



National
Qualifications
2017

X724/76/11

English
Reading for Understanding,
Analysis and Evaluation — Text

THURSDAY, 11 MAY

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Total marks — 30

Read the passages carefully and then attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.



The following two passages discuss the issue of music being played in public places.

Passage 1

This passage has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Passage 2

Read the passage below and attempt question 9. While reading, you may wish to make notes on the main ideas and/or highlight key points in the passage.

In the second passage, Will Self describes his experiences with muzak.

Is there nowhere I can escape the tyranny of muzak?

Sitting in the snug restaurant of Tarr Steps Farm in Exmoor National Park, I looked out over the wooded valley. I felt the stress of city life slacken in my shoulders. My wife observed at this point quite how strange it was that even a stylish establishment of this type still had a loop of soft rock music playing in the background in its public areas. I had become so relaxed that for once I hadn't even noticed the muzak but as soon as I registered that Foreigner, or some other equally tedious rock group, was perturbing the air with their guitars, my breakfast — hitherto blissful — was entirely ruined.

Like all right-listening folk, I am an implacable enemy of all muzak. True, I'm not in the position of those factory workers in the 1940s and 1950s for whom muzak constituted a sort of mind-control designed to move their tasks forward with its insistent and carefully calibrated tempo, while lulling them into the monotony of their tasks with its equally bland and repetitive melodies. However, even in modern Britain we are still subject to a form of control. I travel for work and there doesn't seem to be a hotel the length of the land that doesn't come equipped with its own piped sonic sewage, which is surely at least partially designed to send the punters quickly on their way.

I remember finding myself in one such establishment in Norwich — eating breakfast, naturally — when I became insistently aware of some particularly dreadful muzak and upon looking up saw the speaker cabinet immediately above my head, trailing some tempting wires. I stood up on my chair and detached them — bingo! Silence (except for the chewing of my fellow diners) fell like a
20 30-tog duvet across the room. Unfortunately, a maintenance man came into view, opened a stepladder and reinserted the jack plugs. I waited until he'd retreated, then got back up on my chair and was about to commit this dreadful crime against oppression for the second time, when he leapt out at me from behind a pillar and near-screamed: "Don't you move!" I thought I was about to be dragged away to some inhuman reconditioning unit, where I would be subjected to
25 muzak until I learned to love it. But this didn't happen, because I was in just such a unit already.

True, there was a backlash against the hateful "elevator music" in the 1960s. But this resistance was outflanked effortlessly by incorporating the pop hits of the day into the play-lists, as well as devising something they termed "audio architecture": muzak cunningly fashioned to sink below
30 the level of ordinary consciousness, while retaining its ability to influence. The success of these strategies can only be gauged by just how little mass objection there is to the fact that hardly any part of the built environment remains untainted by these aural atrocities.

I found myself a while back eating dinner in a trendy restaurant. My dining companions showed no unhappiness towards the muzak playing. I, however, am made of less stoical stuff and confronted the waitress, explaining that since we were the only diners and we didn't want to
35 listen to the so-called music, perhaps she could turn the appalling noise off! She looked at me quizzically and replied — as if this definitively settled the matter — "But this is a restaurant." The obvious implication was that even when all human life is extinct on this planet, there will remain buildings that continue to resound with Beethoven's 5th Symphony or indeed Foreigner warbling, "I wanna know what love is . . . !"

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Passage 2 – Article is adapted from “Is there nowhere I can escape the tyranny of muzak?” by Will Self, taken from *New Statesman*, 8 August 2012. Reproduced by permission of New Statesman Limited.