Skills Test in Reading

Use the following passage to answer questions 1–5.

1. The atmosphere forms a gaseous, protective envelope around Earth. It protects the planet from the cold of space, from harmful ultraviolet light, and from all but the largest meteors.
2. After traveling over 93 million miles, solar energy strikes the atmosphere and Earth’s surface, warming the planet and creating the biosphere, the region of Earth capable of sustaining life. Solar radiation in combination with the planet’s rotation causes the atmosphere to circulate. Atmospheric circulation is one important reason that life on Earth can exist at higher latitudes, because equatorial heat is transported poleward, moderating the climate.

The equatorial region is the warmest part of Earth because it receives the most direct and, therefore, strongest solar radiation. The plane in which Earth revolves around the sun is called the ecliptic. Earth’s axis is inclined 23.5 degrees with respect to the ecliptic. This inclined axis is responsible for the seasons because, as seen from Earth, the sun oscillates across the equator in an annual cycle. On or about June 21 each year, the sun reaches the Tropic of Cancer, 23.5 degrees north latitude. This is the northernmost point where the sun can be directly overhead. On or about December 21 of each year, the sun reaches the Tropic of Capricorn, 23.5 degrees south latitude. This is the southernmost point at which the sun can be directly overhead. The polar regions are the coldest parts of Earth because they receive the least direct and, therefore, the weakest solar radiation. Here, solar radiation strikes at a very oblique angle and thus spreads the same amount of energy over a greater area than in the equatorial regions. A static envelope of air surrounding Earth would produce an extremely hot, uninhabitable equatorial region, while the polar regions would remain inhospitably cold.

1. Which sentence from the passage best supports the author’s argument that circulation of the atmosphere is vital to life on Earth?
   a. “[The atmosphere] protects Earth from the cold of space, from harmful ultraviolet light, and from all but the largest meteors.”
   b. “The equatorial region is the warmest part of Earth because it receives the most direct and, therefore, strongest solar radiation.”
   c. “The polar regions are the coldest parts of Earth because they receive the least direct and, therefore, the weakest solar radiation.”
   d. “Here, solar radiation strikes at a very oblique angle and thus spreads the same amount of energy over a greater area than in the equatorial regions.”
   e. “A static envelope of air surrounding Earth would produce an extremely hot, uninhabitable equatorial region, while the polar regions would remain inhospitably cold.”

2. Which inference about Earth’s biosphere can be made from the information provided within the passage?
   a. It operates as the home to human beings.
   b. It is responsible for solar energy in the atmosphere.
   c. It contributes to the circulation of the atmosphere.
   d. It is the uppermost layer of the earth’s atmosphere.
   e. It is most susceptible to climate change.
3. In the context of the passage, *oblique* (line 35) can be replaced with which word to incur the smallest alteration in meaning?
   a. opaque
   b. obtuse
   c. slanted
   d. perpendicular
   e. straight

4. The first paragraph of the passage deals mainly with which of the following effects of the atmosphere on Earth?
   a. its sheltering effect
   b. its reviving effect
   c. its invigorating effect
   d. its cleansing effect
   e. its warming effect

5. The word *oscillates* as it appears in the passage (line 23) shares the closest meaning with which expression?
   a. rotates around itself
   b. shines brightly
   c. radiates energy
   d. moves back and forth
   e. remains stationary

---

Use the following passage to answer questions 6 and 7.

1. Plato, the famous Greek philosopher, taught that the things of the world around us are merely copies, or "shadows," of greater, eternal realities. He used a metaphor of people living inside a cave to convey his ideas. The people inside the cave could not see the world outside the cave; they could only see shadows of people and animals as they passed by. Plato was suggesting that the shadows would seem very real and alive to the people inside the cave, because that was all they had ever seen of the outside world. But these shadows were not the real, living creatures of the outside world; they were merely reflections of them. Plato's position was that this temporal world is a narrow picture of some greater, eternal reality.

6. For which reason did the author most likely include the sentence, "The people ... passed by" (lines 5–8) in the passage?
   a. to provide concrete evidence for a philosophical truism
   b. to provide a metaphor that will obscure a true meaning
   c. to illustrate a concept using an understandable context
   d. to describe the geographic location and setting of a story
   e. to illustrate a vision of a greater, eternal reality

7. As it appears in the passage, *position* (line 14) most nearly means
   a. situation.
   b. location.
   c. movement.
   d. opinion.
   e. style.
Use the following passage to answer questions 8 and 9.

Far too often artists are pigeonholed into the medium for which they are most famous and the works that are the most lucrative. But for many artists whose talents overflow, it may be the case that no single form can contain their abilities. After all, Pablo Picasso was not only a painter but a sculptor, and Salvador Dali was both a painter and a filmmaker. Emerging artists should never let their output be constrained within a solitary structure, lest their shining brilliance be dulled as a result.

8. The primary concern of this passage is
   a. describing artists who have found success with a variety of art forms.
   b. encouraging artists to experiment beyond their more recognizable media.
   c. suggesting that artists disdain the commercial exploits of their artwork.
   d. recommending that artists focus on their primary and most profitable art forms.
   e. condemning shortsighted people who disregard an artist's secondary works.

9. The author's ideas could be reinforced with the success of which other artist?
   a. Chuck Close, whose paralysis restricts the details of his paintings
   b. Samuel Clemens, whose work was attributed to either Clemens or Mark Twain
   c. Claude Monet, whose paintings varied in style throughout his career
   d. Marc Chagall, whose contributions to art include paintings and stained glass
   e. Paul Simon, who wrote songs in a partnership and as a solo artist

Use the following passage to answer question 10.

Despite what some lawyers might suggest, litigation is not always the only or best way to resolve conflicts. Mediation offers an alternative approach, and it is one that can be quite efficient and successful. Mediation can be faster, less expensive, and can lead to creative solutions not always possible in a court of law. Additionally, mediation focuses on mutually acceptable solutions, rather than on winning or losing.

10. The author of this passage would most likely agree with which of the following statements?
    a. There is too much reliance on litigation in our society.
    b. Litigation is expensive, slow, and limited by its reliance on following the letter of the law.
    c. Mediation is the best way to resolve a conflict.
    d. Compared to litigation, there is a greater chance that mediation satisfies both parties in a conflict.
    e. Lawyers are overly concerned with their earning potential and not the best interest of their clients.

Use the following passage to answer questions 11 and 12.

Recycling is a well-intentioned action to follow responsible Earth stewardship, but its usefulness is greatly overshadowed by the other "R" words: reduce and reuse. While some materials, such as steel, are easily recyclable, other materials, such as plastic, offer only a minimal reduction in environmental waste or conservation of resources. When glass or aluminum is recycled, it can be reused as a similar glass or aluminum product. When plastic is recycled, it cannot be
used to make the same plastic form—meaning that a brand-new bottle will still need to be manufactured for the next water bottle. Worse still, products made from recycled plastics, such as plastic chairs, are not recyclable. It is for these reasons that plastic is an especially dreadful material. It may feel environmentally conscientious to recycle, but it would be far, far better to avoid the creation of new materials altogether by reducing or reusing existing materials.

11. In the author’s argument, what are the functions of the sections of the text in boldface?
   a. The first section supports the transitional conclusion that supports the overall argument’s conclusion; the second section lists that transitional conclusion.
   b. The first section contradicts the overall argument; the second section provides support for that overall argument.
   c. The first section provides support for the overall argument of the passage; the second section presents that overall argument.
   d. The first section provides support for the overall argument; the second section contradicts that overall argument.
   e. The first section lists the transitional conclusion that supports the overall argument’s conclusion; the second section supports that transitional conclusion.

12. Which sentence from the passage contains an opinion rather than a statement of fact?
   a. “While some materials . . . of resources.”
   b. “When glass or . . . aluminum product.”
   c. “When plastic is . . . water bottle.”
   d. “Worse still, products . . . not recyclable.”
   e. “It is for . . . dreadful material.”

Use the following passage to answer questions 13–15.

No one is immune to the repercussions of extreme weather conditions. But with age, the body may become less able to respond to long exposure to very hot or very cold temperatures. This explains why older people are more susceptible to hypothermia—a drop in internal body temperature below 95°F—when exposed to cold weather. In fact, the majority of hypothermia victims are senior citizens. Hypothermia can be fatal if not detected and treated, usually through external warming. It is for this reason that the living environments of the elderly should be closely monitored to ensure that their temperatures are maintained within appropriate ranges.

Rate of Hypothermia Deaths in the United States, 2001

*Per 100,000 population.

13. The passage offers information on each of the following EXCEPT
   a. causes of hypothermia.
   b. prevention of hypothermia.
   c. treatments of hypothermia.
   d. hazards of hypothermia.
   e. symptoms of hypothermia.
14. According to the data in the accompanying bar graph, which conclusion about hypothermia can be fully supported?
   a. The majority of all victims of hypothermia were 90 years old or older.
   b. Children under the age of 10 are not in danger of hypothermia.
   c. The percentage of octogenarians who fell victim to hypothermia was greater than the percentage of septuagenarians who fell victim to hypothermia.
   d. Hypothermia must be detected at an early stage, before its onset affects the body's internal organs, as prevention from death.
   e. Regardless of the age of its victims, hypothermia affects a wide range of people in an equal distribution.

15. It can be concluded from the information in the passage that
   a. older people are less easily able to tolerate cold weather compared to hot weather.
   b. hypothermia is a condition that only affects older people.
   c. fewer than 50% of hypothermia victims are under 60 years old.
   d. older people who live in warm climates are healthier than older people who live in cold climates.
   e. a deteriorating circulation system is responsible for elderly people's susceptibility to hypothermia.

Use the following passage to answer questions 16–19.

1. The success of the immune system in defending the human body relies on a dynamic regulatory communications network consisting of millions and millions of cells. Organized into sets and subsets, these cells pass information back and forth like clouds of bees swarming around a hive. The result is a sensitive system of checks and balances that produces an immune response that is prompt, appropriate, effective, and self-limiting. At the heart of the immune system is the ability to distinguish between self and non-self entities. When immune defenders encounter cells or organisms carrying non-self molecules, the immune troops move quickly to eliminate the intruders. The body's immune defenses do not normally attack its own tissues because of the presence of self-markers, indicators unique to the DNA that tell that the cells belong to the host body. Rather, immune cells and other body cells coexist peacefully in a state known as self-tolerance. When a normally functioning immune system attacks a non-self molecule, the system can remember the specifics of the foreign body. Upon subsequent encounters with the same species of molecules, the immune system reacts accordingly. With the possible exception of antibodies passed during lactation, this so-called immune system memory is not inherited: an immune system must learn from experience with the many millions of distinctive non-self molecules in the sea of microbes in which we live.

16. When a person gets the chicken pox virus for the first time, his or her immune system will most likely be able to
   a. prevent its offspring from infection by the chicken pox virus.
   b. distinguish between its body cells and those of the chicken pox virus.
   c. remember previous experiences with the chicken pox virus.
   d. attack its own tissues.
   e. recall the specifics of the foreign body from ancestors' experiences.
17. Which statement represents a main idea rather than a supporting detail from the passage?
   a. The human body's immune system effectiveness lies in its complex organizational structure.
   b. The basic function of the immune system is to distinguish between self and non-self.
   c. Immune cells and body cells from the host body can coexist due to self-tolerance.
   d. The human body is an extraordinary and complicated mechanism.
   e. The human body presents an opportune habitat for microbes.

18. According to the information in the passage, why might tissue transplanted from father to daughter have a greater risk of being detected as foreign than tissue transplanted between identical twins?
   a. The identical twin's tissue would carry the same self-markers and would, therefore, be less likely to be rejected.
   b. The age of the twins' tissue would be the same and, therefore, be less likely to be rejected.
   c. The difference in the sex of the father and daughter would cause the tissue to be rejected by the daughter's immune system.
   d. The twins' immune systems would remember the same encounters with childhood illnesses.
   e. The immune system would have the previous experience of being transplanted, whereas the father and daughter's system would not.

19. As it appears in the passage, sensitive (line 7) most nearly means
   a. responsive.
   b. delicate.
   c. indifferent.
   d. nervous.
   e. sensible.

Use the following passage to answer question 20.

Regardless of the claims that may be made by the companies that manufacture them, there are simply no effective boundaries when it comes to pollutants. Studies have shown that toxic insecticides that have been banned in many countries are riding the wind from countries where they remain legal. Compounds such as DDT and toxaphene, used as a pesticide and an insecticide, respectively, for decades before being banned in the United States, have been found in far-flung places like the Yukon and other Arctic regions.

20. Which statement, if it were true, most significantly weakens the argument in the passage?
   a. Few companies continue to claim that their pollutants remain in the same general geographic location.
   b. Depending on the size of compounds and their relative weight, some pollutants are more stationary than others.
   c. Years after the production of some toxic compounds were banned, their presence can be identified in random ocean samplings.
   d. DDT, once considered one of the most environmentally dangerous pesticides, is now not considered nearly as toxic.
   e. The levels of compounds identified in faraway places are low enough to be considered statistically insignificant.

Use the following passage to answer questions 21–26.

1. Oil, gas, and coal—America's chief sources of power—are among the chief contributors to greenhouse gases. While utilizing nuclear energy does not spew greenhouse gases into the environment, nuclear power plants present safety concerns for many. And as any driver knows, the rising cost of energy is demoralizing for consumers. In an effort to avoid the...
potentially deleterious consequences of oil, gas, coal, and nuclear power, some companies are investigating new technologies for the potential to generate cheap, clean, safe power. One of these new technologies involves harnessing tidal energies, using the ebb and flow of the ocean's tides to produce electricity. To help determine the effectiveness of this technology, a power company has installed tidal power turbines in New York City's East River. The river, technically a tidal strait, features swift currents that can spin the underwater turbine's long blades, which in turn generate electricity. While the capacity of the project can currently only supply a miniscule fraction of the city's power, the potential for a clean energy source within the city's limits is exciting for many of the city's residents. Furthermore, the success of this initial trial in New York City opens up the possibilities for the greater use of tidal power at areas of running water across the globe.

21. Which best describes the organization of the passage?
   a. An untested theory is given, and then it is proven with appropriate evidence.
   b. A problematic situation is provided, and then a potential solution is given.
   c. A new technology is introduced, and then its difficulties are addressed.
   d. The benefits of technologies are explained, and then their disadvantages are provided.
   e. A series of potential technologies are compared and contrasted.

22. As it is used in the context of the sentence, which word best describes the meaning of deleterious (line 9)?
   a. disappearing
   b. expensive
   c. important
   d. safe
   e. harmful

23. Which piece of evidence, if true, would most significantly weaken the author's primary argument?
   a. Solar energy also provides a clean and inexpensive source of energy, but it is not yet efficient enough to power entire cities.
   b. With a 16-foot diameter, the size of the tidal energy turbines is substantial.
   c. The turbines will be installed on the river bottom and will therefore not be visible from the shore.
   d. Due to tidal changes, the speed of the East River is not always fast enough to generate electricity.
   e. Given its speed and pollution, the East River can be dangerous for swimmers in its waters.

24. Which geographic location would provide the best option for additional experiments with tidal energies?
   a. the Bay of Fundy, a narrow bay on the Atlantic coast of Maine
   b. the peak of Mount Whitney, the tallest peak in the continental United States
   c. the Great Salt Lake, the largest natural lake in the western United States
   d. Death Valley, a low, hot, and dry desert valley in California
   e. Bullough's Pond, a former mill pond in suburban Massachusetts
25. What purpose does the author have in mentioning the potential concerns of nuclear power?
   a. to accentuate the benefits of a safe energy source through a contrast
   b. to provide a list of negative features of nuclear power
   c. to make a point about the dangers of greenhouse gases
   d. to stress the financial considerations of alternative energy sources
   e. to downplay the safety issues of renewable energy sources

26. Which information from the passage contains an opinion rather than a fact?
   a. Oil, gas, and coal are America's chief sources of power.
   b. Nuclear energy does not spew greenhouse gases into the environment.
   c. The rising cost of energy is demoralizing for consumers.
   d. A power company installed tidal power turbines in the East River.
   e. The capacity of the project can only supply a miniscule fraction of the city's power.

Use the following passage to answer questions 27–29.

1  The forty-three men who have held the title of U.S. president through 2011 have come from a remarkable variety of fields. Before entering politics, these leaders have been schoolteachers (John Adams), tailors (Andrew Johnson), peanut farmers (Jimmy Carter), and even actors (Ronald Reagan). While there are many paths to the presidency, one avenue is less circuitous. Unsurprisingly, most presidents served in the armed forces before becoming commander in chief, including three generals: George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. In fact, only a dozen U.S. presidents never served in uniform. However, voters lately seem to discount the importance of military service; eight of the 12 presidents in the last 100 years, including two of the three presidents from 1993 to 2012, never served at all. More important to voters lately is the president's knowledge of the law; half of the presidents since 1961 have been lawyers at one time, including two of the last three.

27. Which inference can be made from the passage?
   a. Regardless of their backgrounds, all presidents had some experience in politics before attaining the highest office.
   b. Military service is a prerequisite for election as U.S. president.
   c. Only Jimmy Carter had a job as a farmer before becoming U.S. president.
   e. More than thirty U.S. presidents have served in the U.S. military in some capacity.

28. According to the passage, which occupation will the next U.S. president most likely have had before taking office?
   a. tailor
   b. soldier
   c. lawyer
   d. actor
   e. army general

29. As it is used in the context of the sentence, which word best describes the meaning of circuitous (line 8)?
   a. direct
   b. roundabout
   c. mainstream
   d. political
   e. circuileike
Use the following passage to answer questions 30 and 31.

One of the most common fears that people have is that of snakes. However, that fear is not only largely groundless but highly irrational. There are more than 2,500 different species of snakes around the world, but only a small percentage of those species are poisonous. Furthermore, only a few species have venom strong enough to actually kill a human being. Statistically, snakes bite only 1,000–2,000 people in the United States each year, and only ten of those bites (that's less than 1%) result in death. In fact, in this country, more people die from dog bites each year than from snake bites.

30. Based on the information in the passage, which number could best represent the number of unique species of snakes in the world?
   a. 10
   b. 1,100
   c. 2,000
   d. 2,350
   e. 2,700

31. Which sentence from the passage represents an opinion rather than a fact?
   a. “However, that fear . . . highly irrational.”
   b. “There are more . . . are poisonous.”
   c. “Furthermore, only a . . . human being.”
   d. “Statistically, snakes bite . . . in death.”
   e. “In fact, in . . . from snake bites.”

Use the following passage to answer questions 32 and 33.

After generations of referring to the creature by its misnomer, marine biologists are now encouraging people to rename all starfish as sea stars. The change in name is more than simply a cosmetic alteration. A fish is defined as an aquatic vertebrate with gills; the marine animals formerly known as starfish are not vertebrates because they have no spine or internal skeleton. The roughly 2,000 species of sea stars belong to a phylum of marine animals called echinoderms, and their name should more accurately represent this classification—despite any complications that some people may have with the amendment.

32. Which sentence best summarizes the main point of the passage?
   a. Sea stars are not considered vertebrates because they have no spine or internal skeleton.
   b. It can be difficult, but it is often necessary to change a creature’s name based on scientific evidence.
   c. Starfish are not technically fish and should therefore be identified as sea stars.
   d. A fish is defined as an aquatic vertebrate with gills.
   e. Sea stars belong to a phylum of marine animals called echinoderms.

33. The author of this passage would most likely agree with which of the following statements?
   a. Sea stars are among the most beautiful creatures in the sea.
   b. Sea stars should be considered in the same classification as vertebrates.
   c. It is not worth the trouble to rename an entire class of roughly 2,000 species.
   d. Jellyfish should be given a new name because they do not have a spine.
   e. Sea stars and starfish are synonyms for the same creature and may be used interchangeably.

Use the following passage to answer questions 34–37.

1. The skyline of St. Louis, Missouri, is fairly
2. unremarkable, with one prodigious exception—
3. the Gateway Arch, which stands on the banks of
the Mississippi River. Part of the Jefferson
National Expansion Memorial, the Arch is an
amazing structure built to honor St. Louis's role
as the gateway to the West. In 1947 a group of
interested citizens known as the Jefferson
National Expansion Memorial Association held
a nationwide competition to select a design for
a new monument that would celebrate the
growth of the United States. Other U.S. monu-
ments at the time featured spires, statues, or
imposing buildings, but the winner of this con-
test was a plan for a completely different type of
structure. The man who submitted the winning
design, Eero Saarinen, later became a famous
architect. In designing the Arch, Saarinen
wanted to "create a monument which would
have lasting significance and would be a land-
mark of our time."

The Gateway Arch is a masterpiece of
engineering, a monument even taller than the
Great Pyramid in Egypt. In its own way, the
Arch is at least as majestic as the Great Pyra-
mid. The Gateway is shaped as an inverted cate-
nary curve, the same shape that a heavy chain
will form if suspended between two points.
Covered with a sleek skin of stainless steel, the
Arch often reflects dazzling bursts of sunlight.
In a beautiful display of symmetry, the height
of the arch is the same as the distance between
the legs at ground level.

34. Which sentence from the passage contains both
a fact and an opinion?

a. In its own way, the Arch is at least as majestic
as the Great Pyramid.
b. In 1947 a group of interested citizens known
as the Jefferson National Expansion
Memorial Association held a nationwide
competition to select a design for a new
monument that would celebrate the growth
of the United States.
c. In designing the Arch, Saarinen wanted to
"create a monument which would have
lasting significance and would be a landmark
of our time."
d. The Gateway Arch is a masterpiece of
engineering, a monument even taller than
the Great Pyramid in Egypt.
e. The Gateway is shaped as an inverted
catenary curve, the same shape that a heavy
chain will form if suspended between two
points.

35. According to the passage, Saarinen's winning
design was

a. modeled after other U.S. monuments.
b. unlike any other existing monument.
c. part of a series of monuments.
d. less expensive to construct than other
monuments.
e. shaped like the Great Pyramid.
36. What was the author's primary purpose in revealing the material of the Gateway Arch's casing?
   a. to provide a comprehensive description of its metallic components
   b. to describe another astounding quality of the monument
   c. to contrast it with the materials of the Great Pyramid
   d. to illustrate the balanced symmetry of the monument
   e. to offer historic context for the construction of the monument

37. As it is used in the context of the sentence, which word best describes the meaning of prodigious (line 2)?
   a. commonplace
   b. talented
   c. extraordinary
   d. timely
   e. lackluster

Use the following passage to answer questions 38–40.

1. The U.S. government has spent more than $10 billion each year since 1989 on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
2. Furthermore, the government agency's budget is expected to increase every year, with its annual spending estimated to surpass $20 billion for the first time in the mid-2010s. A hefty fraction of this budget will be spent on space operations, including the construction and maintenance of the International Space Station (ISS). At a time when the country is facing domestic crises with unemployment, energy, and health care, it can be difficult to justify the exorbitant costs of space exploration. Nevertheless, its indirect benefits are impossible to ignore; the valuable research and development associated with NASA's space program have resulted in an incredibly wide variety of important everyday technological advancements, ranging from water filters to improved highway safety.

38. How is the key word nevertheless used in the last sentence of the passage?
   a. to accentuate the financial concerns of space exploration
   b. to list additional domestic concerns that should receive a higher priority
   c. to suggest that too great a fraction of NASA's budget is spent on space operations
   d. to show that the financial expenditures of the agency have been changing
   e. to provide a contrast with the monetary costs of a government agency

39. As it is used in the context of the sentence, which word best describes the meaning of exorbitant (line 14)?
   a. excessive
   b. painful
   c. reasonable
   d. fixed
   e. exciting

40. Which sentence best describes the author's attitude toward the financial cost of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration?
   a. The costs must be curtailed to allow for increased funding for domestic crises.
   b. The costs are very high, but the rewards make the agency a worthwhile expense.
   c. The costs should decrease at a time when the government operates with a financial deficit.
   d. The increasing cost of running the government agency is simply indefensible.
   e. The high costs should only be validated during periods of planetary exploration, such as a trip to Mars.