

X270/11/01

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2012

WEDNESDAY, 16 MAY
1.00 PM – 2.00 PM

ENGLISH
INTERMEDIATE 2
Close Reading

Answer all questions.

30 marks are allocated to this paper.

Read the passage carefully and then answer **all** the questions, **using your own words as far as possible**.

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 has said it (**Analysis—A**);

you can, using appropriate evidence, comment on how effective the writer has been—in other words, **how well** he 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.



SUPERSTITION

In this passage, the writer explores how superstition can both help and hinder us.

Tennis players are a funny bunch. Have you noticed how they always ask for three balls instead of two; how they bounce the ball the same number of times before serving, as if any deviation from their routine might bring the world collapsing on their heads?

5 But the superstitions and rituals so beloved by the world's top players are not confined to the court. They take even more bizarre twists when the poor dears get home after their matches. Goran Ivanisevic got it into his head that if he won a match he had to repeat everything he did the previous day, such as eating the same food at the same restaurant, talking to the same people and watching the same TV programmes. One year this meant that he had to watch Teletubbies every morning during his Wimbledon
10 campaign. "Sometimes it got very boring," he said.

Could it be that these multifarious superstitions tell us something of deeper importance not only about humanity but about other species on the planet?

The answer, I think, is to be found in the world of pigeons. Yes, really. These feathered fellows, you see, are the tennis players of the bird world. Don't take my word for it:
15 that was the opinion of B. F. Skinner, the man widely regarded as the father of modern psychology.

Skinner's view was based on a groundbreaking experiment that he carried out in 1947 in which he placed some hungry pigeons in a cage attached to an automatic mechanism that delivered food "at regular intervals with no reference whatsoever to the bird's
20 behaviour". He discovered that the pigeons associated the delivery of the food with whatever chance actions they happened to be performing at the moment it was first delivered. So what did the pigeons do? They kept performing the same actions, even though they had no effect whatsoever on the release of food.

I know, I know. This is nothing compared with the weird behaviour that goes on
25 at Wimbledon, but do you see the connection? The pigeons were acting as if they could influence the mechanism delivering the Trill in just the same way that Ivanisevic thought that he could influence the outcome of his next match by watching Teletubbies. To put it a tad formally, they both witnessed a random connection between a particular kind of behaviour and a desired outcome, and then (wrongly) inferred that one caused
30 the other.

But did Ivanisevic really believe that his superstitions were effective or was he just having us on? Well, let's hear from the man himself – this is what he said when asked if he had ever abandoned a ritual when it stopped working: "I didn't. They do work. I won Wimbledon." So, he really did believe. And what of the pigeons? They were,
35 unfortunately, unavailable for interview.

Superstitious behaviour emerged quite early in evolutionary history. What is certain is that it is widespread, particularly within *homo sapiens*. More than half of Americans admitted to being superstitious in a recent poll, and it is not just silly and gullible types either. At Harvard University, students frequently rub the foot of the statue of John
40 Harvard for good luck.

Even cricketers, perhaps the brightest and most sensible sportsmen of all (well, that's what they tell us), are not immune to superstition. Jack Russell, the former England wicketkeeper, was among the most notorious, refusing to change his hat or wicketkeeping

pads throughout his career, even though they became threadbare and smelly, something
45 that really got up the noses of his team-mates.

But this raises another, deeper question: why do so many of us maintain rituals of
various kinds when they have no real connection with the desired outcome? Or, to put it
another way, why is superstitious behaviour so widespread, not just within our species
but beyond, when it seems to confer no tangible benefits? It's here that things get really
50 interesting (and just a little complex). And, as with most interesting things, the answer
is to be found in deep evolutionary history.

Imagine a caveman going to pick some berries from some bushes near his rocky abode.
He hears some rustling in the bushes and wrongly infers that there is a lion lurking in
there and scarpers. He even gets a little superstitious about those bushes and gives them
55 a wide berth in future. Is this superstition a problem to our caveman? Well, not if there
are plenty of other berry-bearing bushes from which to get his five-a-day.

But suppose that there really is a lion living in those bushes. The caveman's behaviour
now looks not only sensible but life-saving. So, a tendency to perceive connections that
do not actually exist can confer huge evolutionary benefits, providing a cocoon of safety
60 in a turbulent and dangerous world. The only proviso (according to some devilishly
complicated mathematics known as game theory) is this: your superstitions must not
impose too much of a burden on those occasions when they are without foundation.

And this is almost precisely what superstitions look like in the modern world. Some
believe in horoscopes, but few allow them to dictate their behaviour; some like to wear
65 the same lucky shoes to every job interview, but it is not as if wearing a different pair
would improve their chances of success; some like to bounce the ball precisely seven
times before serving at tennis, but although they are wrong to suppose that this ball-
bouncing is implicated in their success, it does not harm their prospects (even if it
irritates those of us watching).

70 It is only when a superstition begins to compromise our deeper goals and aspirations
that we have moved along the spectrum of irrationality far enough to risk a diagnosis of
obsessive compulsive disorder. Take Kolo Touré, the former Arsenal defender, who
insists on being the last player to leave the dressing room after the half-time break. No
real problem, you might think, except that when William Gallas, his team-mate, was
75 injured and needed treatment at half-time during a match, Touré stayed in the dressing
room until Gallas had been treated, forcing Arsenal to start the second half with only
nine players.

When a superstition that is supposed to help you actually hinders you, it is probably
time to kick the ritual into touch. With a rabbit's foot, obviously.

Matthew Syed, in *The Times*

QUESTIONS

Marks Code

1. Look at lines 1–3, and then explain **in your own words** what is meant by
tennis players being “a funny bunch”. 1 U
2. Consider the first two sentences of the second paragraph (lines 4–6), and
then show how any example of the writer's **word choice** here reveals what
his attitude to “top players” is. 2 U

QUESTIONS (continued)

Marks Code

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 3. Explain why the paragraph in lines 11 and 12 works well at this point as a link of the ideas in the passage. | 2 | A |
| 4. Explain in your own words why the writer can feel confident about using B. F. Skinner (see line 15) to support his claims about pigeons. | 1 | U |
| 5. Explain how effective you find the writer’s use of the image or metaphor “groundbreaking” (line 17) to refer to Skinner’s experiment. | 1 | E |
| 6. Look at lines 24–30, and then explain fully and in your own words what “the connection” was. | 3 | U |
| 7. What is the effect of the inclusion of the sentence “They were, unfortunately, unavailable for interview” (lines 34–35)? | 1 | A |
| 8. Why does the writer include the reference to Harvard University (line 39)? | 1 | A |
| 9. Explain the humour of “something that really got up the noses of his team-mates” (lines 44–45). | 2 | A |
| 10. Look again at lines 52–56. | | |
| (a) How do these lines relate to the ideas the writer presents in the previous paragraph? | 2 | A |
| (b) What is surprising about the expression “to get his five-a-day” (line 56)? | 2 | A |
| 11. Explain in your own words what the “huge evolutionary benefits” (line 59) of superstitions are. | 2 | U |
| 12. Explain the writer’s use of a colon in line 61. | 1 | A |
| 13. Look again at lines 63–69, in which the writer examines the nature of superstition nowadays. | | |
| (a) Explain in your own words the points the writer makes. | 2 | U |
| (b) How does the sentence structure reinforce the ideas the writer is putting forward? | 1 | A |
| 14. Explain how effective you find the word “spectrum” (line 71) as an image or metaphor to illustrate people’s “irrationality”. | 2 | E |
| 15. Why does the writer include the anecdote about the footballer Kolo Touré (lines 72–77)? | 2 | A |
| 16. How effective do you find any aspect of the final paragraph (lines 78–79) as a conclusion to the passage? | | |
| Your answer might deal with such features as word choice or tone . | 2 | E |

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

Total (30)

[Open out for Questions]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Article is adapted from “Very superstitious: the obsessive, compulsive side of sport”, by Matthew Syed, taken from The Times, 1 July 2009. © The Times, July 2009.