Reading Test 3 – Main Ideas and Headings

Reading Test 3: Main Ideas and Headings

IELTS Reading Practice – All Levels

⏱️ **Time:** 10 minutes • 📝 **Questions:** 10 • 🎯 **Skills:** skimming, identifying main ideas, understanding purpose

This test practises **Matching Headings** and questions about the writer's purpose: understanding what each paragraph is mainly about, not just the details.

How to use this test: set a timer for 10 minutes, read the passage and answer all the questions. Then check your score with the Answer Key and read the explanations to see **why** each answer is correct.

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Click a heading to go straight to that part of the test.

📖 **Reading Passage – The Bicycle: A Short History**

🔎 **Questions 1–6 – Matching Headings**

🎯 **Questions 7–8 – Multiple Choice**

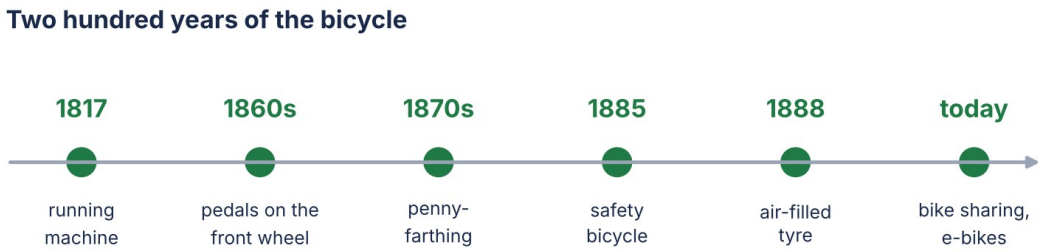
✍️ **Questions 9–10 – Short Answers**

✅ **Answer Key and Score**

🔄 **Answers Explained**

🧭 **What Should You Practise Next?**

⏱️ **Try It Again**



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📖 Reading Passage

The Bicycle: A Short History

A Today there are thought to be more than a billion bicycles in the world, but the machine that so many people use every day had a slow and uncertain start. The first bicycle-like vehicle appeared in Germany in 1817, when Karl Drais built a wooden “running machine”. It had two wheels but no pedals: riders sat on it and pushed themselves along with their feet.

B Pedals arrived in the 1860s, when inventors in France attached them directly to the front wheel. These early machines were heavy and uncomfortable on the rough roads of the time, and they soon became known as “boneshakers”. Because the pedals turned the front wheel directly, the only way to go faster was to make that wheel bigger.

C This led to the penny-farthing of the 1870s, with its huge front wheel and tiny back wheel. It was fast, but riders sat so high that a small stone in the road could throw them over the handlebars. As a result, cycling became a risky sport for young, wealthy men rather than a form of everyday transport.

D The breakthrough came in 1885, when the English inventor John Kemp Starley produced the Rover “safety bicycle”. It had two wheels of similar size and a chain that drove the back wheel. Three years later, John Boyd Dunlop developed a practical air-filled tyre, which made riding far more comfortable. The basic design of the modern bicycle had arrived.

E The safety bicycle had important effects on society. It was cheap enough for many working people to buy, and it gave them a new way to travel to work or visit other towns. It was also important for women, who gained a new sense of independence, and it encouraged changes in fashion, as long, heavy skirts were replaced by more practical clothing.

F In the twenty-first century, the bicycle is enjoying a revival. Many cities have built cycle lanes and introduced bike-sharing schemes, and electric bicycles have made cycling possible for older people and those who live in hilly areas. More than two hundred years after Drais’s invention, the bicycle may have a brighter future than ever.

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🔎 Questions 1–6 – Matching Headings

The passage has six paragraphs, **A–F**. Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list below.

Write the correct number, **i–viii**. There are more headings than paragraphs.

List of Headings

i A dangerous design for a few
ii Wider effects on society
iii A machine without pedals
iv The design we still use today
v A new life in modern cities
vi Pedals, but an uncomfortable ride
vii Why cycling never became popular
viii The high cost of building cycle lanes

1. Paragraph A
2. Paragraph B
3. Paragraph C
4. Paragraph D
5. Paragraph E
6. Paragraph F

🎯 Questions 7–8 – Multiple Choice

Choose the correct letter, **A, B, C** or **D**.

7. What is the writer's main purpose in the passage?
   A. to persuade readers to cycle more
   B. to describe how the bicycle developed and the effects it had
   C. to compare bicycles with other forms of transport
   D. to explain how to choose the right bicycle
   Answer:

8. Why did the penny-farthing have such a large front wheel?
   A. to make it safer to ride
   B. because a bigger front wheel was the only way to go faster
   C. because wealthy riders wanted to look impressive
   D. to make it easier to ride on rough roads
   Answer:

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✍️ Questions 9–10 – Short Answers

Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** for each answer.

9. What name was given to the early bicycles with pedals on the front wheel?
   Answer:
10. Who developed a practical air-filled tyre?
    Answer:

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✅ Answer Key

Q	Answer
1	iii
2	vi
3	i
4	iv
5	ii
6	v
7	B
8	B
9	boneshakers
10	John Boyd Dunlop / Dunlop

Your Score

Score	What it means
9–10	Excellent. Try the next test, or repeat this one in 8 minutes.
7–8	Good. Read the explanations for the questions you missed.
5–6	A solid start. Use **What Should You Practise Next?** to choose a skill to work on.
0–4	Read the explanations carefully, then try the test again tomorrow without a time limit.

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🔄 Answers Explained

Read the passage again, without the time limit. For each question, notice how the words in the question **paraphrase** the words in the text.

Questions 1–6: Matching Headings

1. iii

The first bicycle-like vehicle *had two wheels but no pedals*. The billion bicycles today is only an introduction.

2. vi

Pedals arrived, but the machines were *heavy and uncomfortable* – the “boneshakers”.

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3. i

Riders could be thrown *over the handlebars*, and cycling became *a risky sport for young, wealthy men* – dangerous, and only for a few.

4. iv

The basic design of the modern bicycle had arrived – a summary sentence at the end of the paragraph.

5. ii

The paragraph is about effects on working people, women and fashion – *important effects on society*.

6. v

The bicycle is enjoying a revival in cities. Heading viii is a trap: cycle lanes are mentioned, but not their cost.

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Questions 7–8: Multiple Choice

7. B

The passage moves through history, from 1817 to today, and paragraph E describes the bicycle's effects. It does not try to persuade or advise.

8. B

Paragraph B: *the only way to go faster was to make that wheel bigger*. Notice that the answer is in the paragraph **before** the one about the penny-farthing.

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Questions 9–10: Short Answers

9. boneshakers

Paragraph B: they *soon became known as "boneshakers"*.

10. John Boyd Dunlop

Paragraph D. *Dunlop* alone is also correct. Three words – within the limit.

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🧭 What Should You Practise Next?

Look at the questions you got wrong. They show you which skill to practise.

If you missed...	Practise this	Start IELTS lesson
Questions 1–6	finding the main idea of a paragraph quickly	Reading: Skimming
Questions 1–6 and 7	topic sentences and how a paragraph develops	Reading: Understanding Paragraphs
Questions 8–10	scanning for names and finding exact details	Reading: Scanning

A wrong heading often uses words from the paragraph but describes only a detail. Choose the heading for the **whole** paragraph.

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⏱️ Try It Again

Give yourself **2 minutes**.

Without looking back at the headings, write your own **three-word heading** for each paragraph.

Then compare your headings with the list. Were they similar to the correct answers?

Next: Reading Test 4: Completion Tasks – practise sentence and summary completion and word limits.

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