

Academic Reading Paper 38

Pallets, Traditions and Deadlines

Time allowed: 1 hour

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- Do not open this booklet until you are told to do so.
- Write your name and the date at the top of the answer sheet.
- Answer **all** the questions.
- Write your answers **on the answer sheet**, not in this booklet.
- You must transfer your answers within the hour. **No extra time is given for transferring answers in the Reading test.**
- Do not remove this booklet from the examination room.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

- There are 40 questions in this paper.
- Each question carries one mark.
- There are three passages, with 13, 13 and 14 questions.

These passages were written for this library. They are **not** reproduced from any published past paper. The format, timing and task types follow the published specification for the Academic Reading test so that sitting this on paper feels like the real thing.

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 1–13, which are based on Reading Passage 1 below.

The most boring object in the world economy

A wooden pallet is a platform of boards with gaps underneath, weighing twenty-odd kilograms and costing very little, and there are billions of them. It is difficult to think of a duller object, and it is one of the two or three things that made the modern movement of goods possible. Before it, everything travelled as individual pieces. Sacks, barrels, cases and bales were carried by men, one at a time, and loading a railway wagon by hand could occupy a gang for most of a day. The labour of moving things was largely the labour of touching each thing, and a port or a warehouse was therefore a place that employed a great many people to lift.

What the pallet does is convert a hundred separate objects into one object with a defined shape, which a machine can then pick up. That machine is the other half of the invention. Forklift trucks developed through the 1920s and 1930s, and neither the truck nor the platform is much use without the other, so the two spread together, each one making the other worth buying. The United States Army adopted them at scale during the Second World War for the same reason every warehouse eventually did: a wagon that had taken a crew several days to fill by hand could be filled in hours.

The difficulty was never the wooden platform. It was that a pallet is only useful if a great many other things agree with it. The forks of the truck must fit the gaps. The racking in the warehouse must take the footprint. The bed of the lorry must be a multiple of it, and so must the floor of the shipping container, or space is wasted on every journey. A pallet is not really an object at all. It is a number that a large number of parties have to accept, and the wood is merely what the number is made of.

They did not accept the same one. North America settled on a platform forty-eight inches by forty. Continental Europe settled on twelve hundred millimetres by eight hundred. Australia uses a square of about eleven hundred and sixty-five millimetres on a side, inherited from its railways. The international standards body recognises six sizes, which is a polite way of recording that the argument was lost rather than settled.

The consequence is quietly expensive and it is permanent. The internal width of a standard shipping container was fixed by an American design and suits the American pallet. The European pallet does not fit that width efficiently, so a container loaded with European pallets carries measurable empty space, on every voyage, for as long as both standards exist. Two of the great standardisations of the twentieth century were carried out separately, by different industries, in different decades, and they do not quite agree. The cost of that appears in no account anywhere, because it is spread thinly across every shipment in the world and charged to nobody in particular.

Nobody can fix it, and the reason is worth stating precisely. The benefit of changing to a common size would be shared by everybody and would arrive slowly. The cost would be paid immediately and entirely by whoever moved first, since they would have to replace their racking, their trucks and their stock of

platforms while their suppliers were still sending the old size. A standard that is merely inconvenient is therefore permanent, and this is the ordinary condition of infrastructure rather than a special failure.

There is a second problem which is about ownership rather than dimensions. A pallet that leaves your warehouse on a lorry does not come back on its own, and it is worth too little to chase and too much to abandon. Two answers exist. One is exchange, in which a delivery is settled by handing over as many empty platforms as arrive full, so that the stock in circulation stays roughly level. The other is renting from a pool, in which a company owns tens of millions of platforms, paints them a distinctive colour so that one can be recognised anywhere in the world, and hires them out by the movement rather than selling them.

The scale of the whole arrangement is easy to miss because nobody photographs it. A substantial share of the timber cut in some countries goes into pallets, most of it into platforms that will be repaired several times and then broken up. There is an entire trade in collecting damaged ones, replacing boards and returning them to circulation, and it is invisible in the way that all such trades are invisible, which is to say that it is visible to everybody, on every industrial estate, and interesting to almost nobody.

Questions 1–5

Complete the table below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the passage for each answer.

Why one size was never agreed		
Region	The size settled on	Consequence
North America	forty-eight inches by 1	the internal width of the standard shipping 2 was fixed to suit it
Continental Europe	twelve hundred millimetres by 3	a container loaded with these carries measurable empty 4 on every voyage
Australia, a square inherited from its 5	about 1,165 mm on a side	—

Questions 6–9

Complete the sentences below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the passage for each answer.

- 6** A pallet converts a hundred separate objects into one object with a defined that a machine can pick up.
- 7** The international standards body recognises pallet sizes.
- 8** Under an exchange system, a delivery is settled by handing over as many empty platforms as arrive
- 9** A pool company paints its platforms a distinctive so that one can be recognised anywhere.

Questions 10–13

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 1?

Write **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information, **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

- 10** The forklift and the pallet became widespread at the same period.
- 11** The main obstacle to a universal pallet was the difficulty of making the platform itself.
- 12** Pool companies charge more for their platforms than a buyer would pay to own one.
- 13** Damaged pallets are normally discarded rather than repaired.

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 14–26, which are based on Reading Passage 2 below.

Traditions in animals

- A** In 1953 a young female Japanese macaque on the island of Koshima picked up a sweet potato that researchers had left on the beach, carried it to a stream and washed the sand off it. The researchers, who had been provisioning and observing the troop since 1948 and knew every animal in it by sight, recorded the act and then recorded, animal by animal, what happened next. Over the following years other animals began doing the same thing, and the same female later worked out how to separate scattered wheat from sand by throwing a handful into the water and letting the sand sink. What made the observation valuable was not the washing itself, which any hungry animal might arrive at, but the pattern of its spread through the troop.
- B** It did not spread at random. It went first to the young female's playmates and to her mother, then through the other juveniles, and only later and incompletely to the adult males, who were the animals least connected to her. In other words it travelled along the lines of the troop's social relationships rather than by each animal discovering it independently, which is what a behaviour that is being learned from somebody looks like, and is not at all what a behaviour that is being invented independently by many animals would look like. A rediscovered trick spreads at random. A copied one spreads along the lines of who spends time with whom.
- C** The story has since acquired an addition that is entirely fictitious, and it is worth naming because it circulates more widely than the research does. In the 1970s a popular book claimed that once a certain number of monkeys had learned the technique, it appeared spontaneously in troops on other islands, with no contact between them. There is no such observation in the records. The claim was invented, traced back, and found to rest on nothing, and it continues to be repeated, in books and lectures, as an example of the very phenomenon it fabricates.
- D** The second body of evidence came from chimpanzees. Jane Goodall, watching at Gombe from 1960, saw animals strip the leaves from a twig and push it into a termite mound to fish the insects out. That is not tool use, which had been reported before; it is tool making, the modification of an object for a purpose, and it was at the time held to be a defining human activity. Her supervisor's response, that we must now redefine the tool, redefine man, or accept chimpanzees as human, is quoted often enough to have become a joke, and it was a fair description of the problem she had created for everybody.
- E** Establishing that such behaviours are cultural rather than genetic or environmental took another forty years and a different kind of study. In 1999 a group of researchers led by Andrew Whiten pooled the long-term records from seven field sites and looked for behaviours that were customary at some and entirely absent at others. They found thirty-nine such patterns, covering tool use, grooming and courtship, in cases where the animals had the same physical capacities and the same

materials available to them. A behaviour present in one community and absent in another, with no difference in genes or in what the forest offers, has to be explained by something passing between individuals.

- F** That argument has a weakness which the authors acknowledged, and which is the standard difficulty of the field. It defines a cultural variant by exclusion: not genetic, not ecological, and therefore social. That is a conclusion arrived at by elimination, and elimination is only as good as the list of things eliminated. Excluding two explanations is not the same as demonstrating a third, and in a forest, where no two sites are alike in every respect, it is never possible to be certain that some relevant difference in the environment has not been missed by everybody. The finding was strong and the logic of it was indirect.
- G** What closed the gap was doing it deliberately. Researchers took captive groups, removed one animal from each, taught it a different method of solving the same problem, returned it to its own group, and watched what the others did. Each group took up the method its own trained individual used, kept using it, and did not drift towards the other, so that two methods persisted side by side in populations that were otherwise identical in every way the experimenters could control. Nothing had been excluded by argument. Two traditions had been created and then observed to persist, which is what the field had been unable to do for as long as it worked only in the wild.

Questions 14–18

Reading Passage 2 has seven sections, A–G.

Which section contains the following information?

Write the correct letter, A–G.

NB You may use any letter more than once.

- 14** a claim that was invented and is still repeated
- 15** an admission that a conclusion was reached by elimination
- 16** a contrast between how a copied habit spreads and how a rediscovered one would
- 17** a second technique worked out by the same animal
- 18** an experiment in which animals were removed and then returned

Questions 19–22

Look at the following statements and the list of researchers below.

Match each statement with the correct researcher, A–C.

NB You may use any letter more than once.

List of Researchers

- A the Koshima researchers
- B Jane Goodall
- C Andrew Whiten and colleagues

- 19 They knew every animal in the group by sight.
- 20 She observed an animal modifying an object for a purpose.
- 21 They compared records gathered at several separate field sites.
- 22 They recorded which individuals took up a habit and in what order.

Questions 23–26

Complete the summary using the list of words, A–H, below.

List of Words

- A random
- B social
- C exclusion
- D ecological
- E capacities
- F deliberately
- G captive
- H materials

How the case was made

The Koshima habit spread along the troop's relationships rather than at **23**, which is the signature of learning from another animal. The 1999 survey identified thirty-nine behaviours present at some sites and absent at others where the animals had the same physical **24** and the same materials. The argument was made by **25**, which the authors acknowledged as a weakness. It was closed by creating two traditions **26** in groups that were otherwise identical.

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 27–40, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.

Against the deadline

The standard defence of deadlines is that people need pressure, and the standard complaint is that pressure destroys the work. Both treat the deadline as a device for making somebody hurry, and both are describing a side effect rather than the thing itself. What a deadline principally does is end a task, and most of the argument about it becomes clearer once that function is put first and the hurrying is treated as a consequence.

The reason ending matters is that a great many tasks contain no internal signal for completion. A wall is built when it reaches the top, and a hole is dug when it is deep enough. A report, a design, a piece of research or a lesson plan has no such property: it can always be checked once more, extended, reorganised or improved a little, and there is nothing inside the work that announces the point at which further effort stops being worth it. Given no external stop, a person of ordinary conscientiousness will continue, and the familiar observation that work expands to fill the time available is usually delivered as a remark about laziness when it is a remark about the absence of a stopping rule.

This is why the deadline that is imposed from outside often produces better work than the one a person sets for themselves, which is otherwise a puzzling result. In a well-known study, students were assigned a set of papers to complete over a term. One group was given a single deadline at the end, one was allowed to set its own dates, and one had evenly spaced dates imposed. The self-imposed group performed better than the single-deadline group, which suggests they knew what they needed, and worse than the imposed group, which suggests that knowing what you need and being held to it are separate problems.

The complaint about quality is real, and it applies to a particular kind of task. Some work is compressible: a piece of writing can be done in three days or in three weeks, and the version done in three days is shorter and rougher but exists. Other work has a minimum duration that no amount of pressure will reduce, because something has to happen at its own pace. A fermentation, a course of treatment, a rehearsal, a set of interviews, the recruitment of participants for a trial: pushing on these does not compress them, it only converts the schedule into a decision to do less of the thing.

Almost all the damage attributed to deadlines comes from applying one instrument to both kinds of work. A deadline is exactly right for a task that has no natural end and can be delivered at many levels of finish. It is exactly wrong for a task with a floor underneath it, where the honest options are to allow the time or to reduce the scope, and where imposing a date does the second while pretending to do neither.

There is a further effect that the argument usually misses, which is what a deadline does to the shape of the work rather than to its quality. Effort tends to arrive at the end, whatever anybody intends, and a task that is approached in the final available period is approached in a particular way: it is executed

rather than explored, the first workable idea is taken because there is no room for a second, and the parts that would have benefited from being set aside and returned to are not set aside. The work may be perfectly good and it is a different piece of work from the one that would have existed.

The concession is that a deadline that is genuinely wrong still beats no deadline at all in most organisational settings, and anybody arguing otherwise should be asked what they propose instead. Work that never ends is not a neutral state. It occupies the person indefinitely, prevents anything else from starting, and eventually produces a version chosen in exhaustion rather than in judgement. The choice presented in these arguments, between a deadline and unhurried excellence, is rarely the choice anybody actually has.

So the useful reform is a distinction rather than a policy. For each piece of work, ask whether the problem is that it has no natural end or that it has a minimum length. If the first, set a date and hold it, and expect the level of finish to be the thing that flexes. If the second, the date is not the instrument, and imposing one produces a smaller piece of work described as the same piece of work, which is the specific failure that has given the deadline its reputation and which no amount of firmness will fix.

Questions 27–32

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in Reading Passage 3?

Write **YES** if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer, **NO** if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer, or **NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

- 27** The writer thinks the main function of a deadline is to make people hurry.
- 28** The writer accepts that work without a deadline is not a neutral state.
- 29** Deadlines are more common in some professions than in others.
- 30** The writer believes the observation that work expands to fill the time is a remark about laziness.
- 31** The writer holds that a deadline changes the shape of the work and not only its quality.
- 32** Students in the study were told which of the three arrangements had produced the best results.

Questions 33–36

Complete each sentence with the correct ending, A–G, below.

Endings

- A there is nothing inside it that announces when to stop.
- B knowing what you need and being held to it are separate problems.
- C the schedule becomes a decision to do less of the thing.
- D the first workable idea is taken because there is no room for a second.
- E the person involved was insufficiently committed.
- F the work is always improved by additional time.
- G the organisation had set the date too early.

- 33 A report or a design has no natural end because
- 34 The self-imposed group did worse than the imposed group, which suggests that
- 35 When a task has a minimum duration, pressing on it means
- 36 Work done in the final available period tends to be executed rather than explored, so

Questions 37–40

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

- 37 What does the passage identify as the source of most of the damage attributed to deadlines?
- A Managers setting dates too close together.
 - B Applying one instrument to two different kinds of work.
 - C Workers leaving everything until the end.
 - D The absence of any deadline at all.
- 38 Which position does the writer reject?
- A That a wrong deadline still beats none in most organisations.
 - B That some work has a floor beneath its duration.
 - C That the choice is between a deadline and unhurried excellence.
 - D That a deadline suits work deliverable at many levels of finish.

- 39** According to the passage, what does a piece of writing done in three days rather than three weeks have in common with the longer version?
- A** It is of the same quality.
 - B** It exists.
 - C** It takes the same effort.
 - D** It cannot be revised.
- 40** Which of the following best expresses the writer's proposal?
- A** Ask whether the work lacks a natural end or has a minimum length, and choose accordingly.
 - B** Set every deadline earlier than the work requires.
 - C** Allow people to set their own deadlines.
 - D** Abolish deadlines for creative work.