

H

National Qualifications

2026

English

Reading for Understanding,
Analysis and Evaluation
(Text)

Friday, 1 May

Instructions to Candidates

Candidates should enter their surname, forename(s), date of birth, Scottish candidate number and the name and level of the subject at the top of their first answer **[Braille page 2]** sheet.

Total marks — 30

Read the passage carefully and then attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.

An arrow in the margin indicates a new question.

You must clearly identify the question number you are attempting on your answer sheet.

Marks are shown in square brackets at the end of each question or part question.

[Braille page 3] The following two passages discuss environmental issues.

Passage 1

Read the passage below and attempt questions 1 to 8.

In the first passage, Jonathan Freedland discusses the challenges facing climate campaigners.

You may think we have all the proof we need right in front of us. In recent years, heatwaves have been scorching through Europe, breaking records, wreaking havoc. In Athens, they closed the Acropolis as **[Braille page 4]** temperatures at the site headed towards 48°C. In Lisbon, visitors expecting perfect blue skies were disappointed to find them streaked with grey: not clouds, but smoke from forest fires. In Italy, there was no spring: floods gave way to unbearable heat with barely a pause. It's happening all over the world — biblical downpours in New York state, unquenchable fires in Canada — and yet humanity is not acting as if it is confronting a planetary emergency.

Extreme weather is fast becoming the **[Braille page 5]** global norm. Nonetheless, Americans, for example, still consider climate change a low priority, ranking it 17th out of 21 national issues in a recent survey. Even when the impact is personal, as it was for many Australians when bushfires raged through their country, opinions prove stubbornly hard to shift: one study found that among those directly impacted by the fires, around a third saw no connection to climate change. They were "unmoved".

How can this be? How can we be so apathetic while the Earth burns? Some **[Braille page 6]** of the explanation lies in human nature. As a species, we tend to prioritise the urgent over the important. Thanks to our evolutionary history, we're programmed to deal with an immediate danger — the lion suddenly coming out of the woods — not to work out how to save our civilisation over the next hundred years. In particular, as humans we find it difficult to contemplate our own destruction. We will find almost any excuse to look elsewhere, to find something urgent and diverting: in Britain there is always **[Braille page 7]** another sporting failure, another political drama. We always find something else to think about. These faults are in our DNA; they are hard to change.

There are, however, other explanations for some people's lack of concern. Most obvious is the fact that vastly wealthy oil and gas companies are spending billions to make people think the way they do. In recent times, the largest fossil fuel companies have spent over one billion dollars peddling one key message to the public: doubt. Like the tobacco industry before it, oil and **[Braille page 8]** gas companies have sought to sweet-talk the global public, to persuade them that we can't be sure the climate crisis is real or human-made or even that serious. This despicable strategy is driven by greed that puts gargantuan profit ahead of a

habitable planet. Sadly, hiring advertising agencies to push their message relentlessly has been hugely effective.

How effective? To take just one number: only 14% of Americans understand there is consensus among climate scientists that global warming is **[Braille page 9]** happening. This specific problem, this specific failure in communication, should be fixable. Enter the climate movement: the scientists, the campaigners, the young people, who have done so much for so long to combat environmental threat. The trouble is, they have not always been communicating the threat loudly enough or in the right way. It turns out their language is sometimes part of the problem.

Let's start with the most basic terms used by climate campaigners. "Global warming" was **[Braille page 10]** rightly rejected some time ago, because it sounds gentle and soothing, as if the most notable impact of burning fossil fuels will be better beach weather. But talk of "heat" is not much more appropriate. In popular culture, hot is sexy. Hot is cool. Hot is new. "Climate change" doesn't work either. Mere "change" is ambiguous: it doesn't indicate whether the change will be negative or positive. It is not immediate: it hints that its consequences will be felt only in the future, when we are feeling them right **[Braille page 11]** now. Multiple other terms favoured by climate activists fall at a more basic hurdle because they are simply not understood by the wider public. "Net zero", "decarbonisation", "climate justice" — when tested, these terms meet blank faces. People are not moved, just confused.

Instead of using a variety of terms, the climate community desperately needs to change tactics and focus on a single word everyone understands: pollution. And they need to settle on the image of a **[Braille page 12]** blanket of pollution trapping heat on Earth. Every oil and gas emission makes that blanket thicker, and all that trapped heat helps cause floods and start fires. Once settled on, that image has to be used again and again, repeated so often it becomes fixed in people's minds. This approach clashes with what many in the climate movement believe: that the catastrophic environmental facts will persuade people all by themselves. That these facts don't need to be repeated or simplified. That the sheer truth of these **[Braille page 13]** facts will convince people. Perhaps this is why the climate movement has devoted relatively few resources to reach or persuade the public.

As things stand, we're in a propaganda war, but only one side is on the battlefield. If we really want to join the frontline, we desperately need a change of mindset. Until now many climate campaigners have recoiled from using marketing, which they regard as tainted. They need to get over that mistaken idea. And they need to do that quickly. **[Braille page 14]** They need to deploy whatever tools work to promote a double message: a message of both fear and hope. Fear for all the beauty, life and lives that will be lost from a parched planet — and hope that we still have time to avert the worst.

Passage 2

Read the passage below and attempt question 9. While reading, you may wish to make notes on the main ideas and/or highlight key points in the passage.

In the second passage, Susan Joy Hassol discusses the issues facing **[Braille page 15]** climate campaigners.

Climate change is already disrupting the lives of billions of people. What was once considered a problem for the future is raging all around us right now. In a recent survey, 71 percent of Americans said they had experienced at least one heat wave, flood, drought or wildfire in the past year. Yet the political response is not meeting the urgency of the crisis. A transition to clean energy is under way, but is happening too slowly to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

[Braille page 16] One thing we can all do to tackle this problem is to alter the language we use about climate change. Transforming the way we talk about climate change can engage people, encouraging them to implement policies strong enough to confront the crisis with the urgency required. To inspire people, we need to talk not of sacrifice and deprivation but of opportunity and improvement in our lives: a story of humans flourishing in a post-fossil fuel age.

Some of the problems we face in presenting these ideas are caused **[Braille page 17]** by the language used by scientists and campaigners. For example, people generally use "positive" to mean "good" and "negative" to mean "bad". But climate scientists use "positive" to mean "increasing" and "negative" for "decreasing". So, a positive trend in temperature means it's going up: not good in an era of global warming. Scientists also speak of negative emissions, which sounds like bad pollution but in fact refers to the removal of carbon dioxide from the air: a good thing! **[Braille page 18]** Changing other terms would also help inform people and redirect the climate conversation. Instead of referring to greenhouse gases, we should refer to "heat-trapping pollution". That term reinforces the idea of human-caused climate change.

A different communication problem is both intentional and insidious. It is the well-funded disinformation campaign led by the fossil fuel industry that is designed to confuse, muddy and mislead. The profit-driven oil and gas companies, hugely **[Braille page 19]** responsible for delaying climate action, have executed a long-running disinformation campaign that takes advantage of the confusion around climate language. The people behind this campaign know that scientists use "theory" to mean an idea that is well established in science, but to the public, a theory is just a hunch. So fossil-fuel advocates endlessly repeat: "Climate change is only a theory. There's so much uncertainty". They have also created doubt by promoting myths and lies about environmental solutions, saying they are too **[Braille page 20]** expensive, too unreliable.

One way to combat disinformation is to get ahead of it, by promoting accurate information. Pre-emptive messages highlighting correct information can be effective in preventing misunderstanding. One key fact to emphasise is that the cost of renewable energy has plummeted, making clean energy cheaper than dirty energy. We're not waiting for an energy miracle; we've already had one. We need to oppose the misconception that it's too late to act: that global **[Braille page 21]** climate catastrophe is inevitable. Because of the media's focus on disasters rather than solutions, many people feel a sense of hopelessness. If people are convinced we're

doomed — that there's nothing we can do — why would they bother trying? It is essential that we clearly communicate that it is not too late to avoid the worst outcomes. As a prominent climate activist so aptly puts it: "When we start to act, hope is everywhere."

People who feel hope are more likely to act and support climate **[Braille page 22]** policies. Raising feelings of hope involves boosting the idea that each of us can be part of this solution. What we do as a society can truly make a difference. Rather than promoting stories of doom and deprivation, we need to emphasise the many benefits we will reap from the clean energy transition and from protecting nature. We need to paint a picture of that better world — powered by renewable energy — and show how and where the improvements are already unfolding. It's vital for people to know that we're not just starting; we're already on our **[Braille page 23]** way.

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