Comprehensive Drill: Module 2, Set 1

This is the first of two drills at the level of the harder Module 2, and it is built to look worse than it is. Every question is modeled on a question from the Official Guide practice tests (the same tests you'll find in Bluebook); together, the twenty use every official main idea and main purpose question in those tests that the Module 1 drill didn't. The skeletons are the official ones. The subjects are new, the passages are denser, and the wrong answers are made from the passage itself: true details that cover only part of the text, the text's own words bent into a new meaning, the right topic tied to the wrong job. So the choices that look best at first glance are often the traps, and the right answer is often the plainest, most general choice on the page. Work every question through blueprint, predict, test, and give yourself 24 minutes.

Question 1

In 1921, José Vasconcelos became the first head of Mexico's Secretariat of Public Education, an agency created after a decade of revolution to extend schooling to a largely rural population. As secretary, Vasconcelos sent "cultural missions" of teachers to remote villages, oversaw the founding of rural schools and public libraries, and published inexpensive editions of classic works of literature. He also commissioned painters such as Diego Rivera to cover the walls of public buildings, including the Secretariat's own headquarters, with murals that could be seen by people who might never enter a museum.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) As secretary, Vasconcelos chose to build Mexico's schooling around art rather than around reading and writing.
B) As secretary, Vasconcelos brought schooling to rural villages that the revolution had left without teachers.
C) As secretary, Vasconcelos used murals to bring art to people who could not afford to visit museums.
D) As secretary, Vasconcelos sought to bring both learning and art within reach of ordinary Mexicans everywhere.

Question 2

In seventeenth-century Japan, poets often gathered to compose renga, long chains of linked verses in which each participant added a stanza responding to the one before. The opening stanza, or hokku, followed a pattern of 5, 7, and 5 sound units and, as the verse that set the tone for all the rest, carried special prestige. Poets such as Matsuo Bashō increasingly composed hokku to stand on their own. In the 1890s, the critic Masaoka Shiki, who held that linked verse was not true literature, promoted the name by which the independent poem is now known around the world: haiku.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) It explains how linked verse declined once poets began composing stanzas on their own.
B) It traces how a part of a larger poetic form became a poetic form of its own.
C) It describes how a poetic form acquired its modern name from an influential critic.
D) It argues that the hokku deserved more prestige than the rest of the renga.

Question 3

In the early 1950s, Bette Nesmith Graham was working as an executive secretary at a bank in Dallas, Texas, when offices began switching to electric typewriters, whose carbon-film ribbons made it nearly impossible to erase a typing error without leaving a smudge. An amateur painter, Graham knew that artists seldom erase a mistake; they simply paint over it. She began bringing a small bottle of white, water-based paint to work and dabbing it over her errors with a fine brush. Other secretaries soon wanted bottles of their own, and by 1956 Graham was selling her correction fluid as "Mistake Out," a product later renamed Liquid Paper.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To recount the origin of an invention that solved an everyday problem
B) To explain how a change in office technology made typing errors harder to correct
C) To show how Graham's background in art shaped her career as a secretary
D) To describe how coworkers' demand turned a personal remedy into a business

Question 4

The following text is adapted from Mark Twain's 1883 memoir *Life on the Mississippi*.

When I was a boy, there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman. We had transient ambitions of other sorts, but they were only transient. When a circus came and went, it left us all burning to become clowns; now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates. These ambitions faded out, each in its turn; but the ambition to be a steamboatman always remained.

Once a day a cheap, gaudy packet [steamboat] arrived upward from St. Louis, and another downward from Keokuk. Before these events, the day was glorious with expectancy; after them, the day was a dead and empty thing.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To describe how the daily arrival of a steamboat transformed a quiet river town
B) To explain why the boys' ambitions changed as often as they did
C) To suggest that the boys' dreams were as fleeting as the steamboats' daily visits
D) To convey how strongly some boys longed for one particular calling

Question 5

At Kalambo Falls in Zambia, archaeologists led by Larry Barham have uncovered two logs joined crosswise by a notch that someone deliberately cut into one of them, perhaps to form the base of a platform. Luminescence dating indicates that the logs are at least 476,000 years old, older than our own species, which makes them the earliest known example of wood shaped for building. Ancient wood rarely survives; at Kalambo Falls, it was preserved by the permanently high water levels at the site, which kept the logs waterlogged for hundreds of thousands of years.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To explain how a dating method established the age of an ancient find
B) To argue that a recent find overturns a long-held view of early humans
C) To present a recent find and explain what makes it notable
D) To discuss the conditions that allow ancient wood to survive

Question 6

Hospitals caring for small and premature infants often rely on costly equipment, yet in many cases simple, inexpensive practices can be remarkably effective. In 1978, faced with a shortage of incubators and with dangerous infections in the hospital, pediatrician Edgar Rey Sanabria of Bogotá's Instituto Materno Infantil began having mothers hold their small babies skin to skin against their chests, where a mother's body heat could do much of an incubator's work. Decades later, a trial led by the World Health Organization in five countries found that beginning this "kangaroo mother care" immediately after birth, rather than after an infant's condition had stabilized, reduced deaths among low-birth-weight infants by about a quarter.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Shortages of medical equipment have led doctors to develop many of the most effective treatments for newborns.
B) Low-cost approaches can be effective ways to improve the care of newborns who are small and premature.
C) As a recent trial showed, starting kangaroo mother care right after birth can save infants' lives.
D) Doctors now recognize that low-cost practices are better for premature infants than incubators.

Question 7

Ernest Hemingway's prose can seem almost artless: short declarative sentences, plain words, few adjectives, as if each line had simply come to him. That impression of ease, however, conceals an exacting habit of revision. Asked in a 1958 interview how much rewriting he did, Hemingway replied that he had rewritten the last page of *A Farewell to Arms* thirty-nine times before he was satisfied, and when the novel was reissued in 2012, its editors included forty-seven alternative endings found among his manuscripts.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To show that a writer's plain style was a deliberate rejection of the ornate prose of his era
B) To argue that the apparent ease of a writer's style is the product of laborious effort
C) To suggest that a writer valued his unpublished drafts as highly as his finished work
D) To contrast a writer's early drafts with the versions that he eventually published

Question 8

The following text is from Anne Brontë's 1847 novel *Agnes Grey*. The narrator, a young woman, is about to become a governess, a teacher who lives with a family and educates its children.

Whatever others said, I felt I was fully competent to the task: the clear remembrance of my own thoughts in early childhood would be a surer guide than the instructions of the most mature adviser. I had but to turn from my little pupils to myself at their age, and I should know, at once, how to win their confidence and affections: how to waken the contrition of the erring; how to embolden the timid and console the afflicted; how to make Virtue practicable, Instruction desirable, and Religion lovely and comprehensible.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To compare teaching with the other kinds of work open to young women
B) To describe the advice that experienced teachers gave the narrator
C) To reveal that the narrator's confidence in her abilities is misplaced
D) To explain why the narrator believes she will succeed in her new position

Question 9

In his own day, physician John Snow was best known for his work with anesthetics; he twice gave chloroform to Queen Victoria during childbirth. Yet it was his work on cholera, set out in an expanded 1855 edition of his study of the disease, that proved most influential. Unusual for its time, the work combined a map plotting the deaths in an 1854 outbreak around London's Broad Street, house-by-house inquiries, and a comparison of death rates among the customers of two water companies. Its conclusion, that cholera spreads through contaminated water rather than foul air, won few converts before Snow's death in 1858, but the study is now regarded as a founding work of epidemiology.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Snow's unusual study of cholera, not the work he was known for, proved to be his most influential.
B) Snow combined several methods in his study of cholera, though his map proved the most persuasive of them.
C) Snow's work on cholera was ignored in his lifetime because he was known mainly as an anesthetist.
D) Snow showed that cholera spreads through foul air, a finding that helped found epidemiology.

Question 10

Physicians long held that most stomach ulcers were caused by stress and by an excess of stomach acid. In the early 1980s, physician Barry Marshall and pathologist Robin Warren proposed instead that a spiral-shaped bacterium found in the stomach lining was to blame. In 1984, Marshall tested the idea on himself: he drank a broth teeming with the bacterium. Within about a week he was vomiting, and a biopsy showed that his stomach lining had become inflamed, a condition that often precedes ulcers. The result strengthened Marshall's conviction that the bacterium, not stress, was the main culprit.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To show how a single experiment settled a long-running dispute among researchers
B) To explain why physicians at first rejected the idea that bacteria cause stomach ulcers
C) To describe an experiment whose result cast doubt on a long-accepted explanation
D) To describe how a bacterium damages the stomach lining and eventually causes ulcers

Question 11

The following text is a poem by Emily Dickinson (1830–1886).

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers [swift horses] like a page
Of prancing poetry.
This traverse [journey] may the poorest take
Without oppress of toll [burden of a fee];
How frugal is the chariot
That bears a human soul!

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To celebrate reading as a kind of travel open to anyone, however poor
B) To compare the experience of sailing with that of riding in a chariot
C) To lament that the poor can reach distant places only in their imaginations
D) To argue that poetry offers a richer journey than other kinds of books do

Question 12

Published in installments between 1884 and 1928, the first edition of what became the *Oxford English Dictionary* set out to trace the history of every English word in use since the mid-twelfth century, illustrating each meaning with dated quotations: nearly two million of them, most gathered on paper slips by thousands of volunteer readers. The dictionary remains an indispensable resource. Yet, as scholar Charlotte Brewer has shown, it shares a weakness common to projects that depend on volunteers' choices: because its readers favored celebrated literary works, Shakespeare's above all, its evidence tilts toward the formal language of the literary canon, leaving everyday and less prestigious writing comparatively thinly represented.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) The first OED is less reliable than later editions because volunteers, not scholars, gathered its quotations.
B) The first OED is still indispensable, but its heavy reliance on Shakespeare has made it outdated.
C) The first OED's reliance on Shakespeare shows that its editors valued literature above all other writing.
D) The first OED was a hugely ambitious record of English, but the way it was compiled skewed its evidence.

Question 13

Many parents and policymakers fear that adolescents' heavy use of smartphones, social media, and other digital technology is damaging their well-being. Psychologists Amy Orben and Andrew Przybylski analyzed survey data from more than 350,000 adolescents in the United States and the United Kingdom and found that technology use was indeed linked to slightly lower well-being, but that it accounted for at most 0.4 percent of the variation in well-being, an association about as strong as that of regularly eating potatoes. Moreover, other factors, such as being bullied, were linked to well-being several times as strongly as technology use was.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To argue that parents and policymakers need not concern themselves with adolescents' technology use
B) To discuss a study of how adolescents' well-being affects how much they use technology
C) To present findings suggesting that a widespread worry about adolescents may be overstated
D) To present findings showing that bullying matters more to adolescents' well-being than technology does

Question 14

The following text is from George Eliot's 1871–72 novel *Middlemarch*. Dorothea Brooke, who usually disapproves of finery, is dividing her late mother's jewels with her sister, Celia.

"Yes! I will keep these—this ring and bracelet," said Dorothea. Then, letting her hand fall on the table, she said in another tone—"Yet what miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them!" She paused again, and Celia thought that her sister was going to renounce the ornaments, as in consistency she ought to do.

"Yes, dear, I will keep these," said Dorothea, decidedly. "But take all the rest away, and the casket."

She took up her pencil without removing the jewels, and still looking at them. She thought of often having them by her, to feed her eye at these little fountains of pure color.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To reveal Dorothea's mixed feelings about the jewels she decides to keep
B) To show that Dorothea keeps the jewels only to avoid disappointing her sister
C) To explain why Celia expects her sister to refuse the ornaments
D) To suggest that Dorothea chooses the jewels mainly for their monetary value

Question 15

When economists Uri Gneezy and Aldo Rustichini arranged for six day-care centers in Haifa, Israel, to begin fining parents who arrived more than ten minutes late to collect their children, late pickups did not fall; within weeks they had nearly doubled, while at four centers without a fine they held steady. This may appear counterintuitive (a fine, after all, attaches a cost to the very behavior it is meant to discourage), but the researchers argue that the fine changed what lateness meant: before it, a late parent was imposing on the teachers' goodwill; afterward, the parent was simply paying a price for extra time.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Although one might expect a fine to reduce late pickups, this fine was too small to make lateness costly, so lateness rose.
B) Although one might expect parents to resent a fine, most accepted it and began collecting their children on time.
C) Although one might expect a fine to reduce late pickups, it increased them, apparently by turning an obligation into a purchase.
D) Although one might expect a fine to reduce late pickups, it increased them because teachers stopped reminding parents to be prompt.

Question 16

The following text is adapted from Jane Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth has begged her father, Mr. Bennet, not to let her flighty younger sister Lydia go to Brighton.

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Wherever you and Jane are known, you must be respected and valued; and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of—or I may say, three—very silly sisters. We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton. Let her go, then. Colonel Forster is a sensible man, and will keep her out of any real mischief; and she is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to anybody. At Brighton she will be of less importance even as a common flirt than she has been here. . . . At any rate, she cannot grow many degrees worse, without authorizing us to lock her up for the rest of her life."

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To convey Mr. Bennet's hope that a stay in Brighton will make Lydia more like her older sisters
B) To offer Mr. Bennet's assurance that Lydia's trip will do little harm
C) To reveal Mr. Bennet's low opinion of every one of his daughters
D) To show Mr. Bennet giving in to Lydia even though he expects her trip to end badly

Question 17

Many linguists follow Ferdinand de Saussure in distinguishing *langue*, the system of rules shared by all speakers of a language, from *parole*, the individual acts of speaking in which that system is used. In this framework, the system is uniform, and the differences heard from speaker to speaker are matters of individual performance. But sociolinguist William Labov maintained that such differences are themselves systematic. In a 1962 study, he asked salespeople in three New York City department stores questions whose answer was "fourth floor," and he found that the more prestigious the store, the more often its employees pronounced the *r* sounds in those words.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Labov showed that differences in speech that Saussure's framework treats as individual follow social patterns.
B) Labov argued that because no two people speak exactly alike, a language cannot be described as a shared system.
C) The speech of New York salespeople may seem inconsistent, but it is easily explained by Saussure's two concepts.
D) Accents that differ from a region's most prestigious pronunciation are harder for listeners to understand.

Question 18

The following text is from Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 novel *North and South*. Mrs. Thornton is waiting to learn whether Margaret Hale has accepted her son John's proposal of marriage.

His step at last! She heard him, even while she thought she was finishing a sentence; while her eye did pass over it, and her memory could mechanically have repeated it word for word, she heard him come in at the hall-door. Her quickened sense could interpret every sound of motion: now he was at the hat-stand—now at the very room-door. Why did he pause? Let her know the worst.

Yet her head was down over the book; she did not look up. He came close to the table, and stood still there, waiting till she should have finished the paragraph which apparently absorbed her. By an effort she looked up. "Well, John?"

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To suggest that Mrs. Thornton pretends to read because she disapproves of her son's choice
B) To suggest that Mrs. Thornton dreads her son's news so much that she refuses to hear it
C) To contrast Mrs. Thornton's outward composure with the suspense she feels inwardly
D) To describe Mrs. Thornton's determination to keep her son from marrying

Question 19

Psychologist Anders Ericsson is widely credited with the "10,000-hour rule," the notion that roughly 10,000 hours of practice will make anyone an expert in anything. Ericsson proposed no such rule. His 1993 study reported that the most accomplished violin students at one Berlin music academy had practiced, on average, a great many hours by early adulthood (about 10,000 by age twenty, by the study's estimate): an average, not a minimum, since half of those students had practiced less. The figure was little known outside psychology until journalist Malcolm Gladwell, in his 2008 best seller *Outliers*, recast it as a threshold that any aspiring expert must cross.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Although Ericsson's figure was little known at first, later writers recognized it as a reliable guide to gaining expertise.
B) Gladwell overstated what Ericsson's figure meant, but the 10,000-hour rule still offers sound advice about practice.
C) The 10,000-hour rule is often read as a guide to any skill, but Ericsson meant it as a description of how violinists should train.
D) Although the 10,000-hour rule is credited to Ericsson, it owes less to his research than to a popular writer's reshaping of it.

Question 20

The following text is Robert Herrick's 1648 poem "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time."

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying:
And this same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy [shy], but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry [wait].

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To mourn how quickly a single day, like a single flower, comes to an end
B) To urge the young to make the most of their youth before it passes
C) To warn the young that each passing year will bring them greater suffering
D) To compare the course of a human life with the daily path of the sun