

IELTS ADVANTAGE



READING SKILLS

A step-by-step guide
to a high IELTS reading score

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IELTS Advantage – Reading Skills

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Introduction

Who is this book for?

This book is for students who are planning to take the IELTS Academic Reading Test and who are aiming for a score of 6.5–7.0 or higher. Students who are taking the General IELTS Test can also benefit from the book, though it is aimed in particular at those taking the Academic Test. While the reading texts in this book, and those in the test, are broadly of an academic nature, they are not highly specialized. As with the test itself, you will not be expected to have specialist knowledge of the subjects discussed. This book contains many hours of work for the motivated student and offers intensive practice for everyone who wants to brush up their skills before taking the test.

How is it organized?

The book is divided into ten units based on topics commonly found in the IELTS Reading Paper. Each unit is divided into different sections so that you can:

- get to know the many question types that may appear in the IELTS Reading Paper
- develop reading skills which will help you cope with the large amount of reading required in the test
- learn strategies which will help you make effective use of your time when taking the exam
- broaden your vocabulary, with particular attention paid to paraphrases, synonyms and collocations, which are all essential for students who want to get a good result in the IELTS test.

At the back of the book, you will find useful pages that will help you become more confident with some of the essential skills you need to be successful at IELTS, such as suggested websites that will give you hours of useful reading practice, tips for effective vocabulary learning, problems to avoid when filling in the answer sheet and how to get the most from your dictionary.

How can it help me get a better IELTS score?

Many students do not do well on the IELTS Reading Paper, not because their English is poor, but because they lack the strategies that will help them get a good result. This book will teach you a range of strategies for reading more effectively and for understanding the text more easily, and give you a lot of guidance about the best way of how to approach the various question forms. Some of the texts are slightly longer and harder than those you will find in the test – stretching you a little so that there should be no nasty surprises when you come to the test itself.

In addition to reading and completing the exercises in the book, we recommend that you:

- add useful new vocabulary to a separate notebook. While you will not be expected to have any specialized vocabulary for the test, the broader your vocabulary in English, the easier the Reading Paper will be for you
- underline phrases and collocations throughout this book, as these are the building blocks of a text. Then decide if they are worth writing in your notebook and learning
- time yourself while you read some of the texts and compare your times with your colleagues. Being able to read quickly is a very useful asset in the IELTS Reading Paper
- make contact with other IELTS students online and support each other in your studies, especially if you do not have the benefit of studying with other students in a classroom
- read, read, read. The more you read, the easier and more enjoyable it becomes. In this book, we give recommendations for the kinds of material you may find useful. With the Internet, there are many opportunities for the well-motivated student to get extra reading practice.

Can I use the book for self-study?

Yes, you can. The book works well for classroom use and also for self-study. In class, you have the benefit of discussing the questions with your classmates, while at home you have some peace and quiet to concentrate (we hope!); you also have the answer key and many comments to guide you through the answers. Discussion tasks are obviously easier when you are in a group. However, if you are studying on your own, we suggest you try this approach:

- 1 Make a list of your own ideas on the topic.
- 2 Put yourself in the position of someone who disagrees with you and make a list of the ideas they could have which are different from yours. To help you, imagine what these people would say:
 - a someone 30 years older than you
 - b someone who lives on the opposite side of the world to you
 - c someone whose religious and political beliefs are different from yours
 - d someone who has much more/less money than you do.
- 3 Imagine a dialogue between people with these different views: how would each person put forward and defend their arguments? How would they argue against opposing points?

Useful information about the IELTS Reading Paper

- You will take the Reading Paper **after** the Listening Paper and **before** the Writing Paper.
- Do not bring a mobile phone or any other communication device into the examination room. Just bring some pencils, an eraser and your ID.
- You will be given a reading text booklet and an answer sheet.
- The Reading Paper consists of three reading texts of approximately 900 words each, with the first text a little easier than the others.
- Each text is accompanied by 13 or 14 questions, with usually three or four different question types for each text. There are 40 questions in total, with 1 mark for each question.
- The test lasts for one hour; you do **not** have extra time to transfer your answers to the answer sheet. Aim to spend 20 minutes on each text, including writing your answers.

The IELTS Reading Paper

There are three reading passages in the test, with a total of 2,000–2,700 words (Academic Training) or 2,000–2,500 words (General Training). There are 40 questions, and you have one hour to do everything. There is no time at the end for you to transfer your answers to the mark sheet. That's why it is important to be able to read quickly and effectively.

The texts in the **Academic Training** module are taken from magazines, journals, books and newspapers. They are written for an educated but non-specialist audience. They are intended to be interesting and accessible to students who aim to enter university at undergraduate or postgraduate level, or for people intending to use English in their professional life. At least one of the texts will have a detailed logical argument that you have to follow. One text may include visual materials such as diagrams, charts or graphs. In the **General Training** module, texts are taken from sources such as notices, advertisements, official documents, instruction manuals, leaflets and timetables, as well as books and magazines. The first section focuses on social survival. The second section focuses on training survival. The final section is general reading.

For both the **Academic** and **General Training** modules, the texts become progressively longer and more complicated, so it is a good idea to try to do the first section more quickly than the others.

There are a number of techniques and strategies you can use to read faster and understand more. In each unit of this book, we will give you practice with different types of exam question and help you to improve your reading skills with some useful techniques.

Use this test to assess your current reading skills.

Are you a good reader?

- 1 How many hours do you spend reading in English in a normal week?
a) 0–1 b) 2–3 c) 4–6 d) 6–8 e) 9+
- 2 On average, how long do you spend reading each time?
a) up to 10 minutes b) 10–30 minutes c) 30–45 minutes
d) 45–60 minutes e) more than 60 minutes
- 3 Tick which of these you have read in English in the past week:
A a timetable ☐ a magazine ☐ a publicity poster ☐
a price list ☐ a telephone directory ☐
product information on food ☐
B an email from a friend ☐ a recipe ☐
a travel brochure ☐ a dictionary ☐
an advert or leaflet for a product or service ☐
C a review ☐ a blog ☐ an encyclopaedic entry ☐
a manual or set of instructions ☐
the lyrics to a song ☐ the blurb of a book ☐
D a whole newspaper or a short story or part of
a novel ☐ a poem ☐ an academic text ☐
a semi-specialized article on a topic of interest ☐

Check your score

- 1 a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) 4
- 2 a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) 4
- 3 1 point for each answer in A;
2 points for each answer in B;
3 points for each answer in C;
4 points for each answer in D.
In addition, give yourself 1 point for each full month between now and when you plan to take the IELTS test.

Results

0–10: You need much more practice to give yourself the best chance of getting a good score in IELTS.

11–15: You do read in English, but are not getting enough practice with reading different sorts of texts. You need to increase your focus on reading.

16–20: You are on the right track for getting a good result in IELTS. Try to increase the amount you are reading, and include a little more variety in your reading.

21+: Excellent! You give yourself a lot of reading practice. With a little more focus, you can get a great score in IELTS.

UNIT 1

Full of energy

In this unit, you will:

- discuss a range of energy sources and their effect on the environment
- study and practise **multiple-choice questions**
- study and practise **paragraph-heading questions**.

Getting started

1 Look at these three forms of energy production and discuss the questions below.



- Are any of these systems used to produce energy in your country?
 - Which system is the best/worst for the environment?
 - Which system(s) do you think will still be in use in 100 years' time?
- 2 a** Put these energy sources into the appropriate column of the table below.
- biofuel biomass coal ethanol fossil fuel gas hydro-electric power
nuclear power peat solar power tidal energy wind power

non-renewable energy resources	renewable energy resources

- b** Answer these questions about the energy sources.
- Which of them involve burning?
 - Which do you think are the safest?
 - How many did you have to look up in a dictionary?
- 3** Discuss these questions.
- What can we do to prepare for the time when non-renewable energy resources run out?
 - What effect does our thirst for energy have on the environment, and how is this likely to change in the future?



Spotlight on language

Energy collocations

- 1** Write four or five sentences that reflect your opinion or the situation in your country. Use these collocations, which are all based on the words *source* and *energy*, and the sentence beginnings below.

source of ... useful source of ... source material government sources
source of confusion source of information at source energy drink
green energy put your creative energies into ... solar energy energy loss

- 1 According to ...
- 2 The source of energy we read about most in my country ...
- 3 In my opinion, we should use more ...
- 4 Green energy is ...
- 5 A useful source of ...

Example: *According to government sources, plans to promote green energy are now receiving more attention than ever before.*

Collocations are an important part of natural, fluent language. You can be sure every text in the IELTS test will contain a number of them, as they are a frequent feature of all speaking and writing. Learning common collocations is also an excellent way to make your English sound more natural.

Write out collocations and useful expressions for different energy sources in your notebook – the more context you can give your examples, the better.

Working from context

- 2** Which energy sources are being talked about in these sentences? It is the same source in a, b and c in each case.

- 1 a As the seams of and iron were exhausted, or became unprofitable to work, mining and smelting diminished.
b After a leisurely tea by a fire, I asked the clerk to phone for a taxi.
c He watched Peter climb onto the large heap of by the wall and start to fill a bag.
Energy source =

- 2 a In the Philippines, the aim is to reduce the heavy dependence on imported
b I think it is fair to say that the really top-quality olives are usually sold in rather than in brine.
c In 2010, the tragedy at the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig led to the release of an estimated 750,000 cubic metres of into the sea, with serious ecological consequences.
Energy source =

- 3 a The question of how to create an economical and reliable supply of electricity without the costs and environmental disadvantages of power was approached from two separate directions.
b The Oxford Survey of Childhood Cancers compared the job histories of the fathers of children with cancers to those of the fathers of healthy children and found that those who worked with materials were more at risk.
c It is becoming increasingly difficult to take seriously claims that the civil side of power has nothing to do with weapons.
Energy source =



Multiple choice

Multiple-choice questions test your ability to read for specific information. There are different types of multiple choice. This type offers you a 'stem' – sometimes an incomplete statement or a question – and three or four possible answers. Read the questions before you read the passage so you know what you are looking for.

1 Read this text, then answer the question that follows.

Tips

- You will not be penalized for wrong answers, so even if you don't know the answer, write something down.
- The different options for the answers include plausible 'distractors' – the wrong answers that only close reading will show to be wrong. These often contain key words from the text, so read carefully!
- You will not be expected to have any specialist knowledge of the subject.
- Read the question and options before you read the text and try to predict the answer.

Energy profile of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's dependence on energy imports has been quite favourable to date (32% of energy demand is met by imports); however, it is structurally unbalanced. The country's dependence on oil is about 95%, and in the case of natural gas, it is about 98%. The Czech Republic also imports nuclear power, but the primary resource, uranium ore, is available and produced domestically. In 2006, some 260,000 tonnes of oil and 150 mcm* of natural gas came from indigenous resources. However, the country's dependence on energy imports is expected to grow (to almost 50% by 2020). A number of direct and indirect measures must be adopted to slow the rate at which the Czech Republic's dependence on energy imports is increasing. Key measures include those geared towards promoting energy efficiency, supporting renewable energy resources in areas where they are effective (in accordance with the government's energy policy: 8% by 2010 and 16.9% by 2030), supporting nuclear energy (zero-emission energy sources) and improving the availability and extending the life span of the hidden potential of indigenous solid fuels, mainly brown coal.

*mcm = million cubic metres

adapted from www.euracoal.org

Which of these statements best describes energy use in the Czech Republic?

- A The country imports almost all of its energy.
- B The country's need for imported energy is likely to decrease through energy efficiency.
- C The country considers nuclear power as one of the potential solutions to the problem of imported energy.
- D The country aims to double its energy efficiency between 2010 and 2030.

Comments

- A Not true: ... *but the primary resource, uranium ore, is available and produced domestically.*
- B Not true: Although energy efficiency is mentioned, it will not be enough to stop the Czech Republic's increasing need for energy imports.
- C True
- D Not true: The figures for energy efficiency are not given.

2 You are going to read a longer text about our increasing need for energy. Before you read, predict which of these topics are likely to be discussed.

energy-saving measures nuclear power pollution health risks
population growth scientific research transport finance

3 Read the text on page 10 and answer the three multiple-choice questions that follow.

Energy crisis? What crisis?

Looking at the forecasts for the world's energy demands for the future is pretty frightening. As the population of the world has increased, so has our thirst for energy. Should we build more nuclear power stations, as these don't produce the carbon dioxide that conventional coal or gas-fired power stations produce? But wait a minute – nuclear power is dangerous! Following the accident in Chernobyl in 1986, many people turned against nuclear power, preferring greener options like wind and solar power. But how reliable is wind power? Even in windy parts of the world, like western England, the wind turbines are not always turning. What could make up the shortfall when the wind stops blowing? Coal? Far too dirty. Gas? Cleaner than coal, but it still produces carbon dioxide. Nuclear? Too dangerous and politically sensitive. Solar power? In northern Europe? You must be joking.

That future generations will have to find alternatives goes without saying. Without trying to sound too apocalyptic, there is no way that we can maintain our present lifestyles. It is still not clear just how much damage we have already done, and are currently doing, to the planet, but the vast majority of scientists believe that we have to do something.

If we accept that change has to take place, we can consider what the catalyst will be for such change. Will it be governments telling us to save energy in various ways? Will it be companies producing ever more energy-efficient products? Or will it be people that change? Some may change for ideological

reasons, believing that to save the planet they will need to change and will stop driving their gas-guzzling four-by-fours and heating their houses to 25 degrees in winter so that they can sit in shorts and a T-shirt to watch their home cinema. Many more are likely to change, not for ideological reasons, but for financial ones. As the price of energy increases – unless a new cheap source of energy is found, it almost certainly will – people will face stark choices: money for food or money for heating. (Interestingly, since the recent financial crisis, there has been a significant increase in the number of people growing their own food, and consequently the demand for allotments, once seen as the preserve of old men, has skyrocketed.)

It is quite probable that we won't be able to rely on the governments of the world to get us out of this difficult situation. Most democratic governments are not around for more than a decade, so it is clear that they are more likely to look at the short-term rather than long-term difficulties.

Perhaps surprisingly, some of the poorest people in the world will be least affected. If you are a subsistence farmer, growing enough food for your family and just a few more vegetables to sell at the market, then you are unlikely to have high energy requirements. However, if you can't live without your car and spend a high proportion of your income on energy in its various forms, then it is highly likely that you will have to accept some quite dramatic changes in your life.

- 1 According to the writer, our energy needs in the future ...
 - A will depend on how the climate changes.
 - B involve equally dangerous options.
 - C have no easy solution.
 - D must include a cleaner use of gas.
- 2 The writer feels that most people will change their behaviour ...
 - A because energy will be more expensive in the future.
 - B because governments will encourage a change in attitude.
 - C because new technology will improve energy efficiency.
 - D for ideological reasons.
- 3 According to the text, in recent times, demand for allotments has ...
 - A fallen quickly.
 - B steadily declined.
 - C risen slowly.
 - D increased dramatically.

Comments

- 1 The answers to the questions are in order in the text, so you can presume that the answer to number 1 is somewhere near the beginning.
 - A Not correct. Aspects of climate are mentioned, but not climate change.
 - B Not correct. Danger is only mentioned in connection with nuclear power.
 - C Correct. The fact there are questions about each form shows there is no easy answer.
 - D Not correct. Gas is mentioned, but not as a 'must'.
- 2 The key to the answer is in the words *most* in the question and *many more* in the key sentence in the text.
 - A Correct
 - B Not correct: This is speculative.
 - C Not correct: This is also speculative.
 - D Not correct: More will change for financial reasons.
- 3 You may well not know the word *allotment*, but you don't need to know it to be able to answer the question. The text states that *there has been a significant increase in the number of people growing their own food, and consequently the demand for allotments ... has skyrocketed*. Again, you may not have seen the word *skyrocketed* before, but the word does suggest something going up very quickly, so the answer is D.

Vocabulary builder 1

Building your bank of words and phrases

As you work through this book, you will increase your vocabulary in the process. This will help you read faster and understand texts more easily. Keep a notebook with you and add any useful new words, expressions or collocations to it, ideally with a bit of context so that you can see how the word or phrase is used. One very important focus is on developing your awareness of paraphrases – different ways of saying the same thing. This is because in the test, the questions will rarely use the same grammar and key words as occur in the text.

1 Look at the relevant paragraphs of the text on page 10 and find words or expressions that have a similar meaning to these definitions.

- 1 quite scary (paragraph 1) *pretty frightening*
- 2 normal, traditional (paragraph 1)
- 3 more environmentally friendly (paragraph 1)
- 4 compensate for a deficiency (paragraph 1)
- 5 is obvious (paragraph 2)
- 6 continue living as we do (paragraph 2)
- 7 types of car that consume a lot of fuel (paragraph 3)
- 8 have difficult decisions to make (paragraph 3)
- 9 solve this problem (paragraph 4)
- 10 use much of the money that you earn to buy something (paragraph 5)

2 Which of the words or expressions in Exercise 1 do you think will be most useful for you?



Spotlight on exam skills 2

Paragraph headings

To match paragraph headings to paragraphs, you have to understand the basic idea – the 'gist' – of a paragraph. There will always be more headings than you need.

1 Which of these is the best title for the passage on page 12?

A

Solar power turns darkness to light in Zimbabwe

B

Ambitious project curtails land degradation

C

UNDP invests \$7 million in Zimbabwe

D

Shamva's farmers share solar power systems

Tips

- 1 Read the headings before you read the text so you know what to focus on.
- 2 Check the instructions to see if you can use a heading more than once.
- 3 Identify key words in the headings.
- 4 Scan the text for similar ideas and paraphrases of key words.
- 5 Remember that the first paragraph of a text is often a general introduction to the topic, so see if one of the headings seems more general than the others.
- 6 When you have matched a heading and a paragraph, cross out the heading.
- 7 Check your answers by rereading the paragraph and ensuring the heading is a logical summary.

In the early 1990s, numerous villages turned to solar power in parts of Africa where one might least expect to stumble upon an oasis of lights shimmering in the pitch-black night. Perhaps the most ambitious project of this nature, and one that is often cited, is a Zimbabwean project supported by UNDP through the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The initiative, jointly funded by GEF (\$7m) and Zimbabwe (\$400,000), installed some 9,000 solar power systems throughout the country in a bid to improve living standards, but also to curtail land degradation and pollution.

The River Estate near Shamva, 70 kilometres from Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, boasts one of the best solar-village models in the country. Fifty-two commercial farming families share systems; there is one system for every two houses. Each family has two lamps and a connection for a radio or small television set. The new lighting systems have improved the quality of life for the community. They have extended study hours for schoolchildren, reduced rural-to-urban migration in the area, and upgraded health standards by electrifying a local health centre.

adapted from www.un.org

Comments

Although B, C and D all mention things from the text, it is only A which encompasses the information from the whole text, so A is the correct answer.

2 Read the paragraph below and decide which of these headings best suits it, and why.

- A A difficult balancing act for news organizations
- B The potential dangers of alternative medicine
- C Alternative medicine fights back

Many news organizations are desperate to be seen as being fair to all sides. For example, when a doctor is on a news programme to talk about the potential dangers of alternative medicine, there will almost certainly be an alternative-medicine practitioner on the same programme. The presenter of the programme, keen to remain neutral, gives them both equal air time to put their side of the story. But does this give a realistic view to the public? Perhaps by remaining neutral, the news organizations are giving an unbalanced view.

Comments

While alternative medicine is mentioned in the paragraph, it was only used as an example to illustrate a wider problem: the difficulty that news organizations face is trying to present the facts and remain neutral at the same time. Therefore, A is the answer.

3 Read the text *Our energy requirements* on page 13. It has seven paragraphs, A–G. Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list above the text. There are more headings than you need. Write the correct number (i–x) next to each question (1–7).

- 1 Paragraph Aviii.....
- 2 Paragraph B
- 3 Paragraph C
- 4 Paragraph D
- 5 Paragraph E
- 6 Paragraph F
- 7 Paragraph G

List of Headings

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| i The process of physical development | vi Forms of exertion |
| ii Dealing with food | vii Expecting a baby |
| iii Beneficial activities | viii Essential processes |
| iv Reserves of fat | ix Mental relaxation |
| v Mother's milk | x Energy as a key to life |

Our energy requirements

As human beings, we depend on energy in many ways.

A This comprises a series of functions that are

essential for life, such as cell function and replacement; the synthesis, secretion and metabolism of enzymes and hormones to transport proteins and other substances and molecules; the maintenance of body temperature; the uninterrupted work of cardiac and respiratory muscles; and brain function. The amount of energy used for basal metabolism in a period of time is called the *basal metabolic rate* (BMR), and is measured under standard conditions that include being awake in the supine position after 10 to 12 hours of fasting and eight hours of physical rest, and being in a state of mental relaxation in an ambient environmental temperature that does not cause heat-generating or heat-dissipating processes. BMR represents 45 to 70 per cent of daily total energy expenditure and is determined mainly by the individual's age, gender, body size, body composition and lifestyle.

B Eating requires energy for the ingestion and

digestion of what we put in our mouths, and for the absorption, transport, interconversion, oxidation and deposition of nutrients. These metabolic processes increase heat production and oxygen consumption, and are known by terms such as *dietary-induced thermogenesis*, *specific dynamic action of food* and *thermic effect of feeding*. The metabolic response to nutrition increases total energy expenditure by about 10 per cent of the BMR over a 24-hour period in individuals eating a mixed diet.

C This is the most variable and, after BMR, the

second largest component of daily energy expenditure. Humans perform *obligatory* and *discretionary* physical activities. Obligatory activities can seldom be avoided within a given setting, and they are imposed on the individual by economic, cultural or societal demands. The term "obligatory" is more comprehensive than

the term "occupational" that was used in the 1985 report (WHO, 1985) because, in addition to occupational work, obligatory activities include daily activities such as going to school, tending to the home and family and other demands made on children and adults by their economic, social and cultural environment.

D Discretionary activities, although not socially or

economically essential, are important for health, well-being and a good quality of life in general. They include the regular practice of physical activity for fitness and health; the performance of optional household tasks that may contribute to family comfort and well-being; and the engagement in individually and socially desirable activities for personal enjoyment, social interaction and community development.

E The energy cost of growth has two components:

1) the energy needed to synthesize growing tissues; and 2) the energy deposited in those tissues. The energy cost of growth is about 35 per cent of total energy requirement during the first three months of age, falls rapidly to about 5 per cent at 12 months and about 3 per cent in the second year, remains at 1 to 2 per cent until mid-adolescence, and is negligible in the late teens.

F During pregnancy, extra energy is needed for the

growth of the foetus, placenta and various maternal tissues, such as in the uterus, breasts and fat stores, as well as for changes in maternal metabolism and the increase in maternal effort at rest and during physical activity.

G The energy cost of lactation has two components:

1) the energy content of this food for the baby; and 2) the energy required in its production. Well-nourished lactating women can derive part of this additional requirement from body fat stores accumulated during pregnancy.

4 Read this checklist and the related expert advice.

Question	Expert advice
1 Did you read the questions carefully and write i-x in the right place?	<i>You must write i-x, not 1-10.</i>
2 Did you leave any answers blank?	<i>If you did, you're throwing away points. If you really don't know, guess.</i>
3 Did you start by reading the text slowly and carefully?	<i>This is not a good idea. The first time you read the text, you should read quickly to get the gist.</i>
4 Did you read the headings before or after you read the text?	<i>Most effective readers read the questions first, so they know what information they are looking for, and then read the text.</i>
5 Did you read the text quickly to get a general idea of the content?	<i>This is a good strategy to use.</i>
6 Did you reread one paragraph at a time trying to find a suitable match?	<i>This is good. Focus on one paragraph, read all the headings, find the best match, then move on to the next paragraph.</i>
7 Did you reread the headings, then reread the whole text to find a match each time?	<i>This wastes your time because instead of rereading the headings, which are short, each time, you reread the whole text. Don't do this.</i>
8 Did you look for the same words in the heading and the paragraphs?	<i>Be careful. You might spot the same word in a heading and paragraph, but that doesn't mean the heading summarizes the key idea.</i>
9 Did you find words which have the same meanings as the headings in the paragraphs?	<i>Often, the heading will summarize or paraphrase a paragraph.</i>
10 Did you cross out the headings as you used them?	<i>Do this – it saves time and makes it easier to match the remaining headings.</i>
11 Did you cross out the example heading already given before you matched the others?	<i>Again, this helps you save time.</i>
12 Did you look up any new words or expressions in the dictionary?	<i>In the test, you won't be able to use a dictionary. You should try to practise working out the meanings of new words from the context.</i>

5 You are going to read an article about using natural gas in cars. Before you read, predict which of these topics will occur in the article.

cost engine design family life pollution road safety taxis storage

6 Now read the article on pages 15–16 and check your answers to Exercise 5.

Natural gas in the transportation sector

Natural gas has long been considered an alternative fuel for the transportation sector. In fact, natural gas has been used to fuel vehicles since the 1930s!

According to the Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition, there are currently 150,000 natural gas vehicles (NGVs) on the road in the United States today, and more than 5 million NGVs worldwide. In fact, the transportation sector accounts for 3 per cent of all natural gas used in the United States. In recent years, technology has improved to allow for a proliferation of NGVs, particularly for fuel-intensive vehicle fleets, such as taxicabs and public buses. However, virtually all types of NGVs are either in production today for sale to the public or in development, from passenger cars, trucks, buses, vans, and even heavy-duty utility vehicles. Despite these advances, a number of disadvantages of NGVs prevent their mass production. Limited range, trunk space, higher initial cost, and lack of refuelling infrastructure pose impediments to the future spread of NGVs.

Most NGVs operate using compressed natural gas (CNG). This compressed gas is stored in a similar fashion to a car's gasoline tank, attached to the rear, top, or undercarriage of the vehicle in a tube-shaped storage tank. A CNG tank can be filled in a similar manner, and in a similar amount of time, to a gasoline tank.

1

There are many reasons why NGVs are increasing in abundance and popularity. New federal and state emissions laws require an improvement in vehicle emissions over the foreseeable future. For example, the state of California has some of the most stringent environmental standards, many of which are currently unattainable with conventionally fueled vehicles. Natural gas, being the cleanest-burning alternative transportation fuel available today, offers an opportunity to meet these stringent environmental emissions standards. In addition, natural gas is very safe. Being lighter than air, in the event of an accident, natural gas simply dissipates into the air, instead of forming a dangerous, flammable pool on the ground like other liquid fuels. This also prevents the pollution of ground water in the event of a spill. Natural-gas fuel storage tanks on current NGVs are stronger and sturdier than gasoline tanks.

Natural gas is also an economical alternative to gasoline and other transportation fuels.

Traditionally, NGVs have been around 30 per cent cheaper than gasoline vehicles to refuel, and in many cases the maintenance costs for NGVs are lower than traditional gasoline vehicles. In addition to being economical, many proponents of NGVs argue that a transportation sector more reliant on domestically abundant natural gas will decrease the US dependence on foreign oil—allowing for a more secure, safer energy supply for the country.

2

One of the primary reasons for pursuing alternative-fueled vehicle technology is to decrease environmentally harmful emissions. It is estimated that vehicles on the road account for 60 per cent of carbon monoxide pollution, 29 per cent of hydrocarbon emissions, and 31 per cent of nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions in the United States. All of these emissions released into the atmosphere contribute to smog pollution and increase the levels of dangerous ground-level ozone. Vehicles also account for the emission of over half of all dangerous air pollutants and around 30 per cent of total carbon emissions in the US, contributing to the presence of "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere. The environmental effects of NGVs are much less detrimental than traditionally fueled vehicles.

NGVs are much cleaner burning than traditionally fueled vehicles due to the chemical composition of natural gas. While natural gas is primarily methane, gasoline and diesel fuels contain numerous other harmful compounds that are released into the environment through vehicle exhaust. While natural gas may emit small amounts of ethane, propane, and butane when used as a vehicular fuel, it does not emit many of the other, more harmful substances emitted by the combustion of gasoline or diesel. These compounds include volatile organic compounds, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides (which combine in the atmosphere to produce ground-level ozone), benzene, arsenic, nickel, and over 40 other substances classified as toxic by the EPA.

Dedicated NGVs also produce, on average, 70 per cent less carbon monoxide, 87 per cent less non-methane organic gas, and 87 per cent less NOx than traditional gasoline-powered vehicles.

3
NGVs as they exist today are best suited for large fleets of vehicles that drive many miles a day. Taxicabs, transit and school buses, airport shuttles, construction vehicles, garbage trucks, delivery vehicles, and public-works vehicles are all well suited to natural-gas fueling. Because these vehicles are centrally maintained and fueled, it is economical and beneficial to convert to natural gas.

The primary impediments to the public proliferation of NGVs include the high initial cost, limited refueling infrastructure, and automobile performance characteristics. NGVs, despite being cheaper to refuel and maintain, are more expensive initially than their gasoline-powered counterparts. However, as the technology becomes more advanced, the cost of manufacturing these vehicles should drop, which may then be passed along to the consumers.

In terms of refueling infrastructure, there are currently around 1,500 natural-gas refueling stations in the US, over half of which are open to the public. Although this is a small fraction of the number of gasoline-fueling stations in the country, as environmental standards and government incentives for NGVs increase, supplying natural gas as a vehicular fuel will become increasingly common.

While driving range, storage space, and initial cost are currently preventing the mass production of dedicated NGVs (which in turn is preventing the expansion of public natural-gas fueling stations), it is expected that with improved technology, research, and infrastructure, the use of NGVs in non-fleet settings will increase in the future. NGVs present an exciting opportunity to reduce the damage of one of our most polluting sectors.

adapted from www.naturalgas.org

7 Choose the best heading for each of the sections in the article in Exercise 6 (1–3). There are two headings you will not need.

- A The advantages of NGVs
- B The need for change
- C Reducing carbon-monoxide emissions
- D Who uses NGVs?
- E An expanding refueling infrastructure

8 Match the words or expressions from the article (1–9) with words or expressions that have a similar meaning (a–i).

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 proliferation | a harmful |
| 2 impediments | b fixed |
| 3 attached | c barriers |
| 4 foreseeable future | d main |
| 5 stringent standards | e great increase |
| 6 unattainable | f out of reach |
| 7 in the event of | g soon |
| 8 detrimental | h if this happens |
| 9 primary | i strict requirements |

9 Find six more new expressions from the article that you think are useful and add them to your vocabulary notebook.

Producing a paragraph-heading question

- 10 a** Find a paragraph from a newspaper or magazine that has a heading. Now write three other headings for the paragraph.
- b** Show your paragraph-heading question to your colleagues. Can they work out which heading was the original one?

Note

You will never be asked to write a question like this in the exam, but writing one yourself will give you a much better understanding of the question form. It's also good reading practice.