2.7 READING

Recognise register in an article about friendship limits.

1 What can you remember about the Student's Book text? Complete the sentences using the words below.

less likely often reduce similar to the same

1 People who spend time with their friends are _____ to get sick.
2 Spending time with friends can help _____ stress.
3 We are more likely to be friends with people with genes that are _____ ours.
4 People who are friends often like _____ smells.
5 People who are friends _____ have very different immune systems.

2 2.07 Read the title of the article and look at the photo. Which of the following would you expect the article to include information about? Read the article quickly and check your ideas.

- Why some animals live in groups and others don't.
- How and why animals form friendships.
- The size of a typical human community.
- The advantages of being in a close community.
- How to make friends online.
- Why social media is bad for real friendships.

Friendship has a limit

You can't have more than 150 friends – your brain isn't big enough!

A ___ According to Professor Robin Dunbar of Oxford University, the total number of friends you can have is 150. Professor Dunbar has spent much of his career studying the behaviour of groups of primates to find out how it is influenced by their biology. He has identified a relationship between the size of the brain and the size of the social group. In simple terms, getting on with lots of other individuals is complex. Therefore, to live in larger social groups, you need a larger brain. In primates generally, there is a natural group size of 150, and this has become known as the 'Dunbar number'.

B ___ Living in a close community, where everyone looks out for each other, means that all members of that community have a better chance of surviving. For most modern humans, 150 is the largest number of people they can have a social relationship with, although these won't all be close friends. Thousands of years ago, when we lived in small, closely connected groups, 150 was also the size of a typical community. People relied on each other for their survival, co-operating to hunt and find other resources. This hasn't changed much throughout history: historical records in Britain have shown that until the 19th century, the average size of a village was still 150.

C ___ With social media, it's possible to keep in touch with more than 150 people online. However, I've been looking at some recent research by an American university, which suggests that the total number of friends hasn't actually increased for many people. It says that online relationships are often less close than personal friendships in the real world. However, they take a similar amount of brain power. So people who spend a lot of time and energy maintaining their online relationships find that they have done this at a cost to their real-life friendships. Also, they have realised that some of the experiences they have in common with real-life friends – like dancing, laughing, eating ice cream or watching a film – keep these friendships strong. As a result, many people – me included – haven't been spending so much time on social media recently!

primates – the group of animals that includes apes, monkeys and humans

3 Match the questions to the paragraphs (A–C) they introduce. There is one question you don't need.

1 Has the situation changed with the internet? ___
2 Why has the Dunbar number changed over time? ___
3 How many people can you have a meaningful social relationship with? ___
4 Why have humans evolved to live in social groups? ___

STRATEGY Recognising register

When you read a text from an unknown source, it's useful to understand the register (how formal or informal it is) and tone. Informal texts are often written in a more personal, 'chatty' style; they use more rhetorical questions, informal words and phrases, personal examples and speak directly to the reader.

Formal texts use fewer personal pronouns, personal opinions and examples, and more formal or academic language.

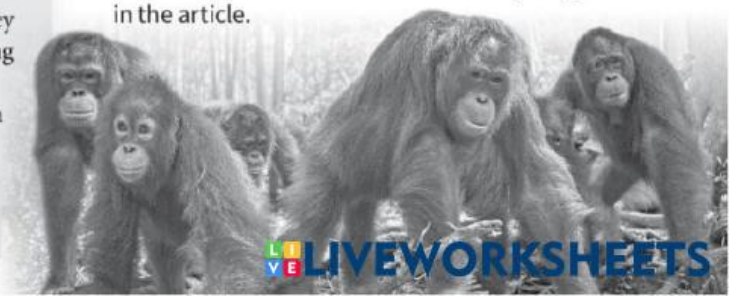
4 Read the strategy above. Then read these sentences from the article. Do you think they are formal (F) or informal (I)?

A Professor Dunbar has spent much of his career studying the behaviour of groups of primates to find out how it is influenced by their biology. ___
B However, I've been looking at some recent research by an American university, which suggests that the total number of friends hasn't actually increased for many people. ___
C As a result, many people – me included – haven't been spending so much time on social media recently! ___

5 Read the article again. Decide if the statements are true (*T*) or false (*F*), according to the writer. Correct the false statements using information from the article.

1 Professor Dunbar has spent his career studying human behaviour. ___
2 Animals that live in large social groups need bigger brains than other animals. ___
3 Humans evolved to live in small social groups as a way to stay alive. ___
4 The size of a typical human community has not stayed the same over time. ___
5 People who use social media often have closer relationships with their online friends. ___
6 Real-life friendships are stronger because of common experiences. ___

6 MEDIATION You have a friend who spends a lot of time on social media. He has written to you saying he's feeling sad because he thinks he doesn't have any real friends. Write to him with two pieces of advice about friends and social media, using ideas in the article.



LIVEWORKSHEETS