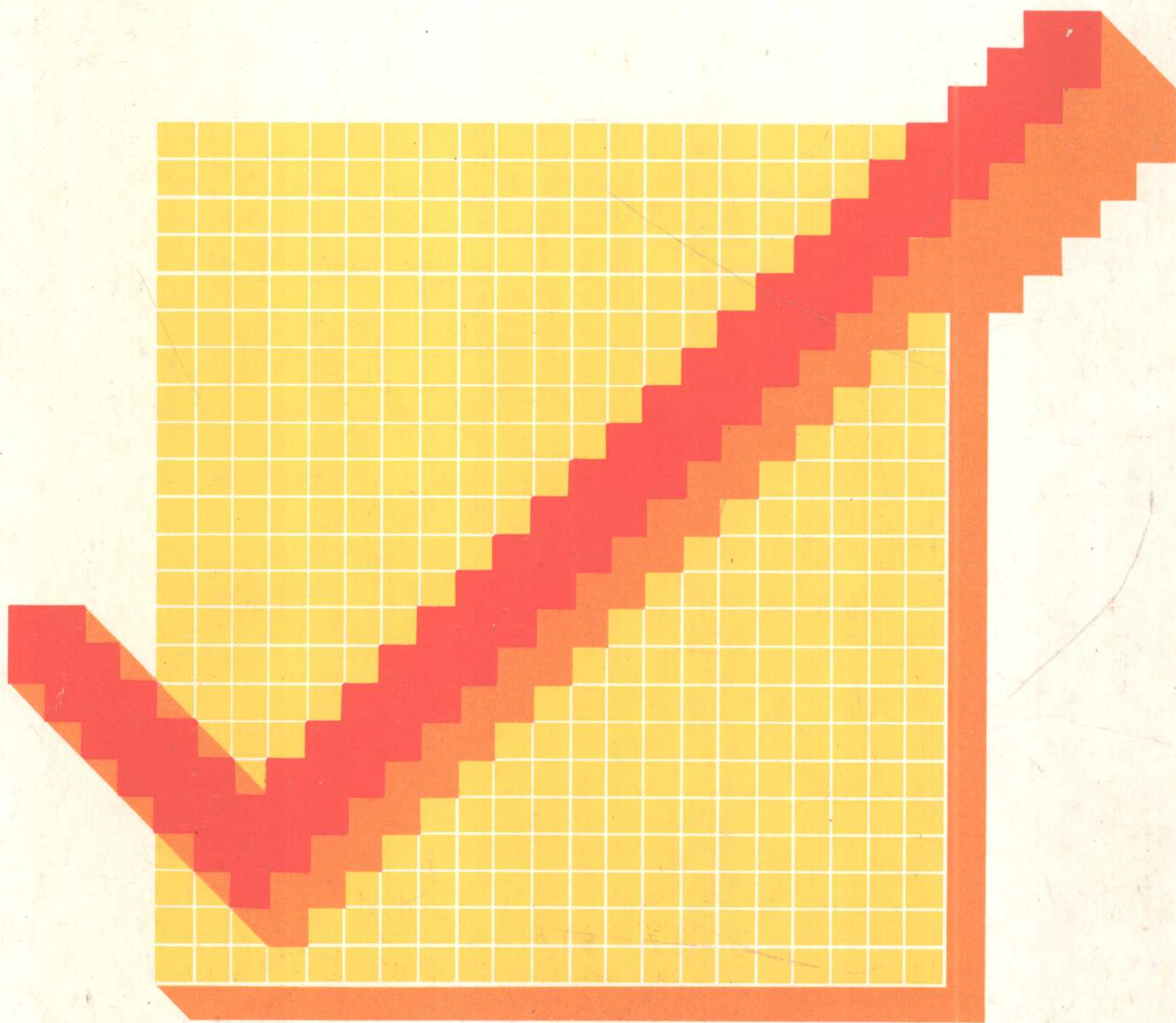


Improve your Comprehension

Alan Proud



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Answers

Answers to the Cloze tests and objective tests are contained in an answer sheet which is available, free of charge, to bona fide teachers on request to the publishers. Please send your request with a stamped addressed envelope to The Education Department, Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., Woodlands Park Avenue, Woodlands Park, Maidenhead, Berks., England.

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To the Teacher

This book provides practice material for young people preparing for the English comprehension exams set by the various examining boards. A wide range of sources has been used, both literary and non-literary, and some work is based on statistics, charts and tables. The variety of source material is complemented by the range of techniques used in setting the questions. While there is a solid core of the traditional 'answer in sentences' type, the students are introduced to the various kinds of objective test currently employed. In particular, a guided approach is made to multiple-choice assignments, reflecting the importance now attached to this format by the examining boards. Use is also made of Cloze tests so that readers may become familiar with this procedure.

Although the exercises of the various types are roughly graded in order of difficulty, the book is deliberately presented as a miscellany from which teachers can select assignments appropriate to particular pupils and

groups. In this connection it may be helpful to list the distribution of the various kinds of assignment within the book as follows:

Standard (answer in sentences) sections

Nos. 1, 2, 4, 6 (Test 1), 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 29, 31, 34, 37, 38, 40, 43.

Cloze (supply the missing words) sections

Nos. 3, 8, 23, 27, 36, 42.

Objective test (true/false) sections

Nos. 5, 16, 32.

Objective test (multiple-choice) sections

Nos. 6 (Test 2), 10, 13, 17, 21, 24, 28, 30, 33, 35, 39, 41.

I have not thought it appropriate to prescribe 'answers' to the standard comprehension sections, where a degree of flexibility is necessary, but an answer sheet for the Cloze tests and the objective tests is available from the Publishers. I hope that, like the tests themselves, it will prove useful and time-saving.

A. P.

Introduction

English language exams cover two broad areas: how well you can write yourself and how well you can understand what other people have written. It is the second of these areas with which this book is concerned. It aims to give you practice in the various tests designed to assess your understanding or, in other words, your comprehension.

The traditional way of testing comprehension is one that you will be familiar with. You have to read a passage and then answer questions on it, usually in full written sentences. There are many such exercises in the pages that follow. In exams your answers would be checked against a marking scheme which lists the right responses and a score would be awarded by the marker, who might deduct points for inaccurate spelling and poor grammar even if the answer were basically correct.

This procedure is not entirely reliable because of the wide variety of wording in which answers can be expressed and because one marker may be a 'harder' or a 'softer' judge than another. Added to this, some young readers are ingenious and may make valid points which designers of the test have not allowed for. Worse still, your final mark may even depend to some extent on how the marker is feeling.

If your paper is on the top of the pile, and your handwriting and presentation are neat, then the examiner may tend to award you a higher mark than he would to someone whose badly-written script

appeared towards the bottom of the heap when the examiner has a headache coming on and really feels he could be better employed. The quality of the answers might be equal but the marks could be quite different.

What is involved here is called the *subjective* element, which can be unfair to some candidates. To overcome it, new-style comprehension tests have been introduced in recent years which are claimed to be *objective*, i.e. there is no room for individual variations in the marking. The exam boards, in fact, have the answers marked by machine.

The essential feature of objective tests is that for each question there is one correct answer and one only. This has to be selected from a number of alternatives because usually, and you may think, strangely, you are presented with the answer—if you can pick it out from those given.

In its simplest form, an objective test might make statements about a passage you have read. All you have to do is to state whether each is A) **true** or B) **false**. A third category C) **no evidence** or **not stated** might be added to cover cases where there is nothing to show whether a statement is true or not. There are several questions and exercises of this type in the book and you should not find them too difficult.

What may cause a few difficulties at first is another type of objective test which is now widely employed. It is called multiple-choice. As the name

suggests, the idea is to select the correct answer from a number of possibles, usually four or five, lettered from A – D/E. The items in a test often consist of statements which have to be completed from the choices given. This can be done by reference to the relevant part of the extract and all you need write is the appropriate letter.

Many people prefer this style of questioning as it does not involve full written answers and there is no possibility of losing marks because of incorrect spelling, punctuation etc. Indeed, the exam boards supply special answer sheets which are already numbered and lettered and you simply indicate your choice by putting a mark in one of the spaces provided. If you work through this book you will find plenty of practice in multiple-choice.

One other technique for testing comprehension will also be found in these pages. Occasionally, you will have to read a passage from which a number of words have been omitted. You will be

invited to supply the missing words. The skill here consists of picking the identical word used by the writer, but you will gain credit for a near miss.

Finally, when you look at the assignments themselves, you will find that not all the tests are based on written passages. It is an important asset in adult life to be able to take in information presented in the form of charts, graphs, statistics etc. and you will be given opportunities to demonstrate your grasp of this kind of presentation.

Comprehension is often one of the duller aspects of English but it forms a major part of the syllabuses of the examining boards. It is also an activity of major importance in life. I hope that the material I have selected for you to consider is of interest in itself and that as you work through the pages that follow, you will feel that you are developing a keener sense of analysis and the ability to pinpoint what is relevant to a given enquiry.

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Standard Comprehension

As I said in the Introduction, you are probably used to ordinary, straight-forward comprehension tests which involve reading a passage and then answering a number of questions on it. That is what many of the assignments in this book consist of. Before you look at the first one, however, it might be helpful to remind ourselves how to tackle these standard comprehension exercises.

In the first place, it is a good idea to read through the extract at least twice so you have a firm grasp of what it is about. Only when this is done should you turn to the questions. You will find that those who set the tests usually play fair and that the answer to the first question will be found near the beginning of the passage, the second a little further down and so on. Finally, there may be one or two general questions which refer to the piece as a whole.

When you are sure what the first question is getting at, you will obviously go back to the passage and track down the line or lines where the necessary information can be found. Sometimes the answer merely consists of re-stating a fairly obvious fact. Even so, remember the two cardinal rules of comprehension: 1) answer in a proper sentence and 2) wherever possible, use your own words—don't just copy out a chunk of the original.

Most questions are of the What? Which? How? type and can be answered with the exercise of a little common sense. A few are more searching—

perhaps asking Why?—and require you to 'read between the lines', as we say, deducing or working out something that is not directly stated. Others ask you to explain the meaning of words or phrases used in the passage. To help you find them, the line numbers where they occur are usually given and as every fifth line of the extracts is numbered, locating them is easy.

Remember to deal with the word as employed in its context, i.e. in that particular sentence, because some words can be used in more than one sense. Look, for instance, at these two examples:

- 1) I *refuse* to help you.
- 2) The *refuse* was taken away in the dustcart.

It would be no use defining *refuse* in the first sentence as *rubbish*—although that's what your answer would be treated as!

Bear in mind, too, that if you are asked to supply an alternative for a given word, your suggestion must fit perfectly. If you were asked to supply a synonym (a word of similar meaning) for *strangling*, it would be no good writing *to choke*. *Choking* would be a better fit. It would be no use, either, putting down two or three guesses in the hope that one would be right; a single attempt is all you are allowed.

On the other hand, do have a go at every question. You can't be given a mark for a blank but you might hit on the right answer with an ingenious guess. If you *are* stuck on one particular question, don't spend ages puzzling over

it. Leave a gap of a few lines and return to it later when it might make more sense. Timing is important, especially in exams, and as you gain experience you will learn to pace yourself so that you cover the questions in the time allowed. On some exam papers the number of marks allotted to each question is given and this is a good guide to the allocation of time and the length of the answer.

It is important to stick to the numbering or lettering of the questions, particularly when there are sub-sections

of the 1 i), ii), iii) or 2 a), b), c) variety. If you embark on some private scheme of your own, it will make the marker's job more difficult.

Finally, always leave a few minutes to check through your answers for accuracy. Now is the time to put in apostrophes that you have forgotten; to look critically at spelling; to make sure you have written what you intended. Remember that marks can be lost in comprehension work for inaccurate use of English, even if you have found the 'correct' answer.

1

Poltergeists

Poltergeist is a German word for 'noisy ghost' or 'racketing spirit'. It has no exact equivalent in the English language. Yet many English-speaking persons as well as those of other nationalities have been haunted—visited or bothered—by them.

Them? They? It?

Exactly what is a poltergeist?

10 In the popular sense, a poltergeist is a frisky, mischievous, unseen spirit that specializes in knocking on walls, tossing things like crockery about, and performing other supernatural feats. In the scientific sense, there is no such thing as a poltergeist. There is only poltergeist activity—odd things that happen due to some unknown force or power, perhaps psychological in nature.

20 While 'ordinary' apparitions and spectres appear visually to those they haunt, the true poltergeist is not seen. Even so, in some poltergeist cases there may be visual effects involved. Ghostly

25 fingers or arms may manifest themselves, eerie lights may illuminate empty rooms, or misshapen animals may turn up briefly and disappear. Usually, however, only the things that poltergeists *do* are apparent to the human eye.

Poltergeists specialize in moving objects about—or somehow causing them to be moved. These things often move as if they were tossed, hurled, thrown, or otherwise transported by some invisible entity. If the poltergeist activity is indoors, the objects can be just about anything around the house, from small things like thimbles to very heavy furniture. Crockery has always been a favourite. Poltergeists never seem to tire of causing saucers, cups, plates and bowls to sail through the air.

If the poltergeist activity is outdoors (and there are many such cases), the objects moved are usually stones, pebbles, gravel, or clods of earth. Once in a while, a poltergeist will produce out-of-doors

phenomena *indoors*. One English
50 family in 1934 had dead frogs and lizards
fall on them while they were eating in
their dining room; another family in 1928
had branches and twigs fall on them
indoors. Still another family experienced
55 a shower of kidney beans. But inside or
outside, poltergeists can be full of
surprises. In one amazing case in 1911, a
French clergyman constantly found his
own photograph covered with fresh blood.
60 When the blood was analysed, it proved
to be human!

Poltergeists are great rappers and
thumpers. A vast number of cases have
commenced with knockings, loud
65 crashing noises, and other unexplainable
sounds. Often a poltergeist will announce

- 1 What is the difference between the way ordinary people regard poltergeists and the way scientists regard them?
- 2 Generally speaking, how do traditional ghosts differ from poltergeists?
- 3 Write down all the words from the sentence beginning 'These things...' (line 33) which mean roughly *moved*.
- 4 Which single word in paragraph six (line 31) means 'saucers, cups, plates and bowls'?
- 5 Explain how what happened to the English family in 1934 was especially

its coming with certain 'signal noises', such as a lifting of door latches or windlike sounds outside a house.

70 Poltergeists can also cause sounds that resemble human activity. Some of those often reported are dragging footsteps, scratching, sighing, moaning, panting, sobbing and screaming.

75 In addition, poltergeists have been great bell-ringers, especially so in the days when houses were equipped with manual bell-pushing systems for summoning servants. Some poltergeists
80 are musically inclined. They cause pianos and organs to play, horns to sound, and in one famous case a poltergeist played for months on a drum. Only rarely do they talk.

odd.

- 6 In what way was it comparable to the experiences another family had had in 1928?
- 7 How do the victims of some poltergeists know that they are approaching?
- 8 Which of the human being's five senses is most involved in paragraph eight (beginning line 62)?
- 9 Which other paragraph contains strong impressions of a different sense? Mention which sense it is.
- 10 Basing your answer only on this passage, write a paragraph of about 50 words on *Poltergeists*.

2

The Chase

Dry, his mouth was dry. There was the taste of dust in his mouth. His lips were covered with dust.

Without lifting his head from the floor
5 he watched the shadow-play. There were the big shadows that moved and stooped,

swelled and shrank, and fainter ones that ran around the walls and ceiling swiftly mocking them. There was a shadow in the corner, and a shadow on the floor, and neither of these moved.

The back of his head began to hurt. At the same time, what he saw came clear to his mind, in one flash, frozen in an instant: Hare slumped in a corner with his head on his knees, Sparrowhawk sprawled on his back, a man kneeling over Sparrowhawk, another tossing gold pieces into a bag, a third standing watching. The third man held a lantern in one hand and a dagger in the other, Arren's dagger.

If they talked he did not hear them. He heard only his own thoughts, which told him immediately and unhesitatingly what to do. He obeyed them at once. He crawled forward very slowly a couple of feet, darted out his left hand and grabbed the bag of loot, leapt to his feet, and made for the stairs with a hoarse yell. He plunged downstairs in the blind dark without missing a step, without even feeling them under his feet, as if he were flying. He broke out into the street and ran fullspeed into the dark.

The houses were black hulks against stars. Starlight gleamed faintly on the river to his right, and though he could not see where the streets led, he could make out street-crossings, and so turn and double on his track. They had followed him, he could hear them behind him, not very far behind. They were unshod, and their panting breathing was

louder than their footfalls. He would have laughed if he had had time; he knew at last what it was like to be the hunted instead of the hunter, the leader of the chase, the quarry. It was to be alone, and to be free. He swerved to the right and dodged stooping across a high-parapeted bridge, slipped into a sidestreet, around a corner, back to the riverside and along it for a way, across another bridge. His shoes were loud on the cobblestones, the only sound in all the city; he paused at the bridge abutment to unlace them, but the strings were knotted, and the hunt had not lost him. The lantern glittered a second across the river, the soft, heavy, running feet came on. He could not get away from them, he could only out-run them, keep going, keep ahead, and get away from the dusty room, far away . . . They had stripped his coat off him, along with his dagger and he was in shirt-sleeves, light and hot, his head swimming and the pain in the back of his skull pointing and pointing with each stride, and he ran, and he ran . . . The bag hindered him. He flung it down suddenly, a loose gold piece flying out and striking the stones with a clear ring. 'Here's your money!' he yelled, his voice hoarse and gasping. He ran on. And all at once the street ended. No cross streets, no stars before him, a dead end. Without pausing he turned back and ran at his pursuers. The lantern swung wild in his eyes, and he yelled defiance as he came at them.

- 1 a) What is the first indication of the time of day in the extract?
b) What further evidence confirms this impression?
- 2 What is the name of the person who runs away?
- 3 a) Explain what has happened to him before this incident.
b) What leads you to this conclusion?

- 4 a) Why do you think he grabbed the bag of money?
b) What happened to it later?
- 5 Explain how he tried to lose his pursuers.
- 6 What kept giving away his position and why could he do nothing about it?
- 7 a) What finally prevented him from out-running his pursuers?

- b) Quote the statement which makes absolutely clear what had happened.
 c) What is unusual about the form of this statement?
- 8 a) Show how the writer makes good

use of three of the five senses in this passage.

- b) Which sense is particularly used in the long final paragraph?
 c) Quote three instances where it is employed effectively.

3

The New Vet

Twenty words have been missed out of this extract. Read through it carefully, then make a numbered list of the words which you think have been omitted—one for each blank space.

'Good afternoon', I said with my best smile. 'My name is Herriot.'

The woman looked bigger than ever with the door open. She was about sixty but her hair, tightly pulled back from her forehead, was jet black and hardly streaked with grey. She nodded and looked at me with grim benevolence, but she seemed to be waiting for further information. Evidently, the name struck no answering spark.

'Mr Farnon is expecting me. He wrote asking me to come today.'

'Mr Herriot?' she said thoughtfully.
 15 'Surgery is from six to seven o'clock. If you wanted to bring a dog in, that would be your best time.'

'No, no,' I said, hanging on to my smile. 'I'm applying for the position of 2. Mr Farnon said to come in time for tea.'

'Assistant? Well, now, that's nice.'
 The lines in her 3 softened a little.
 'I'm Mrs Hall. I keep house for Mr
 25 Farnon. He's a 4, you know. He never said anything to me about you, but never mind, come in and have a cup of 5. It shouldn't be long before he's back.'

30 I followed her between whitewashed walls, my feet clattering on the tiles. We turned right at the end into another 6 and I was beginning to wonder just how far back the house extended when I
 35 was shown into a sunlit 7.

It had been built in the grand manner, high-ceilinged and airy with a massive fireplace flanked by arched alcoves. One end was taken up by a french window
 40 which gave on a long, high-walled 8. I could see unkempt lawns, a rockery and many fruit trees. A great bank of peonies blazed in the hot sunshine and at the far end, 9 caved in the branches of a
 45 group of tall elms. Above and beyond were the green hills with their climbing walls.

Ordinary looking 10 stood around on a very worn 11. Hunting prints hung
 50 on the 12 and books were scattered everywhere, some on shelves in the alcoves but others piled on the 13 in the corners. A pewter pint pot occupied a prominent place at one end of the
 55 mantelpiece. It was an interesting pot. Cheques and bank notes had been stuffed into it till they bulged out of the 14 and overflowed on to the hearth beneath.

I was studying this with astonishment
60 when Mrs Hall came in with a tea 15.

'I suppose Mr Farnon is out on a
case,' I said.

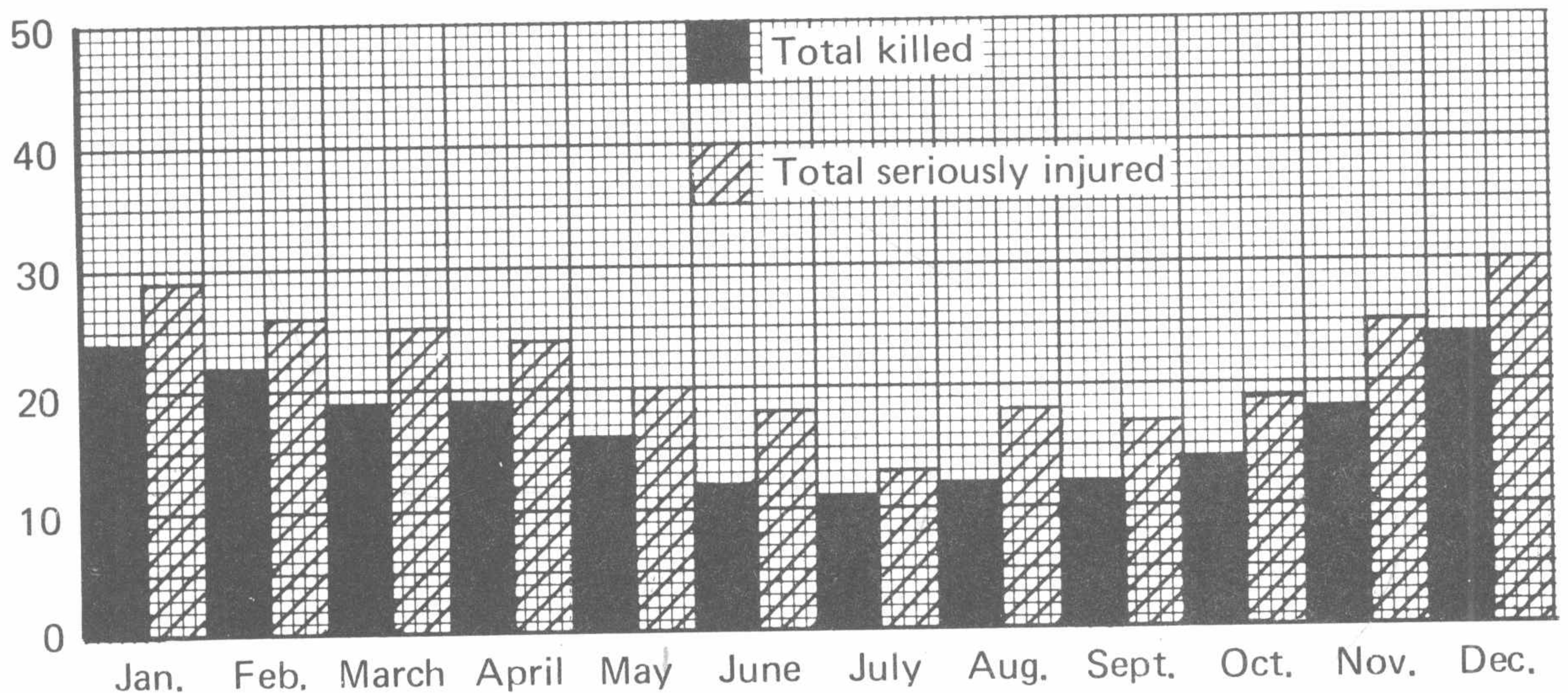
65 'No, he's gone through to Brawton to
visit his mother. I can't really say when
he'll be back.' She left me with my tea.

The dogs arranged themselves
peacefully around the room and, except

for a brief 16 between the Scottie and
the cocker spaniel about the occupancy of
70 a deep 17, there was no sign of their
previous violent behaviour. They lay
regarding me with friendly boredom and,
at the same time, fighting a losing 18
against 19. Soon the last nodding
75 20 had fallen back and a chorus of
heavy breathing filled the room.

4

Road Casualties



The graph printed above shows the number of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents in one area of northern England last year. Use it to answer these questions.

1 How many people were killed in May?

16

- 2 How many were seriously injured in December? 30
- 3 What was the total number of people killed during the whole year? 203
- 4 How many were injured in the same period?
- 5 What was the total of people killed and injured during March? 30

- 6 Give the total of people killed during
a) the months of January, February
and March and b) the months of
June, July and August.
- 7 What reasons can you suggest to
explain the big difference between the
totals for 6a) and b)?
- 8 Why is it likely that figures for
January will always be higher than
those for February?
- 9 Which of these statements is
incorrect?
A In the period covered by the graph
there were more people seriously
injured than killed.
B Fewer people died in the three
months July – September than in
the single month of January.
C More people died in February
than were injured in August.
D Over two hundred people were
killed on the roads in this one area
in the year shown.
- 10 Write a short paragraph showing in
general terms what these figures show
about the distribution of road accident
casualties throughout the year.

5

The Old Man

Read this extract, which is the beginning
of Ernest Hemingway's story, *The Old
Man and the Sea*.

He was an old man who fished alone in a
skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone
eighty-four days now without taking a
fish. In the first forty days without a fish
5 the boy's parents had told him that the
old man was now definitely and finally
salao, which is the worst form of unlucky,
and the boy had gone at their orders in
another boat which caught three good fish
10 the first week. It made the boy sad to see
the old man come in each day with his
skiff empty and he always went down to
help him carry either the coiled lines or
the gaff and harpoon and the sail that
15 was furled around the mast. The sail was
patched with flour sacks and, furled, it
looked like the flag of permanent defeat.

The old man was thin and gaunt with
deep wrinkles in the back of his neck.
20 The brown blotches of the benevolent

skin cancer the sun brings from its
reflection on the tropic sea were on his
cheeks. The blotches ran well down the
sides of his face and his hands had the
25 deep-creased scars from handling heavy
fish on the cords. But none of these scars
were fresh. They were as old as erosions
in a fishless desert.

Everything about him was old except
30 his eyes and they were the same colour as
the sea and were cheerful and
undefeated.

'Santiago,' the boy said to him as they
climbed the bank from where the skiff
35 was hauled up. 'I could go with you
again. We've made some money.'

The old man had taught the boy to fish
and the boy loved him.

'No,' the old man said. 'You're with a
40 lucky boat. Stay with them.'

'But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks.'

45 'I remember,' the old man said. 'I know you did not leave me because you doubted.'

'It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him.'

50 'I know,' the old man said. 'It is quite normal.'

'He hasn't much faith.'

'No,' the old man said. 'But we have. Haven't we?'

55 'Yes,' the boy said. 'Can I offer you a beer on the Terrace and then we'll take the stuff home.'

'Why not?' the old man said. 'Between fishermen.'

60 They sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man and he was not angry. Others, of the older fishermen, looked at him and were sad. But they did not show it and they spoke politely about the current and the depths they had drifted their lines at and the steady good weather and of what they had seen. The successful fishermen of that day were already in and had
70 butchered their marlin out and carried them laid full length across two planks,

with two men staggering at the end of each plank, to the fish house where they waited for the ice truck to carry them to
75 the market in Havana. Those who had caught sharks had taken them to the shark factory on the other side of the cove where they were hoisted on a block and tackle, their livers removed, their fins cut
80 off and their hides skinned out and their flesh cut into strips for salting.

When the wind was in the east a smell came across the harbour from the shark factory; but today there was only the faint
85 edge of the odour because the wind had backed into the north and then dropped off and it was pleasant and sunny on the Terrace.

'Santiago,' the boy said.

90 'Yes,' the old man said. He was holding his glass and thinking of many years ago.

'Can I go out and get sardines for you for tomorrow?'

95 'No. Go and play baseball. I can still row and Rogelio will throw the net.'

'I would like to go. If I cannot fish with you, I would like to serve in some way.'

100 'You bought me a beer,' the old man said.

Now consider these twenty statements about the extract. If you think that a statement is true then write **true**; if you think it is untrue, write **untrue**; if you think that no decision can be made because there is no evidence on which to base it, then write **no evidence**. There is no need to copy the statements but remember to number your answers clearly from 1 to 20.

- 1 The old man has not caught a fish for more than three months.
- 2 The old man has always fished alone.
- 3 The boy feels sorry for the old man.

- 4 The boy insists on unloading all the equipment from the boat.
- 5 The boat has no motor.
- 6 The old man is slowly dying of cancer.
- 7 You can tell that the old man has not caught a fish for some time because his hands show no signs of recent damage.
- 8 The old man has blue eyes.
- 9 His nose is red from constant exposure to sun and sea.
- 10 He is resigned to the fact that he will never catch a big fish again.

- 11 The boy wants to go to Santiago with the old man.
- 12 The old man once went longer without catching a fish.
- 13 The boy buys the old man a beer and he drinks it straight from the can.
- 14 As he drinks his beer, everyone makes fun of the old man because he is 'past it'.

- 15 Marlin is a big heavy fish.
- 16 The Marlin are sold fresh on the quayside.
- 17 Sharks' liver is a great delicacy.
- 18 As they drink their beer, the old man and the boy are refreshed by a cool breeze from the north.
- 19 The boy's name is not given.
- 20 The old man lives on his own.

6

The Portland Spy Ring

Early in 1960, security officers at Britain's secret Underwater Weapons Establishment at Portland began to investigate one of their clerks. His name was Harry Houghton and he had been under suspicion before. Now he was buying large rounds of drinks at a local pub, had bought a cottage and a brand new car. How could he afford these luxuries? He was spending more on drink alone than he received in salary. For nine months, MI5 (British security and counter-espionage) kept Houghton under close watch. They also watched his mistress, Ethel Gee, who worked at Portland too. They discovered that the pair made frequent trips to London, and there met a man called Gordon Lonsdale. At these meetings, Houghton and Lonsdale would hand each other a package. It was not hard to guess what was going on. Houghton and Gee were exchanging secrets for cash. They were small-time spies. But Lonsdale?

On the face of it, Gordon Lonsdale was a successful Canadian businessman. He had lived in Britain for five years, a

respected company director who was very popular with women. Nothing in his behaviour suggested the truth. "Gordon Lonsdale" was really a dedicated Russian agent, whose real name was Colonel Konon Trofimovitch Molody. Molody was an "illegal", a trained agent who lives and works under a false name. He had slipped into Canada in 1954 and spent a year there perfecting his accent and obtaining a passport and other identity papers before coming to Britain. His new identity was so convincing, that when he first approached Houghton and Gee, they believed he was an *American* agent, doing a little friendly spying on the Portland Establishment.

On 7 January 1961, Houghton, Gee and Lonsdale were picked up during an exchange of parcels in a dramatic arrest near the Old Vic theatre in London. Back at Scotland Yard, Houghton admitted 'I've been a bloody fool.' Miss Gee tried to pretend she was innocent. But Lonsdale, the professional, maintained complete silence.

Checking up on Lonsdale's friends,