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ENGLISH

Introduction to Comprehension

The Four Major Communication Skills

Learning a language involves acquiring four major skills.

- **Listening:** Frequently used to receive instructions and process instructions
- **Speaking:** Used to communicate in a language effectively
- **Reading:** Used to understand and analyse literature written in a particular language
- **Writing:** Used to reproduce one's thoughts using words and writing formats effectively

These skills are commonly called **LSRW** skills and are collectively termed communication skills. Communication skills help to understand a particular language, process it and use it effectively. Let us examine the role of reading comprehension in acquiring **Reading** skills.

Reading Comprehension

What is Reading Comprehension?

Reading comprehension is the act of understanding what you are reading.

Reading comprehension involves

- Gaining knowledge from the information shared in the passage
- Building a good vocabulary
- Reviewing the writer's ideas
- Forming an opinion on the facts or the information in the passage
- Appreciating the passage stylistically
- Answering the questions asked at the end of the passage

Guidelines to Read a Passage

Comprehension: Prose

- Read the passage thoroughly.
- Identify the main idea and the supporting details of the passage.
- Understand the first (introduction) and the last (conclusion) paragraph of the passage.
- Identify the theme of each paragraph.
- Identify the tone used in the passage.
- Understand the author's purpose and viewpoint.
- Read the questions carefully.
- Understand what is being asked in the questions.

Comprehension: Poetry

- Read the poem thoroughly.
- Identify the theme and the rhyme scheme of the poem.
- Identify the figures of speech used.
- Read the questions carefully.
- Understand what is being asked in the questions.
- Identify the imagery used by the poet.

The answers that you provide to the questions asked show how well you have understood the given passage.

Types of Comprehension Passages

You may come across many types of passages while attempting the reading comprehension section in your paper.

A **factual passage** deals with facts usually shared in the form of reports, scientific articles and historical descriptions.

A **literary passage** consists of extracts from works of great writers and can be in the form of novels, short stories and poetry.

A **discursive passage** consists of articles which present an opinion or a reasoned argument on a topic.

Let us look at some sample passages.

Sample Comprehension Passages

1. Factual Passage

The first two years of life are a critical 'window of opportunity'. In this period, it is possible to prevent the largely irreversible damage which follows early childhood undernutrition. There are 805 million undernourished people in the world today. That means one in nine people do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life.

Hunger and malnutrition are in fact the number one risk to health worldwide—greater than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. Three-quarters of all hungry people live in rural areas, mainly in the villages of Asia and Africa. An estimated 146 million children in developing countries are underweight—the result of acute or chronic hunger. Poverty trap, lack of investment in agriculture, natural calamities, war and displacement, unstable markets and food wastage are the major causes for the presence of hunger in the world. Hunger leads to malnutrition, which in turn causes diseases. Malnutrition is the largest single contributor to disease in the world, according to the UN's Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN).

Malnutrition at an early age leads to reduced physical and mental development during childhood. According to the World Bank, India is one of the highest ranking countries in the world for the number of children suffering from malnutrition. One of the major causes for malnutrition in India is gender inequality. Because of the low social status of Indian women, their diet often lacks in both quality and quantity. Women who suffer malnutrition are less likely to have healthy babies. In India, mothers generally lack proper knowledge in feeding children. Consequently, new born infants are unable to get adequate amount of nutrition from their mothers.

Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar have very high rates of undernutrition. Studies show that individuals belonging to Hindu, Jain or Muslim backgrounds in India tend to be more malnourished than those from Sikh or Christian backgrounds. The Akshaya Patra Foundation runs the world's largest NGO-run midday meal programme serving freshly cooked meals to over 1.3 million schoolchildren in government and government-aided schools in India. However, the challenge for all these programmes and schemes is how to increase efficiency, impact and coverage.

Questions

- Q1)** What are the causes of the presence of hunger in the world?
- Q2)** How does gender inequality lead to malnutrition in India?
- Q3)** What role does the Akshay Patra foundation play?
- Q4)** Where are the majority of the hungry people inhabited?
- Q5)** Which religious communities in India tend to be less malnourished?