National Qualifications 2015

X724/75/11

English
Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

THURSDAY, 14 MAY

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Total marks — 30

Attempt ALL questions.

Write your answers clearly in the answer booklet provided. In the answer booklet you must clearly identify the question number you are attempting.

Use **blue** or **black** ink.

Before leaving the examination room you must give your answer booklet to the Invigilator; if you do not you may lose all the marks for this paper.

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On the spot

If you throw a rat into the middle of a room full of humans, it will instinctively freeze. By becoming completely still, it is more likely to avoid detection. Then, it will dart into a corner of the room, hoping to flee danger. If cornered, however, it will fight. Ferociously.

Psychologists call it the fight-flight-freeze response, and it emerged very early in evolution. We know this because it is common to all vertebrates. The response starts in a part of the brain which reacts when an animal is confronted by a threat, and is controlled by the automatic nervous system. This is the same system that manages digestion and respiration, and is independent of conscious will.

At the World Cup finals, we were given a neat insight into this deeply ingrained response. The players who took penalties, and the former players who shared their experiences as pundits, talked about “the walk”. This is the fearful, solitary journey from the halfway line to the penalty area in preparation for a single moment of truth: the spot-kick.

In the modern world, we rarely face danger head-on. It is not like the good old days when the fight-flight-freeze response was regularly called upon to deal with predators (of both an animal and human kind). Instead, the danger we face today is artificially created: taking an exam, giving a speech, taking a penalty.

The psychological response, however, is the same. As footballers walk towards the spot, they are experiencing precisely the things you experience when put under pressure at work. The threat is not to life or limb, but to ego and livelihood. We fear the consequences of messing up.

There is an acceleration of heart and lung function. There is paling and flushing. There is an inhibition of stomach action, such that digestion almost completely ceases. There is a constriction of blood vessels. There is a freeing up of metabolic energy sources (fat and glycogen). There is a dilation of the pupils and a relaxation of the bladder. Perception narrows. Often, there is shaking.

All of these things are incredibly useful, in the right context. They prime the muscles; they massively increase body strength in preparation for fighting or running. The increased muscle flow and blood pressure means that you become hyper-vigilant. The response is beautifully balanced for a simple reason: it helped our ancestors (and the ancestors of modern-day rats) to survive.

But there is a rather obvious problem. The fight-flight-freeze response is great for fighting, freezing or fleeing, but it is terrible if you have to do something complex, or subtle, or nuanced. When you are taking a penalty, or playing a piano concerto, or marshalling the arguments necessary to pass a difficult interview, it is not helpful to have adrenalin pumping like crazy and perception obliterated by tunnel vision. You need to be calm and composed, but your body is taut, pumped and trembling.

Sports psychology can be thought of as helping performers to manage a response (ie fight, flight, freeze) that has outlived, to a large extent, its usefulness. The players standing in the semi-circle holding hands are virtually motionless. It is a nice metaphor for the freeze response. The walk to the penalty spot is curiously self-conscious. You can almost hear the inner dialogue: “Get out of here, run away! ‘But I can’t run away. I have to take this thing!’ ”

How to deal with these responses? One way is with reflection. The next time you give a speech or are doing a job interview, take note of how you feel. Gauge the curious feeling of dread, the desire to run away, the way your heart is beating out of your chest. But do not let this intimidate you; instead, reflect that these are normal reactions and everyone experiences them: even Michael Jordan (a marvel from the free-throw line) and Roger

Federer (who always looks unnaturally calm on Centre Court).

One of the most creative sports psychologists has found that simply discussing the fight-flight-freeze response has huge therapeutic benefit. It takes the edge off. It makes an otherwise bewildering reaction (what on earth is going on inside me?) into a comprehensible one. To put it another way, the first stage of liberation from the tyranny of pressure is echoing the behaviour of our ancient selves.

This, I think, is what top athletes mean when they repeat that otherwise paradoxical saying: "Pressure is not a problem; it is a privilege". Talk to David Beckham, Sebastian Coe or Sir Chris Hoy and they will be perfectly open about their nerves and fear. But they also talk with great pride about facing up to them. They didn't see these human responses as signs of weakness but as opportunities to grow. They created mechanisms (often highly personal ones) to help them through. They seized every opportunity to face danger, and learnt from each experience.

So, here is a piece of (free) advice: if you are given an opportunity to take the equivalent of a penalty, whether at work or anywhere else, grab it. Accept that you will feel uncomfortable, that your stomach will knot and that, at the moment of truth, you will wish to be anywhere else in the world. Think also, as you are about to perform, of the footballers at a World Cup who volunteered to step forward with the weight of a nation's expectations on their shoulders.

Because here is the most revelatory and paradoxical thing of all: if you miss, your life will not end. If you fluff your lines, you won't die. Instead, you will grow, learn and mature. And isn't that what life – whether at home, on the football pitch, or in the office – is ultimately about?

Matthew Syed, in "The Times"

MARKS

Total marks — 30

Attempt ALL Questions

1. Explain fully why the first paragraph (lines 1—4) is an effective opening to the passage as a whole. **3**

2. Look at lines 5—10, and then explain **in your own words** what the writer means when he calls the response "deeply ingrained". **2**

3. Look at lines 14—21, and then explain **in your own words two** aspects of "danger" or "threat" we used to experience in the past, and **two** we face now. **4**

4. Look at lines 22—37, and then summarise, **using your own words** as far as possible, some of the changes in the body which occur with the response.

You should make **five** key points in your answer. **5**

5. Explain why the sentence "How to deal with these responses?" (line 44) provides an appropriate link at this point in the passage. **2**

6. Look at lines 50—54, and then explain how **two** examples of the writer's **word choice** demonstrate the "benefit" of the response. **4**

7. Look at lines 55—61. Explain what the attitude of top athletes is to pressure, and how **two** examples of the language used make this attitude clear. **5**

8. Look at lines 62—67, and explain fully **using your own words** why the advice to "grab" the opportunity might at first seem strange. **3**

9. Pick an expression from the final paragraph (lines 68—71), and show how it helps to contribute to an effective conclusion to the passage.

You should refer to an expression or idea from earlier in the article. **2**

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

[Open out for Questions]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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