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**FUNCTIONAL SKILLS**

English Level 2



**Area: Reading**

Criterion 18: Follow an argument, identifying different points of view and distinguishing fact from opinion

**Identifying facts and opinions**

**Facts**

A fact is a statement that can be checked and proven to be true.

Facts can be based on evidence, research or actual events.

For example, ‘Tess is going to Paris on Friday’.

This is a fact: it could be confirmed by looking at evidence.

*Please note that evidence may not be presented outright in a text.*

Facts are usually also statements that contain numbers, or dates.

For example, ‘Tim has 5 puppies for sale.’

**Opinions**

An opinion is a statement based on a writer’s personal feelings, thoughts and beliefs.

Opinions usually include words or phrases that show a personal judgement is being made, such as ‘I think’ or ‘I believe’.

They may also contain other subjective words like ‘best’ or ‘great’.

For example, ‘I think that shopping is fun’ or ‘Dan makes the best pizza’.

Other people might not agree with these statements, and they cannot be proven, so they are opinions.

**Using the information provided above, answer the following question.**

**Question 1**

Read the statements and decide whether they are **facts or opinions**.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Fact** | **Opinion** |
| Apples contain natural sugars and are a good source of fibre. |  |  |
| I think the summer holidays are too short. |  |  |
| Early mornings are the worst part of the day. |  |  |
| The Eiffel Tower was completed in 1889. |  |  |
| The UK is made of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. |  |  |
| In my opinion, social media does more harm than good. |  |  |
| Water freezes at 0oC. |  |  |
| Chocolate tastes better than any other type of dessert. |  |  |
| I believe travelling is the best way to learn about the world. |  |  |
| A standard workweek in the UK is typically 37 - 40 hours. |  |  |

**Recognising points of view in an argument**

An argument has one main idea. For example, ‘social media does more harm than good’.

In the argument, there will be comments and reasons that **agree** or argue **for** the idea, as well as reasons that **disagree** or go **against** the idea.

People will often use **both** facts and opinions in their argument.

The argument – social media does more harm than good

Against

Social media is a great way to discover new brands, new hobbies and all sorts of interesting facts.

It can also be used to keep in touch with friends and family and see what they’re up to. Everyone gets jealous at some point. That’s not social media’s fault.

For

Social media can make people jealous, so they don’t appreciate the things that they already have.

It’s also addictive and can mean people spend less time interacting with friends and family.

***Please note*** *that one writer may give both reasons for and against an idea. An argument does not necessarily need two people.*

**Using the information provided above, answer the following questions.**

**Question 2**

Read the email below and pick out arguments for and against building a staff canteen.

|  |
| --- |
| To: alldepartments@highfield.coz |
| From: adam@highfield.coz |
| Subject: Should we introduce a staff canteen? |
| Date: 20/06/2025 |
| Dear team,  I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to gather your thoughts on an idea that has been discussed recently – introducing a staff canteen at our workplace. There are arguments both for and against this proposal and your feedback would be valuable.  A staff canteen could offer convenient meal options for everyone, saving time and effort during lunch breaks. Some employees have said that they would appreciate a space to socialise and relax, which would help build stronger workplace relationships. Having a canteen might also make it easier to access affordable, healthy food options, which is something several team members have requested.  However, there are some challenges to consider. Setting up a canteen would require a significant upfront cost and ongoing maintenance might impact the budget for other areas. Not everyone will use it, especially if they prefer bringing food from home or eating out. Obviously, we would not want to build a canteen if only a small number of staff will use the space. We also need to consider the disruption to our workspace that the construction will bring.  I would like to hear your views on this. Do you think a staff canteen would benefit our team? Are there other solutions we could explore? Please reply with your thoughts by the end of the week.  Best regards,  Adam Rooney |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| For | Against |
|  |  |

**Exam practice**

Text A

|  |
| --- |
| **Are smartphones making life better?**  Smartphones have become an essential part of modern life, with billions of people using them daily. They are praised for making communication, entertainment and accessing information easier than ever before. However, some argue that smartphones may be doing more harm than good.  It’s true that smartphones help people stay connected. With apps like messaging services and social media, it’s possible to talk to friends and family instantly, no matter where they are in the world. Smartphones also provide access to tools like navigation apps, online shopping and internet banking, which many say make life more convenient. Additionally, studies have shown that mobile technology can improve productivity, allowing people to manage tasks on the go.  However, with all these tools at our fingertips, are we spending too much time staring at our phones? Increased screen time can lead to stress and sleep problems. The constant notifications from our phones can also distract us from work and even face-to-face conversations. Our attention spans are getting shorter and we’re losing important skills like reading a map or talking to people without a screen between us.  While smartphones undoubtedly bring many benefits, it’s clear that they also come with drawbacks. I believe that the world would be better off if smartphones were used less. |

**Exam practice 1**

Identify whether the following statements in Text A are **facts** or **opinions**.

(4 marks)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Fact** | **Opinion** |
| Smartphones also provide access to tools like navigation apps |  |  |
| Studies have shown that mobile technology can improve productivity |  |  |
| We’re losing important skills like reading a map or talking to people without a screen |  |  |
| I believe that the world would be better off if smartphones were used less |  |  |

Text B

|  |
| --- |
| **Should we switch to electric cars?**  Electric cars are becoming more popular, with many people seeing them as the future of transportation. But are they the right choice for everyone?  One large benefit of electric cars is the reduced environmental impact. Unlike petrol or diesel vehicles, electric cars don’t produce exhaust emissions, helping to cut down on air pollution. Maintenance is often simpler for electric cars as there are fewer moving parts and governments are offering grants and tax incentives to encourage people to buy electric vehicles, making them more affordable to run.  However, electric cars do have their challenges. Critics point out that they can be expensive to purchase upfront, even with the government incentives. Another issue is charging ports. Electric cars are still relatively new, so charging ports are still being built, which can make long journeys difficult. Additionally, some argue that producing batteries for electric cars harms the environment just as much as running a petrol or diesel car, so they’re not as green as they seem.  Whether electric cars are the future or not depends on us balancing these pros and cons. They may suit some people perfectly, but they’re not without their downsides. |

**Exam practice 2**

Give two reasons why the writer of Text B **agrees** that we should use electric cars and two reasons why the writer **disagrees** that we should use electric cars.

(4 marks)

|  |
| --- |
| Agree:  Disagree: |

**Answers**

**Fact or opinion?**

**Question 1**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Fact** | **Opinion** |
| Apples contain natural sugars and are a good source of fibre. | ✓ |  |
| I think the summer holidays are too short. |  | ✓ |
| Early mornings are the worst part of the day. |  | ✓ |
| The Eiffel Tower was completed in 1889. | ✓ |  |
| The UK is made of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. | ✓ |  |
| In my opinion, social media does more harm than good. |  | ✓ |
| Water freezes at 0oC. | ✓ |  |
| Chocolate tastes better than any other type of dessert. |  | ✓ |
| I believe travelling is the best way to learn about the world. |  | ✓ |
| A standard workweek in the UK is typically 37 - 40 hours. | ✓ |  |

**Following arguments**

**Question 2**

**For**

* The staff canteen could provide healthy, affordable and convenient meal options for everyone
* It would save the staff time
* They would have a place to relax
* It would improve workplace relationships

**Against**

* Setting up a canteen would require a significant upfront cost
* Ongoing maintenance might impact the budget for other areas
* Not everyone will use the canteen
* The workspace would be disrupted by construction

**Exam practice**

**Exam practice 1**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Fact** | **Opinion** |
| Smartphones also provide access to tools like navigation apps | ✓ |  |
| Studies have shown that mobile technology can improve productivity | ✓ |  |
| We’re losing important skills like reading a map or talking to people without a screen |  | ✓ |
| I believe that the world would be better off if smartphones were used less |  | ✓ |

**Exam practice 2**

*Learners should have chosen 2 reasons that agree and 2 reasons that disagree.*

**Agree**

* One large benefit of electric cars is the reduced environmental impact
* Unlike petrol or diesel vehicles, electric cars don’t produce exhaust emissions, helping to cut down on air pollution
* Maintenance is often simpler for electric cars
* Governments are offering grants and tax incentives to encourage people to buy electric vehicles

**Disagree**

* They can be expensive to purchase upfront
* Electric cars are still relatively new, so charging ports are still being built
* Producing batteries for electric cars harms the environment just as much as running a petrol or diesel car

**Your functional skills exam**

Your functional skills exams will consist of 2 papers.  
These papers will take place over the following time periods:

* Reading – 60 minutes
* Writing – 60 minutes

Further information on the format that your test will take can be obtained from your training provider.

**Hints and tips**

* Find out what format your exam will be in. It may be paper-based   
  or on-screen.
* Plan what you are going to revise in advance. Don’t leave it until the last minute.
* Do as many past papers as you can so you are prepared for the day. If possible, try to complete the past papers following the same format as the actual exam.
* Find a quiet place to study and revise. It helps to sit at a table or a desk, don’t revise in bed.
* Don’t stay up all night revising the night before your exam. It’s important to have a good rest so you feel refreshed and ready to go.
* Read the question 3 times. The first time to ensure you understand what is being asked, the second time to get an understanding of what you need to do, and a third time to figure out exactly what techniques you should be applying.
* If you are struggling with a question, skip it and come back to it later. Try not to sit getting worked up about a difficult question, it will only waste exam time. Move on and come back to it after you have answered the other questions.
* Take note of the number of marks available. This will give you an indication of how much working out you must show. For example, 1 mark will need an answer only and more marks will need you to show your working out.
* When you’ve finished the exam, go back and check your answers. If you still have time remaining, use it to check your answers and when you have checked your answers check them again.