ALBERTA ENGLISH 30-1 · FULL COURSE

Reading Comprehension — Practice Test

Alberta English 30-1 • 50 questions

This practice test was made by AI and there may be mistakes. If a question or answer looks wrong, use the Flag a mistake button to let Brett know so he can fix it.

Reading I — The Salt House (novel excerpt)

Use this reading for questions 1 to 10.

The key was where it had always been, under the blue flowerpot beside the door, and Mara stood with it cold in her palm, surprised that eleven years could be undone by so small a thing. She had told everyone in the city she would need three days: one to sign the papers the agent had sent, one to clear the house, one to drive back. Her list had no column for the smell of salt and cedar at the door.

Inside, the house kept its old habits. Dust sheets stood over the furniture like patient ghosts, and in the kitchen her grandmother had left everything in readiness, the kettle on the stove, two cups on a tray. On the table, weighted by a shell, lay the real estate papers, and beside them a note in her brother's square hand. Tomas had written only: Sold the boat. Sorry. Do not hate me. She read it three times, penitent on his behalf, the way she had once confessed his broken windows as her own.

Her grandmother Agnes had kept a tide ledger for forty-one years. It began practically, as columns of dates and heights of water. But the margins had filled with other records. Mrs. Hale, poorly, October. The Parsons boy, home safe, God be thanked. Lent Tomas five dollars, told him it was four, so he would not be ashamed. It was less a record of the harbour than of her grandmother's attention, and attention, in that house, had been the whole of love.

She was a practical woman herself, or so her employers believed. She drew buildings other people lived in, and she had come home, she reminded herself, to leave the house forever. That was the sentence she had practised on the drive down. Yet the sentence was losing its grammar. The agent telephoned at noon and spoke of the market and the property's potential. Mara listened, watching a spider repair its web in the window with a concentration she envied. When he finished she said, Give me until Friday, and did not know whether she had postponed a sale or begun a rescue.

On the last evening she went to the attic and found a biscuit tin of letters, and at the bottom, in an envelope marked with her name in her grandmother's upright script, a single page. You will want to be efficient, the letter said. You were efficient at six, lining up your shoes. Efficiency is a fine servant and a poor master. A house is not what it is worth, Mara. A house is what it remembers. Below it: The ledger is on the shelf. There is room at the back. She did not sign the papers that night. She filled the kettle, wiped the dust from the ledger's cover with her sleeve, and sat at the table while the tide came back in the

dark, bringing the boats up one by one like something being forgiven. On the first clean page at the back she wrote the date, and underneath: Mara, home. The pen shook a little. The letters held.

1 **The tone of Reading I is best described as**

- A Wistful and reflective
- B Bitter and accusatory
- C Lighthearted and comic
- D Cold and detached

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

2 **In Reading I, the tide ledger chiefly reveals that Agnes**

- A Feared the sea too much to trust memory
- B Kept careful accounts in order to profit
- C Expressed love through sustained attention
- D Wished to control the lives of her neighbours

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

3 **The word penitent, used of Mara as she reads the note, most nearly means**

A Amused and forgiving

B Remorseful on behalf of another

C Impatient to be finished

D Proud of her own honesty

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

4 **The statement that Mara had come home to leave the house forever is best understood as a**

A Simile

B Hyperbole

C Metaphor

D Paradox

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

5 **The third person narration of Reading I chiefly allows the reader to**

- **A** Follow a change occurring inside Mara
- **B** Learn the private thoughts of Tomas
- **C** Judge the agent from his own viewpoint
- **D** See the harbour described without bias

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

6 **The spider repairing its web is included mainly to suggest that Mara**

- **A** Has neglected the house for many years
- **B** Feels superior to the natural world
- **C** Longs for patient and absorbed work
- **D** Intends to harm the waiting buyers

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

7 **By the end of Reading I, the clean page at the back of the ledger most strongly symbolizes**

- **A** A debt that can never be repaid
- **B** A place for Mara in an ongoing story
- **C** Proof that the house will sell quickly
- **D** The failure of memory over time

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8 **The central conflict in Reading I is between**

- **A** Mara and her brother over the boat
- **B** The family and the town over the sale
- **C** The sea and the people who sail on it
- **D** Efficiency and attachment in Mara herself

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9 **The advice that efficiency is a fine servant and a poor master implies that efficiency**

- A Is useful when it serves human values
- B Should be rejected in every circumstance
- C Matters more than memory and affection
- D Can be learned only from experience

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

10 **Taken as a whole, Reading I most strongly values**

- A Independence from the claims of the past
- B Profit gained through timely decisions
- C Faithfulness to people and places known well
- D Escape from the duties of family life

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Reading II — What the Winter Garden Keeps (poem)

Use this reading for questions 11 to 20.

Beneath the snow, the garden does not sleep;
it keeps its accounts in a slower hand,
roots at their ledgers in the frozen deep,
bulbs like coins of light in the dark land.

The gate is locked, the paths are white and bare,
the rose canes rattle in a thin, dry ring;
nothing here hurries, nothing wastes repair,
and the whole plot practices the art of waiting.

My mother saved the seeds in labelled jars,
in pencil, in a script that storms could not erase:
variety, season, and the fault of stars,
each packet promised to its proper place.

She taught me fallow is a kind of prayer,
a field at rest is not a field in loss;
the patience of the soil is past compare,
it gathers strength the way a heart gathers moss.

So let the snow do its slow, honest art,
and let the cold keep what the cold must keep;
what love has planted does not fall apart,
it only roots in darkness, twice as deep.

Spring is not promised. It is prepared for, here,
one seed, one season, one believing year.

11 **The central metaphor of Reading II presents the garden in winter as**

- **A** A battlefield awaiting a final defeat
- **B** A storehouse keeping life in trust
- **C** A stage set for human celebration
- **D** A prison holding the speaker captive

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

12 **The closing contrast between spring being promised and spring being prepared for emphasizes that hope**

- **A** Arrives on a fixed and certain schedule
- **B** Requires no human effort or attention
- **C** Belongs only to those who work in gardens
- **D** Is active faith, not passive expectation

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13 **In Reading II, the word fallow most nearly means**

A Resting and deliberately left unplanted

B Frozen solid and permanently ruined

C Freshly ploughed and ready for seed

D Covered in snow and hidden from view

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14 **The images of ledgers, coins, and labelled jars work together to emphasize**

A The commercial value of a good harvest

B The disorder that winter brings to farms

C The careful keeping of small valuable things

D The wealth the speaker hopes to gain

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

15 **The tone of Reading II is best described as**

- A Anxious and foreboding
- B Reverent and quietly hopeful
- C Sardonic and dismissive
- D Jubilant and unrestrained

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16 **The shift in the final six lines of the poem is chiefly a movement from**

- A Memory of the mother to description of soil
- B Despair at winter to anger at nature
- C Hope for spring to certainty of failure
- D Description and memory to direct reflection

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17 **The last line of the poem suggests that hope, for the speaker, is best understood as**

A A discipline practised rather than a gift received

B A guarantee issued by the turning seasons

C An illusion that winter will soon expose

D A reward owed to those who work hardest

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18 **Personification in Reading II chiefly serves to**

A Mock the garden for its inactivity

B Make winter seem cruel and deliberate

C Credit the natural world with purposeful care

D Separate human feeling from natural process

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19 **The mother in Reading II is presented mainly as**

- **A** A figure of sorrow who regretted her labour
- **B** A teacher whose habits formed the speaker
- **C** A distant owner of the garden plot
- **D** A critic of the speaker and her methods

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20 **Taken as a whole, Reading II most strongly affirms the value of**

- **A** Immediate results in all human effort
- **B** Control over every natural process
- **C** Ambition unrestrained by season or limit
- **D** Patience sustained by hidden preparation

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Reading III — The Last Stop (short story excerpt)

Use this reading for questions 21 to 30.

Elias had driven the number nine bus for nineteen years, long enough to know the route by heart. The last run left at eleven forty, through streets so cold the traffic lights seemed to change colour out of pity. He knew which regulars wanted conversation and which wanted the far greater kindness of being left alone, and he kept spare mittens in the glove box because his sister had once waited for a bus with bare hands.

The boy began riding on the first Friday of December. Fifteen, perhaps sixteen, with a furtive way of looking at the fare box, as if money were a subject he expected to be caught out on. He always paid. He always rode to the end of the line, although Elias had seen him, that first night, reach twice for the bell cord at Harrow Street and pull his hand back both times. A boy who reaches for the bell and does not ring it is a boy who has somewhere to be and would rather be almost anywhere. Elias understood this without being told.

He did not ask questions. Instead he developed a routine, and made it look like no routine at all. He began to drive Harrow Street a little more slowly. He took to eating half his sandwich at the depot stop, and leaving the other half, wrapped, on the dash, where a hand might take it as if by accident. He kept the heater blowing a stop longer than the rules allowed. And when the boy slept, forehead against the cold glass, Elias drove the long way round by the river road and let him sleep.

In the middle of February it changed. That night, at Harrow Street, the boy did what he had never done: he rang. He stood up too quickly, so that he swayed, and Elias saw that one of his shoes was wet through, dark with meltwater, and that the boy had been sitting all this time with one wet foot drawn up under him like a bird. At the door the boy stopped. He said, My mum works nights now, so it is all right. Our building got a new super. He heats the place. It was the longest speech he had ever made on the bus, and it was addressed, carefully, to a point just past Elias's shoulder.

Elias nodded, careful as a man carrying something full to the brim. He said, Well. That is good news about the heat. He did not say the rest of it, because the rest was not his to say: that he would miss the small weight of the boy in the mirror, that nineteen years of strangers had taught him how much of love is simply noticing, on time, and saying almost none of it. The boy went down the steps into the ordinary dark, one shoe squeaking. At

the depot, alone, Elias ate both halves of the sandwich, slowly, like a man at a table. Then he took the short way home.

21 **Elias keeps the spare mittens and drives past the boy stop chiefly because he**

- A Hopes the boy will one day pay him back
- B Has been ordered to watch the boy
- C Understands need that is never spoken aloud
- D Wishes to prove the schedule is wrong

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22 **The setting of Reading III chiefly contributes to the story by**

- A Making the bus a place of warmth against the cold
- B Proving the city is indifferent to its drivers
- C Showing that winter defeats every kindness
- D Turning the route into a test of endurance

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

23 **The word furtive, used of the boy at the fare box, most nearly means**

- A Openly defiant
- B Cheerfully careless
- C Loud and demanding
- D Secretive, as if expecting blame

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

24 **Elias is characterized mainly through**

- A What other passengers say about him
- B Small actions he tries to make unnoticeable
- C His own account of his long career
- D Descriptions of his strength and appearance

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25 **The detail of the boy wet shoe, revealed at the door, most strongly serves to**

- **A** Introduce a new conflict about the fare
- **B** Explain why the bus arrived late that night
- **C** Show how much hardship the boy had concealed
- **D** Suggest the boy had been dishonest all along

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26 **The third person narration limited to Elias chiefly allows the reader to**

- **A** Share his inferences while the boy remains private
- **B** Know the boy thoughts as fully as his own
- **C** Distrust everything Elias believes about the boy
- **D** Follow the mother through her night at work

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27 **When the boy finally speaks, he addresses a point past the shoulder of Elias. This detail suggests**

A Contempt for the man who drove the bus

B Relief that the winter has finally ended

C A plan to deceive Elias about his home

D Feeling too strong for direct expression

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28 **The final paragraph implies that Elias regards the end of the boy rides with**

A Anger at having been used by a stranger

B Quiet loss beneath genuine gladness for him

C Indifference, since passengers always change

D Suspicion that the boy story was invented

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29 **The recurring references to heat, light, and food in Reading III form a pattern that emphasizes**

A The cost of running a bus in winter

B The unreliability of the city heating system

C Care offered in ordinary and material forms

D The boy dependence on public services

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30 **Taken as a whole, Reading III most strongly suggests that compassion often consists of**

A Noticing need while protecting the dignity of another

B Demanding the truth before offering any help

C Giving generously and expecting gratitude in return

D Solving the problems of strangers completely

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Reading IV — Aisle Three (modern drama scene)

Use this reading for questions 31 to 40.

[A small-town hardware store, after closing. Rain on the skylight. LENA, 42, stands with a real estate folder under her arm. MARCUS, 38, is polishing a brass key, though it is already bright.]

LENA: You polish that key every night. It has been clean since March.

MARCUS: Dad polished it. Somebody should keep the habit, in the interim.

LENA: There it is. That word. Interim. [She puts the folder on the counter.] The offer is in there. It pays the care home for three years, and the developer keeps the frontage. He keeps the sign.

MARCUS: He keeps the sign and guts the rest. A sign over a coffee place is not keeping anything. That is taxidermy.

LENA: And what are we doing? Dusting a museum that loses money every month, while Dad asks the nurses when the store opens. He does not know the store, Marcus. Half the time he does not — [She stops.]

MARCUS: Say it.

LENA: Half the time he does not know me. [A pause. Rain.] So do not tell me I am selling him. I visit.

MARCUS: I know.

LENA: Then visit the arithmetic with me. The roof. The insurance. Your wages, which are not wages, which are whatever is left, which is nothing —

MARCUS: Rosa has run the paint desk for twenty-six years. People do not come here for nails, Lena. They can get nails anywhere. They come because somebody knows which nail.

MARCUS: [standing] You think I never did the arithmetic. I did it the winter Dad got the diagnosis, at that counter, and I cried over it, and then I opened the shop in the morning. You left. But you do not get to come back eleven years later and call the staying stupid.

[A long pause. LENA turns the brass key over in her hands.]

LENA: When did he give you this?

MARCUS: He did not. That is the spare. His has been at the care home since June, under his pillow. He sleeps with it.

LENA: [quietly] Then he knows something.

MARCUS: He knows the way home. That is all. That is everything. [He takes the folder, but does not open it.] Leave it here. Not a yes. Come in the morning, before we open, and work the counter with me. One morning. Then tell me what it is we are selling.

LENA: One morning proves nothing.

MARCUS: No. [A pause.] But it is a place to stand while we decide. [Lights narrow to the key, back on the counter between them.]

31 **The pauses and unfinished lines in Reading IV chiefly serve to reveal**

- **A** That both speakers have forgotten the past
- **B** That the shop has already been sold
- **C** That Rosa is listening outside the door
- **D** Feeling that neither speaker can yet state plainly

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32 **In Reading IV, Marcus compares keeping only the store sign to taxidermy in order to argue that**

- **A** The developer intends to deceive the town
- **B** Preserving an appearance without the life is false
- **C** The sign itself is the most valuable asset
- **D** His father would prefer the coffee business

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33 **The brass key in Reading IV most strongly symbolizes**

- **A** Belonging and the way home, held by habit
- **B** Wealth locked inside the family business
- **C** Authority that Lena refuses to recognize
- **D** A secret both siblings are keeping from Rosa

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34 **The revelation about the father sleeping with his key has the dramatic effect of**

A Proving the father is well enough to return

B Ending the disagreement between the siblings

C Deepening Lena understanding of what the store means

D Showing Marcus has misled her about the care home

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35 **Lena is best characterized as**

A Coldly eager to profit from the family loss

B Indifferent to her father and his condition

C Ashamed of the shop and of her upbringing

D Practical in argument but divided in feeling

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36 **By the end of Reading IV, Marcus request that Lena work one morning is best understood as**

- **A** A surrender of his position on the sale
- **B** A delay that invites shared experience before judgment
- **C** A test designed to humiliate his sister
- **D** Proof that he has already signed the offer

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37 **The central conflict in Reading IV is most accurately stated as a conflict between**

- **A** Financial necessity and loyalty to a living place
- **B** Two siblings competing for their father favour
- **C** The town and a developer over land use
- **D** Rosa and the siblings over wages and hours

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38 **The word interim, as Marcus uses it, suggests that he regards the present arrangement as**

A Permanent and beyond all discussion

B A burden he intends to abandon soon

C Temporary, though he cannot name what follows

D A punishment imposed by his father

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39 **The closing stage direction, narrowing the light to the key between them, chiefly emphasizes**

A That the decision has already been made

B That the shop will certainly be saved

C That both siblings reject their father memory

D A shared inheritance that still divides and joins them

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

40 **Taken as a whole, Reading IV most strongly suggests that decisions about the past require**

A Speed, before feeling can interfere with reason

B Presence and shared knowledge, not figures alone

C Obedience to the eldest member of a family

D Distance from the people who will be affected

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Reading V — In Defence of Dawdling (essay excerpt)

Use this reading for questions 41 to 47.

My grandfather shelled peas the way other men conducted business: slowly, on the porch, with the bowl between his knees and no evident interest in finishing. As a boy I found this maddening. There was a technique, I was sure, a faster way, and I once said so, with the cruelty of the young. He did not look up. A pea, he said, is not improved by your hurry. Neither, I have come to suspect, is a thought, a grief, a friendship, or a self. He was dawdling, by every modern definition. He was also doing important work: being a person in no danger of being used up by his own schedule.

Consider how completely we have surrendered the language of worth to the language of output. We measure our days in steps and our nights in sleep scores. We count our friends in followers and our reading in books finished. We praise the colleague who answers messages at midnight and pity, quietly, the one who cannot be reached. A whole civilization has agreed to blush about time that produces nothing saleable. Yet ask any honest person where a real decision was made or a real idea born, and the answer is almost never the meeting. It is the walk home, the long drive, the hour of staring out of a train window while the mind, unbossed at last, does its slow repair.

Efficiency has its place, and it is an honourable one. I want efficiency in a fire hall and in an operating room. What I resist is its promotion from servant to sovereign, its claim to govern the hours in which nothing is burning and nobody is bleeding. A mind is not a warehouse, to be optimized shelf by shelf. A mind is closer to a field, and every farmer my grandfather knew understood what our managers have forgotten: a field worked without rest does not become heroic. It becomes thin. It becomes fallow by force instead of by wisdom.

What, then, is dawdling, properly understood? It is not laziness, which avoids what matters. It is not distraction, which scatters what matters across a dozen glowing surfaces. Dawdling is attention without an invoice. The dawdler on the porch is available: to the neighbour who needs an ear more than an answer, to the grandchild whose question takes twenty minutes to arrive, and to his own half-formed thoughts, which will not visit a man in a hurry.

I am proposing something smaller and harder: that we stop apologizing. Leave one hour unscheduled and defend it the way you would defend sleep, because it is a form of sleep

— the waking kind, in which the self is reassembled. Let the peas take the time they take. What fills, in the meantime, is everything the hurry was supposed to be for.

41 **The main purpose of Reading V is to**

- A Defend apparently idle time as necessary to thought
- B Prove that modern workplaces should be abolished
- C Describe the daily habits of the writer grandfather
- D Argue that technology has no value in modern life

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

42 **The repeated opening of sentences with the words We measure, We count, and We praise is anaphora. It chiefly**

- A Provides statistical proof for the argument
- B Shows the writer cannot decide his position
- C Emphasizes how completely output governs daily life
- D Invites the reader to admire modern workers

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43 **The concession about efficiency in fire halls and operating rooms serves mainly to**

- **A** Weaken the argument by admitting it is wrong
- **B** Strengthen the argument by granting a fair limit
- **C** Change the subject to emergency services
- **D** Suggest that all work should be done slowly

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44 **In Reading V, dawdling is finally redefined as**

- **A** Avoiding every task that requires effort
- **B** Scattering attention across many distractions
- **C** Laziness practised in pleasant surroundings
- **D** Attentive, unhurried presence without an invoice

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45 **The comparison of the mind to a field is used to argue that the mind**

- **A** Needs periods of rest if it is to remain fertile
- **B** Should be managed like commercial property
- **C** Produces most when it is never left alone
- **D** Is wholly natural and requires no cultivation

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

46 **The tone of Reading V is best described as**

- **A** Detached and purely scientific
- **B** Angry and contemptuous of workers
- **C** Warmly persuasive and reflective
- **D** Hesitant and unwilling to conclude

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

47 **The closing sentences of Reading V imply that unscheduled time should be**

A Eliminated once a person becomes an adult

B Protected as a need, not treated as a fault

C Spent only in the company of family

D Converted into evidence of personal growth

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48 **Reading II and Reading V are most strongly linked by their shared use of**

A The sea as an image of returning memory

B A family business as a symbol of loyalty

C Public argument addressed to an opponent

D Resting land as an image of fruitful inactivity

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49 **Reading I and Reading IV are most strongly linked in that both present**

- **A** A family place whose worth exceeds its price
- **B** A journey undertaken in severe winter weather
- **C** A narrator who conceals the ending from the reader
- **D** Young people rebelling against their parents

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50 **Reading I and Reading III are most strongly linked in that both present love primarily as**

- **A** Grand declarations made at moments of crisis
- **B** Sustained attention paid to the lives of others
- **C** Sacrifice that must be publicly acknowledged
- **D** Duty performed without any personal feeling

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ANSWER KEY

1.	A	**10.**	C	**19.**	B	**28.**	B	**37.**	A	**46.**	C
2.	C	**11.**	B	**20.**	D	**29.**	C	**38.**	C	**47.**	B
3.	B	**12.**	D	**21.**	C	**30.**	A	**39.**	D	**48.**	D
4.	D	**13.**	A	**22.**	A	**31.**	D	**40.**	B	**49.**	A
5.	A	**14.**	C	**23.**	D	**32.**	B	**41.**	A	**50.**	B
6.	C	**15.**	B	**24.**	B	**33.**	A	**42.**	C		
7.	B	**16.**	D	**25.**	C	**34.**	C	**43.**	B		
8.	D	**17.**	A	**26.**	A	**35.**	D	**44.**	D		
9.	A	**18.**	C	**27.**	D	**36.**	B	**45.**	A		

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