Multiple Choice

What a map leaves out

Full exam-style task: a substantial text followed by six four-option questions. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

Read the article. For questions 1-6, choose the answer A, B, C or D which fits best according to the text.

I used to think that the greatest compliment anyone could pay a map was that it was accurate. Then I joined a project to map the walking routes in my home town. Our team had access to excellent satellite images, so I imagined our task would be mostly technical: confirm where each path ran, measure the distances and give the finished files to a designer. At our first public meeting, however, a resident asked why the route to the health centre went through the park. It was the shortest route, I explained. She replied that the park gates were locked long before her evening appointments ended. Nothing on our beautifully precise base map was wrong, but it did not answer her question.

We began holding walks with different groups of residents. This was less efficient than studying a screen, at least if efficiency meant the number of streets checked per hour. A parent stopped at every crossing to explain which traffic signals changed before her children could comfortably reach the other side. A retired shopkeeper identified a passage that looked private but was, in fact, open to everyone. Such observations did not replace measurements. They told us which measurements were worth making. We timed the crossings, checked the passage's status with the council and added opening hours to routes through gated spaces. The map became less tidy, but the information became more useful.

One proposal caused particular disagreement. Some volunteers wanted to mark places where people felt unsafe. Others objected that putting a warning symbol beside a street could damage its reputation, especially if the concern rested on a single unpleasant encounter. I initially favoured including everything residents reported: surely leaving information out would amount to censorship. Our coordinator asked whether I would publish the exact same warning after hearing an account from five years earlier. I would not. The problem was not whether residents' experiences mattered; it was how to represent experiences without turning them into permanent facts about a place. We eventually recorded specific, checkable conditions, such as broken lights, and dated those entries.

That decision did not make our work neutral. Choosing to record lighting rather than feelings was itself a judgement about what the map could responsibly claim. Nor could we simply solve the problem by collecting more opinions. People who attended our meetings were generally confident about speaking in public and had time to spare. A large response from that group might give us a very detailed picture of a narrow range of lives. We therefore visited a shift-workers' breakfast club and arranged short conversations outside a school. We heard different priorities there, including routes with toilets and places to rest. The number of contributors mattered less than the experiences missing from the conversation.

By the time we prepared the first printed version, I had become attached to its awkward qualifications. Several routes carried notes about steep sections or temporary works; one suggested connection was left uncoloured because its legal status was unresolved. The designer worried that this would make the publication appear unfinished. Yet a confident line would have concealed uncertainty rather than removed it. We kept the gap, explained it in the key and invited readers to

report changes. There was a practical limit, of course: a pocket map could not include every observation. We selected details that would change a walking decision and provided a link to fuller notes.

The printed map is now distributed in the library. I still care whether its distances and street names are correct. Accuracy has not become optional. What has changed is my understanding of what an accurate map owes its users. It should make its choices visible enough for someone to question them, and it should be clear about when its information was checked. Our map will become outdated; that is unavoidable. What would trouble me more is a version so polished that nobody noticed whose journeys it had failed to imagine.

Your answers

1. What does the writer's account of the first meeting illustrate?

A Reliable geographical data can still be insufficient for a practical journey.

B Residents tend to reject maps that present unfamiliar routes.

C Satellite images are less precise than locally produced drawings.

D Short routes usually involve greater risks than longer ones.

2. What did the organised walks contribute to the project?

A They showed that technical checks could safely be omitted.

B They made it possible to inspect more streets in less time.

C They helped the team decide what needed investigation.

D They confirmed that most apparent private passages were public.

3. Why did the writer change their position on safety warnings?

A The council refused permission to publish residents' views.

B The coordinator showed that every concern could be objectively disproved.

C The volunteers agreed that protecting a street's image was their main duty.

D The discussion exposed the danger of treating experiences as lasting conditions.

4. What point does the writer make about collecting more opinions?

A Disagreement decreases once enough people have contributed.

B A higher response count may still leave important experiences unrepresented.

C Public meetings are useful only when experts attend them.

D People with little spare time generally have less useful information.

5. What does keeping the uncoloured connection reveal about the team's priorities?

A They wanted readers to recognise a limit in the available knowledge.

B They hoped an incomplete design would reduce printing costs.

C They believed legal questions were outside their responsibility.

D They preferred to publish quickly rather than check any information.

6. Which statement best captures the writer's final view?

A Maps should eventually replace measured facts with personal accounts.

B A map is trustworthy only if it never needs revising.

C Correct information should be accompanied by transparency about choices and limits.

D The most attractive maps are generally the least useful.

Answers & explanations

Question 1 | A - Reliable geographical data can still be insufficient for a practical journey.

A is supported by "Nothing ... was wrong, but it did not answer her question": the route existed, yet closed gates made it unusable after the appointment. B invents a general resistance to unfamiliar routes. C contradicts the description of excellent images and precise data. D turns one access problem into an unsupported general claim about risk.

Question 2 | C - They helped the team decide what needed investigation.

C paraphrases "They told us which measurements were worth making." Residents directed attention to crossing times, access and opening hours, which the team then verified. A contradicts the timing and council checks. B contradicts the walks being less efficient by streets per hour. D generalises from one passage and adds an unsupported majority.

Question 3 | D - The discussion exposed the danger of treating experiences as lasting conditions.

D follows the coordinator's question about a five-year-old account and the concern about "turning them into permanent facts". A invents a council ban; the council was consulted about a passage. B misrepresents the question about age as disproving every concern. C elevates one objection about reputation into the team's main duty, which is not stated.

Question 4 | B - A higher response count may still leave important experiences unrepresented.

B matches "a very detailed picture of a narrow range of lives". Numbers alone cannot correct a restricted contributor group. A says nothing about who responds and invents a decline in disagreement. C excludes ordinary residents despite the passage valuing their input. D reverses the reason for seeking shift workers and school visitors: their missing experiences mattered.

Question 5 | A - They wanted readers to recognise a limit in the available knowledge.

A is supported by "a confident line would have concealed uncertainty rather than removed it" and the explanation in the key. B supplies a financial motive never mentioned. C confuses an unresolved legal status with indifference to legality. D exaggerates one unresolved connection into a refusal to check anything; multiple checks are described earlier.

Question 6 | C - Correct information should be accompanied by transparency about choices and limits.

C combines the continued commitment to correct distances with making choices visible and showing when information was checked. A contradicts "Accuracy has not become optional." B contradicts the acceptance that becoming outdated is unavoidable. D turns a concern about misleading polish into a general claim against attractive design. The conclusion qualifies accuracy rather than rejecting it.