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WITH 555 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

by Larry Ronaldson M.S.
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New SAT Verbal Prep Book for Reading and Writing Mastery

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This passage is an excerpt from the book Taijiquan through the Western Gate by Tai Chi master, Rick Barrett.

My friend, Read, reached into his toolbox and picked up a drill bit called a speed-bore. He pointed to a broom leaning against the wall 15 feet away. In a flash, his make-shift knife was firmly in the broomstick. Throwing a tiny blade 15 feet away into an object only slightly larger than the knife itself seems so improbable. Read had to perform myriad calculations in less than a second, taking into account his current body position, arm strength, size and weight of the bit, distance from the target, force and velocity required, number of spins, trajectory etc. Any athlete knows that the thinking mind is only a hindrance at such times. Such computations are not done by the reasoning mind.

Athletes speak reverently of being “in the Zone.” It is a magical state where everything is working well together. Effortlessly. Every cell seems to cooperate at such a high level that the body almost disappears. The state may be transitory and unpredictable, but while you are visiting, putts drop, crosscourt volleys find the lines, and a ninety-mile-an-hour fastball hangs so long you can count the seams. A basketball player in the Zone always wants the ball with the game on the line. When asked what they are thinking during such performances, all the great ones say they have no thoughts. Others say respectfully, “He was unconscious!”

Peak performance is not just a result of natural ability and lots of training. Many amazing athletes never meet expectations. There are other qualities that coaches look for, intangibles that allow even a moderately gifted athlete to perform at championship level. There is something special about them that cannot be described in ordinary language.

The Zone is not restricted to million-dollar professionals and world-class athletes. We ordinary folks can have glimpses of it as well. It requires being familiar enough with a particular activity and comfortable enough with the physical demands of performance to allow concerns about those things to disappear. This may happen a lot more often than we are aware. Familiarity and ease in our mundane activities resonate with the exalted Zone experience, but may be dismissed because we take these things for granted.

I may be so comfortable driving a certain route in my car that I engage in a lively conversation and do not even think about the actions of driving until I magically appear at my destination. Time and space alter significantly. There may be no perception of time at all. I trust my game so much that little or no thought is required. This might explain the 120 words a minute typist or the violinist playing Paganini or even a physicist being able to come up with a theory that changes our world.

For most athletes, the ability to play in the Zone wanes with age, but for one group, Taijiquan masters and a number of their disciples, it is present even at advanced age.

Moroei Ueshiba, the founder of the Japanese martial art aikido, was a slight man in his seventies when he deftly flipped hundred-pound sacks of rice with a long spear in a demonstration for the emperor. Yang Chin-Hou, a great Tai Chi master, defeated nine opponents at once when almost eighty. These martial artists display an effortless competence similar to what we see in athletes in the Zone. This ability does not come from size, speed and strength because at their age, they no longer have these.

Imagine if we could be in the Zone in virtually everything we do. We could live a life devoid of stress and achieve levels of competence unheard of. Prince Hamlet tells his best friend, Horatio, that there are “more things in heaven and earth than are thought of in your philosophy.” Perhaps Taiji and the Zone are two cogent examples of that.

1. It can be reasonably inferred that being “in the zone” is achieved by:
   (A) being at one with the thing you are doing.
   (B) paying close attention to detail.
   (C) being intensely aware of your surroundings.
   (D) knowing your subject very well.

2. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?
   (A) Lines 11-12 (“Any athlete … times”)
   (B) Lines 14-17 (“It is … disappears”)
   (C) Lines 26-28 (“Peak performance … expectations”)
   (D) Lines 40-43 (“Familiarity … granted”)

3. As used in line 18, “transitory” most nearly means
   (A) strange
   (B) short-lived
   (C) overwhelming
   (D) inconsistent

4. The author uses the anecdote about Read in order to illustrate:
   (A) the element of chance
   (B) the art of knife throwing
   (C) the physics of being in the zone
   (D) the complexity of the brain
5. The literary device used in the final paragraph, lines 70-73 is:
(A) personification
(B) irony
(C) metaphor-simile
(D) hyperbole

6. The author insinuates that the knife-thrower, the violinist, the speed typist, etc. are:
(A) exceptional people
(B) at the top of their field
(C) ordinary people who understand how to become immersed in what they are doing
(D) skilled people whom we should all emulate

7. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?
(A) Lines 17-22 (“The state … line”)
(B) Lines 22-24 (“When asked … thoughts”)
(C) Lines 53-56 (“For most … age”)
(D) Lines 64-66 (“This ability … these”)

8. As used in line 40, “mundane” most nearly means
(A) everyday
(B) extraordinary
(C) professional
(D) favorite

9. The purpose of the passage is to:
(A) describe some amazing feats by athletes
(B) educate the reader about an elevated level of unconscious effort
(C) demonstrate specific steps to getting in the Zone
(D) indicate why many of us never achieve a high level of expertise

10. The tone of the passage is:
(A) provocative
(B) poignant
(C) practical
(D) upbeat

11. The author mentions the elderly martial artists to make which point?
(A) You are never too old to learn
(B) You can learn a lot from old people
(C) The exception does not make the rule
(D) One does not need speed, strength and power to be effective

12. As used in line 54, “wanes” most nearly means
(A) emboldens
(B) incorporates
(C) lessens
(D) succumbs
Explanations

1. **A. being at one with the thing you are doing.** This is our answer because it is reinforced throughout the passage. B and C are really the opposite since the passage points out that both are counterproductive. D certainly seems helpful, but it is never developed in the passage.

2. **B. Lines 14-17 (“It is … disappears”).** This is the answer because it is “a magical state where everything is working together.” How else could we achieve this? A acknowledges a barrier to getting into the zone, but does not show how to get into it; C mentions things that help to get one ready for the zone, but does not deal with the essential aspect; D does not indicate how one can get into the zone.

3. **B short-lived.** We want a word that means “does not last long.” We are tempted to go with “strange” (A) because of unpredictable, but it does not get across the idea of brevity that B does. C is no good because if it overwhelmed us, it would not be effective. Also, D, inconsistent would not be effective.

4. **C. the physics of being in the zone.** Everything in this passage and particularly in paragraph 4 deals with how being in the zone is accomplished. A, chance, is not considered and B is too specific; D is not developed at all.

5. **D. hyperbole.** This is our answer because he compares it to all the things “in heaven and earth” and that’s pretty much everything. Hyperbole which we remember from our charts in math is an exaggerated curve and in literature is any gross exaggeration. A must be an example of a concept being given human characteristics and that is not present here; there is no irony or metaphor present.

6. **C. ordinary people who understand how to become immersed in what they are doing.** This is the answer because he is maintaining that even an ordinary person can achieve this. A and B are wrong because he is an ordinary person, not someone who is exceptional. D is wrong for the same reason.

7. **B. Lines 22-24 (“When asked … thoughts”).** This reinforces the idea that these people have gone into a state where they “have no thoughts.” A, though interesting, does not show how ordinary people are able to do this; C deals with exceptions, not ordinary people; D is talking about older people, not ordinary people.

8. **A. everyday.** We want a word that means daily or regular. Everyday fits the bill. B is the opposite meaning of what we want; C indicates someone getting paid for something and there is no indication of that here; D, favorite, has nothing to do with our answer.

9. **B. educate the reader about an elevated level of unconscious effort.** At almost every turn the author is attempting to define for us and educate us about an “elevated level of unconscious effort.” A is incorrect because even though he does cite some amazing athletic feats, those are just examples to make his point; C specific steps are never mentioned; D although we might be able to infer why many of us never achieve getting into the zone, it is never specifically dealt with in the passage.

10. **D. upbeat.** In every paragraph we sense a high level of excitement. This author not only knows what he is talking about, but is very upbeat about the phenomenon; A is incorrect because at no moment is he attempting to provoke the reader; B poignant means deeply felt in that it brings out strong emotions in us and almost brings us to tears. There is none of that here at all; C is not acceptable because there are no practical steps towards achieving this zone.

11. **D. One does not need speed, strength and power to be effective.** The author constantly makes the point that even those lacking these traits can still get into the zone; A, B and C are time honored adages, but they have nothing to do with what the author is developing in this passage.

12. **C. lessens.** We all know that this ability must lessen with age in most people. He has made the point that those who have developed this ability through many years of practice do not see it diminish all that much, but for most athletes there certainly is a lessening of this ability; A, embolden means to make stronger and bolder and that is the opposite of what we want here; B, incorporate means to embody and that is not what is asked for; D, succumb, means to give into but we could not replace “wane” with this and get the meaning we intend.
The following essay is about Bobby Fischer, who rose to become the top chess player in the world.

One of the (1) genuinely authentic American geniuses of the 20th century was an extremely troubled person. Bobby Fischer (2) rose to become the top chess player in the country at age 13. The winner each year usually won by the margin of half a point. Fischer (3) however won all 11 matches one year. In 1972, he battled Boris Spassky, the reigning world champ, in Reykjavik, Iceland. The (4) whole entire country was riveted to this televised event for two months. Chess teacher, Shelby Lyman, went from being an unknown to a household name (5) as a result of his live analyses of the matches.

Russia had long dominated the chess world and Fischer was a serious threat to this dominance. It was a “cold war” battle and people could not get enough. Never before or after has chess had such popularity in our country.

Fischer on occasion showed up late, allowing precious time to elapse from his clock. This and many other gimmicks threw Spassky off his game and he was finally able to defeat him. This was devastating to the Russians because not only did America not have a strong chess tradition, (6) but Fischer was a high school dropout who was very uneducated despite having two intelligent parents, both with their doctorates. Traditionally, chess champions were cosmopolitan (7) polyglots, they had been trained by top grandmasters for many years. How was it possible that Bobby had been able to ascend to such a pinnacle of success without the lessons, the financial support and (8) people to guide him?

Fischer began (9) to play at age five and was very much a loner. Having no one to play, he often played against himself. He played a match against the US champ when he was 12 and lost after a close battle. (10) Still, no one has ever been able to explain how he became so great.

After that, he was able to join the Manhattan chess club, the top club in America, and get some solid training, (11) resulting in him being crowned national champion the very next year.

Fischer (12) had been born in Chicago but raised in Brooklyn, New York by his single parent mother. Although Jewish, he was fiercely anti-Semitic. He was also anti-American as evidenced by his clapping at the film Pearl Harbor when the Japanese planes began to bomb the airbase. He had many acquaintances but seemed to have no actual friends. Probably due to an impoverished youth, he demanded (13) exorbitant fees for appearances and felt that people should consider it a privilege to be in his presence. He refused to defend his title a few years after he won it because FIDE, the governing body of Chess, would not change one of (14) there rules to accommodate him. He died four years after moving to Reykjavik at age 64, the same number of squares on a chessboard. Sadly, his flame that shone so brightly has been missed by very few.

1. (A) No Change
   (B) authentic
   (C) genuine authentic
   (D) genuinely, authentic

2. (A) No Change
   (B) has risen
   (C) had risen
   (D) have risen

3. (A) No Change
   (B) however,
   (C) actually
   (D) thus

4. (A) No Change
   (B) entire
   (C) complete
   (D) whole, entire

5. (A) No Change
   (B) since
   (C) for
   (D) resulting from

6. (A) No Change
   (B) but Fischer had been
   (C) but, Fischer was also
   (D) but Fischer was also

7. (A) No Change
   (B) polyglots, they had been
   (C) polyglots, who had been
   (D) as a result of their having

8. (A) No Change
   (B) professional guidance
   (C) others help him
   (D) people guiding him

9. (A) No Change
   (B) playing
   (C) trying to lay
   (D) initially to play

10. What is the best placement for this sentence?
    (A) No Change
    (B) after the first sentence
    (C) omit it
    (D) after the second sentence
11. (A) No Change
   (B) which resulted in his being
   (C) which cause him being
   (D) which resulted in him being

12. (A) No Change
   (B) has been
   (C) was
   (D) was being

13. (A) No Change
   (B) unfair
   (C) wild
   (D) questionable

14. (A) No Change
   (B) its
   (C) their
   (D) omit it

15. What is the best title?
   (A) The Greatest
   (B) A Troubled Genius
   (C) Chess Highlight
   (D) America’s Chess Moment
Explanations

1. **B. authentic.** A is redundant; C is wrong because you must have an adverb to modify an adjective; D is wrong because no comma is necessary.

2. **A. No Change.** B and D indicate ongoing action and C is past perfect, which means that it indicates a prior action having been completed in the past.

3. **C. actually.** This is the correct word and it does not require any commas. A needs a comma before and B after. D is the wrong word.

4. **B. entire.** A is redundant; C is the wrong word and D is again redundant and has a comma.

5. **C. for.** A is too wordy; B, since, is the wrong word; D, “resulting from,” is awkward.

6. **D. but Fischer was also.** A does not complete the “both…and” requirement and C has a comma after but. You must follow “not only” with “but also”; B, “had been” is the wrong tense as the action had not been completed before another past action.

7. **C. polyglots, who had been.** This choice correctly clears up the run-on sentence; A is incorrect because there is no punctuation separating the two parts of the sentence; B is wrong because you cannot correct a run-on with a comma; D is awkward and wordy.

8. **B. professional guidance.** This choice completes the parallel structure. Once you have a grammatical pattern, you must keep it. A, C and D break that pattern by inserting verbs rather than nouns.

9. **B. playing.** The reason is simple. That is just the acceptable word. Every language has its own idiom and that establishes what is and is not preferred. We prefer “playing” after the verb began.

10. **A. No Change.** This is the correct choice because it sums up everything in the paragraph. It is where the sense of the paragraph is taking us.

11. **B. which resulted in his being.** This is correct because it is the only answer that contains “his” which is the possessive and necessary here.

12. **C. was.** A (had) indicated something happening earlier than another past action in the sentence. It is called the “past perfect.” From this point on, we will refer to that definition rather than explain it each time. B and D are the incorrect tense.

13. **A. No Change.** Exorbitant is the correct word here. B, “unfair” has nothing to do with being too much. C, “wild” is close but has too many other connotations; D, “questionable” is not what is needed.

14. **B. its.** The singular possessive is required here. A is incorrect because it is not possessive; C because it is plural and FIDE is one group; For D, we still need a possessive so we must keep it.

15. **B. A Troubled Genius.** This is because, although he was undoubtedly a chess genius, he was certainly troubled as exhibited by a number of examples in the passage. A is close as he perhaps was the greatest, but the passage does not validate that or even stress it; C is wrong because the passage is more than a highlight; D is wrong because the passage does indicate a great moment for American chess, but it deals with so much more than that.

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Sample One:

*Transcript of President Barack Obama's speech at Georgetown University announcing his new climate-change policy:*

On Christmas Eve, 1968, the astronauts of Apollo 8 did a live broadcast from lunar orbit. So Frank Borman, Jim Lovell, William Anders -- the first humans to orbit the moon -- described what they saw, and they read Scripture from the Book of Genesis to the rest of us back here. And later that night, they took a photo that would change the way we see and think about our world.

It was an image of Earth -- beautiful; breathtaking; a glowing marble of blue oceans, and green forests, and brown mountains brushed with white clouds, rising over the surface of the moon.

And while the sight of our planet from space might seem routine today, imagine what it looked like to those of us seeing our home, our planet, for the first time. Imagine what it looked like to children like me. Even the astronauts were amazed. “It makes you realize,” Lovell would say, “just what you have back there on Earth.”

And around the same time we began exploring space, scientists were studying changes taking place in the Earth’s atmosphere. Now, scientists had known since the 1800s that greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide trap heat, and that burning fossil fuels release those gases into the air. That wasn’t news. But in the late 1950s, the National Weather Service began measuring the levels of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, with the worry that rising levels might someday disrupt the fragile balance that makes our planet so hospitable. And what they’ve found, year after year, is that the levels of carbon pollution in our atmosphere have increased dramatically.

That science, accumulated and reviewed over decades, tells us that our planet is changing in ways that will have profound impacts on all of humankind.

The 12 warmest years in recorded history have all come in the last 15 years. Last year, temperatures in some areas of the ocean reached record highs, and ice in the Arctic shrunk to its smallest size on record -- faster than most models had predicted it would. These are facts.

Now, we know that no single weather event is caused solely by climate change. Droughts and fires and floods, they go back to ancient times. But we also know that in a world that’s warmer than it used to be, all weather events are affected by a warming planet. The fact that sea level in New York, in New York Harbor, are now a foot higher than a century ago -- that didn’t cause Hurricane Sandy, but it certainly contributed to the destruction that left large parts of our mightiest city dark and underwater.

The potential impacts go beyond rising sea levels. Here at home, 2012 was the warmest year in our history. Midwest farms were parched by the worst drought since the Dust Bowl, and then drenched by the wettest spring on record. Western wildfires scorched an area larger than the state of Maryland. Just last week, a heat wave in Alaska shot temperatures into the 90s.

And we know that the costs of these events can be measured in lost lives and lost livelihoods, lost homes, lost businesses, hundreds of billions of dollars in emergency services and disaster relief. In fact, those who are already feeling the effects of climate change don’t have time to deny it -- they’re busy dealing with it. Firefighters are braving longer wildfire seasons, and states and federal governments have to figure out how to budget for that. I had to sit on a meeting with the Department of Interior and Agriculture and some of the rest of my team just to figure out how we’re going to pay for more and more expensive fire seasons.

Farmers see crops wilted one year, washed away the next; and the higher food prices get passed on to you, the American consumer. Mountain communities worry about what smaller snowpacks will mean for tourism -- and then, families at the bottom of the mountains wonder what it will mean for their drinking water. Americans across the country are already paying the price of inaction in insurance premiums, state and local taxes, and the costs of rebuilding and disaster relief.

So the question is not whether we need to act. The overwhelming judgment of science -- of chemistry and physics and millions of measurements -- has put all that to rest. Ninety-seven percent of scientists, including, by the way, some who originally disputed the data, have now put that to rest. They've acknowledged the planet is warming and human activity is contributing to it.
So the question now is whether we will have the courage to act before it’s too late. And how we answer will have a profound impact on the world that we leave behind not just to you, but to your children and to your grandchildren.

As a President, as a father, and as an American, I’m here to say we need to act.

**Essay Prompt:** Write an essay in which you demonstrate how President Obama builds his case for our need as a nation to curb the problems of climate control in our world. In your essay, analyze how the author uses various rhetorical devices and specific arguments to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Focus on the most important aspects of the passage.

Don't indicate or stress whether or not you agree with the author. Just explain how he organizes his argument using facts, stats, quotes, examples and logical connections to persuade his audience - you.

**Student Essay #1**

I agree with Obama that our climate is changing. You can see it again and again in melting ice, hotter summers and strange amounts of rain. Obama uses lots of quotes and stats and examples and connections to make his point. He is really good at writing. Lots of hot summers have come our way in the past 12 -15 years and it is drying up our rivers and lakes and reservoirs. That’s why I agree with him, because you can see it all over the place. I see this in the news a number of time and only a few channel seem to disagree with him. He uses a chart that shows we blow all past times out of the water as far as how much CO2 we have in our air. Like he said, we owe it to our children and grandchildren and to mankind to stop being so selfish and get out there and do something about it. I really like the way he writes. He’s real clear about it. He doesn’t pretend to know things. He really does. He gets to the point and really let’s you know how he feels. He uses great information to back everything up.

**Reading Score:** 2. Although he does mention many things that President Obama brings up, it is not clear that this writer has made the connection of how they all fit into the picture of global warming. He does not mention specific quotes or examples or stats that are used in the passage to demonstrate his knowledge of what has been written.

**Analysis Score:** 1. Although he does mention that the writer uses stats, examples, etc., he never shows exactly how they prove the point or even how they are used. He also gives his opinion of whether he is right or wrong and that he writes well when neither of these were part of the prompt.

Also, he does not use specific quotes, stats, etc. to demonstrate how the argument is developed but brings in his own information. He mentions that he saw it on different news shows and mentions that some shows disagreed with him, but does not indicate which ones or in what way they disagree.

**Writing Score:** 1. This writer is far too casual in his style, using a lot or repetition and seldom supporting what he says with concrete examples. There is also no apparent structure or game plan for getting his ideas across.

He must avoid expressions like “You can see it all over the place,” “Like he said,” “blow out of the water,” “I really like,” and “He’s real clear about.” These take away from the serious tone of the passage.

He mentions 4-5 times how much he likes Obama’s writing without ever being specific about why he likes it so much. There does not seem to be a careful approach to making his point anywhere in the passage and he uses only two paragraphs to make his point.
Student Essay #2

President Obama makes a very strong case for doing something dramatic about climate change. He not only mentions statistics, but shows how they support his thesis. He alludes to space travel and the wonderful view and then alerts us to how that view might be changing.

What he does particularly well is to use each paragraph for a particular purpose. He discusses the difficulty of raising crops when we have one summer of floods and the next one has almost no rain at all. He mentions the dates for the 12 warmest years in history. He cites the stat that 97% of scientists think that there is global warming and that mankind is contributing.

He also speaks in a style that is very direct. He is not pulling any punches but he is does not come off as an alarmist. He also talks to us about what it will take to halt the terrible climate change that has been causing fires and changing the landscapes of the world.

Finally, he discusses our having the courage to act and why we must - that our children and grandchildren should not have to inherit a world that is crumbling.

Reading Score: 4. This writer gets the point. Every paragraph displays a grasp of this topic and it is not a superficial understanding. He cites examples, statistics and allusions throughout.

Analysis Score: 3. Although the writer mentions many of the techniques that President Obama uses to make his point, he does not consistently show us how he uses them to develop this essay. He also does not show us how the ideas are connected at some points.

Writing Score: 2. The use of language is weak, transitional words are rare and it is not a very thorough treatment of the essay. Try to have at least 4 paragraphs in every essay if you can

Student Essay #3

So often we students are turned off when reading science essays because they are so technical and just lack any style. Frankly, they are just not written in human terms. President Obama’s speech is a welcome exception. He uses the stats, allusions, examples that we might find in a scientific journal, but he speaks directly to us in a style that is folksy, yet serious.

He also has a very definite structure that enables the listener or reader to follow the logic of his arguments as each paragraph progresses. Each one has a point and everything in it revolves around that point.

He alludes first to a photo from space travel that changed our view of the world and then goes on to explain how that view might be changing soon. He then goes on to explain some of those changes from fires, to poor crops to rising insurance premiums, to higher taxes.

He uses striking stats to buttress his thesis and many examples from everyday life so that we can relate to what is happening.

President Obama is able to make us look at these very real problems as adults because that is how he addresses us. This is a no holds barred approach, but not one that hinges on the typical news hour gimmick of scaring us half to death so that we cannot even think straight. If he were my teacher, I think I would learn things more easily.

Reading Score: 4. This writer demonstrates his grasp of the essay in every paragraph. He cites allusions, examples, stats and quotes to show us that he “gets it.”

Analysis score: 3. Although he does mention all of the devices used by Obama to get his point across, he does not consistently show us how he develops the essay.

Writing Score: 3. This essay does not have a strong level of vocabulary or a solid amount of transitional words to guide the reader. There is, however, a serious tone that is consistent throughout and it stays focused at every turn.