

Name: _____

Class: _____

EXAM SKILLS

18 Read the passage and answer questions 1–14.

REALITY TV

A Reality TV accounts for 67% of TV programmes watched by Americans. A huge range of programme types come under the banner 'Reality TV', some of them more edifying than others. There are those which follow the pattern of one of the earliest reality shows, *Big Brother*, where a group of people have to co-exist in a house, their every move being filmed. Then there are the competitive shows where ordinary people compete in skills such as singing, cooking, diving, ice-skating or work-related skills like sales and entrepreneurship. Another sub-genre is the self- or home improvement/makeover type of show, such as *What Not to Wear*, *The Biggest Loser* or *Hoarders*. Some of the most popular reality TV shows are those of the social experiment sub-genre, such as *The World's Strictest Parents*, where misbehaving teens are sent to live in a less liberal family, usually in a distant country. Perhaps the most educational type which comes under the reality TV heading are the programmes that follow someone with an interesting or useful job doing their ordinary day-to-day work. This is the one type of reality TV show most parents encourage their children to watch, as they can learn about the work of police officers, paramedics, doctors, pilots and teachers.

B So how can we account for the immense popularity of reality TV? One reason it has found favour with viewers is that for most ordinary people it is their best hope of achieving at least a degree of fame or notoriety. A tiny minority might even become really famous and be rewarded with a TV show of their own. A survey of 239 people revealed that, contrary to common belief, most reality TV fans were not less sociable or less intelligent than others. It was thought that the main aim of watching such shows was to be able to discuss them with friends and co-workers. However, that has always been one of the reasons people watch any kind of TV programme. What is different about reality TV aficionados is that they desire a rise in status and strongly value prestige. Reality TV has produced 'stars' with little or no actual talent in conventional terms. Although they can't sing, dance or act, the force of their personality has shot them to stardom through an appearance on a TV show. From there, many have launched careers as 'TV personalities' and achieved the wealth and fame they craved. It is no wonder, then, that so many hope to follow their example.



C One crucial point about reality TV is that the name itself is a misnomer. It is not actually 'real'. While producers don't go as far as having scripts, they edit footage in such a way as to distort what really happened. Events are twisted to create an illusion of conflict or to shape a more interesting storyline. Participants are told to adapt their own personalities to suit the requirements of the show. For example, a lady with a pleasant and gentle personality was told to 'act mean' or be ejected from the show. Similarly, though viewers assume that either judges or the voting public have the power to eliminate contestants, in fact the producers retain the decision-making power. If a candidate in a singing competition has been voted off by the public, he or she may be kept on for amusement value, not for the quality of his or her singing. One producer admitted that a '24-hour bathroom makeover' actually had a crew working on it behind the scenes for at least two weeks.

D Apart from the illusions of reality, what other criticisms are made of reality TV? Author Mark Andrejevic wrote in the *New York Times* in 2012 that reality TV in post 9/11 society represents the 'normalisation of surveillance'. In all our favourite TV shows, the cameras are on the participants 24 hours a day. It therefore doesn't seem so strange when our own activities are caught on CCTV as we move around our cities and workplaces. Another accusation levied at some of these shows is that they glamorise vulgarity and consumerism. An American show called *Toddlers and Tiaras*, for example, shows little girls dressing up in skimpy costumes and make-up to take part in beauty pageants. Their parents spend thousands of dollars to parade their tiny children, some barely old enough to walk, in front of judges, who evaluate their beauty, clothes and modelling skills. The children featured in this and similar shows are growing up to focus only on winning and many are totally unable to accept defeat. Many reality TV shows feature a 'confessional', where contestants are encouraged to back-stab and report on their fellow contestants. Unethical behaviour is valued and rewarded because it boosts viewing figures. The plethora of shows encouraging us to change our weight, wardrobe, job, house and car creates generations of discontented individuals who feel themselves inadequate with who they are and what they have.



E To make matters worse, the experience of being on reality TV is not what it appears. These shows are so popular with the television companies because they are so cheap to produce. The producers' aim is to get as much talent as possible for as low a price as possible. While appearing on a reality show, you can expect your expenses to be paid, but you will probably only receive \$20 or \$30 a day. What is more, you can expect every aspect of your background and family to be investigated in detail. Anything you would prefer to remain hidden will inevitably come out. And the person who becomes the reality star will not be 'you'. It will be a character created by the producers who happens to have your face. So, if you are longing for your 15 minutes of fame, be aware of the risks of achieving it through reality TV.

Questions 1-6

The text has five paragraphs, A-E. Which paragraph contains the following information?
Write the correct letter, A-E.

N.B. You may use any letter more than once.

- 1 What attracts people to watch reality TV
- 2 An explanation for the promotion of bad behaviour on reality TV
- 3 A description of a show the writer disapproves of
- 4 An example of why the term reality TV is misleading
- 5 Some examples of shows that might benefit young people
- 6 A piece of research that reveals information about fans of reality TV

Questions 7-10

Answer the questions below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

- 7 How does the writer describe programmes that show people doing their job?
- 8 What does the writer say can help people achieve fame if they have no special talent?
- 9 Who has the ultimate decision about the elimination of competitors?
- 10 What feature of reality TV invites participants to criticise their peers?

Questions 11-14

Complete each sentence with the correct ending, A-G, below.

- 11 People who like watching reality TV
 - 12 The effects of reality TV on society
 - 13 Producers of reality TV
 - 14 People who take part in reality TV shows
- A include the development of competitiveness and materialistic attitudes.
 B will pay lots of money for the right people.
 C may not realise how intrusive and financially unrewarding it will be.
 D are willing to distort reality to attract more viewers.
 E tend to aspire to raising their status in society.
 F are usually grateful to be given a chance of becoming famous.
 G are particularly damaging for young girls.