

ACT Practice Paper

ACT Reading Practice Paper 2

DIRECTIONS: There are several passages in this test. Each passage is accompanied by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

Reading Passage 1

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from “A Poem of One’s Own,” an essay by Mary Jo Salter in which she discusses feminist literary critics’ recent reappraisal of women’s writing. The essay was taken from *Audiences and Intentions: A Book of Arguments* (©1994 by Macmillan College Publishing Company, Inc.).

A Poem of One’s Own

The time is overdue to admit that there is something of a vacuum in women’s poetry, and that we

abhor it. For a woman to concede this is not disloyal to

her sex; it’s the first step in the creation of an environment in which women artists will flourish. But what

can be done about the fact that the list of beloved

women poets is not as long as the list of beloved poets

who were born male?

The most liberating response to the problem was

the one Elizabeth Bishop chose. As James Merrill

writes, “Lowell called her one of the four best womenpoets ever—which can hardly have pleased Miss

Bishop, who kept her work from appearing in ‘women’s

anthologies.’ Better, from her point of view, to be one

15of the forty, or forty thousand, best poets, and have

done with it.” And he adds, “If I raise the issue at all,

it’s to dissociate her from these shopworn polarities.”

For the working poet, moved by the sexless sunset or

the sex-indeterminate beetle, the polarities are indeed

20shopworn, but perhaps as readers we may pursue the

issue an inch further. For one thing that we can do

about these two unequal lists is to read women poets of

the past who have never been much read and to discover whether or not they deserve to be.

25 Emily Dickinson, after all, would never have

become one of the most revered poets in the world had

her sister Lavinia not rescued her poems from the

obscurity of a dresser drawer; and had her editor Mabel

Loomis Todd not painstakingly transcribed nearly illeg³⁰ible scraps using a bizarre typewriter. Helen Hunt

Jackson, that once celebrated, now forgotten poetwhose work Dickinson herself admired, was another

“sister” in this story, for she alone fully understood

Dickinson's gifts. Jackson wrote to Dickinson urging
35 her to publish: "You are a great poet—and it is wrong
to the day you live in, that you will not sing aloud," her
letter went. "When you are what men call dead, you
will be sorry you were so stingy." That has to be one of
the most moving moments in American literary history.

40 And yet, and yet. Another reason many of us are
devoted to Dickinson is that we love the romance of her
story. Dickinson has to be one of the luckiest great
writers who ever lived. She chose to live in isolation,
which meant she was saved from the corruption of the

45 literary crowd; no husband ever patted her head dismissively, no child ever
interrupted her, and when her life

was finished a team of disciples ensured her immortality. If we do the necessary
work of reappraising the

literary "canon," and if we add some new women's

50 names to the reading list, we will nonetheless have to

settle for discoveries less dramatic than Lavinia Dickinson's, and we can't expect
them to appear with

frequency.

For the fact is that we can't have it both ways. We

55 can't simultaneously espouse the line that women

haven't until recently been allowed the depth of education and experience to become Shakespeare, while also

claiming that we really have an abundance of

Shakespeares, if anybody would just take the time to

60 read us.

But what is all this rating and counting and classifying of authors about anyway? If we set up one writer

against another, aren't we giving in to what some feminists tell us is the adversarial mentality of patriarchal

65 culture? We may think of Matthew Arnold's view of

the function of criticism—"to learn and propagate the

best that is known and thought"—and squirm in our

chairs: Who's to say what is best, who's to say what is

relevant?

70 Theoretically, these questions are of some interest.

Practically speaking, most of us who are habitual readers of poetry already have an answer. While

acknowledging our profound differences of taste, we

never doubt that there are good poems and terrible

75 poems, and that the good ones are the only ones we

have time for.

What else can be done about the fact that the list of

the best women poets is not as long as the men's list?

In addition to looking closely for unjustly neglected
80 women, one might question whether some men poets
have been overrated. I think, for some reason, of poets
whose names contain double Ws—William Wordsworth,
Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams—and while I
would be sorry to throw out the entire oeuvre of them, I
85 confess that each of these poets has at times bored me to
tears.

The problem with taking men poets down a peg,
however, is that it's hard to do so with discernment.

The zeal to undo, immediately, the centuries of neglect
90 and abuse endured by women poets has resulted in the
devaluation of great poets who were born male and (far worse) in the devaluation of
poetry itself.

1. Which of the following most fully lists solutions considered by the author to the
problem that the list of beloved women poets is not nearly as long as the list of
beloved men poets?

A. Reading women poets who have never been read, rejecting the writing of
those whose names contain double Ws, and redefining what's good about the
literary canon

B. Reappraising the literary canon, adding new women's names to the list,
weighing the importance of some male poets, and reading work by women

as yet not widely read

C. Questioning the importance of some male poets, encouraging readers to study women's journals, and creating a world in which women will flourish

D. Promoting the best work of current women writers, rediscovering older writers, reappraising Matthew Arnold's view of criticism, and acknowledging differences in literary taste

2. Which of the following sentences best summarizes the first paragraph?

A. It is disloyal to encourage women to write, and to ask: Why do male poets flourish more readily than female poets?

B. We must ask why there are so few women writers; perhaps asking this question will help create a women-centered culture.

C. It can be liberating to ask questions such as: What can be done about the fact that there are fewer beloved male poets than female poets?

D. If we admit that there is not enough quality poetry written by women, it can make it easier to discover why this is so, and help us change the situation.

3. It may reasonably be inferred from lines 10–17 that James Merrill respected Elizabeth Bishop's poetry:

A. and wished that reaction to her poems had not been complicated by gender issues.

B. but was disturbed by her refusal to be included in women's anthologies.

C. but felt she should be more concerned with women's issues.

D. and was glad she was one of the four best women poets ever.4. According to the third paragraph (lines 25–39), Emily Dickinson’s career was

helped by Helen Hunt Jackson, who:

A. published her; Mabel Loomis Todd, who transcribed her writing; and

Lavinia Dickinson, who discovered her poems in a cabinet.

B. encouraged her; Mabel Loomis Todd, who transcribed her work using a

bizarre machine; and Lavinia Dickinson, who rescued her work from

oblivion.

C. encouraged her sister to keep writing; Mabel Loomis Todd, who convinced

her to use a typewriter; and Lavinia Dickinson, who rescued her poems from

a dresser drawer.

D. taught her; Mabel Loomis Todd, who translated her writing into English; and

Lavinia Dickinson, who introduced her poems to the public.

5. Which of the following most clearly distinguishes between the “two ways” suggested by the author’s assertion that “we can’t have it both ways” (line 54)?

A. Women haven’t until recently been allowed to see the depths in Shakespeare,

but nobody bothers to read Shakespeare anyway

B. Women haven’t written as well as men because they’ve been too busy being

spouses, but nobody takes time to read women writers anyway.

C. Women haven’t written as well as men because they have not had the same

educational opportunities, yet there are many great women writers no one

reads.

D. Women have always had an abundance of Shakespeares, yet have not experienced the kind of education it takes to appreciate Shakespeare.

6. The author feels that “all this rating and counting and classifying of authors” (lines 61–62) is:

A. an example of giving in to a competitive approach to literature, which the author feels is counterproductive.

B. an example of an approach to literature that feminists have supported and should continue to support.

C. at odds with Matthew Arnold’s view of the function of criticism, a view that the author endorses.

D. important, especially if it helps eliminate the entire oeuvre of writers whose names contain double Ws.

7. Which of the following best states the author’s response to Matthew Arnold’s

view of the function of criticism (lines 65–76)?

A. It makes her reflect on why criticism is always so negative, yet she knows that most people don’t read criticism.

B. It makes her uncomfortable because so many respect Matthew Arnold, yet she realizes his ideas about poetry are now irrelevant.

C. It makes her wonder who decides what is good, yet she knows most readers think they know what good poetry is and don’t have time to read bad poetry.

D. It makes her question why more women don’t read Matthew Arnold, yet she realizes that few women today would find Arnold’s views engaging.

8. Which of the following most nearly paraphrases Helen Hunt Jackson’s statement to Emily Dickinson that “it is wrong to the day you live in, that you will not sing aloud” (lines 35–36)?

- A. It is morally reprehensible of you not to let other poets read your work.
- B. It is unacceptable for you to continue writing; you should become a singer.
- C. It is stingy and wrong of you not to read out loud to those who like your work.
- D. It is unfair to this age that you do not share your poetry with the world.

9. It may reasonably be inferred that the author considers Emily Dickinson “one of the luckiest great writers who ever lived” (lines 42–43) in part because:

- A. her writing was discovered in such a dramatic way by her editor.
- B. she lived such a romantic life, dressing in white and enjoying many suitors.
- C. she was never interrupted by her disciples.
- D. she lived in isolation, which allowed her much time to write.

10. The last paragraph suggests that those who would reevaluate, and perhaps want to devalue, the work of famous male poets should above all be:

- A. cautious.
- B. decisive.C. opinionated.
- D. zealous.

Reading Passage 2

2.

NATURAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article “How to Build a Baby’s Brain” by Sharon Begley (©1997 by Newsweek, Inc.). In this selection, the term neuron refers to a specialized cell of the nervous system, and tomography refers to a method of producing three-dimensional images of internal structures.

How to Build a Baby’s Brain

You cannot see what is going on inside your newborn’s brain. You cannot see the electrical activity as

her eyes lock onto yours and, almost instantaneously, a

neuron in her retina makes a connection to one in her

5brain’s visual cortex that will last all her life. The

image of your face has become an enduring memory in

her mind. And you cannot see the explosive release of a

neurotransmitter—brain chemical—as a neuron from

your baby’s ear, carrying the electrically encoded

10sound of “ma,” connects to a neuron in her auditory

cortex. “Ma” has now commandeered a cluster of cells

in the infant’s brain that will, as long as the child lives,

respond to no other sound. You cannot see any of this. But Dr. Harry Chugani

15can come close. With positron-emission tomography

(PET), Chugani, a pediatric neurobiologist, watches the

regions of a baby’s brain turn on, one after another, like

city neighborhoods having their electricity restored

after a blackout. He can measure activity in the primitive brain stem and sensory cortex from the moment the

baby is born. He can observe the visual cortex burn with activity in the second and third months of life. He can see the frontal cortex light up at 6 to 8 months. He can see, in other words, that the brain of a baby is still forming long after the child has left the womb—not merely growing bigger, but forming the microscopic connections responsible for feeling, learning and remembering.

Scientists are just now realizing how experiences after birth, rather than something innate, determine the actual wiring of the human brain. Only 15 years ago neuroscientists assumed that by the time babies are born, the structure of their brains had been genetically determined. But by 1996, researchers knew that was wrong. Instead, early-childhood experiences exert a dramatic and precise impact, physically determining how the intricate neural circuits of the brain are wired.

Since then they have been learning how those experiences shape the brain's circuits.

40 At birth, the brain's 100 billion or so neurons form more than 50 trillion connections (synapses). The genes the baby carries have already determined his brain's

basic wiring. They have formed the connections in the brain stem that will make the heart beat and the lungs 45respire. But that's not all. Of a human's 80,000 different genes, fully half are believed to be involved in forming and running the central nervous system. Yet even that doesn't come close to what the brain needs. In the first months of life, the number of synapses will increase 20-50 fold—to more than 1,000 trillion. There simply are not enough genes in the human species to specify so many connections.

That leaves experience—all the signals that a baby receives from the world. Experience seems to exert its55effects by strengthening synapses. Just as a memory will fade if it is not accessed from time to time, so synapses that are not used will also wither away in a process called pruning. The way to reinforce these wispy connections has come to be known as stimula60tion. Contrary to the claims of entrepreneurs preying on the anxieties of new parents, stimulation does not mean subjecting a toddler to flashcards. Rather, it is something much simpler—sorting socks by color or listening to the soothing cadences of a fairy tale. In the most 65extensive study yet of what makes a difference, Craig

Ramey of the University of Alabama found that it was

blocks, beads, peekaboo and other old-fashioned measures that enhance cognitive, motor and language

development—and, absent traumas, enhance them permanently.

The formation of synapses (synaptogenesis) and

their pruning occurs at different times in different parts

of the brain. The sequence seems to coincide with the

emergence of various skills. Synaptogenesis begins in the motor cortex at about 2 months. Around then,

infants lose their “startle” and “rooting” reflexes and

begin to master purposeful movements. At 3 months,

synapse formation in the visual cortex peaks; the brain

is fine-tuning connections allowing the eyes to focus on

an object. At 8 or 9 months the hippocampus, which

indexes and files memories, becomes fully functional;

only now can babies form explicit memories of, say,

how to move a mobile. In the second half of the first

year, finds Chugani, the prefrontal cortex, the seat of

forethought and logic, forms synapses at such a rate

that it consumes twice as much energy as an adult

brain. That furious pace continues for the child’s first

decade of life.

1. The main point of this passage is to:

- A. illustrate the importance of genetics in the formation of a baby's brain.
- B. illustrate the importance of stimulation and experience in the formation of a baby's brain.
- C. indicate the great need for conducting further research on babies' brains.
- D. compare the latest research on babies' brains with similar research

conducted fifteen years ago.2. The main point made in the second, third, and fourth paragraphs (lines 14–52) is

that the structure of a baby's brain:

- A. is genetically determined before the child is born.
- B. can be seen through positron-emission tomography.
- C. can be altered through a process known as pruning.
- D. is still developing after the child is born.

3. According to the passage, one thing PET allows neurobiologists to do is:

- A. observe activity in the frontal cortex of a baby's brain.
- B. determine the number of genes involved in the formation of a baby's brain.
- C. control the release of neurotransmitters in a baby's auditory cortex.
- D. restore microscopic connections in a baby's brain.

4. When she compares a baby's brain to city neighborhoods, the author is most nearly illustrating her point that:

- A. neurotransmitters are actually brain chemicals.
- B. regions of the brain are awakened through experience.

C. the visual cortex allows a baby to recognize specific images.

D. a baby's brain has about 1,000 trillion synapses.

5. Which of the following would the author of the passage be LEAST likely to recommend as a way to strengthen the synapses of a baby's brain?

A. Reading to a baby

B. Playing peekaboo with a baby

C. Teaching a baby with flashcards

D. Showing a baby how to distinguish red socks from blue blocks

6. The last paragraph suggests that the formation of synapses occurs most rapidly:

A. during the first two months of a child's life.

B. during the first nine months of a child's life.

C. from the time a child is about six months old until that child is about ten

years old. D. from the time a child is about one year old until that child is well into adolescence.

7. As it is used in line 30, the phrase something innate most nearly means:

A. a memory.

B. learned behavior.

C. physical immaturity.

D. an inherited trait.

8. The fifth paragraph (lines 53–70) suggests that one of the main causes of pruning is:

- A. a lack of stimulation.
- B. an insufficient number of genes.
- C. the use of flashcards.
- D. the strengthening of synapses.

9. When the author refers to “entrepreneurs preying on the anxieties of new parents” (lines 60–61), she is most likely suggesting that new parents should:

- A. give their babies products such as flashcards only if they have examined these products carefully.
- B. not be deceived by advertising that claims certain products will increase a baby’s intelligence.
- C. not worry if their babies’ development is slightly behind that suggested by neurobiologists.
- D. take their pediatrician’s advice before they listen to the advice given by other family members.

10. The passage states that, in terms of development, the average baby should be able to:

- A. focus his or her eyes on an object at two months of age.
- B. develop a “startle” reflex at about two months of age.
- C. make logical connections between ideas at about four months of age.
- D. form explicit memories at about nine months of age.