Part 7

You are going to read an article about the sense of smell. Six paragraphs have been removed from the article. Choose from the paragraphs **A–G** the one which fits each gap (**41–46**). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.
Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet.**

Using our sense of smell

I make perfume for a living, and run workshops at my studio teaching people to recognise different fragrances and produce blends of their own. Even someone who claims to have a terrible sense of smell can become proficient at it.

41	

To do this requires sufficient practice. It's no different from identifying sounds. If you're not a music aficionado, you'll have a hard time distinguishing between a clarinet and an oboe, or a mandolin and a guitar. As you devote attention to listening and spend periods of time watching instruments being played, you begin to improve.

42	

However, it is not just for appreciating beautiful fragrances like these that our sense of smell has been bestowed on us. It evolved for survival: avoiding threats, assessing whether something is edible and identifying people. Most of the time we think we aren't smelling anything at all; we are, but not consciously. That's due to the brain switching off from the signals once it's decided we're safe, although the nose is still picking up scents.

43	

Such effects are demonstrable, but working with perfumes every day, I've found that I can still detect aromas long after untrained noses perceive them as completely gone. It seems it's possible to actually build up our scent stamina. If we're suffering from tiredness we tend to smell less acutely and less accurately.

44	

To make a very different kind of comparison, consider colour. Working with smell is as varied as working with the colour spectrum, if not more so. But in one particular way, the two are dissimilar. With smell, there's no chart with hundreds of shades to point to so that two people can compare similarities. We're left with a verbal classification system for scent that only keen 'perfumistas' learn.

45	

Another sort of error is feeling certain of your ability to spot the difference between a natural and a synthetic aroma. However, when tested on this, people are generally deceived. For example, lime essential oil is identified by 90% of people as smelling 'chemical'. Yet synthetic but pleasantly smooth lime oxide is almost always identified as natural. Research in neuroscience backs up my observations of this, and it also shows that our ability to smell accurately is affected by stress.

46	

Aside from following sensible advice like that, to continue developing your sense of smell, make it a habit to smell the roses, the coffee, everything you eat. If you smell something nice, stop and identify the source. You'll soon be better at it than you can imagine – and perhaps even as good as a dog!

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A Our aroma vocabulary tends to be restricted. In the modern world we struggle to describe scents. Last year I made several futile attempts at creating a perfume for a client who'd requested something deep and heavy. It turned out she had in mind a particular brand that was light and fluffy, but, due to the brand's slightly misleading name, she'd described it as the opposite of what she was seeking.

B One way of dealing with such an issue is for people at my perfume studio who are being taught the art of fragrance recognition to take regular nose breaks, particularly if they're novices, to avoid 'nose blindness'. So, if they can't identify what's on a paper strip, they 'turn off' and then 'turn on' again, as if rebooting a computer.

C In other words, this lack of skill causes a feeling of anxiety instead, which can undermine the ability to detect the odours. Perfume is like any other smell in this respect.

D Despite what many believe, that of humans has the capacity to be on a par with that of dogs and rodents. In fact, we can develop comparable abilities pretty quickly.

E An example of this is when people coming to my studio to learn to create fragrances sometimes put themselves under pressure to produce a masterpiece at their first attempt, and suddenly go frantic, unable to smell anything at all. I tell them to sit down and rest to restore it.

F Perfumers do something similar when we train at specialist colleges. We focus on thousands of odourants sprayed on paper strips until our ability to identify materials by smell alone, as well as detect subtle nuances in quality, has been cultivated. With somewhat less dedication, most people can gain expertise in recognising the finest perfumes.

G This is why the smell of our favourite perfume seems to wear off quickly. Usually it's still there, but we don't need to be reminded about it as it's become familiar. Then, when we step into another environment, our sense of smell checks for danger or food and reports in again, and the seemingly worn-off fragrance briefly returns.

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