

# The individual and society

## UNIT AIMS

**READING SKILLS**

Dealing with opinion  
Answering Yes/No/Not Given statements  
(writer's opinion)

**EXAM PRACTICE**

Completing short answer questions  
Completing multiple-choice questions

## Dealing with opinion

**1** Describe the photos and answer the questions below.



- a Which people are likely to form a group? How do you know?
- b Which person is alone?
- c Which people are probably not part of a group?
- d Is it becoming easier or more difficult to find places to be alone in the modern world? Is privacy becoming impossible to achieve?
- e What factors in the modern world are having an impact on our private lives? Can these developments be stopped?

**2** Match statements 1 and 2 with descriptions a and b.

- 1 Governments could do more to help vulnerable people in society.
- 2 Governments help vulnerable people in society.

- a The statement is reporting a fact.
- b The statement is giving an opinion.

**3** Read the pairs of sentences below. Decide which is a fact and which states an opinion.

- 1 a The government spent less money last year on vulnerable people in society.  
b Governments should do more to help vulnerable people in society.
- 2 a The encroachment of digital control in all people's lives is inevitable.  
b The survey revealed that sales of digital technology are increasing.
- 3 a Practical skills in many traditional societies are under threat because technology is making them redundant.  
b The research showed a range of practical skills were practised in ancient Greek society.
- 4 a Foolishly, some employees choose not to be a member of a trade union.  
b Some employees choose not to be a member of a trade union.

- 4** Find examples of structures a–d in the sentences in exercise 3 on page 78. Why are these structures used in the sentences?
- a** a qualifying adverb
  - b** a qualifying adjective
  - c** a cause and effect relationship
  - d** a modal verb
- 5** Read statements a–g and decide whether they are opinions or not.
- a** A minimum of two players are required to play tennis.
  - b** The results of the social survey are clearly mistaken.
  - c** Unfortunately, the tendency to seek fame for its own sake seems to be growing in our society.
  - d** Sports like football, netball, rugby, etc are taught in schools.
  - e** It would, I feel, be a good idea to make citizenship classes compulsory in schools.
  - f** If young people engaged in different activities after school, unsociable behaviour would certainly decline.
  - g** Formal education fails miserably to meet the needs of the business world and society in general.
- 6** Underline the words in the statements in exercise 5 which show that they are opinions.
- Example*  
It is better to spend money on social housing than new theatres.

## Answering Yes/No/Not Given statements (writer's opinion)

- 1** Statements 1–6 below relate to paragraph A of the reading passage on page 80. For each statement below, decide if it agrees (Yes) or contradicts (No) the writer's opinion. Write 'Not Given' if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks.

- 1** Having more choice is good because it helps the economy to grow.
- 2** Making decisions about minor issues is irritating.
- 3** People should seek the help of professionals when making a decision which can have adverse consequences.
- 4** If people in poor countries had the same range of choices as those in rich countries, their lives would be easier.
- 5** Only people in poor countries do not have any real choices.
- 6** Advertisers encourage the mistaken idea that more choice is beneficial.

- 2** To check your answers to the questions in exercise 1, ask yourself the following questions about the passage. Does the writer
- 1** mention a reason why having more choice is good?
  - 2** describe the effect of making decisions about minor issues?
  - 3** say when people need to consult professionals?
  - 4** state a comparison between poor and rich countries?
  - 5** state a restriction about people in poor countries?
  - 6** give an opinion about what advertisers do?

## Spoilt for choice



A Choice, we are given to believe, is a right. In daily life, people have come to expect endless situations about which they are required to make decisions one way or another. In the main, these are just irksome moments at work which demand some extra energy or brainpower, or during lunch breaks like choosing which type of coffee to order or indeed which coffee shop to go to. But sometimes selecting one option as opposed to another can have serious or lifelong repercussions. More complex decision-making is then either avoided, postponed or put into the hands of the army of professionals, lifestyle coaches, lawyers, advisors, and the like, waiting to lighten the emotional burden for a fee. But for a good many people in the world, in rich and poor countries, choice is a luxury, not a right. And for those who think they are exercising their right to make choices, the whole system is merely an illusion, created by companies and advertisers wanting to sell their wares.

B The main impact of endless choice in people's lives is anxiety. Buying something as basic as a coffee pot is not exactly simple. Easy access to a wide range of consumer goods induces a sense of powerlessness, even paralysis, in many people, ending in the shopper giving up and walking away, or just buying an unsuitable item that is not really wanted in order to solve the problem and reduce the unease. Recent surveys in the United Kingdom have shown that a sizeable proportion of electrical goods bought per household are not really needed. The advertisers and the shareholders of the manufacturers are, nonetheless, satisfied.

C It is not just their availability that is the problem, but the speed with which new versions of products come on the market. Advances in design and production mean that new items are almost ready by the time that goods hit the shelves. Products also need to have a short lifespan so that the public can be persuaded to replace them within a short time. The classic example is computers, which are almost obsolete once they are bought. At first, there were only one or two available from a limited number of manufacturers, but now there are many companies all with not only their own excellent products but different versions of the same machine. This makes selection a problem. Gone are the days when one could just walk with ease into a shop and buy one thing; no choice, no anxiety.

D The plethora of choice is not limited to consumer items. With the greater mobility of people around the world, people have more choice about where they want to live and work – a fairly recent phenomenon. In the past, nations migrated across huge swathes of the Earth in search of food, adventure and more hospitable environments. Whole nations crossed continents and changed the face of history. So the mobility of people is nothing new. The creation of nation states and borders effectively slowed this process down. But what is different now is the speed at which migration is happening.

### 3 Decide why the following statements about the passage are Not Given.

- 1 Increased choice makes customers more anxious about overspending.
- 2 It is important for customers to complain when they are dissatisfied with the electrical goods that they buy.
- 3 More unnecessary goods tend to be bought in the UK than in the rest of Europe.
- 4 There should be restrictions on the range of products that can be advertised.

- 4 Read paragraph C and underline the parts of the passage which the following sentences contradict.

- 1 It is a good thing that new products are so widely available.
- 2 Products can be kept and used for longer than in the past.
- 3 People don't need to replace computers very often nowadays.
- 4 There has always been too much choice for the consumer.

- 5 Read the following pairs of statements. Decide which one agrees with the writer's opinion in paragraph D.

- 1 a The phenomenon of migration barely changed the course of history.  
b The phenomenon of migration changed the course of history.
- 2 a People migrated less after the establishment of frontiers between countries.  
b People migrated more after the establishment of frontiers between countries.
- 3 a Migration is happening more rapidly than in the past due to modern aviation.  
b Migration is happening more rapidly than in the past.

- 6 A class of students studying for IELTS were asked to choose four more techniques for Yes/No/Not Given tasks. Which four techniques from a–f do you think they added to the list below?

- 1 Identify cause and effect statements, then scan for this relationship in the passage.
- 2 Identify qualifying adverbs such as *always* and adjectives such as *important*, *crucial*, *well suited*. Then scan the passage for words with similar/opposite meaning.
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_
- a Check that comparisons in the statements are actually made in the text.
- b Try to predict answers before you check the text.
- c Look for words that you know in the statements and underline them.
- d Check that the statements are in the same order as in the passage.
- e Identify modal verbs like *must*, *should*, *can*, *could* and look for similar expressions in the passage.
- f Notice phrases such as *It is important*, *It is easier to*, *It is possible to*, etc.

## Improve your IELTS word skills

- 1 Decide if the expression in *italics* means that the item is part of the larger group or an exception to it.
- a All members of the board were in agreement, *apart from* Mr Blake.
  - b Some people, *myself included*, believe that school exams are too easy.
  - c All of the books were translated into Spanish, *with the exception of* the last.
  - d Many gifted musicians have come from musical families, and Mozart and Beethoven were *no exception*.
  - e All societies, *including* technologically advanced ones, retain certain taboos.
  - f All employees took part in the strike, *save* the director's PA.
  - g All of the furniture was designed specially, *bar* the lecturer's desk.
  - h These essays *can be subsumed under* the wider category of existentialist tracts.

- 2 Write the noun forms of these adjectives.

lonely ■ solitary ■ remote ■ distant ■ isolated ■ secluded

- 3 Which two of the three adjectives can combine with the given noun to make common collocations?

- a *remote/solitary/secluded* area
- b *lonely/solitary/distant* existence
- c *isolated/remote/distant* past
- d *lonely/solitary/secluded* person
- e *remote/solitary/isolated* community

- 4 Complete sentences a–h with the adjectives in exercise 2 above or with a corresponding noun form.

- a There is a \_\_\_\_\_ chance that the hurricane could wipe out the village.
- b The new manager was disliked for his cold and \_\_\_\_\_ manner.
- c Unlike wolves, bears are \_\_\_\_\_ animals and do their hunting alone.
- d He experienced feelings of great \_\_\_\_\_ after the death of his wife.
- e There were a few \_\_\_\_\_ incidents last night but no serious rioting.
- f There is a \_\_\_\_\_ possibility that he has managed to escape the country.
- g After their refusal to withdraw their troops from the area, the country was left diplomatically \_\_\_\_\_.
- h These days, many universities offer \_\_\_\_\_ learning programmes.

- 5 Which of the collocations below imply something usual and which imply something unusual?

popular opinion ■ standard formula ■ peculiar idea ■ eccentric behaviour  
odd characteristic ■ conventional wisdom ■ orthodox theory ■ deviant personality

- 6 Think of other adjectives which can collocate with the nouns in exercise 5 to give a similar meaning. You can recombine some of the ones above.

## Reading passage 10

1 You should spend 20 minutes on questions 1–13, which are based on Reading Passage 10.

### Animal personalities



A Any cat or dog owner will tell you that their pet has an individual personality, different from other people's pets. But recent research has indicated that different types of personalities are found amongst a far wider range of species than was previously supposed, including not only mammals, but also birds and fish.

5 B It was formerly believed that if behaviour varied between members of the same species, this was the result of adaption to different circumstances. Different animals within the same species might show different degrees of readiness to explore unknown territory, but this was just a response to the availability of food or potential mates. If an animal was lucky enough to be in a place where food was plentiful, it would not venture far, whereas in a different  
10 environment, it would develop a bolder personality. One early piece of research to question this was published by Huntingford in 1976. She noticed that sticklebacks\* often displayed the same degree of aggression or sociability towards others in their group at all stages in their life cycle. Such factors as whether they were seeking mates did not affect their behaviour. This seemed to imply that some sticklebacks were more bold and others less so, not because  
15 of their circumstances or a predictable stage in their life but because of something more mysterious called 'personality'; they were simply made like that.

C Of course, there can be other reasons besides personality or environment which cause members of the same species to act differently. In the case of ants, individuals follow different developmental paths so that they take on different roles within the colony, such as soldiers or  
20 workers. In some species of insects, an individual may even change its function over time, as in bees, some of whom start out as workers and later become food hunters. But these kinds of roles are not the same as personality. They exist within a large social organism so that it runs smoothly. Personality, on the other hand, is not aimed at maintaining any kind of larger whole.

25 D Personality differences are difficult to explain from an evolutionary point of view. Different traits have both good and bad consequences, so there is no reason why evolution should favour one over another. Bolder individuals do better when it comes to searching for food but they are also more likely to be eaten by a predator. They may have more success in attracting mates but they are also more likely to fight with rivals and be injured.

30 **E** The presence of one trait will often go hand in hand with another, creating clusters of traits known in psychology as behavioural syndromes. For example, studies show that in the case of birds, adventurous individuals are also likely to be less effective at parenting and that their offspring are less likely to reach maturity, a further instance of how personality traits may work against the preservation of the species. In one study of sheep by Denis Reale, it was found that the male animals who showed more aggression reproduced earlier in life whereas the less aggressive ones bred later. At the same time, the first group tended to die at a younger age. 35 The more docile rams did not start breeding until later, but they generally lived longer, so in the end they produced the same number of young as their more aggressive peers.

40 **F** How exactly these complex syndromes come about is difficult to determine. One theory is that all personality traits arise from a choice between a small number of fundamental preferences, such as whether an animal tends to seek or avoid risk. It is an open question, too, as to what extent these choices might be the same for human personalities. The two types of ram as outlined in Reale's study could be said to reflect two different lifestyles that we also see in humans, something like 'live fast and die young' versus 'slow but sure wins the race'. Certainly the idea that personality is based on a limited number of basic preferences seems to be supported by many psychologists. 45 It is an interesting possibility that these oppositions may be the same across much of the animal kingdom, and only vary in the way they manifest themselves.

\*stickleback: a type of small fish

### Technique

Read the title and skim the reading passage and questions. Remember you can use the information from the questions to help you predict the content of the reading passage.

#### Questions 1–5

*Which paragraph, (A–F) contains the following information?*

**NB** You may use any letter more than once.

- 1 Examples of creatures which carry out specific jobs in a social structure
- 2 A link between personality and average lifespan
- 3 The claim that one personality trait will imply certain others
- 4 A reference to the theory that personality traits are the result of differences in environment
- 5 Possible dangers associated with boldness as a personality trait

## Questions 6–11

Complete the sentences below. Use **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

- 6 Huntingford's study showed that the sticklebacks' personalities remained the same throughout their .....
- 7 Ants become soldiers or workers as a result of the ..... that they take.
- 8 The roles within an ant colony are aimed at maintaining a complete .....
- 9 In Reale's study of rams, a tendency to start breeding earlier was linked with greater .....
- 10 One basic choice in determining personality may involve an animal's attitude to .....
- 11 It is possible that the same basic preferences create personalities throughout the .....

## Questions 12 and 13

Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

- 12 According to the writer, a personality trait
  - A is usually the result of either good or bad parenting.
  - B can work both for and against an animal's chance of survival.
  - C can help an animal to live effectively in a large social group.
  - D is probably the result of a process of natural selection.
- 13 Which is the writer's main idea in this text?
  - A Animal personality traits develop as a response to their environment.
  - B Individual personalities are not found in animals who live in social groups.
  - C Animals can have individual personality traits rather like humans do.
  - D Individual personality traits are a uniquely human phenomenon.

## 2 Answer these questions.

- a Do you think personality is mainly the result of your environment or is it mainly something you are born with?
- b Do you enjoy doing personality tests? In what fields of work could personality tests be useful?