



National
Qualifications
2024

X824/76/11

English
Reading for Understanding,
Analysis and Evaluation — Text

THURSDAY, 9 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.



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The following two passages discuss changing attitudes towards car use.

Passage 1

Read the passage below and attempt questions 1 to 8.

In the first passage, John Vidal argued that the age of the car is over.

Back in 1989, a group of city planners from the Chinese government came to Britain on a fact-finding mission. At that time they were widely praised for curbing car use in China: the country of one billion people, after all, had just a few million vehicles. The bicycle was king; its city streets were safe and the air mostly clean. How did China manage to have so few cars? asked their British
5 hosts, grappling as ever with chaotic streets, traffic jams and pollution.

‘But you don’t understand how China is changing,’ replied one of the Chinese delegates. ‘In twenty years, there will be no bicycles in China.’

He was nearly right. China’s breakneck development has been led by mass car ownership. It now has 300 million cars — and what was once the kingdom of bikes is now the land of 20-lane
10 motorways, towering scrap metal yards and more than 100,000 petrol stations. Beijing, Shanghai and most other Chinese cities are choked with traffic, their air is some of the worst in the world, and their hospitals are full of children with respiratory diseases. Now China, like every other country, is having to rethink the car.

The worldwide love affair with the car — which promised consumers convenience, status and
15 freedom — is over. A century ago, the coach and horse were pushed aside by automobiles. In this century, the car is being steadily evicted from cities by the authorities or by public revulsion. The reality from Inverness to Istanbul, from Lagos to Lahore is that the car is now a social and environmental curse. It disconnects people. It erodes public space. It fractures local economies. Ecologically, the air pollution caused by cars is an increasing problem, suffocating society
20 remorselessly. Once we savoured the prospect of speed and cheap mobility. Now consumers suffer personal danger, ill health and the soaring costs caused by the most serious energy crisis in 30 years.

When the cost of living crisis started to bite, Ireland, Italy and other countries cut public transport fares by as much as 90%. Spain went a step further, announcing free train travel on many routes.
25 Global car sales, already stuttering before the pandemic, are now declining in many major countries. UK new car sales have fallen for five months in a row and the level of UK car ownership has now fallen for two consecutive years — the first successive drops in ownership in more than a century. As thousands of street parties over the years have shown, car-free streets are popular, and the surest and best way to save money, improve health and make cities more liveable. In this
30 urban century, where nearly 70% of people are expected to live in built-up areas within 30 years and the global population is expected to grow by another 3 billion by 2100, the private car makes little economic or social sense.

Thankfully, we may be reaching ‘peak car’, the point at which the world is so saturated with vehicles — and city leaders and individuals are so disillusioned or financially stretched by them
35 — that they are banned or voluntarily given up. From here on, it looks like death by a thousand breakdowns for the private car. Recently, UK petrol hit a staggering £2 a litre. It cost £100 to fill up a tank. To own a car in the first place involves coughing up thousands of pounds in loans and taxes. Is it any wonder then that young people especially are rejecting cars and embracing other forms of transport? The auto-magic that has entranced societies for a century has gone.

40 Major cities may have little choice but to reduce car use. Most European cities are either outlawing cars from their centres on a large scale or making it prohibitively expensive to drive them. They are pushing at an open door. Recently 50,000 Berliners asked the city to impose the world’s largest car ban, covering 34 square miles. Car-sharing, e-bikes and scooters are all

45 hastening the car's demise. City leaders, as well as health, transport and environmental groups, are now calling for it to be made easy and affordable for people to leave the car at home or get rid of it — and for cities to be reimagined so that people can access key things like food and health centres on foot or by bike.

50 It is time for cities to start to design themselves not around the car, but around the bicycle and the pedestrian. And it is time for those who worship the car and aggressively assert its place in our social and economic hierarchy — and its divine right to road space — to understand that a page has been turned. The sooner they accept that, the easier the future will be. The car as we know it is fast becoming extinct; it is a relic of a former age. Sitting in a traffic jam in a ton of metal that belches pollution and costs a fortune will surely be seen by future generations as not just stupid, but criminal.

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, George Monbiot reflects on the impact of the car on our lives.

It's the last straw. Parked outside the hospital doors is a minibus with its engine running. The driver is playing on his mobile phone. The fumes are blowing into the entrance. I step up to his window and ask him to turn the engine off. He does so, grumpily. I walk into the hospital's huge waiting room, wondering how many of the people sitting here are ill as a result of air pollution. I
5 think of people in other departments: children with asthma attacks, patients being treated for road injuries. And I'm struck by the amazing variety of ways in which cars have ruined our lives.

Let's abandon this disastrous experiment, recognise that this 19th-century technology is now doing more harm than good, and plan our way out of it. Let's set a target to cut the use of cars by 90% over the next decade. Yes, the car is still useful — for a few people it's essential. It would
10 make a good servant. But it has become our master, and it spoils everything it touches. It now presents us with a series of emergencies that demand an emergency response.

Burning fossil fuels, according to a recent paper, is now 'the world's most significant threat to children's health'. In other sectors, greenhouse gas emissions have fallen sharply. But transport emissions in the UK have declined by only 2% since 1990. The government's legally binding target
15 is an 80% cut by 2050, though even this, the science now tells us, is hopelessly inadequate. Transport, mostly because of our obsession with the private car, is now the major factor driving us towards climate breakdown, in this and many other nations.

There are also subtler and more widespread effects. Traffic diminishes communities, as the noise, danger and pollution in busy streets drive people indoors. The places in which children could play
20 and adults could sit and talk are reserved instead for parking. Engine noise, a great but scarcely acknowledged cause of stress and illness, fills our lives. As we jostle to secure our road space, as we swear and shake our fists at other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists, as we grumble about speed limits and traffic calming measures, cars change us, enhancing our sense of threat and competition, cutting us off from each other.

25 A switch to electric cars addresses only some of these issues. Already, beautiful places are being wrecked by an electric vehicle resource rush. Lithium mining, for example, is now poisoning rivers and depleting groundwater from Tibet to Bolivia. Electric cars still require a vast expenditure of energy and space. They still need tyres, whose manufacture and disposal is a massive environmental blight.

30 We are told that cars are about freedom of choice. But every aspect of this assault on our lives is assisted by state planning and government funding. Roads are built to accommodate projected

traffic, which then grows to fill the new capacity. Streets are modelled to maximise the flow of cars. Pedestrians and cyclists are squeezed by planners into narrow and often dangerous spaces — the afterthoughts of urban design. The chaos on our roads is a planned chaos.

- 35 Transport should be planned, but with entirely different aims: to maximise its social benefits, while minimising harm. This means a wholesale switch towards electric mass transit, safe and separate bike lanes and broad pavements, accompanied by tighter restrictions to prevent cars rampaging through our lives. In some places, and for some purposes, using cars is unavoidable. But for the great majority of journeys they can easily be substituted, as you can see in Amsterdam and Copenhagen. We could almost eliminate them from our cities.

40 In this age of multiple emergencies — climate chaos, pollution, social alienation — we should remember that technologies exist to serve us, not to dominate us. It is time to drive the car out of our lives.

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Passage 2 – Article is adapted from “Cars are killing us. Within 10 years, we must phase them out” by George Monbiot, taken from The Guardian, 7 March 2019. Reproduced by permission of The Guardian. © Guardian News & Media Ltd 2024.