

IELTS Advanced Free Lesson 2: Reading — Multiple Choice

IELTS Advanced Series — Free Lesson 2 of 2

Target: Band 8–9 (CEFR C2)

Multiple Choice at Band 8–9

At Band 8–9, multiple choice tests your ability to evaluate the precision and completeness of each option against the full meaning of the passage. Wrong options are carefully designed to be plausible — they may reflect something in the passage, but not the complete picture.

The correct answer reflects the full meaning

- Wrong options are often partially correct. Always check your chosen answer is supported by the entire relevant section.
- A single word in the passage that contradicts an option is enough to eliminate it.

Watch for distractor techniques

- Too strong: an option that overstates the writer's claim (e.g. 'always' when the text says 'often').
- Too narrow: an option that captures only part of the relevant paragraph.
- True but irrelevant: information from the passage that does not answer this specific question.

Read the question stem carefully

- Identify exactly what is being asked before looking at the options.
- Questions often ask about the writer's purpose, attitude, or implication — not just factual content.

Reading Passage: The Limits of Behavioural Economics

Behavioural economics — the discipline that applies psychological insights to economic decision-making — has, over the past three decades, fundamentally altered how governments and institutions think about policy. By demonstrating that human beings are systematically irrational in predictable ways, researchers such as Daniel Kahneman and Richard Thaler provided policymakers with a compelling new toolkit: rather than relying on coercive regulation or financial incentives, governments could achieve behaviour change by redesigning the environments in which choices are made. The resulting approach — commonly known as ‘nudging’ — proved enormously influential, giving rise to dedicated behavioural insights units in governments across Europe, North America, and beyond.

Yet the discipline’s ascent has not been without criticism. A substantial body of empirical research has raised questions about the reproducibility of key findings. Several landmark studies in the field — most notably those relating to ‘priming’ effects, in which subtle environmental cues were held to influence subsequent behaviour significantly — have failed to replicate under more rigorous experimental conditions. This has led some researchers to question not merely individual studies, but the broader theoretical framework that underpins the nudge agenda.

Defenders of behavioural economics argue that the replication crisis, while real, is not unique to their field and should be understood as part of a broader reckoning across the social sciences. They also point to a distinction between laboratory findings, which are admittedly fragile, and real-world policy interventions, which have produced measurable results across domains including tax compliance, pension enrolment, and public health. The two, they argue, should not be conflated.

A more fundamental critique, however, concerns the political assumptions embedded in the nudge framework. Critics argue that nudging, by operating below conscious awareness, is inherently manipulative — it achieves compliance without genuine deliberation or informed consent. This concern is particularly acute in democratic contexts, where the legitimacy of policy is typically grounded in public reason rather than engineered acquiescence. For these critics, the efficiency gains offered by nudging come at an unacceptable cost to individual autonomy.

Proponents respond that all choice environments are designed by someone, and that the alternative to deliberate, evidence-based design is not neutrality but simply unexamined design. The question, in their view, is not whether to shape choice environments but how to do so transparently and accountably. Whether this reframing adequately addresses the autonomy objection remains, at present, an open question in both policy and philosophical circles.

Exercise 1: Multiple Choice

Choose the answer that best reflects the full meaning of the passage.

1. What was the key appeal of the nudge approach to policymakers?
 - A) It was cheaper than traditional financial incentives
 - B) It allowed behaviour change without coercive regulation or financial incentives
 - C) It was supported by decades of empirical evidence
 - D) It had been proved effective in multiple countries
2. What does the writer say about the replication crisis in behavioural economics?
 - A) It has completely discredited the discipline
 - B) It affects only laboratory studies
 - C) It is a problem shared across the social sciences
 - D) It has been resolved by more rigorous methods
3. What distinction do defenders draw in paragraph three?
 - A) Between nudging and other policy types
 - B) Between laboratory findings and real-world interventions
 - C) Between the work of different researchers
 - D) Between European and North American approaches
4. What is the 'more fundamental critique' in paragraph four?
 - A) Nudging is too expensive to implement
 - B) The evidence base is unreliable
 - C) Nudging manipulates people without their deliberate awareness or consent
 - D) Governments lack expertise to design effective nudges
5. How do proponents respond to the autonomy criticism?
 - A) They accept the criticism and propose safeguards
 - B) They argue all choice environments are shaped by someone, so the question is how to do it responsibly
 - C) They dismiss it as a philosophical distraction
 - D) They argue informed consent is unnecessary

Exercise 2: Vocabulary from the Passage

Complete each sentence using a word from the passage.

Word bank: reproducibility, replication, acquiescence, autonomy, conflated, coercive

1. The ability of an experiment to produce the same results when repeated is called ____.
2. When researchers repeat an experiment to check the original findings, this is called ____.
3. Passive acceptance or agreement without objection is called ____.
4. The freedom to make your own decisions and act independently is known as ____.
5. When two different things are incorrectly treated as the same, they are ____ with each other.
6. A measure that forces people through threats or penalties is described as ____.

ANSWER KEY — TEACHER USE ONLY

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Exercise 1: Multiple Choice

- 1. B – behaviour change without coercive regulation or financial incentives
- 2. C – a problem shared across the social sciences
- 3. B – between laboratory findings and real-world policy interventions
- 4. C – nudging manipulates without deliberate awareness or consent
- 5. B – all choice environments are shaped by someone; the question is how to do it responsibly

Exercise 2: Vocabulary

- 1. reproducibility
- 2. replication
- 3. acquiescence
- 4. autonomy
- 5. conflated
- 6. coercive