



National
Qualifications
2021 ASSESSMENT RESOURCE

X824/76/11

**English
Reading for Understanding,
Analysis and Evaluation — Text**

Duration — 1 hour 30 minutes

Total marks — 30

Read the passages carefully and then attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.



* X 8 2 4 7 6 1 1 *

The following two passages discuss changes to town centres and shopping.

Passage 1

Read the passage below and attempt questions 1 to 8.

In the first passage, Rowan Moore, writing in 2018, considers changes in shopping habits.

It's not as if no one saw it coming. The decline of physical shopping, the business of getting yourself to an actual place and receiving actual goods from an actual person in return for actual cash, has long been predicted. One could choose landmarks along the journey: in 2011 when the government appointed a special consultant, in an attempt to reverse shops' failing fortunes; in 5 2015 when online Amazon surpassed multi-store Walmart to become the most valuable retailer in the United States; in 2018 when several well-known brand names in the UK either shrunk or closed their doors permanently, resulting in the loss of 85,000 retail jobs.

One by one, the things that used to be done only by shops have been picked off. Travel agencies, banks and bookshops are now joined on the endangered list by takeaways (once thought an imperishable fixture) because of the rise of online delivery services. It would be foolish to foretell their complete demise, but shops, like CDs and DVDs, like typewriters, like film photography and answering machines, are losing their invincibility. 10

The difference with shopping is that its departure is leaving behind vast stretches of redundant urban landscape. The identity and self-esteem of entire towns is wrapped up with retail — what, for example, is a 'market town' if it doesn't have a market? As it has become ingrained that one of the main forms of shared public life is shopping, its loss becomes a threat to society. This is summed up in the phrase 'high street', which carries with it ideas of locality and community, but is also routinely used as shorthand for 'shopping'. The resulting empty spaces will be on a similar scale to those left by past closures of docks and factories. The difference is that those left by 15 retail will be in the centres of towns and cities. 20

What you hear from more or less everyone involved with physical retail is that the future lies in offering things that the internet cannot, in providing for the needs of humans as social beings. Retail experts now like to talk about the importance of 'experience' in terms of physical shops. One of these experts, Lara Marrero, believes it is less a case of death than reincarnation, the emergence of a bright new world in which a brand engages its customers at every single opportunity, in which physical spaces combine with events and social media to enthrall their followers. As Lara comments, many retailers such as the beauty brand Sephora offer physical shopping experiences perfectly tailored to our desires: 'you run wild through rooms brimming with one-of-a-kind experiences. You feel indescribable euphoria. You enjoy plenty of 25 Instagrammable moments, such that the whole giddy pageant goes tumbling on.' 30

As part of this discovery of 'experience', online retailers have started to irrigate the landscape they previously helped to parch. Having caused countless high street bookshops to close, some online retailers are now opening stores of their own. Others are calling their physical stores 'town squares' and are trying to shape public life around them. All those aspects of being human that somehow got mislaid in the evolution of shopping from market to high street to mall to internet — that is to say sensuality, sociability and exploration — are to be reinstated by fast-moving brands and their wizarding Chief Marketing Officers. And all made possible by the personal data they have harvested from us. In this new world, a brand's Chief Marketing Officer is at the root of everything, a puppet master pulling the strings of data and desire. 35

Overall, there is something bigger here, which is to make, as the old saying goes, an opportunity out of a problem. Rather than mourn something we may not miss, there is a chance to revive what is actually good about towns and cities. 40

Bill Grimsey, a former head of retail, believes that every town can reinvent itself as 'something

bigger than shops. Retailers spent the whole of the last century cloning every town and it doesn't
45 work.' Rather, he argues, they can draw on their individual identities, on local produce, heritage,
culture, art and crafts, to attract people. 'Every town can be its own Disneyworld. Every town can
be its own "wow".' If this sounds optimistic, he cites the example of Stockton-on-Tees. Here,
historic buildings were revived. An amphitheatre, equipped for theatrical lighting and sound, was
50 created in the re-landscaped town centre. A programme of events — performance, music, cycling,
a car show — was launched. New independent shops were encouraged. Activities and classes
were offered as well as products. New homes were built so that people could, once again, live in
the centre.

Much of the repurposing of retail space can come from the bottom up. Forms of sociability that
do not rely on the adrenaline of consumption, can grow up. If new life, like artists' studios, pop-up
55 cafes and co-operative housing, can flourish in abandoned warehouses, might an empty shop, with
minimal expenditure, become an informal library? Or might it be a public 'living room' in which
people escape the loneliness of their own private space? If a high street had a number of such
places it would become a truer community than one where people are rushing between chain
stores. If it is true that the monster of retail's grip is weakening, it is time to escape its tentacles.

Passage 2

Read the passage below and attempt question 9. While reading, you may wish to make notes on
the main ideas and/or highlight key points in the passage.

In the second passage, Simon Jenkins, writing in 2019, reflects on how town centres can be revived.

Another winter passes, and the devastation of retail continues through the high streets of Britain.
Shutters are going up and stores are closing: everything from the corner post office and pub to
many long-established brand names. The reason is simple: online shopping. In 2017, this was
5 forecast to rise from 17% of consumer spending to 40% by 2030. Online retailers deliver goods to
the door. Free returns enable people to order clothes, wear them once and send them back
— and still the retailer makes a profit. The tell-tale is America. Shopping malls are falling empty.
Since the start of 2017, 150,000 jobs have been lost in the American retail sector. An era is passing.

The two high streets I know best, in central London and rural Wales, are vital to their communities.
But they are overwhelmed by empty shops. They are collapsing and the figures are grim. Sales of
10 groceries were down at the UK's three major supermarkets, fashion outlets have closed, followed
by restaurants, pubs, banks and electrical stores. Four hundred village shops are disappearing
annually. Some of the UK's biggest retail landowners stand to have billions wiped off their value.
High streets from Chichester to Penrith have had the commercial blood sucked from them as they
became carbon copies of each other. This was mindless planning.

15 In the US, the fightback is desperate. High streets may be dying, but malls are shifting to become
'social and sensory experiences'. One of the new ones is built around an amusement park,
Legoland and a skating rink. Meanwhile in France, town halls are being converted into one stop
local shops and service centres.

Existing British high street stores are beginning to offer new 'experiences'. For example, one well
20 known furniture brand offers not goods but 'planning studios' for online shoppers. A successful
government initiative has been the modest £40m boost to Historic England's 'heritage action
zones', driven by evidence that smartening up old high streets makes them attractive
destinations. The actions taken to enliven Derby, Altrincham and Woking have been remarkably
successful. Likewise, new village community stores are opening by the week. The one at Ewelme
25 in the Chilterns recently celebrated its 10th birthday.

If there is a social wrong that cries out for a solution it is personal isolation. The bonds that once
held people of all ages in the embrace of neighbourhood and community are snapping. This

stretches from the Facebook agonies of the young to the greatest curse of old age: not ill-health,
but loneliness. The humdrum institutions of the high street — the pub, the library, the cafe —
30 were all comforts for the community. But the magnet was still the need to shop.

That magnet now must become the craving to congregate, the search for company and enjoyment.
The marketplace is clearly shifting to services and experiences, but one solution in Britain would
be a version of France's town hall enterprise. That is, the use of one town centre building that is
immoveable and familiar to all. This could become a true one-stop shop for local activity and
35 welfare. It could offer something for everyone.

High streets are seen by planners as places where people shop. They are not. They are places of
character, where people congregate, communicate and feel at home in company. Their shops can
be replaced by out-of-town hypermarkets, and now by online warehouses. But their society is
irreplaceable.

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Passage 2 — Article is adapted from “We can’t rely on shops to revive our town centres. They need a new magnet” by Simon Jenkins, taken from *The Guardian*, 12 December 2019. Reproduced by permission of The Guardian. © Guardian News & Media Ltd 2021.