IELTS Self Practice Reading

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Passage 1 – The History of the Compass

Few inventions in human history have shaped exploration as profoundly as the magnetic compass. Originating in China around the 11th century, the first compasses were simple lodestones — naturally magnetised pieces of iron ore. These early devices were initially used for divination, not navigation.

By the 12th century, Arab traders and European sailors had adopted the compass for maritime use. Before its introduction, navigation relied on the position of the stars, the sun, and coastal landmarks. These methods were unreliable during cloudy weather or long ocean voyages. The compass, by pointing north regardless of visibility, revolutionised travel.

The design of the compass gradually evolved. Early versions were crude, with a magnetic needle floating on water or resting on a piece of reed. Later, the needle was mounted on a pivot, improving accuracy. By the 15th century, the compass had become indispensable for explorers such as Christopher Columbus, who crossed the Atlantic with confidence partly thanks to this tool.

Despite its importance, the compass was not perfect. Magnetic variation — the difference between magnetic north and true north — created errors that sailors had to learn to adjust for. In addition, the iron used in ships could interfere with the needle's accuracy. By the 18th century, scientists developed correction methods, making the compass even more reliable.

Today, the compass remains a symbol of guidance, though modern navigation is dominated by GPS technology. Yet, the compass still plays a role in survival training, hiking, and education. Its story illustrates how a simple natural phenomenon — magnetism — changed the course of human history.

Questions 1–13

Questions 1–6 (Complete the notes. Choose ONE WORD ONLY.)

The invention of the compass:

1. First compasses in China were made of _____.
2. At first, they were used mainly for _____.
3. Before compasses, sailors used stars, the sun, and _____ to navigate.
4. Early compasses sometimes floated on _____.
5. Explorers like _____ benefited from compasses in long voyages.
6. One problem was magnetic _____ between true and magnetic north.

Questions 7–10 (True/False/Not Given)
7. The compass was first developed in Europe.
8. Clouds made early navigation difficult.
9. Iron on ships could disturb compass accuracy.
10. GPS has completely replaced compasses in modern use.

Questions 11–13 (Short answers, NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS)
11. Who were among the first non-Chinese users of the compass?
12. In which century did scientists improve compass correction methods?
13. Today, name one group of people who still use compasses.

Passage 2 – Sleep and Productivity

For centuries, philosophers and scientists debated the purpose of sleep. Modern research confirms that sleep is vital for both physical health and mental performance. Despite this, many societies undervalue rest, with long working hours and digital distractions reducing average sleep duration.

Lack of sleep has measurable effects on productivity. Studies show that sleep-deprived workers make more mistakes, react more slowly, and struggle with creativity. In one study, employees sleeping fewer than six hours a night were 20% less efficient than those with at least seven hours. Chronic sleep loss has also been linked to serious conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, increasing healthcare costs for businesses.

The “culture of busyness” often treats rest as laziness. In some industries, working late is seen as a badge of honour. Ironically, this reduces overall output. Companies like Google and Nike have recognised the importance of rest, providing nap pods or flexible schedules.

The relationship between sleep and productivity is also psychological. During sleep, the brain consolidates memories and processes new information. Without sufficient rest, learning and decision-making suffer. Experiments on students reveal that test scores drop significantly when sleep is reduced before exams.

Solutions are both personal and societal. On an individual level, avoiding screens before bed, maintaining a regular schedule, and limiting caffeine help improve sleep quality. On a broader scale, governments and employers can encourage better work-life balance. The evidence is clear: sleep is not wasted time but an investment in efficiency and health.

Questions 14-26

Questions 14–18 (True/False/Not Given)
14. Ancient philosophers believed sleep was unnecessary.
15. Sleep deprivation affects reaction times.
16. Workers who sleep more than seven hours never make mistakes.
17. Some companies encourage employees to rest during the day.
18. Sleep helps the brain process information.

Questions 19–22 (Complete the summary, ONE WORD ONLY)
Effects of sleep loss:
19. Workers make more _____ when deprived of sleep.
20. Sleep-deprived employees are less _____ in their work.
21. Sleep loss before exams lowers _____ results.
22. Healthcare _____ rise due to sleep-related illnesses.

Questions 23–26 (Short answers, NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS)
23. Which two companies provide nap pods or flexible schedules?
24. Name one medical condition linked to lack of sleep.
25. What common evening activity can reduce sleep quality?
26. What type of balance can governments promote to improve rest?

Passage 3 – Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming workplaces worldwide. Algorithms already perform tasks from diagnosing medical images to translating languages. While AI promises efficiency, it also raises concerns about employment and ethics.

One argument is that AI will create more jobs than it destroys. Historically, technology has displaced certain roles but generated new industries. For example, the Industrial Revolution replaced many manual jobs but expanded manufacturing and services. Optimists suggest AI will follow the same pattern, producing new careers in data science, robotics, and ethics oversight.

However, sceptics highlight differences. AI can replace not only physical labour but also cognitive tasks. For instance, legal software can scan documents faster than junior lawyers, and AI systems can generate news summaries or customer service replies. If widespread, this could shrink middle-income jobs, polarising economies.

Another concern is fairness. AI systems learn from data, which may contain biases. Biased recruitment software, for example, could exclude qualified candidates. Ethical frameworks and regulation are needed to ensure transparency.

Governments face difficult choices. Should they tax companies heavily for automation, or encourage innovation at the risk of inequality? Proposals such as universal basic income have gained attention, but critics question affordability. What is clear is that the AI revolution cannot be stopped. The challenge is to manage it responsibly.

Questions 27–40

Questions 27–31 (Match headings A–E to paragraphs)

A. Concerns about fairness
B. Historical comparisons
C. Examples of AI in current use
D. Optimistic outlook on jobs
E. Government responses

- Paragraph 1 → _____
- Paragraph 2 → _____
- Paragraph 3 → _____
- Paragraph 4 → _____
- Paragraph 5 → _____

Questions 32–35 (Multiple choice)

32. What is one role AI already performs?

A. Driving buses
B. Diagnosing medical images
C. Cooking in restaurants
D. Farming crops

33. Optimists argue AI will...

A. Destroy more jobs than it creates
B. Repeat patterns seen in history
C. Reduce the need for ethics oversight
D. End inequality in work

34. A risk of AI in law is...

A. It cannot read documents accurately
B. It will replace senior judges
C. It reduces work for junior lawyers
D. It increases court costs

35. Universal basic income is criticised because...

A. It is unfair to companies
B. It may not be affordable
C. It increases inequality
D. It discourages innovation

Questions 36–40 (True/False/Not Given)

36. The Industrial Revolution created new types of work.
37. AI cannot perform tasks that require language.
38. Biased data may lead to unfair hiring.
39. Governments have already solved the problem of AI inequality.
40. The text concludes that AI progress is inevitable.

🟦 Altruist IELTS Self Practice Test – Reading Answer Key

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Passage 1 – The History of the Compass

Q1. lodestones

- Passage: “the first compasses were simple lodestones — naturally magnetised pieces of iron ore.”
- Reasoning: Question asks “made of” → material. “Lodestones” = correct.
- Trap: “iron ore” looks correct but too general; text specifies “lodestones.”

Q2. divination

- Passage: “These early devices were initially used for divination, not navigation.”
- Reasoning: Clear contrast → divination was the first use.
- Trap: “navigation” is wrong because it’s mentioned as what they weren’t used for.

Q3. landmarks

- Passage: “navigation relied on the position of the stars, the sun, and coastal landmarks.”
- Reasoning: The missing word must parallel “stars” and “sun.”
- Trap: Students may write “coastal” but only “landmarks” completes meaning.

Q4. water

- Passage: “a magnetic needle floating on water.”
- Reasoning: The medium was water, not reed in this case.
- Trap: “reed” is mentioned but only in later versions.

Q5. Christopher Columbus

- Passage: “By the 15th century, ... explorers such as Christopher Columbus.”
- Reasoning: Named example in text.
- Trap: Writing “Columbus” or “Christopher” = also correct.

Q6. variation

- Passage: “Magnetic variation ... created errors.”
- Reasoning: Only word that completes the meaning.
- Trap: “difference” appears in text but doesn’t match technical term.

Q7. False

- Passage: “Originating in China...” → Not Europe.
- Reasoning: Statement contradicts text.

Q8. True

- Passage: “These methods were unreliable during cloudy weather.”
- Reasoning: Matches text exactly.

Q9. True

- Passage: “iron used in ships could interfere with accuracy.”
- Reasoning: Direct support.

Q10. False

- Passage: “Yet, the compass still plays a role...”
- Reasoning: Shows compasses are still used, not completely replaced.

Q11. Arab traders / European sailors

- Passage: “By the 12th century, Arab traders and European sailors had adopted the compass.”
- Reasoning: Either group is acceptable.

Q12. 18th century

- Passage: “By the 18th century, scientists developed correction methods.”
- Reasoning: Exact phrase.

Q13. hikers / students / survival trainers

- Passage: “The compass still plays a role in survival training, hiking, and education.”
- Reasoning: Any of the listed groups valid.

Passage 2 – Sleep and Productivity

Q14. Not Given

- Reasoning: Text says philosophers debated purpose, but not that they believed sleep unnecessary.

Q15. True

- Passage: “Sleep-deprived workers ... react more slowly.”
- Reasoning: Matches “affects reaction times.”

Q16. False

- Reasoning: Text: “make more mistakes.” Even well-rested workers make errors.

Q17. True

- Passage: “Companies like Google and Nike ... nap pods or flexible schedules.”

Q18. True

- Passage: “the brain consolidates memories and processes new information.”

Q19. mistakes

- Passage: “sleep-deprived workers make more mistakes.”

Q20. efficient

- Passage: “20% less efficient.”

Q21. test

- Passage: “test scores drop significantly.”

Q22. costs

- Passage: “increasing healthcare costs.”

Q23. Google, Nike

- Reasoning: Both must be named.

Q24. diabetes / heart disease

- Reasoning: Either acceptable.

Q25. using screens

- Passage: “avoiding screens before bed improves quality.”

Q26. work-life balance

- Passage: “governments ... encourage better work-life balance.”

Passage 3 – AI and the Future of Work

Q27. C (Examples of AI in current use)

- Passage: “diagnosing medical images, translating languages.”

Q28. D (Optimistic outlook)

- Passage: “AI will create more jobs than it destroys ... historical pattern.”

Q29. B (Historical comparisons)

- Passage: “Industrial Revolution replaced many manual jobs...”

Q30. A (Concerns about fairness)

- Passage: “Biased recruitment software...”

Q31. E (Government responses)

- Passage: “Governments face difficult choices.”

Q32. B. Diagnosing medical images

- Trap: “farming, buses, cooking” not in passage.

Q33. B. Repeat patterns in history

- Passage: Optimists compare to Industrial Revolution.

Q34. C. Reduces work for junior lawyers

- Passage: “AI can scan documents faster than junior lawyers.”

Q35. B. May not be affordable

- Passage: “critics question affordability.”

Q36. True

- Passage: “expanded manufacturing and services.”

Q37. False

- Passage: “translating languages” = AI can use language.

Q38. True

- Passage: “biased recruitment software could exclude candidates.”

Q39. False

- Passage: “governments face difficult choices” = problem unsolved.

Q40. True

- Passage: “AI revolution cannot be stopped.”