

IELTS READING – THE SWIFTER S10AT3



IELTS READING THE SWIFTER reading practice test has 10 questions..

For a fascinating tale about creativity, look at a cleaning product called the Swiffer and how it came about, urges writer Jonah Lehrer. In the story of the Swiffer, he argues, we have the key elements in producing breakthrough ideas: frustration, moments of insight and sheer hard work. The story starts with a multinational company which had invented products for keeping homes spotless, and couldn't come up with better ways to clean floors, so it hired designers to watch how people cleaned. Frustrated after hundreds of hours of observation, they one day noticed a woman do with a paper towel what people do all the time:

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wipe something up and throw it away. **Q27 An idea popped into lead designer Harry West's head** the solution to their problem was a floor mop with a disposable cleaning surface. Mountains of prototypes and years of teamwork later, they unveiled the Swiffer, which quickly became a commercial success.

Lehrer, the author of Imagine, a new book that seeks to explain how creativity works, says this study of the imagination started from a desire to understand what happens in the brain at the moment of sudden insight. 'But the book definitely spiraled out of control,' Lehrer says. 'When you talk to creative people, they'll tell you about the 'eureka' moment, but when you press them they also talk about the hard work that comes afterwards, so I realised I needed to write about that, too. **Q28 And then I realised I couldn't just look at creativity from the perspective of the brain,** because it's also about the culture and context, about the group and the team and the way we collaborate.'

Q29 When it comes to the mysterious process by which inspiration comes into your head as if from nowhere, Lehrer says modern neuroscience has produced a 'first draft' explanation of what is happening in the brain. He writes of how burnt-out American singer Bob Dylan decided to walk away from his musical career in 1965 and escape to a cabin in the woods, only to be overcome by a desire to write. Apparently 'Like a Rolling Stone' suddenly flowed from his pen. 'It's like a ghost is writing a song,' Dylan has reportedly said. 'It gives you the song and it goes away.' But it's no ghost, according to Lehrer.

Q30 Instead, the right hemisphere of the brain is assembling connections between past influences and making something entirely new. Neuroscientists have roughly charted this process by mapping the brains of people doing word puzzles solved by making sense of remotely connecting information. For instance, subjects are given three words – such as 'age', 'mile' and 'sand' – and asked to come up with a single word that can precede or follow each of them to form a compound word. (It happens to be 'stone'.) Using brain-imaging equipment, researchers discovered that when people get the answer in an apparent flash of insight, a small fold of tissue called the anterior superior temporal gyrus suddenly lights up just beforehand. This stays silent when the word puzzle is solved through careful analysis. **Q31 Lehrer says that this area of the brain lights up only after we've hit the wall on a problem.** Then the brain starts hunting through the 'filing cabinets of the right hemisphere' to make the connections that produce the right answer.

Studies have demonstrated it's possible to predict a moment of insight up to eight seconds before it arrives. The predictive signal is a steady rhythm of alpha waves emanating from the brain's **Q32 right hemisphere, which are closely associated with relaxing activities.** 'When our minds are at ease-when those alpha waves are rippling through the brain – we're more likely to direct the spotlight of attention towards that stream of remote associations emanating from the right hemisphere,' Lehrer writes. 'In contrast, when we are diligently focused, our attention tends to be towards the details of the problems we are trying to solve.' In other words, then we are less likely to make those vital associations. So, heading out for a walk or lying down are important phases of the creative process, and smart companies know this. **Q33 Some now have a policy of encouraging staff to take time out during the day and spend time on things that at first glance are unproductive** (like playing a PC game), but day-dreaming ,has been shown to be positively correlated with problem-solving. However, to be more imaginative, says Lehrer, it's also **Q34 crucial to collaborate with people from a wide range of backgrounds** because if colleagues are too socially intimate, creativity is stifled.

Creativity, it seems, thrives on serendipity. American entrepreneur Steve Jobs believed so. Lehrer describes how at Pixar Animation, Jobs designed the entire **Q35 workplace** to maximise the chance of strangers bumping into each other, striking up **Q37 conversations** and learning from one another. He also points to a study of 766 business graduates who had gone on to own their own companies. Those with the greatest diversity of **Q36 acquaintances** enjoyed far more success. Lehrer says he has taken all this on board, and despite his inherent shyness, when he's sitting next to strangers on a plane or at a conference, forces himself to initiate conversations. As for predictions that the rise of the **Q38 Internet** would make the need for shared working space obsolete, Lehrer says research shows the opposite has occurred; when people meet face-to-face, the level of creativity increases. This is why the kind of place we live in is so important to innovation. According to theoretical physicist Geoffrey West, when corporate institutions get bigger, they often become less receptive to change. **Q39 Cities,** however, allow our ingenuity to grow by pulling huge numbers of different people together, who then exchange ideas. Working from the comfort of our homes may be convenient, therefore, but it seems we need the company of others to achieve our finest 'eureka' moments.

Q40 Understanding what drives our moments of inspiration

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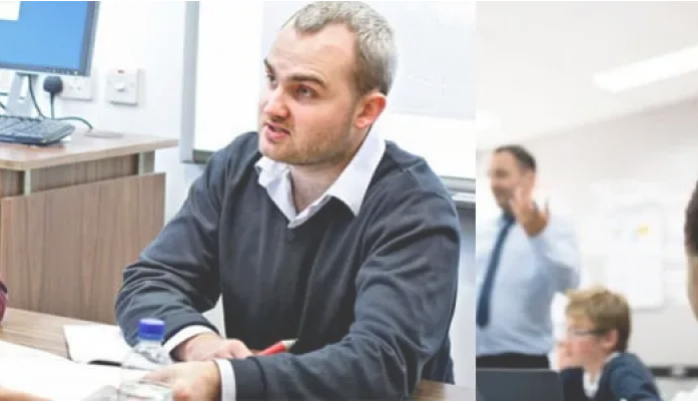
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