

PRACTICE TEST 5

READING 1

What defines a city?

1. Which is the biggest city in the world? I believe there is no definitive answer to this question. An Internet search will bring up numerous seemingly authoritative lists, but the problem is that many of the lists won't agree. In one list, Tokyo, Japan, will be at the top, and in another it will be Chongqing, China. These discrepancies occur because there is no set international standard method for measuring cities. Although the general aim is to measure population, the problem is that there are at least three ways to define the outer limits of a city, and hence its population.

2. One definition is that a city is the municipal area, which is defined by the law. This is a very simple way of looking at it, but it is not very helpful, because different countries have different legal descriptions. Another is the metropolitan definition, which includes outlying areas that are influenced by the city. The third definition is based on the actual buildings; the city is measured by the built-up area. This definition appeals to common sense; after all, who can argue against a city being defined by its buildings? However, the problem is that it is impossible to agree on what constitutes "built-up"—in some cities, there is a very low density of buildings, but in others the density is much higher. Putting Chongqing at the top of the list is a good example of the problems that can result from these varying definitions; the figures are completely misleading, because in China the definition of a city is more similar to what is commonly accepted elsewhere as the definition of a province. Large numbers of people counted as living in Chongqing are actually in the countryside, according to some experts. As a result, estimates of the population vary wildly, from around 30 million at the most to six or seven million at the least—a variation of more than 20 million!

3. Another difficulty of answering the question of which is the biggest city is that it is actually impossible to accurately count the population due to social factors. There may be large numbers of people who do not want to be included in the statistics—for example, illegal immigrants. Another problem is that low educational levels may mean that people are not able to fill in written census forms. These factors also vary massively from country to country, making it almost impossible to compare the results with any degree of confidence. It is likely that as migration from rural to urban areas increases, it will become even more difficult to keep track of city populations.

4. To conclude, I feel that it is important that we stop fooling ourselves with false comparisons. Until there is a fixed set of standards applied internationally, it makes no sense to say that city X is bigger than city Y, or even that it is growing faster. Who does it help, anyway? What use are such comparisons? We live in a competitive world where people are obsessed with superlatives—the biggest, the most expensive, the wealthiest. This is a distraction from the real

problems of underemployment, overpopulation, and other issues that are at the center of urban life.

I. Identifying persuasion techniques

Match the sentences (a–f) to the persuasion techniques (1–5). One sentence is extra.

1. the inclusion of insights into the future

2. dismissal of alternative arguments

3. use of questions

4. use of vocabulary related to feelings

5. repeating or paraphrasing arguments

- a.** Who does it help, anyway? What use are such comparisons?
- b.** It is likely that as migration from rural to urban areas increases, it will become even more difficult to keep track of city populations.
- c.** It is actually impossible to accurately count the population due to social factors.
- d.** One definition is that a city is the municipal area, which is defined by the law.
- e.** We live in a competitive world where people are obsessed with superlatives—the biggest, the most expensive, the wealthiest.
- f.** However, the problem is that it is impossible to agree on what constitutes “built-up”—in some cities, there is a very low density of buildings, but in others the density is much higher.

II. Reading for detail

Choose the correct answer.

- 1.** What will you see when you look at Internet lists of large cities?
 - a.** The lists are different.
 - b.** There is only one list.
 - c.** The lists are all the same.
- 2.** What does the writer say is the problem with measuring city size?
 - a.** The Chinese cities are the biggest.

- b. There are different ways of doing it.
 - c. Populations are difficult to count.
3. Why does the writer argue that using the legal definition of “municipal area” is not useful?
- a. It is too expensive to correctly define the term.
 - b. There are different interpretations of this around the world.
 - c. There are too many people involved in defining the term.
4. What does the writer think about cities being measured by built-up area?
- a. It is obviously a very bad idea.
 - b. It is the best idea.
 - c. It seems like a good idea.
5. What issue does the writer say makes the third method difficult?
- a. People cannot decide what “built-up” means.
 - b. There are too many buildings to count.
 - c. Sometimes there are not enough buildings to make a city.
6. Which statistics does the writer argue are not clear at all?
- a. those about the Chinese city Chongqing
 - b. those about the number of buildings in China
 - c. those about people who moved out of China
7. What is an important factor for the writer regarding Chongqing?
- a. Not enough people live there to make it a city.
 - b. Some population estimates are very different.
 - c. It is difficult to count a population of around 30 million.
8. What problems does the writer argue are connected with social factors?
- a. They affect people in different ways around the world.

- b. Every country faces the same issues, so there are no differences.
- c. Not enough people can complete census forms.

9. What does the writer think we should stop doing?

- a. trying to determine the populations of different cities around the world
- b. agreeing on shared standards that should be applied internationally
- c. comparing information that is not based on the same definitions

10. What does the writer argue is the most important thing?

- a. focusing on the lack of jobs and the overcrowding in cities
- b. being obsessed with false information
- c. measuring cities accurately and counting people

READING 2

Is Social Media to Blame for Students' Poor Writing Skills?

1. For as long as we have had academic writing, academics have complained about the writing skills of students. Students are expected to write research papers and academic reports with a high degree of formality and professionalism. There is a practical reason for this; professional writing skills are necessary for many different types of jobs. Casual syntax, abbreviations, misspellings, and slang are tolerated only in informal settings.

2. Today's students arguably write more frequently than any previous generation. Young adults spend a significant portion of their time using electronically mediated communication, such as texting or tweeting. The informal, slang-filled style of writing often used on social media is not acceptable in professional or academic writing. Unfortunately, many students end up using casual language in their papers. Is this simply a mistake, or does it indicate some dastardly warping of one's writing ability due to social media?

3. In simple terms, the Internet does influence the way people speak and write—as does every other form of media. Language is always evolving. One of the ways speech changes is with the introduction of new vocabulary. There's quite a lot of new vocabulary introduced through digital media. The early days of the Internet and texting spawned numerous acronyms. An acronym is a lexical term for when the first letter of each word in a phrase becomes shorthand for the entire phrase. When communicating in texts and on social media, *BTW*, *FTW*, and *IDK* are stand-ins for “by the way,” “for the win,” and “I don't know.”

4. There are many other examples of this sort of simplification of language. Sometimes acronyms are incorporated into speech. Examples of this include *ASAP* and *RSVP*. It is less common to hear *LOL*, *BRB*, or other text-speak in speech, but it still happens, particularly among young people. Amusingly, this same phenomenon occurred decades prior. Style guides on professional writing from the 1940s and 1950s decried the overuse of acronyms like *ASAP* and *RSVP*—especially the “unnatural” sounding use of them in spoken language!

5. Other new words taken directly from Internet communication include *trolling*, *friending*, *unfriending*, and *selfies*, which was the Oxford Dictionary's Word of the Year in 2013. There are also entirely new phrases like *I can't even*, which indicates being overwhelmed. Many new

phrases come directly from Internet blogs, tweets, and videos that have gone viral. The verbal phrase *to go viral* is itself another example of new terminology derived from the Internet. New, clever words have always entered the English language—the speed of digital communication simply means that *more* of them become commonplace quickly. Digital media makes the life cycle of slang much shorter. A clever new word used to survive for a few years; now, new slang can be invented, popularized, and disappear over a few short months.

6. One study from 2013, conducted by the Pew Research Center, found that teens who use digital technologies are more likely to use informal language in school papers. Does this *really* mean that digital technology harms your writing skills, or does it just indicate that spending more time on social media means that you are spending less time writing papers? Students on Twitter, Tumblr, and other sites are likely writing *more* nowadays than people did in the past, but their ability to construct a formal sentence is not any better for it. Linguistics has a term—*register*—which describes the particular language used in a certain place and time. Students are getting a great deal of practice writing in the register of informal social media, but need to be more meticulous writing in a formal, academic register.

7. Another problem is that, despite what your English teachers may have told you, appropriate professional and academic English is *also* changing frequently. I snuck an example in a few sentences ago. Henry Fowler, one of the early 20th century's most respected authors on the subject of English style and usage, absolutely hated the idea of using the word *meticulous* to mean “careful.” The proper meaning, he insisted, was “fearful,” after its French origins. Fowler went one way, while the rest of the world chose to use the word in its modern, commonly accepted form. The point is that all language changes, even the professional. Students have a broader audience than ever for their writing. Digital technologies allow students to collaborate, edit, and revise more easily than ever before. Students simply need more practice with the register of academic and professional writing. That will prove more helpful than any amount of faculty complaining.

Answer the questions. Use the reading and language skills you have learned and your notes.

1. What is the best summary of the main idea of the introduction?
 - A Academics complain about having to teach writing skills.
 - B Informal language is sometimes OK in academic writing.
 - C Academic and professional writing skills are the same.
 - D Academic writing skills are difficult for students to acquire.
2. According to the author, digital technologies _____.
 - A are directly to blame for casual writing in student papers
 - B have decreased the amount of writing people do in their daily lives
 - C can help students collaborate, edit, and revise their writing
 - D prevent students from writing in an academic register
3. In what ways does the Internet influence language, according to the passage?
 - A It introduces and popularizes new vocabulary quickly.
 - B It simplifies and ruins people's ability to write.
 - C It makes language change more slowly.
 - D It simplifies speech and improves written grammar.
4. What type of language is *RSVP* an example of?
 - A slang
 - B acronym
 - C verbal phrase
 - D misspelling
5. In Paragraph 4, the word *decried* is closest in meaning to _____.
 - A approved
 - B described
 - C saddened
 - D criticized

6. What type of text is the passage?

- A scientific article
- B academic essay
- C informal blog
- D short story

7. Why are the words *more* and *really* italicized in Paragraph 6?

- A to show they are part of a title
- B to show sarcasm
- C to quote speech
- D to emphasize the words

8. What is implied in Paragraph 4?

- A The writer feels that acronyms should not be used in spoken language.
- B The writer finds acronyms to be an interesting phenomenon.
- C The writer finds it funny that style guides criticized the use of acronyms.
- D The writer finds that younger generations use acronyms too frequently in speech.

9. We can infer from the writing that _____ .

- A professional writing skills are not taught at university
- B digital technologies are losing their popularity with students
- C faculty's complaints are positively impacting students' writing
- D social media doesn't help or hurt students' academic writing

