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## Basic Skills

### Writing Sample Items

Read the passage below; then answer the three questions that follow.

(Note: An error of paragraph organization has been purposely included in the second paragraph.)

<sup>1</sup>Not long ago, the surprising announcement that Pluto is not the ninth planet in our solar system confounded the wisdom of millions of science books and generations of schoolteachers.

<sup>2</sup>Reclassified by the International Astronomical union as a "dwarf planet," Pluto is not even the largest of the five dwarf planets identified thus far. <sup>3</sup>This development underscores the difficulties scientists face in evaluating data about the outer planets of our solar system. <sup>4</sup>As a result of recent advances in technology, there has been an explosion of new and more detailed information about the universe, and researchers are kept hard at work collecting data and devising theories to explain what they see.

<sup>5</sup>One of these hard-working scientists is U.S. astronomer Heidi Hammel. <sup>6</sup>Aided by the Hubble Space Telescope, Dr. Hammel's team made the surprising discovery in 2005 that one of the rings of Uranus is blue. <sup>7</sup>Several planets have been found to have rings, but practically all of them appear to be reddish in hue, suggesting the presence of the element iron. <sup>8</sup>A possible explanation for Uranus's blue ring, says Dr. Hammel, is that the ring is composed of tiny particles too small to contain iron. <sup>9</sup>It may instead be made of minuscule ice particles or some substance similar to the electrically charged particles in the tail of a comet. <sup>10</sup>With more information constantly coming in, she and her colleagues must always be prepared to adapt their theories to the facts. <sup>11</sup>Than again, it may be something else.

1. Which change would make the sequence of ideas in the second paragraph clearer?

- A. Reverse the order of Parts 6 and 7.
- B. Reverse the order of Parts 7 and 8.
- C. Reverse the order of Parts 8 and 9.
- D. Reverse the order of Parts 10 and 11.

2. Which change is needed in the passage?

- A. Part 7: Change "hue" to "hew."
- B. Part 8: Change "too" to "to."
- C. Part 10: Change "their" to "there."
- D. Part 11: Change "Than" to "Then."

3. Which part contains an error in capitalization?

- A. Part 2
- B. Part 5
- C. Part 6
- D. Part 8

Read the passage below; then answer the three questions that follow.

<sup>1</sup>Best known for its imaginative poetry, the Romantic Era in English literature also witnessed important developments in the genre of fiction. <sup>2</sup>These changes can be seen in the enormously popular Gothic novels that explored the dark side of human nature and introduced an other-worldliness that inspired early science fiction. <sup>3</sup>Even more significant were the complex crafted novels of Sir Walter Scott. <sup>4</sup>By creating detailed settings and populating them with the full range of Scottish society, from beggars and rustics to landed nobility, Scott took the historical novel well beyond its previous focus on the lives of royalty. <sup>5</sup>In the course of doing so, he redefined the genre of historical fiction.

<sup>6</sup>Sir Walter Scott came to this literary world through his fascination with the past, particularly that of his native Scotland. <sup>7</sup>The son of a solicitor, he entered the University of Edinburgh at the age of twelve. <sup>8</sup>Initially applying his energies to narrative verse he completed the first of his more than thirty novels in 1814. <sup>9</sup>The blend of the historical and the marvelous found in this and succeeding works soon made Scott one of the most famous writers of his era. <sup>10</sup>No less notable were the techniques he employed—an omniscient narrator, the use of regional dialect and historical language, the creation of detailed local settings, and sophisticated and realistic characterization.

<sup>11</sup>The resulting product not only fascinated readers but also inspired other writers, untold numbers of whom have been following his lead for nearly two centuries now.

**4. Which part is *least* relevant to the main idea of the second paragraph?**

- A. Part 6
- B. Part 7
- C. Part 10
- D. Part 11

**5. Which change is needed in the passage?**

- A. Part 3: Change "complex" to "complexly."
- B. Part 5: Change "historical" to "historic."
- C. Part 10: Change "notable" to "notably."
- D. Part 11: Change "nearly" to "almost."

**6. Which change is needed in the passage to correct an error in punctuation?**

- A. Part 2: Insert a comma after "nature."
- B. Part 4: Delete the comma after "society."
- C. Part 6: Delete the comma after "past."
- D. Part 8: Insert a comma after "verse."

**Read the passage below; then answer the three questions that follow.**

<sup>1</sup>In 2004, the two major parties spent a combined total of four billion dollars on the presidential campaign. <sup>2</sup>Less than a decade earlier, they spent only half that much. <sup>3</sup>These figures illustrate the emergence of two serious problems. <sup>4</sup>One is the staggering cost of national campaigns, which prevent people of modest means from running for office and condemns those who try to almost certain defeat. <sup>5</sup>The other is the negative impact that such vast amounts of money have on our political system, as much of this money is used to fund the transmission of emotional appeals that degrade the democratic process.

<sup>6</sup>It seems only fair that all candidates have the same spending limit, regardless of their financial circumstances. <sup>7</sup>Wealthy individuals should be prohibited from using private funds in excess of perscribed limits. <sup>8</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, donations from organized groups should be limited to the same amount for each candidate. <sup>9</sup>The result would be fewer highly paid political consultants, less character defamation, and fewer ads designed to bolster a given candidate's public image.

<sup>10</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, citizens might once again see serious treatment of important issues in contests that embody the best traditions of U.S. democracy.

**7. Which words or phrases, if inserted in order into the blank lines in Parts 8 and 10 of the second paragraph, would best help the reader understand the sequence of the writer's ideas?**

- A. As a result; Meanwhile
- B. For this reason; Consequently
- C. Similarly; Instead
- D. Moreover; On the contrary

**8. Which change is needed to correct an error in subject-verb agreement?**

- A. Part 4: Change "prevent" to "prevents."
- B. Part 5: Change "have" to "has."
- C. Part 5: Change "degrade" to "degrades."
- D. Part 10: Change "embody" to "embodies."

**9. Which underlined word in the passage is spelled incorrectly?**

- A. condemns
- B. transmission
- C. perscribed
- D. defamation

**10. From time to time all of us take on or are given responsibilities that we may or may not be glad to have. In a written response for educated adults, describe a responsibility that you were given or took on and explain why meeting that responsibility became a rewarding experience or a difficult chore.**

11. It has been proposed that all citizens in the United States be required to vote in local, state, and national elections. In an essay to be read by educated adults:

- discuss why you agree or disagree with this proposal; and
- defend your position with reasoned arguments and relevant examples.

### Answer Key

Item Number	Correct Response	Objective
1	D	0007
2	D	0008
3	A	0009
4	B	0007
5	A	0008
6	D	0009
7	C	0007
8	A	0008
9	C	0009
10	Sample strong response	0010
11	Sample strong response	0010

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