Word Formation

Testing the air around us

Full exam-style task: eight word-formation gaps. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

Use the word in capitals beside each gap to form one word that fits the passage. Consider the part of speech and whether the meaning needs a negative prefix.

A neighbourhood group bought inexpensive sensors to measure local air pollution. Before publishing the results, they asked a university to check the equipment's (1) _____. The first readings were (2) _____: two sensors placed beside each other reported sharply different figures. A direct (3) _____ with a laboratory instrument confirmed that one sensor needed adjusting.

The researchers explained that a single reading was (4) _____ to provide a useful picture of conditions over a whole month. Instead, they recommended a (5) _____ approach, with measurements taken at regular intervals in the same locations. They also warned against confusing a small numerical difference with a change of practical (6) _____.

The group welcomed this advice. Full (7) _____ of the method would allow other residents to understand how the figures had been collected. Although some early results remained (8) _____, the project had already taught its volunteers something valuable: collecting data was only the beginning of a careful investigation, not a substitute for one.

Your answers

1 RELY _____

2 CONSIST _____

3 COMPARE _____

4 LIKELY _____

5 SYSTEM _____

6 SIGNIFY _____

7 DISCLOSE _____

8 CONCLUDE _____

Answers & explanations

Question 1 | reliability

RELY -> reliability. "Check the equipment's reliability" needs a noun after the possessive. Reliability is its ability to give trustworthy results; reliable is an adjective and cannot fill that noun position. The family changes rely to reliable, then reliability: notice the -i- and the ending -ability.

Question 2 | inconsistent

CONSIST -> inconsistent. "The first readings were inconsistent" needs an adjective describing the readings. "Sharply different figures" from neighbouring sensors shows disagreement, so the negative prefix in- is essential. Consistency is a noun; consistent would contradict the evidence.

Question 3 | comparison

COMPARE -> comparison. "A direct comparison with a laboratory instrument" requires a singular countable noun after a direct. Comparison names the act of checking the two instruments against each other. Comparative is normally an adjective here and would leave the noun missing; comparing does not fit a direct ... with in this sentence.

Question 4 | unlikely

LIKELY -> unlikely. "A single reading was unlikely to provide a useful picture ... over a whole month." The recommendation for repeated measurements establishes the negative meaning. Add un- to likely; likelihood would require a different structure. Unlikely to + verb means not expected to happen.

Question 5 | systematic

SYSTEM -> systematic. "A systematic approach" needs an adjective before the noun. "At regular intervals in the same locations" describes an organised method. Systemic means affecting an entire system and does not describe the step-by-step measurement procedure intended here.

Question 6 | significance

SIGNIFY -> significance. "A change of practical significance" requires a noun after the adjective practical. Significance means importance: the researchers distinguish a measurable difference from one that matters. Significant is an adjective and would need to modify a noun rather than follow practical in this phrase.

Question 7 | disclosure

DISCLOSE -> disclosure. "Full disclosure of the method would allow..." uses a noun phrase as the sentence's subject. Disclosure means making the procedure available for inspection. Disclosed is a participle and cannot be the head noun after full. Notice the ending -sure rather than an invented -ment form.

Question 8 | inconclusive

CONCLUDE -> inconclusive. "Some early results remained inconclusive" needs an adjective after remained. Although introduces a contrast: results did not settle the scientific question, but volunteers learned something. Conclusive would reverse that meaning; conclusion is a noun. Form conclusive, then add in-.