BRAINIACS OLYMPIAD

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SHAPE DISCIPLINES - ENGLISH

CATEGORY 5 (GRADES 11–12)

PRELIMINARY ROUND

SAMPLE 2



50 questions; 75 minutes; 100 points; no negative marking.

All questions are multiple-choice or multiple-response questions and are automatically marked. The number in square brackets after each question number indicates the point value of the question: [1] Easy, [2] Normal, [3] Difficult.

Part A: Grammar in Context (Questions 1–15) — 30 points

Section A1.

Choose the correct answer.

1. [1] Rarely _____ a proposal attract such uniform opposition.

a) has b) it does c) is d) does

2. [1] The committee recommended that the deadline _____ extended.

a) will be b) is being c) be d) was

3. [1] _____ she had read the report, she declined to comment on it.

a) Owing to b) However c) Although d) Despite

4. [1] It is the tone of the letter, rather than its content, _____ concerns me.

a) what b) that c) who d) which it

5. [2] Had the warning been issued earlier, the damage _____ avoided.

a) might have been b) might be c) would avoid d) had been

6. [2] No sooner had the results appeared _____ the objections began.

a) then b) than c) that d) before

7. [2] The scheme is worth pursuing, if only _____ it costs so little.

a) for b) that c) because d) as to

8. [3] So convincing _____ that the panel reversed its earlier decision.

a) was her account b) was that her account c) her account was d) did her account

9. [3] She is thought _____ the country before the warrant was issued.

a) leaving b) to be left c) to leave d) to have left

Section A2.

Read the text and choose the correct answer for each gap.

> Almost nobody reads the terms they agree to, and the law has adjusted to that fact rather than the reverse. Studies in which participants were observed, (10) _____ merely asked, found that the median reader spends seconds on a document that takes an hour. Courts now ask not (11) _____ the user consented but whether a reasonable person (12) _____ have noticed the terms — a standard (13) _____ shifts the burden from the individual. Critics argue that this concedes too much. (14) _____ the alternative is, (15) _____ rather less readily, is a system in which nobody is bound by anything.

10. [1] a) let alone b) apart from c) rather than d) instead

11. [2] a) whether b) that if c) if that d) either

12. [2] a) will b) could c) would have d) can

13. [3] a) what b) whose c) that it d) which

14. [3] a) What b) As c) That d) Which

15. [3] a) do they concede b) concede they c) they are conceding d) they concede

Part B: Vocabulary and Collocation (Questions 16–31) — 32 points

Section B1.

Choose the correct answer.

16. [1] Which word best describes an agreement that is openly expressed rather than merely implied?

a) a provisional one b) a mutual one c) a binding one d) an overt one

17. [1] Which word describes reasoning that assumes what it sets out to prove?

a) circular b) empirical c) inductive d) tangential

18. [1] Which of these is a term from formal logic?

a) premise b) precedent c) postscript d) prelude

19. [1] Which word means to weaken something gradually from within?

a) underline b) understate c) undercut d) undermine

20. [2] The minister preferred not to _____ the discrepancy between the two figures.

a) hand over b) count on c) dwell on d) give away

21. [2] Which of these belongs to a different field?

a) amplitude b) gradient c) velocity d) candour

22. [2] Her argument _____ on an assumption she never states.

a) consists b) rests c) sits d) stands

23. [2] The findings were _____ received, which is to say politely ignored.

a) hotly b) chilly c) coolly d) warmly

24. [3] The committee's reasoning was _____ at best.

a) loud b) thin c) flat d) lean

25. [3] Which two words are interchangeable?

a) cogent – muddled b) spurious – bogus c) salient – trivial d) nuanced – blunt

26. [3] He has a remarkable _____ for knowing exactly when to intervene.

a) habit b) tendency c) custom d) knack

Section B2.

Choose the correct meaning of each word.

27. [1] ostensible

a) agreed by all the parties involved

b) difficult to demonstrate in practice

c) appearing to be true but possibly not

d) obvious to any observer from the start

28. [2] corroborate

a) to withdraw an accusation without apology

b) to support a statement with evidence

c) to summarise an argument fairly

d) to contradict a witness in court

29. [2] perfunctory

a) done without care or interest

b) repeated at intervals

c) carried out in complete secrecy

d) performed in public

30. [3] specious

a) deliberately offensive to the reader

b) unusually detailed and thorough

c) seeming reasonable but actually wrong

d) impossible to verify at all

31. [3] attenuate

a) to make something weaker or thinner

b) to make something official

c) to postpone something indefinitely

d) to divide something equally

Part C: Reading — Locating Detail (Questions 32–40) — 16 points

Read the text and answer the questions.

> In 1977 a junior curator at a provincial museum in northern England was given the task of clearing a store room. In it were four hundred glass plate negatives, with no accession numbers and no accompanying paperwork. The obvious conclusion was that they had been deposited by a local photographer and forgotten, which was probably true, and that they were of no particular interest, which was not. She did what the rules required: she logged them, described them in a single line — ‘street scenes, unidentified, probably 1900s’ — and returned them to the shelf. Nothing further happened for thirty-one

years. In 2008 a doctoral student working on housing reform requested the box on the strength of that one line. What she found was a systematic record of a single street, photographed from the same six positions between 1901 and 1912. The same families are visible in successive frames. Nobody has established who commissioned it or why. The photographer's name appears on none of the plates. The sequence survived intact only because the curator, in 1977, resisted the temptation to select the best fifty and discard the rest — a decision for which she was mildly criticised at the time, on the reasonable grounds that storage was expensive. She is now in her eighties. Asked recently what she had seen in them, she said that she had seen nothing in them at all, and that this was rather the point.

32. [1] What was the curator asked to do in 1977?

a) close the museum for repair b) catalogue the collection c) clear out a store room d) value a private bequest

33. [1] How many negatives were found?

a) eleven b) four hundred c) thirty-one d) fifty

34. [1] How did she describe them in the record?

a) in a single line b) in a published article c) in a detailed catalogue d) not at all

35. [2] Why was the box requested in 2008?

a) because the curator suggested it

b) because the museum advertised it

c) because the photographer had been identified

d) because of the one-line description

36. [2] What made the sequence unusual?

a) one street was photographed from fixed positions

b) the photographs were all taken on a single winter day

c) the plates were of an unusually large format

d) the subjects were all well-known people

37. [2] Over what period was the street photographed?

a) six years b) thirty-one years c) eleven years d) one year

38. [2] Why was the curator criticised at the time?

a) because she refused to display them

b) because keeping everything was expensive

c) because she catalogued the plates too slowly

d) because she could not identify the photographer

39. [2] What is still unknown about the photographs?

a) how many camera positions were used

b) who ordered them and why

c) when they were taken

d) how many of them survive

40. [3] What does the curator mean by her final remark?

a) She thinks the doctoral student overstated the find.

b) She regrets not having examined the plates properly.

c) She believes the photographs are still of little interest.

d) She preserved material she could not judge.

Part D: Reading — Main Idea and Inference (Questions 41–50) — 22 points

Read the text and answer the questions.

Multiple Response: Select all correct choices. Points are awarded only if all correct answers and no incorrect answers are selected.

> The night train is back, and the reasons given for its return are not quite the reasons it disappeared. From the mid-1990s to 2015 sleeper services across western Europe were withdrawn in large numbers, on the grounds that they lost money against budget airlines and that the rolling stock was worn out. Both claims were true.
> What has changed since is partly environmental and partly political. A flight from Berlin to Vienna emits several times as much carbon per passenger as the equivalent rail journey, and a number of governments now subsidise the difference directly. Austria's state operator has been the most conspicuous investor, ordering new sleeping cars at a moment when the market was widely described as dead. Its passenger numbers have risen strongly since, the pandemic years apart.
> The economics remain awkward and the enthusiasts tend to skate over them. A sleeper carriage carries perhaps a third of the passengers of a seated one, and occupies a scarce night-time path on tracks increasingly used for maintenance. It earns nothing for the

sixteen hours it spends stationary. Where services have succeeded commercially, they have done so by charging fares comparable to a hotel room plus a flight, which places them outside the reach of exactly the young travellers most often cited in their favour. None of this settles the question, and it is worth being clear about what kind of question it is. If the night train is judged as a business, it is a marginal one. If it is judged as infrastructure — like a rural bus route or a lighthouse — the calculation changes, because the thing being bought is the option of travelling that way at all. Which frame is correct is a political decision dressed, as such decisions often are, in the language of accountancy.

41. [1] Which of these best describes the writer's stance?

a) opposed to public subsidy of transport of any kind

b) convinced that night trains will replace short flights

c) even-handed, but sceptical of the case made

d) indifferent to the outcome of the argument

42. [1] Why were sleeper services withdrawn from the mid-1990s?

a) the track could no longer carry them

b) they lost money and the carriages were worn out

c) passengers came to prefer daytime services

d) governments banned them on strict safety grounds

43. [2] What does the writer say about those two reasons?

a) Both were accurate at the time.

b) Only the financial one was accurate.

c) Both have since been shown to be false.

d) Neither was ever properly examined.

44. [2] What is significant about the Austrian operator's decision?

a) It was the only operator to receive a subsidy.

b) It bought carriages more cheaply than its rivals.

c) It was ordered to do so by the government.

d) It invested when the market looked finished.

45. [2] What does "skate over" mean here?

a) exaggerate b) misunderstand c) avoid d) explain

46. [2] Multiple Response — Choose ALL the commercial disadvantages the writer lists.

a) The carriage earns nothing while it stands still.

b) Sleeping cars cannot be built in Europe.

c) Night trains are slower than they were in 1990.

d) A sleeper carries fewer passengers than a seated carriage.

47. [3] What is the irony the writer identifies about fares?

a) Those most cited in its favour cannot afford it.

b) Fares are far lower than the operators will admit.

c) Airlines have raised their prices in response.

d) Hotel rooms cost more than a sleeper berth.

48. [3] What distinction does the final paragraph draw?

a) between long-distance routes and regional ones

b) between the environmental and the economic arguments

c) between state operators and private ones

d) between it as a business and as infrastructure

49. [3] Multiple Response — Choose ALL the claims the writer treats as established.

a) Night trains are commercially profitable across Europe.

b) Some governments now subsidise sleeper services.

c) Austrian passenger numbers have risen since the investment.

d) Flying emits more carbon per passenger than the train.

e) Sleeper carriages are now built only in Austria.

50. [3] Multiple Response — Choose ALL the ways the writer signals scepticism without taking sides.

a) Pointing out what supporters pass over.

b) Naming the operator that invested successfully.

c) Quoting figures from both sides of the argument.

d) Conceding that the original reasons for withdrawal were true.

e) Calling the final choice political rather than financial.

Answer Key – Preliminary Round

Preliminary Round — Questions 1–50

Questions	Answer	Questions	Answer
1	d	26	d
2	c	27	c
3	c	28	b
4	b	29	a
5	a	30	c
6	b	31	a
7	c	32	c
8	a	33	b
9	d	34	a
10	c	35	d
11	a	36	a
12	b	37	c
13	d	38	b
14	a	39	b
15	d	40	d
16	d	41	c
17	a	42	b
18	a	43	a
19	d	44	d
20	c	45	c
21	d	46	a d
22	b	47	a
23	c	48	d
24	b	49	b c d
25	b	50	a d e