

TOEFL READING PRACTICE PAPER

Most people can remember a phone number for up to thirty seconds. When this short amount of time **elapses**, however, the numbers are erased from the memory. How did the information get there in the first place? Information that makes its way to the short term memory (STM) does so via the sensory storage area. The brain has a filter which only allows stimuli that is of immediate interest to pass on to the STM, also known as the working memory.

There is much debate about the capacity and duration of the short term memory. The most accepted theory comes from George A. Miller, a cognitive psychologist who suggested that humans can remember approximately seven chunks of information. A chunk is defined as a meaningful unit of information, such as a word or name rather than just a letter or number. Modern theorists suggest that one can increase the capacity of the short term memory by chunking, or classifying similar information together. By organizing information, one can optimize the STM, and improve the chances of a memory being passed on to long term storage.

When making a conscious effort to memorize something, such as information for an exam, many people engage in "rote rehearsal". By repeating something over and over again, one is able to keep a memory alive. Unfortunately, this type of memory maintenance only succeeds if there are no interruptions. As soon as a person stops rehearsing the information, it has the tendency to disappear. When a pen and paper are not handy, people often attempt to remember a phone number by repeating it aloud. If the doorbell rings or the dog barks to come in before a person has the opportunity to make a phone call, he will likely forget the number instantly.* Therefore, rote rehearsal is not an efficient way to pass information from the short term to long term memory.* A better way is to practice "**elaborate** rehearsal".* This involves assigning semantic meaning to a piece of information so that it can be filed along with other pre-existing long term memories.*

Encoding information semantically also makes **it** more retrievable. Retrieving information can be done by recognition or recall. Humans can easily recall memories that are stored in the long term memory and used often; however, if a memory seems to be forgotten, it may eventually be retrieved by prompting. The more **cues** a person is given (such as pictures), the more likely a memory can be retrieved. This is why multiple choice tests are often used for subjects that require a lot of memorization.

Glossary:

semantic: relating to the meaning of something

Reading Comprehension questions:

1. According to the passage, how do memories get transferred to the STM?

- A) They revert from the long term memory.
- B) They are filtered from the sensory storage area.
- C) They get chunked when they enter the brain.
- D) They enter via the nervous system.

2. The word **elapses** in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to:

- A) passes
- B) adds up
- C) appears
- D) continues

The correct answer is A. This is a **vocabulary** question.

3. All of the following are mentioned as places in which memories are stored EXCEPT the:

- A) STM
- B) long term memory
- C) sensory storage area
- D) maintenance area

4. Why does the author mention a dog's bark?

- A) To give an example of a type of memory
- B) To provide a type of interruption
- C) To prove that dogs have better memories than humans
- D) To compare another sound that is loud like a doorbell

5. Look at the four stars that indicate where this sentence can be added to the passage. Where would the sentence fit best?

For example, a reader engages in elaborate rehearsal when he brings prior knowledge of a subject to a text.

6. How do theorists believe a person can remember more information in a short time?

- A) By organizing it
- B) By repeating it
- C) By giving it a name
- D) By drawing it

7. The author believes that rote rotation is:

- A) the best way to remember something
- B) more efficient than chunking
- C) ineffective in the long run
- D) an unnecessary interruption

8. The word **it** in the last paragraph refers to:

- A) encoding
- B) STM
- C) semantics
- D) information

9. The word **elaborate** in paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to:

- A) complex
- B) efficient
- C) pretty
- D) regular

10. Which of the following is NOT supported by the passage?

- A) The working memory is the same as the short term memory.
- B) A memory is kept alive through constant repetition.
- C) Cues help people to recognize information.
- D) Multiple choice exams are the most difficult.

11. The word **cues** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- A) questions
- B) clues
- C) images
- D) tests

12. Which of the following best provides the important information in the underlined sentence from the passage. Incorrect answer choices leave out essential information or change its meaning.

- A) Prompting is the easiest way to retrieve short term memory after an extended period of time.
- B) A memory can be retrieved by prompting, in a case where it has been rarely used.
- C) It's easier to remember short term memories than long term memories due to

regular prompts.

D) Recalling a long term memory that is often used is easy, while forgotten memories often require prompting.

13. An introductory sentence for a summary of the passage is found below. Complete the summary by choosing the THREE answer choices that contain the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not fit in the summary because they provide ideas that are not mentioned in the passage or are only minor ideas from the passage. This question is worth 2 points.

The brain stores information that a person may need in the immediate future in a place called the short term memory (STM).

1. Most people can only remember numbers for a short time.
2. Many psychologists agree that only a certain amount of information can be stored in the STM at once.
3. Some techniques for memorization don't work because of potential interruptions.
- 4) Elaborate rehearsal is generally considered less effective than rote rehearsal.
- 5) Assigning meaning to information makes it easier for the brain to retrieve.