

IELTS Hi-Intermediate Reading Week 9

Exercise 1. Read the summary completion task, which is based on the text *The Future of Virtual Reality*.

Complete the summary using the list of words, A-J, below.

Write the correct letter, A-J.

VR: How popular can it become?

There is some debate as to whether VR will ever become something used in a

1 _____ way, rather than predominantly in niche areas of technology. On the one hand, experts say it is
2 _____ that by 2030, HMDs will have become part of our everyday lives. On the other, it is also possible that
they will go the same way as other 3 _____ technologies, such as CDs or PDAs. This is because most home consoles
and computers are 4 _____ of coping with the VR software. Thus, even enthusiastic users are likely to be
5 _____ to endure the resultant physical side-effects.

A mainstream

B interactive

C unable

D reluctant

E outmoded

F operational

G incapable

H essential

I conceivable

J functioning

THE FUTURE OF VIRTUAL REALITY

A. For the next ten years, various aspects of society could be going through enormous change as Virtual Reality (VR) technology moves towards fully operational and interactive implementation of its potential. To what extent VR establishes itself as an integral part of our lives, and how quickly it is likely to move from niche technology to common usage throughout society, is currently under discussion. However, many experts are of the opinion that VR may well have become sufficiently developed for it to form an essential part of life by 2030 (if not sooner). Over 40 million people currently own VR headsets, and this figure is expected to double over the next three years. By 2025, we may well have reached the point at which almost 200 million users own a VR viewing device, the Head Mounted Display (HMD), more commonly known as a VR headset.

B. The ultimate aim of these headsets is to generate a 360-degree, 3D virtual world, enabling the viewer to enjoy what they are watching without the physical limits of a TV, computer or cinema screen. There are two LCD displays, one for each eye, which display images being sent by the computer or some such device (via an HDMI cable) or on the screen of a smartphone inserted into the front of the headsets. Lenses, set inside the HMD between the user's eyes and the LCD display, are necessary to counteract the natural differences between what one human eye and the other simultaneously see.

C. These lenses enable two 2D images of the display to be viewed, thus creating a tailored picture for each eye. These combine to create the illusion of 'real life' in 3D. The HMD also use 'head tracking', a system that follows the principle of aircraft flight, tracking three measurements known as pitch, yaw and roll (or movement along the x, y and z axes). It means that when the user tilts their head up, down, or to the side, VR follows these motions and allows them to 'see' all around them.

D. With such technology in place, one of the most notable sectors in which VR is likely to have far-reaching effects will be the games industry. In this field, traditional games are in development even now with far greater scope for creativity than ever before. Role Playing Games (RPGs), in which a gamer plays the part of a character from a first-person viewpoint, moving through an entirely imagined, graphically rendered world, are nothing new. However, VR games designers will be able to add to this existing appeal by enabling the user to look all around themselves at a fully immersive world, one in which the flow of the narrative can more easily be controlled by the gamer, rather than the creator.

E. Despite this, games designers currently appear to be more attracted to the untapped potential of new approaches to their end product. For example, games may become less about employing motor skills, such as swift reflexes or hand-eye coordination. Instead, the aim may be to enjoy the experience of a VR world in a more unhurried way, with traditional game mechanics (e.g., accumulating points, moving through a series of levels) running alongside as a secondary concern.

F. Other fields are similarly going to find their landscapes greatly altered. Educators, for one, will be presented with a vast array of new opportunities through which to pass on knowledge. Within the next five to ten years, teachers may become able to move completely away from the course book or flat screen – even the classroom itself – and into an immersive

world of instruction and learning. By way of example, history students could be taken into the epicentre of the world's greatest battles and conflicts, experiencing and understanding the machinations of victory first-hand. Medical students may be provided with the opportunity to travel through the human body as if they were themselves the size of a blood cell, building their comprehension of how veins and arteries, or nerve systems, are interconnected. Music students will be able to watch a VR orchestra perform their new composition in a venue of their choice, whether that be the local concert hall or even the Sydney Opera House.

G. Current HMDs do not allow for any dialogue to take place between the user and the simulated people they encounter in the VR world. However, this is unlikely to be the case forever; a student of Mandarin should one day be able to 'walk' the streets of Beijing, conversing with the local native-speakers, and practising the regional pronunciation. Similarly, by the year 2021, the concept of travel may have undergone a profound transformation. Parts of the world currently inaccessible to most people, whether because the expense of flying is too great or because those places are too remote to be easily reached, will become open to visitors in the form of exact VR replicas of the original cities, rainforests, beaches and so on. Not only is this bound to please avid travellers, it could also appease the concerned environmentalist; the number of commercial flights operating each day might well decrease as people opt for VR vacations.

H. Despite its potential to change life as we know it today, it is also possible that VR will ultimately fail to catch on, and HMDs will be consigned to history in the same way as were CDs, MiniDisc players and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). After all, even the technology that today seems improbable will at some point become outdated. If this does indeed occur, the most likely cause of its failure will be that the vast majority of computers and consoles available for the home market lack the required processing power. One potentially disastrous side effect of underpowered hardware is that latency issues – when what the viewers sees on the display fails to catch up with the movement of their head – can cause motion sickness in the HMD wearer. Even the most devoted VR enthusiast may be unwilling to accept this as the consequence of their interest in new technologies.