Gapped Text

An edition that leaves room for doubt

Full exam-style task: seven paragraph gaps and eight options, C2 Proficiency Part 6. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

Seven paragraphs have been removed from the article. Choose from paragraphs A-H the one which fits each gap 1-7. There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Use each paragraph at most once.

When I agreed to edit a new edition of Mara Venn's novel Northern Rooms, the brief seemed straightforward: return to the manuscripts and produce the text the author really intended. Previous editions differed, sometimes replacing a sentence and sometimes rearranging a scene. A definitive edition, the publisher suggested, would finally remove the need to worry about these discrepancies. I initially found the promise appealing.

(1) _____

That absence mattered because our task involved choosing, not simply recovering. The material included notebooks, loose pages and a typescript annotated by at least two people. Some corrections were unmistakably Venn's; others could have belonged to a copy-editor. First we had to establish the documents' sequence. Then we could ask whether a change represented an author's revision, a production error or someone else's attempt to smooth an awkward sentence.

(2) _____

This material evidence produced a chronology more reliable than the handwriting alone. Yet later did not automatically mean more authoritative. One alteration accommodated a magazine's demand for a shorter extract. Another appeared only in a copy sent to a friend. The changes were equally late, but their purposes differed. Privileging them indiscriminately would substitute the apparent neutrality of a date for a judgement about the circumstances.

(3) _____

This was the point at which I abandoned the idea that our uncertainty was merely temporary. It belonged to the record itself. We could make responsible decisions, but not pretend that only one interpretation was possible. The publisher was sympathetic until I mentioned placing competing versions of a passage on the printed page rather than quietly choosing between them.

(4) _____

The two passages consequently appeared together in a trial booklet, each with an account of its origin. Readers did not report the paralysis we feared. Several said the difference sharpened their attention to the narrator's evasions. Others preferred a continuous text and consulted the alternative afterwards. The problem seemed less the presence of alternatives than how we presented them. We therefore distinguished the reading route from its supporting evidence.

(5) _____

The separation made the printed book manageable without discarding the fuller record. A new difficulty arose when an audio producer approached us. A printed note can sit unobtrusively beside a passage; a spoken note interrupts it and takes time to hear. Transferring the apparatus into the recording unchanged would not preserve the reader's experience. It would impose a different

rhythm on the novel.

(6) _____

Hearing the alternatives in those separate recordings revealed an effect I had missed on the page: a repeated phrase sounded defensive in one version and merely hesitant in the other. This did not establish Venn's preference. It reminded us that decisions acquire consequences through a particular medium. The finding went into our introduction, explaining why the main recording followed one reading while additional material allowed comparison.

(7) _____

That invitation survived into the final edition. We described our method, identified unresolved passages and made manuscript images available. This guaranteed neither that readers would investigate nor that future editors would agree. It made disagreement possible on stated grounds. The publisher eventually replaced definitive with documented. I prefer the less triumphant description: it promises a defensible account of our decisions rather than an impossible end to the novel's history.

A

The most troubling case could not be resolved even that far. Two versions of a conversation occupied adjacent leaves, with no cancellation on either and no independent evidence of their order. Each gave the narrator a subtly different motive. Choosing the more elegant exchange would have answered a literary question while pretending to settle a historical one.

B

Instead, we recorded the main narrative without interruptions and placed the disputed passages in a separate audio supplement. Listeners could hear each alternative in full, introduced by a short explanation, without being forced to leave the story at the editor's command. We tested the arrangement with the same group who had read the booklet.

C

The archive soon undermined it. There was no final manuscript carrying Venn's unambiguous approval, no comprehensive set of instructions and no letter declaring one surviving version superior to all the others. What the publicity promise assumed was precisely what the collection could not supply: a single, securely identifiable last word from the author.

D

We retained one coherent sequence as the main text, marking the few disputed passages discreetly. A compact appendix explained the significant alternatives; a digital companion held the longer transcriptions and images. The website was not a place to conceal inconvenient evidence but a way of offering different depths of access without making every reader absorb everything.

E

As the publication deadline approached, I was tempted to tidy the introduction into a confident account of problems solved. Instead, we ended it by asking future readers to test our choices and to tell us about evidence we might have missed. An edition assembled through judgement should provide the means for that judgement to be challenged.

F

For that purpose, we turned to features the novelist had never intended anyone to read: paper stocks, watermarks and invoices tucked between the pages. A dated printer's receipt linked one group of revisions to the magazine extract, while a change of paper separated another set from the earliest notebook. These clues did not interpret the prose, but they helped locate it.

G

He feared that duplication would make the book look unfinished, and I understood the concern. We agreed to test the proposal on just the unresolved conversation, asking a small group of readers how they used the alternatives. The aim was not to let a vote determine the authentic wording, but to discover whether displaying the uncertainty obstructed reading.

H

The manuscript's order eventually settled that dispute. A clearly dated instruction in Venn's own hand cancelled the earlier conversation and substituted the later one. We could therefore print the replacement without qualification, preserving the discarded exchange only as an illustration of the author's changing technique in the digital archive.

Your answers

1 _____ 2 _____

3 _____ 4 _____

5 _____ 6 _____

7 _____

Answers & explanations

Question 1 | C - Paragraph C

C answers the first paragraph's promise of a definitive authorial text: "The archive soon undermined it" points back to that promise. Its list of missing final instructions supplies the referent for "That absence" after the gap. H also concerns manuscript authority, but positively resolves a particular dispute; it cannot establish the absence on which the following paragraph depends.

Question 2 | F - Paragraph F

F explains how the editors established the document sequence requested before the gap. Paper, watermarks and the dated receipt become "This material evidence" afterwards. The paragraph following then qualifies what that chronology can prove. D also mentions manuscript images but concerns presentation to readers, not determining dates, so it would break the investigative sequence.

Question 3 | A - Paragraph A

A develops the preceding warning that dates alone cannot settle authority by giving a case where even the order of two versions cannot be established. "This was the point" afterwards refers to that unresolved choice, motivating the recognition that uncertainty is permanent. H is the closest trap: it concerns the same conversation but claims conclusive cancellation, contradicting both the following acknowledgement and the later display of competing passages.

Question 4 | G - Paragraph G

G takes up the publisher's hesitation immediately before the gap: He refers to the publisher and duplication to the competing versions. The agreed trial then explains why "The two passages consequently appeared together in a trial booklet" afterwards. E also concerns publication decisions but belongs near the deadline, after the experiment has generated a method.

Question 5 | D - Paragraph D

D turns the preceding distinction between a reading route and supporting evidence into a concrete design: main text, compact appendix and digital companion. "The separation" and "the fuller record" afterwards refer to those different layers. G describes a trial of competing passages, which has already occurred, and cannot explain the printed/digital division now introduced.

Question 6 | B - Paragraph B

B solves the audio problem raised before the gap by separating uninterrupted narrative from an optional supplement. "Those separate recordings" afterwards refers specifically to that arrangement, and the observation about sound follows naturally from the listening trial. D is a plausible thematic distractor because it also separates materials, but its website and printed appendix cannot supply the recordings required by the next paragraph.

Question 7 | E - Paragraph E

E introduces the invitation to future readers that "That invitation" picks up after the gap. Its deadline and proposed ending fit the final stage, after print and audio decisions have been explained. G invites a trial group to comment earlier, but asks about usability, not future evidence or challenges to editorial judgement. H is unused: its decisive resolution contradicts the deliberately unresolved conversation and the article's central reasoning.