

READING PASSAGE 2

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 14–26**, which are based on Reading Passage 2 below.

Second nature

Your personality isn't necessarily set in stone. With a little experimentation, people can reshape their temperaments and inject passion, optimism, joy and courage into their lives

- A** Psychologists have long held that a person's character cannot undergo a transformation in any meaningful way and that the key traits of personality are determined at a very young age. However, researchers have begun looking more closely at ways we *can* change. Positive psychologists have identified 24 qualities we admire, such as loyalty and kindness, and are studying them to find out why they come so naturally to some people. What they're discovering is that many of these qualities amount to habitual behaviour that determines the way we respond to the world. The good news is that all this can be learned.

Some qualities are less challenging to develop than others, optimism being one of them. However, developing qualities requires mastering a range of skills which are diverse and sometimes surprising. For example, to bring more joy and passion into your life, you must be open to experiencing negative emotions. Cultivating such qualities will help you realise your full potential.

- B** 'The evidence is good that most personality traits can be altered,' says Christopher Peterson, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, who cites himself as an example. Inherently introverted, he realised early on that as an academic, his reticence would prove disastrous in the lecture hall. So he learned to be more outgoing and to entertain his classes. 'Now my extroverted behaviour is spontaneous,' he says.
- C** David Fajgenbaum had to make a similar transition. He was preparing for university, when he had an accident that put an end to his sports career. On campus, he quickly found that beyond ordinary counselling, the university had no services for students who were undergoing physical rehabilitation and suffering from depression like him. He therefore launched a support group to help others in similar situations. He took action despite his own pain – a typical response of an optimist.
- D** Suzanne Segerstrom, professor of psychology at the University of Kentucky, believes that the key to increasing optimism is through cultivating optimistic behaviour, rather than positive thinking. She recommends you train yourself to pay attention to good fortune by writing down three positive things that come about each day. This will help you convince yourself that favourable outcomes actually happen all the time, making it easier to begin taking action.