Exam folder 7

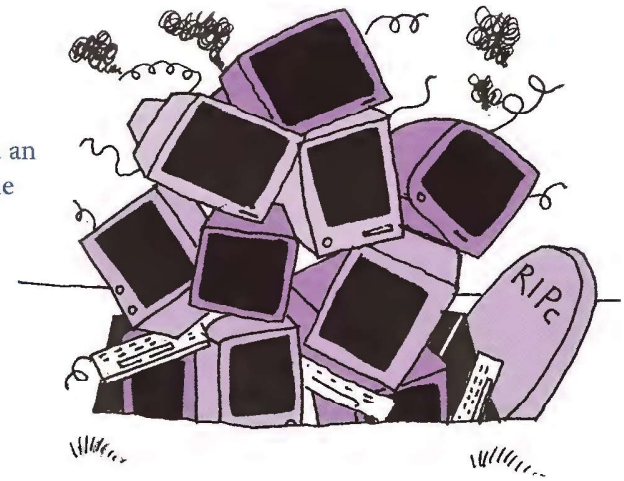
Paper 1 Part 4
Multiple-choice text

This part of the Reading paper consists of a text from a range of sources with seven four-option multiple-choice questions. The questions may test any of the following: content, detail, opinion, attitude, tone, purpose, main idea and implication. They may also test organisational features such as exemplification, comparison and reference.

Advice

- Read through the text carefully.
- Read through the questions very carefully to make sure you really understand what the question is asking. Then find the answer in the text.
- Underline your answer in the text and then find the option, A, B, C or D, which best matches your answer.
- Read the text again to check you are right.
- Don't spend too much time worrying about a word you can't guess the meaning of.

You are going to read an extract from an article about the disposal of old computers. For questions 1–7, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.



Into the Silicon Valley of Death

Old computers never die. They just leach heavy metals into our drinking water. That's the worst-case scenario, anyway. Some of them just sit in the loft or the shed, quietly accumulating dust and obsolescence. Others – a very, very few – are refurbished or recycled. Over a million of the things, each year – and that's a conservative estimate. And if you think that's the best place for them, consider this: each desktop PC unit contains up to 9 kilos of lead. Other toxic substances, too – cadmium, mercury, dioxins – but for the moment, let's concentrate on the lead. You may need a computer to do the sum: 8,165 metric tonnes of poisonous residue spread under the topsoil every 12 months, and that's just the British Isles, granulated in a mulch of eggshells, banana skins and mutton bones. Include the lead waste from other dumped electronic equipment, and the total rises to around 27,000 tonnes – sitting below ground upon which new houses may one day be built, and through which water pipes will be laid. Bear in mind that – as even the most casual PC-users will have noticed – each new generation of computers is superseded more swiftly than the last. And you will gather that, while this may seem a slow-burning environmental problem, it is heating up rapidly.

In a steel hangar on an industrial estate in central England, one company is trying to address the problem, and, in the process, doing very nicely out of it. RGA began as a one-room outfit over a sweet shop and now has an annual turnover of £15 m. It offers its clients the safe extraction and disposal of the toxic nasties lurking within their decommissioned computers, and the secure destruction of any sensitive data.

A visit to their warehouse is a surreal experience. It's like paddling in a Sargasso Sea of obsolete technology. You see shoals of keyboards beached on the concrete floor; piles of nicotine-yellowed hard drives, spotted with the stains left by adhesive toys and security tags; pallets of grimy mice; crates stacked with fragments of acid-green circuitry; keyboards filleted from laptops, flimsy and forlorn. Seeing a heap of computers disembowelled by the thousand in a featureless concrete bay exerts a weird kind of culture shock. Of this material 80 per cent can, after a scrub-down, be returned to use, or cannibalised for spare parts. The remainder is exported to plants in France and Mexico which specialise in reclaiming useful chemical and metal elements from technological trash. And what these companies can't use is crunched up and landfilled. ▶

Adapted from an article by Matthew Sweet first published in The Independant 29 October 2000

However, what generates the big bucks for RGA is data destruction. As the complexity of the disposal process indicates, computers aren't a cash-rich scrap purchase. Although PCs contain small amounts of gold and other valuable elements – one US survey estimated that the landfilling of computer equipment resulted in the annual burial of 120,000 tonnes of precious metals – they are difficult to extract profitably. The true cost of disposing of an unwanted PC is around £450 – which may be the reason why the press stories that circulated some years ago about hi-tech rubbish collectors getting rich quick by strip-mining piles of decommissioned computers for their gold content have now ceased.

However, a new law is set to change the way things are done. Manufacturers and retailers might be made responsible for the problem of electric and electronic waste. For every shiny new item neatly packed in a bed of polystyrene and cardboard, they will receive a broken-down model in a plastic bag. And they won't be able to pass the cost on to the consumer – or not in any obvious way, at least.

So, what will happen to the machines? There are several options; you can strip the machines for reusable components or valuable metal elements, extracting and storing the toxic chemicals inside them. That's expensive. There are, however, cheaper and less ethical options. Send the offending material to countries where the rules about what you may or may not stuff in a hole in the ground are non-existent. Or you can donate more recent models to schools or just pile up the PCs in a warehouse. The day of the computer mountain is on its way.

There's a mournful quality about the sea of deconstructed computers lapping around the benches in the RGA warehouse. How, thanks to the dependence that our working lives and our shopping trips and our banking activities have put upon them, have we come to believe that these machines are somehow more than a sum of their parts? Well, they are, not because they might start answering back or take over the world, or offer us lives free of manual labour. There is a chemical ghost in these machines, one which, if ignored for too much longer, will eventually return to haunt us. ■

1 What does the writer say about computers in the first paragraph?
- **A** They are best taken away and buried in the earth.
- **B** They contain more heavy metals than other electronic equipment.
- **C** They may poison drinking water on a number of sites.
- **D** They are better stored in the home than recycled.

2 What does the writer say about RGA in the second paragraph?
- **A** The company does its job very professionally.
- **B** The company is prospering.
- **C** The company has had to move premises a number of times.
- **D** The company refurbishes computers for clients.

3 How does the writer feel when confronted with the warehouse?
- **A** Disconcerted that such useful things have ended up in this way.
- **B** Surprised that people have misused the computers.
- **C** Annoyed that some machines are being exported.
- **D** Anxious about what will happen to the machines.

4 What are we told about the disposal process in paragraph four?
- **A** Computer manufacturers no longer use gold in their machines.
- **B** Destroying the stored data is a time-consuming business.
- **C** Only certain companies are equipped to remove the precious metals.
- **D** It is uneconomic to dispose of the actual machines.

5 What does the writer imply about the new law in paragraph five?
- **A** That the new law needs to be amended.
- **B** That manufacturers and retailers will ignore this law.
- **C** That the consumer may pay in the long run.
- **D** That more environmentally-friendly materials have to be used.

6 Why does the writer use the phrase 'stuff in a hole in the ground'?
- **A** To give an example of what to do with the computers.
- **B** To emphasise the fact that no safety precautions will be taken.
- **C** To underline the fact that poor countries should have a fair share of this process.
- **D** To clarify what most people think should be done with the computers.

7 What point is the writer making in the last paragraph?
- **A** New computers are easier to use nowadays than previously.
- **B** Computers will be more powerful still in the future.
- **C** Old computers require more care and attention than we have previously given them.
- **D** Computers make us more dependent than we should be.