

Academic Reading - section 2 practice test

This is the second section of your IELTS Academic Reading test. You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 14–27, which are based on Reading Passage 2 below.

Fair games?

For seventeen days every four years the world is briefly arrested by the captivating, dizzying spectacle of athleticism, ambition, pride and celebration on display at the Summer Olympic Games. After the last weary spectators and competitors have returned home, however, host cities are often left awash in high debts and costly infrastructure maintenance. The staggering expenses involved in a successful Olympic bid are often assumed to be easily mitigated by tourist revenues and an increase in local employment, but more often than not host cities are short changed and their taxpayers for generations to come are left settling the debt.

Olympic extravagances begin with the application process. Bidding alone will set most cities back about \$20 million, and while officially bidding only takes two years (for cities that make the shortlist), most cities can expect to exhaust a decade working on their bid from the moment it is initiated to the announcement of voting results from International Olympic Committee members. Aside from the financial costs of the bid alone, the process ties up real estate in prized urban locations until the outcome is known. This can cost local economies millions of dollars of lost revenue from private developers who could have made use of the land, and can also mean that particular urban quarters lose their vitality due to the vacant lots. All of this can be for nothing if a bidding city does not appease the whims of IOC

members – private connections and opinions on government conduct often hold sway (Chicago's 2012 bid is thought to have been undercut by tensions over U.S. foreign policy).

Bidding costs do not compare, however, to the exorbitant bills that come with hosting the Olympic Games themselves. As is typical with large-scale, one-off projects, budgeting for the Olympics is a notoriously formidable task. Los Angelinos have only recently finished paying off their budget-breaking 1984 Olympics; Montreal is still in debt for its 1976 Games (to add insult to injury, Canada is the only host country to have failed to win a single gold medal during its own Olympics). The tradition of runaway expenses has persisted in recent years. London Olympics managers have admitted that their 2012 costs may increase ten times over their initial projections, leaving tax payers 20 billion pounds in the red.

Hosting the Olympics is often understood to be an excellent way to update a city's sporting infrastructure. The extensive demands of Olympic sports include aquatic complexes, equestrian circuits, shooting ranges, beach volleyball courts, and, of course, an 80,000 seat athletic stadium. Yet these demands are typically only necessary to accommodate a brief influx of athletes from around the world. Despite the enthusiasm many populations initially have for the development of world-class sporting complexes in their home towns, these complexes typically fall into disuse after the Olympic fervour has waned. Even Australia, home to one of the world's most sportive populations, has left its taxpayers footing a \$32 million-a-year bill for the maintenance of vacant facilities.

Another major concern is that when civic infrastructure developments are undertaken in preparation for hosting the Olympics, these benefits accrue to a single metropolitan centre (with the exception of some outlying areas that may get some revamped sports facilities). In countries with an expansive land mass, this means vast swathes of the population miss out entirely. Furthermore, since the International Olympic Committee favours prosperous "global"

centres (the United Kingdom was told, after three failed bids from its provincial cities, that only London stood any real chance at winning), the improvement of public transport, roads and communication links tends to concentrate in places already well-equipped with world-class infrastructures. Perpetually by-passing minor cities creates a cycle of disenfranchisement: these cities never get an injection of capital, they fail to become first-rate candidates, and they are constantly passed over in favour of more secure choices.

Finally, there is no guarantee that an Olympics will be a popular success. The “feel good” factor that most proponents of Olympic bids extol (and that was no doubt driving the 90 to 100 per cent approval rates of Parisians and Londoners for their cities’ respective 2012 bids) can be an elusive phenomenon, and one that is tied to that nation’s standing on the medal tables. This ephemeral thrill cannot compare to the years of disruptive construction projects and security fears that go into preparing for an Olympic Games, nor the decades of debt repayment that follow (Greece’s preparation for Athens 2004 famously deterred tourists from visiting the country due to widespread unease about congestion and disruption).

There are feasible alternatives to the bloat, extravagance and wasteful spending that comes with a modern Olympic Games. One option is to designate a permanent host city that would be re-designed or built from scratch especially for the task. Another is to extend the duration of the Olympics so that it becomes a festival of several months. Local businesses would enjoy the extra spending and congestion would ease substantially as competitors and spectators come and go according to their specific interests. Neither the “Olympic City” nor the extended length options really get to the heart of the issue, however. Stripping away ritual and decorum in favour of concentrating on athletic rivalry would be preferable.

Failing that, the Olympics could simply be scrapped altogether. International competition could still be maintained through world championships in each discipline. Most of these events are already held on non-Olympic years anyway – the International Association of Athletics Federations, for example, has run a biennial World Athletics Championship since 1983 after members decided that using the Olympics for their championship was no longer sufficient. Events of this nature keep world-class competition alive without requiring Olympic-sized expenses.

Questions 14–18

Complete each sentence with the correct ending, A–K, below.

Write the correct letter, A–K, in boxes 14–18

14. Bids to become a host city	A. often help smaller cities to develop basic infrastructure.
15. Personal relationships and political tensions	B. tend to occur in areas where they are least needed.
16. Cost estimates for the Olympic Games	C. require profitable companies to be put out of business.
17. Purpose-built sporting venues	D. are often never used again once the Games are over.
18. Urban developments associated with the Olympics	E. can take up to ten years to complete.
	F. also satisfy needs of local citizens for first-rate sports facilities.
	G. is usually only successful when it is from a capital city.
	H. are closely related to how people feel emotionally about the Olympics.
	I. are known for being very inaccurate.
	J. often underlie the decisions of International Olympic Committee members.
	K. are holding back efforts to reform the Olympics.

Questions 19–25

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 2?

In boxes 19–25 on your answer sheet, write

True - if the statement agrees with the information

False - if the statement contradicts the information

Not Given - if there is no information on this

19. Residents of host cities have little use for the full range of Olympic facilities.

20. Australians have still not paid for the construction of Olympic sports facilities.

21. People far beyond the host city can expect to benefit from improved infrastructure.

22. It is difficult for small cities to win an Olympic bid.

23. When a city makes an Olympic bid, a majority of its citizens usually want it to win.

24. Whether or not people enjoy hosting the Olympics in their city depends on how athletes from their country perform in Olympic events.

25. Fewer people than normal visited Greece during the run up to the Athens Olympics.

Questions 26 and 27

Choose TWO letters, A–E.

Write the correct letters in boxes 26 and 27 on your answer sheet.

Which TWO of the following does the author propose as alternatives to the current Olympics?

- A. The Olympics should be cancelled in favour of individual competitions for each sport.
- B. The Olympics should focus on ceremony rather than competition.
- C. The Olympics should be held in the same city every time.
- D. The Olympics should be held over a month rather than seventeen days.
- E. The Olympics should be made smaller by getting rid of unnecessary and unpopular sports.

26 _____ **27** _____

Remember, you have 60 minutes to complete the Reading test! You should spend about 20 minutes on each of the three sections.

You have completed the second section of your Reading test. Now move on to Reading passage 3.