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Model Questions for Entrance Test for PhD Admissions Department of English

Questions 1–10.

Read the following passage carefully before you choose your answers. *This passage is taken from a nineteenth-century essay.*

It is not easy to write a familiar style. Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary, there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may so say, purity of expression, than the style I am speaking of. It utterly rejects not only all unmeaning pomp, but all low, cant phrases, and loose, unconnected, slipshod allusions. It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common uses; it is not to throw words together in any combination we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes. Or to give another illustration, to write naturally is the same thing in regard to common conversation, as to read naturally is in regard to common speech. It does not follow that it is an easy thing to give the true accent and inflection to the words you utter, because you do not attempt to rise above the level of ordinary life and colloquial speaking. You do not assume indeed the solemnity of the pulpit, or the tone of stage-declamation: neither are you at liberty to gabble on at a venture, without emphasis or discretion, or to resort to vulgar dialect or clownish pronunciation. You must steer a middle course. You are tied down to a given and appropriate articulation, which is determined by the habitual associations between sense and sound, and which you can only hit by entering into the author's meaning, as you must find the proper words and style to express yourself by fixing your thoughts on the subject you have to write about. Any one may mouth out a passage with a theatrical cadence, or get upon stilts to tell his thoughts: but to write or speak with propriety and simplicity is a more difficult task. Thus it is easy to affect a pompous style, to use a word twice as big as the thing you want to express: it is not so easy to pitch upon the very word that exactly fits it. Out of eight or ten words equally common, equally intelligible, with nearly equal pretensions, it is a matter of some nicety and discrimination to pick out the very one, the preferable ness of which is scarcely perceptible, but decisive. The reason why I object to Dr. Johnson's style is, that there is no discrimination, no selection, no variety in it. He uses none but "tall, opaque words," taken from the "first row of the rubric:"—words with the greatest number of syllables, or Latin phrases with merely English terminations. If a fine style depended on this sort of arbitrary pretension, it would be fair to judge of an author's elegance by the measurement of his words, and the substitution of foreign circumlocutions (with no precise



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associations) for the mother-tongue. How simple it is to be dignified without ease, to be pompous without meaning! Surely, it is but a mechanical rule for avoiding what is low to be always pedantic and affected. It is clear you cannot use a vulgar English word, if you never use a common English word at all. A fine tact is shown in adhering to those which are perfectly common, and yet never falling into any expressions which are debased by disgusting circumstances, or which owe their signification and point to technical or professional allusions. A truly natural or familiar style can never be quaint or vulgar, for this reason, that it is of universal force and applicability, and that quaintness and vulgarity arise out of the immediate connection of certain words with coarse and disagreeable, or with confined ideas.

1. Which of the following best describes the rhetorical function of the second? Sentence in the passage?
 - (a) It makes an appeal to authority.
 - (b) It restates the thesis of the passage.
 - (c) It expresses the causal relationship between morality and writing style.
 - (d) It provides a specific example for the preceding generalization.
 - (e) It presents a misconception that the author will correct.
2. Which of the following phrases does the author use to illustrate the notion of an unnatural and pretentious writing style?
 - (a) "unconnected, slipshod allusions" (line 7)
 - (b) "throw words together" (lines 8–9)
 - (c) "gabble on at a venture" (line 22)
 - (d) "get upon stilts" (lines 30–31)
 - (e) "pitch upon the very word" (line 34)
3. In lines 10–32 of the passage, the author uses an extended analogy between
 - (a) language and morality
 - (b) preaching and acting
 - (c) writing and speaking
 - (d) vulgar English and incorrect pronunciation
 - (e) ordinary life and the theater
4. In line 17, "common speech" refers to
 - (a) metaphorical language
 - (b) current slang
 - (c) unaffected expression
 - (d) regional dialect
 - (e) impolite speech



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5. Which of the following words is grammatically and thematically parallel to "tone" (line 21)?
- (a) "solemnity" (line 21)
 - (b) "pulpit" (line 21)
 - (c) "stage-declamation" (line 21)
 - (d) "liberty" (line 22)
 - (e) "venture" (line 22)
6. In context, the expression "to pitch upon" (line 34) is best interpreted as having which of the following meanings?
- (a) To suggest in a casual way
 - (b) To set a value on
 - (c) To put aside as if by throwing
 - (d) To utter glibly and insincerely
 - (e) To succeed in finding
7. The ability discussed in lines 35–38 is referred to elsewhere as which of the following?
- (a) "theatrical cadence" (line 30)
 - (b) "foreign circumlocutions" (line 46)
 - (c) "fine tact" (line 51)
 - (d) "professional allusions" (lines 54–55)
 - (e) "universal force" (line 56)
8. The author's observation in the sentence beginning "It is clear" (lines 49–51) is best described as an example of which of the following?
- (a) Mocking tone
 - (b) Linguistic paradox
 - (c) Popularity of the familiar style
 - (d) The author's defense of Johnson's style
 - (e) The author's advice to the reader
9. In line 52, "those" refers to which of the following? I. "words" (line 45), II. "circumlocutions" (line 46), III. "Associations" (line 46)
- (a) I only
 - (b) II only
 - (c) I and III only
 - (d) II and III only



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10. The author's tone in the passage as a whole is best described as

- (a) harsh and strident
- (b) informal and analytical
- (c) contemplative and conciliatory
- (d) superficial and capricious
- (e) enthusiastic and optimistic