

Reading non-fiction and media: 7. Gap and List

This audio bite is about answering questions using Gap and List.

ELIOT: In the reading section you are dealing with different texts, or passages. You need to work fairly quickly, because you'll be covering several questions about the texts. Each question looks for different things, so start by roughly estimating how long to spend on each question. The paper will show you how many marks each question is worth – and this is important to you.

ALIX: Yes, a lot of people waste time writing far too much on the first question or so. It might only be worth three marks, yet they spend twenty minutes on it. And later on they only have fifteen minutes to write about a question which is worth nine marks. So divide up your time properly.

ELIOT: And quite a few people forget about time all together. They carry on writing an answer and forget there are other, more important questions left. So stick to your plan – perhaps take off your watch and check where you are in the plan every few minutes.

ALIX: Read the questions before you look at the texts. The questions will tell you lots about the passages anyway, and the questions are what you have to answer, and what you will be marked on.

ELIOT: Highlight the key words – so underline them, or circle them, or colour them in - this will make you focus on the question.

ALIX: There will be some questions which seem difficult. They often have bullet points and ask you to do a number of things. Take your time – you've made a plan so you don't have to rush. Go through the 'Gap' ideas. So think about the genre – what sort of passage is it? Then about the audience – who is it for? How do you know? And then about the purpose, or purposes - what is the passage doing?

ELIOT: 'Gap' is a good way to remember how to tackle the text. And so is 'List' which is about language, information, style, and tone. So language is basically what you can find on the page – like the words and headings. Information is what the passage is telling you – is it made up of facts? Or does it have lots of opinions?

ALIX: That's 'L – I', so we need 'S' and 'T'. 'S' is Style, which is the way everything is expressed – is it eye-catching? Is it attractive? And 'T' is the tone, how you should treat the subject – should you be angry, sad, or disgusted? Or should you be interested and happy?

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ELIOT: If this doesn't quite make sense, think of an advert for fast food on the TV – people seem to be having fun, they all look like models and they're smiling all the time. So the advert fits the purpose – it makes you want to go out and get some of this food.

ALIX: But if you don't normally cook, and you decide to make chicken korma and rice for your girlfriend's birthday, you don't need lots of pictures of people grinning at you. You need lots of facts, like what to buy, and you want clear instructions, so you don't make mistakes.

ELIOT: So the reading questions are about understanding the passages. You need to plan how long you'll spend on each question, and stick to your plan, so you make sure you cover all the questions.

Read the questions before you read the texts. Check you understand the questions by circling the key words. When you are doing the more difficult questions, use 'Gap' and 'List' to help you remember. And try to link the texts with the language – show you understand what's going on.