5.3 READING and VOCABULARY — So you want to be an astronaut?

I can understand specific detail in an article.

1 Match words/phrases 1–8 with definitions a–h.

1 [b] attend
2 [ ] space camp
3 [ ] pilot's licence
4 [ ] training programme
5 [ ] 20/20 vision
6 [ ] weightless
7 [ ] mission
8 [ ] simulate

a the ability to see clearly, without glasses
b be present at (an event)
c an important job that involves travelling somewhere
d the qualification you need to fly a plane
e replicate the appearance or character of something
f a course of studying practical skills
g having little weight because there is no gravity, e.g. in space or under water
h a place where you stay in the summer and learn about space

2 Read the article. Put the topics a–f in the order they are mentioned.

a [ ] professional requirements
b [ ] how difficult it is
c [ ] work on the ground
d [ ] training
e [ ] physical requirements
f [ ] academic requirements

3 Read the article again. Choose the correct answers.

1 Which of the following do you need to become an astronaut?
a academic qualifications
b physical requirements
c work experience
d all three of the above

2 What's the minimum academic requirement to become an astronaut?
a a PhD
b a university degree
c a school diploma
d a pilot's licence

3 Why is it important to be very healthy?
a Because it would be a big problem if you got ill in space.
b So you can cope with the training.
c Because you have to be strong to fly a spacecraft.
d So you weigh less on the spacecraft.

4 What happens after you graduate as an astronaut candidate?
a You go straight on to a space mission.
b You do several years' more training.
c You do several weeks' more training.
d You take an exam.

So you want to be an astronaut?

Becoming an astronaut isn't easy. If you want to go into space one day, you'll have to spend many years training, studying and becoming physically fit and that's just the beginning. Only a small number of people who apply will successfully become astronauts.

The first step is getting a university qualification. NASA requires at least a first degree in Engineering, Science or Maths. But if you really want to succeed, you'll get a Master's or even a PhD. Attending space camp when you're a teenager helps too.

That's only the start. There are other requirements. You also need at least three years' professional experience in something similar (e.g. flying a plane with a pilot's licence). Alternatively, NASA also look for people who have worked as teachers.

You also need to be physically fit, with 20/20 vision, normal blood pressure and be between 157 and 190.5 cm tall. It's important that you're healthy, because if you became ill in space, it would be very expensive to bring you home for a medical emergency.

If you are selected, you'll begin a two-year training programme as an 'astronaut candidate'. You spend your time scuba diving, learning Russian, training in a weightless environment and many other things. Part of this training involves going up in the 'vomit comet', a special aeroplane which flies up and down to simulate weightlessness (and often makes people sick!).

If there are no problems, it will be many years before you are chosen to go on a mission. During this time, you'll do more training and work on the ground, helping with missions already out in space. Becoming an astronaut takes a lot of hard work, patience and determination, but if you're lucky, you'll become one of the few people to see Earth from space!

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