

Form 9
Reading Test

Read the article about Big Ben and look at statements 1-8 below. Having read the article, tick which statements are true (T) and which ones are false (F).

Big Ben



People think that Big Ben is the name of the clock tower that stands at the North end of the Houses of Parliament. In reality, it is the nickname given to the great bell in the tower. Nevertheless, most people today think of the whole clock when they think of Big Ben.

A clock tower was originally built on the site in 1288, but it was destroyed when the Palace of Westminster burned down in 1834. The new clock tower which houses Big Ben was built and first started working in 1859. It is the largest four-faced clock in the world and the third largest free-standing clock tower. Standing at 96.3 metres high.

Big Ben is famous for its reliability. It keeps very accurate time and rarely breaks or stops. Its mechanism was specially designed so that its speed can be changed by adding or removing a penny coin. This alters the time by 0.4 seconds a day.

During World War One, the clock faces, which are normally lit up, were darkened and the bells silenced to prevent attack by German zeppelin ships. During World War Two, only the clock was darkened and Big Ben continued to ring. In 1941 the clock tower was hit by a German bomb. Amazingly, the clock continued to work. On New Year's Eve, 1962, ice and snow made the hour and minute hand slow down. This caused the bell to ring in the New Year ten minutes late.

In 1976, after over one hundred years of use, the clock mechanism broke down, and in May 2005 the clock stopped for a short while because the weather was too hot. This doesn't happen very often in England. Although Big Ben was voted the most popular landmark in London, it's not actually possible to walk up the tower. This is only allowed for VIP guests of the parliament. Most visitors usually look up at the clock from the ground and enjoying the sound of its great bell – Big Ben.

1. The name Big Ben was originally only used for the bell, not the clock.
2. The clock tower with Big Ben is nearly 800 years old.
3. Big Ben is the tallest clock tower in the world.
4. The speed of the clock can be changed using coins.
5. The clock's bell has rung every hour for 200 years.
6. The clock worked even after being hit by a bomb.
7. The reliability of the clock can be affected by the weather.
8. Thousands of tourists go up the clock tower every month.