BEC Vantage Reading Part 3 – Teacher’s Notes

Description
Students do vocabulary exercises to help them understand a text about product life cycles. They answer several multiple-choice questions by comparing the options with the relevant parts of the text. They do a Part 3 task, then complete sentences giving information and advice about Part 3.

Time required: 60 minutes

Material s required:
- Student’s Worksheet (one per student)
- Answer Sheet (one per student) from the relevant part of the Vantage Reading section of the Cambridge English Business Handbook; which needs to be enlarged to double the size, available online.

Aims:
- to familiarise students with the format of Reading Part 3
- to help them to understand the importance of analysing the distractors

Procedure
1. Ask students who might be happier: manufacturers of typewriters or manufacturers of iris-based personal identity cards (ones that identify the coloured part of a person’s eye, the iris), and why. [The demand for typewriters has fallen a great deal, and is continuing to fall; the demand for ID cards is rising; so the latter is a better business.]

2. Ask if they think sales of products are more likely to continue increasing over a long period, or to grow, remain steady then fall [grow, remain steady then fall, as with typewriters]. Ask why sales of a whole product category, such as typewriters, might fall [they are replaced by later technology, such as personal computers].

3. Ask if they’ve heard of the ‘product life cycle’, and if so, what they know about it [see Key to Procedure steps]. If they haven’t, go on to stage 4.

4. Give each student a copy of the Student’s Worksheet and ask them to read the first paragraph of Exercise 1 and look at the graph showing the four stages of the product life cycle. Explain that this will help them understand the first text they are going to read. Elicit the answers to Exercise 1 [see Key to Student’s Worksheet].

5. Ask them to look at Exercise 2, which gives definitions of some of the words used in the first text they are going to read. Ask them to match the definitions to the words or phrases, working in pairs. Check the answers [see Key to Student’s Worksheet].

6. Ask the students what they can remember or know about Reading Part 3 and tell them that it consists of a fairly long text with six multiple-choice questions. Point out that the correct answer to each question is usually a paraphrase of part of the text, so that is what you’re going to look at.
7. Explain that in Exercise 3 a Part 3 task is broken down into individual paragraphs, each with a multiple-choice question on it. They need to think about *every* option, and decide whether it’s right or wrong. Ask them to read the instructions. Then check understanding by asking why *finally* is in bold

[it introduces the relevant part of the text for the question]; why some phrases are underlined [they are the parts of the text that are relevant to the options]; and why there are letters in brackets [they indicate which option the following underlined phrase is relevant to]. Point out that this isn’t how Part 3 looks, but is an exercise to help them prepare for Part 3.

8. Ask them to read 1 (the paragraph, question and options), and to decide whether each option A–E is right or wrong, according to the text. There may be more than one right answer. Point out the importance of reading the question (‘The end of a product’s life cycle is market by’) and finding the relevant part of the text (which here is in bold – ‘finally’). Check the answers, and ask why the wrong ones are wrong [see *Key to Student’s Worksheet*].

9. Ask students to do the same with 2 and 3, working in pairs. Remind them that the part of the text relating to the question is in bold. Check the answers [see *Key to Student’s Worksheet*].

10. Ask them to read the instructions for 4–6, then ask what the difference is between these questions and 1–3 [1–3 consisted of both right and wrong options; in 4–6 all the options are wrong. In 1–3 some phrases were underlined to help students decide if each option was right or wrong; in 4–6 students have to decide which part of the text shows the options are wrong].

11. Ask them, in pairs, to do 4–6, then check the answers [see *Key to Student’s Worksheet*].

12. Elicit a way of approaching Part 3 tasks, and write it on the board: read the instructions; read the heading to the text; read the text quickly to find out what it is about; read the first question and find the part of the text it refers to; read all four options and check which one is right in relation to the text; after answering all the questions, check all the answers.

13. Explain that Exercise 4 is from a past exam. Tell students to read the instructions and ask them what the text is about [leadership in business]. Ask what the heading is [The Effective Leader]. Ask whether they think an effective leader is able to persuade staff to change their way of working [yes], consults relevant people before making decisions [yes], has always worked for the same company [not necessarily].

14. Say you’ll give them 15 minutes to do the task, following the procedure on the board (see step 12). This is the maximum time they should spend on it in the test, so if they don’t finish in that time they can judge how much quicker they need to be.

15. Give each student an Answer Sheet and ask them to do Exercise 4 individually, filling in (in pencil) the letter they choose for each answer. Give them 15 minutes to do the exercise, then check the answers [see *Key to Student’s Worksheet*].

16. Ask them to look at Exercise 5, and explain that this summarises information about Part 3, and that they should know most of the answers from doing Exercise 4. Elicit the answers [see *Key to Student’s Worksheet*].

17. Ask them if they want to be leaders in a business or other organisation, and if they think they have the qualities necessary to be an effective leader.
Suggested follow-up activities

See the preparation ideas from the relevant part of the Vantage Reading section of the Cambridge English Business Handbook.

Key to Procedure steps

Step 3: ‘product life cycle’ is a common business term referring to the typical sales pattern of a product over time, from its introduction onto the market to its decline when demand falls, possibly because consumers prefer new, more innovative products, tastes have changed, or newer technology has made the product obsolete (as with typewriters, which gave way to personal computers). The diagram in Exercise 1 on the Student’s Worksheet illustrates this typical pattern of sales.

At each stage, a different marketing mix (price, advertising, sales promotions, etc.) is likely to be used to encourage potential buyers to purchase the product and retailers to stock it. For example, a product may be launched with a price below that of competing products, to attract purchasers, and the price may be increased at a later stage.
BEC Vantage Reading Part 3 – Answer Keys

Key to Student's Worksheet Exercise 1
1. Maturity (3)
2. Decline (4)
3. Introduction (1) 4. Growth (2)
5. Introduction (1)
6. Maturity (3)

Key to Student's Worksheet Exercise 2
1. strategy
2. unit sales
3. saturation level
4. unit profit
5. production costs
6. profitability
7. selling costs

Key to Student's Worksheet Exercise 3
1. A is right: ‘finally … become obsolete’ means that at the end of the product’s life cycle it is becoming outdated. B is wrong: according to the text, customers become less likely to buy the product, but there is no mention of complaints. C is wrong: the text doesn’t mention the amount of support from sales management. D is right: ‘finally … are … no longer produced’ means the product may be discontinued. E is wrong: there is no mention in the text of production costs.

2. A is wrong: there is no mention in the text of managers’ sales performance. B is wrong: the text refers to formulating better marketing plans, but doesn’t say anything about the time spent on the plans. C is wrong: the text refers to identifying the stage, but doesn’t mention any failure to do so. D is right: the option paraphrases the final sentence of the paragraph.

3. A is wrong: although the text mentions ‘heavy advertising’ in the introduction stage, it doesn’t say that a greater sales effort is needed when advertising is reduced. B is right: when sales have reached saturation level, ‘the sales team will have to work even harder’. C is wrong: there is no mention of any differences in the sales effort for different kinds of products. D is right: ‘rival companies start to produce something similar’ paraphrases ‘competitors will have entered the market with their own version’ in the text, and this is when the sales team will have to work even harder. E is wrong: in the text, the decline is related to ‘better versions’ entering the market, that is, items in the same product category.
4. to ensure an effective marketing strategy, A is wrong because products are mentioned in line 1, but there is nothing about knowing product details in order to have a good marketing strategy. B is wrong because according to the text, most firms know their sales statistics, but these are not the primary concern of a good marketing strategy. C is wrong because customers are mentioned in line 2, but nothing about data on them. The right answer comes from 'it is unit profit that is the decisive factor … It is this figure that sales management has to monitor … to ensure an effective marketing strategy.'

5. the unit profit has already fallen. A is wrong because according to line 1, production costs are worked out accurately, i.e. correctly. B is wrong because making improvements to deliveries is mentioned in line 5, but there is no suggestion of unforeseen problems. C is wrong because no mention is made of economic conditions. The right answer comes from ‘the extra expenditure is not accurately charged to the product and the result is that, long before unit sales are noticeably falling, the unit profit has already fallen.’

6. interpret sales results. A is wrong because a decline in sales (mentioned in the last line) is not related to a review of policy. B is wrong because lines 3-5 mention using the chart as a guide, and the need to be able to interpret sales results. There is no suggestion that sales charts are unlikely to provide sufficient guidance. C is wrong because there is no mention of getting confirmation of the data. The right answer comes from ‘An essential management skill is being able to interpret sales results … Deciding where each stage begins and ends can be a random exercise, though usually the stages are based on where the rate of sales growth or decline becomes pronounced.’

Key to Student’s Worksheet Exercise 4

13. C: effectiveness is more easily recognisable when it is absent. A is wrong because ‘most people want to be … more effective leaders’ and there is no mention of poor leaders not wanting to listen to criticism. B is wrong because the text suggests that certain leaders ‘are too often seen as figures of fun’, but doesn’t say that they shouldn’t be taken seriously. D is wrong because there’s no indication of how widespread poor leaders are, or how widespread people expect them to be.

14. A: While descriptions of leadership are all different, they are all true – and this is where disagreement arises. However, leadership is specific to a given context. B is wrong because there is no mention of the number of outstanding leaders. C is wrong because ‘descriptions of leadership’ doesn't limit the descriptions to ones made by leaders of their own qualities. D is wrong because there is nothing in the text to suggest that the ‘huge amounts of research’ have concluded little.

15. D: Before he was able to describe his own objectives for the new publishing organisation he was setting up, he had to see a clear fit between these proposals and the larger situation outside. A is wrong because the publishing executive’s objectives had to fit with what was happening in the industry. B is wrong because there is no mention of ‘organisational aspects’: it is implied in the reference to ‘his own company’ but this is secondary to what was happening in the industry. C is wrong because ‘professional skills and abilities’ are not mentioned.

16. A: what he most needed to do was to communicate effectively with his subordinates, so that they all felt at ease with his different approach. B is wrong because, although it is true that the ‘clients … were …distrustful of any product that was too revolutionary’, the reason that is given for the finance director’s lack of success was that ‘most staff below him were unwilling to change’ and he was unable to make them change their minds. C is wrong because, although he saw ‘potential challenges from competitors’, who may have had a more dynamic approach, this is not given as the reason for his lack of success. D is wrong because, although it is true that most staff seemed to disagree with his ideas, in the writer’s opinion the reason for the
finance director’s lack of success was their unwillingness to change and his inability to communicate effectively with them.

17. **B**: executives are expected, as they rise within the system, to know more than those beneath them ... A good example of this would be a firm of accountants I visited. **A** is wrong because the accountants were expected to *avoid* mistakes (last line), not correct them. **C** is wrong because there’s no mention of maintaining discipline: the closest reference is to managing the operation, but this is not mentioned in relation to the accountants. **D** is wrong because the firm was expected to help its clients avoid uncertainty: this is not quite the same as advising clients on responding to uncertainty, and isn’t given as being what was required of staff who were promoted.

18. **C**: My point is that what her people needed at that moment was a steady hand, not further changes – she should have recognised that. **A** is wrong because the sentence beginning ‘My point’ doesn’t mention support from employers to managers. **B** is wrong because the text doesn’t comment on the manager’s attitude towards lack of popularity (implied in the last paragraph). **D** is wrong because the point made is about the manager failing to recognise ‘what her people needed’: needs are different from attitudes, which aren’t mentioned.

**Key to Student’s Worksheet Exercise 5**

1. six
2. text
3. paragraph
4. question
5. text
6. 15
7. four
8. options
9. one
10. question (sometimes an option may be true in relation to the text, but not as the answer to the question, e.g. ‘She was dissatisfied with her working conditions’ and ‘She wanted to meet new challenges’ may both reflect the text, but only one will answer the question ‘Why did she decide to resign?’
11. options
BEC Vantage Reading Part 3 – Student’s Worksheet

Exercise 1

Most products go through four stages, usually over a period of years. The first stage starts when the product is launched onto the market. In the fourth stage the product might be discontinued. These stages form what is called the ‘product life cycle’.

1. Introduction
2. Growth
3. Maturity
4. Decline

Look at the graph above. For which stage is each of the following statements true?

1. Sales volume reaches its highest level: ..............................................
2. Sales volume drops: .................................................................
3. Sales volume is low: ...............................................................
4. Sales volume increases significantly: .............................................
5. Demand has to be created: .........................................................
6. Sales volume stabilises: .............................................................
Exercise 2

Match each definition with one of the words or phrases in the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>production costs</th>
<th>profitability</th>
<th>saturation level</th>
<th>selling costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strategy</td>
<td>unit sales</td>
<td>unit profit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Plans intended to achieve the basic objectives of a business:
   .................................

2. The number of individual items that customers buy:
   .................................

3. The situation where sales of a product can't be increased in a particular market:
   .................................

4. The difference between the amount each item is sold for and the cost of producing and selling it:
   .................................

5. The amount spent on making items:
   .................................

6. The situation where a company or product has a higher income than expenditure:
   .................................

7. The amount spent on creating a demand for products, including advertising, packaging and the salaries of sales staff:
   .................................
Exercise 3

The following paragraphs in the boxes together make up an article about product life cycles.

For questions 1 – 3, some options are right and some are wrong. Decide whether each option is right or wrong.

The words in bold show you the relevant part of the text for the question.

The underlined words are to help you to locate the relevant part of the text for each option. For some options, nothing is underlined.

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Product Life Cycles and Sales Strategy

1. One of the most important concepts in (C) sales management and marketing is that of the product life cycle. This is a historical record of the life of a product, showing the stage in its life the product has reached at a particular time. All products have 'lives' in as much as they are created, sell with varying profitability over a period of time, and finally (B) lose favour with customers and (A) become obsolete and are replaced or simply (D) no longer produced.

The end of a product’s life cycle is marked by
   A the product becoming outdated.
   B an increase in customer complaints.
   C less support from sales management.
   D the possibility of the product being discontinued.
   E a sharp rise in production costs.

2. A product's sales position and profitability can be expected to fluctuate over time, and by (C) identifying the stage that a product is in or may be heading towards, (B) companies can formulate better marketing plans as part of their sales management activities. (D) At each successive stage in the product’s cycle, it is necessary to adopt different tactics.

What does the writer say about sales management?
   A There are many managers who need to improve their sales performance.
   B Companies should spend more time on their sales planning.
   C Most sales managers fail to recognise which stage a product has reached.
   D The sales approach should change with each phase of the product life cycle.
3. The two main features of the product life cycle are unit sales and unit profit. The unit sales figures usually jump on introduction, in response to (A) heavy advertising and promotion, as customers buy the product experimentally. This is generally followed by a levelling off while it is evaluated – the length of this period depending on the use to which the product is put. Then, unit sales rise steadily through the growth phase to the maturity phase, when the product is widely accepted, and so on to (B) saturation level. By this time, (D) competitors will have entered the market with their own version and, from this point, the sales team will have to work even harder to win all additional sales. Eventually, (E) the product’s sales decline as better versions enter the market and competition becomes too strong.

According to the text, a greater sales effort is required for a product when
A. the advertising budget has been cut.
B. sales are at what could be their highest level.
C. it is particularly innovative.
D. rival companies start to produce something similar.
E. consumer interest switches to a new product category.

For questions 4 – 6, all the options A-C are wrong.

4. In retrospect, most firms know what happened to their products from launch to withdrawal. They can compile this information from the records of unit sales to customers. Unfortunately, unit sales are not the complete story, as it is unit profit that is the decisive factor, although this is not always recorded accurately. It is this figure that sales management has to monitor, though, to ensure an effective marketing strategy and to produce effective profits.

According to the text, a good marketing strategy must primarily be concerned with
A. product details.
B. sales statistics.
C. consumer data.

The right answer is ‘profit information’. Which part of the text shows that this is the right answer?

5. At launch, the product is costed accurately on the basis of production costs plus selling costs. Initially, these remain fairly stable, but, when the product is proving successful, competitors will bring out their own ‘copy-cat’ products. With a competitor in the field, the original firm has to respond in order to maintain its market position. It can run special sales promotions, improve deliveries, make more frequent sales calls, and so on. Often the extra expenditure is not accurately charged to the product and the result is that, long before unit sales are noticeably falling, the unit profit has already fallen.

According to the text, profit levels may fail to correspond to the volume of sale because
A. the production costs were not estimated correctly.
B. there are unforeseen problems with distribution.
C. there has been a lack of economic stability.

The right answer is ‘the full selling costs have not been taken into account’. Which part of the text shows that this is the right answer?
The product life cycle, then, presents a picture of what happened in the product’s ‘lifetime’, so how can this be used as an ongoing aid to management decision-making? Every sales manager has a chart on which the progress of sales is plotted and this can be used as a guide to the stage of development each product is currently in. An essential management skill is being able to interpret sales results and draw in the stages as they occur. Deciding where each stage begins and ends can be a random exercise, though usually the stages are based on where the rate of sales growth or decline becomes pronounced.

What does the writer say about interpreting the charts that show sales progress?

A. Managers should review policy when a sharp fall in sales is indicated.
B. It is difficult to see how sales charts can provide sufficient guidance to managers.
C. Managers should get confirmation of the data they plot on the sales charts.

The right answer is ‘It is a matter of judgement where one sales phase finishes and another begins.’ Which part of the text shows that this is the right answer?
Exercise 4

This is a complete Part 3 task. Aim to spend 10 – 15 minutes on it.

• Read the article below about leadership in business and the questions on the opposite page.
• For each question 13 – 18, mark one letter (A, B, C or D) on your Answer Sheet for the answer you choose.

The Effective Leader

From workplace surveys I have found that most people want to be – and feel they could be – more effective leaders. Certainly they want their leaders to be more effective. But what do we mean by effective leadership in business? It would appear a simple question. Unfortunately, effectiveness is more easily recognisable when it is absent. Leaders who attempt to use business jargon and try out the latest ideas are too often seen as figures of fun. Whilst people frequently agree on what ineffective leadership is, clearly knowing what not to do is hardly helpful in practice.

Huge amounts of research have been done on this very wide subject. When you look at leadership in different ways, you see different things. While descriptions of leadership are all different, they are all true – and this is where disagreement arises. However, leadership is specific to a given context. The effectiveness of your actions is assessed in relation to the context and to the conditions under which you took them.

For a magazine article I wrote recently, I interviewed a publishing executive, author of several well-known publications, about what effective leadership is. It was significant that, at first, he did not mention his own company. He talked at length about what was happening in the industry – the mergers, takeovers and global nature of the business. Before he was able to describe his own objectives for the new publishing organisation he was setting up, he had to see a clear fit between these proposals and the larger situation outside. Obvious? Of course. But I have lost count of the number of leaders I have coached who believed that their ideas were valid whatever the situation.

At this point I should also mention another example, that of a finance director whose plan of action was not well received. The company he had joined had grown steadily for twenty years, serving clients who were in the main distrustful of any product that was too revolutionary. The finance director saw potential challenges from competitors and wanted his organisation to move with the times. Unfortunately, most staff below him were unwilling to change. I concluded that although there were certainly some personal skills he could improve upon, what he most needed to do was to communicate effectively with his subordinates, so that they all felt at ease with his different approach.

Some effective leaders believe they can control uncertainty because they know what the organisation should be doing and how to do it. Within the organisation itself, expertise is usually greatly valued, and executives are expected, as they rise within the system, to know more than those beneath them and, therefore, to manage the operation. A good example of this would be a firm of accountants I visited. Their business was built on selling reliable expertise to the client, who naturally wants uncertainty to be something only other companies have to face. Within this firm, giving the right answer was greatly valued, and mistakes were clearly to be avoided.

I am particularly interested in what aims leaders have and what their role should be in helping the organisation to achieve its strategic aims. Some leaders are highly ineffective when the aim doesn’t fit with the need, such as the manufacturing manager who was encouraged by her bosses to make revolutionary changes. She did, and was very successful. However, when she moved to a different part of the business, she carried on her programme of change. Unfortunately, this part of the business had already suffered badly from two mismanaged attempts at change. My point is that what her people needed at that moment was a steady hand, not further changes – she should have recognised that. The outcome was that within six months staff were calling for her resignation.
13 In the first paragraph, the writer says that poor leaders

A do not want to listen to criticism.
B do not deserve to be taken seriously.
C are easier to identify than good ones.
D are more widespread than people think.

14 Why does the writer believe there is disagreement about what effective leadership is?

A Definitions of successful leadership vary according to the situation.
B There are few examples of outstanding leaders available to study.
C Leaders are unable to give clear descriptions of their qualities.
D The results of research on the subject have concluded little.

15 The publishing executive’s priorities for leadership focused on

A significant and long-term aims.
B internal organisational aspects.
C professional skills and abilities.
D overall business contexts.

16 According to the writer, the finance director was unsuccessful because

A staff were uncomfortable with his style.
B existing clients were suspicious of change.
C competitors had a more dynamic approach.
D colleagues gave little support to his ideas.

17 Staff at the accountancy firm who were promoted were required to

A correct mistakes.
B have a high level of knowledge.
C maintain discipline within the organisation.
D advise clients on responding to uncertainty.

18 The example of the manufacturing manager is given to emphasise that

A managers need support from their employers.
B leaders should not be afraid of being unpopular.
C effective leaders must be sensitive to staff needs.
D managers do not always understand the attitudes of staff.
Exercise 5

• Complete these sentences giving facts and advice about Part 3 by writing one word or a number in each gap. You may need to write the same answer more than once.

• You should be able to work out most of the answers from Exercise 4.

Text and questions

1 Part 3 consists of one text and …………………… questions.

2 The questions follow the order of the ……………………

3 Usually each question focuses on a separate ……………………

4 It’s useful to underline the relevant part of the text for each ……………………

5 The last question sometimes focuses on the whole ……………………

6 You should spend no more than …………………… minutes on Part 3.

Options and answers

7 Each question includes …………………… options.

8 The …………………… generally don’t follow the order of the text.

9 Every question has …………………… right answer.

10 Choose the option that answers the …………………… correctly.

11 Consider all the ……………………, not only the first one you read that seems to be right.