

Writing Practice Set 1 (Integrated)

Passage, Lecture and Question

Directions: Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.

Reading Time: 3 minutes

In an effort to encourage ecologically sustainable forestry practices, an international organization started issuing certifications to wood companies that meet high ecological standards by conserving resources and recycling materials. Companies that receive this certification can attract customers by advertising their products as "ecocertified." Around the world, many wood companies have adopted new, ecologically friendly practices in order to receive ecocertification. However, it is unlikely that wood companies in the United States will do the same, for several reasons.

First, American consumers are exposed to so much advertising that they would not value or even pay attention to the ecocertification label. Because so many mediocre products are labeled "new" or "improved," American consumers do not place much trust in advertising claims in general.

Second, ecocertified wood will be more expensive than uncertified wood because in order to earn ecocertification, a wood company must pay to have its business examined by a certification agency. This additional cost gets passed on to consumers. American consumers tend to be strongly motivated by price, and therefore they are likely to choose cheaper uncertified wood products. Accordingly, American wood companies will prefer to keep their prices low rather than obtain ecocertification.

Third, although some people claim that it always makes good business sense for American companies to keep up with the developments in the rest of the world, this argument is not convincing. Pursuing certification would make sense for American wood companies only if they marketed most of their products abroad. But that is not the case—American wood businesses sell most of their products in the United States, catering to a very large customer base that is satisfied with the merchandise.

Directions: Read the transcript.

Narrator: Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

Professor Well, despite what many people say, there's good reason to think that many American wood companies will eventually seek ecocertification for their wood products. First off, consumers in the United States don't treat all advertising the same. They distinguish between advertising claims that companies make about their own products and claims made by independent certification agencies. Americans have a lot of confidence in independent consumer agencies. Thus, ecologically minded Americans are likely to react very favorably to wood products ecologically certified by an independent organization with an international reputation for trustworthiness.

Second point—of course it's true that American consumers care a lot about price—who doesn't? But studies of how consumers make decisions show that price alone determines consumers' decisions only when the price of one competing product is much higher or lower than another. When the price difference between two products is small—say, less than five percent, as is the case with certified wood—Americans often do choose on factors other than price. And Americans are becoming increasingly convinced of the value of preserving and protecting the environment.

And third, U.S. wood companies should definitely pay attention to what's going on in the wood business internationally, not because of foreign consumers, but because of foreign competition. As I just told you, there's a good chance that many American consumers will be interested in ecocertified products. And guess what, if American companies are slow capturing those customers, you can be sure that foreign companies will soon start crowding into the American market, offering ecocertified wood that domestic companies don't.

Directions: Give yourself 20 minutes to plan and write your response. Your response is judged on the quality of the writing and on how well it presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage. Typically, an effective response will be 150 to 225 words. You may view the reading passage while you respond.

Response time: 20 minutes

Question: Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

Question 2

Directions: Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.

Reading Time: 3 minutes

Critics say that current voting systems used in the United States are inefficient and often lead to the inaccurate counting of votes. Miscounts can be especially damaging if an election is closely

contested. Those critics would like the traditional systems to be replaced with far more efficient and trustworthy computerized voting systems. In traditional voting, one major source of inaccuracy is that people accidentally vote for the wrong candidate. Voters usually have to find the name of their candidate on a large sheet of paper containing many names—the ballot—and make a small mark next to that name. People with poor eyesight can easily mark the wrong name. The computerized voting machines have an easy-to-use touch-screen technology: to cast a vote, a voter needs only to touch the candidate's name on the screen to record a vote for that candidate; voters can even have the computer magnify the name for easier viewing. Another major problem with old voting systems is that they rely heavily on people to count the votes. Officials must often count up the votes one by one, going through every ballot and recording the vote. Since they have to deal with thousands of ballots, it is almost inevitable that they will make mistakes. If an error is detected, a long and expensive recount has to take place. In contrast, computerized systems remove the possibility of human error, since all the vote counting is done quickly and automatically by the computers. Finally some people say it is too risky to implement complicated voting technology nationwide. But without giving it a thought, governments and individuals alike trust other complex computer technology every day to be perfectly accurate in banking transactions as well as in the communication of highly sensitive information.

Directions: Here is the transcript.

Narrator Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

Professor While traditional voting systems have some problems, it's doubtful that computerized voting will make the situation any better. Computerized voting may seem easy for people who are used to computers. But what about people who aren't? People who can't afford computers, people who don't use them on a regular basis—these people will have trouble using computerized voting machines. These voters can easily cast the wrong vote or be discouraged from voting altogether because of fear of technology. Furthermore, it's true that humans make mistakes when they count up ballots by hand. But are we sure that computers will do a better job? After all, computers are programmed by humans, so "human error" can show up in mistakes in their programs. And the errors caused by these defective programs may be far more serious. The worst a human official can do is miss a few ballots. But an error in a computer program can result in thousands of votes being miscounted or even permanently removed from the record. And in many voting systems, there is no physical record of the votes, so a computer recount in the case of a suspected error is impossible! As for our trust of computer technology for banking and communications, remember one thing: these systems are used daily and they are used heavily. They didn't work flawlessly when they were first introduced. They had to be improved on and improved on until they got as reliable as they are today. But voting happens only once every two years nationally in the United States and not much more than twice a year in many local areas. This is hardly sufficient for us to develop confidence that computerized voting can be fully trusted.

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Question: Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

Question 3

Sea otters are a small mammal that lives in the waters along North America's west coast from California to Alaska. A few years ago some of the sea otter populations off of the Alaskan coast started to decline rapidly and raised several concerns because of their important role in the coastal ecosystem. Experts began investigating and came up with two possible explanations. One explanation was environmental pollution and the second was attacks by predators.

At first it seemed as if the pollution was the most likely cause for the population decline. One reason pollution was more likely was because of the known pollution sources along the Alaskan coast such as oil rigs. Also water samples taken in the area showed increased levels of chemicals that could decrease the otters' immune systems and indirectly result in their deaths.

Another thing that pointed to pollution as the culprit was the decline of other sea mammals such as seals in the same areas. This indicated that whatever was affecting the otters was also affecting the other sea mammals. Environmental pollution usually affects an entire ecosystem instead of just one species. Only predators that occurred in a large area, such as orcas (a large predatory whale), could cause the same effect, but they usually hunt larger prey.

Finally, scientists believed the pollution hypothesis would also explain the uneven pattern of otter decline. In some Alaskan locations the otter population declined greatly while other populations remained stable. Some experts suggested this could be explained by ocean currents, or other environmental factor, might have created uneven concentrations of pollutants along the coast.

Professor:

Ongoing investigations have shown that predation is the most likely cause of the sea otter decline after all.

First, there is a lack of dead sea otters washing up on Alaskan beaches which is not what you would expect from infections caused by pollution killing them off. However, the fact that dead otters are seldom found supports the predator hypothesis. If a predator kills an otter, then it is eaten right away and can't wash up on shore.

Second, orcas prefer to hunt whales, but whales have essentially disappeared in that area from human hunters. Since the whales are not as available, orcas have had to change their diet to what is available. Since it is only smaller sea animals available, the orcas have probably started hunting those more and created the decline in all of the species mentioned in the passage.

Finally, predation is a more likely reason for the uneven pattern of otter decline. Otters in locations that are more accessible to orcas are more likely to be hunted. This is supported by the stable populations of otters in shallow rocky locations where orcas can't access.

Question: Summarize the point made in the lecture and explain how the speaker cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

Question 4

Although it's a new technology, solar energy provides benefits to the entire world. First, solar energy eliminates our reliance on non-renewable fossil fuels. Additionally, solar energy is non-pollutant, which makes it better for everyone. Finally, there is almost no maintenance as solar panels have a long life span without regular maintenance. So, the benefits seem to be overwhelmingly positive and supportive of further production.

The first benefit is the ability for solar energy to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Many sources of energy are renewable only over millions of years. Unfortunately, humans consume those faster than they are produced. Solar energy could be a replacement for non-renewable sources as a perpetual source of energy. Thus solar energy can become a new energy with no legitimate fear of overproduction.

Another benefit is the non-pollutant aspect of solar energy. Burning fossil fuels is known to produce deadly pollution, while solar energy produces zero harmful byproducts. While current energy sources produce disgusting smells, sounds, and visuals, solar energy

produces nothing offensive. Therefore, when considering the health of the planet, the lifelong health benefits of solar energy are unparalleled.

Finally, solar energy has low costs. The cost of solar panels is a one-time purchase. Also, after installation, the lifespan of a solar panel is thirty years. After the initial cost, the solar panel will cost almost nothing. This is a benefit to personal finances, but also peace of mind since there is no worry about rising prices or lack of resources.

In conclusion, these benefits provide support for more people to consider switching to solar power. Both the renewable aspect as well as the non-polluting aspect means that there will be added benefits for individuals, cities, and the planet. The low lifelong cost of installation and maintenance provides a lifetime of benefits. Thus, solar energy looks to be one of the world's great ideas.

Audio Script

Ok class, today we're going to talk about solar energy. That's right, energy we get from the sun. Aside from the typical advantages such as renewable clean energy, there are other less thought of considerations for renewable energy. We'll rehash some of those important ideas and other concepts such as offset production, multifaceted uses, and financial benefits.

One argument for solar energy use is clean renewable energy. Unfortunately at this point to produce solar panels we need to use fossil fuel energy. Is the energy used worth the energy gained? In five years, a solar cell will produce more energy than was used to make it. Given the lifespan of a solar cell this offsets the production cost of consumption.

The second point today is the multifaceted uses for solar energy. There are more uses than just clean energy. The privatization of energy means that a person controls their energy output and where it goes. Solar powered water heaters are designed to optimize energy use so that people aren't wasting money and energy. This is a benefit to the consumer concerning health and finances.

Our final point for the day, the financial benefits of solar. You're paying for the panels, but that's all. On top of that, some people have been able to acquire so much energy that they sell their excess power to energy companies. Also, there are tax incentives that help offset the cost of installation. At that point, the financial benefits are amazingly compounded.

So let's recap really quickly. The benefits of solar energy are renewable clean energy

with a lifespan that outweighs the energy production costs. The energy produced can be used in multiple ways by consumers, while the benefits of selling energy or receiving tax benefits makes this an obvious choice. So what exactly is keeping people from making the move to solar energy?

Question: Summarize the points in the lecture, being sure to explain how they address the specific ideas about solar energy described in the reading passage.

Question 5

Were Dinosaurs Endotherms?

Reading Passage:

Endotherms are animals such as modern birds and mammals that keep their body temperatures constant. For instance, humans are endotherms and maintain an internal temperature of 37°C, no matter whether the environment is warm or cold. Because dinosaurs were reptiles, and modern reptiles are not endotherms, it was long assumed that dinosaurs were not endotherms. However, dinosaurs differ in many ways from modern reptiles, and there is now considerable evidence that dinosaurs were, in fact, endotherms.

Polar dinosaurs One reason for believing that dinosaurs were endotherms is that dinosaur fossils have been discovered in polar regions. Only animals that can maintain a temperature well above that of the surrounding environment could be active in such cold climates.

Leg position and movement There is a connection between endothermy and the position and movement of the legs. The physiology of endothermy allows sustained physical activity, such as running. But running is efficient only if an animal's legs are positioned underneath its body, not at the body's side, as they are for crocodiles and many lizards. The legs of all modern endotherms are underneath the body, and so were the legs of dinosaurs. This strongly suggests that dinosaurs were endotherms.

Haversian canals There is also a connection between endothermy and bone structure. The bones of endotherms usually include structures called Haversian canals. These canals house nerves and blood vessels that allow the living animal to grow quickly, and rapid body growth is in fact a characteristic of endothermy. The presence of Haversian canals in bone is a strong indicator that the animal is an endotherm, and fossilized bones of dinosaurs are usually dense with Haversian canals.

Listening:

[Narrator] Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

[Professor] Many scientists have problems with the arguments you read in the passage. They don't think those arguments prove that dinosaurs were endotherms. Take the polar dinosaur argument. When dinosaurs lived, even the polar regions where dinosaur fossils have been found were much warmer than today—warm enough during part of

the year for animals that were not endotherms to live. And during the months when the polar regions were cold, the so-called polar dinosaurs could have migrated to warmer areas or hibernated like many modern reptiles do. So the presence of dinosaur fossils in polar regions doesn't prove the dinosaurs were endotherms. Well, what about the fact that dinosaurs had their legs placed under their bodies, not out to the side, like a crocodile's? That doesn't necessarily mean dinosaurs were high-energy endotherms built for running. There's another explanation for having legs under the body: this body structure supports more weight. So with legs under their bodies, dinosaurs could grow to a very large size. Being large had advantages for dinosaurs, so we don't need the idea of endothermy and running to explain why dinosaurs evolved to have their legs under their bodies. OK, so how about bone structure? Many dinosaur bones do have Haversian canals, that's true, but dinosaur bones also have growth rings. Growth rings are a thickening of the bone that indicate periods of time when the dinosaurs weren't rapidly growing. These growth rings are evidence that dinosaurs stopped growing or grew more slowly during cooler periods. This pattern of periodic growth—you know, rapid growth followed by no growth or slow growth and then rapid growth again—is characteristic of animals that are not endotherms. Animals that maintain a constant body temperature year round, as true endotherms do, grow rapidly even when the environment becomes cool.

Prompt: Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they challenge the specific points made in the reading passage.