

Practice Test
For the TOEFL®
Reading Section

The TOEFL Reading Section:
Directions

In this section, you will be able to demonstrate your ability to understand academic passages in English.

There are two passages in this section. You have 36 minutes to complete the entire section. You may read the passages and answer the questions in any order you choose but plan to spend about 18 minutes on each passage and the accompanying questions.

Most questions are worth one point, but the last question for each passage is worth more than one point. The directions for the last question indicate how many points you may receive.

At the end of this practice test, you will find an answer key, information to help determine your score and explanations of the answers.

Turn the page to begin the reading section.

Transcendentalism

Beginning in the 1820s, a new intellectual movement known as transcendentalism began to grow in the Northeast. In this context, to transcend means to go beyond the ordinary sensory world to grasp personal insights and gain an appreciation of a deeper reality, and transcendentalists believed that all people could attain an understanding of the world that goes past rational, sensory experience. Transcendentalists were critical of mainstream American culture. They reacted against the age they lived in where people were encouraged to act the same as others, and argued for greater individualism against conformity. European romanticism, a movement in literature and art that stressed emotion over cold, calculating reason, also influenced transcendentalists in the United States, especially the transcendentalists' celebration of the uniqueness of individual feelings.

Ralph Waldo Emerson emerged as the leading figure of this movement. Born in Boston in 1803, Emerson came from a religious family. His father served as a minister, and after graduating from Harvard Divinity School in the 1820s, Emerson followed in his father's footsteps. However, after his wife died in 1831, he left the clergy. On a trip to Europe in 1832, he met leading figures of romanticism who rejected the cold, strict rationalism of popular 18th-century Enlightenment thought, emphasizing emotion instead.

When Emerson returned home the following year, he began giving lectures on his romanticism-influenced ideas. In 1836, he published "Nature," an essay arguing that humans can find their true spirituality in nature, not in the everyday bustling working world of cities and industrial factories. In 1841, Emerson published his essay "Self-Reliance," which urged readers to think for themselves and reject the mass conformity he believed had taken root in American life. Emerson expressed concern that a powerful majority could overpower the will of individuals.

Emerson's ideas struck a chord with a class of literate adults who also were dissatisfied with mainstream American life and searching for greater spiritual meaning. Many writers were drawn to transcendentalism, and they started to express its ideas through new stories, poems, essays, and articles. The ideas of transcendentalism were able to permeate American thought and culture through magazines, journals, and newspapers that were widely read.

Among those attracted to Emerson's ideas was his friend, Henry David Thoreau, whom he encouraged to write about his own ideas. Thoreau placed a special emphasis on the role of nature as a gateway to the transcendentalist goal of greater individualism. In 1848, Thoreau gave a lecture in which he argued that individuals must stand up to governmental injustice, a topic he chose because of his disgust over the Mexican-American War and slavery. In 1849, he published his lecture, "Civil Disobedience," and urged readers to refuse to support a government that was immoral.

Margaret Fuller also came to prominence as a leading transcendentalist and advocate for women's equality. Fuller was a friend of Emerson and Thoreau, and other intellectuals of her day. Because she was a woman, she could not attend Harvard, as it was a male-only institution for undergraduate students until 1973. However, she was later granted the use of the library there because of her towering intellect. In

1840, she became the editor of *The Dial*, a transcendentalist journal, and she later found employment as a book reviewer for the *New York Tribune* newspaper. Tragically, in 1850, she died at the age of forty in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York.

Some critics took issue with transcendentalism's emphasis on individualism by pointing out the destructive consequences of compulsive human behavior. Herman Melville's novel, *Moby Dick*, emphasized the problems with individual obsession by telling the tale of Captain Ahab's single-minded quest to kill a white whale, *Moby Dick*, which had destroyed Ahab's original ship and caused him to lose one of his legs. Edgar Allan Poe, a popular author, critic, and poet, decried "the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists." These American writers who questioned transcendentalism illustrate the underlying tension between individualism and conformity in American life.

Source: Corbett, S.P., Janssen, V., Lund, J.M., Pfannestiel, T., Waskiewicz, S., & Vickery, P. (2014).

Reading Paragraph 1

Beginning in the 1820s, a new intellectual movement known as transcendentalism began to grow in the Northeast. In this context, to transcend means to go beyond the ordinary sensory world to grasp personal insights and gain an appreciation of a deeper reality, and transcendentalists believed that all people could attain an understanding of the world that goes past rational, sensory experience. Transcendentalists were critical of mainstream American culture. They reacted against the age they lived in where people were encouraged to act the same as others, and argued for greater individualism against conformity. European romanticism, a movement in literature and art that stressed emotion over cold, calculating reason, also influenced transcendentalists in the United States, especially the transcendentalists' celebration of the uniqueness of individual feelings.

1. According to paragraph 1, what did transcendentalists do?

- a. They overreacted toward those who acted the same as everyone else
- b. They protested the government for greater nonconformity
- c. They celebrated individualism and nonconformity
- d. They wrote articles in favor of a more rational culture

Reading Paragraph 2

Ralph Waldo Emerson emerged as the leading figure of this movement. Born in Boston in 1803, Emerson came from a religious family. His father served as a minister, and after graduating from Harvard Divinity School in the 1820s, Emerson followed in his father's footsteps. However, after his wife died in 1831, he left the clergy. On a trip to Europe in 1832, he met leading figures of romanticism who rejected the cold, strict rationalism of popular 18th-century Enlightenment thought, emphasizing emotion instead.

2. Which of the following is NOT true about Ralph Waldo Emerson?

- a. He was one of the leaders of the transcendentalism movement
- b. Like his father, he served as a minister
- c. He went to Europe after his wife had passed away
- d. He met critics of romanticism while visiting Europe

Reading Paragraph 3

When Emerson returned home the following year, he began giving lectures on his romanticism-influenced ideas. In 1836, he published "Nature," an essay arguing that humans can find their true spirituality in nature, not in the everyday bustling working world of cities and industrial factories. In 1841, Emerson published his essay, "Self-Reliance," which urged readers to think for themselves and reject the mass conformity he believed had taken root in American life. Emerson expressed concern that a powerful majority could overpower the will of individuals.

3. Why does the author say "his romanticism-influenced ideas"?

- a. To show that his ideas were romantic in nature
- b. To explain why he published his essays "Nature" and "Self-Reliance"
- c. To show that his beliefs were inspired by the romanticists he met
- d. To prove that his ideas came from other sources

4. The phrase **taken root** in paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to

- a. Become abandoned
- b. Been established
- c. Been examined
- d. Been discovered

Reading Paragraph 5

Among those attracted to Emerson's ideas was his friend, Henry David Thoreau, whom he encouraged to write about his own ideas. Thoreau placed a special emphasis on the role of nature as a gateway to the transcendentalist goal of greater individualism. In 1848, Thoreau gave a lecture in which he argued that individuals must stand up to governmental injustice, a topic he chose because of his disgust over the Mexican-American War and slavery. In 1849, he published his lecture, "Civil Disobedience," and urged readers to refuse to support a government that was immoral.

5. Which of the following is true, according to paragraph five?

- a. Henry David Thoreau believed that nature could help people achieve more individualism
- b. Henry David Thoreau was Emerson's closest friend and had similar ideas
- c. Emerson suggested that Henry David Thoreau should start giving lectures
- d. Thoreau organized groups that protested the injustices of governments

Reading Paragraph 6

Margaret Fuller also came to prominence as a leading transcendentalist and advocate for women's equality. Fuller was a friend of Emerson and Thoreau, and other intellectuals of her day. Because she was a woman, she could not attend Harvard, as it was a male-only institution for undergraduate students until 1973. However, she was later granted the use of the library there because of her towering intellect. In 1840, she became the editor of *The Dial*, a transcendentalist journal, and she later found employment as a book reviewer for the *New York Tribune* newspaper. Tragically, in 1850, she died at the age of forty in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York.

6. All of the following are true EXCEPT

- a. Margaret Fuller did research in the library at Harvard
- b. Harvard University remained an all-male school until the 20th century
- c. Margaret Fuller was a transcendentalist and supported the equality of women
- d. Margaret Fuller met Emerson and Thoreau while studying at Harvard

Reading Paragraph 6

Margaret Fuller also came to prominence as a leading transcendentalist and advocate for women's equality. Fuller was a friend of Emerson and Thoreau, and other intellectuals of her day. Because she was a woman, she could not attend Harvard, as it was a male-only institution for undergraduate students until 1973. However, she was later granted the use of the library there because of her towering intellect. In 1840, she became the editor of *The Dial*, a transcendentalist journal, and she later found employment as a book reviewer for the *New York Tribune* newspaper. Tragically, in 1850, she died at the age of forty in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York.

7. What can be inferred about Margaret Fuller from the information in paragraph six?

- a. She was the most famous transcendentalist of her time
- b. She attended Harvard University even though women were not allowed at that time
- c. She held positions that most women did not in her time
- d. She only reviewed books that were of interest to her while at the *New York Tribune*

Reading Paragraph 7

Some critics took issue with transcendentalism's emphasis on individualism by pointing out the destructive consequences of compulsive human behavior. Herman Melville's novel, *Moby Dick*, emphasized the problems with individual obsession by telling the tale of Captain Ahab's single-minded quest to kill a white whale, *Moby Dick*, which had destroyed Ahab's original ship and caused him to lose one of his legs. Edgar Allan Poe, a popular author, critic, and poet, decried "the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists". These American writers who questioned transcendentalism illustrate the underlying tension between individualism and conformity in American life.

8. Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in paragraph 7? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

- a. Herman Melville wrote a novel called *Moby Dick* and the main character is Captain Ahab
- b. The story of Captain Ahab's quest to kill a white whale is titled *Moby Dick*
- c. After learning about transcendentalism, Herman Melville decided to write a book criticizing it
- d. Herman Melville's book, *Moby Dick*, was inspired by the issues surrounding the obsession with individualism

9. Look at the four squares (A, B, C, D) that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

However, as with all major movements, transcendentalists faced criticism for their beliefs.

Where would the sentence best fit?

A Some critics took issue with transcendentalism’s emphasis on individualism by pointing out the destructive consequences of compulsive human behavior. **B** Herman Melville’s novel, *Moby Dick*, emphasized the problems with individual obsession by telling the tale of Captain Ahab’s single-minded quest to kill a white whale, *Moby Dick*, which had destroyed Ahab’s original ship and caused him to lose one of his legs. **C** Edgar Allan Poe, a popular author, critic, and poet, decried “the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists”. **D** These American writers who questioned transcendentalism illustrate the underlying tension between individualism and conformity in American life.

10. **DIRECTIONS:** An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. This question is worth 2 points.

Transcendentalism was an intellectual movement in which prominent thinkers sought greater levels of individualism and spirituality.

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- a. Ralph Waldo Emerson encouraged members of society to be more individualistic
- b. Herman Melville’s book *Moby Dick* subtly criticizes the transcendentalist beliefs
- c. Emerson was friends with other transcendentalists like Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller
- d. Margaret Fuller could not attend Harvard because she was a woman
- e. Some transcendentalist subscribers warned of the problems with mass conformity
- f. American transcendentalist ideas were influenced by European romanticism

Hydroculture

The world is in the middle of a food crisis. Opinions differ as to its severity, but most accept that the crisis is real and potentially poses a major threat to the health and food supply of a large proportion of the global population. The roots of the crisis are diverse, but among them are two primary factors. The first of these is changing weather patterns and extreme weather events. Simply put, a number of previously productive agricultural regions are no longer as fertile as they once were because of the weather. And second, many farmers have found that they can get a better return growing biofuels than raising crops. As a result, large areas of valuable cropland are no longer being used for this end. Conventional agriculture is ill-suited to solve the food crisis, but hydroculture might be a potential solution.

As its name suggests, hydroculture typically involves growing plants in nutrient-rich water rather than in soil. Hydroponics is the most widely-known method of hydroculture. Some believe it has significant potential to reduce the impact of the food crisis by allowing farmers to produce large quantities of food in a sustainable and cost-effective way. In a typical hydroponic system, crops are grown indoors in controlled environments. The plants grow in containers that are filled with water and nutrients that they need to thrive. These nutrients vary depending on the crop being grown but typically include nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, calcium, iron, zinc, and copper, among other trace elements. A light source provides the energy the sun would usually deliver.

In so-called static systems, the nutrient solution is changed or replaced either according to a schedule or when the plants require it. In continuous-flow systems, the nutrient solution flows constantly past the roots of the plants. Although it may seem like a technologically sophisticated form of agriculture, scientists have been experimenting with hydroculture since at least 1627. Early experiments showed that plants grow best when raised in water that is rich in various nutrients rather than in distilled water. By the early decades of the twentieth century, the concept of hydroponics was becoming more widely known and some commercial applications of the technology were even in place. These days, even NASA, the US government agency in charge of space missions, is researching hydroponics.

Hydroponics offers a number of benefits over conventional agriculture. It happens indoors, so it does not require large areas of land. In fact, hydroponic farms can be located in industrial warehouses in or near large cities. This gives them another advantage over traditional farms since they can be located much closer to the markets for their produce, reducing distribution and transportation costs for hydroponic farmers. The indoor location allows farmers to create controlled environments. Not only does this mean that crops are not affected by weather, it means that farmers can grow crops in regions where they would not normally thrive. For example, tropical vegetables can be grown in Canada. But hydroponic farms are not without their drawbacks. For one thing, some important food crops do not grow well hydroponically. Most herbs and vegetables thrive, but important sources of nutrition like carrots, potatoes, and corn are either not suitable or hard to grow. And so much space would be required to raise staple crops like rice and wheat cost-effectively that their hydroponic cultivation is not practical. Furthermore, most foods that grow well hydroponically are relatively low in protein, a vital nutrient for human health.

A variation on hydroponics that solves some of these issues is aquaponics. A basic aquaponics system is a hydroponics farm with a second layer. On top are plants growing hydroponically in nutrient-rich water. Below that is a tank of fish being raised as part of a fish farm. In traditional aquaculture, farmers must spend time and money cleaning the water in which the fish live; if they do not, the health of the fish will suffer as waste from the fish concentrates in the water. The clever part of aquaponics is that instead of having to filter and discard the fish waste, farmers can use it as the source of nutrients for the plants. By closing the system in this way, aquaponic farms can produce the same kinds of herbs, fruits, and vegetables as hydroponic farms, as well as high-quality protein from farm-raised fish.

Reading Paragraph 1

The world is in the middle of a food crisis. Opinions differ as to its **severity**, but most accept that the crisis is real and potentially poses a major threat to the health and food supply of a large proportion of the global population. The roots of the crisis are diverse, but among them are two primary factors. The first of these is changing weather patterns and extreme weather events. Simply put, a number of previously productive agricultural regions are no longer as fertile as they once were because of the weather. And second, many farmers have found that they can get a better return growing biofuels than raising crops. As a result, large areas of valuable cropland are no longer being used for this end. Conventional agriculture is ill-suited to solve the food crisis, but hydroculture might be a potential solution.

1. The word **severity** in paragraph 1 most likely means

- a. Conversion
- b. Deployment
- c. Opportunity
- d. Seriousness

2. What does the author say about the food crisis in paragraph 1?

- a. It could be solved by limiting the global production and use of biofuels
- b. Its causes are related to a reduction in farms growing crops
- c. Its main effect is that major agricultural regions have become less fertile
- d. It has already had a major impact on the health of the world's population

Reading Paragraph 1

The world is in the middle of a food crisis. Opinions differ as to its severity, but most accept that the crisis is real and potentially poses a major threat to the health and food supply of a large proportion of the global population. The roots of the crisis are diverse, but among them are two primary factors. The first of these is changing weather patterns and extreme weather events. Simply put, a number of previously productive agricultural regions are no longer as fertile as they once were because of the weather. And second, many farmers have found that they can get a better return growing biofuels than raising crops. As a result, large areas of valuable cropland are no longer being used for **this end**. Conventional agriculture is ill-suited to solve the food crisis, but hydroculture might be a potential solution.

3. The phrase **this end** in paragraph 1 refers to

- a. Large areas
- b. Raising crops
- c. Growing biofuels
- d. Many farmers

Reading Paragraph 2

As its name suggests, hydroculture typically involves growing plants in nutrient-rich water rather than in soil. Hydroponics is the most widely-known method of hydroculture. Some believe it has significant potential to reduce the impact of the food crisis by allowing farmers to produce large quantities of food in a sustainable and cost-effective way. In a typical hydroponic system, crops are grown indoors in controlled environments. The plants grow in containers filled with water and the nutrients that they need to thrive. These nutrients vary depending on the crop being grown but typically include nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, calcium, iron, zinc, and copper, among other trace elements. A light source provides the energy the sun would usually deliver.

4. What does the author say about hydroponics in paragraph 2?

- a. The food crisis will be greater without food from hydroponic farms
- b. Food that has been grown hydroponically costs less than all other food
- c. The goal of hydroponic farms is to produce food in a sustainable way
- d. Hydroponically-grown plants need a source of water, energy, and food

Reading Paragraph 3

In so-called static systems, the nutrient solution is changed or replaced either according to a schedule or when the plants require it. In continuous-flow systems, the nutrient solution flows constantly past the roots of the plants. Although it may seem like a technologically sophisticated form of agriculture, scientists have been experimenting with hydroculture since at least 1627. Early experiments showed that plants grow best when raised in water that is rich in various nutrients rather than in distilled water. By the early decades of the twentieth century, the concept of hydroponics was becoming more widely known and some commercial applications of the technology were even in place. These days, even NASA, the US government agency in charge of space missions, is researching hydroponics.

5. It can be inferred from paragraph 3 that

- a. Distilled water has a negative impact on the growth of plants
- b. NASA is planning to use hydroponics to create farms in space
- c. The first experiments in hydroponics were mostly unsuccessful
- d. Hydroponics is a simpler form of agriculture than people believe

Reading Paragraph 4

Hydroponics offers a number of benefits over conventional agriculture. It happens indoors, so it does not require large areas of land. In fact, hydroponic farms can be located in industrial warehouses in or near large cities. This gives them another advantage over traditional farms since they can be located much closer to the markets for their produce, reducing distribution and transportation costs for hydroponic farmers. The indoor location allows farmers to create controlled environments. Not only does this mean that crops are not affected by weather, it means that farmers can grow crops in regions where they would not normally thrive. For example, tropical vegetables can be grown in Canada. But hydroponic farms are not without their drawbacks. For one thing, some important food crops do not grow well hydroponically. Most herbs and vegetables thrive, but important sources of nutrition like carrots, potatoes, and corn are either not suitable or hard to grow. And so much space would be required to raise staple crops like rice and wheat cost-effectively that their hydroponic cultivation is not practical. Furthermore, most foods that grow well hydroponically are relatively low in protein, a vital nutrient for human health.

6. Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in paragraph 4? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

- a. Hydroponic farms benefit from reduced costs by being placed near large markets
- b. Farmers contemplating growing hydroponically should consider factors like distribution
- c. The main advantage of hydroponics compared to conventional farming is its location
- d. The markets for both conventional and hydroponic crops are situated close to farms

7. Why does the author mention “tropical vegetables” in paragraph 4?

- a. To imply that the popularity of food can vary
- b. To highlight the demand for one type of crop
- c. To illustrate one advantage of farming indoors
- d. To argue that healthy diets require vegetables

8. What point does the author NOT make in paragraph 4?

- a. Certain crops are harder to grow hydroponically than others
- b. Many herbs and vegetables do well when hydroponically grown
- c. It is often not cost-effective to grow staple crops hydroponically
- d. It is relatively easy to produce protein-rich crops hydroponically

9. Look at the four squares (A, B, C, D) that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

Even though it has yet to be implemented on the same scope as traditional farming methods, the potential for the aquaponics industry is enormous.

Where would the sentence best fit?

A variation on hydroponics that solves some of these issues is aquaponics. A basic aquaponic system is a hydroponics farm with a second layer. On top are plants growing hydroponically in nutrient-rich water. **A** Below that is a tank of fish being raised as part of a fish farm. In traditional aquaculture, farmers must spend time and money cleaning the water in which the fish live; if they do not, the health of the fish will suffer as waste from the fish concentrates in the water. **B** The clever part of aquaponics is that instead of having to filter and discard the fish waste, farmers can use it as the source of nutrients for the plants. **C** By closing the system in this way, aquaponic farms can produce the same kinds of herbs, fruits, and vegetables as hydroponic farms, as well as high-quality protein from farm-raised fish. **D**

10. **DIRECTIONS:** Select the phrases that correctly describe each farming method. Two of the phrases will NOT be used. This question is worth 3 points.

Both hydroponics and aquaponics

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Aquaponics only

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- a. Crops are grown indoors in a controlled environment
- b. The system uses waste as a valuable source of plant food
- c. Cultivating food requires a significant amount of space
- d. The crops grown do not contain much protein
- e. Crops are grown in a solution of water and nutrients
- f. Farmers cultivate both plants and protein-rich species
- g. Changing weather conditions have a negative impact on the crops