

## Reading Comprehension

‘Comprehend’ means ‘to take in the meaning, nature, or importance of something or somebody’. It is the act of grasping the meaning of a given passage or text. It is often not realized that comprehension broadly means ‘understanding through reading and integrating it with the knowledge you already have. It involves a wide range of skills and interests. It is truly a multi-dimensional affair. It encompasses a variety of abilities with respect to vocabulary, grammar, spirit of the text, inferential processes and contextual knowledge. The most important factors operating in comprehending a text or passage are: remembering word meanings, following the structure of a passage, finding answers to questions answered directly or indirectly, recognizing the writer’s purpose, attitude, tone and mood and thus drawing inferences from the passage.

Usually, making out the meaning of a question and writing the answer down is one way often found in school and college examinations? Besides this, there is the second kind known as objective comprehension, in which multiple answers are given only to choose the correct answer out of the alternatives given under the questions. This type is often found in the present competitive examinations.

### **Some important techniques:**

- Use your pencil as a pointer to guide your eye along a line of the text and to read as speedily as possible.
- Circle key words and phrases in order to identify them immediately as an answer to a question posed.
- Don’t get bogged down even if there is a word or a phrase or a sentence which you don’t understand. Don’t worry. You can sense the meaning from the context later. So move on to come back later if the time permits.
- Another good reading comprehension strategy is to read the questions first (which doesn’t mean to read the answer choices). This helps you know what information you need after reading the text. It will remind you to concentrate more on the required details from where the questions drawn.
- Read the passages as fast as you can and re-read the questions for correct understanding. For fast reading understanding the spirit of the text given, you have to train your eyes and mind to function simultaneously. As your mind begins to look for ideas rather than words, your eyes will begin to obey

your mind, which is always supreme. Good reading is good grasping and good grasping is only good reading.

The questions for reading comprehension usually test the ability to find out the following.

1. Main idea or a suitable title for the text.
2. Information directly given or specified in the passage or text.
3. Any inferences to arrive at logical conclusions from the passage given.
4. The meaning of new and strange words in the text.
5. The author's style, mood or point of view.

Among the choice answers, there will be certainly one or two answers most illogical and inappropriate. They must be eliminated. Some general knowledge, common sense and logical thinking will do the job of elimination. The remaining answers are either from the information given directly from the text or for inference. So, finally, the three words information, elimination and inference will do the job for being successful in reading comprehension. The following example from Davis quoted by Carroll would make any reader proficient only in simple comprehension feel out of his depth.

*The delight Tad had felt during his long hours in the glen faded as he drew near the cabin. The sun was nearly gone and Tad's father was at the wood pile. He was wearing the broadcloth suit that he wore to Church and to town sometimes. Tad saw his father's hands close around a bundle of wood. He was doing Tad's work and in his good clothes. Tad ran to him. "I'll get it, Pa."*

When Tad saw his father, he felt

- A) disappointed      B) impatient      C) angry      D) guilty

It is not easy to say which linguistic skills in what order and combinations would enable the expert reader to infer or deduce D as the correct answer. However, as pointed out by Carroll, the following two important points seem to be indisputably involved in comprehension:

- 1) Language comprehension occurs in situational contexts whose characteristics may influence not only the degree to which comprehension processes operate but also the nature and extent of certain other processes that may accompany comprehension, usually as a consequence of it. The special arrangements that are frequently necessary to test comprehension constitute such situational contexts.

- 2) Two processes often co-occurring with comprehension are memory and inference; while they are conceptually distinguishable from comprehension, their occurrence may make it difficult to assess the separate occurrence of the comprehension process itself.

Let us look into comprehension in practice as part of language in use.

We are going to take up sample passages and illustrate various kinds of difficulties involved in comprehending them.

**Passage 1:** Luckily at the moment he was much too busy talking to the man opposite him to catch sight of me.

Two things are necessary to understand this sentence fully. First, one has to know the structure 'too – to' (too busy to catch sight of me), so that one gets to know that the person mentioned was so busy doing something that he could not see the narrator. Secondly, under the given circumstances the narrator did not want to be seen by the man referred to. The latter understanding is implied by the use of the word 'luckily'.

**Passage 2:** These nephews of mine never give me any peace – that young man is the worst of them all! As you see, when he needs money, he even follows me into the country. Well, perhaps next time he won't even warn me by writing me a letter.

Confronted with a text like the above, assuming that the context is not known, one is called upon to make intelligent guesses, particularly, if one were asked to say what kind of man, a person who says such things, could be. This point can be exemplified by framing the following question:

The person who said these things is most likely to be

- a) Contented                      b) angry                      c) complaining                      d) miserly

Surely, there must be some skill or skills which would enable the reader to make the correct guess and choose c) as the best alternative. This too is an important part of the general ability making full comprehension possible.

**Passage 3:** Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. The general recognition of this fact is shown in the proverbial phrase, 'It is the busiest man who has time to spare.' Thus, an elderly lady at leisure can spend the entire day writing a postcard to her niece. An hour will be spent in finding the postcard,

another hunting for spectacles, half an hour to search for the address, an hour and a quarter in composition and twenty minutes in deciding whether or not to take an umbrella when going to the pillar box in the street. The total effort that would occupy a busy man for three minutes, all told, may in this fashion leave another person completely exhausted after a day of doubt, anxiety and toil.

1. Explain the sentence: 'Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion'.

A) The more work there is to be done, the more the time needed.

B) Whatever time is available for a given amount of work, all of it will be used.

C) If you have more time, you can do more work.

D) If you have some important work to do, you should always have some additional time.

The answer here is B. This can be found out through simple inference. A statement is made right in the beginning of the passage and the story of the lady illustrates the fact that whatever time is available for a work, people tend to use all of it.

2. Who is the person likely to take more time to do work?

A) A busy man

B) A man of leisure

C) An elderly person

D) An exhausted person

Here, the answer is B. It requires inference. The answer is to be inferred from the facts given in the passage that the more the time you have, the more you will need. Therefore this answer is arrived at through complex inference.

3. What does the expression 'pillar box' stand for?

A) A box attached to the pillar

B) A box in the pillar

C) Box office

D) A pillar-type post box

The answer is D. It can be derived through implied information. The lady has to go to the pillar box to drop her letter.

4. What happens when the time to be spent on some work increases?

A) The work is done smoothly

B) The work is done leisurely

C) The work consumes all the time

D) The work needs additional time

Here the method of elimination applies and simple inference confirms it. A and D are eliminated at the first reading. The description that the lady who has enough leisure time takes the entire day in writing the postcard gives us the clue that the correct answer is C. This again is complex inference.

5. What is the total time spent by the elderly lady in writing a postcard?

- A) Three minutes
- B) Four hours and five minutes
- C) Half an hour
- D) A full day

The answer is D and it is based on the information given in the passage.

**Passage 4:** The last half of my life has been lived in one of those painful epochs of human history during which the world is getting worse, and past victories which had seemed to be definitive have turned out to be only temporary. When I was young, Victorian optimism was taken for granted. It was thought that freedom and prosperity would spread gradually throughout the world through an orderly process, and it was hoped that cruelty, tyranny, and injustice would continually diminish. Hardly anyone was haunted by the fear of great wars. Hardly anyone thought of the nineteenth century as a brief interlude between past and future barbarism.

1. The author feels sad about the latter part of his life because:
  - A) He was nostalgic about his childhood
  - B) The world had not become prosperous
  - C) The author had not won any further victories
  - D) The world was painfully disturbed during that period of time
2. The victories of the past:
  - A) Brought permanent peace and prosperity
  - B) Ended cruelty, tyranny and injustice
  - C) Proved to be temporary events
  - D) Filled men with a sense of pessimism
3. The word 'definitive' used in the passage means:
  - A) Defined
  - B) Final
  - C) Temporary
  - D) Incomplete
4. During the Victorian age people believed that:
  - A) Strife would increase

- B) There would be unlimited freedom
  - C) Wars would be fought on a bigger scale
  - D) Peace would prevail and happiness would engulf the whole world
5. A brief interlude between past and future barbarism' can be interpreted as:
- A) A short period of time between past and future acts of savagery
  - B) A short space of time between two great events
  - C) An interval between cruel wars
  - D) A dramatic performance during wars

**Now, let us examine the answers:**

1. The answer is 'D'. You can hit at the answer through inference. The clue is in the first sentence itself—'the world is getting worse'. The whole passage also implies that the last half of the life of the author was a period of turmoil.
2. The answer is 'C' and it can be based on information given in the passage: 'the nineteenth century was a brief interlude'.
3. The answer is 'B'. Both information and simple inference suggest this answer.
4. The answer is 'D'. It is based on information.
5. The answer is 'A'. The information is implied in the question itself—'barbarism'. The passage also confirms it.

## Exercise

**Passage I:** Three-fourths of the surface of our planet is covered by the sea, which both separates and unites the various races of mankind. The sea is the great highway along which man may journey at his will, the great road that has no walls or hedges hemming it in, and that nobody has to keep it in good repair with the aid of pickaxes and barrels of tar and steamrollers. The sea appeals to man's love of the perilous and the unknown, to his love of conquest, his love of knowledge, and his love of gold. Its green, and grey and blue, and purple waters call to him and bid him fare forth in quest of fresh fields. Beyond their horizons he has found danger and death, glory and gain.

In most continents such as America and Australia, there are towns and villages many thousands of miles from the coast, whose children have never seen or heard-or felt the waves of the sea. But in the British Isles it is now here much more than a

hundred miles from the most inland spot. The love of the sea is in the very blood of the British people.

1. How much of our planet is not covered by the sea?
  - a) Half the planet
  - b) One-fourth of the planet
  - c) More than one can measure
  - d) Three-fourths of the planet
  
2. The sea helps a man
  - a) In building great roads
  - b) In making journey at his will all around the world
  - c) In raising walls on the coast
  - d) In clearing hedges he milling the sea-water
  
3. In what way does the sea appeal to man?
  - a) It helps man take lessons from the perilous waves and stay at home
  - b) It invites man to amass gold hidden under the sea-water.
  - c) It makes man wax eloquent about the futility of adventurous deeds
  - d) It bids man to venture out in quest of new places.
  
4. The children have not responded to the call of the sea
  - a) In remote towns and of America
  - b) In Great Britain
  - c) In the Antarctica
  - d) In India
  
5. The sea-route is kept in order
  - a) By steam rollers
  - b) By pickaxes
  - c) By regular repair
  - d) By none of these
  
6. What suitable title would you suggest?
  - a) Treasure trove of knowledge
  - b) Man's quest for the unknown
  - c) The irresistible call of the sea
  - d) The infatuation of the Britishers for the sea

7. The sea has been compared to
  - a) A steamroller
  - b) Hedges hemming it
  - c) The great highway
  - d) A spacecraft in motion
  
8. The sea has a special attraction for the people of
  - a) America
  - b) Britain
  - c) Australia
  - d) India
  
9. The sea is the great highway. The figure of speech employed here is
  - a) Metaphor
  - b) Simile
  - c) Poetic fancy
  - d) Alliteration

**Answers:** 1) b; 2) b; 3) d; 4) a; 5) b; 6) c; 7) c; 8) b; 9) a.

**Passage II:** Broken friendship may be repaired but the break will always show. Friendship is a precious thing-too precious a treasure to be carelessly broken or thrown away. The world handles the word 'friend' lightly; its real, true, deeper meaning is forgotten.

Your friend is one who appreciates you- your faults as well as your virtues. He understands and sympathizes with your defeats and victories, your aims and ideals, your joys and temptations, your hopes and disappointments, as no one else does or can. It is your friend to whom you turn for counsel, for comfort, for praise; he may not be as learned as some or as wise as others.

Blessed is the man or woman into whose life has come the beauty and power of such a friendship. Prize it well. Do all in your power to keep such a friendship unbroken. Avoid the break, for when it comes it can't be mended and the jarring note mars the harmony.

1. In what way will you judge your sincere friend?
  - a) By his appearance
  - b) By the way he appreciates your virtues
  - c) By the way he pinpoints your demerits
  - d) By the way he appreciates your faults and virtues
  - e) By no measures discussed above
  
2. A true friend is one who
  - a) Shares with another all the joys of life



- b) Encourages you in your hour of trials and tribulations
  - c) Deserts you
  - d) Shows lip sympathy
  - e) Shares your defeats and victories, aims and ideals, joys and temptations
3. We owe our blessed life to
- a) The experience of moments of loneliness
  - b) A friend's constant companionship
  - c) The power and beauty of friendship
  - d) The feeling that there is someone to humour us
  - e) None of the things mentioned so far
4. Why do we turn to sincere friends?
- a) For physical support
  - b) For financial support
  - c) For their magnanimity
  - d) For their paeans of praise
  - e) For their counsel, comfort and words of cheer
5. Friend ought not to be broken. Why?
- a) Because it will foster discord
  - b) Because it will make life troublesome
  - c) Because it will rob life of all its vitality and vivacity
  - d) Because it will foster pessimistic attitude towards life
  - e) Because broken friendship can't be mended

**Answers:** 1) d; 2) e; 3) c; 4) e; 5) e

**Passage III:** Many people think that science and religion are contrary to each other. But this notion is wrong. As a matter of fact, both these are complementary to each other. The aim of both these institutions is to explain different aspects of life, universe and human existence. There is no doubt that the methods of science and religion are different. The method of science is observation, experimentation and experience. Science takes its recourse to progressive march towards perfection, the rules of religion are faith, intuition and spoken word of the enlightened, in general, while science is inclined towards reason and rationality, spiritualism is the essence of religion.

In earlier times when man appeared on earth, he was over-awed at the sight of violent and powerful aspects of objects of nature overwhelmed man. Thus began the worship of forces of nature-fire, the sun, the rivers, the rocks, the trees, the snakes etc. The holy scriptures were written by those who had developed harmony between external nature and their inner self. The object was to ennoble, elevate and liberate the human spirit and mind. But the priestly class took upon itself the monopoly of scriptural knowledge and interpretation to its own advantage. Thus the entire human race was in chains. Truth was flouted and progressive, liberal and truthful ideas of their beholders punished. It was in these trying circumstances the **science emerged as a saviour of mankind**. But its path was not smooth and safe. The scientists and free thinkers were tortured. This was the fate of Copernicus, Galileo, Bruno and others. But, by and by science gained ground. (Indian Bank Pos)

1. Why does man worship the force of nature, according to the passage?
  - a) The holy scriptures advocate the worship of forces of nature.
  - b) The worship elevates and liberates the human spirit and mind.
  - c) The worship makes man believe in faith and intuition.
  - d) Forces of nature preached us spiritualism.
  - e) None of the above.
  
2. Which of the following statements is true in the context of the passage?
  - a) Science and religion are antagonistic to each other.
  - b) Science encourages worship of nature.
  - c) Religion is essential for external peace and harmony.
  - d) Regimental religion was replaced by scientific principles.
  - e) Science is essential for inner peace of mind.
  
3. According to the passage science and religion both
  - a) Rely on the spoken word of the enlightened
  - b) Emerged out of the fear of man
  - c) Emerged from the desire of man to worship the forces of nature
  - d) Employ different methods of enquiry
  - e) Work at the cross-purpose of each other
  
4. Why is it said in the passage that ‘science emerged as a saviour of mankind’?
  - a) Many great thinkers contributed to the progress of science
  - b) Science takes recourse to progressive march towards perfection

- c) Science is inclined towards reason and rationality
  - d) Man was bound in chains by religious orthodoxy
  - e) The free thinkers and enlightened men were tortured
5. Which of the following statements is not true in the context of the passage?
- a) Man worship the forces of nature
  - b) Methods of science and religion are different
  - c) Regimental religion got degenerated into orthodoxy
  - d) Galileo and Bruno were disciples of Copernicus
  - e) The holy scriptures were written by people who had tremendous inner strength
6. Choose the word which is most nearly the same in meaning as the word 'flouted' as used in the passage:
- a) mocked
  - b) nourished
  - c) expressed
  - d) deflated
  - e) concealed
7. According to the passage science and religion:
- a) Are contrary to each other
  - b) Have the same origin
  - c) Are supportive of each other
  - d) Have the same aim of controlling universe
  - e) Don't allow any deviation from their rules
8. According to the passage, at the present juncture, there is a need to:
- a) Encourage spiritualism as much as possible
  - b) Teach people to worship the forces of nature
  - c) Free man from all sorts of bondage
  - d) Explain to the people different aspects of life and universe
  - e) Judiciously mix the principles of science and true spirit of religion
9. What was the object of the authors of the Holy Scriptures?
- a) To teach man the methods of worshipping nature
  - b) To educate the progressive and liberal ideas
  - c) To educate and raise the human spirit and mind
  - d) To develop harmony between external nature and their inner self
  - e) None of the above

10. Choose the words which is most opposite in meaning of the 'enlightened' as used in the passage

- a) Uniformed                      b) Derogatory                      c) Downtrodden  
d) Educated                      e) Authority

**Answers:** 1) b                      2) d                      3) d                      4) d                      5) d  
6) a                      7) c                      8) e                      9) c                      10) a

**Passage IV:** In 1923, he landed in England. In 1928, he returned to India in response to an urgent call from Bhagat Singh. When he reached Lahore, he was detained for violation of the Arms Act. He was released after four years rigorous imprisonment. In 1935, he escaped to Germany by giving a slip to the police. From Berlin, he reached Paris and purchased a revolver. He kept it ready for action and managed to reach London again. Opportunity came on 13 March, 1940 when Sir Michael O' Dwyer was to speak at a seminar in the Caxton Hall. As Sir Michael turned to resume his seat after the speech, Udham Singh pulled out his revolver and fired at him. Sir Michael died without a shriek. Udham Singh was arrested and produced before the court on 2 April, 1940. The court passed death sentence on him and he was hanged at Pentonville Prison, London on 3 July, 1940.

- Udham Singh went to America where he
  - Mobilised the Indian citizens for the liberation of the motherland
  - Collected sufficient funds to fight colonialism
  - Met fellow-citizens working for the same cause
  - Went speculating
  - Mobilised likeminded Americans and Indians against the British
- Where did Udham Singh buy the weapon which was used for killing Sir Michael?
  - Paris
  - Lahore
  - London
  - Berlin
  - None of these
- Udham Singh shot at Sir Michael O' Dwyer in
  - Jallianwala Bagh
  - Amritsar
  - London
  - Lahore
  - Paris
- When Udham Singh was arrested in Lahore, he was charged for
  - Instigating his countrymen against the Britishers

- b) His links with anti-British forces
  - c) Concealing his identity and carrying on underground activities
  - d) Possessing unlicensed arms and ammunition
  - e) Plotting the assassination of Sir Michael O' Dwyer
5. Udham Singh returned to India in 1928 mainly because he was
- a) Short of funds to meet his expenses
  - b) To procure some arms from Lahore
  - c) To escape from the British police
  - d) Called by a revolutionary in India

**Answers:** 1) c    2) c    3) c    4) d    5) d

**Passage V:** White cement is the basic raw material for producing cement tiles and cement paint which are used extensively in building construction. The main consumers of white cement are, therefore, cement tile and cement paint manufacturing units. These consumers, mostly in the small scale sector, are today facing a major crisis because of a significant increase in the price of white cement during a short period. The present annual licensed production capacity of white and grey cement in the country is approximately 3.5 lakh tonnes. The average demand is 2 - 2.5 tonnes. This means that there is idle capacity to the tune of one lakh tonnes or more. The price rise is, therefore, not a phenomenon arising out of inadequate production capacity but evidently because of artificial scarcity created by the manufacturers in their self interest.

The main reason for the continuing spurt in cement price is its decontrol. As it is, there is stiff competition in the cement paint and tile manufacturing business. Any further price revision at this stage is bound to have a severe adverse impact on the market conditions. The Government should take adequate steps to ensure that suitable controls are brought in. Else it should allow import of cement.

1. Why is the price of cement going up?
- a) Because the Government is controlling the quota
  - b) Because of export of white cement
  - c) Because of extensive use of white cement
  - d) Because of large amount of usage of white cement for construction
  - e) None of these

2. Which of the following statements is false according to the passage?
  - a) Price rise in the white cement would increase the price of cement paint
  - b) White cement is a controlled product.
  - c) Increase in price of white cement is not because of production problem.
  - d) Price rise in white cement would upset cement tile market.
  - e) Most cement paint manufacturers are from small scale sector.
  
3. What is the crisis being faced by the cement tile manufacturers as described in the passage?
  - a) White cement is priced very low.
  - b) White cement is not of good quality.
  - c) White cement usage is high.
  - d) White cement prices are very high.
  - e) White cement is being exported.
  
4. Which of the following words has the same meaning as the word 'idle' as used in the passage?
  - a) Lazy
  - b) Clumsy
  - c) Large
  - d) Excess
  - e) Known
  
5. Which of the following is correct according to the passage?
  - a) White cement is not used in the manufacture of paint.
  - b) White cement forms a minor part of tile manufacturing.
  - c) White cement is very important for tile manufacturing.
  - d) White cement is used only for making paints.
  - e) None of these.
  
6. Which of the following words has the same meaning as the word 'artificial' as used in the passage?
  - a) Unnatural
  - b) Prolonged
  - c) Practical
  - d) Absolute
  - e) Deliberate.
  
7. What is the author's suggestion to bring down prices?
  - a) Government should control the white cement market.
  - b) Production capacity should be increased.
  - c) Usage of white cement in other areas should be reduced.

- d) Competition among manufacturers of cement paints and tiles should be reduced.  
e) None of these.
8. Which of the following words has the opposite meaning as the word 'basic' as used in the passage?  
a) Vital                      b) Unimportant                      c) Acidic  
d) Last                      e) Small
9. Which of the following is correct according to the passage?  
a) Cement production capacity is more than usage.  
b) Cement production capacity is less than usage.  
c) Cement production capacity equal to usage.  
d) Cement production capacity is twice than usage.  
e) None of these.
10. What can be presumed from the passage regarding foreign trade in cement?  
a) The country is exporting cement at present.  
b) The country is importing cement at present.  
c) The country is exporting and importing cement.  
d) The country is neither exporting nor importing cement.  
e) None of these.

**Answers:** 1) e      2) b      3) d      4) d      5) c  
6) e      7) a      8) b      9) a      10) d

**Passage VI:** To those who do listen, the desert speaks of things with an emphasis quite different from that of the shore, the mountain, the valley or the plains. Whereas these invite action and suggest limitless opportunity and exhaustless resources, the implications and the mood of the desert are something different. For one thing, the desert is conservative, not radical. It is more likely to provoke awe than to invite conquest. The heroism which it encourages is the heroism of endurance, not that of conquest. It brings man up against this limitation, turns him in upon himself and suggests values which more indulgent regions suppress. Sometimes it includes contemplation in men who has never contemplated before. And of all the answers to the question what is a desert good for 'contemplation' is perhaps the best.

1. In order to receive the desert's message the beholder needs to be
  - a) Courageous in his reaction.
  - b) Conservative in his responses.
  - c) A good listener.
  - d) Sensitive to nature.
  
2. The desert is unique among landscapes in that it encourages only
  - a) Contemplation
  - b) Indolence
  - c) Heroic Endeavour
  - d) Adventurous spirit
  
3. If one responds with insight to the mood of the desert, it evokes
  - a) An inclination for deep thought.
  - b) The possibility of unending resources.
  - c) The desire for heroic conquest.
  - d) A sense of intense revulsion
  
4. The writer calls the desert 'conservative' rather than 'radical' because it provides an environment that
  - a) Inspires man to explore it.
  - b) Offers unlimited opportunity to conquer.
  - c) Tests one's endurance
  - d) Makes one gloomy.
  
5. What does the phrase 'It brings man up against his limitations' mean?
  - a) It makes man feel hopeless about his limitations
  - b) It makes man aware of his limitations
  - c) It compels man to fight against his limitations
  - d) It persuades man to overcome his limitations.

**Answers:** 1) d                      2) a                      3) a                      4) c                      5) d