

Part 5

You are going to read a newspaper article about libraries. 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.

Why libraries matter in today's technological world

Municipal libraries are perhaps one of the most enduring public institutions – priceless repositories of history, language, and culture. The dawn of the 'information superhighway' threatened to make them less relevant, even obsolete. Yet now, these institutions are extending their mission well beyond the storage of knowledge. Indeed, to distinguish themselves in a world where Google is well on its way to digitally scanning most of the books ever written, libraries are learning to avail themselves of the simple fact that they are centrally located in almost every community in the USA. In other words, libraries now see success being linked to their role as public places and destinations.

While many US cities and towns now recognize the importance of re-inventing public libraries as destinations, this awareness doesn't always translate into a well-rounded success. The most high-profile new libraries rely on stylized designs to create buzz, feeding a false perception that public libraries are all about attention-grabbing looks. But when the tour bus crowds stop coming, these libraries will sink or swim based on how well they serve the needs of their respective communities – whether they are truly great places, not just eye-catching buildings.

There are plenty of unsung libraries that embody a very different and more compelling vision of what it means to be a public place. They may fly under the radar as architectural landmarks, but they still garner respect, praise and even adoration on account of their innovative management and programming. They are taking on a larger civic role – balancing their traditional needs and operations with outreach to the wider community – thereby contributing to the creation of a physical commons that benefits the public as a whole. If the traditional model of the library was the inward-focused community 'reading room', the current one is more like a community 'front porch'.

line 14

line 15

line 19

line 20

But what of universities and other academic institutions; what is the value of an academic library in an age of abundant information? A recent report commissioned by the Online Computer Library Center focusing on college students found that they use libraries more than any other demographic group, that they like to help themselves to information, that they are aware of the library's electronic resources, and that they identify libraries with books (but they don't seem to feel that's a bad thing, unlike the so called experts who authored the report who reveal deep dismay at that finding). What's more, they supplement library resources with ones found on the web (no surprise there; don't we all?), they are largely satisfied with services and facilities and they are strongly attached to the idea of libraries.

For college students, the library is like the poet Robert Frost's idea of home, 'the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.' They may not want to be there, they may not have any real curiosity about the topic they are researching, but the library is a gateway to the sources they need, and for at least some students the librarians are 'saviors' who help them take an assignment and locate sources that will match.

Of course, these days any distinction between library and digital information is obsolete. But there is a valid distinction between printed book and the web, as there is between library and home computer. And the fact is, there are things that the web cannot offer which any library can. In a library it's the totality of the experience that matters: the website, the face-to-face services, the catalog, the collection. Staff are on hand to ensure the user's reaction to the library is positive and productive, especially the novice user. Moreover, a library creates relationships. It develops in users a sense of belonging, both to the library community, whether local or academic, and to the wider world of knowledge. In this and other respects, the billions of web pages in existence do not carry the same symbolic weight as the library. It stands for the importance of knowledge, for access, for the idea that pursuing questions is a valuable human endeavor. We would do well not to dismiss that symbolism as mere nostalgia.

- 31** What point is the writer making about public libraries in the first paragraph?
- A** They are struggling to survive in the digital age.
 - B** They will have to find a completely new purpose.
 - C** They are taking full advantage of an existing benefit.
 - D** They may well have to give up their function of storing books.
- 32** In the second paragraph, the writer's purpose is to
- A** warn libraries against trusting in new buildings to attract users.
 - B** praise libraries which recognize the benefits of tourism.
 - C** stress the need for libraries to consult local residents.
 - D** advise libraries to move to more central locations.
- 33** Which phrase illustrates 'a very different and more compelling vision of what it means to be a public place'? (lines 14–15)
- A** they may fly under the radar (line 15)
 - B** architectural landmarks (line 15)
 - C** community 'reading room' (line 19)
 - D** community 'front porch' (line 20)
- 34** What is the writer emphasising in the first bracketed comment in the fourth paragraph?
- A** her contempt for the reaction of the report writers
 - B** her concern for the outdated attitudes of the students
 - C** her doubt about the range of library users that were questioned
 - D** her distrust regarding the motives of those commissioning the report
- 35** Why does the writer quote the poet Robert Frost's definition of home?
- A** to underline the literary value of a library's resources
 - B** to describe the function an academic library is required to fulfil
 - C** to suggest the paternal role taken by some college librarians
 - D** to express the sense of comfort libraries used to give their readers
- 36** In comparing libraries and the Internet, the writer
- A** is urging libraries to concentrate on doing what they do best.
 - B** suggests there is no essential difference between them.
 - C** is making the case for the existence of libraries as a separate entity.
 - D** appears to regard libraries as an unnecessary luxury.