

READING

Task 1 (7 points)

Five people have shared their experience of having a gap year after high school. Read their comments (A–E) and answer the questions. For each question (1–7), choose one of the texts (A–E). Write one appropriate letter (A, B, C, D or E) next to the question (1–7). Each text may be used more than once.

Questions		Text
1.	Who has decided to develop their personal interests into career opportunities?	
2.	Who spent their time developing creative interests?	
3.	Who realised the importance of higher education during their gap year?	
4.	Whose gap year did not go as planned?	
5.	Who admits they used to think too highly of themselves?	
6.	Who views calculated risk-taking as worthwhile?	
7.	Whose experience could help students deal with the consequences of not getting what they wanted?	

TEXTS

A

During the year between high school and university, I discovered the value of spending time alone with my thoughts, reflecting on my true wants and needs. I devoted myself to reading literature of all kinds, which opened my mind to different perspectives and broadened my understanding of the world. Without the distraction of social media, I was able to develop my passion for writing, starting a personal blog where I poured out my thoughts and reflections on my life experiences. Although some people may find being alone overwhelming, I saw it as a chance to engage in activities that made my life richer. Art became my way to escape, and I would lose track of time while painting, expressing emotions that words could not capture. Throughout this period, I gained a clearer understanding of my values and what truly matters in life. While the journey of self-discovery was sometimes lonely, the personal growth and lessons I learned will continue to guide me forward.

Anna

B

When I first thought about my gap year, I had this really ambitious idea of going on a big backpacking trip across Europe. I spent countless hours preparing and carefully mapping out my route. In my imagination, I would walk through historic cities with their cobblestone streets and marvel at picturesque landscapes. However, the reality was different. Instead of travelling across Europe, I found myself working in restaurants and shops. Day after day, I worked long shifts, getting experience in the service industry. Though my original wish did not come true, I was fortunate enough to visit Brazil and Jamaica – both trips were birthday gifts for turning eighteen. During that year of working in customer service, I made an important discovery:

this was not the career path I wanted to follow. It hit me that my hesitation about university wasn't because I disliked education, but rather because I was nervous about the challenges of college life. Looking back, gaining real-world experience before starting my degree was probably the best thing that could have happened.

Brian

C

While my classmates were receiving their college acceptance letters after high school, I found myself struggling with indecision. My challenging experiences in high school had left me worried that college would be even more difficult, complete with intimidating social situations and feelings of isolation. I was doing well academically, but none of my subjects sparked any real enthusiasm. By graduation, I had missed the application deadlines, and I finally gathered the courage to inform my parents that I wasn't going to college after all. It was a tense period, but my parents eventually accepted my decision. My father made a deal with me: I could continue living at home without going to college, provided I had a full-time job. I wasn't in a position to negotiate, so I agreed. I found a job in the mailroom of a large insurance company, and after nine months or so, I came to two important conclusions. Firstly, advancing in any business career would be nearly impossible without a degree. Secondly, my fears about college life were largely unfounded. Now that I'm here, I've discovered that fellow students actually show me respect, and the university environment is far more welcoming than I had imagined.

Carol

D

Taking a gap year after secondary school requires thoughtful planning and consideration. While there is certainly a danger of not using the time effectively and losing the motivation to continue with your education, stepping away from academic studies can open up some valuable opportunities. When you're no longer caught up in the usual rush of studying, you have the chance to explore what really excites you and potentially discover an entirely new direction for your life. My gap year experience proved to be transformative. It helped me recognize that certain activities I had previously seen as mere hobbies could actually become a future occupation. This completely changed the way I thought about going to university, and when I eventually began my studies, I found the experience significantly more rewarding. The secret is to spend your gap year doing things that match your long-term aspirations. Instead of just going through the motions and doing what was expected, I tried out different activities that appealed to me.

Dave

E

When I applied to universities, I made a big mistake – I only applied to the top ones and got rejected by every single one. I hadn't prepared any backup options, so a gap year it was. At first, this felt like a huge setback, but it turned out to be exactly what I needed. During that year, I spent time volunteering, got some real work experience, and dedicated myself to learning new things on my own. But the most important change wasn't what I did – it was how I changed as a person. I became more driven, more humble, more open to new experiences. Looking back now, I can clearly see why things didn't work out the first time around, and I understand how my attitude played a big part in it. One of the most valuable lessons I learned was about taking responsibility for our failures. Instead of pointing fingers or making excuses, I realized it was more important to understand what went wrong and work on improving myself. It's perfectly fine to aim for the best, but I discovered there's a crucial difference between being confident and being arrogant. If you're considering taking a gap year, I'd strongly encourage it. Just remember to use this time to really look inside yourself and think about who you want to become.

Eric

Task 2 (10 points)

Read the article and answer questions 8–17.

DAILY DOSES OF NATURE IN THE CITY

1. The environmental movement is shifting away from focusing solely on raising awareness about environmental issues. Many agencies and organisations now also aim to connect people with nature. For example, every year in the United Kingdom, the Wildlife Trust runs the *30 Days Wild* campaign. This encourages people to carry out a daily “random act of wildness” for the month of June. At the same time, the International Union for Conservation of Nature recently launched its #NatureForAll program, which aims to inspire a love of nature. Our new research suggests daily doses of urban nature may be the key to developing connections for the majority who live in cities.
2. This shift in focus is starting to appear in environmental policies as well. For example, the UK’s recent 25-year environment plan identifies connecting people with the environment as one of its six key areas. Meanwhile, in Australia, the state of Victoria’s Biodiversity 2037 plan aims to help all Victorians engage with nature as one of two overarching objectives.
3. The thinking behind such efforts is simple: connecting people to nature will motivate them to act in ways that protect and care for the world. Evidence does suggest that people who have a high connection with the natural world are likely to display pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. However, over half of all people globally, and nine out of ten people in Australia, live in urban environments, which reduces their opportunities to experience and connect with the natural world.
4. A recent study may offer some answers. A survey of Brisbane residents revealed that people who experienced nature during childhood or regularly spent time in nature were more likely to report feeling connected to the environment. The study also looked at the relationship between nature experiences in childhood and adulthood. The results suggest that people who lack such childhood experiences can still come to have a strong connection with nature by experiencing it as an adult. While there have been focused efforts on connecting children with nature, equal emphasis should be placed on promoting adult nature experiences and creating a sense of connection, particularly among those lacking such encounters.
5. We are starting to understand the important role that frequent local experiences of nature may play. In addition to boosting people’s sense of nature connection, daily interactions with urban green spaces deliver the benefits of improved physical, mental and social well-being. A growing evidence base is showing that exposure to nature, particularly in cities, can lead to healthier and happier urban dwellers. That said, we still have much to discover about how an individual’s relationship with nature is shaped. We need a better understanding of how people from diverse cultural and social contexts experience and connect to different types of nature.
6. Dunn and colleagues have already advocated for the importance of urban nature experiences as a way to strengthen city residents’ support for conservation. They described the “pigeon paradox” whereby experiencing urban nature, which is often of low ecological value – such as interactions with non-native species – may still have wider environmental benefits through people behaving in more environmentally conscious ways. As new evidence emerges, we need to build on this thinking. It would seem that the future of our very connection to nature, our well-being, and conservation depend on city dwellers’ abilities to experience urban nature.

Adapted from theconversation.com

For questions 8–13, match the most appropriate heading (A–H) to paragraphs 1–6. You can use each heading once. There are two headings you do not need to use.

	Paragraph	Heading
8.	Paragraph 1	
9.	Paragraph 2	
10.	Paragraph 3	
11.	Paragraph 4	
12.	Paragraph 5	
13.	Paragraph 6	

Headings	
A	Not enough information yet
B	When quality does not matter
C	A clear solution with a limitation
D	Connecting with nature throughout life
E	Bringing nature into the city
F	Recognition at the state level
G	From informing about to encountering nature
H	The quality of urban nature experiences matters

For questions 14–17, decide if the statements are true (T), false (F) or not mentioned (NM) based on the text. Tick (✓) the appropriate box.

Statements		T	F	NM
14.	The UK and Australia disagree on the need to improve human engagement with nature.			
15.	A strong connection to nature typically results in more environmentally friendly behaviour.			
16.	The success rate of programs connecting urban residents to nature varies by their duration.			
17.	Spending time in urban nature may be sufficient to make people more environmentally aware.			

Task 3 (8 points)

Read the article about favourite songs. For questions 18–25, choose and circle the answer (A, B, C or D) that you think fits best based on the text.

WHY IS THAT YOUR FAVOURITE SONG?

We all have favourite songs. Some music sticks in our heads immediately and reverberates in our memory for hours or days, but we don't really like it. Effective advertising jingles fit this description. And then there are songs or music that you consciously return to again and again through your playlist, or the ones that immediately make you smile when they spontaneously fill your environment. Why do we develop favourite songs? And why is it so individual and unpredictable which ones will stick with us, while others do not?

We know intuitively that music triggers both an aesthetic and an emotional response. We may find certain music beautiful, but that is not enough for it to become a favourite. My son, for example, explains that his favourite song simply "makes me happy", despite recognising that the beat and lyrics are only average. Functional brain imaging research has shown that our brain picks up music and processes it in a variety of specific locations, each of which codes different aspects ranging from abstract sounds, rhythms, lyrics, and language. These separate brain regions then send information to yet additional regions with different functions that form complex, interdependent associations that bring about both the aesthetic experience and the emotional result. The brain generates strong emotions from musical stimuli through the activation of a particular neurologic circuit called the *Papez* circuit.

One school of thought is that our favourite music is largely due to its emotional impact, such as the effect when we are at a live concert of our favourite group. It remains unclear whether a favourite song creates something new emotionally or simply triggers pre-existing pathways. Another of my sons has paid attention to his emotional response to music and has curated a go-to playlist that he can source to improve or change his mood to suit whatever situation he is about to face. He relies on these favourite songs to handle the emotional demands of the teenage world. This conscious use of music to extract an emotional dividend can be employed to motivate us during exercise, to relax customers at a spa, to rally a crowd during a sporting event, and more. These songs can become favourites as we wish to recreate that atmosphere later.

Another school of thought is that there are songs that become favourites not so much for the musical structure or lyrics that generate a specific emotion, but rather for what that song represents in our memory. Music is heard in unique contexts and becomes integrated in our memories. The human brain possesses different systems for storing those memories, and it processes music in a distinctive manner. When we hear music, our brain stores both the actual sound (similar to remembering a melody) and its meaning (similar to our ability to recall poetry). Additionally, our emotional responses become linked to these musical memories and the circumstances in which we experienced them. Consequently, the brain encodes music as a component of our multifaceted memory of a moment or experience.

The intricate relationship between music and memory explains why AI algorithms from streaming services cannot quite get our music preferences right. The algorithms model the users' behaviour when picking playlists but are only able to process the artistic components of selected music. The associations and memories connected to music are uniquely individual and not necessarily related to its aesthetic quality. In other words, our taste in music does not necessarily define the songs we identify as favourites. Fortunately or unfortunately, even other humans cannot replicate our individual experience, and we are left with discovering our favourites through chance and luck.

Adapted from psychologytoday.com

18. What is the main purpose of the article?
- A To discuss how the structure of our favourite songs affects their appeal.
 - B To provide the scientific basis for the music people feel attracted to.
 - C To explain how the authors' sons select music for their playlists.
 - D To explain the science behind a music style becoming a favourite.
19. According to paragraph 2, which is a likely reason for a song to become someone's favourite?
- A Its lyrics combined with its emotional appeal.
 - B Its association with a specific genre.
 - C Its quality rather than its emotional appeal.
 - D Its emotive elements rather than its quality.
20. Which of these is NOT given as an aspect of the brain's response to music?
- A The area in which the brain combines lyrics and sound.
 - B The way brain regions process music.
 - C The formation of sophisticated associations in the brain.
 - D The pathway which the brain uses to convert music into emotions.
21. We can we infer from paragraph 3 that a song
- A mostly gives us new feelings we have not experienced before.
 - B only brings back something we have already experienced.
 - C can be potentially used to evoke a particular response.
 - D triggers a different emotion every time it is listened to.
22. Which is true about the two theories discussed in the article?
- A Both theories suggest that music becomes meaningful through personal experiences.
 - B The theories disagree on the importance of musical structure and lyrics.
 - C Both theories deny the importance of the environment in which we listen to music.
 - D The theories agree that a song is either emotionally impactful or memory-based.
23. What do we learn about the human brain from paragraph 4?
- A It stores music as the main component of the experience.
 - B It stores music memories separate from emotions.
 - C It stores music in order to create a new experience.
 - D It stores music as part of a larger memory package.
24. Why do artificial intelligence algorithms fail to capture our music preferences accurately?
- A They are not advanced enough to analyse musical structure.
 - B They cannot keep up with the changes in personal choices.
 - C They cannot process the personal significance of music.
 - D They focus too much on trending music styles.
25. The author of the article concludes that
- A we can predict whether a song will become a favourite.
 - B people find new favourite songs through coincidence.
 - C our favourite songs are consistent with our musical taste.
 - D people should take risks to discover new favourite music.