

X270/11/01

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2013

FRIDAY, 17 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/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.



WHY REALITY TV WORKS

In this passage, the writer explores some of the reasons for the popularity of reality TV shows such as “The X Factor”.

It is a Saturday night in the northernmost fringes of London. Outside an anonymous building with blanked-out windows, a discarded plastic bag swirls in the breeze.

At first glance it seems a miserable place. But in fact this is where dreams are made and broken. Because this is where, every weekend, *The X Factor* goes live.

5 *The X Factor*, brainchild of Simon Cowell, is the most popular programme on Saturday night. Each week, hundreds make the pilgrimage to be part of the live audience, and millions of us tune in at home to watch.

10 As a result, many of us will spend more time in the virtual company of the contestants than we do with our real-life friends and family. In a modern world in which local communities have become increasingly fractured, where relatives live further apart from each other than ever before and where one in five of us will never speak to our neighbours, Cowell’s creation seems to be filling the void.

15 And yet despite the fact that more of us seem to be tuning in than ever before, relatively little is known about who watches and why. All we know is that *The X Factor*—whether it signifies the reinvigoration of weekend family viewing or the disintegration of civilised society—is a reality-television phenomenon.

So why, after a decade of phone-in rows, vote-rigging accusations and celebrity-hungry wannabes with bloated egos, does the British public remain so in love with reality television?

20 By now most of us know that the version of reality on offer is one shaped by a multimillion-pound business with slick production values, and yet we willingly suspend our disbelief week after week, month after month, in the name of entertainment. Is there something lacking in our daily lives that draws us so inexorably into Cowell’s web?

25 We do get swept up in it, wanting to be behind somebody, wanting them to do well. That’s why producers will make the hard-luck story—those little snippets of someone struggling in a dead-end job—because that enables us to feel we have a sort of connection.

30 And perhaps, in a world increasingly dominated by Facebook and Twitter, where friendships are made and broken at the click of the computer mouse, we feel more comfortable engaging with someone on the other side of the screen rather than chatting to them over the garden fence, as our grandparents might once have done. If we are already sharing the details of our private lives in Tweets and status updates, are we also becoming more accustomed to the notion of putting our intimate selves on display for the entertainment of others?

35 It’s no coincidence that our love affair with *The X Factor* is so potent right now, more than ever before, as Britain endures a period of relative austerity. In a time of economic hardship, we are seeking out the simple and cheap—family entertainment that makes us feel part of something bigger. But the popularity of such shows may be traced back even further—to the emergence of 19th-century periodicals which relied on reader contributions. Reality TV is merely a manifestation of a very, very old craving. We
40 love sentimental stories, such as Dickens’ Little Nell; we love a tear jerker, and shows like *The X Factor* are no more crass or exploitative than cheap sensational 19th-century fiction.

Yet it seems that 21st-century viewers are looking for more than just simple entertainment. Part of the attraction is the sense of control *The X Factor* gives us: the sense that we

45 can put right wider social wrongs by voting for our favourite contestants and that although our lives are being shaped by forces beyond our control—such as government cutbacks, widespread job losses or social deprivation—the ability to have a say in what happens to others in reality TV shows gives us back a much-needed sense of power.

The most popular contestants almost always have a backstory of personal triumph over adversity which enables us to feel that we are helping them succeed, that we are giving them a break even if no one else will. And perhaps this is why Susan Boyle, who grew up in a council house and was bullied as a child for her learning difficulties, has proved such an enduring figure.

55 Of course there are less noble motivations for watching, too: for every Susan Boyle there is a caterwauling teenager who cannot hold a tune and yet remains convinced he or she is destined for stardom. A part of us just loves it when people are awful and embarrass themselves—but human nature is contradictory like that, and reality television allows us to have it both ways.

In fact, most of us know we are being manipulated and that our emotional buttons are being shamelessly pressed every time there is a lingering close-up of a tear-stained contestant’s face recounting the traumatic time their grandmother’s budgerigar died. But because we have become so accustomed to such televisual shorthand, we are increasingly willing participants in the charade. We become, along with the contestants, part of the performance.

65 Do we care that reality television is not actually real? That question misses the point. Reality television is a completely constructed premise. None of the people would be in it if we were just showing their normal lives. But what it does do is take human flesh and blood and challenges it in situations that bring out a person’s true personality. That’s why shows work, because the public is after authenticity . . . They want to support people with talent and for them to win, but they punish pretension and two-facedness. On the whole, the public are positive, but they are judgemental.

Perhaps this, in the end, is the key to Cowell’s success: he acknowledges that we crave the appearance of reality, but that we also want the reassurance of a happy ending for those who deserve it and retribution for those who do not.

75 Either that or we just want to laugh at the man with the comb-over singing an out-of-tune Mariah Carey song.

Adapted from an article by
Elizabeth Day, in *The Observer*

QUESTIONS

Marks Code

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 1. Explain why any one example of the writer’s word choice from paragraph 1 (lines 1–2) helps to give the impression that the place she describes is “miserable”. | 1 | U/A |
| 2. Explain how effective you find the expression “pilgrimage” (line 6) as an image or metaphor . | 2 | E |
| 3. (a) Show how another expression in the immediate context helps us understand the meaning of “virtual” (line 8). | 2 | U |
| (b) Explain in your own words one of the reasons why there is a “void” which “Cowell’s creation seems to be filling” (line 12). | 2 | U |

QUESTIONS (continued)

Marks Code

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|--|---|-----|
| 4. Explain fully why any two components of the expression “celebrity-hungry wannabes with bloated egos” (lines 17–18) convey a tone of disapproval. | 2 | A |
| 5. Look at lines 20–23, and then explain what is suggested by the writer’s word choice of either “slick” or “web”. | 1 | U |
| 6. Explain fully the function of the words in dashes (the parenthesis) in lines 25–26. | 2 | A |
| 7. Look at lines 27–33, and then | | |
| (a) explain in your own words what is meant by “engaging with someone on the other side of the screen”; | 2 | U |
| (b) explain in your own words why people do this; | 1 | U |
| (c) explain how well the content of the sentence beginning “If we are” reinforces the writer’s argument; | 2 | E |
| (d) identify an aspect of the structure of this sentence which helps the writer get the content across. | 1 | A |
| 8. Look at lines 34–42, and then explain in your own words two reasons the writer gives in this paragraph for “our love affair with <i>The X Factor</i> ”. | 2 | U |
| 9. Explain fully why the sentence “Yet it seems that 21st-century viewers are looking for more than just simple entertainment.” (line 43) works well as a link at this point in the passage. | 2 | A |
| 10. Re-read lines 43–53, and then explain in your own words why the writer chooses Susan Boyle as an example to support her argument. | 2 | A |
| 11. Look at lines 54–58, and then explain how the writer achieves a wry or humorous tone in these lines. | 2 | A |
| 12. The word “charade” (line 63) usually refers to a pretence, something that is false or fake.

Explain how an expression used by the writer earlier in this paragraph prepares us for the word “charade”. | 2 | U/A |
| 13. Look at the last two paragraphs (lines 72–76), and then explain how they help to provide an effective conclusion to the passage.

You may wish to consider such aspects as word choice , ideas , structure and/or tone . | 2 | A/E |
| Total (30) | | |

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

[Open out for Questions]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Article is adapted from “Reality Checks” by Elizabeth Day from *The Observer Magazine*, 21 November 2010. © Guardian News & Media 2010.