

READING & LISTENING PRACTICE

B2

Read the article about the human brain. Six sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the sentences A–G the one which fits each gap. There is one extra sentence.

The amazing human brain

The brain is an amazing organ and the complexities of the way it works may never be fully understood, but scientists have made a lot of progress in explaining how and why different parts of our brains are used. (1) These people are sometimes called 'autistic savants' and their mental abilities are brilliant and inexplicable. Some are able to do amazing mathematical calculations at high speed. Others can perform music without ever having had a music lesson in their lives. One American savant, Kim Peek, the person who inspired the famous film *Rain Man*, could read two pages at the same time, one with each eye and was said to have total recall of more than 12,000 books he had read. A British savant, Stephen Wiltshire, can draw incredibly detailed drawings of places after seeing them only once.

It is believed that savants may have these exceptional abilities because of some form of damage to the brain which allows an unusual form of communication between the different sides of the brain. (2) The problem in understanding a savant's abilities has been that most are unable to explain how they do these extraordinary things – either because their language skills are less advanced or because they themselves do not know how; the abilities simply 'come' to them.

(3) This man's name is Daniel Tammet. Scientists believe that what Daniel can tell them may help unlock some important secrets of the brain. Daniel is capable of doing extremely complicated mathematical calculations in his head in a matter of seconds. He is obsessed with numbers and counting. (4) While they were playing in the playground, he was standing there counting the number of leaves on the trees! For him, counting is an absolute joy. It makes him happy and content. (5) He gets uncomfortable when there is too much disorder. For example, going to a supermarket is not an enjoyable experience for him as he is distracted by counting the tins and calculating anything and everything that he sees there. Likewise, working nine to five in a typical office environment would be difficult. (6) He can also speak seven languages and has been writing his own language, called Manti, since he was a child.

According to Daniel, he sees numbers as different colours, textures and images, and when he calculates complex numbers, the images change and form new images which give him the answers. If Daniel's explanations can help scientists discover more about the way the brain works, then perhaps we can all learn to develop our own potential to a greater level.

- A He therefore works from home helping clients with literacy and numeracy skills.
- B However, Daniel needs to be in control of what is happening around him.
- C Some scientists believe that we all have the potential to use this ability, but we do not know how.
- D However, scientists have found one savant who has excellent linguistic ability and is able to describe his thought processes clearly.
- E Apparently, there are very few people who can match this in the world.
- F He says he has been like this for as long as he can remember and it set him apart from other children at school.
- G There are, however, a certain number of people whose brains seem to work in a completely different way to the rest of us.

Read the article again and choose the best answers, A, B, C or D.

- 1 The mental abilities of 'autistic savants'
 - A only apply to science subjects.
 - B will never be understood.
 - C are similar to those of other brilliant people.
 - D cannot be easily explained.
- 2 When he read books, Kim Peek
 - A was able to picture them as films.
 - B could remember everything in them.
 - C had to read everything twice.
 - D preferred to look at the drawings.
- 3 'Autistic savants' may have unusual abilities because of
 - A damage to one side of the brain.
 - B a need to communicate with other people.
 - C uncommon connections within the brain.
 - D their advanced language skills.
- 4 The autistic savant Daniel Tammet is unusual because
 - A he can explain how he thinks.
 - B he can speak more than one language.
 - C he is a scientist.
 - D he has no mathematical ability.
- 5 Daniel Tammet dislikes some environments because
 - A they are outside his control.
 - B there are too many people.
 - C they remind him of the school playground.
 - D he doesn't know how to express himself.
- 6 What does the word 'potential' in the last line refer to?
 - A Our ability to do complex mathematics.
 - B Our ability to see numbers as colours, textures and images.
 - C Our ability to improve and succeed.
 - D The possibility of understanding how the brain works.

Find words in the text which mean the same as these phrases.

- 1 **Paragraph 1:** To provide the idea for a book, film, play, etc.
- 2 **Paragraph 1:** The action or faculty of remembering something.
- 3 **Paragraph 3:** Pleased with your situation and not hoping for change or improvement.
- 4 **Paragraph 4:** To make someone stop giving their attention to something.

► Listen to four speakers talking about extraordinary people. Match the speakers (1–4) with the statements (A–F). There are two extra statements.

Speaker 1

Speaker 2

Speaker 3

Speaker 4

- A He/she talks about someone we may know from the television.
- B He/she talks about someone who has had a successful career at a young age.
- C He/she talks about someone whose work inspired those who came after him/her.
- D He/she talks about someone who has refused to change a situation.
- E He/she talks about someone who has overcome a big problem.
- F He/she talks about someone who was given a second chance to achieve his/her goals.

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► Listen again and complete the sentences with two or three words in each gap.

- 1 According to Speaker 1, Steve Jussup used to be an person before his accident.
- 2 Steve Jussup is very determined and never
- 3 Speaker 2 describes a young woman who found out that she had persuasion.
- 4 Agatha Christie was the subject of a mystery herself when she for a short period of time.
- 5 People know about Sister Wendy because of her
- 6 Sister Wendy has a special talent as