IELTS Reading
Academic

Test 2

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READING PASSAGE 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 1–13, which are based on Reading Passage 1 below.

Nudge Theory

We might assume that people make sensible, carefully considered choices at all times, but the truth is that humans don't always act in their own self-interest, or behave in perfectly rational ways. People make countless "snap decisions" or "impulse buys" on a daily basis, many of which may not be particularly smart choices. But what drives us to do this when just a few minutes' thought could prevent us from making unwise decisions?

Two different modes of information processing can drive people's behaviour. Humans certainly possess the ability to consider various options and draw conclusions. This involves consciously evaluating data and considering how the information fits in with their needs and desires. This type of cognitive reasoning should help us to avoid making poor judgements. To illustrate, making a supermarket shopping list means we are less likely to be tempted into wasting money on unnecessary items. However, there are situations in which this type of information processing has less influence on our actions.

Evidence suggests that our capacity for rational information processing is limited. Once the information required to make judgements becomes too complex or involves too much time to process, we are less likely to apply cognitive reasoning. This may result in no action being taken at all. For instance, making important financial decisions such as saving for retirement can seem incredibly complicated, which is why many people put it off. This is not because we lack the necessary information to make a choice. It is due to the fact that the decision requires the analysis of so many variables, and, consequently, we feel overwhelmed. And if we do make a decision, it may well be driven by a different type of information processing.

When people make choices while feeling under pressure or overwhelmed, their decisions are more likely to be made instantly at the subconscious level. In these circumstances, research has shown that we are heavily influenced by our external environment. If we're hungry, we're more likely to accept an offer of a biscuit even when we're trying to cut down on sugary snacks. Our impulsive desire for instant gratification takes priority over our rational understanding of healthy eating. Of course, reaching for the occasional biscuit isn't the end of the world, but it illustrates the fact that impulsive behaviour can hinder our ability to make the best decisions for our wellbeing.

But can our decision-making patterns be improved? Supporters of nudge theory certainly believe so. Proponents of this theory seek to harness the power of instant, subconscious processing in positive ways. Subconscious processing involves making quick decisions without cognitive reasoning, meaning we select the option requiring the least effort. According to nudge theory, in the right circumstances, external cues can actually help people automatically adopt the best course of action. By making the sensible option the easiest to select, people will hopefully choose it without even thinking.

Governments are making increasing use of nudge theory to influence citizens' behaviour in areas including energy consumption, healthy eating and financial planning. The key principle is that, by controlling the way various options are presented, people can be guided towards certain desirable actions.

One common way for governments to influence people's behaviour is by setting the target behaviour as the default option. As picking an alternative requires effort, most people naturally stick to the default option unless they feel strongly opposed to it. For instance, in many countries citizens are required to enrol if they wish to participate in organ donation programmes. In such countries, organ donation rates are low since people rarely make the effort to sign up. Several countries have addressed this by changing the default option to automatic registration on organ-donation programmes. Citizens are of course free to opt out, but they must make the effort to do so. Studies have shown that few people decide to leave the programme. This suggests that low registration rates in "opt in" countries are largely due to people not making the effort to sign up, rather than because of any objections to organ donation.

Behavioural nudges can also be applied by altering external cues. Research has shown that highlighting a particular option in comparison to others increases the likelihood that it will be selected. Thus, displaying healthier food items in prominent and easily accessible places in shops will make it more likely that customers will buy them. Similarly,

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people are thought to be influenced by other people's behaviour. If they see other people donating money to a charity collection, they will usually follow this example and do the same.

It is hard to argue against any measures designed with society's best interests in mind. Nevertheless, concerns have been expressed about nudge theory's manipulative nature. Critics argue that it potentially interferes with people's civil liberties, especially if alternatives to the intended behaviour are made virtually impossible to access. Ethical concerns aside, some people have questioned whether nudges lead to long-lasting changes. While there is compelling evidence that people can be tempted into making certain choices in an instant, studies have yet to prove that they will continue to adopt that behaviour permanently.

Questions 1–8
Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in Reading Passage 1?
In boxes 1–8, write:

YES	*If the statement agrees with the claims of the writer*
NO	*If the statement contradicts the claims of the writer*
NOT GIVEN	*If it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this*

1 People often overestimate how much time is needed to make sensible decisions. ☐

2 Cognitive information processing is associated with careful deliberation. ☐

3 Insufficient information is the main reason why people postpone decision making. ☐

4 Subconscious information processing results in quick responses. ☐

5 Nudge theory encourages people to adopt cognitive reasoning. ☐

6 Low organ-donation rates are mainly due to ethical concerns. ☐

7 Defaults have been found to be more influential on people's decisions than external cues. ☐

8 Evidence supporting nudge theory mainly focuses on its short-term effects. ☐

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Questions 9–12
Complete the summary using the list of words or phrases, A–I, below.
*Write the correct word, **A–I**, in gaps 9–12.*

Understanding Nudge Theory

We are less likely to make **(9)**_____ when we feel stressed or confused. When our decisions are made using **(10)**_____, we generally prioritise immediate rewards over ultimate aims. However, altering the way "nudges" are presented to people can change this. For instance, there has been a clear **(11)**_____ in organ-donor registrations in countries where citizens have to take action to opt out of the programme. Even so, there is doubt concerning the **(12)**_____ of nudge theory.

A	long-term impact	**B**	logical decisions	**C**	behavioural nudges
D	statistical evidence	**E**	increase	**F**	subconscious processing
G	fall	**H**	cognitive reasoning	**I**	defaults

Question 13
What is the writer's purpose in Reading Passage 1?
Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.
*Write the correct letter **A–D** in the answer box below.*

A To argue that people often overestimate how much time is needed to make sensible decisions

B To show that cognitive information processing is associated with careful deliberation

C To analyse whether insufficient information is the main reason why people postpone decision making

D To defend the idea that subconscious information processing results in quick responses

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READING PASSAGE 2

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 14–27, which are based on Reading Passage 2 below.

Motoring Trends

The 1950s saw significant economic expansion in many developed countries. Several governments launched ambitious infrastructure programmes, including substantial investment in road networks intended to serve the needs of the growing urban and suburban communities. At the same time, manufacturing innovations enabled companies to produce large quantities of goods at more affordable prices. This meant that more households could buy products that had previously been beyond their means. In particular, car ownership became something that more people could finally achieve, and it became both attainable and desirable. Cars became a practical necessity, enabling more people to reach the growing employment opportunities in cities. They also opened up new leisure possibilities, leading to growth in the tourism sector. Thus, cars have played a key role in economic development in the second half of the twentieth century.

Motoring trends attract considerable research interest. Academics in various fields analyse car sales to forecast potential changes in car-ownership rates. Much like housing trends, vehicle-usage patterns can reveal valuable insights into how lifestyles are changing. Likewise, car-ownership trends may reflect people's attitudes to consumption and social status. They can also be a useful indicator of a country's economic conditions, demographics and population distributions. In a wider sense, policy makers have to understand the implications of changing transportation trends. This helps governments to decide whether to invest more in roads, public transport or cycling routes, and helps climate scientists to make vital forecasts about air-pollution levels.

Studies on motoring trends in developed countries indicate that car ownership is currently in decline. Car sales are falling, and analysts have also found evidence that car usage is decreasing. Compared to previous decades, fewer people are applying for driving licences or taking driving tests. Motorists are also driving shorter distances, and cars are seemingly becoming less popular in many developed nations including Germany, the UK and the USA. Is this the death of the motor car?

Different models have been used to examine motoring trends. One approach focuses on the impact of economic conditions. When there are significant changes in a country's gross domestic product (GDP), fewer people may be able to afford major purchases such as a car. This GDP-based approach could explain why car ownership has risen in emerging economies such as India and Russia. Viewed from this perspective, the current falls in car usage in countries such as the UK or Germany should be regarded as temporary decreases rather than permanent downward trends. This "interrupted growth" will end once the economy improves. Provided this happens, car usage and car sales will rise.

However, many analysts doubt that the motor industry is destined for further growth as the car market may have become saturated. In economics, market saturation occurs when demand for a product has stopped increasing: anyone who has the ability and intention to buy the product has already done so, therefore the market can no longer attract new customers. To illustrate, a recent study investigated car-ownership patterns in American households, and found that, on average, there were more cars per household than drivers. This means that many households already have more cars than they actually need. Therefore, it is probable that car usage will remain constant in the coming years, but new consumers are unlikely to enter the market.

Some experts have gone further and support the "peak car" hypothesis. This hypothesis states that vehicle usage has already reached its maximum, and will therefore gradually and permanently decline. "Peak car" isn't linked to an ability to supply the needs of the motor industry. Rather, it is concerned with a perceived decline in demand for cars as societies cease to be organised around motor travel. According to this theory, there has been, or will soon be, a fundamental shift in the role of cars in society.

Supporters of the peak car theory argue that, as nations develop, people will rely less on car travel. Consequently, the distance travelled in private cars will decrease, as will car-ownership rates. Research suggests that most people are unwilling to travel more than an hour on a single journey per day. This is known as people's "travel budget". Recent studies have found no noticeable change in the amount of time people are prepared to spend travelling to complete their daily tasks. However, improvements in technology, public transport and local amenities mean that it's becoming increasingly possible to meet one's needs without

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spending an hour in a car. Furthermore, the growth in car-sharing smartphone apps means that people no longer view cars as desirable objects to own, but as something to be hired instantly when needed for short journeys.

Personal convenience is not the only factor influencing people's attitudes to cars. Environmental concerns are undoubtedly affecting the automotive sector. Growing awareness of the need to reduce carbon emissions has influenced legislation in many countries, which has led to greater commitment to public transport. Motorists are also opting for car models which are thought to be more environmentally friendly, as demonstrated by the growth of electric- and hybrid-car sales in recent years.

While the world may not be ready to give up cars entirely, our love affair with them is fading.

Questions 14 and 15
*Chose **TWO** letters, A–E. Write the correct letter A–E in answer boxes 14–15.*

*The list below gives some reasons why the middle of the twentieth century was an important time for economic growth in many countries. Which **TWO** of these reasons are mentioned by the writer of the text?*

A Rural areas received financial support from governments. ☐ **14**

B The price of consumer goods fell significantly. ☐ **15**

C The number of people entering the job market increased.

D The travel and tourism industry developed.

E The quality of consumer goods improved.

Questions 16–18
*Chose **TWO** letters, A–F. Write the correct letter A–F in answer boxes 16–18.*

*The list below gives some reasons why experts analyse motoring trends. Which **THREE** of these reasons are mentioned by the writer of the text?*

A Motoring trends can potentially affect environmental issues such as pollution. ☐ **16**

B It helps the motor industry forecast which models are likely to be popular. ☐ **17**

C Rising car sales can significantly improve national economies. ☐ **18**

D It can help governments decide which transport policies to prioritise.

E Motoring trends are closely linked to people's housing choices.

F It provides evidence of how society is evolving.

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Questions 19–23

Complete the table below.

*Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from Reading Passage 2 for each answer.*

Write your answers in gaps 19–23.

Explanation	Examples / evidence	Predicted car usage trends
GDP-based approach	Rising car sales in emerging markets such as Russia and India	Car usage will grow if the **(19)**_____
Saturation point	Multiple cars in **(20)**_____	There is unlikely to be further growth in demand for new vehicles Car usage is likely to **(21)**_____ in the coming years
(22)_____ theory	Growth of car ride apps	Both car ownership and **(23)**_____ in cars are likely to decline

Questions 24–27

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in Reading Passage 2?

In boxes 24–27, write:

TRUE	*If the statement agrees with the information in the passage*
FALSE	*If the statement contradicts the information in the passage*
NOT GIVEN	*If there is no information on this in the passage*

24 The number of driving licence applications has fallen in some countries. ☐

25 Private vehicle usage rates are similar in Germany and the USA. ☐

26 The length of time people are willing to spend on daily journeys has decreased. ☐

27 Environmental concerns are influencing the types of cars consumers are purchasing. ☐

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READING PASSAGE 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 28–40, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.

Stage Arrangements in Theatre

Section A

Whether planning a musical comedy or serious drama, theatre producers must consider many creative elements to achieve their dramatic objectives. For instance, visual elements can enhance the performance space. This area of theatre production, known as stage design, is mainly concerned with how lighting, props and costumes support the performance.

However, before these additional elements can be planned, producers must consider the physical arrangement of the performance space itself. Wise use of stage layout can have a surprisingly powerful effect on the overall impact of a performance. Conversely, failing to take it into consideration can ruin the efforts of performers and stage designers. In the most extreme cases, issues with stage layout may make the action onstage difficult to see or feel very artificial, leaving audiences underwhelmed.

Section B

The position of the stage and performers in relation to the audience can be arranged in various ways, each with pros and cons. Different arrangements may be selected to create a particular atmosphere, or to influence how audiences and actors interact during a performance. For this reason, certain types of staging are often associated with different types of show or dramatic genre.

Of course, practical constraints can determine the stage layout just as much as artistic preference. Producers may be forced to use a certain type of arrangement because no other option is available. For instance, in old theatres with fixed seating, it's virtually impossible to change the layout of the performance space. Therefore, understanding the individual strengths and weaknesses of a particular stage layout helps producers to identify the creative elements which are most likely to work.

Section C

When most people picture a live theatre performance, they usually imagine actors performing on a raised rectangular stage facing rows of seated audience members. This classic style, the proscenium stage, became popular during the Italian Renaissance, although its origins can be traced back to ancient Rome. This layout places performers directly in front of the audience. Actors enter and exit from several different directions, including the side wings or from the back of the stage.

The key feature of this arrangement is the proscenium, or proscenium arch. This physical structure serves as a kind of picture frame or window through which the performance is viewed. It focuses the audience's attention towards only what is meant to be seen onstage. In this sense, the proscenium provides both a literal and figurative separation between the performance area and audience.

Section D

For centuries, theatres were designed around the principles of proscenium staging, and this has become a standard theatrical layout. Many renowned theatres make impressive use of this design. When accompanied by beautiful background scenery, dramatic lighting and a live orchestra, the overall effect can be extremely powerful. On a practical level, since the entire audience is seated facing in one direction, everyone usually has a clear view of the action, with nothing blocking lines of sight. A further benefit is that lighting can be stored in an area above the stage called the flyspace, away from the audience's view.

However, depending on the size of the theatre itself, audiences may feel quite far from the stage. This, combined with the fact that there is relatively little scope for the performers to move around, can make the action feel artificial. Therefore, alternative types of staging may be preferred to achieve an intimate, natural connection between audience and performers.

Section E

If the aim is to make the audience feel more directly involved in the action, a theatre-in-the-round format can be extremely effective. In this layout, also known as arena staging, the performance area is in the centre, with the audience seating arranged around it. Actors enter using walkways placed between audience seating. This builds up the excitement as the actors move through the audience towards the stage. Arena staging brings the audience closer to the action, which can be particularly useful for productions which require participation from the spectators.

However, it's important to ensure that the performers move around the stage frequently so that they address different

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sides of the audience throughout the show. Otherwise, some audience members will only see the performers' backs during the performance. Similarly, the placement of lighting and scenery must be planned so that it doesn't interfere with actors' sight lines when they change directions.

Section F

An even more dynamic type of staging is promenade theatre, where it's the audience that moves rather than the performers. The action takes place across multiple sites, or "stations". Actors remain in their individual stations and, when the audience arrives, they perform their scene, after which the audience travels to the next one. This format can certainly create an immersive experience. It's often a highly engaging way of bringing factual information to life, which is why the format is commonly used in interactive museum and city tours.

However, more than any other type of staging, this format has many uncontrollable variables, since the performance only begins once the audience reaches the site. If the distance between sites is too great, the rhythm of the show will be affected, and the audience may even forget what has already happened. From a safety perspective, the route between stations must be carefully planned. Planning any live performance involves consideration of safety matters, but with promenade staging, the risks are greater since it involves the movement of so many people.

Section G

Ultimately, logistic, artistic and budgetary factors influence how theatre companies present their work. No staging format is without challenges or limitations. Nevertheless, selecting the right format does more than support the performance. In the best cases, it can actually add an extra dimension which enhances the dramatic impact of the story.

Questions 28–33

Complete each sentence with the correct ending A–J from the box below.

*Write the correct letter **A–J** in answer boxes 28–33.*

N.B. You may use any letter more than once.

28 Stage design in theatre production ☐

29 Choice of stage layout ☐

30 The proscenium stage arrangement ☐

31 A lack of connection between audience and performers ☐

32 During in-the-round productions, some of the audience ☐

33 Consideration of safety matters ☐

A	is considered to be a traditional type of stage layout.	**F**	is one potential drawback of proscenium staging.
B	is mainly determined by the number of actors on the stage.	**G**	is likely to be distracted by lighting.
C	has particular importance when organising promenade productions.	**H**	has restricted views of the performers unless the action onstage is carefully planned.
D	focuses on incorporating visual elements to enhance live performance.	**I**	involves a greater range of practical difficulties than other theatre formats.
E	is the main advantage of promenade staging compared to proscenium staging.	**J**	affects the type of interaction actors and spectators have during a show.

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Questions 34–37
*Answer the questions below using **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** from the passage for each answer.*

Write your answers in boxes 34–37.

34 During which historical period did proscenium staging gain widespread attention?

_____

35 What can be kept in the flyspace?

_____

36 What do actors use to get to the stage in arena layouts?

_____

37 Which type of staging involves the audience moving from place to place?

_____

Questions 38–40
Reading Passage 2 has 7 sections labelled A–G.
Which paragraph contains the following information?

*Write the correct letter **A–G** in answer boxes 38–40.*

NB: You may use any letter more than once.

38 a popular belief about how theatre shows look ☐

39 an example of an educational application of theatre staging ☐

40 an explanation of what stage designers do ☐

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