

## Part 5

You are going to read a newspaper article about people's attitudes to their possessions in a digital age. For questions 31–36, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text. Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

## Less is More

*How do people cut down on their possessions in a digital age*

The 17th century French artist Poussin is well-known for his paintings, usually set in serene and idyllic pastoral landscapes, which convey serious lessons for mankind. These messages are sometimes a bit obscure, and some continue to puzzle art historians, but in the picture *Landscape with Diogenes*, things seem relatively straightforward. The ancient philosopher Diogenes is depicted casting away his last possession, a drinking bowl. He realises he doesn't need it after seeing a youth cupping a hand to drink from a river. The significance for us is that Diogenes' spiritual descendants known as 'new minimalists' are now everywhere, if not as radically possession-free as he was.

There are hundreds of websites extolling the virtues of uncluttered living. 'I can carry everything I own,' says Kevin. 'I have a few changes of clothing, laptop, two pots, bowl, spoon, fork, futon and flask. I like sitting on the floor eating fruit, nuts, vegetables and rice.' At this point I really hated Kevin, but I should have known better because he continued, 'The nice thing about a bare room is that you begin to notice other things like the changing sunlight during the day. Many possessions tend to tie one down mentally and physically – seeing too much permanence in inanimate objects rather than being aware of the vitality of the outside world of nature.'

Everyone is trying to cut down on things these days. People are trying to reduce their carbon footprints, their waistlines, their monthly outgoings. What's more, there's a general fear that people are becoming asphyxiated by their possessions, and this is fuelled by the knowledge that, according to innumerable sociological surveys, the leading pastime these days seems to be shopping. It's true, sales of e-readers and e-books outstrip those of paperbacks, and we know that only losers and reactionaries buy camera film today. As a result, the need for bookshelves and photo albums is cut out.

However, today's new minimalists don't urge us to burn our books and crush our CDs, but just make sure we have them as digital files. So, for example, I have digitised versions of some of my old vinyl LP records and haven't, as yet, stirred myself to take the LPs to the nearest charity shop – and I admit I shall probably go on keeping them. Technology has, perhaps, gone beyond our dreams and there is always the lurking suspicion that our hard drives will crash and all will be lost. Far more important, however, is the fact that our memories are so inextricably tied to our possessions that we can't get rid of stuff. No matter how much glossy magazines insist that we should.

We are not exactly suffering withdrawal symptoms as we try to break our addiction to objects. We are just acquiring new stuff that means we can bin or recycle our old stuff. Diogenes, who was quite the cynic philosopher, would have seen through this imposture in seconds. Those who can afford to, buy the kit to make the minimalist dream a reality, but they are still investing in commodities, just different ones from those they collected a decade earlier.

A few years ago I wrote a piece predicting the demise of incredibly expensive watches, believing that they would inevitably be eclipsed by the amazingly more versatile mobile phone, no matter how beautifully crafted and elegant they might be, but they still seem to be covetable objects of conspicuous consumption. Clearly the ostensible function of a £20k watch is negligible enticement to owning it. Here then is another manifestation of the lure of possessions – we are not only sentimental in our attachment to them, but also status driven.

I'm happy to have found another website which seems to solve a whole lot of problems at once – a thriving online advice surgery offering storage solutions. The interior designer responsible for this does not counsel getting rid of stuff, but rather recommends buying more stuff (elegant flexible trugs, colourful lidded containers) to hide the first lot of stuff from view. I love this philosophy – get that decluttered minimalist look, convince yourself you've got your desire for possessions under control, without having to lose a thing. There's no reason to think such bad faith will change soon: we aren't ruthless enough to emulate Diogenes and cast away all our possessions.

- 31 Why does the writer refer to a painting by the artist Poussin?
- A Its message is not as simple as it appears.
  - B Its meaning is only now becoming clear.
  - C It illustrates a very modern trend.
  - D It portrays a very wise philosopher.
- 32 What lesson did the writer take from his own reaction to Kevin's blog?
- A Learn to enjoy your natural surroundings.
  - B Don't be too quick to judge people.
  - C Take pleasure in the simple things of life.
  - D Don't become tied down by possessions.
- 33 In the writer's opinion, what prompts people to want to reduce their possessions?
- A unease about the acquisitive nature of modern society
  - B a desire to take advantage of new technology
  - C a concern about wasting money
  - D an urge to simplify their lives
- 34 The writer thinks minimalism will not succeed in the long term because of people's
- A lack of faith in digital hardware.
  - B laziness in the face of change.
  - C nostalgia for physical objects.
  - D resistance to media pressure.
- 35 The writer suggests Diogenes would have viewed modern attempts at minimalism with
- A indifference.
  - B sympathy.
  - C approval.
  - D contempt.
- 36 According to the writer, people invest in smart new storage in order to
- A ease their conscience over having too many things.
  - B provide a temporary solution to a problem.
  - C make attractive additions to their homes.
  - D indulge their desire to make purchases.

## Part 6

You are going to read a newspaper article about psychology. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A–H** the one which fits each gap (37–43). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

## Psychology: just common sense?

For many sceptics, it was a sweet moment when, at a recent science meeting, a psychology professor denounced his own discipline as 'banal' and 'a fake science'. As a rehearsal for an international conference on the theme of 'critical psychology', Professor Ian Parker was addressing the British Psychology Association.

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So it was a relief for some to hear of Professor Parker's claim that psychologists 'don't tell us anything we don't already know'. The rebel professor argues that psychology cannot claim to be a science because it is unable to subject itself to the same research and validation processes that biology, physics and chemistry do. This accusation has been made loudly for decades and he says the subject has done little to improve itself. 'Psychology pretends to be a science but it is not a science and it is questionable whether it could ever be one,' he says.

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For a long time, psychologists have attempted to address the issue of what effect this attitude has. Some have incorporated into their conclusions the influence it has on results, exposing it instead of making ineffectual attempts to hide it. And new, more sophisticated theories have arisen. Professor Parker thinks a few of these have been useful but most are merely fads: 'They are there for about 10 years and then they disappear.'

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Professor Parker accepts that these may be cheap experiment fodder. But, he argues, how many of us feel that their behaviour yields much insight into the rest of us? In some institutions, he claims, it is now becoming compulsory for them to take part in psychology

experiments, narrowing even further the range of people that is studied.

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Thus, the psychologist who studies, say, impulse buying, must first test our preconceptions about the habit to decide on common views on it. After that, he then makes more detailed investigations to see if the evidence supports them. In this way, psychologists' conclusions would be supported by layer upon layer of reliable evidence.

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A key problem here is that humans themselves keep changing, partly in response to what psychologists have previously told them about themselves. Ask the man on the street to account for his behaviour and he may well invoke his 'unconscious' in the explanation. But before the concept of the unconscious was invented by Freud, the man would have explained himself differently.

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The fact that fashions in psychology can change so dramatically is one more argument in Professor Parker's attack on his own profession. But whatever doubts he and those who support him hold, there is no denying the great public and media appetite for the results of even the smallest of experiments conducted by the most inexperienced of researchers.

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There is a willing audience ready to absorb and believe things that affect all of us in our daily lives. And so without challenge, without counter-proposition, yet another rumour would enter the world of popular psychology, masquerading as proven fact.

- A** Although he therefore acknowledges that there have been some positive developments, Professor Parker believes there are still some very obvious problems with psychologists' techniques. An example is the temptation among university researchers to study only undergraduates.
- B** Psychological theories even cause people to behave differently. The agony aunts advising people on their problems in British newspapers and magazines fifty years ago absorbed the psychology of their generation and urged readers to repress feelings which they would now encourage them to indulge.
- C** Moreover, it is testimony to psychology's success that much of its research now appears common sense. This is because psychology's findings are more generally disseminated to a general audience than other sciences. But why is this the case?
- D** The week-long get-together was packed with interesting science but some of the psychology presentations were so dubious that delegates were already inclining towards his views. One researcher, for example, had discovered that impulse buyers like clothes and hi-fis but are not tempted by gardening tools or car equipment.
- E** But this is what Professor Parker thinks is missing: 'If the theories are built up on solid ground, the question is: where is the building? The magnificent tower of psychological knowledge never appears,' he says.
- F** As a result, just a day's research by a student has in the past been deemed worthy of presentation at a psychology conference. It has then duly been reported by uncritical newspapers.
- G** One contributing factor to this lack of academic rigour, he believes, is that the subjects who volunteer for psychology experiments are different from the rest of us. Investigations have shown that they are more insecure and they try harder to please. Indeed, they try hard to discover what result the researcher wants and then help to produce it.
- H** Combine this with the 'banal' or 'common sense' results that seem to flood psychology journals and conferences, and it is not surprising that the discipline of psychology may appear ridiculous to some outsiders. To restore its reputation, first and foremost psychologists must establish the foundations of their research to avoid creating a structure that rests on mere hearsay.

Part 7

You are going to read a newspaper article about poetry. For questions **44–53**, choose from the sections (**A–D**). The sections may be chosen more than once. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

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**In which section does the writer mention**

the possibility of a poem following certain conventions?

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poetry which sounds like prose?

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particular lines of poems being precious to most people?

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poetry being instantly recognisable?

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evidence that poetry has long been seen as a creative act?

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poetry being the ultimate expression of an intellectual mind?

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professional respect for the integrity of poetry?

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the possibility of poetry dealing with everyday matters?

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poetry's relative lack of exposure?

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poetry that relies for its effectiveness purely on its emotional resonance?

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## Poetry

### *The writer AA Gill reflects on the nature of poetry*

#### **A**

One of the most satisfying things about words is their black and whiteness, the neat, austere simplicity of their process. Letters on a page are so direct and literal; you read a sentence and you can trace the thought. You know how it's done – just so long as it's prose. With poetry, however, the rules don't apply. On the face of it, it looks the same; the letters, the words, are familiar. But by some internal magic, poetry hovers above the page. It happens outside the black and white lines. Poetry is in essence a mysterious art. Poems are coded messages for your eyes only, left under pillows, tied to roses, written in water. There are no regular poetry reviews in cultural magazines, or poetry programmes on the telly. I expect Seamus Heaney and Wendy Cope could stroll hand in hand through most bookshops unmolested. Poems sell few and far, for little or less. But this reticence belies the truth of verse. Even if we haven't read a new poem for a decade, still there are verses that are the most dear cultural amulets we own, hidden in the dead letterboxes of our hearts. Snatches of verse, we take them to our end.

#### **B**

I write about 1,500 words every day. I handle them with respect and pleasure, for they are the tools of my trade. I reckon I can make a craftsman-like job of most wordy things, from a shopping list to a eulogy. But I have no idea, not the faintest inkling, of how a poem is made, and not for want of trying. Of course, I've tried. I've chopped the lines out, I've counted the syllables and made similes and metaphors, but it's barely poetry. It remains resolutely page-bound: prosaic, poetish pastiche. The hardest thing after writing poetry is writing about poetry, as you must already have noticed. It makes the author sound either pretentiously airy-fairy or thuggishly indifferent. For a start, nobody has really even satisfactorily defined what poetry is. Have a look in any dictionary, and you'll see what I mean. The word 'poet' got its first recorded use in English in the 14th century. It came from the Ancient Greek for 'the maker'. People have written books defining what poetry is and isn't, but they can only tell you the mechanics. I asked an editor what poetry was. She said, 'It's that which can't be edited.'

#### **C**

You know poetry the moment you see it; the first line tells you. Yet it has no rules. It can rhyme or not. It can have as many rhythms as a Brazilian ballroom, lines of any length, as much or as little punctuation as it feels like. But poetry can also be as rigorous as mathematics. It exists outside grammar and formula, and yet it can tie itself up in manners and etiquette. It can have any number of subtly different meanings; indeed, it can have no logical meaning at all, yet still be beautiful and touching and disturbing. A woman once wrote to Dylan Thomas saying that she loved his poetry, but was worried that her understanding of it was not what he'd intended. Thomas replied that a poem was like a city: it had many entrances.

#### **D**

I have yet to hear a convincing explanation of where poetry comes from and how it arrives, but I do know it is the highest calling of a sensitive and cerebral existence. Poetry, along with dancing and drumming is probably the most ancient of all our arts. There was rhythm and rhyme before written language. Poems lit up the memory of our collective past, told us who we were and where we came from, and they still do. People who never read poetry still reach for it at the precipitous points of their existence. At times of great happiness or terrible sadness, those places where prose is leaden with its own wordiness, only poetry will do. And there is poetry for every occasion. In my life we have had a particularly rich period of poets: Auden, Graves, Larkin, Thomas, Betjeman, to name but five. They have written between the lines on every facet of our lives, from sport to table manners. The poetry of our times is a fairer record of our concerns and hopes and our collective life than film or television or painting.