

VSTEP READING PRACTICE TEST 2

Time allotted: 60 minutes

Number of questions: 40

Directions: In this section of the test, you will read FOUR different passages, each followed by 10 questions about it. For questions 1-40, you are to choose the best answer A, B, C, or D to each question. Answer all questions following a passage on the basis of what is stated or implied in that passage.

You have 60 minutes to answer all the questions.

PASSAGE 1 - QUESTIONS 1 - 10

No one travels alone to the hottest place on Earth. You need, for starters, a driver and a Jeep stocked with water and four days of nonperishable food. There are no places to lodge or dine in this desert, so you'll need space for beds and someone who knows how to cook. And finally, because a journey like this costs many thousands of dollars, you'll need some fellow travelers to split the bill - the sort of people who like to fry themselves on vacation.

My father is the easiest recruit. Dad, who naps best roasting in the afternoon sun, is a lover of extreme heat. He's also an extreme traveler, drawn to the fringes of places, all the countries where no one vacations. From my father, I've inherited both tendencies: I'm known for getting bright pink sunburns, and also for stalking the edges of maps. The Danakil desert lies on the fringes of several countries, which claim a sliver of this sweltering, low-lying desert, named the cruelest place on earth. I don't have to mention this to my father - not the endless salt flats, lakes the bright color of mouthwash, or camels by the thousands. When dad starts calling this desert "the frying pan", I know he's in.

We enlist three more people and in Mekele, the starting place for our voyage, we merge with four others. We fill five Jeeps and have nothing in common but a love of travel, and a willingness to sweat for it. The Jeeps plunge down mountains for hours. The heat, of course, is brutal. I remind myself this is just a warm-up. The real heat won't strike until we reach the sizzling edge of the frying pan, an uninhabited region, roughly 130 meters below sea level, called Dallol, which holds the record for the highest average annual temperature: 94 degrees.

As we continue, sand gives way to salt, and soon we're in a landscape of white crystals glinting in the fresh morning light. The ground is miraculously flat. Our driver, who has been battling fine sand, cannot resist the urge to go for it. We surge ahead of the other cars in what looks like a Jeep race across some frozen lake. Suddenly, in the pure white expanse, a huge brown mound appears. We're ordered by our guides to find a full liter of bottled water, and to bring it with us up the lumpy brown mountain.

At the summit, I find my travel mates standing in a kind of silent daydream. Astonished, they crouch down beside pale green toadstools - mineral formations whose glossy tabletops are smooth as marble. The hottest place on earth is an assault of color: yellow and deep rust, pea green and purple. Some of the formations look like coral reefs, others like egg shells, air-blown from the hot breath of the earth below. Everyone wanders off alone, crunching over the earth, heads down, staring at the ground and shaking their heads.

I know the ground is hot - you can even hear water boiling underground. Everywhere we step, things break and splinter. Just when I work up the nerve to step with force, the purple ground collapses beneath my foot. The sneaker I pull back out is covered in bright yellow stuff. You start to think: we

really shouldn't be here. This desert wasn't built to handle a human intrusion, and the human body certainly wasn't built to handle this desert.

1. What is NOT a thing to prepare for the desert trip?
 - A. food and water
 - B. a dining table
 - C. a place for sleep
 - D. a Jeep
2. Which of the following does the author agree with?
 - A. Planning for a trip in the desert is straightforward.
 - B. High temperatures can cause problems for travelers.
 - C. Travelling individually in the desert is unwise.
 - D. The expense of desert travel puts many people off.
3. What does the writer say about her father?
 - A. He's passed on his love of travelling in remote places to his daughter.
 - B. He misses having company when he goes to unusual places.
 - C. He prefers to research places for himself than listen to others.
 - D. He likes to plan every detail of a journey by studying maps.
4. How many people were there on the trip?
 - A. 2
 - B. 3
 - C. 4
 - D. 9
5. The word 'it' highlighted in paragraph 3 refers to -----.
 - A. heat
 - B. willingness
 - C. travel
 - D. voyage
6. Why does the author mention "**I remind myself this is just a warm-up**" in paragraph 3?
 - A. To say that the writer is still getting to know her fellow travelers.
 - B. To show that the real challenge of the journey is still ahead of them
 - C. To say that they have a long way to go before they reach their destination
 - D. To say that the drivers are still learning how to find their way in the mountains
7. What does the writer compare the landscape to in paragraph 4?
 - A. A beach
 - B. Mud
 - C. Ice
 - D. Dust
8. What is mentioned about the fellow travelers in paragraph 5?
 - A. They find it difficult to look at the brightness of the colors.
 - B. They are disappointed by some of the things they see.
 - C. Their surroundings are impossible to make sense of.
 - D. They are unable to take their eyes off the scene in front of them.

9. How does the writer feel as she is walking around on her own?

- A. Shocked by the fact that the ground is so soft
- B. Afraid that she might never find her way out of the place
- C. Worried that she is going to hurt herself
- D. Uncertain about whether she is doing the right thing

10. What is the purpose of the passage?

- A. To describe difficulties people might have on a desert trip
- B. To report a journey to the hottest place on earth
- C. To give advantages of travelling with others to a desert
- D. To describe beautiful desert landscapes.

PASSAGE 2 - QUESTIONS 11 - 20

Volcanoes are both creators and destroyers. They can shape lands and cultures, but can also cause great destruction and loss of life. Two of the best-known examples are found at opposite ends of the world, separated by the Pacific Ring of Fire.

Japan's Sacred Summit

Located in the center of Japan, Mount Fuji is a sacred site. Japan's native religion, Shintoism, considers Fuji a holy place. Other people believe the mountain and its waters have the power to make a sick person well. For many, climbing Fuji is also a rite of passage. Some do it as part of a religious journey; for others, it is a test of strength. Whatever their reason, reaching the top in order to stand on Fuji's summit at sunrise is a must for many Japanese - and every July and August, almost 400,000 people attempt to do so.

Fuji is more than a sacred site and tourist destination, however. It is also an active volcano around which four million people have settled, and sits just 112 kilometers (70 miles) from the crowded streets of Tokyo. The last time Fuji exploded, in 1707, it sent out a cloud of ash that covered the capital city and darkened the skies for weeks. [A]

Today, new data have some volcanologists concerned that Fuji may soon erupt again. According to Motoo Ueda and his associates at the National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention, there has been an increase in activity under Fuji recently, which may be caused by low-frequency earthquakes. Understanding what causes these quakes may help scientists predict when Fuji, the largest of Japan's 86 active volcanoes, will come back to life. In the meantime, locals living near Fuji hold special festivals each year to offer gifts to the goddess of the volcano - as they have for generations - so that she will not erupt and destroy the land and its people below.

Mexico's Smoking Mountain

Halfway across the globe from Fuji, El Popo - one of the world's tallest and most dangerous active volcanoes - stands just 60 kilometers (37 miles) southeast of Mexico City. Although the volcano has erupted many times over the centuries, scientists believe its last great eruption occurred around 820 A.D. In recent years, however, El Popo has been threatening to explode once more; in December 2000; almost 26000 people were evacuated when it started to send out ash and smoke. As with all active volcanoes, the question is not if it will erupt again (an eruption is inevitable); the question is when it will happen. [B]

"Every volcano works in a different way," explains Carlos Valdés González, a scientist who monitors El Popo. "What we're trying to learn here are the symptoms signaling that El Popo will

erupt." These include earthquakes, or any sign that the mountain's surface is changing or expanding. The hope is that scientists will be able to warn people in the surrounding areas so they have enough time to escape. A powerful eruption could displace over 20 million people - people whose lives can be saved if the warning is delivered early enough. [C]

For many people living near El Popo-especially the farmers - **abandoning** their land is unthinkable. As anyone who farms near a volcano knows, the world's richest soils are volcanic. They produce bananas and coffee in Central America, fine wines in California, and enormous amounts of rice in Indonesia. [D]

People who live near El Popo consider it as a god, a mountain, and a human all at the same time and present their offerings, asking the volcano to protect and provide for one more season.

11. What is paragraph 2 mainly about?
 - A. How Mount Fuji became an important religious site
 - B. The healing properties of Mount Fuji
 - C. Reasons people climb Mount Fuji
 - D. The visitors to Mount Fuji
12. What is NOT a reason for people who climb Mount Fuji?
 - A. Religion
 - B. Testing their health
 - C. Finding a cure for a disease
 - D. Seeing the sunset
13. Which of these statements about Mount Fuji is NOT true?
 - A. It is the largest volcano in Japan.
 - B. Scientists believe it may erupt soon.
 - C. It has erupted recently.
 - D. Locals have traditions concerning the mountain.
14. How can scientists date the last great eruption of El Popo?
 - A. By talking to people who experienced the event
 - B. From videos of the eruption
 - C. From investigating geological evidence
 - D. From descriptions in religious books
15. In paragraph 6, the word "**symptoms**" could be replaced with -----.
 - A. earthquakes
 - B. signs
 - C. sounds
 - D. lessons
16. What was the reason for the evacuation from El Popo in 2000?
 - A. Ash and smoke were seen coming from the mountain.
 - B. A large earthquake was felt.
 - C. A change in the mountain's surface was noticed.
 - D. A powerful eruption took place.
17. Which statement is true about both Mount Fuji and El Popo?
 - A. They have both erupted recently.
 - B. They are both less than 100 kilometers from a very large city.
 - C. Locals present gifts to both volcanoes for protection.

D. They both provide rich soil used for producing coffee.

18. The word “**abandoning**” in paragraph 7 is closest in meaning to -----.

- A. leaving
- B. reaching
- C. cultivating
- D. farming

19. In which space marked [A], [B], [C], and [D] in the passage will the following sentence fit?
For this reason, people will stay on their land, even if they face danger.

- A. [A]
- B. [B]
- C. [C]
- D. [D]

20. Which of the following would be the best title for this passage?

- A. Volcanoes as religious sites
- B. Destructive volcanoes
- C. Two most famous volcanoes worldwide
- D. Mount Fuji and El Popo - examples of active volcanoes

PASSAGE 3 - QUESTIONS 21 - 30

It's 1:45 a.m., and 21-year-old Thomas Murphy is burning the midnight oil, studying for an important engineering exam he has at 2:00 in the afternoon later today. To stay awake and focused, he's had two cups of coffee in the last three hours and is now **downing** a popular energy drink - one that has two to three times the amount of caffeine as a similar sized can of soda. Many students like Murphy, as well as marathon runners, airline pilots, and long distance travelers, owe their energy - and sometimes their efficiency - to one of humankind's oldest stimulants: caffeine. [A]

The power to counter physical fatigue and increase alertness is part of the reason caffeine ranks as the world's most popular mood-altering drug. It is found not only in sodas, energy drinks, coffee, and tea, but also in diet pills, pain relievers (like aspirin), and chocolate bars. Many societies around the world have also created entire rituals around the use of caffeine: afternoon tea in the U K., the cafe culture of France, the tea ceremony in Japan, and the morning cup of coffee or tea that in many cultures marks the start of the day.

Caffeine is present in many of the foods or drinks we consume, but is it really good for us? Charles Czeisler, a scientist and sleep expert at Harvard Medical School, believes that caffeine causes us to lose sleep, **which** he says is unhealthy. "Without adequate sleep - the typical eight hours - the human body will not function at its best, physically, mentally, or emotionally." Too often, Czeisler says, we consume caffeine to stay awake, which later makes it impossible for us to get the rest we need.

Health risks have also been tied to caffeine consumption. Over the years, studies have attributed higher rates of certain types of cancer and bone disease to caffeine consumption. To date, however, there is no proof that caffeine actually causes these diseases. [B]

A number of scientists, including Roland Griffiths, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in the U.S believe that regular caffeine use causes physical dependence. Heavy caffeine users, Griffiths says, exhibit similar behaviors: Their moods fluctuate from high to low; they get

mild to severe headaches; or they feel tired or sad when they can't have a coffee, a soft drink, an energy drink, or a cup of tea. To minimize or stop these feelings, users must consume caffeine - a behavior Griffiths says is a characteristic of drug addiction.

Despite these concerns, the general opinion in the scientific community is that caffeine is not dangerous when consumed moderately - for example, having one or two small cups of coffee (about 300 milligrams of caffeine) per day. Furthermore, a lot of current research contradicts long-held negative beliefs about caffeine, and suggests that it may, in fact, have health benefits. For instance, studies have shown that caffeine can help ease muscle pain. Because it is a stimulant, caffeine can also help improve one's mood. Research has also shown that some caffeinated drinks - specifically certain teas – have disease-fighting chemicals that can help the body fight a number of illnesses, including certain types of cancer. [C]

Moreover, despite its nearly universal use, caffeine has rarely been abused. "With caffeine, overuse tends to stop itself," says Jack Bergman, a specialist at Harvard Medical School. If you consume too much, "you get uncomfortable, and you don't want to continue." [D]

21. What is the passage mainly about?
 - A. The popularity of coffee
 - B. The effects of caffeine on the body
 - C. Healthy versus unhealthy caffeine products
 - D. The dangers of caffeine intake

22. The word “**downing**” highlighted in paragraph 1 could be replaced with -----.
 - A. holding
 - B. waking
 - C. decreasing
 - D. drinking

23. Which group do NOT use caffeine regularly?
 - A. marathon runners
 - B. airline pilots
 - C. students
 - D. city bus travelers

24. The word “**which**” in paragraph 3 refers to -----.
 - A. adequate sleep
 - B. lack of sleep
 - C. food containing caffeine
 - D. consuming caffeine

25. Which statement would sleep expert Charles Czeisler probably agree with?
 - A. It's a good idea to consume caffeine if you want to maintain your energy.
 - B. Regular consumption of caffeine will make it difficult for you to get enough rest.
 - C. How caffeine affects your sleep depends on the type of caffeine you consume.
 - D. Caffeine can help you get an adequate amount of sleep if consumed in moderation.

26. Which of the following is NOT listed as a possible side effect of drinking caffeine?
 - A. addiction
 - B. mood changes
 - C. painful headaches

D. muscle inflammation

27. What best paraphrases the following sentence in paragraph 7?

Moreover, despite its nearly universal use, caffeine has rarely been abused.

- A. Even though caffeine is consumed almost the world over, there aren't many instances of misuse.
- B. Even though caffeine is often misused, it is consumed almost the world over.
- C. Despite caffeine's popularity, addiction isn't a problem.
- D. Caffeine is used all over the world, so it is commonly misused.

28 In which space marked [A], [B], [C], and [D] in the passage will the following sentence fit?

Many say they couldn't live without it.

- A. [A]
- B. [B]
- C. [C]
- D. [D]

29. Which statement do most scientists agree with?

- A. Caffeine causes loss of sleep.
- B. Caffeine is beneficial in moderate use.
- C. Caffeine leads to certain types of cancer and bone disease.
- D. Caffeine leads to severe headaches.

30. The author's attitude toward caffeine can be best described as -----.

- A. skeptical
- B. positive
- C. negative
- D. critical

PASSAGE 4 - QUESTIONS 31 - 40

The human body contains muscle, a soft tissue made of protein filaments. The filaments move and flex in different ways to make the muscles contract and expand, supporting the body and producing motion. There are two primary types of muscle - skeletal ("voluntary") muscle and smooth ("involuntary") muscle. While the differences between skeletal muscle and smooth muscle are taught in elementary schools around the world, few of us were taught the differences between the two types of skeletal muscles: slow-twitch muscles and fast-twitch muscles. Slow-twitch and fast-twitch muscles are named for the relative speeds at which they **twitch**, or contract. The **two types** of muscle have different structures, compositions, actions, and functions and work together to keep our bodies in motion.

Slow-twitch muscles, officially called Type I muscles, are the muscles that provide endurance. They conduct oxygen and contain blood capillaries that give them a red color, so they are sometimes referred to as "red muscles." Slow-twitch muscles do not contract with significant force, but this is offset by the fact that they can contract for longer periods of time. Slow-twitch muscles process fats and carbohydrates to use as fuel for aerobic activity, carrying oxygen for endurance activities, such as long-distance running and cycling.

Fast-twitch muscles, officially called Type II muscles, are the muscles that provide strength and speed. There are two subtypes of fast-twitch muscles. Type IIa muscles are called intermediate fast-twitch muscles, and perform both aerobic and **anaerobic** functions equally. Type IIb muscles are what are traditionally thought of as fast-twitch muscles. Fast-twitch muscles

do not conduct oxygen, and are not red in color but white. They perform anaerobic activity, not aerobic, but contract quickly and forcefully. Fast-twitch muscles are the muscles that build bulk through weightlifting and other use because of the strength of contraction, and are useful in activities requiring speed and force, such as sprinting.

In general, the muscle fibers in our skeletal muscles are divided evenly between slow-twitch and fast-twitch muscles, but each individual's specific mix of types of muscles is determined genetically. It may be true that we are "born runners," or weightlifters, or swimmers because of our skeletal and muscle structures. However, humans have the ability to change our bodies and prevail over genetics by altering which form of muscle is prominent in our bodies. The more we work one of the two types, the more predominant that type will become. This can be seen in professional and elite athletes, who have muscle structures that reflect the different demands of their particular sports. For example, sprinters' bodies and long-distance runners' bodies reflect the fact that sprinters use fast-twitch muscles more predominately and long-distance runners use slow-twitch muscles more predominately. This change does not happen overnight, however, and is the result of years of specific and intentional training.

This is not to say that elite athletes only focus on one type of muscle and ignore the other type. Even endurance athletes need well-developed fast-twitch muscles, and sprint and weight athletes need well-developed slow-twitch muscles. Many athletes focus on working both types of muscles specifically, through different forms of athletic training, to maintain balance and support for their sports. They also support the development of balanced muscle types through diet, as the two types of muscle are fueled by different nutrients.

31. What is the passage mainly about?

- A. The two main types of muscle are skeletal and smooth.
- B. Skeletal and smooth muscles are known as Type I and Type II muscles, respectively.
- C. The two types of skeletal muscles, slow-twitch and fast-twitch, have different functions and uses.
- D. Slow-twitch and fast-twitch muscles can be trained with different exercises.

32. The word “**twitch**” highlighted in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to -----.

- A. shake
- B. freeze
- C. run
- D. fiber

33. The phrase “**two types**” in paragraph 1 refers to -----.

- A. smooth and skeletal
- B. voluntary and involuntary
- C. Type IIa and Type IIb
- D. slow-twitch and fast-twitch

34. Why does the author mention the length of contractions in paragraph 2?

- A. To explain how slow-twitch muscles provide endurance
- B. To give evidence that slow-twitch muscles are red
- C. To show why capillaries carry oxygen
- D. To describe why strength training is necessary

35. The word “**anaerobic**” in paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to -----.

- A. cardio
- B. using oxygen
- C. not using oxygen
- D. fast

36. Which can be inferred about the color of fast-twitch muscles?

- A. The color of fast-twitch muscles is determined by the strength of their contractions.
- B. The color of fast-twitch muscles varies from person to person.
- C. The color of fast-twitch muscles is red.
- D. The color of fast-twitch muscles is determined by their not carrying oxygen.

37. Sprinters use more fast-twitch muscles than slow-twitch muscles because -----.

- A. sprinting involves endurance more than speed and strength
- B. sprinting involves speed and strength more than endurance
- C. sprinters are born with more fast-twitch muscles
- D. sprinters use more oxygen than long-distance runners

38. According to the passage, who probably use fast-twitch muscles the most?

- A. Long distance runners
- B. Weightlifters
- C. Swimmers
- D. Cyclists

39. Which is NOT true about fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles?

- A. Each person has a mix of slow-twitch and fast-twitch muscles.
- B. A person can change the mix of fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles in the body.
- C. Athletes can train both fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles.
- D. Working one type of muscle strengthens that type of muscle.

40. The passage implies that -----.

- A. athletes have more muscles than non-athletes
- B. there is a connection between athletic performance and medicine
- C. athletes cannot train for their sports if they do not understand the differences between fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles
- D. people can change which form of muscle is prevalent in their bodies with enough work.

THIS IS THE END OF READING PRACTICE TEST 2.