

# Reading Comprehension Test Practice based on “Where Ideas Come From”

These questions are good practice for a multiple-choice reading comprehension test. For reading test practice, read the transcript and answer the questions before you watch the video. (The transcript is the written text of the talk. It’s just below the video box, on the right, of the TED talk, “Where Good Ideas Come From:” [http://www.ted.com/talks/steven\\_johnson\\_where\\_good\\_ideas\\_come\\_from.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_johnson_where_good_ideas_come_from.html))

The more times you read or watch it in English, the more familiar you’ll get with English rhythms and word order, as well as with the vocabulary. So enjoy it multiple times-- but if you’re practicing for a test, try the test right after your *first* reading! How did you do on it?

## Demonstration Question & Explanation

Q: Johnson said coffee houses were important to the development of the Enlightenment for at least two reasons. One was because people could think more clearly and have better ideas if their preferred drink was tea or coffee rather than beer all day long. The second was that coffeehouses

- A. were open and airy and light.
- B. allowed people of different backgrounds to meet and share ideas.
- C. led to sexy ideas.

Answer: B. The talk does not tell us much about what those coffee houses looked like, but from the photo of the Grand Café entrance and from Hogarth’s painting, they were probably dark and crowded. So A is not given, and probably not even true.

C is a restatement of something Johnson said, but it is an effect (of B), not a reason.

Johnson’s point was that coffeehouses provided “a space where people would get together from different backgrounds, different fields of expertise, and share...ideas would get together there” -- just what B says.

## Practice Reading Comprehension

Choose the best answer:

1. Johnson looked for “recurring patterns” in places that have produced a lot of creative ideas. He wanted to find

- A. common characteristics that people can apply to encourage more ideas.
- B. unusual and interesting ideas that people can develop.
- C. ways to have a “eureka” moment-- a sudden inspiration.

2. Johnson argued that the best metaphor or illustration of a new idea is not a “light bulb moment” but

- A. neurons firing in a person’s brain
- B. a rainforest full of life
- C. a network of new connections
- D. the world wide web

3. Johnson suggested a baby incubator made from auto parts as a good example of creative innovation. Why did they use auto parts?

- A. as a symbol for power and high value
- B. because they were commonly available and could be maintained
- C. because they could be hidden inside so the incubator would not appear any different

4. Johnson said his purpose in telling the incubator story was to suggest that breakthroughs—ideas that allow completely new approaches to problems--

- A. are worth \$40,000 or more.
- B. come from new, state-of-the-art technology
- C. often come from Toyota and other innovative companies.
- D. are often just a new combination of currently available ideas and information.

5. Why should an office look more like a coffee shop or Hogarth’s tavern?

- A. It’s a chaotic environment where people can bump into each other.
- B. It’s exciting and more fun than a quiet office.
- C. Different kinds of people can share ideas and experiences there.

6. Johnson told a story about Darwin to show that

- A. people don’t always remember how their ideas originated.
- B. ideas can require a long time to fully develop.
- C. both A and B are true.

7. American scientists watching Sputnik had ideas that eventually led to developing GPS devices (which use satellite signals to give locations.) Put these actions of the American scientists in order:

- a. They developed GPS (Global Positioning System.)
- b. They figured out a way to track Sputnik’s course.
- c. They listened for signals from Sputnik.
- d. GPS devices help people find locations of coffee shops and other places they want to go.
- e. They decided to make a tape recording of Sputnik signals.
- f. Their boss asked them to find locations of American nuclear submarines in the oceans.

- A. b, c, e, a, f, d.
- B. c, e, b, f, a, d.
- C. e, c, b, a, f, d.

## Answers to the reading comprehension test practice

1. A. common characteristics that people can apply to encourage more ideas.
2. C. a network of new connections
3. B. because they were commonly available and could be maintained
4. D. are often just a new combination of currently available ideas and information.
5. C. Different kinds of people can share ideas and experiences there.
6. C. both A and B are true.
7. B. c, e, b, f, a, d.