



# TOEFL Reading Practice Questions

PS. If you like this PDF, don't forget to check out our [TOEFL lesson videos and practice questions](#).

**Directions:** Now answer the questions.

**Paragraph 1**

Chickenpox is a highly contagious infectious disease caused by the *Varicella zoster* virus; sufferers develop a fleeting itchy rash that can spread throughout the body. The disease can last for up to 14 days and can occur in both children and adults, though the young are particularly vulnerable. Individuals infected with chickenpox can expect to experience a high but tolerable level of discomfort and a fever as the disease works its way through the system. The ailment was once considered to be a “rite of passage” by parents in the U.S. and thought to provide children with greater and improved immunity to other forms of sickness later in life. This view, however, was altered after additional research by scientists demonstrated unexpected dangers associated with the virus. Over time, the fruits of this research have transformed attitudes toward the disease and the utility of seeking preemptive measures against it.

1. According to paragraph 1, which of the following is true of the chickenpox virus?
  - A. It leads to a potentially deadly disease in adults.
  - B. It is associated with a possibly permanent rash.
  - C. It is easily transmittable by an infected individual.
  - D. It has been virtually eradicated in the modern world.
  
2. Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence? Incorrect answer choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.
  - A. U.S. parents believed that having chickenpox benefited their children.
  - B. U.S. parents believed that chickenpox led to immunity against most sickness.
  - C. U.S. parents wanted to make sure that their children developed chickenpox.
  - D. U.S. parents did not think that other vaccinations were needed after chickenpox.

**Paragraph 2**

*A vaccine against chickenpox was originally invented by Michiaki Takahashi, a Japanese doctor and research scientist, in the mid-1960s. Dr. Takahashi began his work to isolate and grow the virus in 1965 and in 1972 began clinical trials with a live but weakened form of the virus that caused the human body to create antibodies. Japan and several other countries began widespread chickenpox vaccination programs in 1974. However, it took over 20 years for the chickenpox vaccine to be approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA), finally earning the U.S. government's seal of approval for widespread use in 1995. Yet even though the chickenpox vaccine was available and recommended by the FDA, parents did not immediately choose to vaccinate their children against this disease. Mothers and fathers typically cited the **notion** that chickenpox did not constitute a serious enough disease against which a person needed to be vaccinated.*

3. Which of the following can be inferred from paragraph 2 about the clinical trials for the chickenpox vaccine?
- A. They took longer than expected.
  - B. They cost a lot of money to complete.
  - C. They took a long time to finish.
  - D. They were ultimately successful.
4. The word **notion** in the passage is closest in meaning to
- A. history
  - B. findings
  - C. fact
  - D. belief

### **Paragraph 3**

*Strong belief in that view eroded when scientists discovered the link between Varicella zoster, the virus that causes chickenpox, and shingles, a far more serious, harmful, and longer-lasting disease in older adults that impacts the nervous system. They reached the conclusion that Varicella zoster remains dormant inside the body, making it significantly more likely for someone to develop shingles. As a result, the medical community in the*

U.S. encouraged the development, adoption, and use of a vaccine against chickenpox to the public. Although the appearance of chickenpox and shingles within one person can be many years apart—generally many decades—the increased risk in developing shingles as a younger adult (30-40 years old rather than 60-70 years old) proved to be enough to convince the medical community that immunization should be preferred to the traditional alternative.

5. According to paragraph 3, which of the following is true of *Varicella Zoster*?
- A. It typically attacks adults who are over 60 years old.
  - B. It is linked to a serious disease that occurs more commonly in adults.
  - C. It likely is not a serious enough threat to human health to require a vaccine.
  - D. It is completely eradicated from the body after chickenpox occurs.

#### **Paragraph 4**

Another reason that the chickenpox vaccine was not immediately accepted and used by parents in the U.S. centered on observations made by scientists that the vaccine simply did not last long enough and did not confer a lifetime of immunity. In other words, scientists considered the benefits of the vaccine to be temporary when given to young children. They also feared that it increased the odds that a person could become infected with chickenpox later as a young adult, when the rash is more painful and prevalent and can last up to three or four weeks. Hence, allowing young children to develop chickenpox rather than take a vaccine against it was believed to be the “lesser of two evils.” This idea changed over time as booster shots of the vaccine elongated immunity and countered the perceived limits on the strength of the vaccine itself.

6. The word *prevalent* in the passage is closest in meaning to
- A. dangerous
  - B. widespread
  - C. infectious
  - D. Contaminated

7. The author uses *booster shots* as an example of
- A. a scientifically approved medicine to eliminate chickenpox
  - B. a preferred method of chickenpox rash and fever treatment
  - C. a way to increase the effectiveness of the chickenpox vaccine
  - D. a strategy for parents to avoid vaccinating their child altogether

**Paragraph 5**

*Today, use of the chickenpox vaccine is common throughout the world. Pediatricians suggest an initial vaccination shot after a child turns one year old, with booster shots recommended after the child turns eight. The vaccine is estimated to be up to 90% effective and has reduced worldwide cases of chickenpox infection to 400,000 cases per year from over 4,000,000 cases before vaccination became widespread. ■ (A) In light of such statistics, most doctors insist that the potential risks of developing shingles outweigh the benefits of avoiding rare complications associated with inoculations. ■ (B) Of course, many parents continue to think of the disease as an innocuous ailment, refusing to take preemptive steps against it. ■ (C) As increasing numbers of students are vaccinated and the virus becomes increasingly rarer, however, even this trend among parents has failed to halt the decline of chickenpox among the most vulnerable populations. ■ (D)*

8. According to paragraph 5, which of the following was true of the rates of chickenpox before the chickenpox vaccine became widely used?
- A. it was 10 times higher
  - B. it was consistently rising
  - C. it declined over time
  - D. it fluctuated over several decades
9. Look at the four squares [•] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.
- Meanwhile, some continue to remain unconvinced, citing a supposed potential of the vaccine to do harm.**

Where would the sentence fit best?

- A. ▪ (A)
- B. ▪ (B)
- C. ▪ (C)
- D. ▪ (D)

10. Directions: Complete the table below by indicating which statements describe chickenpox and which describe shingles. Two answer choices will NOT be used. *This question is worth 3 points.*

Chickenpox
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>

Shingles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>

- A. Public vaccination campaigns against it began in the 1970s.
- B. It was considered an irksome but relatively harmless ailment.
- C. It primarily afflicts adults.
- D. It is a serious, lingering illness.
- E. It negatively affects the nervous system.
- F. Infection primarily occurs as a result of close contact with infected rashes.
- G. There is confusion as to exactly what virus causes it.

## Reading Section Answer Key and Explanations

You can find tips and preparation resources for the Reading Section [here](#).

### Answer Key

1. C
2. A
3. D
4. D
5. B
6. B
7. C
8. A
9. B
10. Chicken Pox: A, B (*Order does not matter. "A, B" is the same as "B, A"*)  
Shingles: C, D, E  
*(5 correct = 3 points; 4 correct = 2 points; 3 correct = 1 point; ≤2 correct = 0 points)*

### Explanations

1. C

Question: According to the paragraph 1, which of the following is true of the chickenpox virus?

- (A) It leads to a potentially deadly disease in adults.
- (B) It is associated with a possibly permanent rash.
- (C) It is easily transmittable by an infected individual.**
- (D) It has been virtually eradicated in the modern world.

Explanation: Much of paragraph 1 is about the chickenpox virus, so we might need to look at our answer choices before we look at specific details in the passage. But notice

that the virus is named in the first sentence (“Varicella zoster”). That will be a good starting point.

(A) is very tempting, because shingles is a serious disease in adults that is caused by the chickenpox virus. But (A) is incorrect because that is **later in the passage**. It’s not in paragraph 1. Besides, we don’t know that shingles is “potentially deadly” (it can kill you).

(B) is incorrect because there is no information that says the chickenpox rash may be permanent. In fact, the passage says that “the disease can last for up to 14 days.” That is far from permanent.

(C) is correct. The word “contagious” means that a disease can be given from one person to another person. “Highly contagious” means it is easy to infect somebody (easy to transmit the disease).

(D) is partly tempting because of later parts of the passage, but it is wrong. Even if there is less chickenpox today than there was in the past, that fact is mentioned in the final paragraph—not in paragraph 1.

## 2. A

Question: Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence? Incorrect answer choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

(A) U.S. parents believed that having chickenpox benefited their children.

(B) U.S. parents believed that chickenpox led to immunity against most sickness.

(C) U.S. parents wanted to make sure that their children developed chickenpox.

(D) U.S. parents did not think that other vaccinations were needed after chickenpox.

Explanation: This sentence tells us two things:

- Parents considered chickenpox a “rite of passage”



- Parents thought chickenpox might give their children greater immunity to other illnesses

A “rite of passage” is an event in your life that shows you’re growing older. Graduation, for instance, might be a rite of passage. So parents felt that chickenpox was normal. They also thought it might actually help their children: “greater and improved immunity” is a good thing.

(A) is correct. It may seem simple at first, but this is the **most** important information from the given sentence. If you are unsure, and think that it needs more detail to be complete, then mark it as correct but check the other answers for something more complete.

(B) is close, but it is incorrect because of the word “most.” Although parents believed that chickenpox helped immunity, the passage does not say anything about “most” or the majority. It was possible only one or two sicknesses.

(C) is incorrect like (B) in that it is too strong. While chickenpox was not so bad, and possibly a bit helpful, those parents did not **try** to get their children sick. That’s what “make sure” would mean.”

(D) is wrong and says almost the same thing as (B) but in different words. If parents thought vaccinations after chickenpox were unnecessary, then that means they thought their children were immune to almost all diseases. The text does not say how many diseases parents thought their children would be immune to. Besides, this sentence misses the focus on parents’ attitude toward the disease—not on the vaccines.

This is a “paraphrase” type question. Here’s a [blog post](#) about this type of question.

3. D

Question: Which of the following can be inferred from paragraph 2 about the clinical trials for the chickenpox vaccine?

- (A) They took longer than expected.
- (B) They cost a lot of money to complete.

(C) They took a long time to finish.

(D) They were ultimately successful.

Explanation: This is an [inference question](#). To answer this correctly, we have to look very carefully at the question. We want to know about the **clinical trials** of the vaccine.

Here's the relevant sentences:

*Dr. Takahashi began his work to isolate and grow the virus in 1965 and in 1972 began clinical trials with a live but weakened form of the virus that caused the human body to create antibodies. Japan and several other countries began widespread chickenpox vaccination programs in 1974.*

So one of the things that we see that those trials happened in Japan between 1972 and 1974 (when vaccination programs were started). We also know that the trials were done with a weak form of the chickenpox virus.

(A) is very tempting because it took the USA many years to approve the vaccine. But it's incorrect because we don't know that was because of **clinical trials**. It's possible that the trials ended in Japan in 1974 (or earlier). Besides that, we don't know what was "expected."

(B) is incorrect. There is no mention of money in the paragraph.

(C) is also very tempting. It is almost the same as (A) but there is no mention of expectations. And the same problem with (A) applies: the FDA took a long time, but that is not necessarily because of "*clinical trials*."

(D) is correct. We know that the trials were successful because Japan started distributing the vaccine (and other countries did too).

4. D

Question: The word [notion](#) in the passage is closest in meaning to

(A) history

(B) findings

(C) fact

(D) belief

Explanation: A “notion” is an idea. In the passage, we see that parents “*cited the notion that chickenpox did not constitute a serious enough disease.*” In other words, they said chickenpox was not a big problem, so children did not need vaccinations. This is false—the rest of our text says that the chickenpox virus **can** lead to serious health problems (shingles). So even if we don’t know the meaning of a “notion,” we know that “notion” must be false.

(A) is incorrect. While it’s true that parents in the past believed the chickenpox virus wasn’t serious, we can’t say that belief is a “history.” In fact, it turned out not to be true.

(B) “findings” are what information we collect from a scientific study. There was no study, here, so (B) is incorrect.

(C) is wrong because these parents only **believed** that chickenpox was not a problem. The fact was actually the opposite—the virus was a problem after all.

(D) is correct. A “belief” is an idea that is not proven to be true. Parents thought it was true, but they didn’t definitely know.

5. B

Question: According to paragraph 3, which of the following is true of *Varicella Zoster*?

(A) It typically attacks adults who are over 60 years old.

(B) It is linked to a serious disease that occurs more commonly in adults.

(C) It likely is not a serious enough threat to human health to require a vaccine.

(D) It is completely eradicated from the body after chickenpox occurs.

Explanation: We see “Varicella zoster” mentioned twice in paragraph 3, so we should look at those sentences first. They describe the discovery of a link between Varicella zoster and shingles. We should look for information about that link in the answer choices.

(A) is tempting, but it is incorrect; the passage says that shingles is actually more common in **younger** adults. Also, earlier in the text, we saw that children are more often infected with chickenpox, which is caused by varicella zoster virus.

(B) is correct. The text says that “Varicella zoster, the virus that causes chickenpox, and shingles, a far more serious, harmful, and longer-lasting disease in older adults that impacts the nervous system.” The virus is linked to a serious disease in adults: shingles.

(C) is opposite of the text and so is incorrect. In fact, the link between Varicella zoster and shingles convinced doctors that the virus was serious enough that we should prefer a vaccine.

(D) is also wrong because it is opposite of the text. “Completely eradicated” means the virus is destroyed and does not exist in the body. In reality, the text says that after chickenpox, the virus can remain dormant, meaning it doesn’t leave the body.

6. B

The word *prevalent* in the passage is closest in meaning to

(A) dangerous

(B) widespread

(C) infectious

(D) contaminated

Explanation: “Prevalent” is an adjective that means “very common”; it means that there are very many of something or that something covers a lot of area.

If we don’t know the meaning, then looking at the text, we see that the chickenpox rash is “more painful and prevalent and can last up to three or four weeks” in young adults. So there are three reasons why this rash is bad:

- it's more painful
- it takes more time
- it's more \_\_\_\_\_

What else could be in this blank? It must be something bad.

(A) *dangerous* is definitely something bad, and it's very tempting. We might be able to cross it out because the disease isn't really "dangerous"—we know that it's painful, but the passage never says that it does permanent damage. But still, "dangerous" works relatively well in the place of "prevalent." The best way to cross this off is simply by definition.

(B) *widespread* is correct. The rash covers a larger (wider) area; there is more of it.

(C) *infectious* is very tempting, but it is incorrect. Notice that chickenpox was already called "highly contagious," even when children are young. Meanwhile, the text said that chickenpox among young children is tolerable and short. That is what is being contrasted with chicken pox in young adults. We are not showing a difference in infectiousness, because the disease was **already** infectious.

(D) *contaminated* isn't possible. A rash is always contaminated. It cannot become "more contaminated." Besides, we don't use "contaminated" to refer to people. It refers to objects.

## 7. C

The author uses *booster shots* as an example of

- (A) a scientifically approved medicine to eliminate chickenpox
- (B) a preferred method of chickenpox rash and fever treatment
- (C) a way to increase the effectiveness of the chickenpox vaccine
- (D) a strategy for parents to avoid vaccinating their child altogether

Explanation: The final sentence in paragraph 4 talks about booster shots. We should look there for our answer:

*This idea changed over time as booster shots of the vaccine elongated immunity and countered the perceived limits on the strength of the vaccine itself.*

So what are these “booster shots”? Well, they gave longer immunity. We saw earlier in the paragraph that the vaccine might give only temporary immunity. But because of booster shots, that idea “*changed over time.*” They countered the limits of the vaccine—these booster shots challenged the idea that the vaccine wasn’t strong enough or didn’t last long enough.

So they were an example of how to make the vaccine longer, strong, or more effective.

(A) is too extreme, so it is wrong. Booster shots do not “eliminate chickenpox.” Nothing has totally eliminated chickenpox. The passage says there are still many cases of the disease every year.

(B) is false because children get the vaccine and booster shots to **prevent** chickenpox, not to treat it. That is, parents vaccinate their children before the children ever have the disease.

(C) matches our prediction. It is correct.

(D) is incorrect because it is opposite of the truth. The booster shots “countered the perceived limits on the...vaccine.” In other words, it made parents **want** to use the vaccine, not avoid it.

8. A

According to paragraph 5, which of the following was true of the rates of chickenpox before the chickenpox vaccine became widely used?

- (A) it was 10 times higher
- (B) it was consistently rising
- (C) it declined over time
- (D) it fluctuated over several decades

Explanation: This question gives us some very specific information to look for, so we want to use that and check the passage before reading our answer choices. Because we're looking for "rates," it's a good idea to check the numbers in the paragraph first.

*The vaccine is estimated to be up to 90% effective and has reduced worldwide cases of chickenpox infection to 400,000 cases per year from over 4,000,000 cases before vaccination became widespread.*

We also see the phrase "*before the vaccination became widespread*" in this sentence, which matches up very well with the question ("before the chickenpox vaccine became widely used"). So let's look carefully at that sentence. The vaccine **reduced** chickenpox infections. So there are two rates: before the vaccine and after the vaccine. The rate after the vaccine is lower. Specifically, the number went from 4 million to 4 hundred thousand.

(A) is correct. 4,000,000 is ten times 400,000. So the rate used to be ten times higher.

(B) has two problems, and so is false. First, the number actually went *down*. Second, we don't know that the number changed at all **before** the vaccine was introduced. We only know that the number changed **because** of the vaccine.

(C) has the same problem as (B), partly: the number did not go down before the vaccine became common. It went down **after** the vaccine became widespread.

(D) again shares the same problem as (B) and (C). We don't know about what happened to the number before the vaccine was used. It may have just been the same all the time until the vaccine became common ("fluctuate" means the numbers went up and down a lot).

9. B

Look at the four squares [•] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

**Meanwhile, some continue to remain unconvinced, citing a supposed potential of the vaccine to do harm.**

Where would the sentence fit best?

(A) A

(B) B

(C) C

(D) D

Explanation: This is an example of an [“insert text” question](#). The [transition word](#) “meanwhile” is an important clue, as is the pronoun “some.” Some of what? Well, “some” are “unconvinced,” so these must be people. The previous sentence must contrast with “some” and show other people who are **convinced**, rather than “*unconvinced*.”

(A) is incorrect because there is nothing for “some” to reference in the previous sentence. Also, there is no opinion or idea that people could be “convinced” of. There is only plain fact.

(B) is correct. “Some” can refer back to doctors. This is a nice contrast between what “most doctors” believe and what others believe: most believe that shingles is riskier than problems with the vaccine, **but** some believe that the vaccine could be harmful.

(C) is tempting because “some” could refer to “parents.” But it is incorrect because the parents in the previous sentence already are “unconvinced”—they continue to believe that the disease doesn’t need any steps against (a vaccine). So there can’t be a contrast between those parents and the “some” in our sentence, because they are **both** unconvinced. The word “meanwhile” makes this impossible.

(D) is wrong because, again, there is nothing about ideas that people are “convinced” or “unconvinced” of in the previous sentence. Instead, that sentence just tells us that more students receive the vaccine and so the virus is becoming less common. That is not a belief to “convince” people.

10. A, B = Chicken pox; C, D, E = Shingles; F, G = Incorrect



Question: Directions: Complete the table below by indicating which statements describe chickenpox and which describe shingles. Two answer choices will NOT be used. ***This question is worth 3 points.***

Chickenpox
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>

Shingles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>

- A. Public vaccination campaigns against it began in the 1970s.
- B. It was considered an irksome but relatively harmless ailment.
- C. It primarily afflicts adults.
- D. It is a serious, lingering illness.
- E. It negatively affects the nervous system.
- F. Infection primarily occurs as a result of close contact with infected rashes.
- G. There is confusion as to exactly what virus causes it.

Explanation: This strange-looking diagram is a [‘categorization’ question](#). This is a great example of starting from the simplest sentence. If we start from (C), we can cross off one answer very quickly.

(A) is about chickenpox, and is a correct answer. We can find evidence for it in the second paragraph. That tells us that *“Japan and several other countries began widespread chickenpox vaccination programs in 1974.”*

(B) is about chickenpox, too, and is correct. The first and second paragraphs give us some evidence: *“Individuals infected with chickenpox can expect to experience a high but tolerable level of discomfort and a fever as the disease works its way through the*

system” and “mothers and fathers typically cited the notion that chickenpox did not constitute a serious enough disease.”

(C), (D) and (E) are all about shingles. They can all be found in this sentence: *Strong belief in that view eroded when scientists discovered the link between Varicella zoster, the virus that causes chickenpox, and shingles, a far more **serious, harmful, and longer-lasting** disease **in older adults** that **impacts the nervous system**.*

(F) is not in the passage. We know that chickenpox is very contagious, but we don't know how it is transmitted. Also, we don't say that rashes are infected—that would be redundant because all rashes are infected. A person becomes infected, not a rash.

(G) is not true of either shingles or chickenpox. This sentence tells us that one virus causes both: “...*scientists discovered the link between Varicella zoster, the virus that causes chickenpox, and shingles...*”