ **D.** Having a more senior expert in the same subject review the lecture slides beforehand

9. As used in the second paragraph, 'remove' could best be replaced by which word without changing the meaning?

◯ **A.** explain
◯ **B.** dispel
◯ **C.** spread
◯ **D.** disguise

10. The claim in the final paragraph that expertise 'feeds' the curse functions mainly to

◯ **A.** argue that experts should leave all teaching to people closer to the novice's level
◯ **B.** retract the earlier claim that the curse can be overcome by observing learners
◯ **C.** explain why an expert's sense that an explanation is clear deserves least trust
◯ **D.** suggest that the tappers in the Stanford study must have been trained musicians

SECTION — CRITICAL REASONING

CRITICAL REASONING — SOCIETY & CULTURE · THE HALL THAT SEATED EVERYONE (Q11–Q15)

The closure of single-screen cinemas across Indian cities is usually mourned in the language of nostalgia: the hand-painted posters, the balcony, the interval samosa. Defenders of the change answer, reasonably, that nostalgia is not an argument. Multiplexes offer cleaner seats, better sound and more films, and audiences have chosen them freely. If the old halls could not compete, the market has simply delivered what people wanted.

This reply is correct about comfort and wrong about what was lost. The single screen was one of the few urban spaces in which people of very different incomes sat in the same room and watched the same thing at the same time. Its tiered pricing, front stalls for a few rupees and the balcony for more, kept the classes in different seats but under one roof, laughing at the same jokes. The multiplex, priced for a narrower band of customers and located in malls that many hesitate to enter, sorts audiences not into different rows but into different buildings.

It will be objected that films are now cheaper to watch than ever, on phones and streaming services, so nobody has lost access to cinema. But access to films was never the point. A film watched alone on a phone may be the same film; it is not the same event. What disappears with the single screen is not entertainment but a shared public experience, and such experiences are among the few ways in which a divided city learns, however briefly, to react as one audience.

None of this requires preserving every crumbling hall as a monument. It requires recognising that a city which lets its common spaces disappear one by one, each closure justified by consumer choice, will eventually find that it has made a collective decision no one actually chose. Planning rules that require new complexes to keep a share of low-priced seats, or that support the conversion of old halls into community screens, would address the real loss, which no amount of better sound can replace. The question for planners is not whether audiences prefer comfort, which they plainly do, but whether a city should allow comfort to be purchased at the price of the last rooms its citizens share.

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

◯ **A.** Single screens should be preserved as monuments because their posters and balconies are heritage
◯ **B.** Closing single screens cost cities a shared cross-class space that planning policy should replace
◯ **C.** Multiplexes are failing because audiences still prefer the cheap front stalls of the older halls
◯ **D.** Streaming on phones has made the cinema hall irrelevant to how most people now watch films

12. The argument in the third paragraph depends on which of the following assumptions?

◯ **A.** Films watched on phones are of poorer picture and sound quality than films in a hall
◯ **B.** Most people who once attended single screens now watch films only on their phones
◯ **C.** Reacting together as a mixed audience has value for a city beyond enjoying the film
◯ **D.** Streaming services charge more per film than the front stalls of single screens did

13. Which of the following, if true, most weakens the claim made in the second paragraph?

◯ **A.** Multiplex ticket prices in most Indian cities have risen faster than general inflation
◯ **B.** Long before multiplexes, wealthier viewers in most cities had stopped attending single screens
◯ **C.** Many single-screen halls were poorly maintained and lacked adequate and safe fire exits
◯ **D.** Multiplex audiences report higher satisfaction with seating and sound than earlier audiences

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14. Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the case for the policies proposed in the final paragraph?

- ◯ **A.** Old single-screen buildings can usually be turned into shops more cheaply than refurbished
- ◯ **B.** Surveys show that most former single-screen patrons remember the halls with real fondness
- ◯ **C.** Streaming subscriptions in India have grown steadily cheaper over the past several years
- ◯ **D.** Where low-priced seats were required, viewers of very different incomes shared screenings

15. The phrase 'a collective decision no one actually chose' is used in the final paragraph mainly to

- ◯ **A.** claim that consumers were deceived by multiplex owners into abandoning the older halls
- ◯ **B.** suggest that many separate choices can add up to an outcome that nobody ever intended
- ◯ **C.** concede that the closures were justified in the end by the preferences of the audiences
- ◯ **D.** argue that markets should never be allowed to decide which public spaces in a city survive

CRITICAL REASONING — HEALTH POLICY · THE TAX THAT WORKS BEFORE ANYONE PAYS IT (Q16–Q20)

Taxes on sugary drinks are usually judged by a single question: do people drink less when the price rises? Critics point out that the effect on consumption is often modest, that drinkers may switch to sweets or untaxed juices, and that the tax falls hardest on poorer households, who spend a larger share of their income on such products. On this view a sugar tax is a regressive levy that inconveniences the poor without making anyone much healthier.

The criticism assumes that the tax works, if at all, through the consumer. The most instructive design points elsewhere. The United Kingdom's Soft Drinks Industry Levy, announced in 2016 and in force from 2018, charged manufacturers according to the sugar content of each drink, with a higher rate above one threshold, a lower rate above another, and nothing at all below it. Faced with that schedule, many manufacturers reformulated their products to fall under the thresholds before the levy took effect. Much of the sugar left the bottle before any shopper paid a penny of tax.

This changes the regressivity objection. A flat tax that leaves recipes unchanged does take more, proportionally, from poorer drinkers. But a tiered levy that drives reformulation reduces the sugar in drinks bought by everyone, and the poorer households that drink more of them gain the most from the change. The measure of such a tax is therefore not how much revenue it raises, since a well-designed one may raise less than forecast precisely because it is succeeding, but how much sugar disappears from the supply.

Policymakers who copy the idea of a sugar tax without copying its structure are likely to be disappointed. A levy charged at one rate on all sweetened drinks gives a manufacturer no reason to change a recipe, since a drink with less sugar pays exactly the same as one with more. Only where the tax falls as the sugar falls does the producer have a reason to act. The lesson is that the design of the tax, and not merely its existence, determines whether it improves health, and a government that wants healthier drinks should aim its levy at the recipe rather than at the shopper.

16. Which of the following best expresses the main conclusion of the argument?

- ◯ **A.** A sugar tax improves health only if a tiered design gives producers a reason to reformulate
- ◯ **B.** Sugar taxes are regressive and should be replaced by direct subsidies for healthier drinks
- ◯ **C.** The UK levy proved that shoppers sharply cut their sugary drink purchases when prices rise
- ◯ **D.** Governments should judge any sugar tax chiefly by the amount of revenue it raises in each year

17. The claim that poorer households 'gain the most' from reformulation assumes that

- ◯ **A.** under a flat tax poorer households would have switched to untaxed fruit juices
- ◯ **B.** wealthier households drink so few sugary drinks that no levy affects them at all
- ◯ **C.** manufacturers do not pass the costs of reformulation on to shoppers as higher prices
- ◯ **D.** the health benefit of less sugar grows with the amount of sweetened drink consumed

18. Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the argument?

- ◯ **A.** The UK levy raised less revenue in its early years than the government had at first forecast
- ◯ **B.** Some manufacturers kept their recipes and paid the higher rate on their best-known drinks
- ◯ **C.** Buyers of reformulated drinks made up the sugar elsewhere, leaving total intake unchanged
- ◯ **D.** Flat-rate sugar taxes in some countries were followed by only modest falls in consumption

19. Which of the following arguments most closely parallels the reasoning of the final paragraph?

- ◯ **A.** Littering fines deter few people because offenders rarely expect to be caught, so hire inspectors
- ◯ **B.** A cigarette tax cuts smoking more among the young, who are price-sensitive, than among adults
- ◯ **C.** A flat water fee is unfair to small families, who use far less water than large households do
- ◯ **D.** A flat road tax gives no reason to buy cleaner cars; a tax that falls with emissions does

20. The remark that a well-designed levy 'may raise less than forecast precisely because it is succeeding' serves mainly to

- ◯ **A.** concede that the UK levy failed to meet the fiscal targets the government had set for it
- ◯ **B.** warn that tiered levies are too unpredictable to be relied upon when drawing up budgets
- ◯ **C.** pre-empt the reading of low revenue as failure by treating it as a sign of the tax working
- ◯ **D.** argue that sugar taxes must be set high enough to guarantee all the revenue that was forecast

RAPID FIRE — ONE-LINE RECALL

97 quick questions · not negatively marked

1. What is the scientific name of the slime mould in the maze passage?
2. Per the passage, how many brains or neurons does the slime mould have?
3. In its foraging form, the slime mould is one cell containing many what?
4. Where is food placed in the maze experiment described?
5. Researchers from which country reported the maze result?
6. When was the maze result reported, according to the passage?
7. What question did headlines ask after the maze result?
8. How does the mould's fluid interior move through its tubes?
9. What happens to tubes that carry more flow?
10. What happens to tubes that carry little flow?
11. Which tube in the maze carries the most traffic?
12. Per the passage, does anything in the cell compare routes?
13. The author says the maze solution is not computed and then

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14. What food was laid out in the pattern of cities around Tokyo?

15. The mould's network resembled which real-world system?
16. In what two qualities did the mould's network resemble the rail system?

17. Over what period was the Tokyo rail design refined, per the passage?

18. Which conclusion about the mould and engineers does the author call 'tempting'?
19. What does the author call the 'fairer conclusion'?
20. Which word does the author say is the wrong one for the mould?

21. The author says calling the mould clever does what to it?
22. The processes that solve such problems are mindless yet not what?

23. Who has borrowed the mould's rule to write algorithms?
24. For what have those algorithms been written?
25. Per the author, what is the real surprise of the maze?
26. In the slime-mould passage, 'starve' is set against which word?

27. What kind of rule does the slime-mould passage say solves the maze?

28. Was the Tokyo demonstration earlier or later than the maze?

29. What did the mould withdraw from in the maze?
30. Within what time does the mould stretch its tube along the shortest route?
31. In the tapping study, what did tappers tap out?
32. Where and when did the much-cited tapping study take place?

33. What did tappers predict about listeners?
34. What did listeners hear in the tapping study?
35. How many songs did listeners identify, per the passage?
36. Were the tappers careless, according to the author?
37. What could tappers hear in their heads while tapping?
38. What name do psychologists give the effect in the tapping passage?

39. Define the curse of knowledge as the passage does.
40. Which two things is the curse usually invoked to explain?
41. What usual remedy does the passage call 'weak in practice'?

42. Why is that remedy weak, per the author?
43. When experts imagine a novice, whom do they tend to imagine?

44. Does a warning about the bias reliably remove it, per the passage?

45. What works better than empathy, according to the author?
46. What does a writer learn from in ten minutes, per the passage?

47. What should teachers ask students to do instead of asking if all is clear?

48. The curse is a failure of what, per the author?
49. What is the cure for a failed simulation?
50. What happens to steps a master once took with effort?
51. Per the passage, expertise does not merely coexist with the curse; it does what?
52. Which judgement should experts trust least?
53. Does the author say experts should not teach?

54. In the tapping passage, 'remove' could be replaced by which word?

55. What does 'dispel' mean?
56. What does 'impenetrable' mean, as applied to manuals?
57. What does 'self-scrutiny' mean?
58. In the cinema passage, which three nostalgic details are listed?

59. How were the old posters made, per the passage?
60. What do defenders of the change say about nostalgia?
61. Which three advantages of multiplexes are listed?
62. Per defenders, what has the market delivered?
63. The author says the defenders' reply is correct about what?
64. Who sat in the same room in the single screen?
65. What cost a few rupees in the single screen?
66. Single-screen pricing kept the classes in different seats but under what?

67. Where are multiplexes located, per the passage?
68. Multiplexes sort audiences into different what?
69. On what devices are films now cheaper to watch, per the objection?

70. The author says access to films was never what?
71. A film watched alone on a phone is the same film but not the same what?
72. What disappears with the single screen, per the author?
73. Shared experiences help a divided city learn to do what?
74. Does the author want every crumbling hall preserved as a monument?

75. Each closure, per the author, was justified by what?
76. What does a city end up making, per the cinema passage?
77. Which planning rule does the author propose for new complexes?

78. Into what could old halls be converted, per the passage?
79. What can no amount of better sound replace?
80. What does 'crumbling' mean?
81. In the sugar-tax passage, critics say the tax falls hardest on whom?

82. To what might drinkers switch, according to critics?
83. What word describes a tax taking more proportionally from the poor?

84. Which country's levy does the sugar-tax passage discuss?
85. What is the UK levy called?
86. When was the UK levy announced?
87. From when was the UK levy in force?
88. On whom was the UK levy charged?
89. On what basis did the UK levy charge drinks?
90. What did drinks below the lower threshold pay?
91. What did many manufacturers do before the levy took effect?

92. Much of the sugar left the bottle before shoppers paid what?

93. Per the author, the critics assume the tax works through whom?

94. Who gains most from reformulation, per the passage?
95. Why may a well-designed levy raise less than forecast?
96. What is the true measure of a sugar tax, per the author?
97. Why does a single-rate levy fail to change recipes?

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