

Reading Exercise > Smart Stuff

Read an article about the *latest developments* in computer technology. For each of the questions (1-7), choose the answer (A, B, C, or D) which fits best according to the text.

INCREASINGLY over the last few years, we have become familiar with the range of small electronic gadgets that come under the heading 'smart' accessories. Joggers, for example, run with heart-rate monitors, and shop assistants carry pocket-sized computers. But these are just the first examples of a whole range of new products that promises to change our lives in all sorts of surprising ways.

As a scientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, Rosalind Picard tries out all kinds of smart accessories before they go on the market. One of these was the so-called 'frown headband'. It came as a shock to Rosalind to realise just how often she frowned. Stuck in a traffic jam recently, waiting for the cars to move forward, Rosalind kept hearing the sounds of the tiny sensor inside the band worn around her forehead – each time she frowned in frustration, the sensor gave out a signal.

Headbands that check facial expressions are just one of the things she and her colleagues have designed. Their aim is to make ready-to-wear items that both look good and give the wearer useful feedback. Body sensors, like those in Rosalind's headband, can detect physical changes that the wearer might not otherwise be aware of. Hidden inside watches, rings or shoes, these sensors can check for signs of stress, give information and offer advice.

Another computer scientist, Steven Feiner, is working on a pair of glasses that will do more than help you to see. Imagine you want to try a restaurant in a foreign city but you're not familiar with the dishes on the menu. If you are wearing a pair of Steven's glasses, all you have to do is glance above the restaurant's doorway and your glasses will immediately become windows to the Internet, offering you full details of the meals served inside. Are you one of those people who lack confidence when giving a talk to an audience? Look to the right and the glasses will flash your notes in front of your eyes. They could also prove useful for cooks who want to check a recipe without leaving sticky fingermarks all over their cookery books.

At the moment, Steven's invention looks more like a pair of ski goggles than a pair of glasses. It's a headset connected to a hand-held computer and a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver, which tracks the wearer's position. Students who don't mind being stared at have tried out the *Star Trek*-like device on campus. But Steven says that these head-worn displays will eventually get smaller, lighter and smarter as technology improves. As they will be relatively cheap, he foresees them replacing the notebooks and manuals that workers have to carry. He predicts that they will be useful to



surgeons, giving them instant access to a patient's medical notes while carrying out operations.

And, of course, this new technology has a fashionable as well as a useful application. A chemical engineer named Robert Langer has invented a new microchip that, if put inside a ring, can give off different scents according to a person's mood. That, of course, may or may not appeal to you. And, in the end, it is shoppers, not scientists, who will determine which of these smart accessories will succeed as fashionable items and which are destined to join history's long list of crazy inventions. Steven Feiner, concerned that vanity may prevent some people from wearing his glasses, is already working on the idea of contact lenses with the same features.

It is clear, however, that as small computer displays get brighter and cheaper, they will pop up in all sorts of easily-wearable accessories, even in the buttons on your coat. What's more, this is something that's going to happen a lot sooner than we all expect.

Recognizing Referents

Q1 What does 'their' in line 28 refer to?

- a. facial expressions b. headbands c. colleagues d. ready-to wear items

Q2 What does 'their' in line 56 refer to?

- a. sticky fingermarks b. cooks c. Steven's glasses d. the uses of the glasses

Q3 What does 'they' in line 73 refer to?

- a. Steven's glasses b. inventions c. workers d. notebooks & manuals

Q4 What does 'which' in line 88 refer to?

- a. fashionable items b. shoppers c. smart accessories d. inventions

Text taken from Stanton, A. & Stephens M. (2001) Fast Track to FCE – Coursebook. Longman. UK. p. 117
Questions adapted and authored by Andrés Barón-Ávila
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LIVEWORKSHEETS

Identifying Context Clues

- Q5** What does the phrase 'smart stuff' refer to?
a. electronic gadgets b. any invention c. new technology d. ordinary objects
- Q6** The word 'detect' in line 32 could be best replaced by
a. notice b. feel c. observe d. expose
- Q7** The word 'glance' in line 45 describes a way of
a. wearing *sth.* b. finding *sth.* c. pointing to *sth.* d. looking at *sth.*
- Q8** The expression 'don't mind' in line 64 could be best replaced by
a. do not think b. care nothing c. have problems d. are annoyed

Finding Factual Information

- Q9** When Rosalind wore the headband, she was surprised at ...
a. how well the sensor worked c. how strong the signal was.
b. how affected she was by the traffic. d. how comfortable it was to wear.
- Q10** Steven's glasses will help people who are giving a talk by
a. telling them if they forget to say things. c. signalling if they make a mistake.
b. checking how nervous they are feeling. d. helping them to remember things.
- Q11** What is the current problem with Steven's glasses?
a. where they are worn. c. what they look like.
b. how much they cost. d. the way they have been tested.

Understanding Negative Facts

- Q12** It is NOT mentioned in the text that 'smart stuff'
a. pledges to improve people's lives. c. may be as stylish as functional.
b. will cost less as technology advances. d. has been engineered for all people.
- Q13** It is NOT indicated in the text that any of the inventors was
a. thinking to replace ordinary objects with their invention.
b. working collaboratively in their project.
c. trying to help people improve their lifestyle.
d. receiving feedback from shoppers to improve their design.
- Q14** According to the text, Steven's invention did all the following EXCEPT
a. be worn unnoticeably outdoors. c. solve a problem in front of an audience.
b. be already released into the market. d. be used in different professional fields.

Inferring Author's View

- Q15** What is the writer's view of Robert Langer's invention?
a. It is unlikely to work successfully. c. He is sure people will laugh at it.
b. it is a bad use of new technology. d. He is uncertain whether people will buy it.
- Q16** In general, what does the writer think about 'smart' accessories?
a. They will soon be widely available. c. Only a few of them will prove to be useful.
b. Much more research is needed into them. d. They will affect the lives of certain people.

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