# Reading skills practice: Are zoos a good thing? – exercises

How do you feel about keeping animals in zoos? Read both sides of the argument to help you decide.

## Preparation

Put the animals in their natural habitats.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| bison | walrus | polar bear | seal |
| giraffe | penguin | lizard | ostrich |
| camel | zebra | meerkat | elephant |

| Polar | Grassland | Desert |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

Zoos are hugely popular attractions for adults and children alike. But are they actually a good thing?

Critics of zoos would argue that animals often suffer physically and mentally by being enclosed. Even the best artificial environments can't come close to matching the space, diversity, and freedom that animals have in their natural habitats. This deprivation causes many zoo animals to become stressed or mentally ill. Capturing animals in the wild also causes much suffering by splitting up families. Some zoos make animals behave unnaturally: for example, marine parks often force dolphins and whales to perform tricks. These mammals may die decades earlier than their wild relatives, and some even try to commit suicide.

On the other hand, by bringing people and animals together, zoos have the potential to educate the public about conservation issues and inspire people to protect animals and their habitats. Some zoos provide a safe environment for animals which have been mistreated in circuses, or pets which have been abandoned. Zoos also carry out important research into subjects like animal behaviour and how to treat illnesses.



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One of the most important modern functions of zoos is supporting international breeding programmes, particularly for endangered species. In the wild, some of the rarest species have difficulty in finding mates and breeding, and they might also be threatened by poachers, loss of their habitat and predators. A good zoo will enable these species to live and breed in a secure environment. In addition, as numbers of some wild species drop, there is an increased danger of populations becoming too genetically similar. Breeding programmes provide a safeguard: zoo-bred animals can be released into the wild to increase genetic diversity.

However, opponents of zoos say that the vast majority of captive breeding programmes do not release animals back into the wild. Surplus animals are sold not only to other zoos but also to circuses or hunting ranches in the US or South Africa, where some people are willing to pay a lot of money for the chance to kill an animal in a fenced enclosure. Often, these animals are familiar with humans and have very little chance of escaping.

So, are zoos good for animals or not? Perhaps it all depends on how well individual zoos are managed, and the benefits of zoos can surely outweigh their harmful effects. However, it is understandable that many people believe imprisoning animals for any reason is simply wrong.

## 1. Check your understanding: true or false

Circle *True* or *False* for these sentences.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Modern zoos can offer animals a living environment that is as good as their natural habitats. | *True* | *False* |
| 2. | One of the reasons zoo animals become distressed is because they are separated from their families. | *True* | *False* |
| 3. | Dolphins and whales usually live longer in zoos than in the wild. | *True* | *False* |
| 4. | People who have visited zoos are more likely to support animal conservation and protection. | *True* | *False* |
| 5. | Zoos protect animals from being used for scientific research. | *True* | *False* |
| 6. | Endangered animals kept in zoos are less likely to meet a mate and breed. | *True* | *False* |
| 7. | In their natural habitats, animals suffer problems related to human activity. | *True* | *False* |
| 8. | Endangered species often lack genetic diversity in their population. | *True* | *False* |
| 9. | Zoos promote genetic diversity by breeding animals and then releasing them back into the wild. | *True* | *False* |



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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10. | If zoos have more animals than they can look after, they always give them to another zoo or release them back into the wild. | *True* | *False* |
| 11. | Animals that have been bred in captivity quickly adapt to life in hunting ranches. | *True* | *False* |
| 12. | The author thinks that, on balance, zoos are generally a good thing. | *True* | *False* |

## 2. Check your vocabulary: gap fill

Complete the gaps with a word from the box.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| habitat | suicide | tricks | illnesses |
| mate | wild | environment | species |

1. Even the best artificial environments cannot come close to an animal's natural _____.
2. Whales and dolphins in zoos are often made to perform _____.
3. Distressed and depressed zoo animals sometimes try to commit _____.
4. Zoos can provide a safe _____ for animals that have been mistreated or abandoned.
5. Zoos carry out important research into how to treat _____.
6. International breeding programmes are particularly important for endangered _____.
7. In the wild, some of the rarest species have difficulty finding a _____.
8. One criticism of breeding programmes is that they do not always release animals back into the _____.

| **Discussion** |
|---|
| Have you ever been to a zoo?<br>What do you think about zoos? Are they a good thing, or is it cruel to keep animals in captivity? |


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