

IELTS Academic Reading Practice Test 4

Original Britfluency Practice Paper

This is an original IELTS-style Academic Reading practice test, not an official IELTS paper. It contains three reading passages and 40 questions.

Instructions for students

You should spend 60 minutes on this test.

There are three reading passages and 40 questions.

Write your answers as you complete the test. In the real IELTS Reading test, there is no extra transfer time, so you must write your final answers within the 60 minutes.

Each correct answer receives 1 mark.

Do not use a dictionary.

Reading Passage 1

Community Science in Public Libraries

A Public libraries are often described as quiet places for borrowing books, but many have become active centres for community science. In this context, community science means projects in which ordinary members of the public help collect, check or interpret information for researchers. Libraries are well suited to this role because they are trusted spaces, open to people with different levels of education and usually located close to everyday life. A person who might never enter a university laboratory may feel comfortable attending a workshop at a neighbourhood library.

B One common library-based project involves environmental monitoring. Visitors may borrow simple air-quality sensors, record temperatures in different streets or identify birds and insects in local parks. The information is then uploaded to a shared database. Although individual observations may seem small, large numbers of them can reveal patterns that would be difficult for a small research team to detect alone. For example, repeated temperature readings across a city can show which streets become dangerously hot during summer afternoons.

C Libraries also help improve the quality of public contributions. Staff can run short training sessions on how to use equipment, recognise common recording errors and follow ethical rules. This matters because unreliable data can weaken a project. If two volunteers measure noise levels in different ways, the results may be hard to compare. By providing clear instructions and supervised practice, libraries can reduce these problems without making participation feel intimidating.

D Another advantage is access. Many community science projects rely on smartphones, home internet and free time, which means they may attract people who are already confident and well connected. Libraries can reduce this imbalance by lending devices, offering internet access and scheduling sessions at different times of day. Some libraries have also worked with schools, retirement groups and migrant communities to involve people whose experiences are often missing from scientific datasets.

E However, community science is not simply a way to obtain free labour. Participants often expect to understand how their efforts will be used. Projects that collect data and then disappear without explanation can leave volunteers disappointed. Successful schemes usually report back through exhibitions, local talks or online maps showing the results. This feedback loop is important because it turns data collection into shared learning rather than one-sided extraction.

F There are also limits to the kind of research libraries can support. Projects involving dangerous chemicals, private medical information or complex laboratory procedures are usually unsuitable. Even simple projects require time, storage space and staff confidence. A library that is already underfunded may struggle to maintain equipment or answer technical questions. For this reason, partnerships with universities, local councils and charities are often essential.

G Despite these challenges, library-based community science has changed how some researchers think about public involvement. Instead of treating citizens only as people who receive scientific information, it allows them to contribute to the production of knowledge. It can also make research questions more locally relevant: residents may notice flooding, pollution or noise problems before official agencies do. When well designed, these projects strengthen both science and civic life.

H The educational value of these schemes is not limited to the people who collect the data. When library displays show local air readings, wildlife maps or water-quality results, visitors can see science as a process rather than a collection of finished facts. They may notice how uncertainty is handled, why repeated measurements matter and how local evidence can support public decisions. This kind of informal scientific literacy is difficult to create through posters alone. It develops more naturally when people can ask questions, handle equipment and compare their own

observations with those of their neighbours.

I Data privacy can also require careful planning. A project that maps pollution or noise may indirectly identify particular streets, homes or workplaces. Libraries therefore need clear rules about what is collected, how long it is stored and who can see it. These safeguards help maintain trust, especially when projects involve children or vulnerable groups.

J These programmes also require realistic expectations about expertise. Volunteers can collect useful observations, but they should not be asked to make decisions that belong to trained specialists, such as declaring a water supply safe or diagnosing health risks. Clear boundaries protect both participants and researchers.

Questions 1-6

Reading Passage 1 has ten paragraphs, A-J. Choose the correct heading for paragraphs B-G from the list below. Write the correct number, i-ix. You do not need to use all the headings.

List of Headings

- i. The importance of giving results back to volunteers
- ii. Projects that are too risky for library settings
- iii. How libraries help produce more reliable data
- iv. Environmental information collected by local people
- v. Why public libraries are closing in some areas
- vi. Making participation possible for a wider range of people
- vii. How community science can change the relationship between researchers and residents
- viii. The financial history of public libraries
- ix. The disadvantages of university laboratories

- 1. Paragraph B _____
- 2. Paragraph C _____
- 3. Paragraph D _____
- 4. Paragraph E _____
- 5. Paragraph F _____
- 6. Paragraph G _____

Questions 7-10

Do the following statements agree with the information in Reading Passage 1? Write TRUE if the statement agrees with the information. Write FALSE if the statement contradicts the information. Write NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this.

- 7. Libraries are considered suitable for community science partly because many people trust them.

- 8. Air-quality sensors used in libraries are always more accurate than professional research equipment.

- 9. Projects can suffer if volunteers collect information in inconsistent ways. _____
- 10. All libraries already have enough money and staff to run community science projects. _____

Questions 11-13

Answer the questions below. Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the passage for each answer.

- 11. What type of readings can identify streets that become dangerously hot? _____
- 12. What can libraries lend to help reduce unequal access? _____
- 13. What kind of organisations may partner with libraries, alongside local councils and charities?

Reading Passage 2

The Science of Coastal Salt Marshes

A Salt marshes occupy the low, wet ground between land and sea. At high tide, seawater spreads across them; at low tide, channels and mudflats are exposed. To a casual visitor they may appear flat and empty, but ecologists regard them as highly productive ecosystems. Their plants tolerate salt, flooding and shifting sediments, conditions that would kill many land species. In return, they perform functions that are increasingly valued by coastal communities.

B One important function is coastal defence. Dense marsh vegetation slows waves and reduces their energy before they reach sea walls or inland areas. The roots and stems also trap sediment, which can gradually raise the marsh surface. This matters because many coastlines are threatened by sea-level rise. A healthy marsh may keep pace with gradual changes if enough sediment is available, whereas a hard concrete barrier cannot grow. However, marshes squeezed between rising seas and fixed coastal development may have nowhere to move.

C Salt marshes are also significant carbon stores. Plants absorb carbon dioxide as they grow, and some of this carbon becomes buried in waterlogged soils. Because decomposition is slow in oxygen-poor mud, carbon can remain locked away for long periods. This so-called blue carbon has attracted interest from governments and conservation groups. Yet measuring it accurately is difficult. Carbon storage varies with plant species, sediment depth, tidal conditions and the history of land use.

D Wildlife benefits are another reason for protecting marshes. Many fish use tidal creeks as nursery areas, where young fish can feed and shelter before moving into deeper water. Birds use marshes for nesting, feeding or resting during migration. Insects and invertebrates living in the mud provide food for larger animals. The value of a marsh therefore extends beyond its visible plant cover. It is part of a larger coastal food web.

E In some places, marshes are being restored through managed realignment. This involves deliberately moving or breaching sea defences so that the tide can flood low-lying land again. The idea can be controversial. Farmers may lose fields, residents may fear increased flood risk, and politicians may dislike the impression of giving land back to the sea. For restoration to succeed, planners must explain where water will go, who will be compensated and what benefits are expected.

F Restoration is not instant. Once tidal flow returns, pioneer plants may colonise the mud, but a mature marsh can take many years to develop. Channels shift, sediments settle unevenly and plant communities change over time. Monitoring is therefore essential. Scientists measure elevation, vegetation, bird numbers and water movement to judge whether a project is developing as expected. Early results can be messy without indicating failure.

G Salt marshes face pressures from pollution, invasive species, coastal construction and changes in river sediment supply. Climate change adds further uncertainty through rising seas and stronger storms. Even so, many researchers argue that marshes should be treated as working landscapes, not wasteland. Their value lies in combining flood protection, carbon storage and habitat creation. Protecting them requires patience because the benefits often accumulate slowly, but the cost of losing them may be far greater.

H Salt marshes can also improve water quality. As tides pass through vegetation and muddy channels, some nutrients and fine particles are trapped before they reach open water. This filtering effect is not unlimited, and it should not be used as an excuse for pollution upstream. Nevertheless, marshes can form part of a broader coastal management system in which farms, towns and natural habitats are considered together. Their usefulness depends on connection: a marsh cut off from tides by embankments cannot perform the same functions as one that still exchanges water, sediment and organisms with the sea.

I The slow pace of marsh development can make public communication difficult. Residents may expect immediate protection or instant wildlife gains, while scientists know that sediment, plants and channels adjust gradually. Clear milestones help: a project can be judged first by tidal flow, then by vegetation, and later by animal use.

J Cost comparisons are also complicated. Building or raising a sea wall may produce a visible result quickly, while marsh restoration spreads costs and benefits across many years. Decision-makers therefore need to consider maintenance, habitat value and future adaptation, not just the initial engineering price.

Questions 14-18

Reading Passage 2 has ten paragraphs, A-J. Which paragraph contains the following information? Write the correct letter, A-J.

14. a reason why buried carbon may remain stored for a long time _____
15. a warning that restored marshes may not look successful immediately _____
16. examples of information planners need to communicate to local people _____
17. a comparison between marshes and fixed sea defences _____
18. an explanation of how marshes support animals beyond the marsh itself _____

Questions 19-23

Complete the table below. Choose ONE WORD ONLY from the passage for each answer.

Salt marsh functions and challenges

19. Marsh vegetation slows waves and reduces their _____
20. Roots and stems trap _____
21. Carbon can remain locked away in oxygen-poor _____
22. Young fish may use tidal creeks as _____
23. Restoration projects require scientific _____

Questions 24-26

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

24. Why can managed realignment be controversial?
A. It prevents any plants from growing.
B. It can involve allowing the sea to flood land again.
C. It only benefits tourists.
D. It removes all need for coastal planning.
25. What does the writer suggest about measuring blue carbon?
A. It is simple because all marshes store identical amounts.
B. It is unnecessary if birds are present.
C. It is complex because several local conditions affect storage.
D. It can only be done by farmers.
26. What is the writer's overall view of salt marshes?
A. They should be regarded as valuable working landscapes.
B. They are empty land with little ecological value.
C. They can solve every coastal problem immediately.
D. They should always be replaced by concrete barriers.

Reading Passage 3

When Measurement Changes What We Do

A Modern organisations measure almost everything. Schools record attendance, hospitals count waiting times, delivery companies track driver performance, and websites analyse how long users remain on a page. Measurement can make hidden problems visible and allow managers to compare results. Without data, decisions may depend on habit, confidence or personal preference. Yet measurement also has a less obvious effect: once people know what is being counted, they often change their behaviour to improve the number, even when the number is only a partial guide to real quality.

B This problem is sometimes discussed through Goodhart's Law, which is usually summarised as the idea that when a measure becomes a target, it stops being a good measure. A hospital may aim to reduce the time patients wait before being seen. If staff reorganise work so patients receive faster care, the target has helped. But if patients are moved quickly through an initial assessment without receiving meaningful treatment, the waiting-time figure may improve while the patient experience does not.

C A related concept is the principal-agent problem. A principal, such as an employer or government department, wants an agent, such as a worker or contractor, to act in a certain way. Because the principal cannot observe every detail, it uses indicators. The difficulty is that the agent may learn to satisfy the indicator rather than the underlying goal. For example, a call-centre worker judged mainly on call length may end conversations quickly, even when customers need more help.

D Not all measurement is harmful. Clear targets can focus attention, reduce waste and reveal unfair differences between groups. If one clinic has much longer delays than another, measurement can prompt useful questions. Data can also protect people from vague impressions. A manager who believes a service is improving may be forced to reconsider when complaints rise or outcomes fall. The danger is not measurement itself, but careless measurement that becomes disconnected from purpose.

E Some researchers distinguish between output measures and outcome measures. Output measures count activities: lessons delivered, articles published, forms processed. Outcome measures ask whether the activity achieved its purpose: whether students learned, readers gained understanding or citizens received effective service. Outcome measures are usually harder to collect because they require judgement over time. As a result, organisations often rely on output measures, even when outcomes matter more.

F In education, this tension is familiar. Standardised test scores can provide useful information about learning, especially when carefully designed. They may identify students who need support or reveal schools where resources are inadequate. However, if a school's reputation depends heavily on test results, teaching may narrow towards likely exam content. Subjects that are not tested may receive less attention, and students may learn strategies for maximising scores without developing broader understanding.

G Digital workplaces have intensified these issues. Software can count keystrokes, response times, location and completed tasks. Employers may argue that such systems improve efficiency and fairness because performance is based on data rather than favouritism. Critics respond that constant monitoring can reduce trust, encourage superficial productivity and ignore work that is important but hard to quantify, such as mentoring colleagues or solving unusual problems.

H A better approach is to treat indicators as signals rather than substitutes for judgement. Numbers should prompt questions, not end discussion. Organisations can use several measures together, review unintended consequences and involve the people being measured in designing the system. Measurement is most useful when it supports reflection. It becomes dangerous when a simplified figure is mistaken for the whole truth.

I Several organisations now try to avoid measurement problems by combining quantitative indicators with qualitative review. A school, for instance, might examine test scores alongside classroom observations, student interviews and evidence of curriculum breadth. A hospital might consider waiting times together with treatment outcomes and patient feedback. This mixed approach is slower and less tidy than relying on a single figure, but it is less likely to reward behaviour that merely improves appearances. The aim is not to abandon numbers, but to keep them connected to professional judgement and the real-world purposes they are meant to serve.

J Poor indicators can also create ethical problems. If workers are rewarded only for speed, they may avoid complex cases or people who need extra help. If researchers are judged only by publication counts, they may divide work into smaller papers rather than pursue deeper questions. Measures therefore shape values as well as behaviour.

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. Write NO if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer. Write NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

27. Measurement can reveal problems that might otherwise remain hidden. _____
28. The writer believes all organisational targets should be removed. _____
29. Goodhart's Law is used to explain how targets can damage the usefulness of measures. _____
30. Output measures are always more reliable than outcome measures. _____
31. Digital monitoring may fail to capture some valuable forms of work. _____
32. The writer thinks numbers should replace professional judgement. _____

Questions 33-36

Match each situation with the correct concept. Write the correct letter, A, B or C. NB You may use any letter more than once.

A. Goodhart's Law B. Principal-agent problem C. Output and outcome measures

33. A worker satisfies the recorded indicator while neglecting the real goal. _____
34. An organisation counts how many lessons are delivered rather than whether students learn.

35. A target improves on paper because people adapt to the target itself. _____
36. A manager cannot observe every action and therefore uses indicators to guide behaviour. _____

Questions 37-40

Complete the sentences below. Choose NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the passage for each answer.

37. Measurement is dangerous when it becomes disconnected from _____
38. In schools, heavy dependence on test results may cause teaching to narrow towards likely _____
39. Digital monitoring can encourage superficial _____
40. The writer says indicators should be treated as _____