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NATIONAL  
QUALIFICATIONS  
2015

THURSDAY, 14 MAY  
9.00 AM – 10.00 AM

ENGLISH  
INTERMEDIATE 2  
Close Reading—Text

Read the passage carefully and then answer all the questions, which are printed in a separate booklet.

The questions will ask you to show that:

you understand the main ideas and important details in the passage—in other words, **what** the writer has said (**Understanding—U**);

you can identify, using appropriate terms, the techniques the writer has used to get across these ideas—in other words, **how** he/she has said it (**Analysis—A**);

you can, using appropriate evidence, comment on how effective the writer has been—in other words, **how well** he/she has said it (**Evaluation—E**).

A code letter (U, A, E) is used alongside each question to identify its purpose for you. The number of marks attached to each question will give some indication of the length of answer required.



## QWERTY is the key to our love of language

*People grumbling about e-mails and tweets don't get it. Technology enriches the written word.*

Jonathan Franzen, the American novelist, is in rage against the machines. He objects to the way that modern gizmos, screens and keyboards are affecting the written word. He wants to make some corrections.

Franzen seems to object to just about every form of modern digital communication. Recently he railed against Twitter: “Unspeakably irritating ... the ultimate irresponsible medium.” Before that, he attacked e-books as “just not permanent enough” and incompatible “with a system of justice or responsible self-government”. Before that he clobbered Facebook: “All one big endless loop ... we like the mirror and the mirror likes us.”

10 Mr Franzen’s pronouncements reflect a fear, shared by many writers and readers, that digitisation is a threat to literature itself, that the world is becoming so swamped with e-distractions, Facebook and Twitter, that we may forget how to read big books with paper pages that sit on shelves.

15 The digital revolution has indeed transformed our relationship with words, but mostly for the better. We are communicating in writing as never before; we are now able to speak instantly across cultures and among languages, and millions are alert to the importance of written words in a way once restricted to an intellectual elite.

20 So far from killing off literature, e-mail, social networking and digital publishing may be creating a generation of humanity that is more closely in touch with words than any before it. Words are surging around and across the world in an extraordinary, unstoppable blizzard, written and read at a rate and on a scale that is mind-boggling and quite new: more than 100 billion entries a day on Facebook and more than one billion tweets a week. E-book sales are soaring in the UK.

25 In 1995 the average mobile telephone user sent one message every two and a half months. Today, the Philippines holds the record for texting: 27 per user per day. In Scandinavia, more than 85 per cent of the population communicates by text. Some 294 billion e-mail messages are sent every day, or 2.8 million per second.

30 These are communications that, until recently, were made by telephone, by letter or face to face; or not at all. These messages may be ungrammatical, misspelt, slang or spam. Language purists shudder at the way text-speak mangles, simplifies and abbreviates. But these are nonetheless written words, deliberately chosen.

35 I am not suggesting that a texting teenager will necessarily move on to *War and Peace*, but since words cost money and time, word selection and word understanding are growing, not diminishing, in cultural importance. We write almost unconsciously as part of our everyday lives and we are reading and writing more and more words, as the technology enabling us to do so grows ever faster.

40 The machines are certainly changing the way we read and write. Many digital readers are magpies, skipping from one shiny object to the next. With so much information available, we tend to skim and browse through what one infuriated Franzen character calls “a trillion bits of distracting noise”. Franzen famously writes with the internet disconnected, and believes no good novelist could write otherwise.

But the multifaceted nature of digital life can enhance as well as distract from the written word: the recent app of T. S. Eliot’s classic poem *The Waste Land* offers not just the

45 text, but also critical notes, Ezra Pound's annotations and the sound of Eliot reading his own poetry.

Franzen insists that a printed book is "permanent and unalterable" (a view contradicted by book burners, censors and bowdlerisers down the ages), whereas "a screen always feels that we could delete that, change that, move it around". But as a writer of nonfiction, I relish the opportunity to return to a text and amend and refine it after publication, 50 as additional historical evidence emerges. As a digital phenomenon, the book is not pickled in literary aspic, as Franzen seems to want, but a continuous work in progress.

Twitter imposes a strange but fascinating discipline of its own. E-mail and text are forging new language and usage. And the very layout of the computer keyboard, now an immutable if arbitrary fact of world culture, may be shaping our perception of words.

55 The layout of the QWERTY keyboard may mean we attach more positive meaning to words with letters located on the right-hand side of the keyboard (ie, to the right of T, G and B), because for the right-handed majority they are easier to type. We know how a word is spoken can affect its meaning. So can how it's typed.

60 The keyboard layout we all use today was invented in 1868 by a newspaperman from Milwaukee. In the old alphabetical layout the typewriter tended to jam because certain commonly used combinations of letters were close to each other. The QWERTY layout led to faster typing and fewer typos, but was also intended to make life easier for Remington salesmen demonstrating the new typewriter, since TYPEWRITER can be tapped out using only the top line.

65 The QWERTY keyboard was flawed—other layouts are less likely to cause repetitive strain injury—but it stuck, and now, as millions of words are communicated through the fingers of computer-users every day, it may be altering the nature of language itself.

70 The typewriter made writing easier and for ever changed the way the written word was produced. The same is true of modern technological vehicles for reading, writing and connecting. Instead of resisting Twitter, Facebook, e-book, text and blog, readers and writers alike should embrace each new advance in the deployment and enjoyment of words.

75 The e-book will not harm reading any more than the camera damaged the art of painting. The emoticon will not, in the end, prevent readers from absorbing the deeper emotions of a Jonathan Franzen novel.

As the history of the keyboard shows, when a new writing or reading technology takes root, it is very hard to control, shift or delete. We live in a QWERTY world, and there is no going back.

Ben Macintyre, in *The Times*,

[END OF TEXT]

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Close Reading – Article is adapted from “*Qwerty is the key to our love of language*” by Ben Macintyre, taken from The Times, 13 March 2012. Reproduced by permission of News Syndication. © The Times, March 2012.