Reading: every part, every level

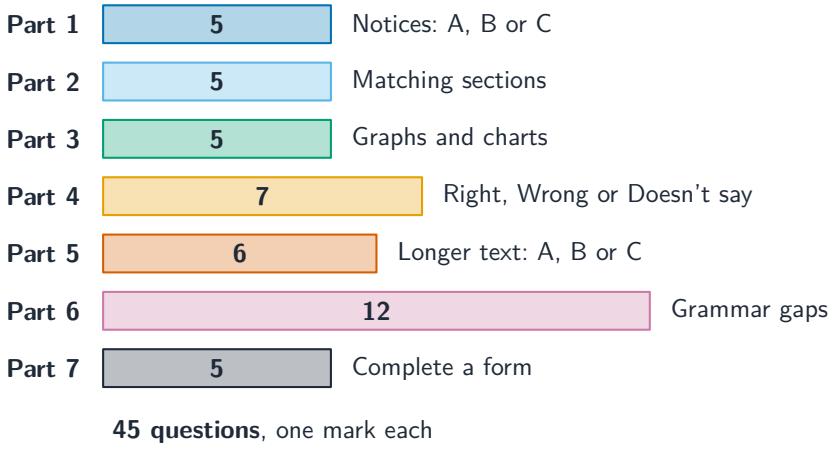
BEC Business English

What this topic covers

BEC Reading uses the texts people meet at work: notices, emails, adverts, articles and reports. This topic shows every part of the Reading paper at the three levels, the skill each part tests, and how to work fast without losing marks.

- **Preliminary:** 7 reading parts, 45 questions, in the 1 h 30 min Reading and Writing paper.
- **Vantage:** 5 parts, 45 questions, 1 hour.
- **Higher:** 6 parts, 52 questions, 1 hour.
- Each question is worth **one mark**, and a blank earns nothing.
- Memory hook: the early parts test **meaning**; the later parts test **words and grammar**.

Preliminary Reading, part by part



Preliminary: seven short parts, 45 questions

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Part	Questions	What you read	What you do
1	5	short notices, messages, labels	choose A, B or C
2	5	one text in sections (e.g. adverts)	match questions to sections
3	5	graphs or charts	match sentences to graphs
4	7	one longer text	**Right**, **Wrong** or **Doesn't say**
5	6	one longer text	choose A, B or C
6	12	a text with gaps	choose the word (grammar)
7	5	e.g. an email and a memo	complete a form or notes

- **Part 3:** read the **graph**, not the words. A sentence such as *"Sales rose steadily, then fell sharply"* matches only one line shape.
- **Part 4:** *Right* means the text says it; *Wrong* means the text says the opposite; *Doesn't say* means the text gives no answer. Never use what you know about the company.
- **Part 7:** copy the facts **exactly** from the texts, with correct spelling. A wrong letter in a name loses the mark.

Vantage and Higher Reading

	Vantage (1 hour, 45 questions)	Higher (1 hour, 52 questions)
Part 1	7 questions: match statements to **four** short texts	8 questions: match to **five** short texts
Part 2	5 gaps: put **sentences** back into an article	6 gaps: the same task
Part 3	6 questions: choose A, B, C or D	6 questions: choose A, B, C or D
Part 4	**15** gaps, multiple-choice cloze	**10** gaps, multiple-choice cloze
Part 5	**12** lines of **proofreading**	**10** gaps, **open cloze** (one word each)
Part 6	–	**12** lines of proofreading

- **Matching** (Part 1): read the statements first, then **scan** the texts for each one. The statement uses different words from the text.

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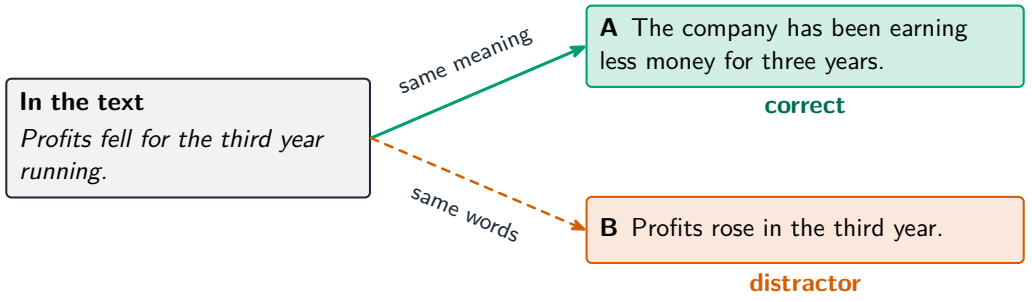
- **Gapped text** (Part 2): one sentence is extra. The right sentence fits the **ideas** and the **grammar** on both sides of the gap.
- **Multiple-choice cloze** : all four options often mean something similar. Only one fits the words around it: *place an order*, *meet a deadline*, *raise prices*.
- **Proofreading:** some lines are correct; the others have **one extra word**. Write the extra word, or *CORRECT*.

The key skill: paraphrase

The question almost never repeats the words of the text. It uses a **paraphrase** : the same meaning in different words. The option that repeats the text's words is often the **distractor** .

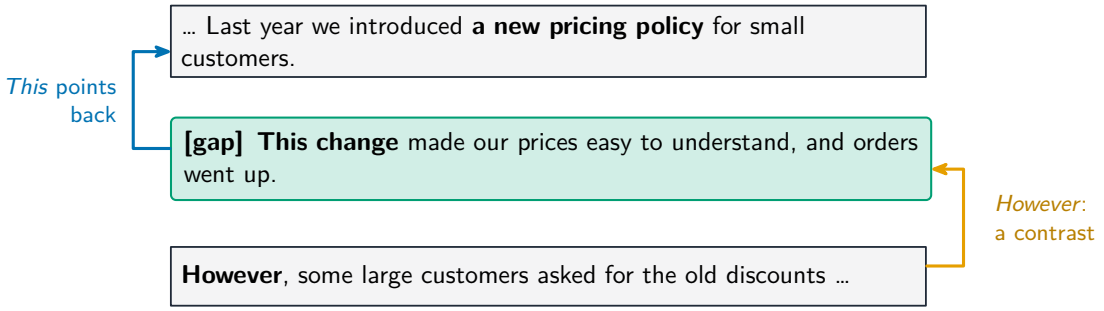


Match the meaning, not the words

In the text	In the question
postponed until next month	*will take place later than planned*
staff turnover is high	*many employees leave*
the figures are not yet available	*the results have not been published*
we have outgrown our office	*the company needs more space*

Gapped text: follow the links

In Part 2 at Vantage and Higher, each missing sentence is held in place by small words: a **reference word** (*this, these, they, such*), a **linking word** (*however, as a result, also*) and repeated ideas.



A sentence fits only when it links both ways

- Read the sentences **before and after** each gap. Ask: what does *this* refer to? Does *however* show a contrast?
- Put in the sentences you are sure of first. The last gaps become easier.
- Check the extra sentence at the end: it should fit **nowhere**.

Timing and answer sheets

- About **one minute per question** at Preliminary leaves about 35 minutes for writing.
- At Vantage and Higher you have one hour for Reading alone. Don't spend 20 minutes on Part 1: about **10 minutes per part** is a safe plan.
- Answers go onto the **answer sheet** inside the time. Copy after each part.
- **Skim** a long text first (one minute, for the main idea of each paragraph), then read for the answers.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Choosing the option with the same word.** Same word, different meaning: the classic distractor. Look for the paraphrase.
- △ **Translating every word.** Read in phrases and keep moving. Use the context for an unknown word.
- △ **Writing two words in an open-cloze gap.** One gap, one word: *a*, *the*, *which*, *for*, *despite*.
- △ **Missing the extra *the* or *to* in proofreading.** Chinese has no articles, so an extra *the* looks normal. Read each line aloud in your head.

Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. Text: *"The launch has been put back to the spring."* Statement: *"The product will appear earlier than planned."* Right, Wrong or Doesn't say?

2. Text: *"Our sales team grew by 20% last year."* Statement: *"The company made more profit last year."* Right, Wrong or Doesn't say?
3. Which word fits? *We need to* _____ *a decision by Friday.* A do B make C get D give
4. Open cloze, one word: *The meeting was cancelled because* _____ *the bad weather.*
5. Proofreading: *We will send you the goods as soon as they will arrive.* Which word is extra?
6. Gap: *"…we introduced flexible hours. [?] However, managers worried about meetings."* Which sentence fits: A *This was popular with most staff.* B *The building has three floors.*

Answers. 1 **Wrong**: *put back* means later. 2 **Doesn't say**: more staff tells us nothing about profit. 3 **B make**: *make a decision* is the collocation. 4 **of** (*because of*). 5 **will**: after *as soon as*, use the present (*as soon as they arrive*). 6 **A**: *This* refers to flexible hours, and *However* contrasts with "popular".

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How many questions are in Preliminary Reading? – **45**, in seven parts.
2. In Part 4 at Preliminary, what does *Doesn't say* mean? – The text gives **no answer** either way.
3. What do you write in proofreading for a correct line? – **CORRECT**.
4. How many words go in an open-cloze gap? – **One**.
5. Why is the option with the text's own words often wrong? – It is a **distractor**: the right answer usually paraphrases.

Vocabulary card meanings

proofreading: Checking a text line by line to find and correct mistakes. open cloze: A gap-fill task where you write one word in each gap, with no options. scan: To look quickly through a text for one particular piece of information. gapped text: A text with missing sentences that you must put back in the right places. multiple-choice cloze: A gap-fill task where you choose the right word for each gap from options. paraphrase: Saying the same meaning with different words. distractor: A wrong option that is designed to look right. reference word: A word such as this or they that points back to something already mentioned. skim: To read a text quickly to get the main idea.

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