Linguaskill BUSINESS

Reading Sample Test

Answer Key

Welcome to the staff notice board

Tell us who you think has worked above and beyond what was required, and at the end of the month a prize winner will be drawn from those nominated.

1. What is the notice asking staff to do?

A Choose which person should win a prize from the list of exceptional performers.

B Put forward the name of someone who has done something exceptional.

C Give feedback on how the awards for exceptional work could be improved.

2. Because of the increase in demand they decided to take ____ more staff.

A up **B** on **C** out **D** in

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PRECAUTIONS AGAINST FIRE

Most commercial buildings have a fire detection system to alert the occupants to an outbreak of fire, but this may be insufficient.

The problem with having nothing more **(3)** ____ detection is that although the fire alarm will alert you to there being a fire, there is no way of safely suppressing the fire **(4)** ____ waiting for the emergency services to arrive. The fire service will extinguish the fire but the damage caused by smoke prior to their arrival and the subsequent water damage can present a company **(5)** ____ major problems.

We provide fire suppression systems and automatic extinguishing systems aimed at reducing the level of damage by automatically suppressing the fire before the fire service arrives. The system ensures that your business can be up and running **(6)** ____ the minimum amount of time. The ultimate success of our system is that your customers will **(7)** ____ even be aware that there has been a fire at your premises.

3. than

4. while / whilst / when

5. with

6. in

7. not / never

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CAMBRIDGE English

ACQUISITION

Acquisition is a favoured method of expanding rapidly into a new business area. This is in spite of research that shows takeovers frequently **(8)** ____ to deliver. Yet they are popular because they allow companies to gain instant **(9)** ____ to customers, market share and technology. In some cases, the company you are taking over may provide you with skills which are in short **(10)** ____ in your own company.

An acquisition adds revenue to the top line from day one, assets that go on the balance **(11)** ____ and, hopefully, profits that help the bottom line. By contrast, a great deal of uncertainty is **(12)** ____ in starting a business from scratch and there is no guarantee that the business plan can be achieved.

8.	**A** fail	**B** lack	**C** miss	**D** stop
9.	**A** approach	**B** entry	**C** introduction	**D** access
10.	**A** amount	**B** supply	**C** number	**D** quantity
11.	**A** account	**B** paper	**C** sheet	**D** book
12.	**A** involved	**B** required	**C** entailed	**D** contained

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Decision-making in teams

Often, teams struggle with their decision-making process. Some team members believe they have more authority over the outcome of the process than they do or, conversely, people feel their perspectives don't count. Furthermore, there is often an assumption among managers that a 'perfect' decision exists and the team will agree if it is presented to them, whereas in fact it comes down to making the best decision with the information available at the time. In order to move forward, someone needs to have the final say, and everyone involved must commit to supporting the chosen way forward. This works best when people feel involved in the decision-making process, even if the outcome of that process may not be their first choice.

If a leader wants employees to participate in decision-making, this requires more than asking for opinions; they must truly consider people's input. From an employee's perspective, there's nothing more frustrating than to be asked for feedback, only to realise that the manager won't take it on board, but this is precisely what happens with many employee surveys. Although not every decision requires consultation with everyone, when managers do solicit employees' opinions, they need to ask themselves whether they actually want advice and whether they would be comfortable overriding their staff's preferences if necessary. Either way, everyone needs to know what's intended. The types of decisions that need to be made are many and varied and it helps everyone if the process is transparent.

13. In the first paragraph, what does the writer say about decision-making in teams?

A Certain employees are often unwilling to take responsibility for decision-making.

B The ease of making team decisions depends on the structure of the organisation.

C All team members should accept a decision once it has been reached.

D Employees lack the power to influence decisions that affect them.

14. The writer believes that when requesting employees' input, leaders should

A devise questionnaires that ask insightful questions.

B be clear about the extent to which it will be acted on.

C ask a broad range of employees to provide their opinions.

D ensure that employees are genuinely comfortable giving their opinions.

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Serious Play Workshops

While some people think toy building bricks are just for children, my job entails convincing fully-grown adults, in sensible jobs, to play with these bricks and build models related to an issue at work. In my Serious Play workshops, I encourage business people to get creative through play, putting aside their usual barriers and responding in a more unconstrained way. This is because when people are playful, they can say and do things they don't normally say and do. Participants build models – symbolic or metaphorical – which represent their thinking, giving them the space to consider their own ideas, without other people's input. When they present their ideas, these are already formed and cannot be modified in any way. Through this, people can find more authentic voices.

Of course, the models themselves make little sense to the casual observer, as their meaning only emerges when the builder describes them. And one of the rules of a Serious Play workshop is that when the builder speaks, everyone else must listen. Other participants are also not allowed to infer any meaning about the model, beyond what the builder gives it. In these situations, the builder is the expert, regardless of where they stand within the organisational hierarchy. Everyone else must accept what they say without questioning or adding to it. This ensures a discussion where everyone's ideas are heard and equally valued.

One issue faced in group problem-solving situations is that different parties see the problem differently. Furthermore, people often try to find a single solution to a variety of problems. The 'serious play' approach helps with both these issues, because it invites participants to build physical representations of their ideas – which are then placed within a landscape of models made by colleagues. Their thoughts become explicit and shared, allowing connections between them to be explored. Through this process, diverse approaches to problems can be combined within the same space. Individual models can also be connected to create a single shared model, perhaps stretching over many metres, representing a single view of how people see every stage of a complex process, from the starting point through to the proposed solution.

I have been using the Serious Play method for about five years now, particularly with small businesses. In every case I have seen the transformation – from dubious playfulness to deep engagement – with participants building models that represent complex, abstract ideas. Participants tell me how the method has allowed them to express things they would not normally be able to express and has also given them a clearer understanding of how others see the world. And in this way, using building bricks can overcome the drawbacks of conventional business meetings.

Business owner Jenny Edwards describes her experience at one such session with work colleagues: 'I was a bit stumped when looking at the pile of bricks at first, but I eventually became drawn to the white and clear bricks because I wanted to build something representing clarity and purity — a place for divided people to go and be free from all the distractions so we could truly hear one another. I also saw others using the pieces to form physical bridges between conflicting groups.' She also emphasises how refreshing it was to do the workshop away from the stresses of everyday life.

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CAMBRIDGE English

15. In the first paragraph, why does the writer suggest Serious Play is successful?

A It allows participants to develop a personal viewpoint.

B It encourages stress-free cooperation among participants.

C It enables participants to develop new models for products.

D It shows participants how teamwork can enhance creativity.

16. What does the writer say about the conduct of a Serious Play workshop in the second paragraph?

A Different interpretations of the model are discussed by participants.

B Builders are selected for their knowledge of a particular field.

C It's the builder's responsibility to explain the model's significance.

D Participants are asked to evaluate the effectiveness of each explanation.

17. According to the writer, building physical representations of ideas can benefit the problem-solving process by

A revealing the sequence in which tasks should be performed.

B giving a visual representation of the relationship between ideas.

C presenting a simplified version of complicated concepts.

D identifying which solution is most likely to succeed.

18. What does the writer suggest in the fourth paragraph?

A Some participants fail to be convinced by the activities.

B Serious Play can only replace certain aspects of business meetings.

C Participants find certain ideas difficult to represent.

D Serious Play workshops initially meet with some scepticism.

19. Jenny's description of a workshop suggests participants had to represent a way of

A finding solitude.

B thinking clearly.

C uniting people.

D relieving anxiety.

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Innovation in business

What businesses should do to ensure that they are able to remain relevant and competitive

One of the best stories about innovation I ever heard came to me from a senior executive at a leading tech firm. His company had won a million-dollar contract to design a sensor that could detect pollutants at very small concentrations underwater. **(20) F** To tackle it, the firm set up a team of the very best microchip designers, and they started putting their heads together.

About 45 minutes into their first working session, the marine biologist assigned to their team walked in with a bag of clams and put the edible sea creatures on the table. Seeing the confused looks of the chip designers, he explained that clams can detect pollutants at just a few parts per million, and when that happens, they open their shells. **(21) B** Indeed, they didn't really need a fancy chip to detect pollutants — just a simple one that could detect when clams open their shells, which is a sign of them trying to filter the pollutants from the water. 'They saved $999,000 and ate the clams for dinner,' the executive told me.

This is an excellent illustration of what has been called 'open innovation', which means deliberately expanding your skill domain beyond a particular area of expertise when you're faced with a really tough problem. **(22) D** Many believe it's just this kind of unusual collaboration that's key to innovation in business.

Open innovation is only one way to solve a problem, however. It's important for businesses to recognise that there's no one 'true' path to innovation. **(23) H** Yet all too often, these possibilities are ignored by organisational leaders. They lock themselves into one type of strategy and say, 'This is how we innovate.' It may work for a while, but eventually they find themselves stuck in a set of solutions that don't fit the problems they need to solve. Essentially, their organisations become square-peg companies in a round-hole world and lose relevance.

We need to start treating innovation like any other area of business. **(24) A** This would be like having an array of marketing tactics or several sources of financing, for example, rather than trying to make do with one for every eventuality in the life of a business.

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CAMBRIDGE English

A By this, I mean that it should be seen as a set of tools, each designed to accomplish specific objectives.

B The point being made was that a relatively straightforward solution was to hand.

C For these types of problems, conventional strategies are usually effective.

D In my example, it involved putting a marine biologist in a room with microchip specialists.

E It's for this reason that every innovation strategy fails if followed too rigidly.

F This was an unusually complex problem with no immediately obvious solution.

G So, innovation begins by asking how well we can define the problem.

H It could be said that there are as many ways to approach it as there are issues to be addressed.

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Marketing during a recession

It is received wisdom that in a period of general economic recession you should concentrate on your core business, and trim the fat. Non-essential fripperies can wait for the good times to return. And one of the most costly non-essentials is marketing. So it stands to reason that this is one area where savings can immediately be made. Chopping the marketing budget is a no-brainer. Isn't it? Well, not really.

(25) D

It is tempting to disregard this point because it is easy to cut a marketing budget. There will be an immediate reduction in expenditure which looks good to shareholders or investors who might be worried about the level of outgoings. Moreover, cutting marketing budgets has little immediate effect on sales, so it can be spun as a decision with no downsides.

(26) B

Those with a more long-term view of things should be aware that copious, compelling research shows that advertising aggressively during a recession increases sales and long-term profits. As the cost of advertising goes down and others are advertising less, those who do advertise find their voice stands out and is, to all intents and purposes, amplified. You get more bang for your advertising buck in a recession.

(27) F

Those companies that are a bit too vague about their market position, or what their promises are, should be aware that during tough times people might be looking for something offering better value. They may feel a little less committed to the brands that they usually purchase.

(28) A

In a recession, then, marketing budgets should give due attention to developing brand loyalty. For many firms, especially those involved in selling to other businesses, that often hinges on developing personal relationships and sharpening up messaging. During a recession it can be particularly appropriate for all types of business to focus on tailoring products to individual clients' needs, rather than pushing what they already do.

(29) E

Bearing all this in mind should mean that firms are battle-hardened and better prepared for a recession. In the good old days, crises only came along once every decade or so. Now 'permacrisis' has been added to the dictionary. That brings challenges, but should at least mean the solutions marketers used last time around should still be fresh in their minds.

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CAMBRIDGE English

A For firms at the budget end of the spectrum, this means that their pricing is likely to be a bonus in a recession. But they should not ignore the fact that habits vary with the seasons. For example, at times of major festivals, customers actually tend to trade up as a treat and go to more expensive retailers.

B Unfortunately, that is not the case. The problem is that the consequences of marketing come with a time lag. Any money put into it might have an impact one or two years later. And in two years from now, the managers who made the budget cuts might well have moved on to a new job. The damage will have been done, but it is not their problem.

C That's why, although there is little you can do to change the economy, a business can do its best to ensure it is well placed to deal with what is happening. When you're cutting your marketing resources, you're limiting your ability to develop brand loyalty.

D This assumes a view of marketing as an expense, which it makes sense to reduce. But marketing might well be better considered as an investment. Seen this way, the moment you reduce your marketing spend, you are potentially turning a short-term problem into a long-term one.

E This will help brands become resilient to negative shocks. As some big-name businesses have discovered to their cost, negativity about brands can go viral in no time. Marketing is about creating loyalty so strong that it weathers these storms. That work can't stop just because inflation is high.

F Of course, it remains wise to spend marketing money as intelligently as possible. It's important to check the pledges made to customers ensuring they focus on what you do well and are attuned to the economic conditions. Indeed, a recession can be the perfect time to review marketing strategies to make certain they are focused on your business's strengths.

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Sustainable fashion

Four fashion journalists comment on how young people feel about fashion which has a low impact on the environment.

Journalist A

Sustainability and ethical clothing are quickly becoming a part of the modern young shopper's value set and they are more than willing to use their social media channels to make their views public. Yet it is doubtful that young activists will have a great deal of success in pressuring retailers to shift to greener suppliers unless these views are accompanied by a change in young spending habits. Naturally, a commitment to ethically sourced fabrics and garments, improved factory conditions and pay for workers means higher production and retail costs. So, when the average price of one new eco-friendly item is the same as several outfits in a typical high street store or second-hand clothing retailer, young shoppers simply have no choice but to go for the cheaper items. Many of these young proponents are eager to support eco-friendly clothes producers but feel unable to.

Journalist B

The most successful clothing brands know that earning a reputation as a sustainable clothing producer requires going beyond one-ad campaigns; they need to show shoppers that they are sewing ethical practice, quite literally, into the very fabric of what they do. Fashion discussion forums are crammed full of young activists' opinions, and studies show that today's young shoppers are prepared to spend 10-15% more on clothes from an eco-conscious brand. It seems clear, therefore, that a significant number are interested in getting new sustainable fashion products. Clothing resale is also becoming popular, with young people welcoming the opportunity to obtain second-hand designer clothing to curate their own look without the high price tag. Bottom line? Sustainability is redefining the fashion industry, primarily being driven by young consumers whose changing shopping behaviour is forcing clothing retailers to make a determined effort to supply only sustainable fashion to the consumer.

Journalist C

With a growing desire for eco-friendly fabrics, and an explosion in the number of young people that are leaving supportive comments on the websites of clothing retailers that work with these materials, we might expect to see a greater proportion of products in the shops made with more ecological production methods. Yet, there is a limit to how instrumental young people are in bringing about such a shift in practices. Yes, they are buying fewer clothes and throwing fewer items away, and purchasing more second-hand items. It's also true that they are happy to hand over more cash for clothes which are produced according to high ethical standards. But some items – however beautiful and ethically-made they are – are simply beyond the budgets of most young people. It seems unthinkable, therefore, that cheap, mass-produced high street fashion will disappear altogether.

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Journalist D

There is some indication that clothing retailers are taking action in response to today's young shoppers' apparent preference for sustainable clothing, but these companies also know that young people love to buy clothes and tend to show off what they are wearing on photo sharing websites instead of vocalizing their complaints. They are fans of recycling and acquiring second-hand clothing, but this has more to do with creating a unique style than anything else. All of this appears to give rise to a contradiction; a desire for sustainably produced clothing on the one hand and getting a good bargain on the other. Indeed, a recent youth survey backs up this view. Whilst the majority of those surveyed said they preferred clothes that did not harm the environment, those same respondents said they would only purchase these items if they were comparable in price to their less eco-friendly equivalents.

30.	Which journalist expresses the same opinion as Journalist D on why young shoppers are buying clothes that have been used before?	**Journalist B**
31.	Which journalist has a different opinion to Journalist A regarding how much young people use the internet to comment on sustainability in fashion?	**Journalist D**
32.	Which journalist has a different view to the other journalists regarding whether young people are willing to pay for sustainable clothes?	**Journalist D**
33.	Which journalist shares an opinion with Journalist C about the extent to which young people are influencing how clothing companies make clothes?	**Journalist A**

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