

English Language for Competitive Exams
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Week - 01
Lecture – 01
What is Reading Comprehension?

Good morning friends. So, we have been talking about various components of this course English language for competitive purposes or competitive exams whatever we want to see it or use it. So, one of the components that is very important in all competitive exams is reading comprehension. Now if you look at higher order competitive exams, it could be related to even international kinds of competitive exams.

Now, what happens here is this particular module or this particular section it usually has a long passage, generally derive from academic texts. Now academic text could be anything they could be based on literature or aspects of science, any aspects of science or even politics. Generally they do not ask politics worker interface, but literature and science related passages, or even social science related passages they are extremely common. So, what we get a long passage which is academically derived and it is followed by a set of questions, multiple choice most of the time in this cause we will be focusing on MCQ type questions.

Just for you are information I have just wanted to know that as you go through this particular course and this all these lectures, you please solve as many questions as possible on your own, you can sit with your friends of course, but do this individually. As a beginner keep a dictionary with you, I cannot stress enough on the use of dictionary; if you look at the syllabus provided for this particular course, I have given the titles of two very popular and well known dictionaries advanced oxford language dictionary, English dictionary and also Cambridge dictionary all advance levels. So, you will find both these volumes both these works extremely useful.

So, coming back to what we were doing reading passages they can be from a novel or a work of nonfiction, academic articles dealing with biology, solar system, marine life anything even astronomy m. So, the language and tone is serious and is scholarly as the word goes academic; and the vocabulary used is of medium to higher order level of

difficulty. It is a good idea to improve your vocabulary by using flash cards, there are online applications for this as well and practicing reading tough passages from text books and journal articles. You have to improve the level and quality of what you are reading here, remember we are not looking at general English course here, we are looking at competitive exams kind of language where the level is quite difficult and complex.

Now, for competitive exams there are usually 3 kinds of questions in reading comprehension; you have to select one choice there will be for a raven 5 choices or options, you have to select one or more choices there will be 3 options out of which sometimes one or two can also be the right answer. So, you have to look at it very carefully and select within passages where one line in the passage corresponds to the line in the question, this is important. Sometime they do give the line number, and ask you to identify word or question which is given in line number let us say sentence number 13 or 14 or line number 18 or 20 you have to be careful about that.

Now, some of the instructions would be like you have to read the entire passage carefully and then read the questions that follow the options, and yes this is important to know they are all very similar sounding, they look alike the sound similar, they are there to confuse you; you will be tempted to pick one fast, but spend time on re reading the question, do not just quickly tick or mark an option. Read with context in mind and ask yourself what is it about if the question is about a specific line, go back to the line and read two sentences before and after to make sure you understand the line well. Do not bring in your own previous knowledge of the subject when answering competitive type of answers.

Many a time and many a student makes this mistake, they start giving their own interpretation of the situation which is not what is expected, it is not a test of your general knowledge or your world view, but it is more a test of your language. So, be specific remember the point of the question is not to test your knowledge, but your ability to read and analyze the question carefully. Usually extreme answers are the wrong answers; you know questions which say always completely etcetera. So, they are not, but this is just a tip. So, they are not the right answers, but then there could be exceptions.

Now, I like you to look at this sample question please look at the text here, I will give you a minute or 2 to go through it.

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Sample Questions

Passage 1

It was by this term that he qualified her conversation, which had much of the 'point' observable in that of the young ladies of her country, to whom the ear of the world is more directly presented than to their sisters in other lands. Like the mass of American girls she had been encouraged to express herself; her remarks had been attended to; she had been expected to have emotions and opinions. Many of her opinions had doubtless but a slender value, many of her emotions passed away in the utterance; but they had left a trace in giving her the habit of seeming at least to feel and think, and in imparting moreover to her words when she was really moved that prompt vividness which so many people had regarded as a sign of superiority.

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In the above passage, the word 'slender' can be replaced with

Lissome

Lean

Negligible

Thin

Now, look at these questions; the word slender look at your dictionaries if you have your dictionaries with you and what does it mean? So, which word do you think goes best what is the meaning of Lissom, lean, negligible and thin? So, let us now discuss, let me first give you why the other answers are not that correct or appropriate here. The literal meaning of the slender is Lissom or lean or thin slender girl in the context of the passage negligible is the right answer. So, the third or the C; option C is the right choice. The author is discussing the meagre value of the girl's opinions, and while lean and thin can be used negligible is the most apt word apt choice in this contrast in this circumstance slenderness of opinion.

I will take you back to this passage, look at this again; many of her opinions had doubtless, but a slender value. Now you cannot if you replace lissome value thin value no it had to have negligible in consequential rather, that is the context here that is the idea here. So, please be careful.

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What is the aim of the the passage above?

To illustrate why she is generally thought to be clever.

To discuss how American cleverness is different from British cleverness.

To show how her opinions had some value.

To demonstrate that American girls are encouraged to express themselves.

Now look at the slide again and here is your question, what is the aim of the passage above, what is the passage trying to tell you? Option a to illustrate why she is generally thought to be clever; option b to discuss how American cleverness is different from British cleverness? Next to show how her opinions had some value and the last to demonstrate that American girls are encouraged to express themselves; what do you think is the right choice? See all these options are very very close to the answer, but what is the aim what is the aim here? The correct choice is answer a or option a while the passages does discuss how American girls are taught to express themselves, and how therefore, they can be seen as clever or as clever more than other girls.

So, compare to other girls more clever; the aim of the passages is to illustrate why this girl in particular is taught to be superior intellect. So, while b c d are partially correct, only a corresponds to the question.

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Passage 2

Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. There are circumstances in which, whether you partake of the tea or not—some people of course never do—the situation is in itself delightful. Those that I have in mind in beginning to unfold this simple history offered an admirable setting to an innocent pastime. The implements of the little feast had been disposed upon the lawn of an old English country-house, in what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality. Real dusk would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf. They lengthened slowly, however, and the scene expressed that sense of leisure still to come which is perhaps the chief source of one's enjoyment of such a scene at such an hour.

Let us look at the second passage now; look at the slide here, under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea there are circumstances in which whether you partake of the tea or not-some people of course, never do-the situation is in itself delightful. Those that I have in mind in beginning to unfold this simple history offered an admirable setting to an innocent pastime. The implements of the little feast had been disposed upon the lawn of an old English country-house, in which in what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality.

Real dusk would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf. They lengthened slowly, however, and the scene expressed that sense of leisure still to come which is perhaps the chief source of one's enjoyment of such a scene at such an hour. This passages is taken from the portrait of a lady by Henry James, you can expect some higher order passages to come your way now look at the question here.

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The author of the passage is primarily concerned with

Describing the beauty of the afternoon.

Locating the best source of enjoyment during afternoon tea.

Begin narrating a simple story.

Describing why under certain favourable circumstances, afternoon tea is a delightful event

The author of the passage is primarily concerned with what? Option a describing the beauty of the afternoon locating the best source of enjoyment during afternoon tea, begin narrating a simple story, describing why under certain favourable circumstances afternoon tea is a delightful event; what do you think is the right answer? All options look very close.

However, the perfect or the most appropriate answer would be option d; why? The passage is concerned with describing why the experience of the afternoon tea, in particular is wonderful. So, while the author is using this as an introduction to a larger narrative, this particular passage is only about the afternoon tea experience. Remember that so it may be the way Henry James begins his novel or a story, but that is not the right answer, he is indeed describing the pleasures of the afternoon tea. So, therefore, d is the best response; look at the second question now, why does the author bring up those who do not drink tea?

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Why does the author bring up those who do not drink tea?

To show that some people dislike tea.

To show that afternoon tea is about more than just the experience of drinking tea.

To demonstrate that not everyone in England drinks tea.

To show that there are certain circumstances in which people do not drink tea.

Option a to show that some people dislike tea, option b to show that afternoon tea is about more than just the experience of drinking tea, option c to demonstrate that not everyone in England drinks tea, option d to show that there are certain circumstances in which people do not drink tea or take tea; what do you think would be the right answer? The best answer is option b, the author brings up people who do not drink tea to show that a afternoon tea ritual is about more than just the tea itself, it is an experience of pleasure made lovely by the summer weather, and the particular aspect of early evening is the experience that matters.

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Passage 3

She was a young person of many theories; her imagination was remarkably active. It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast; to have a larger perception of surrounding facts, and to care for knowledge that was tinged with the unfamiliar. It may be affirmed without delay that she was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem; she often surveyed with complacency the field of her own nature; she was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right; impulsively, she often admired herself. Every now and then she found out she was wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility. After this she held her head higher than ever again; for it was of no use, she had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself. She had a theory that it was only on this condition that life was worth living; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization, should move in the realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic.

So, let us look at the slide again, option b is to show that afternoon tea is more about is more is about more than just the experience of drinking tea all right. Look at the third passage; again from portrait of a lady by Henry James, she was a young person of many theories; her imagination was remarkably active. It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast; to have a larger perception of surrounding facts, and to care for knowledge that was tinged with the unfamiliar.

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She had a theory that it was only on this condition that life was worth living; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization should move in the realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic. Please go through the passage carefully, I would give you tips underline or note down write down a couple of important per interesting looking words, and ideas; let us move on to the questions now.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:31)

In the passage above the word 'liable' corresponds most closely to

- Culpable
- Likely
- Pliable
- Capable of

So, in the passage the word liable corresponds most closely to culpable, likely, pliable and capable of; what do you think is the best response? Culpable, likely, pliable and capable of; the best response is choice a. Liable in the passage means guilty or of culpable of the sin of self extreme, no other option comes close to the meaning of liable, hence the right choice is option a.

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The author's aim in this passage is

To show that she has a really active imagination.

To show that the girl was often volatile .

To illustrate how her intelligence, while remarkable,
was also prone to error.

To describe the girl's conceit.

Look at this slide now set of questions; the authors aim in this passage is to show that she was she has a really active imagination; b to show that the girl was often volatile, c to illustrate how her intelligence while remarkable was also prone to error, d to describe the girls conceit; and what is the answer? Answer is option c the author while acknowledging the girls intelligence, and noting that she was a fine cast of mind, she as a fine mind he also shows how often she is prone to thinking that she is right she may not be right, even when the evidence provided in a particular cases scanty. So, option c to illustrate how her intelligence while remarkable was also prone to error.

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Passage 4

The lady was certainly a person of many oddities, of which her behaviour on returning to her husband's house after many months was a noticeable specimen. She had her own way of doing all that she did, and this is the simplest description of a character which, although by no means without liberal motions, rarely succeeded in giving an impression of suavity. She might do a great deal of good, but she never pleased. This way of her own, of which she was so fond, was not intrinsically offensive— it was just unmistakably distinguished from the ways of others. The edges of her conduct were so very clear-cut that for susceptible persons it sometimes had a knife-like effect. That hard fineness came out in her deportment during the first hours of her return from America, under circumstances in which it might have seemed that her first act would have been to exchange greetings with her husband and son. She, for reasons which she deemed excellent, always retired on such occasions into impenetrable seclusion, postponing the more sentimental ceremony until she had repaired the disorder of dress with a completeness which had the less reason to be of high importance as neither beauty nor vanity were concerned in it.

Look at the next passage; the lady was certainly a person of many oddities, of which her behaviour on returning to her husband's house after many months was a noticeable specimen. She had her own way of doing all that she did, and this is the simplest description of a character which, although by no means without liberal motions, rarely succeeded in giving an impression of suavity. She might do a great deal of good, but she never pleased. This way of her own, of which she was so fond, was not intrinsically offensive- it was just unmistakably distinguished from the ways of others.

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What is the author's intention in this passage?

To introduce the lady and justify her many oddities of character.

To show how she always offended people without meaning to.

To justify why she wanted to change her clothes first before meeting her family after many months of travel.

To show how the lady was different from other people in the book.

Now, what is the author's intention in this passage? A; to introduce the lady and justify her many oddities of character, b to show how she always offended people without meaning to, c to justify why she wanted to change her clothes first before meeting her family after many months of travel, d in the last one to show how the lady was different from other people in the book. The correct answer is of course, a the focus is on here oddities. The author you should know while explaining that the lady in the passage has several art quirks you know she is quieten extrinsic she is not really without sentiment or good feeling as could be understood; he shows how a rather or behaviour when back home after many months might be construed or constructed as unfeeling.

But this is an due to or either due to consideration of due to the vanity; option b can be inferred, but is not explicitly mentioned, and c and d are the aims of the authors at all the aim is to establish the eccentricity of this lady. Now I would give you another exercise where I want to do, pick out the line from the passage which shows how while retaining independence of character, the lady never convinced any one of any flare. So, retaining independence of character I want you to go back to the previous slide, independence of character which do you think suits here most. Do you think lines two onwards line two onwards is best suited here; she had her own way of doing all that she did you know independence of character? And this is the simplest description of a character which

although by no means without liberal motions, rarely succeeded in giving an impression of suavity. So, this is the answer we are looking at.

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Passage 5

England was a revelation to her, and she found herself as diverted as a child at a pantomime. In her infantine excursions to Europe she had seen only the Continent, and seen it from the nursery window; Paris, not London, was her father's Mecca, and into many of his interests there his children had naturally not entered. The images of that time moreover had grown faint and remote, and the old-world quality in everything that she now saw had all the charm of strangeness. Her uncle's house seemed a picture made real; no refinement of the agreeable was lost upon Isabel; the rich perfection of Gardencourt at once revealed a world and gratified a need. The large, low rooms, with brown ceilings and dusky corners, the deep embrasures and curious casements, the quiet light on dark, polished panels, the deep greenness outside, that seemed always peeping in, the sense of well-ordered privacy in the centre of a 'property'—a place where sounds were felicitously accidental, where the tread was muffled by the earth itself and in the thick mild air all friction dropped out of contact and all shrillness out of talk - these things were much to the taste of our young lady, whose taste played a considerable part in her emotions.

Now let us look at the next passage; England was a revelation to her, and she found herself as diverted as a child at a pantomime. In her infantine excursions to Europe she had seen only the Continent, and seen it from the nursery window; Paris, not London, was her father's Mecca, and into many of his interests there his children had naturally not entered. The images of that time moreover had grown faint and remote, and the old-world quality in everything that she now saw had all the charm of strangeness. Her uncle's house seemed a picture made real; no refinement of the agreeable was lost upon Isabel; the rich perfection of Gardencourt at once revealed a world and gratified a need.

The large, low rooms, with brown ceilings and dusky corners, the deep embrasures and curious casements, the quiet light on dark, polished panels, the deep greenness outside, that seemed always peeping in, the sense of well-ordered privacy in the centre of a proper 'property' - a place where sounds were felicitously accidental, where the tread was muffled by the earth itself and in the thick mild air all friction dropped out of contact and all shrillness out of talk-these things were much to the taste of our young lady, whose taste played a considerable part in her emotions.

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The word 'feliculously' in the passage most closely corresponds to
Suitably
Fortunately
Wonderfully
Fittingly

Let us look at the questions now, look at the slide here, the word feliculously in the passage most closely corresponds to a suitably; b fortunately; c wonderfully and for fittingly; which do you think is the right answer? Answer is option b, while a and b are synonyms in the context of the passage fortunately and luckily fit in better.

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What is the passage about?

The girl's love of Gardencourt.
The beauty of the house and surroundings.
The girl's fascination for the English quality of her surroundings.
The girl's impeccable taste in all things refined.

Let us look at the second questions slide what is the passage about. It is the girl's love of garden court b, the beauty of the house and surroundings; c the girl's fascination for the English quality of her surroundings, and d the girl's impeccable taste in all things

refined. What is the answer, what is that author trying to get it? So, answer is best answer is option c, where the author begins by writing about the girls childhood trips to Europe, you know her father would take her to Paris mostly and how the passages is also about how she seems or she is England with the new eyes, and loves the old world charm of the place especially garden court.

So, option c is the best answer. So, this is the way we read passages, do not just tick a mark the question mark the answer which seems to be you know most popular view, in your mind it could be the best answer, but also through process of elimination. C decides for yourself which answer not just the answer which is right, but also the answer which cannot be right. So, try out each and every option this is most important tip to understand in a reading comprehension. We look at more passages in the next few classes all the best.

Thank you very much.