Test 12

La Mercè Festival

by Adrian Jacobs

Last September, I attended the La Mercè festival in the city of Barcelona, Spain, with my family. I'd never been to the city before and was looking forward to spending a few days there. After checking in to our hotel, we wandered into the centre for our first look around the city I'd heard so much about. With the festival already in full swing, the footpaths were crowded, making it challenging to move with any speed around the sights. It was nothing I hadn't been warned about and we were in no rush. I could barely take my eyes off the beautiful old buildings as we walked along. All that fascinating history: I imagined all the stories the buildings would be able to tell if they had a voice. Traffic buzzed round us, filling the air with sounds of beeping horns, adding to the atmosphere.

The first event we attended was the building of 'human towers'. Different teams competed to create the tallest tower of people by standing on each others' shoulders. Then the youngest member of each group climbed up the outside to the very top. I gazed in awe at the height of the towers. They made it look easy but what an incredible amount of practice and teamwork the activity must need. Now and then, a tower would collapse to the gasps of the onlookers. The teams had clearly prepared for this eventuality, though, and caught each other easily. We stood and watched for ages, transfixed.

Next was the parade of the 'giants', where huge brightly painted figures were carried through the streets representing different neighbourhoods of the city. Kings and queens dressed in historical costumes hovered over the crowds, spinning and dancing in pairs to the tunes played on ancient instruments by bands of musicians. Children stared in wonder, their faces lighting up when they spotted a favourite character – that was a magical thing. I soon abandoned any attempt at filming the procession; it was far better just to store the images away in my memory instead.

That evening we saw what, for me, was the highlight of our whole trip: the 'fire run'. Another parade, but this one was a procession of huge five-breathing beasts – again, brightly painted – which were carried along the road, showering the spectators with sparks from fireworks attached to them. Spectators are advised to cover up as protection, but there's no real danger. Even so, I decided to stand well back away from it! It was an incredible sight and must have been great fun to participate in. The fire lit up the spectators in the darkness and I recognised my own feelings of happiness on their faces. I snapped away with my camera, but when I looked at my pictures the next day, I'd just recorded a blur of movement.

Over the next couple of days we saw everything from a kite flying competition at the beach to an aerobatic show, sampled local specialities in seaside cafés and sang and (*line 52*) danced in the city's numerous squares. All too soon it was the last night of the festival. Together with thousands of other people, we stood ready to watch the final event: the closing of the festival with a magnificent fireworks display. It was as fantastic as all the other events had been and I knew that even if I never came back again, I'd go home having made the most of the celebrations I'd so longed to see, and having gained an insight into another culture.

1 How did Adrian feel when he saw the city of Barcelona for the first time?

- **A** amazed at the number of visitors there
- **B** excited by the interesting architecture
- **C** annoyed by how noisy the city was
- **D** pleased about how easy it was to get around

2 What does Adrian say about the 'human towers' event in the second paragraph?

- **A** It made him feel nervous at certain moments.
- **B** It continued for longer than he would have liked.
- **C** It required a lot of skill on the part of the participants.
- **D** It was not as impressive as he had expected it to be.

3 When Adrian saw the parade of giants in the third paragraph, he particularly liked

- **A** trying to capture the figures on video.

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B seeing other people's enjoyment of it.
C learning about the history of the activity.
D listening to the music which accompanied it.

4 During the 'fire run' in the fourth paragraph, Adrian
A thought it wise to keep at a distance from the parade.
B wished he was able to take part in the procession.
C managed to take some atmospheric photos.
D saw someone he knew in the crowds.

5 What does *sampled* in line 52 mean?
A checked
B experimented
C observed
D tried

6 How did Adrian feel at the end of the festival?
A hopeful that he would return in the future
B regretful that the experience was over
C satisfied to have fulfilled an ambition
D happy to be heading home

How to write a good blog

Joey Benson started writing a blog at the age of thirteen. Here, he tells us about his own experiences of blog writing and offers tips for other young bloggers starting out.

'I never expected to get many followers when I started writing my blog,' says Joey Benson, now 15. 'I just wrote down my thought about films I'd seen at the cinema. I didn't think anyone would take my opinions seriously or even be particularly interested in them.'

Since he started blogging two years ago, however, Joey's attracted tens of thousands of readers, some of them professional film critics, who are interested in his fresh approach to reviewing films. (1)…… This attention has led to him tripling the number of hits his blog receives, and he now gets sent free tickets for screenings of new films for his age group.

Joey's style is informal and chatty, and he presents an interesting angle on the films he sees. Instead of simply commenting on how amazing the special effects are, or how effective the sound track is, Joey delves into psychological subject matter like what it was that made the bad guy turn bad or weather the heroes of the story have hidden motives. (2)…… Why did they choose that camera angle to shoot that scene from? Why was that particular animation process selected?

Joey has certainly made an impact on the teenage and film critic blogging scenes. His ideas are far from predictable, and he never fails to surprise readers with a new take on old themes. (3)…… It's definitely something he manages, though.

With so many talented bloggers out there, how does Joey stand out from the crowd? He says it's crucial to either find something no one's written about before or a new way of approaching a subject, like he does. You don't have to present a balanced opinion of an issue. (4)…… They probably won't come back again, either.

If you're hoping to reach a wide range of readers with your blog, following advice from experienced bloggers like Joey is a wise move. You may be truly passionate about a subject close to your heart, and may even consider yourself a bit of an expert on it. This makes it tempting to use jargon and technical words that people familiar with the field will know. (5)…… This means you automatically limit the number of hits you receive on your blog.

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‘Remember the expression “first impressions count”?’ asks Joey. ‘Well, that doesn’t just stand for meeting people but when aiming to make an impact with your blog-writing too. (6)…… Then keep their interest by addressing them personally, asking questions and making them think.’
One last word from Joey: ‘Don’t try too hard to use big fancy words or get too hung up on things like grammar. It’s important to check your work afterwards for things like spelling errors, though, and make sure it flows well and is relevant to your target readers. Oh, and make sure you check your facts! You don’t want to get into trouble about what you’ve written. Good luck!’

A Draw the reader in by writing a funny or surprising title.
B He makes it seem easy, but not all young, or indeed older, bloggers hit the right tone.
C A national newspaper recently picked up on his unique style and he’s since appeared in an article about teenage bloggers.
D Age doesn’t matter when you’re writing about something you feel strongly about.
E He isn’t only interested in considering this kind of thing, but in the technicalities of film-making, too.
F However, simply repeating the same thing over again without backing up your ideas with actual examples is unlikely to make readers stick around for long.
G Be aware, though, that a general audience may not, and you may put them off by doing so.

Where to go whale watching

When asked to list the things they would most like to experience in life, a surprising (1)…… of people mention seeing whales in their natural habitat. It’s an ambition that can be (2)…… surprisingly easily. It is (3)…… that the seas around Iceland are home to over five thousand orca whales. But their behaviour, and therefore your chances of seeing them, varies (4)…… to the season.
In summer, the whales have a (5)…… to hang out near the coast and can be seen swimming up fjords and inlets. During the winter months, however, the animals are generally to be found (6)…… out at sea. (7)…… season you choose for your trip, whale-watching trips are very easy to organise, and there’s a chance you’ll get to see other whale species too.
Besides Iceland, another option is to (8)…… for northern Norway between October and January. Orcas arrive here at this time of year in (9)…… of large shoals of herring, which form an important part of their diet.

1	A number	B amount	C honoured	D crowd
2	A answered	B rewarded	C quantity	D fulfilled
3	A estimated	B counted	C guessed	D totalled
4	A according	B depending	C relying	D agreeing
5	A custom	B tendency	C habit	D trend

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6 A longer B wider C broader D further

7 A Whenever B Whoever C Whichever D However

8 A head B set C point D pick

9 A hunt B follow C pursuit D seek

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