



DEPARTMENT OF
**OPERATIONAL
SUPPORT**



Language Proficiency Practice Exam - 2021

ENGLISH

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING UNIT | CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT
AND OPERATIONAL TRAINING SERVICE | OFFICE OF SUPPORT OPERATIONS

RECEPTIVE ACTIVITY: LISTENING

Remember to monitor the Moodle timer to avoid running out of time.

Task 1: TEDx Talk by Shivya Nath

Play the audio excerpt and read the questions. Mark your answers to the questions.

1. When the speaker “started calling the road home,” what did she do with her possessions?
 - a. She sold all of them.
 - b. She left them in her apartment.
 - c. She stored some with a friend.
2. How does the speaker describe her background?
 - a. She grew up in a large town.
 - b. She had a non-traditional education.
 - c. She was raised in a conventional family.
3. Why does the speaker say that she got a bachelor’s degree in economics, even though she “didn’t really care for it”?
 - a. Because her job required it.
 - b. Because she was following an expected path.
 - c. Because she got good grades when studying it.
4. How did the speaker feel when she turned 23?
 - a. That she was missing out on life.
 - b. That she was not advancing in her job.
 - c. That she had become too materialistic.
5. What did the speaker give up in order to pursue what inspired her?
 - a. relationships with friends
 - b. a job as a freelancer
 - c. a fixed residence
6. What did the speaker learn from Ravi, the fisherman?
 - a. That he envied his friends with houses and steady jobs.
 - b. That fishing does not provide a sustainable income.
 - c. That he lives happily even without physical comforts.
7. What is a similarity between Ravi’s and the speaker’s life?
 - a. Neither has their own home.
 - b. Both feel inspired by what they do.
 - c. They both enjoy snorkeling in the sea.

8. What types of people has the speaker met on her travels?
 - a. translators and marathon runners
 - b. astronomers and hitchhikers
 - c. nuns and celebrities

9. Why does the speaker like travel-blogging?
 - a. It provides her with a steady income.
 - b. She can combine her work with what she loves to do.
 - c. She finds lesser-known destinations by reading others' travel blogs.

10. It can be inferred from the speech that the speaker:
 - a. believes in a simple life that is inspiring each day, no matter what other people think.
 - b. feels that only by traveling extensively can we learn truly valuable life-lessons.
 - c. is unlikely to ever buy a home, remain in one city for long, or have a steady job.

Task 2: Podcast Excerpt about National Geographic Explorer, Anton Seimon

Play the audio excerpt and read the questions. Mark your answers to the questions.

11. A tornado forms from a supercell thunderstorm.
 - a. True
 - b. False

12. Supercell storms always create tornados.
 - a. True
 - b. False

13. Being a storm-chaser requires being physically fit.
 - a. True
 - b. False

14. Anton compares storm-chasing to chess because both activities contain an element of unpredictability.
 - a. True
 - b. False

15. At cloud level, droplets obstruct radar beams.
 - a. True
 - b. False

16. Most deaths from tornadoes occur at ground level.
 - a. True
 - b. False

17. It can be inferred that storm chasers are necessary to see inside a tornado at ground level.
- True
 - False

Task 3: (Questions 18-25)

Play each of the video/ audio excerpts and read the questions. Mark your answers to the questions.

3A. Video excerpt on “The Great Broadband Divide and the FCC (Federal Communications Commission)”

18. According to the excerpt:
- Programs designed to increase affordable Internet access have been successful.
 - Rural broadband companies spent billions of dollars to increase Internet access.
 - The government needs to ensure that companies increase Internet access.

3B. Video excerpt on “The International Day of Forests”

19. According to the speaker, what does reforestation do?
- Prevents soil erosion through absorption of carbon dioxide.
 - Releases more carbon dioxide to produce cleaner air.
 - Produces new jobs outside the forest sector.
20. The speaker refers to forests as “lungs of the earth” because trees:
- draw in oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide.
 - soak up carbon dioxide and help keep the climate healthy.
 - need oxygen to grow, just as humans need lungs to breathe.

3C. Video excerpt on “Artificial Intelligence.”

21. Artificial Intelligence technology needs clear legal guidelines because:
- people are no longer taking it seriously as a technological development
 - people are using it in extreme ways to further democracy
 - people are engaging in data theft and manipulation

3D. Video excerpt on “What is Time?”

22. The writers of Science News examine time from three different standpoints: molecular biology, neuroscience, and physics.
- True
 - False

23. According to the passage, time may have flowed in two directions from the Big Bang, creating two futures from a single past.
- a. True
 - b. False

3E. Video excerpt on “Hydrogen-Fueled Cars.”

24. What is one difference between the cars in the video and battery electric cars?
- a. They run partially on petrol.
 - b. They use hydrogen as fuel.
 - c. They have a lower mileage range.
25. According to the video, what is one advantage of this new technology?
- a. Refueling is fast and convenient.
 - b. The cars can run without fuel for long distances.
 - c. It is more environmentally-friendly than battery electricity.

RECEPTIVE ACTIVITY: READING

Remember to monitor the Moodle timer to avoid running out of time.

Task 1: Four Texts

Read each of the texts and the questions. Mark your answers to the questions.

Text 1A (questions 26-27)

In a wide expanse of space, gravity drew dust and gas together to create the solar system. The sun formed first from the vast material. But how did a sea of swirling particles become the brightest star in our sky?

Although it may look empty, space is filled with gas and dust. Most of the material was hydrogen and helium, but some of it was leftover **remnants** from the violent deaths of stars. About 4.5 billion years ago, waves of energy traveling through space pressed clouds of such particles closer together, and gravity caused them to collapse and spin. The spin caused the cloud to flatten into a disk like a pancake. In the center, the material clumped together to form the sun.

The young sun was a ball of hydrogen and helium not yet powered by fusion. Over tens of millions of years, the temperature and pressure of the material inside increased, jumpstarting the fusion of hydrogen that drives the sun today.

26. The word “remnants” in paragraph 3 could best be replaced by:
- Parts
 - Waves
 - Excess
27. According to the passage:
- a cloud of dust and gas collapsed under its own gravity to form the Sun at the center.
 - the Sun and planets formed at the same time from a contracting cloud of gas and dust.
 - gravity pulled material to the edges of the cloud, which released vast amounts of energy.

Text 1B (Questions 28-29)

Though people have always understood the concept of nothing or having nothing, the concept of zero is relatively new; it fully developed in India around the fifth century A.D., perhaps a couple of centuries earlier. Before then, mathematicians struggled to perform the simplest arithmetic calculations. Today, zero — both as a symbol (or numeral) and a concept meaning the absence of any quantity — allows us to perform calculus, do complicated equations, and to have invented computers.

The numerical zero, widely seen as one of the greatest innovations in human history, is the cornerstone of modern mathematics and physics, plus the spin-off technology," said Peter Gobets, secretary of the [ZerOrigIndia Foundation](#), or the Zero Project. The foundation, based in the Netherlands, researches the

origins of the zero digit. (129 words)

28. Zero is one of the most important inventions of all time because:
- it allows us to simplify complicated equations.
 - it helped make calculus, engineering and technology possible.
 - it is part of a symbolic language to explain quantities that exist in the world.
29. An implied outcome of research into the origin of zero is that it could:
- reveal the marvel of ancient technologies
 - inspire more technological innovations in the future
 - reveal that advanced mathematics existed in the past

Text 1C (Questions 30-32)

In a world where we are constantly asked to move forward, we have forgotten the powerful art of taking a “step back.” When something happens to us, our instinct is often to immediately take action. Someone bothers you at work? Snap back at them. Want that slice of cake? Grab it and take a bite.

Life is one continuous cycle between things occurring to us and us responding. However, often it is better to take a “step back” prior to making a final decision. Taking a “step back” can be essential for our happiness, success, and well-being.

Society conditions us to be hyper-reactive, whether it’s buying a new product online with one click or sending out a message instantly to hundreds of people through social media.

We’ve become addicted to instant gratification. However, taking a step back can allow us to cool intense emotions, re-direct our path, and discover gratitude for what we have.

30. It can be inferred from the text that we all need to find a healthy balance in life between “moving forward” and “taking a step back.”
- True
 - False
31. “Stepping back” means pushing ourselves in new ambitious ways.
- True
 - False
32. “Stepping back” gives us the freedom and time to re-evaluate our choices.
- True
 - False

Text 1D (Questions 33-34)

The latest round of national climate pledges falls “far short of what is required” to achieve the targets set out in the Paris Agreement, according to new UN analysis. A new “synthesis report” from UN Climate Change examines the combined impact of the 48 new and updated “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs) submitted by its end-of-year deadline. Countries were meant to set more ambitious targets by the close of 2020, but the report shows that, overall, targets only increased slightly.

The combined emissions cuts of the new pledges are only around 3% lower by 2030 than the previous round of pledges submitted by those nations in 2015. Furthermore, with these targets in place their combined emissions would be just 0.5% lower in 2030 than in 2010 – far from the 45% reduction in total CO2 emissions from 2010 that scientists have recommended. The report emphasizes “the need for parties to further strengthen their mitigation commitments.

33. The new UN synthesis report says that nations promised larger cuts in CO2 emissions in 2015 than in 2020.
- True
 - False
34. The report shows that governments need to aim for higher targets to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.
- True
 - False

Task 2: One Text

Read the text and the questions. Mark your answers to the questions.

1. On Tuesday, the United Arab Emirates became just the fifth nation to successfully send a spacecraft to Mars when its robotic probe, named Hope, began orbiting the red planet. It is the first interplanetary mission undertaken by an Arab country. In recent days, a number of prominent buildings and monuments in the wealthy oil country were lit up at night in red in honor of Mars, the red planet.
2. “From the U.A.E. government’s perspective, basically 90 percent of this mission has been achieved successfully,” said Omran Sharaf, the project manager of Hope, in an interview ahead of the spacecraft’s arrival. For the remaining 10 percent, there was little to do but watch and wait as the spacecraft executed instructions already loaded into its computer. Sarah al-Amiri, who leads the science portion of the mission, said she had felt a range of emotions when the spacecraft was launched last summer. But as it approached Mars, she said, “This is further intensifying them.”
3. Once in orbit, the spacecraft can begin its study of the red planet’s atmosphere and weather. On Tuesday controllers at the mission operations center in Dubai first received word from the spacecraft that it had started firing thrusters to slow itself down and allow it to fall into the thrall of the gravity of Mars. Then, after the 27-minute burn was complete, they confirmed that the probe was in orbit.

4. Cheers erupted in the control room, where the mission’s managers sat at sleek computer consoles. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai and the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, was at the center to offer his congratulations, and wrote “Mission Accomplished” on his Twitter account. The mission is to spend at least two years studying how dust storms and other weather conditions near the surface affect the speed at which Martian air is leaking away into outer space.

35. The Mars Mission from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was significant because:

- a. numerous buildings and monuments in the UAE were lit up at night in red.
- b. it was the first interplanetary mission undertaken by an Arab nation.
- c. the UAE’s first robotic probe landed on the planet Mars.

36. The word “this” in paragraph 2 refers to:

- a. the Mars Mission
- b. the spacecraft launch
- c. the spacecraft entering Mars orbit

37. According to the passage, the spacecraft:

- a. studied the red planet's atmosphere and weather from its orbit in space
- b. had to execute instructions given remotely from the mission operations center
- c. entered the gravity of Mars to land and study weather conditions near the surface

38. The word “thrall” in paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to:

- a. Bondage
- b. Spell
- c. Grip

39. Why does the project manager of Hope say that “from the U.A.E. government’s perspective, basically 90 percent of this mission has been achieved successfully”?

- a. Because the spacecraft had successfully begun its orbit around Mars.
- b. Because computer programming would manage the rest of the mission.
- c. Because the launch was the most exciting and anticipated part of the mission.

40. The objective of the mission is to study:

- a. Martian weather dynamics to understand Mars’ atmosphere in the past
- b. how the Martian atmosphere could one day be used to support life
- c. the impact weather has on the release of Martian air into space

Task 3: One Text

Read the text and the questions. Mark your answers to the questions.

1. Working life often involves the push and pull of various contradictory demands. Musicians want to maintain artistic integrity while also making sacks full of cash. Teachers have to impose tough discipline for the good of the class – being “cruel to be kind”. In the era of remote work, employees want to manage work from home, while also balancing a dedication to spouses and children.
2. Being dragged in two different directions, simultaneously, should create tension and stress. And yet, some exciting research suggests that these conflicts can often work in our favour. [2A] Although paradoxes often seem challenging at first, embracing contradictory ideas may actually be the secret to creativity and leadership. Over a series of studies, psychologists and organisational scientists have found that people who learn to embrace, rather than reject, opposing demands show greater creativity, flexibility and productivity. [2B] The researchers call this a “paradox mindset” – and there has never been a better time to start cultivating it. [2C]
3. Although this concept may sound counter-intuitive, it is inspired by a long history of research showing that contemplation of apparent contradictions can break down our assumptions, offering us wholly new ways of looking at a problem.
4. Harvard University psychiatrist Albert Rothenberg was among the first to investigate the idea formally, with a study in 1996 of acclaimed geniuses. Interviewing 22 Nobel laureates, and analysing historical accounts of deceased world-changing scientists, he noted that each revolutionary thinker had spent considerable time “actively conceiving multiple opposites or antitheses simultaneously”.
5. Einstein, for instance, contemplated how an object could be both at rest and in motion depending on the position of the observer, a consideration that ultimately led to his relativity theory. Danish physicist Niels Bohr tried to reconcile the ways that energy acted like both waves and particles: two states that existed simultaneously, even though they could not be observed together. This train of thought ultimately inspired a startling new understanding of quantum mechanics.
6. In terms of the workplace, a series of studies have shown that “paradoxical cognition” can also help more average thinkers to solve everyday problems, and organisations to enhance their performance.
7. In an early study, Ella Miron-Spektor, associate professor of organisational behaviour at INSEAD, and her research collaborators asked participants to write down three paradoxical statements. This, the participants were told, could be as banal as the idea that “sitting can be more tiring than walking;” they simply had to list any thoughts that were “seemingly contradictory but nonetheless possibly true.” She then gave them various standard psychological tests of creativity.

8. Miron-Spektor found that the participants who had been asked to consider the paradoxical statements tended to perform much better on problem-solving and associative tasks, compared to a control group who had simply noted down three “interesting” statements. Thirty-five percent of the paradoxical thinkers found the correct solution to scenarios, for example, compared with just 21% of the control group – a large difference after such a simple prime.

9. Although the participants’ paradoxical statements were not directly related to the task itself, their contemplation of the contradictory ideas seemed to have freed their thinking from its usual constraints, meaning that they were better able to think “outside the box.”

10. Miron-Spektor demonstrated that this also occurs when we consider the apparently paradoxical goals found in many jobs. People who were asked to reflect on the dual (and apparently opposing) requirements of minimising costs and maximising innovation were subsequently more creative than those who only considered one goal or the other: somehow, the contradictory demands fuelled their thinking.

11. These discoveries are becoming especially important for leaders, with evidence that a manager’s paradox mindset influences the innovation of their team. Companies and institutions that embrace paradoxical strategies tend to outperform their competitors.

12. Individuals can cultivate the paradox mindset, by contemplating paradoxes before solving problems, such as the paradoxes that inspired scientists like Einstein and Bohr. Instead of sacrificing a seemingly contradictory goal at work for another – we can spend more time considering ways to pursue both goals, simultaneously. Rather than seeing conflicting demands as something to avoid, we can view competing demands as an opportunity for growth and motivation. Regardless of finding an immediate solution, the very act of thinking about reconciling contradictory issues can lubricate your mind for greater innovation elsewhere. Furthermore, researchers have recently shown that people with this mindset also get greater satisfaction from their role. In addition to innovation and success, there is a deep fulfillment, apparently, in reconciling two opposing goals.

41. Which of the sentences below best summarizes the highlighted sentence in paragraph 1?
- Remote work has resulted in employees working longer hours than usual.
 - Remote work has brought about greater efficiency and increased productivity.
 - Remote work has created a balancing act between the job and home life.

42. In paragraph 2, in which box [] would the following sentence best fit?

In other words, the dual demands actually enhanced their performance.

- [2A]
 - [2B]
 - [2C]
43. Why does the author use the word “counterintuitive” in paragraph 3?
- To make the point that contradictions cause challenges.
 - To indicate that embracing a paradox mindset may seem unnatural.

- c. To explain why the concept of a paradox mindset seems based on common sense.
44. According to paragraph 4, which group of people did psychiatrist Albert Rothenberg study?
- a. self-proclaimed intellectuals
 - b. modern scientists
 - c. above average thinkers
45. The word “their” in paragraph 6 refers to:
- a. Studies
 - b. Organizations
 - c. People
46. Ella Miron-Spektor’s research findings can best be summarized as:
- a. People who embrace competing demands gain increased creativity.
 - b. Both individuals and teams can find ways to reframe contradictory demands.
 - c. We are driven to resolve inconsistencies or conflicts to regain comfort.
47. The word “those” in paragraph 10 refers to:
- a. costs
 - b. requirements
 - c. people
48. What can be inferred from paragraph 11?
- a. Constantly balancing tensions is how to develop a paradox mindset.
 - b. Paradoxical thinking enhances job performance and creativity.
 - c. Paradoxical strategies help competitors.
49. In this context, the word “lubricate” in paragraph 12 is closest in meaning to:
- a. Weaken
 - b. Accelerate
 - c. Prepare
50. The author includes the phrase “Regardless of finding an immediate solution” in paragraph 12 in order to:
- a. emphasize that a paradox mindset will enhance thinking for new solutions across all tasks
 - b. explain how searching for possibilities is key to the development of a paradox mindset
 - c. reinforce the idea that conflicting demands always leads to solutions in the present circumstance

WRITTEN PRODUCTION AND INTERACTION

Remember to monitor the Moodle timer to avoid running out of time.

Task 1 (55 minutes, 225-250 words):

Re-read the passage, “Mars Mission from the U.A.E. Begins Orbit of Red Planet” and then complete the task below. Your production should be 225-250 words in total.

First, briefly summarize the main ideas of the text in 100 words or less. Do not copy whole phrases from the text. Instead, reformulate the ideas in your own words.

In the second part of your response, share your ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of space exploration. Some people think we should spend as much money as possible on space exploration. Others think we should allocate this money for basic and more immediate needs on Earth. What do you think? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.

Task 2 (35 minutes, 150-175 words):

Your supervisor has written the email below to your team/office. Write a 150-175-word email in response.

Dear Colleagues,

The past several years have seen many changes in the way we work. From the traditional 8 or 9-hour workday spent on site, many offices have moved to open work spaces, hot-desking, flexible work hours and, especially during the pandemic, more remote working. Now that we have learnt how some of these modifications work in practice, I would like to ask for your input in designing a plan for our team.

How should we organize our workspace and work schedules to maintain our overall productivity while also promoting a healthy work/life balance for all of us? What are your individual work schedule and location preference(s)?

I am open to all suggestions, even ones that have not yet been tried, so be as creative as you would like. Once I have everyone’s input, I will make a proposal for the team.

Looking forward to your responses.

Best,
Xxxxxxxx

SPOKEN PRODUCTION AND INTERACTION

Remember to monitor the Moodle timer to avoid running out of time.

Task 1:

Read the task instructions below. You will have five minutes to read and prepare your response. Then, record a three-minute response that details your opinion on the topic.

Read and think about the statement below. Is access to the Internet an individual human right? Support your position with details and/or examples.

Over time, the global community has come to define certain human rights as universal. Recently, the emergence of the internet as a disruptive technology has prompted many to propose that access to the Internet is in itself a human right. It is true that at no other time in human history has access to information so greatly impacted the evolution of an individual. Others argue that although the Internet may be essential to the development of a country or nation, it is not necessarily an individual right.

Task 2

Read the following prompt and then speak for about three minutes in response. Please note that you will not have time to prepare your response in advance.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 calls for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. What are some concrete steps the international community can take towards this goal? Please give specific examples to support your answer.

Task 3:

This task contains five unrelated situations to which you need to briefly respond in a manner appropriate for the given context. Please respond in one or two sentences. Read the example before you start.

Example:

Situation: Your colleague asks you to edit a report, but you don't have time. Refuse your colleague's request.

Response: *I have a really heavy workload this week, so I am sorry, but I cannot edit the report. Simon has just finished his last project, and I think he might be available to help.*

Situations:

1. Your colleague provides inaccurate information at a meeting. Correct the error.
2. Your friend is about to turn down a new job offer that you think is a great opportunity. Try to persuade them to accept the offer.
3. During your performance review, your supervisor tells you that your reports are consistently late and not well edited. Explain why this is happening.
4. You are in a shop and the attendant ignores your requests for assistance. Complain to the manager of the store.
5. You are in a restaurant and accidentally break one of the water glasses. Apologize to the restaurant manager and offer to rectify the error.