

Time Reading

Academic Texts

Starting time: _____

1. Sleep and Memory

When you sleep, your brain does not simply rest. It is actually very busy processing everything you experienced during the day. Scientists now believe that sleep is one of the most important factors in how well we remember new information, especially information learned right before bedtime.

During the day, your brain collects experiences and stores them as short-term memories. These memories are fragile — they can easily be lost if the brain does not have time to process them properly. Sleep gives the brain that time. While you sleep, the brain replays the day's experiences and transfers important information into long-term memory. This process is called memory consolidation.

There are two main stages of sleep that help with learning. The first is deep sleep, also called slow-wave sleep, which usually occurs early in the night. During this stage, the brain strengthens memories of facts and knowledge — things like vocabulary, dates, and formulas. The second stage is REM sleep, which stands for Rapid Eye Movement. During REM sleep, the brain connects new information to things you already know, helping you understand ideas more deeply and solve problems more creatively.

Studies show that students who sleep well before an exam perform significantly better than those who stay up late studying. Losing even one or two hours of sleep can impair a person's ability to focus and recall information the next day. In contrast, a short nap of 20 to 30 minutes after studying can boost memory retention noticeably.

Sleep also clears waste products from the brain. When we are awake, certain proteins build up inside brain cells. During sleep, the brain's cleaning system becomes more active and removes them efficiently. Scientists believe this process protects long-term brain health. In short, sleep is not time lost — it is time the brain uses to learn. *(300 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage

1. What happens to short-term memories if the brain does not process them during sleep?
 - a) They are consolidated into long-term memory more slowly.
 - b) They become stronger the next day.
 - c) They can easily be lost.
2. What is memory consolidation?
 - a) The stage of sleep when deep sleep replaces REM sleep.
 - b) The brain transferring memories into long-term storage during sleep.
 - c) A type of deep sleep that occurs in the early morning.
3. Which stage of sleep helps you connect new information to things you already know?
 - a) Slow-wave sleep.
 - b) Light sleep.
 - c) REM sleep.
4. What does the passage say about students who sleep well before an exam?
 - a) They show no real improvement unless they also nap afterward.
 - b) They perform significantly better than those who study late.
 - c) They need less REM sleep than other students.
5. What does sleep do to waste products in the brain?
 - a) It removes them through the brain's cleaning system.
 - b) It stores them safely to protect the brain.
 - c) It slows their production during deep sleep.
6. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - a) Sleep plays a critical role in how the brain stores and processes memories.
 - b) Losing sleep before an exam is the leading cause of poor grades.
 - c) REM sleep is more important for learning than deep sleep.

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **fragile:** unstable, temporary, short, delicate
2. **consolidation:** transfer, strengthening, removal, improvement
3. **impair:** replace, improve, ignore, damage
4. **boost:** remove, measure, increase, delay
5. **retention:** suffering, reduction, loss, keeping
6. **active:** useful, strong, busy, awake

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2.Athena in Greek Mythology

Athena was one of the most powerful goddesses in ancient Greek religion. She was the goddess of wisdom, warfare, and crafts, and was believed to protect cities and guide heroes in times of danger. Of all the Greek gods, Athena was considered the most rational and strategic, even in moments of chaos — she solved problems through intelligence rather than force.

According to myth, Athena was born in a highly unusual way. She sprang fully grown from the head of her father Zeus, the king of the gods, already wearing armor and carrying a spear. The Greeks saw this as proof that wisdom and readiness for battle were inseparable — you could not have one without the other.

Athena was the patron goddess of the city of Athens. According to legend, she competed against the sea god Poseidon for the right to protect the city. Each offered the citizens a gift. Poseidon struck the ground with his trident and produced a spring of saltwater. Athena offered an olive tree. The citizens chose Athena's gift because the olive tree provided food, oil, and wood — resources that had real value in daily life for many generations afterward. The city was named Athens in her honor.

Athena also played a central role in two of Greece's greatest myths. She guided the hero Odysseus on his long journey home after the Trojan War, and she helped Perseus defeat the monster Medusa by giving him a reflective shield so he could look at Medusa indirectly without being turned to stone, since brute strength alone would have failed.

Unlike Ares, the god of war, who fought for the pleasure of battle, Athena only supported warfare in the service of justice. This distinction made her one of the most respected figures in the Greek world — powerful, but never cruel. *(300 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage

1. What were Athena's main areas of responsibility?
 - a) Trade, agriculture, and the sea
 - b) Wisdom, warfare, and crafts
 - c) Music, love, and the harvest
2. How was Athena born, according to myth?
 - a) She was born to Zeus and a mortal woman.
 - b) She rose from the sea fully grown.
 - c) She came out of Zeus's head.
3. Why did the citizens choose Athena's gift over Poseidon's?
 - a) The olive tree provided food, oil, and wood for daily life.
 - b) Athens had already been named after Athena.
 - c) Saltwater was dangerous to the city.
4. Why did Athena give Perseus a reflective shield?
 - a) So that he could look at Medusa indirectly
 - b) To protect him from Medusa's claws
 - c) To hide his identity during a battle
5. What role did Athena play in the story of Odysseus?
 - a) She gave him the inspiration to make the Trojan Horse.
 - b) She guided him on his journey home after the war.
 - c) She protected him during the Trojan War.
6. How was Athena different from the god Ares?
 - a) Athena fought wars for justice while Ares fought wars for pleasure.
 - b) Athena fought alone while Ares worked with other gods.
 - c) Athena preferred crafts over warfare.

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **rational:** logical, confident, cautious, aggressive
2. **patron:** ruling, native, guardian, favorite
3. **spring:** water source, storm protection, small river, large wave
4. **reflective:** transparent, mirrored, heavy, curved
5. **distinction:** reputation, personality, difference, achievement
6. **figures:** warriors, leaders, icons, enemies

Time Reading

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3. The Inca Empire

The Inca Empire was the largest empire in the Americas before European contact. At its peak in the early sixteenth century, it stretched along the western coast of South America for over 4,000 kilometers, covering parts of modern-day Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina, making it larger than most European kingdoms of the time. The Inca called their empire Tawantinsuyu, meaning "the four regions," and governed it from their capital city, Cusco.

The Inca were remarkable engineers. Without the use of the wheel or iron tools, they built an extensive network of roads totaling over 40,000 kilometers, complete with rest stations and messenger relay points. These roads connected remote mountain villages to the capital and allowed soldiers, goods, and information to move quickly across the empire. The Inca also built in stone with extraordinary precision. Their walls were constructed without mortar — the stones fit together so tightly that even today a knife blade cannot pass between them.

The empire was held together by a strong central government. The emperor, known as the Sapa Inca, was believed to be a descendant of the sun god Inti. Citizens paid taxes not in money but in labor, a system called mit'a, often working on farms, roads, or temples. In return, the state provided food, clothing, and security during difficult times.

The Inca Empire collapsed with unexpected speed. In 1532, the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro arrived with fewer than 200 soldiers, despite being vastly outnumbered by Inca forces. He captured the Inca emperor Atahualpa and demanded an enormous ransom of gold and silver. After receiving the ransom, the Spanish executed Atahualpa anyway. Without their emperor, the Inca leadership disintegrated rapidly.

Spanish weapons, horses, and European diseases — to which the Inca had no immunity — completed the destruction of the empire within a few decades. *(299 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage

1. What does Tawantinsuyu mean?
 - a) The land of the sun god
 - b) The great road network
 - c) The four regions
2. What features did the Inca road system include?
 - a) Roads covered with stones on raised wooden platforms
 - b) Toll gates and guarded checkpoints at each village
 - c) Rest stations and messenger relay points
3. What is notable about Inca stone construction?
 - a) The stones fit so precisely that no mortar was needed
 - b) They used a special mortar made from volcanic rock
 - c) The stones were carved using iron tools
4. How did Inca citizens pay their taxes?
 - a) With gold and silver
 - b) With agricultural products
 - c) With labor
5. What did Francisco Pizarro demand for the release of the Inca emperor?
 - a) The Incas converting to the Catholic religion
 - b) An enormous ransom of gold and silver
 - c) The surrender of the entire Inca army
6. Which of these factors did NOT contribute to the fall of the Inca Empire?
 - a) Spanish weapons and horses
 - b) Drought and famine
 - c) European diseases

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **extensive:** wide-ranging, well-maintained, newly built, carefully planned
2. **precision:** speed, exactness, effort, beauty
3. **descendant:** representative in government, relative from a later generation, house servant, chosen successor
4. **conquistador:** trader, settler, explorer, conqueror
5. **disintegrated:** surrendered, reorganized, expanded, collapsed
6. **immunity:** natural protection, deadly weakness, careful treatment, awareness

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4. Ada Lovelace

Ada Lovelace was born in London in 1815, the daughter of the poet Lord Byron and a mother who insisted she study mathematics rather than literature, fearing that Ada might inherit her father's unstable temperament. That unusual education shaped her into one of the most original thinkers of the nineteenth century, a visionary who imagined machines doing things no one else had considered possible, long before such fields were considered suitable for women.

In 1833, Lovelace met the inventor Charles Babbage, who had designed a mechanical calculating device called the Analytical Engine, a machine intended to perform complex calculations automatically using punched cards. The two collaborated for years, exchanging letters filled with mathematical ideas. Babbage never finished building the machine, but Lovelace became fascinated by what it might someday accomplish.

In 1843, Lovelace translated an Italian mathematician's article about the Analytical Engine into English. Her translation included a set of personal notes that ended up three times longer than the original manuscript. Buried inside those notes was a detailed method for calculating a sequence of numbers using the machine, something historians now consider the first computer program ever written.

What made Lovelace's thinking so remarkable was that she foresaw uses for computing far beyond arithmetic. While Babbage focused on numbers, Lovelace suggested that a machine like his could someday manipulate symbols, compose music, or create images, an idea that sounded absurd to skeptical readers at a time when machines were viewed only as tools for repetitive arithmetic.

Lovelace died in 1852 of cancer at just thirty-six, long before computers existed in any real form. For over a century, her contribution was largely forgotten. Today, however, she is widely celebrated as the first person to recognize that computing could become something far greater than a tool for mathematics alone. *(298 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage

1. Why did Ada Lovelace's mother insist she study mathematics?
 - a) She wanted Ada to take over the family's business
 - b) She feared Ada might inherit her father's unstable temperament
 - c) She wanted her daughter to break the traditional path for women.
2. What was the Analytical Engine designed to do?
 - a) Perform complex calculations automatically using punched cards
 - b) Translate mathematical articles from Italian into English
 - c) Compose music and create images automatically
3. What happened when Lovelace translated the Italian article about the Analytical Engine?
 - a) She shortened it to make it easier to understand
 - b) Her personal notes ended up three times longer than the original
 - c) Babbage rewrote it before it was published
4. How did Lovelace's view of computing differ from Babbage's?
 - a) She believed the machine would never actually work
 - b) She saw uses for it far beyond arithmetic, like music and images
 - c) She wanted to build a faster version of his machine
5. Why did Lovelace's ideas sound absurd to readers at the time?
 - a) No one believed machines could ever be built
 - b) Babbage himself publicly disagreed with her notes
 - c) Machines were viewed only as tools for repetitive arithmetic
6. How is Ada Lovelace remembered today?
 - a) As the first person to recognize computing's potential beyond mathematics
 - b) As the inventor of the first working computer
 - c) As Charles Babbage's most famous student

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **temperament:** reputation, nature, condition, ability
2. **visionary:** scholar, rebel, expert, dreamer
3. **collaborated:** negotiated, cooperated, competed, argued
4. **manuscript:** translation, summary, letter, document
5. **foresaw:** predicted, ignored, doubted, denied
6. **skeptical:** excited, doubtful, curious, confused

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5. Microplastics

Plastic is one of the most useful materials ever invented, but it creates a serious problem once it enters the natural world. Unlike organic materials, plastic does not decompose. Instead, it slowly breaks into smaller and smaller pieces over many years, a process that can continue almost endlessly. When these pieces reach five millimeters or less in size, scientists classify them as microplastics. Researchers have now found microplastics in oceans, rivers, soil, air, and even deep inside human blood.

The journey of microplastics through the food chain begins in the water. Plastic waste enters rivers and oceans from landfills, storm drains, and eroding coastlines. Sunlight and constant wave action break larger plastic items into tiny fragments. These fragments are often mistaken for food by small marine animals such as zooplankton and small fish. Once consumed, microplastics are not digested — they remain trapped inside the animal's body indefinitely.

The problem grows steadily worse as you move up the food chain. When larger fish eat smaller fish, they accumulate the microplastics carried by every animal they consume along the way. This process, known as bioaccumulation, means that animals at the top of the food chain — including tuna, dolphins, and humans — carry the highest concentrations of microplastics in their bodies.

Humans are exposed to microplastics not only through seafood but also through daily drinking water, sea salt, and even the air we breathe indoors. A 2019 study estimated that the average person ingests approximately five grams of plastic every single week — roughly the weight of a credit card.

The long-term health effects of microplastics on humans are still being studied, but early research suggests they may cause inflammation and disrupt hormone systems throughout the body. What is already clear is that microplastics are now pervasive — present everywhere in the natural world and increasingly difficult to avoid. *(303 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage

1. According to the passage, at what size are plastic fragments classified as microplastics?
 - a) 5 millimeters or less
 - b) 1 millimeter or less
 - c) 15 microns or less
2. How do microplastics first enter the food chain?
 - a) Small marine animals mistake plastic fragments for food
 - b) Zooplankton absorb dissolved plastic particles directly from seawater
 - c) Microplastics dissolve into the water and are absorbed through skin
3. What is bioaccumulation?
 - a) The gradual breakdown of hormone systems caused by long-term plastic exposure
 - b) A method scientists use to measure plastic in ocean water
 - c) The buildup of microplastics in animals as they eat other contaminated animals
4. According to the passage, which groups carry the highest concentrations of microplastics?
 - a) Zooplankton and small fish at the bottom of the food chain
 - b) Animals and humans at the top of the food chain
 - c) Marine animals that live near landfills and cities
5. According to the passage, besides seafood, what other sources expose humans to microplastics?
 - a) Sunlight, wave action, and ocean currents
 - b) Drinking water, sea salt, and indoor air
 - c) Landfills, storm drains, and eroding coastlines
6. Approximately how much plastic does the average person ingest per week according to the 2019 study?
 - a) 50 grams
 - b) 15 grams
 - c) 5 grams

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **decompose:** recycle, harden, expand, decay
2. **fragments:** toxins, particles, deposits, chemicals
3. **accumulate:** scatter, release, reduce, collect
4. **ingests:** removes, produces, consumes, absorbs
5. **inflammation:** weakness, swelling, reaction, infection
6. **pervasive:** widespread, occasional, invisible, harmful

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6. The Sense of Smell

Of all the human senses, smell has the most direct and immediate connection to memory and emotion. A single smell can instantly bring back a childhood memory or trigger a strong feeling. This happens because smell signals travel directly to the limbic system — the part of the brain that processes emotion and long-term memory — without first passing through other brain regions the way most other senses do.

When you smell something, tiny molecules released by objects around you enter your nose. These molecules travel to a small patch of tissue at the top of the nasal passage called the olfactory epithelium, which contains millions of specialized receptor cells. Each receptor is designed to detect one or more specific molecules. When the right molecule meets the right receptor, a signal travels along the olfactory nerve to the brain, which identifies the smell almost instantly.

Humans can distinguish an estimated one trillion different smells — far more than scientists once believed possible. However, naming a smell without seeing its source is surprisingly difficult, even for a familiar one. Most people recognize a familiar smell immediately but cannot find the word for it. Researchers call this the "tip of the nose" experience.

Smell also affects how we taste things far more than most people assume. When you eat, molecules from your food travel through the back of your throat to the same olfactory receptors. This is why food seems bland when you have a blocked nose — since the flavor information is simply missing. Scientists estimate that up to 80 percent of what we normally call taste is actually smell.

Finally, the sense of smell can deteriorate gradually with age. Many people over 60 notice a significant decline in their ability to detect odors, which can affect appetite, safety awareness, and overall quality of life. *(300 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage.

1. Why can a smell trigger a strong memory or emotion?
 - a) Smell signals pass through several other brain regions before reaching the limbic system.
 - b) Smell signals travel directly to the brain's emotion and memory center.
 - c) Smell molecules are stronger than other sensory signals.
2. What happens when a smell molecule connects with the correct receptor cell?
 - a) The signal bypasses the olfactory nerve and travels straight to the limbic system.
 - b) The molecule is broken down and absorbed into the bloodstream.
 - c) A signal travels along the olfactory nerve to the brain.
3. What is the "tip of the nose" experience?
 - a) Being unable to recognize a smell even though it feels vaguely familiar
 - b) Recognizing a smell instantly but being unable to name it
 - c) Confusing two similar smells with each other
4. According to the passage, how much of what we call taste is actually smell?
 - a) Around 20 percent
 - b) Around 50 percent
 - c) Around 80 percent
5. Where in the body is the olfactory epithelium located?
 - a) At the back of the throat near the esophagus
 - b) Deep within the limbic system of the brain
 - c) At the top of the nasal passage
6. What does the passage say happens to the sense of smell as people age?
 - a) It slowly gets worse, which affects quality of life.
 - b) It becomes more sensitive to certain types of harmful smells.
 - c) It loses its ability to trigger memories and emotions.

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **molecules:** substances, particles, organisms, compounds
2. **tissue:** sense, paper, layer, action
3. **nasal:** relating to the throat, relating to the nose, relating to the mouth, relating to the ears
4. **distinguish:** separate, detect, compare, combine
5. **bland:** unpleasant, tasteless, mild, bitter
6. **deteriorate:** weaken, slow, disappear, change

Time Reading

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7. Light Pollution

For most of human history, nights were dark. The only artificial light came from fires and candles, which had little effect on the natural world. Today, electric lighting has completely transformed the night sky. Cities and towns glow so brightly that in many parts of the world, people can no longer see the stars at all. This excess artificial light, known as light pollution, is having serious consequences for animals that depend on true darkness to survive.

Many animals are nocturnal — they sleep during the day and are active only at night. Their bodies and behaviors have evolved over millions of years in response to natural cycles of light and darkness. Artificial light disrupts these ancient cycles in ways that can be damaging and sometimes fatal.

The sea turtle reproduction cycle is one well-documented example. Female sea turtles return to the same beaches where they themselves were born to lay their eggs. When the eggs hatch, the newborn turtles instinctively move toward the brightest point on the horizon, which in nature is the ocean reflecting moonlight. On bright coastlines, however, hatchlings (baby turtles) frequently move toward streetlights and buildings instead, becoming lost and dying before they ever reach the water.

Migratory birds also suffer greatly from this problem. Many species navigate at night using stars as reference points. Bright city lights disorient them, causing birds to circle lit buildings for hours, exhausting themselves in the process. Millions of birds die each year from collisions with brightly lit buildings during their long seasonal migrations.

Insects are similarly affected. Artificial lights attract and trap moths and other insects in large numbers, disrupting their feeding and reproduction cycles and steadily reducing their populations over time. Since insects are a critical food source for many other animals, their decline creates problems throughout the entire food chain. *(303 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage.

1. What is light pollution?
 - a) A temporary increase in nighttime brightness caused by seasonal weather patterns
 - b) Extra artificial light that affects the natural environment
 - c) A type of chemical released by electric lighting systems
2. What can people in many parts of the world no longer do because of city lights?
 - a) Use artificial lighting to extend their nighttime working hours
 - b) Sleep properly and undisturbed through the night
 - c) See the stars in the night sky
3. Why do newborn sea turtles sometimes move toward streetlights instead of the ocean?
 - a) Because they cannot see color, they are drawn to any light source of equal intensity.
 - b) Streetlights produce a color of light that resembles moonlight.
 - c) They instinctively move toward the brightest point.
4. How do migratory birds use stars during their journeys?
 - a) They use star patterns as seasonal cues to begin their migration.
 - b) They use stars as reference points to navigate at night.
 - c) They use stars to measure altitude during flight.
5. What happens to birds that are disoriented by city lights?
 - a) They adapt and begin using the lit buildings as new navigation points.
 - b) They change their migration routes to avoid bright areas.
 - c) They circle lit buildings for hours.
6. Why does the decline of insects matter beyond insects themselves?
 - a) Insects are being replaced by predators that are more destructive to the ecosystem.
 - b) Insects are a critical food source for many other animals
 - c) Insects help filter pollutants from rivers and soil.

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **excess:** unnecessary, reflected, harmful, artificial
2. **evolved:** survived, learned, changed, adapted
3. **fatal:** serious, permanent, harmful, deadly
4. **hatch:** grow, emerge, die, break
5. **instinctively:** repeatedly, quickly, naturally, carefully
6. **migratory:** tropical, traveling, territorial, nocturnal
7. **disorient:** slow, separate, confuse, attract
8. **collision:** warning, injury, escape, crash
9. **critical:** rare, popular, limited, essential

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8. Bridges

Bridges are among the most impressive structures humans have ever built. Some span enormous distances, carrying thousands of vehicles every single day. Yet most people never stop to think about why bridges actually stay up. The answer lies in two fundamental forces that engineers must carefully balance: tension and compression.

Compression is a pushing force. When weight presses down on a structure, compression squeezes the material together. Stone and concrete handle compression well — they are extremely strong when squeezed but crack easily when pulled apart. Ancient builders understood this instinctively, long before modern physics existed. The stone arch, used in bridges for thousands of years, works by redirecting the weight of the structure outward and downward into the ground, spreading compression evenly through the stone.

Tension is the opposite force — it pulls material apart. Steel handles tension well because it is flexible enough to stretch slightly without breaking. Modern suspension bridges exploit this property. Thick steel cables hang between tall towers and support the road below. The weight of the road pulls down on the cables, placing them under enormous tension. The cables transmit this force to the towers, which push it down into the ground as compression.

Most bridges use both forces simultaneously. A simple beam bridge, for example, experiences compression along its upper surface and tension along its lower surface at the same time. Engineers must choose their materials carefully, matching each material to the type of force acting on that specific part of the structure.

When bridges fail, it is usually because one force exceeded what the material could withstand. The Tacoma Narrows Bridge in Washington State collapsed in 1940 not from excess weight but from wind. Strong gusts caused the bridge to oscillate — swinging rhythmically from side to side — until the structure eventually tore itself apart. *(300 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage.

1. What are the two fundamental forces that bridge engineers must balance?
 - a) Tension and compression
 - b) Gravity and momentum
 - c) Flexibility and rigidity
2. Why did ancient builders favor the arch shape in stone bridges?
 - a) Arches convert tension into compression at the keystone
 - b) Arches are easier to construct without modern materials
 - c) Arches spread compression evenly across the structure
3. Why does steel handle tension well?
 - a) It contains natural compounds that resist pressure
 - b) It is flexible enough to stretch without breaking
 - c) It is denser than stone or concrete
4. In a suspension bridge, what are the steel cables under?
 - a) Tension from the weight of the road pulling downward
 - b) Compression from the weight of the towers
 - c) Equal amounts of tension and compression simultaneously
5. What does a beam bridge experience on its upper and lower surfaces?
 - a) Compression on top and tension on the bottom at the same time
 - b) Tension on top and compression on the bottom at the same time
 - c) Tension on both surfaces, increasing toward the center
6. Why did the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse?
 - a) The weight of traffic exceeded what the cables could support
 - b) Wind caused the bridge to oscillate until it tore itself apart
 - c) The steel cables corroded and snapped during a storm

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **fundamental:** powerful, invisible, dangerous, basic
2. **exploit:** utilize, ignore, discard, delay
3. **transmit:** transfer, release, redirect, absorb
4. **simultaneously:** over and over again, one at a time, in equal amounts, at the same time
5. **gusts:** waves, rays, clouds, blasts
6. **oscillate:** vibrate, rotate, expand, collapse

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9. Digital Minimalism

In recent years, a growing number of people have started making deliberate choices to use their phones less. This trend, sometimes called digital minimalism, involves setting clear limits on screen time rather than simply reaching for a device out of habit. Supporters see it less as rejecting technology and more as reclaiming control over it.

Researchers have found a connection between heavy phone use and problems such as poor sleep, reduced focus, and constant distraction. Many people report feeling dependent on their phones, checking them dozens of times a day even without a clear reason to do so. Notifications are often designed to pull attention back to the screen as quickly as possible.

In response, some schools have begun to restrict phone use during class time, asking students to store devices in lockers or pouches until the school day ends. Sales of simple dumb phones, devices that can only call and text, have also increased in recent years. Some workplaces have introduced similar rules, limiting phone use during meetings or certain hours of the day.

People who try to cut back often notice how difficult it is to resist checking their phone, especially in the first few days. Some report feeling restless or uneasy without their device nearby, reaching for a pocket that suddenly feels empty. This discomfort is usually temporary, though it can feel strong at first. After a few weeks, many say the urge becomes far less noticeable, and checking the phone no longer feels automatic.

Digital minimalism does not require giving up technology completely. Instead, it encourages using devices with more moderation, choosing when and why to go online rather than doing so automatically. Supporters argue that this small shift can lead to better focus, deeper sleep, and more attention for the people and activities around them. *(300 words)*

Finishing Time: _____

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Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage.

1. What does digital minimalism involve?
 - a) Replacing smartphones with dumb phones
 - b) Deleting all social media accounts
 - c) Setting clear limits on screen time
2. According to the passage, what have researchers linked to heavy phone use?
 - a) Poor sleep, reduced focus, and constant distraction
 - b) Higher stress levels and more frequent headaches
 - c) A reduction in decision making ability
3. What have some schools done in response to concerns about phone use?
 - a) Asked students to store phones in lockers or pouches during class
 - b) Allowed students to use their devices only during breaks
 - c) Replaced textbooks with tablets and phones
4. What do people often experience in the first few days of cutting back?
 - a) Meaningful improvement in sleep quality
 - b) A general loss of interest in their phone
 - c) Restlessness without their device
5. What happens to the urge to check a phone after a few weeks?
 - a) It returns strongly whenever the phone is nearby
 - b) It becomes far less noticeable
 - c) It shifts from phones to other devices
6. According to the passage, what is the goal of digital minimalism?
 - a) To balance screen time equally across every day of the week
 - b) To use devices with more moderation and intention
 - c) To limit phone use outside work and school

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **deliberate:** sudden, occasional, intentional, careless
2. **dependent:** uninterested, reliant, helpful, curious
3. **store:** use, share, sell, keep
4. **cut back:** reduce, increase, forget, continue
5. **resist:** welcome, delay, avoid, accept
6. **urge:** routine, memory, impulse, decision
7. **moderation:** urgency, restraint, neglect, excess

Time Reading

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Starting time: _____

10. Soil Erosion

Soil is one of the most valuable resources on Earth, but it is disappearing faster than it can be replaced. It takes nature about 500 years to form just one centimeter of fertile topsoil. When that soil is lost, the effects on farming, nature, and water quality can be serious and long-lasting.

Soil erosion happens when the top layer of soil is removed by wind or water. In nature, plant roots hold soil in place, and plants slow down rainwater as it moves across the ground. When plants are removed — through farming, cutting down trees, or letting too many animals graze in one place — the soil becomes exposed and vulnerable. Rainwater then runs off quickly instead of soaking into the ground, carrying large amounts of loose soil into rivers and streams.

Farming is the main cause of fast soil erosion around the world. Intensive farming methods, such as plowing large areas of land, leaving fields empty between growing seasons, and removing hedgerows (rows of bushes and small trees) and windbreaks (rows of trees that block strong wind), all increase how quickly soil is lost. In some heavily farmed areas, topsoil is disappearing up to 100 times faster than it naturally forms.

The effects reach beyond the farm. Soil that washes into rivers raises sediment levels, blocking sunlight and lowering oxygen in the water, which harms fish and other aquatic life. Along coasts, sediment accumulation from erosion can damage coral reefs. On land, losing topsoil lowers how much food farms can grow, forcing farmers to use more fertilizer.

Some solutions exist. Planting cover crops protects bare soil between seasons. Contour plowing — farming across slopes instead of up and down — slows water runoff a lot. Bringing back plants along riverbanks helps stabilize soil and filter sediment before it reaches the water. (299 words)

Finishing Time: _____

Reading Time: _____

Part 1: Answer these questions. Do not look back at the passage.

1. How long does it take nature to form one centimeter of fertile topsoil?
 - a) Less than 100 years
 - b) Approximately 100 years
 - c) More than 500 years
2. Why does removing vegetation increase soil erosion?
 - a) Tree roots push topsoil deeper underground where it is unprotected.
 - b) Plant roots hold soil in place and slow the movement of rainwater.
 - c) Vegetation absorbs chemicals that harden the soil surface.
3. What causes the loss of plants that leads to soil erosion?
 - a) Urban expansion moving into natural environments
 - b) Disease and insect damage to root systems
 - c) Farming, logging, and overgrazing
4. How does eroded soil affect rivers and aquatic life?
 - a) It raises sediment levels, blocking sunlight and reducing oxygen in the water.
 - b) It introduces chemicals that cause algae to grow uncontrollably.
 - c) It increases the water's acidity, directly killing plant life.
5. How can soil erosion affect coastal areas?
 - a) Ocean currents can carry topsoil back onto beaches.
 - b) Rising sea levels can flood nearby farmland.
 - c) Sediment runoff can damage coral reefs.
6. What is contour plowing?
 - a) Farming across slopes rather than up and down to slow water runoff.
 - b) Plowing fields immediately after heavy rainfall to reduce runoff.
 - c) Alternating crop types row by row to reduce nutrient loss.

Part 2: Circle the word that is closest in meaning to the word from the passage above (in bold).

1. **fertile:** sandy, salty, rocky, rich
2. **graze:** run very fast, move far away, hide alone, eat grass
3. **exposed:** unprotected, frozen, flooded, buried
4. **vulnerable:** weak, rough, dry, dense
5. **intensive:** traditional, seasonal, organic, large-scale
6. **sediment:** soil particles, residue, large rocks, beach foam
7. **accumulation:** shortage, leak, decline, buildup
8. **stabilize:** set up, make secure, erode, dissolve

1. Sleep and Memory

Part 1: 1. c 2. b 3. c 4. b 5. a 6. a

Part 2: fragile: delicate
consolidation: strengthening
impair: damage
boost: increase
retention: keeping
active: busy

2. Athena in Greek Mythology

Part 1: 1. b 2. c 3. a 4. a 5. b 6. a

Part 2: rational: logical
patron: guardian
spring: water source
reflective: mirrored
distinction: difference
figures: icons

3. The Inca Empire

Part 1: 1. c 2. c 3. a 4. c 5. b 6. b

Part 2: extensive: wide-ranging
precision: exactness
descendant: relative from a later generation
conquistador: conqueror
disintegrated: collapsed
immunity: natural protection

4. Ada Lovelace

Part 1: 1. b 2. a 3. b 4. b 5. c 6. a

Part 2: temperament: nature
visionary: dreamer
collaborated: cooperated
manuscript: document
foresaw: predicted
skeptical: doubtful

5. Microplastics

Part 1: 1. a 2. a 3. c 4. b 5. b 6. c

Part 2: decompose: decay
fragments: particles
accumulate: collect
ingests: consumes
inflammation: swelling
pervasive: widespread

6. The Sense of Smell

Part 1: 1. b 2. c 3. b 4. c 5. c 6. a

Part 2: molecules: particles
tissue: layer
nasal: relating to the nose
distinguish: detect
bland: tasteless
deteriorate: weaken

7. Light Pollution

Part 1: 1. b 2. c 3. c 4. b 5. c 6. b

Part 2: excess: unnecessary
evolved: adapted
fatal: deadly
hatch: emerge
instinctively: naturally
migratory: traveling
disorient: confuse
collision: crash
critical: essential

8. Bridges

Part 1: 1. a 2. c 3. b 4. a 5. a 6. b

Part 2: fundamental: basic
exploit: utilize
transmit: transfer
simultaneously: at the same time
gusts: blasts
oscillate: vibrate

9. Digital Minimalism

Part 1: 1. c 2. a 3. a 4. c 5. b 6. b

Part 2: deliberate: intentional
dependent: reliant
store: keep
cut back: reduce
resist: avoid
urge: impulse
moderation: restraint

10. Soil Erosion

Part 1: 1. c 2. b 3. c 4. a 5. c 6. a

Part 2: fertile: rich
graze: eat grass
exposed: unprotected
vulnerable: weak
intensive: large-scale
sediment: soil particles
accumulation: buildup
stabilize: make secure

Timed Reading Score Card | 300-word passages

time	words per minute	passage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1:00	300	# correct										
1:05	277	300										
1:10	257	277										
1:15	240	257										
1:20	225	240										
1:25	212	225										
1:30	200	212										
1:35	189	200										
1:40	180	189										
1:45	171	180										
1:50	164	171										
1:55	157	164										
2:00	150	157										
2:05	144	150										
2:10	138	144										
2:15	133	138										
2:20	129	133										
2:25	124	129										
2:30	120	124										
2:35	116	120										
2:40	113	116										
2:45	109	113										
2:50	106	109										
2:55	103	106										
3:00	100	103										
3:05	97	100										
3:10	95	97										
3:15	92	95										
3:20	90	92										
3:25	88	90										
3:30	86	88										
3:35	84	86										
3:40	82	84										
3:45	80	82										
3:50	78	80										
3:55	77	78										
4:00	75	77										
		75										