Multiple Choice

A book exchange that changed direction

Complete original B2 First exam-style task. Independent practice material, not an official Cambridge paper.

You are going to read an article about a community book exchange. For questions 1-6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

When Maya opened a book exchange in an unused corner of her community centre, she imagined a fairly simple arrangement. People would leave a book they had finished and take another home. She painted the shelves, printed a sign saying "Bring one, take one", and waited. Plenty of visitors stopped to look. What puzzled her was how often someone would pick up a book, read the back cover with interest, then put it down and leave empty-handed.

At first she blamed the selection. Perhaps the shelves needed newer novels or more adventure stories. But a conversation with a regular visitor changed her mind. He wanted to try reading in English again after many years, but owned no books he could leave in exchange. Others worried that their old paperbacks were not good enough. "I had created a rule to make things fair," Maya says, "and it was making people feel that they needed permission to join in."

She replaced the sign with "Take a book. Bring one another time, if you can." A volunteer objected that the shelves would soon be empty. Maya shared the concern, but they agreed to try the change for a month rather than argue about what might happen. Some books disappeared quickly; others arrived in boxes. There were fewer books at the end of the month, yet enough to keep the exchange running. More importantly, visitors who had previously stood at a distance were now choosing something.

The next difficulty was less obvious. Readers kept taking books by writers they already knew, while unfamiliar names stayed on the shelves. Maya considered buying more popular titles, although there was little money available. Instead, she put a folding table beside the shelves and invited readers to leave a brief recommendation inside a book they enjoyed. One note described a detective story as "the first book that made me miss my bus stop". The book was borrowed that afternoon. People were willing to take a chance when another ordinary reader gave them a reason.

As the exchange became busier, Maya contacted the town library. She feared the librarians might see her shelves as competition. In fact, they offered practical advice about displaying books and keeping passages clear, and sent visitors to the centre when a book group wanted somewhere informal to meet. Maya had not expected this support. "We didn't need another organisation to run the project," she explains. "We needed people who understood books and public spaces to tell us what we were overlooking."

There are still problems. Donations sometimes include damaged books, and the volunteers have to explain politely why these cannot go on the shelves. Maya also resists requests to record every loan. It would provide impressive totals, but asking people for names and return dates could turn a relaxed visit into another administrative task. She does keep a short weekly note of practical issues, so the team can see whether a change has helped. Being informal, she argues, should not mean refusing to learn.

Now, when someone asks whether the exchange has succeeded, Maya describes a man who first visited to collect his daughter from a class. He began browsing, then borrowing, and recently offered

to help on Saturday mornings. She is pleased about the number of books moving through the centre, but this gradual change matters more to her. The shelves have become useful because the people running them were prepared to rethink how the exchange should work.

Your answers

1. What puzzled Maya when the exchange first opened?

A Visitors preferred talking about books to reading them.

B The books she supplied were not attracting any attention.

C People showed interest in books but did not take them.

D Visitors took books without bringing anything in return.

2. Why did Maya decide to change the original rule?

A She wanted visitors to donate more expensive books.

B She realised that it was discouraging some people from participating.

C She had been told that the rule was too difficult to explain.

D She wanted to make the exchange operate like the town library.

3. What does the month-long trial show?

A A feared problem did not prevent the new system from working.

B Maya was right to expect the number of books to increase.

C The volunteer's objection stopped people donating books.

D The new rule had to be reversed to protect the remaining stock.

4. Why did the recommendation notes help?

A They explained how readers could reserve popular books.

B They persuaded visitors to buy books for the exchange.

C They gave unfamiliar authors the approval of professional critics.

D They offered a personal reason to try an unfamiliar book.

5. What did Maya value most about the library's involvement?

A Its willingness to take responsibility for the exchange.

B Its ability to supply replacement copies of popular titles.

C Its experience of issues the volunteers had not considered.

D Its decision to direct all local book groups to the centre.

6. What is the main point of the final paragraph?

A The exchange will succeed only if more visitors become volunteers.

B Responding to people's needs has made the exchange worthwhile.

C The number of borrowed books is the best evidence of success.

D The original plan would have worked if Maya had waited longer.

Answers & explanations

Question 1 | C - People showed interest in books but did not take them.

C is supported by "read the back cover with interest" followed by "leave empty-handed". Maya was puzzled by the difference between interest and action. A invents conversations as the cause; the opening describes browsing. B contradicts the visitors stopping and examining books. D describes breaking the exchange rule, which is not what she observed. Follow the sequence of actions rather than assuming low borrowing means low interest.

Question 2 | B - She realised that it was discouraging some people from participating.

B follows from the visitor who had no book to exchange and those who thought their paperbacks were not good enough. Maya says the rule made people feel they "needed permission to join in". A reverses her concern: she removes a barrier rather than demanding better donations. C is unsupported; people understood the rule but felt unable to meet it. D is not her aim, and contact with the library happens later. The reason for a decision is the problem it solves.

Question 3 | A - A feared problem did not prevent the new system from working.

A matches the outcome: there were fewer books, but "enough to keep the exchange running", and new people participated. The worry about empty shelves did not become a reason to abandon the change. B is false because the stock decreased, and Maya had shared the concern rather than predicted growth. C invents a link between the volunteer and donors. D is contradicted by the continued use of the more welcoming system. Distinguish a manageable reduction from the complete failure the volunteer feared.

Question 4 | D - They offered a personal reason to try an unfamiliar book.

D is the writer's explicit explanation: "another ordinary reader" gave visitors a reason to "take a chance". The bus-stop note describes an engaging reading experience. A introduces reservations, which are never mentioned. B confuses Maya's rejected idea of buying titles with the readers' action. C contradicts "ordinary reader": the notes work without professional authority. The example illustrates the purpose of the notes, not a rule about travel or borrowing.

Question 5 | C - Its experience of issues the volunteers had not considered.

C paraphrases her wish for experienced people to explain "what we were overlooking"; the advice concerns displays and safe movement through the space. A contradicts "We didn't need another organisation to run the project". B is not mentioned: advice, not a book supply, is described. D overstates the referrals; the library sent visitors when a group needed an informal meeting place, not every group. Check the limit of a claim: some suitable referrals are not all referrals.

Question 6 | B - Responding to people's needs has made the exchange worthwhile.

B is supported by the man's gradual involvement and the conclusion that the organisers were "prepared to rethink" the exchange. The project's value comes from making participation possible and useful. A turns one encouraging example into an essential condition. C conflicts with Maya saying the gradual change "matters more" than the number of books. D reverses the conclusion: changes to the plan helped it work. Use both the human example and the concluding statement to identify the main point.