

IELTS Academic Reading Practice Paper 12

IELTS Academic Reading test 1

This page will help you practise for the IELTS Academic reading test.

Read about the settlement at Skara Brae and answer the questions.

Skara Brae

Off the Northern tip of Scotland, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the North Sea, lies a group of 70 or so islands called the Orkneys. These largely treeless isles are frequently battered by Atlantic storms, gales and rain. It was during one such storm in the winter of 1850, when the combination of wind and high tides stripped away the grass from the top of a small hill called *Skerrabra* on the west side of the largest island known simply as 'The Mainland'. This revealed a number of stone dwellings.

The local landowner started excavations on the site, and within twenty years the remains of four ancient houses were unearthed. However, work was later abandoned until 1925 when another storm damaged some of the excavated buildings. A sea wall was proposed to protect the site, and, during construction, yet more buildings were discovered.

It was first believed that the village was an Iron Age settlement, dating from around 1500 years ago. However, radiocarbon dating proved that it was in fact much older. It was a Neolithic village and dated back to 3000 B.C. The village had been inhabited for a period of about 600 years. The Neolithic village of *Skara Brae* now consists of eight dwellings, connected by low, covered passages. The stone buildings are extremely well-preserved, thanks to the layer of sand that protected the settlement. The interior fittings, furniture and household objects also survive to this day.

The houses were partly built into a mound of waste material known as 'midden', which would have provided both stability and a thick layer of thick insulation against the harsh climate. From the outside, the village would have looked like a low, round mound, from which the rooves emerge. Nothing remains of these, so it is assumed that driftwood or whalebone beams supported a roof made of turf, skins, seaweed or straw. The dwellings were all connected by a series of passageways covered by stone slabs. This allowed the villagers to travel from one house to another without stepping outside – not a bad idea, considering the harsh climate. There was only one main passageway leading outside the village, which could be sealed from the inside.

Evidence suggests that there were never more than eight dwellings, suggesting a total population of no more than 100 people. The houses are all very similar in design, consisting of a large square room with a central fireplace. The furnishings were all made of stone, given the shortage of wood on the islands. Two stone-edged compartments on either side of the fireplace appear to be beds. Every house also had a distinctive shelved, stone dresser. Its position, opposite the doorway and illuminated by the fire, indicating that this piece of furniture was not just a useful storage space, but had special significance. There was a sunken floor tank in each dwelling, possibly to supply shell fish. The village also had a remarkably sophisticated drainage system.

One of the buildings, now known as 'house seven', is intriguingly different from the others. This building is detached from the others, and has a door which door could only be secured from the outside, suggesting that the house may have served as a type of jail – an unusual necessity in a village of less than a hundred people. 'House eight' is also unique, having none of the furnishings of the other houses. Excavators have found that the floor of the building is littered with fragments from the manufacture of tools, suggesting that the room was a workshop.

The standardised house design has led some to believe that there was no hierarchy of rank within the settlement at Skara Brae, and that all villagers were equal. Whether or not this is true is debatable. However, it is likely that life here was probably quite comfortable for the Neolithic people. The villagers kept sheep and cattle, and grew wheat and barley. They probably traded these commodities for pottery. They would have hunted red deer and boar for their meat and skins. They would also have consumed fish, seal and whale meat, and the eggs of sea birds. The skin and bones of these animals would have provided tools such as needles and knives. Flint for cutting tools would have been traded or gathered from the shore. Fuel probably came from seaweed, making the inside of the dwellings smoky and probably smelly. Driftwood was probably too valuable to burn.

Why Skara Brae was deserted is still unknown. For some time it was thought that the people met with disaster. This theory came about when beads from a necklace were found abandoned on the floor. It was thought that the woman who dropped them was in too much of a panic to pick them up. However, it is more likely that environmental and social factors forced people to leave. Firstly, the encroachment of sand and salt water would have made farming increasingly difficult. Second, there may have been changes in Neolithic society. Construction of large henge monuments in other parts of the island

suggests that an elite ruling body, with the power to control other people, was emerging. Tight-knit communities like the one at Skara Brae were being replaced by larger, organised civilizations.

1. The village of Skara Brae is located on an island called SelectOrkneyThe MainlandSkerrabra

Select
Orkney
The Mainland
Skerrabra

2. In 1925, ... Selectexcavations at Skara Brae stopped. a storm revealed more buildings.excavations resumed after a storm.

Select
excavations at Skara Brae stopped.
a storm revealed more buildings.
excavations resumed after a storm.

3. The village is about... Select1500 years old.3000 years old.5000 years old.

Select
1500 years old.
3000 years old.
5000 years old.

Choose the correct material from the list. You may need an answer more than once. You will not need to use them all.

Select
pottery
wood
dung
sand
midden
seaweed
animal skins
stone

4. What preserved the village for such a long time?

Selectpotterywooddungsandmiddenseaweedanimal skinsstone

5. What surrounded the walls and kept the buildings warm?

Selectpotterywooddungsandmiddenseaweedanimal skinsstone

6. What building material did the villagers lack?

Select pottery wood dungs and middensea weed animal skins stone

7. What did villagers obtain from other settlements, by exchanging goods?

Select pottery wood dungs and middensea weed animal skins stone

8. What did villagers burn for warmth and cooking?

Select pottery wood dungs and middensea weed animal skins stone

9. What were the passage roofs made of?

Select pottery wood dungs and middensea weed animal skins stone

IELTS Academic Reading test 2

Read a text about 'Wind Power in the US' and answer some questions.

Read the text and then answer questions 1-5.

Wind Power in the US

Prompted by the oil crises of the 1970s, a wind-power industry flourished briefly in the United States. But then world oil prices dropped, and funding for research into renewable energy was cut. By the mid 1980s US interest in wind energy as a large-scale source of energy had almost disappeared. The development of wind power at this time suffered not only from badly designed equipment, but also from poor long-term planning, economic projections that were too optimistic and the difficulty of finding suitable locations for the wind turbines.

Only now are technological advances beginning to offer hope that wind power will come to be accepted as a reliable and important source of electricity. There have been significant successes in California, in particular, where wind farms now have a capacity of 1500 megawatts, comparable to a large nuclear or fossil-fuelled power station, and produce 1.5 per cent of the state's electricity.

Nevertheless, in the US, the image of wind power is still distorted by early failures. One of the most persistent criticisms is that wind power is not a significant energy resource. Researchers at the Battelle Northwest Laboratory, however, estimate that today wind

turbine technology could supply 20 per cent of the electrical power the country needs. As a local resource, wind power has even greater potential. Minnesota's energy commission calculates that a wind farm on one of the state's south western ridges could supply almost all that state's electricity. North Dakota alone has enough sites suitable for wind farms to supply more than a third of all electricity consumed in the continental US.

The prevailing notion that wind power is too costly results largely from early research which focused on turbines with huge blades that stood hundreds of metres tall. These machines were not designed for ease of production or maintenance, and they were enormously expensive. Because the major factors influencing the overall cost of wind power are the cost of the turbine and its supporting systems, including land, as well as operating and maintenance costs, it is hardly surprising that it was thought at the time that wind energy could not be supplied at a commercially competitive price. More recent developments such as those seen on California wind farms have dramatically changed the economic picture for wind energy. These systems, like installations in Hawaii and several European countries, have benefited from the economies of scale that come through standardised manufacturing and purchasing. The result has been a dramatic drop in capital costs: the installed cost of new wind turbines stood at \$1000 per kilowatt in 1993, down from about \$4000 per kilowatt in 1980, and continues to fall. Design improvements and more efficient maintenance programs for large numbers of turbines have reduced operating costs as well. The cost of electricity delivered by wind farm turbines has decreased from about 30 cents per kilowatt-hour to between 7 and 9 cents, which is generally less than the cost of electricity from conventional power stations. Reliability has also improved dramatically. The latest turbines run more than 95 per cent of the time, compared with around 60 per cent in the early 1980s. Another misconception is that improved designs are needed to make wind power feasible. Out of the numerous wind turbine designs proposed or built by inventors or developers, the propeller-blade type, which is based on detailed analytical models as well as extensive experimental data, has emerged as predominant among the more than 20,000 machines now in commercial operation world-wide. Like the gas-driven turbines that power jet aircraft, these are sophisticated pieces of rotating machinery. They are already highly efficient, and there is no reason to believe that other configurations will produce major benefits. Like other ways of generating electricity, wind power does not leave the environment entirely unharmed. There are many potential problems, ranging from interference with telecommunications to impact on wildlife and natural habitats. But these effects must be balanced against those associated with other forms of electricity

generation. Conventional power stations impose hidden costs on society, such as the control of air pollution, the management of nuclear waste and global warming. As wind power has been ignored in the US over the past few years, expertise and commercial exploitation in the field have shifted to Europe. The European Union spends 10 times as much as the US government on research and development of wind energy. It estimates that at least 10 per cent of Europe's electrical power could be supplied by land-based wind-turbines using current technology. Indeed, according to the American Wind Energy Association, an independent organisation based in Washington, Denmark, Britain, Spain and the Netherlands will each surpass the US in the generating capacity of wind turbines installed during the rest of the decade.

1 Which one of the statements is true?

- A. **Cost was a big factor in preventing the development of wind power**
- B. **Wind power has developed steadily since the 1970s.**
- C. **Wind power can provide enough electricity for the United States**
- D. **Some US states are powered solely by wind**

2 What is the general view of wind energy in the United States?

- A. **very positive**
- B. **it will reduce global warming**
- C. **it can only provide small amounts of energy**
- D. **very negative**

3 Which of these factors has not contributed to the reduced cost of wind energy?

- A. **state subsidies**
- B. **economies of scale**
- C. **standardisation of design**
- D. **more efficient maintenance**

4 Wind turbine designs ...

- A. **are already very good**

- B. are expected to improve in the future
- C. will be much more efficient in the future
- D. are good for the environment

5 Wind energy is more developed in Europe than the USA

- A. true
- B. false

IELTS Academic Reading test 3

Read the passage and then complete Parts 1, 2 and 3.

The gangs behind bars - prison gangs

Part 1

Prison gangs are flourishing across the country. Organized, stealthy and deadly, they are reaching out from their cells to organize and control crime in America's streets.

Prison gangs are flourishing from California to Massachusetts. In 1996, the Federal Bureau of Prisons found that prison disturbances soared by about 400 percent in the early nineties, which authorities say indicated that gangs were becoming more active. In states such as Illinois, as much as 60 percent of the prison population belong to gangs, Godwin says. The Florida DC has identified 240 street gangs operating in their prisons. Street gangs, as opposed to gangs originating in prisons, are emerging as a larger problem on the East Coast.

Of the 143,000 inmates Texas houses in state pens, 5,000 have been identified as gang members and another 10,000 are under suspicion. Texas prison-gang expert Sammy Buentello says the state's prisons are not infested with gangs, but those that have set up shop are highly organized. "They have a paramilitary type structure," he says. "A majority of the people that come in have had experience with street-gang membership and have been brought up in that environment accepting it as the norm. But some join for survival."

After James Byrd Jr. was dragged to death in Jasper last June, rumors spread throughout Texas linking two of the suspected assailants to racially charged prison gangs. While

authorities and inmates dismiss these rumors, the Jasper murder occurred only weeks after a San Antonio grand jury indicted 16 members of the Mexican Mafia, one of the state's largest and most lethal prison gangs, for ordering the deaths of five people in San Antonio from within prison walls.

Part 2

Section A

As they are being released into the community on parole, these people are becoming involved in actions related to prison-gang business. Consequently, it is no longer just a corrections problem--it is also a community problem. It is a misnomer that when you lock a gang member up they cease criminal activity. It has only been in the last five years that law enforcement has realized that what happens on the inside can affect what happens on the outside and vice versa.

Section B

According to gang investigators, the gang leaders communicate orders through letters. Where mail is monitored they may use a code--for instance, making every 12th word of a seemingly benign letter significant. They use visits, they put messages into their artwork and in some states they use the telephone.

Section C

Of the two kinds of gangs, prison gangs and street gangs, the prison gangs are better organized, according to gang investigators. They are low-key, discreet--even stealthy. They monitor members and dictate how they behave and treat each other. A serious violation means death, say investigators.

Section D

The street gangs are more flagrant. "Their members are going into the prisons and realizing that one of the reasons they are in prison is that they kept such a high profile" making it easier for the police to catch them, says Buentello. "So, they are coming out more sophisticated and more dangerous because they aren't as easily detected. They also network and keep track of who is out and so forth."

Section E

According to gang investigators and prisoners, the prison gangs were formed for protection against predatory inmates, but racketeering, black markets and racism became factors. They developed within the prison system in California, Texas and Illinois in the 1940s.

Part 3

Godwin says Texas should never have outlawed smoking in the prisons, adding cigarettes as trade-goods contraband to the prohibited list. "If you go back to the Civil War era, to Andersonville prison," Godwin says of the prisoner-of-war facility for Union soldiers, "you will see that the first thing that developed was a gang because someone had to control the contraband--that is power. I'm convinced that if you put three people on an island somewhere, two would clique up and become predatory against the other at some point."

But protection remains an important factor. When a new inmate enters the prison system he is challenged to a fight, according to a Texas state-pen prisoner. The outcome determines who can fight, who will be extorted for protection money and who will become a servant to other prisoners. Those who can't join a gang or afford to spend \$5 a week in commissary items for protection are destined to be servants. Godwin explains: "The environment is set up so that when you put that many people with antisocial behavior and criminal history together, someone is going to be the predator and someone the prey, and that is reality."

The Texas inmate describes a system in which gangs often recruit like fraternities, targeting short-term inmates because they can help the gang--pay them back, so to speak--when they leave prison for the free world. Most of the groups thrive on lifelong membership, according to the Florida DC, with "blood in, blood out" oaths extending

leadership and membership beyond the prison into the lucrative drug trade, extortion and pressure rackets.

Prison gangs operating in Texas and Florida include Neta, the Texas Syndicate, the Aztecs, the Mexican Mafia, the New Black Panthers, the Black Guerrilla Family, Mandingo Warriors, Aryan Brotherhood, La Nuestra Familia, the Aryan Circle and the White Knights. Some of these gangs have alliances, and some are mortal enemies. Many on this list originated in California over the decades, some of them (such as the Texas Syndicate) to protect members from the other gangs. In addition, street gangs such as the Crips and Bloods and traditional racial-hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan also operate in the prisons.

What prisoners may not realize is that because the gangs are monitored by prison authorities the law-enforcement community is becoming very sophisticated about the gangs. "Sixty percent of what we learn about what is going on in the city streets of Florida" is garnered in prison and not from observing the streets, says Godwin.

Prison officials say they concentrate on inmate behavior to identify gang members. They do not single out gang leaders to strike any deals because acknowledging the gang as anything other than a "security-threat group" gives them too much credibility. This has been a particular problem in Puerto Rico with the native and political Neta gang. Recognizing groups during the 1970s, in a system in which prisoners have the right to vote, has led to a tendency among politicians to award clemency to some inmates.

For Part 1, questions 1 – 5, complete each sentence with the correct ending.

Select

have been identified as gangsters
are becoming infested with gangs.
indicate that prisons' population has increased
have experience of street gangs.
determines who does what in prison.
have been manipulating crime from inside prison
has become evident in prisons.
are organized as if in a martial regime.

1. The rising number of criminal gangs ... Select
have been identified as gangsters
are becoming infested with gangs.
indicate that prisons' population has increased
have experience of street gangs.
determines who does what in prison.
have been manipulating

crime from inside prisonhas become evident in prisons.are organized as if in a martial regime.

2. Prisoners organized in gangs ... Selecthave been identified as gangstersare becoming infested with gangs.indicate that prisons' population has increasedhave experience of street gangs.determines who does what in prison.have been manipulating crime from inside prisonhas become evident in prisons.are organized as if in a martial regime.

3. Most prisoners ... Selecthave been identified as gangstersare becoming infested with gangs.indicate that prisons' population has increasedhave experience of street gangs.determines who does what in prison.have been manipulating crime from inside prisonhas become evident in prisons.are organized as if in a martial regime.

4. Some Texan state prisoners ... Selecthave been identified as gangstersare becoming infested with gangs.indicate that prisons' population has increasedhave experience of street gangs.determines who does what in prison.have been manipulating crime from inside prisonhas become evident in prisons.are organized as if in a martial regime.

5. The outcome of fights ... Selecthave been identified as gangstersare becoming infested with gangs.indicate that prisons' population has increasedhave experience of street gangs.determines who does what in prison.have been manipulating crime from inside prisonhas become evident in prisons.are organized as if in a martial regime.

For Part 2, questions 6 – 10, choose the correct heading for Sections labelled A to E in the passage.

Select
Secretive leadership from the inside
Origins of prison gangs
Violence in prison
Inter-relationship of prisons and the outside community
No need of more sophistication
Skills learnt in prison
Discretion fails
Discipline within prison gangs

6. Section A SelectSecretive leadership from the insideOrigins of prison gangsViolence in prisonInter-relationship of prisons and the outside communityNo need of more sophisticationSkills learnt in prisonDiscretion failsDiscipline within prison gangs

7. Section B Select Secretive leadership from the inside Origins of prison gangs Violence in prison Inter-relationship of prisons and the outside community No need of more sophistication Skills learnt in prison Discretion fails Discipline within prison gangs
8. Section C Select Secretive leadership from the inside Origins of prison gangs Violence in prison Inter-relationship of prisons and the outside community No need of more sophistication Skills learnt in prison Discretion fails Discipline within prison gangs
9. Section D Select Secretive leadership from the inside Origins of prison gangs Violence in prison Inter-relationship of prisons and the outside community No need of more sophistication Skills learnt in prison Discretion fails Discipline within prison gangs
10. Section E