

## B. READING

**Exercise 1.** With a long, complicated passage, always decide *why* you are reading, before you start to read in detail. Read the information. Then look at the statements and the underlined key words. Match the paragraphs that contain the information you need with the statements.

With *Yes / No / Not Given* tasks, read the statements carefully. Look for key words, for example, names, places or dates, which will help you find the paragraph which contains the information you need.

### Why siblings often have little in common

**A** According to popular theory, a person's birth order – whether they are the first, second or last child to be born in a family – has a large influence on determining their eventual personality. First-born children, it has been claimed, tend to be more dominant, perhaps going on to achieve more in life. Last-born children may become more self-centred and attached to their parents, tending to be 'always the baby' throughout their lives. Only children, who have neither brothers nor sisters, may become more self-confident due to the fact that they have their parents' undivided attention. This, however, may cause them to have difficulty in understanding others.

**B** Recent research, however, suggests that there is more to be discovered about sibling personalities. Dr Rhys Sheersmith, a child psychologist, raises the following issue. 'We know that birth order can affect personality, but what is also interesting is that two siblings brought up in exactly the same environment, by exactly the same parents, in more or less similar periods of time, may actually have completely different personalities. In fact, they may have very little in common. What we have found out is that one sibling may share a great deal more, in terms of personality, with another child from outside that family, who they never grew up with.'

**C** We would naturally expect children who were raised in the same household to have similar characteristics, but this is not the case. Dr Norman Kronstadt, another psychologist, claims that the adults that children are surrounded by as they are growing up may have a significant influence. 'In our research, we found that children are often assigned labels as they are growing up. It's the parents who do this, or sometimes the grandparents. For instance, one daughter may be labelled "the clever one" in the family. Her brother may be labelled "the difficult, naughty one". However, this has little to do, really, with how clever the girl is or how naughty the boy is. Compared with other children from other families, they might not be especially clever or naughty, but they will have been given these roles by the adults around them.'

**D** Child therapist Ben Williams agrees. 'The effect this has is significant. If a child believes he or she is "the clever one", or "the naughty one", or "the one who is good at sports", then they will make different choices in life. They will spend their time differently. They will choose to do or avoid doing certain things, because of what they believe their role to be. Over a period of years, naturally, their personalities will change to fit the role that their parents have given them. So, "the sporty one" will choose sports activities and get better at them as time progresses. In contrast, "the naughty one" might believe that they aren't really good at anything, and will make little effort to try hard at anything.' This, more than anything else, might explain why two siblings from the same family go on to have such different personalities.

Paragraph A

Paragraph B

Paragraph C

Paragraph D

- 1 People with no siblings may have both positive and negative characteristics.
- 2 Dr Rhys Sheersmith's research shows that children often make friends with other children, rather than with their own siblings.
- 3 Ben Williams states that children's personalities are fixed early, and stay the same throughout their childhood.
- 4 Norman Kronstadt believes that the labels children have may not reflect their actual characteristics.

**Exercise 2: Read the information. Then look at the statement in question 1. Is it True or False? Choose the two sentences from the paragraph which you need to read in detail, in order to decide.**

When you know which paragraph contains the information you need, you then have to decide which part to read in more detail.





1 People with no siblings may have both positive and negative characteristics.

- ☐ According to popular theory, a person's birth order – whether they are the first, second or last child to be born in a family – has a large influence on determining their eventual personality.
- ☐ First-born children, it has been claimed, tend to be more dominant, perhaps going on to achieve more in life.
- ☐ Last-born children may become more self-centred and attached to their parents, tending to be 'always the baby' throughout their lives.
- ☐ Only children, who have neither brothers nor sisters, may become more self-confident due to the fact that they have their parents' undivided attention.
- ☐ This, however, may cause them to have difficulty in understanding others.

**Exercise 3 :** Look at the paragraph from the text. Find words in the text in bold that have a similar meaning to the words in the statement in question 1. Write the words.

According to popular theory, a person's birth order – whether they are the first, second or last child to be born in a family – has a large influence on determining their eventual personality. First-born children, it has been claimed, tend to be more dominant, perhaps going on to achieve more in life. Last-born children may become more self-centred and attached to their parents, tending to be 'always the baby' throughout their lives. **Only children, who have neither brothers nor sisters, may become more self-confident due to the fact that they have their parents' undivided attention. This, however, may cause them to have difficulty in understanding others.**

1 People with no siblings may have both positive and negative characteristics.

people with no siblings: \_\_\_\_\_  
positive characteristic: : \_\_\_\_\_  
negative characteristic: : \_\_\_\_\_

**Exercise 4 :** Read the information. Then look at the paragraph. Choose TRUE if the statement in question 1 agrees with the information in the text, choose FALSE if the statement contradicts the information.

After locating the relevant part of the Reading passage and looking for confirmation of your decision, you can choose your answer confidently.



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☐ TRUE

☐ FALSE

**Exercise 5 :Read the information. Then look at the statement in question 2. Is it True, False, or is the information Not Given? Choose the one sentence from the paragraph which you need to read in order to decide.**

As well as deciding whether a statement is true or false, you may also need to decide whether no information is given in a passage. This is more difficult because you have to read carefully and decide whether the information you need is there or not.

2 Dr Rhys Sheersmith's research shows that children often make friends with other children, rather than with their own siblings.

- ☐ Recent research, however, suggests that there is more to be discovered about sibling personalities.
- ☐ Dr Rhys Sheersmith, a child psychologist, raises the following issue.
- ☐ 'We know that birth order can affect personality, but what is also interesting is that two siblings brought up in exactly the same environment, by exactly the same parents, in more or less similar periods of time, may actually have completely different personalities.
- ☐ In fact, they may have very little in common.
- ☐ What we have found out is that one sibling may share a great deal more, in terms of personality, with another child from outside that family, who they never grew up with.'



**Exercise 6 : Answer the question. Choose TRUE if the statement agrees with the information in bold in the text, choose FALSE if the statement contradicts the information, or choose NOT GIVEN if there is no information about this.**

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2 Dr Rhys Sheersmith's research shows that children often make friends with other children, rather than with their own siblings.

- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

**Exercise 7 : Answer the questions. Choose TRUE if the statement agrees with the information in bold in the text, choose FALSE if the statement contradicts the information, or choose NOT GIVEN if there is no information about this.**

We would naturally expect children who were raised in the same household to have similar characteristics, but this is not the case. Dr Norman Kronstadt, another psychologist, claims that the adults that children are surrounded by as they are growing up may have a significant influence. 'In our research, we found that children are often assigned labels as they are growing up. It's the parents who do this, or sometimes the grandparents. For instance, one daughter may be labelled "the clever one" in the family. Her brother may be labelled "the difficult, naughty one". **However, this has little to do, really, with how clever the girl is or how naughty the boy is. Compared with other children from other families, they might not be especially clever or naughty, but they will have been given these roles by the adults around them.**'

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3 Norman Kronstadt believes that the labels children are given may fail to reflect their actual personalities.

- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

4 Ben Williams states that children's personalities stay the same throughout their childhood.

- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

**Exercise 8:** Read the information. Then answer the questions. Do the following statements agree with the information given in the text? Choose TRUE if the statement agrees with the information, choose FALSE if the statement contradicts the information, or choose NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this.

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- Quickly look at the passage to get an idea of what each paragraph is about.
  - Scan the passage to find the paragraph which relates to each statement.
  - Decide whether the statement is correct according to the information in the passage.
  - If there is not enough information in the passage to decide whether the statement is TRUE or FALSE, it must be NOT GIVEN.

### How birth order might affect a child's personality

In the last few decades of the 20th century, a considerable number of books were published in Europe and the USA on the theme of birth order, and how it affected personality. These books seemed to put forward a similar argument: that a child's brothers or sisters – their *siblings* – could have as much, or even more, influence on their development than their parents, and that this influence could have far-reaching consequences. Furthermore, the authors described the personalities of children in the same way: first-born children would naturally be leaders, 'middle' children would be the family diplomats, and the youngest in the family would be charming but often lazy and rebellious.

These books were popular, and not just with the public, but with certain companies who were interested in matching 'first-born, middle-born, and last-born' employees with particular roles. Since then, there has been a change of thinking, and those kinds of book are no longer at the top of bestseller lists. It is now felt that explanations and descriptions of siblings' behaviour were often simplistic and too general, and not really based on any hard evidence. Researchers are still interested in birth order and how it affects children's development, but are developing new theories.

The findings from a recent Canadian study suggest that the first-born sets the pattern for the siblings who follow. It found that if the child was easy-going and 'well-behaved', it would make the parents feel better about their own parenting skills. This positive feeling grew further if the first-born performed well academically and got good reports from teachers. Such an experience for parents meant that they would have the same expectations of the following children, and would actively encourage them to develop their abilities. However, as Dr Anna



Stevens, a senior child psychologist, states: 'My research shows that when the first-born child is "difficult" – when they seem to be angry, moody and upset all the time, or refuse to do what their parents tell them – the parents may consider themselves to be "bad parents". As a result, they may not make much of an effort with the next child, expecting them to demonstrate the same difficult behaviour.'

But how true is the idea that the personalities of first-born, middle-born and last-born children will be defined by their relationships with their siblings? Clara Solway, a child and family development specialist, makes an interesting point. 'We found that last-born children tend to be independent-thinkers and rather rebellious,' she says. 'This confirms our theory that their behaviour is not connected to their relationship with older siblings. It's more to do with the way their parents treat them.' She explains that because many parents are so familiar with the first-born, middle-child, youngest-child stereotypes, they *expect* their youngest to behave in a rebellious way. As a result, they act in a way that actually encourages that kind of behaviour to develop, even though they don't realise it.

Child therapist and author Edward Croft claims that our early experiences shape our self-image. 'We form ideas and beliefs about ourselves based on what we are good at, and how others treat us. It is common for a child to notice any differences in how parents treat them and their siblings. And if they believe that a brother or sister is the favourite, this will almost certainly create a sense of inferiority. And that kind of feeling often continues into adulthood.'

However, this does not automatically mean that the 'preferred' child will receive only benefits from their status. As Croft explains, 'Children who please their parents, and enjoy the attention they receive, sometimes fall into the habit of trying to please everyone. In later life, this can include people at work, management for example.' So how is this a bad thing? 'If you are constantly trying to please other people, you may not know what your own needs and desires are, and so become directionless in life.'

Recently it has been suggested that it is the size of the family, rather than the birth order, that has the greatest impact on individual development, for many different reasons. Michael DeHara, a senior researcher at the City Institute of Societal Development, points out that 'In large families, with both parents working, older siblings often find themselves taking on responsibilities for taking care of the younger ones.' There's considerable evidence, he claims, to show that siblings who are caregivers and teachers in their family become skilled at reading and communication, and gain confidence as a result. However, it is also the case that such responsibility at an early age can increase their levels of anxiety if they feel under pressure.

One other interesting area of research is connected to acquiring new vocabulary. Researchers have for a long time pointed out that first-born children are quick to learn and use new language, and will acquire, for example, 100 words several months earlier than their siblings. The traditional view was that the vocabulary of younger children was poorer because their parents spent less time interacting with them. However, a Norwegian study has just disproved this idea. Carried out over fifteen years, the study has shown that younger children do catch up, and eventually acquire the same number of words as older siblings. The reason for this is that the older siblings often take on the role of teacher, and the younger children learn entire phrases just by listening to and copying them.

- 1 Authors writing in Europe and the USA towards the end of the 20th century had very different opinions about the impact of birth order on personality.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 2 Companies in the late 20th century advertised for first-born children to apply for particular posts.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 3 A Canadian study showed that when first-born children did well in school, their parents' confidence increased.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 4 Dr Anna Stevens advised parents to give second-born children extra support.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 5 Clara Solway was surprised by the results of her study into the behaviour of last-born children.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 6 Edward Croft's research shows that children develop a dislike of siblings who their parents seem to prefer.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 7 Children who try hard to please parents will probably be more successful later on in life.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 8 Older children in larger families can become stressed when they have to take care of younger siblings.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN
- 9 A Norwegian study suggests that children who are born second are in the end likely to have an equally good vocabulary as their older sibling.
- ☐ TRUE
- ☐ FALSE
- ☐ NOT GIVEN