

Part 3: Exam practice

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the following text?

Write:

TRUE	if the text confirms the statement
FALSE	if the text confirms the opposite of the statement
NOT GIVEN	if it is impossible to know from the text

Statement	Your answer:
On average, women marry men who are older than them.	
Married couples in their forties are more likely to divorce than others.	
Women often stay at home while men go out to work.	
People in their thirties usually have not made much money yet.	
People's experiences in their previous relationships can damage their current relationships.	
People who marry in their thirties are pressured by their families to have children quickly.	

The trend is to get married later in life, but Andrew G. Marshall argues that the earlier you commit, the greater your chances of a long, happy partnership.

Over the past 35 years we have been waiting longer before settling down. According to the Office for National Statistics, men are getting married for the first time seven years later and women six years later. This means that the average man is aged 32 when he asks 'Will you marry me?' and the average woman is 29 when she says 'Yes'. But is this trend towards the thirty-something marriage making us happier and more satisfied? And when it comes to the forty-something crunch – the most common age for divorce – who is most vulnerable: those who took the plunge early at twenty-something or the ones who waited until thirty-something?

When couples seek my help as a marital therapist, I start by asking for the history of their relationship. People who married in their twenties often report tough times at the beginning: living with in-laws, financial problems or moving around the country as one partner climbed the career ladder. Also, couples who marry relatively early can grow apart, especially when one partner has been successful at work, travelled, met new people and grown in confidence while the other has been home-based.

However, the greatest threat to the twenty-something marriage is reaching 40 and wondering if the grass could be greener elsewhere. This is particularly dangerous when someone who married his or her first love starts fantasising about what he or she has missed. The temptation to have an affair can be overwhelming and very damaging. By contrast, the thirty-something marriage seems to sidestep these problems. At this age people are more established in careers and can start a relationship on a firm financial footing. They have a clearer idea of who they are and what they need from a relationship. When these couples reach their forties, they are less likely to be nostalgic or curious about the single life.

Yet, when faced with forty-something couples in crisis, I always feel more optimistic about the outcome for those who married in their twenties than those who married in their thirties. Why should this be? If you marry later, you are more likely to bring old baggage into your relationship. In some cases, I help couples to unravel the influence of someone from maybe two or three relationships back. For example, to someone who once had a suspicious partner – forever quizzing them about their movements – an innocent inquiry such as 'What time will you be back?' can sound aggressive.

Another problem of marrying later is higher expectations. This is because one of the best ways of recovering from a failed relationship and starting to look again is to tell yourself: 'I deserve better', or 'Next time I'll meet Mr or Miss Right'. There is nothing wrong with this strategy. But unfortunately, if the next relationship does not deliver, the bitterness becomes that bit greater and the desire for perfection that bit stronger.

The final issue about getting married at thirty-something, particularly your late thirties, is the need to start a family almost immediately. Many couples have no time to get to know each other properly or put down solid roots together. If a relationship has been built on long weekend lie-ins and brunches, the demands of small children can be a shock. This sense of isolation is worse if the grandparents are correspondingly older, too, and not fit enough to help.

Although the ultimate deciding factor for the success of a relationship is the character, determination and generosity of each partner (and that is not determined by age), my advice is always to seize the day and commit.