

Reading

Comprehension

Comprehend is a verb meaning 'to grasp with the mind, take in'. Comprehension, then, is 'the act of grasping with the mind, and taking in'. It is to understand a text in depth.

Very careful reading of the set passage is the first requirement. One must read with entire concentration, determined to master the meaning of the passage. One must also read it sympathetically, entering into its spirit.

Read the passage right through once, concentrating your attention on what seems to be its main theme. In other words, get the gist of it. As soon as you have completed this first reading make a note of the main drift of the contents.

Read the passage right through a second time, bearing in mind the main drift as discovered during first reading. During this second reading, pay attention to the spirit of the passage, noticing the key words and phrases and opening your mind to their implicit meaning as well as their explicit sense. Notice not only what is said but also how it is said. Notice, too, how the passage is developed. Now you are ready to study the examiner's questions.

Read through all the questions first. Careful reading of all the questions throws light on each separate question. When you have read all the questions, read through the passage once more, bearing the questions in mind.

Having completed the third reading, begin to answer the questions. If you are asked for a sentence answer, give a sentence answer. If you are asked for a one-word answer, answer in one word. If you are asked to write down four reasons why a character in a narrative passage did something, write down four reasons-neither less nor more. You get no marks for doing what you were not told to do.

Finally, when you have answered all the questions, read through the questions and your answers again, checking that you have obeyed all the instructions and correcting any careless slips of spelling or grammar that you might have made.

The passage that you find in your examination paper may be an example of narrative, or descriptive, or discursive, or dramatic, or impressionistic writing. It may be humorous, serious, satirical, factual, subjective, objective... and so on.

For Practice

Passage

On Not Answering the Telephone

Why don't I have a telephone?

Not because I pretend to be wise or pose as unusual.

There are two chief reasons: because

I don't really like the telephone, and because I find I can still work and play, eat,

breathe , and sleep without it. Why don't I like telephone? Because I think it is pest & time-waster.

It may create unnecessary suspense and anxiety, as when you wait for an expected call that doesn't come; or irritating delay, as when you keep ringing a number that is always engaged.

As for speaking in a public telephone box, that seems to me really horrible. You would not use it unless you're in a hurry and because you are in a hurry you will find other people working before you. When you do get into the box, you are half asphyxiated by stale , unventilated air, flavoured with cheap face powder and chain smoking; and by the time you have begun your conversation your back is chilled by the cold looks of somebody who is fidgeting to take your place.

If you have a telephone in your house, you will admit that it tends to ring when you least want it to ring - when you are asleep , or in the middle of a meal or a conversation , or when you are just going out or when you are in your bath .Are you strong minded-enough to ignore it, to say to yourself, 'Ah well, it will all be the same in a hundred years' time' ? You are not . You think there may be some important news message for you. Have you never rushed dripping from the bath, or chewing from the table, or dazed from bed, only to be told that you are a wrong number ? You were told the truth. In my opinion all telephone numbers are wrong numbers. If , of course, your telephone rings and you decided not to answer it , then you will have to listen to an idiotic bell ringing and ringing in what it supposed to be the privacy of your own home. You might as well buy a bicycle bell and ring it yourself...

If ,like me ,one is without a telephone ,somebody is sure to say 'Oh, but don't you find you have to write an awful lot of letters ?' The answer to that is 'Yes, but I should have to write an awful lot of letters anyway. 'This may bring the remark 'Ah well if you don't have a telephone, at least you must have a typewriter.' And the answer to that is 'No.'

'What, no telephone and no typewriter! Do please explain why.' Well, I am a professional man of letters, and when I was younger I thought a typewriter would be convenient. I even thought it was necessary, and that editors and publishers would expect anything sent to them to be typewritten. So I bought a typewriter and taught myself to type, and for some years I typed busily. But I didn't enjoy typing. I happen to enjoy the act of writing. I enjoy forming letters or words with a pen, and I never could enjoy tapping the key of a typewriter. There again , there was a bell- only a little bell that rang at the end of each line- but still, a bell. And the fact is, I am not mechanically minded, and the typewriter is a machine. I have never been really drawn to machines. I don't like oiling, cleaning, or mending them. I do not enjoy making them work. To control them gives me no sense of power- or not of the kind of power that I find interesting. And machines do not like me. When I touch them they tend to break down, get jammed, catch fire, or blow up.

Questions

1. Does the author find telephone a nuisance? Why?
 2. Do you agree with all that is said in the above passage?
 3. Describe the author's observation while using a telephone box.
 4. Are you 'mechanically minded' to use all types of gadgets? If so, what do you think can be done for those who are not?
 5. What irritates the author the most while using a typewriter?
 6. Make sentences beginning with- scarcely, not only, seldom, at no time, never again, little, and rarely, and in which there is inversion of the subject and the verb.
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Spring in the Park

When the spring sunshine awakens a man once more to a fresh awareness of his surroundings, and takes his mind back to other springs which first suggested to his infant mind that the earth was a beautiful place, it is not invariably a shining river that he remembers, or solitary hills, or green fields and greening woods. It may be, if he was a town mouse and nurtured among bricks and mortar, nothing more than a public park. A town park is a poor thing to set beside the country, but for many a man, before his legs grew strong enough and his spirit independent enough to carry him to the moors or the mountains, a park was his English heaven, air, rivers; 'suns of home'. It was here that he was pushed along in his perambulator, and here that he made his first close contacts with Mother Earth-though large areas of the Mother Earth in the place might have been carefully concealed by Father Macadam and his associates. The ratio of gravel and asphalt to grass and flowers and water was likely to be in the neighbourhood of two to five. And yet enough of Nature remained, enough at least to mark the passage of the seasons.

It is not necessarily the birds and the flowers that flash from time to time upon the inward eye of the man thus indebted to the park. The annual spring visit in a party from school, to draw the bursting birds in the botanical garden, is remembered less for its intrinsic excitement than for the relief it afforded from ordinary lessons. The annual furnishing of the boathouse and the tea chalet were much more satisfying signs of spring and of the return to a fuller life-the boathouse from which the Princess Ida would soon be setting sail round the little-more-than-a-duck pond with cargos of small children gazing down into 18-in. depths, the sea chalet that was the trusty stand-by of mothers in the long summer holidays when the children grew bored and tea in the park was a sure diversion. In school-time the park had other uses. It was the obvious place to play truant in and, though adults might wonder what a child could find to do there alone all day, truants were untroubled by such trifling problems.

At weekends in the summer in these present days there are concert parties in the park, and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', and roller skating. The former patron will remember that in his young days it was always brass bands. Good brass bands, too, for the audience was expert. The best bands in the country were summoned to the park and the local paper sent its music critic. The children might be deaf to musical points, but they could not be blind to uniforms of scarlet. For the rest, it was their parents who enjoyed it most-the band and the sunshine and the gossip with friends; their parents, and those older brothers and sisters who had reached the mysterious stage of washing without being told, and going for walks without father and mother, and flirting with the opposite sex. Though the last phenomenon, to be sure, did not

wait on summer bands. It all began, in the park, in spring.

Questions

1. What do people who spent their childhood in the town often remember in the springtime?
 2. What did children like to do during the holidays in the park which the writer remembers?
 3. What can be seen in the park at the weekend?
 4. What used to be heard in the parks when the writer was a boy?
 5. What did the children most like about the bands?
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Poetry Appreciation

Poetry is not like ordinary speech or writing, it is a specially made object in words. The word 'poetry', in fact, comes from a Greek verb which means to make. The first thing one should remember is that the voice is as much the medium of poetry as the page upon which it is written. You should attend the words individually and as a whole group. You must try to see what they are saying and also be aware of the very way in which the words combine to say it. You should attend to the ideas, pictures and emotions of the poem, and you should be no less attentive to its sounds, rhythms and rhymes. The aim of reading should always be to come to grips with the poem in the fullest possible way.

Before you start the detailed study of a poem, you should have a general idea of what it is about. Is it a narrative, a meditation or reflection upon life or an argument about something? What you should aim for is a state in which you could give a general summary of what the poem is about and be able to show the stages through which it goes.

To write about how the words create meanings, and how they form lines, rhythms and stanzas, and about how they rhyme and make patterns of sounds you have to master a specialised vocabulary of technical terms. You should also master words that cover a great variety of emotions, moods and thoughts, and you must be sensitive and flexible about how they are used.

Tone is the most general of all the technical words because it can be applied to many aspects of poetry.

There is one other aspect of poetry that, like tone, applies to every poem; enactment. Enactment depends upon an idea that is central to the study of literature. Poetry uses every aspect, or resource, of language to enact meaning.

Poetic appreciation is an attempt to tell others what we see, hear, feel and understand in and through a poem. One well-known way of appreciating poetry is by attention to the text of the poem. Here, one tries to analyse and study the use of words in the poem at three levels, namely, sounds, structures, and meanings.

Finally, you should feel free to read and interpret the poems in your own way. Do not hesitate to express your views. An 'Indian' response to an English literary work is not in itself wrong. On the contrary, your perception may add a fresh viewpoint, or a new dimension

Exercise

Poetry Appreciation

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
 And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
 When I behold the violet past prime,
 And sable curls, all silver'd o'er with white;
 When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
 Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
 And summer's green all girded up in sheaves,
 Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,
 Then of thy beauty do I question make,
 That thou among the wastes of time must go,
 Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
 And die as fast as they see others grow;
 And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
 Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

Questions

1. Summarise the theme of this poem in about thirty-fifty words of your own.
 2. Explain the following clearly, showing that you understand the details of each:
 - a) summer's green
 - b) borne on the bier with white and bristly beard
 - c) Then of thy beauty do I question make
 - d) the wastes of time
 - e) Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake, And die as fast as they see others grow
 3. Show clearly that the poem falls into four distinct sections.
 4. Show how the last two lines form a climax to the poem and explain clearly the thought contained in them.
 5. What is the rhyme-scheme of this poem, and what is the effect of the rhyme in lines 13 and 14?
 6. What is the metre of the poem?
 7. Find an example of personification.
 8. Suggest a suitable title to the poem.
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Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stain in desert..... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown, (4)
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculpture well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed: (8)
And on the pedestal these world appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty , and despairs"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay (12)
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.(14)
- Percy Bysshe Shelley

Questions

1. Write the theme of this poem in about thirty-fifty words of your own.
 2. What is the meaning in the poem of:
(1) antique (2) trunkless (3) visage (4) pedestal (5) decay
 3. Explain the following clearly showing that you understand the details of each:
(1) These lifeless things(1.7)
(2) The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed
 4. Whose passions are referred to in line 6?
 5. From the description given in line 9 to 11, attempt a brief character-sketch of Ozymandias. in your own words.
 6. Find an example of irony in the poem.
 7. Bearing in mind the description of a lyric, say why this poem is classed as a lyric.
 8. What is the metre of this poem? What is its rhyme- scheme? What name is given to this verse- form?
 9. Show how the last two and a half lines drive home meaning of the poem.
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