READING 3

How technology has changed the way we communicate

Paragraph A

It's often impossible for teenagers to imagine that in the past we all had to make our social arrangements either face-to-face or using a telephone landline. Just 20 years ago, trying to organise a visit to the cinema meant that you had to call your friends at least a day in advance and hope they'd be home when you rang. If someone didn't turn up, you could try to call them from a public telephone box. If their parents were home, you could leave a message, but your plans for the evening would probably be ruined.

Paragraph B

Nowadays, getting in touch is a lot easier. Almost every aspect of human communication has changed: we have email, text, Skype, Facebook and Instagram, and we are certainly busy using them to build and maintain our relationships. According to recent reports, the top social networks now each have more than a billion monthly active users. And keeping in touch isn't just something we do in class or at work any more: we continue to communicate with friends, strangers, family and colleagues (1) while we're on the train, in the living room and at the dinner table, for instance. One recent British study indicated that (2) 79% of teens even put their phone under their pillow so they can keep up-to-date with whatever is happening on social media day and night, and not miss out on updates. As for adults, a recent survey showed that (3) they now spend 20 to 28 hours a week on social media and have on average 275 personal connections. However, in contrast, only 11% of these same people actually meet their social connections in an actual physical environment on a regular basis.

Paragraph C

Email is now one of the most common means of communication. At the moment, over 100 billion emails are sent and received per day for business purposes. (1) This trend is expected to continue, and business email will account for over 132 billion emails sent and received per day two years from now. The number of letters which are sent through the post, however, has decreased dramatically. (2) A consequence of this is that many town and village post offices have closed. These were once places where a great deal of social interaction used to take place between local people. Now it is no longer possible for neighbours or workers in the area to meet up with each other like this, and older people in particular are often unhappy about this development. But certainly the advantages of email cannot be ignored: in the past, the post would only be delivered once or twice a day. If a letter was sent to an overseas destination, it could take months. Without doubt, email has made it easier to do business.

Paragraph D

However, there are several downsides to this form of technology. Firstly, no one would disagree that email puts pressure on people to respond immediately as soon as they find a new message in their inbox. A recent French report says that anxiety and general tiredness has risen dramatically amongst office workers, largely because they carry their digital devices with them, feeling obliged to constantly check for

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new mail from clients. A further problem is how to write an email, especially when communicating with people we don't know well. In the past, everyone knew that it was 'correct' to begin a letter 'Dear Sir/Madam' and end with 'Yours faithfully'. Nowadays, these phrases often feel too formal. No one wants to give the wrong impression when writing an email, but without 'rules', this can easily happen.

Paragraph E

Another significant impact technology has had on methods of communication is in the field of education. Traditionally, if someone wanted to take a higher education course, they would have to travel to attend lessons on a university campus. Nowadays, it is possible to take a range of courses through distance learning, and the number of these is likely to rise in the next few years. What is the appeal of studying this way? Many online courses encourage students to take part in online forums and post comments about their learning experiences, reading assignments and projects. They must also comment on their classmates' posts. In one way, this approach certainly appears to encourage communication.

Paragraph F

However, some surveys have found the opposite to be true. Because online students are physically separated, and indeed may never have met, they do not have the opportunity to build a good relationship. Students who come to campus regularly have the chance to get to know and support each other, and feel part of a community, so when they are asked to comment on the other person's work, they can do this in ways they know the other person will appreciate. For example, some students prefer their peers to be direct in their criticism, whereas others might prefer a more sensitive approach. But when students are asked to comment on the work or opinions of people they have never met, they are often reluctant to do so. Interestingly, one of the main reasons why people give up studying on their online courses is that they miss the face-to-face interaction with others. Certainly technology has made our lives more 'convenient' but perhaps also more complicated. There are many questions still to be answered about how we can and should use our modern digital tools to enable effective communication, an evolutionary skill that has been centuries in development.

Which paragraph contains the following information? You may use any letter more than once.

1. a reason why some learners do not complete an academic programme

   D E F

2. a reason for an increase in levels of stress in employees

   D E F

3. a prediction about the way that an academic service might develop in the future

   D E F

4. an example of a traditional practice in writing that people used to use more often

   D E F

5. a comparison between the ways that different people like to be given feedback on their work

   D E F

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USEFUL PHRASES

1	
2	
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4	
5	

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