

Question A2: Analysing language

This question will be based on the first text and require you to look at how the writer conveys a certain view or idea. You will need to consider language, tone and structure and look at the way attitudes and arguments are presented. This question is worth 10 marks.

What exactly must I do?

Explain how a writer puts forward a point of view by commenting on the content of the text and the way it is written. Aim to spend about 10–12 minutes answering the question. Support what you say by finding evidence (quotations) and explaining the effect of the writer's language choices.

The following text is a review of Scott Carney's book *What Doesn't Kill Us*. It was written for *The Spectator* magazine by William Leith. Answer the questions that follow.

Jogging in winter with your shirt off will help you in the long run

A life of ease and comfort ruins your health, says Scott Carney. Take icy baths and roll in the snow instead.

All animals, Scott Carney tells us, seek comfort. But human beings are a bit different. We don't need to spend much time actively seeking it. He's right: it's all around us – in your nice warm house, your air-conditioned car, your shoes, your bed, the temperate shopping mall you visit. Here in the affluent west, we eat comfort food in comfortable chairs, and then we recline on cushions, tweaking our dimmer switches and thermostats and adjusting the brightness on our screens.

Good for us, you might think. We can 'control and fine-tune our environment so thoroughly that many of us can live in what amounts to a perpetual state of homeostasis'. That's a scientific way of saying we've designed the world around us so we can feel good all the time.

But there's a problem – 'a hidden dark side', as Carney puts it. 'Effortless comfort has made us fat, lazy and increasingly in ill health.' In other words, if you spend all your time trying to feel good, after a while you'll start to feel bad. If you avoid pain for too long, you'll end up in terrible pain – the pain of diabetes, obesity, autoimmune diseases, gout, piles, stiff necks and backs, bad hearts and weak lungs.

So what's the answer? Let's see: if seeking comfort ends up making us feel uncomfortable, what happens when we actively seek discomfort? As you might guess, it makes you feel great. Of course, it must be the correct type of discomfort.

Anyway, here's what Carney does. He jumps into freezing water. He sits, shirtless, in the snow on the banks of a river in Poland. He climbs Mount Kilimanjaro in what might be record time (two days), stripped to the waist. He swims under water. He learns to hold his breath for ages. He trains with the toughest, most extreme athletes in the world – the surfer Laird Hamilton and the 'high-intensity' advocate Brian Mackenzie. Then there's the Dutch guru Wim Hof, who is quite extraordinary.

Before I describe Hof, let me say that I believe he's right – I always knew that jumping into freezing water makes you feel brilliant afterwards, but now I know why. Hof is a skinny chap with a scrubby beard. When he was 20, he jumped into an icy canal in Amsterdam. 'The feeling wasn't of cold; it was something like tremendous good,' he says. That's partly because the cold constricts your blood vessels, giving them a workout. It does lots of other things, too – you experience a rush of endorphins and a clarity of mind.

But there's more. If you get cold regularly enough, it seems, good things happen to your body. You get better at controlling your temperature. The workouts strengthen your blood vessels. Also, Hof believes, you will develop 'brown fat', a substance that helps you to burn ordinary white fat as fuel, and 'anti-inflammatory molecules' in your blood. So: jumping into freezing water, and jogging in cold weather with your shirt off will help you in the long run.

And it feels good. We all know that. Getting into an ice bath, Carney says: 'Endorphins buzz around my brain.' Getting out, he says: 'I feel almost perfect.'

From William Leith, in *The Spectator* (27 May 2017)

Consider the following question on the text:

How does the writer support the view that getting cold regularly is good for your health? [10]

The following ideas will help break down the question.

Fact and opinion



ACTIVITY 1

1 What comforts of modern life does the writer mention?

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2 What diseases does the writer mention we suffer from in our modern life?

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ACTIVITY 2

1 What does the writer say about how 'jumping into freezing water' makes you feel?

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2 According to the writer, what benefits does your body experience 'if you get cold regularly'?

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ACTIVITY CONTINUES ➞

- 3 How does Carney say he feels when he gets out of an ice bath?

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Language choices



ACTIVITY 3

- 1 What words does the writer use to describe our Western lifestyles?

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- 2 What words and phrases do Leith and Carney use to show their support for this lifestyle?

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Structure



ACTIVITY 4

- 1 What is the effect of the opening heading and introduction?

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- 2 What is the effect of discussing our Western lifestyles alongside Carney's lifestyle?

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- 3 How does the article end and what is the effect of this choice?

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ACTIVITY 5

ACTIVITY 6

ACTIVITY CONTINUES 

Extended practice

In this text, John Humphrys explains why he believes texting is destroying our language.

I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language

... It is the relentless onward march of the texters, the SMS (Short Message Service) vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped.

This, I grant you, is a tall order. The texters have many more arrows in their quiver than we who defend the old way.

Ridicule is one of them. 'What! You don't text? What century are you living in then, granddad? Need me to sharpen your quill pen for you?'

You know the sort of thing; those of us who have survived for years without a mobile phone have to put up with it all the time. My old friend Amanda Platell, who graces these pages on Saturdays, has an answerphone message that says the caller may leave a message but she'd prefer a text. One feels so inadequate. [...]

The texters also have economy on their side. It costs almost nothing to send a text message compared with a voice message. That's perfectly true. I must also concede that some voice messages can be profoundly irritating.

My own outgoing message asks callers to be very brief – ideally just name and number – but that doesn't stop some callers burbling on for ten minutes and always, always ending by saying: 'Ooh – sorry I went on so long!'

But can that be any more irritating than those absurd little smiley faces with which texters litter their messages? It is 25 years since the emoticon (that's the posh word) was born.

It started with the smiley face and the gloomy face and now there are 16 pages of them in the texters' A-Z.

It has now reached the stage where my computer will not allow me to type the colon, dash and bracket without automatically turning it into a picture of a smiling face. Aargh!

Extended practice continues ➔

A large rectangular area with a light blue background and a thin blue border. It contains 25 horizontal dotted lines for writing.