Multiple Matching

What expertise requires us to reconsider

Full exam-style task: four substantial texts and ten matching questions, C2 Proficiency Part 7. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

Read the four accounts of professional expertise. For questions 1-10, choose the writer A-D who expresses the idea. The writers may be chosen more than once.

Four professionals discuss occasions when expertise required them to reconsider their own practice.

A

As a structural engineer, I used to believe that a sufficiently detailed model would eventually remove the need for judgement. That conviction survived until a technician questioned a perfectly plausible output from my bridge simulation. She had noticed a vibration in the physical model that the software treated as insignificant. My first impulse was to explain why her observation could not matter; fortunately, I listened before doing so. The fault proved to be in an assumption I had supplied, not in the calculation itself. At the next project meeting I explained the error and named the technician whose observation had exposed it. The admission cost me some embarrassment, but colleagues became noticeably readier to challenge my subsequent proposals. I still use sophisticated models, and I am impatient with suggestions that intuition can replace them. What has changed is my view of where their authority ends. A tool can calculate the consequences of an assumption with extraordinary precision while remaining incapable of telling us whether that assumption belongs in the world we are investigating.

B

Literary translation confronts you with a peculiar request: make a reader feel that nothing has been lost while continually deciding what can be lost. Early in my career I treated an unresolved phrase as a personal failure. I now distinguish between uncertainty caused by my ignorance and uncertainty deliberately created by the writer. The former calls for research; the latter may deserve protection. In a recent novel, an unusual regional expression could suggest either affection or contempt. Interviews with speakers did not eliminate the ambiguity: they confirmed it. My publisher wanted a fluent, unequivocal phrase, but I retained a slightly unsettling expression and explained my reason in an afterword. That decision did not make the translation more accurate word by word; it preserved the reader's difficulty in deciding how to judge the speaker. I would not recommend obscurity as a universal virtue. Sometimes a clear solution is exactly right. Expertise, for me, includes recognising when the pressure to sound assured comes from a commercial expectation rather than from the work's artistic demands.

C

I supervise junior surgeons, and one of the most revealing exercises I set them is to observe a consultation without planning a treatment. Some find this almost intolerable: they have worked hard to acquire answers and want to use them. An older patient recently explained that a technically successful operation would count as a failure if recovery prevented her from caring for her husband. A trainee heard this concern and proposed a different timetable before I had considered it. The experience reinforced my doubts about our hospital's habit of treating rapid discharge as the chief indicator of success. That measure is easy to collect, but it can reward a decision whose consequences only become visible at home. I am arguing for broader evaluation, not for abandoning clinical standards or allowing every preference to override safety. The novice's contribution also matters: experience can help us recognise a familiar pattern so quickly that we stop hearing the details that make this patient different. Listening is not preliminary to expert work; it is part of it.

D

Our historical research project began with a compelling account of how a trading family had financed a local school. A charitable foundation funded the work partly because that account fitted its anniversary programme. Then a newly catalogued ledger showed that the family's contribution had been much smaller than our preliminary article suggested. Some colleagues proposed retaining the article's central story and treating the ledger as an interesting complication. I thought that would mistake loyalty to a project for loyalty to the evidence. We revised the article and accepted that the foundation might decline further support. What troubled me most was not having to surrender a pleasing conclusion but realising how many questions we had failed to ask while it seemed secure. The revision led us to investigate less prominent donors whose records had previously attracted little attention. A conclusion can collapse while an investigation becomes more valuable. That does not mean every fashionable challenge deserves equal weight: the obligation is to examine consequential evidence, not to perform scepticism for its own sake.

Your answers

1. Which writer describes making their own mistake known in a way that encouraged colleagues to question them?

Answer: _____

2. Which writer distinguishes an uncertainty that should be resolved from one that may be worth retaining?

Answer: _____

3. Which writer questions whether a convenient measure captures the outcome that really matters?

Answer: _____

4. Which writer accepted a possible loss of financial backing as a consequence of revising a claim?

Answer: _____

5. Which writer argues that technical precision cannot validate the initial premises on which a result depends?

Answer: _____

6. Which writer benefited from an insight offered by someone they were responsible for training?

Answer: _____

7. Which writer identifies a conflict between a publisher's expectation and the effect a work is intended to create?

Answer: _____

8. Which writer says that confidence in an earlier explanation had restricted the investigation itself?

Answer: _____

9. Which writer used consultation with other people to establish that two interpretations were genuinely possible?

Answer: _____

10. Which writer rejects the idea that discovering a limitation makes a specialist tool dispensable?

Answer: _____

Answers & explanations

Question 1 | A - Writer A

A explains the simulation error at a project meeting and says colleagues became "readier to challenge my subsequent proposals". The question requires both public admission and its effect on colleagues. D revises a published article, but does not describe a resulting willingness among colleagues to challenge the writer.

Question 2 | B - Writer B

B separates uncertainty "caused by my ignorance" from uncertainty "deliberately created by the writer": research should address the first, while the second may deserve protection. D also responds to incomplete knowledge, but advocates revising a conclusion when new evidence appears, not preserving intentional ambiguity.

Question 3 | C - Writer C

C calls rapid discharge "easy to collect" but warns that it can reward decisions whose consequences emerge at home. The patient's caring responsibilities illustrate why that measure is incomplete. A questions an assumption in a simulation rather than a measure used to assess successful outcomes.

Question 4 | D - Writer D

D says the foundation funded a particular historical account and that revising the article meant accepting it "might decline further support". This is a possible financial consequence, not a claim that funding was actually withdrawn. B faces commercial pressure, but no loss of funding is described.

Question 5 | A - Writer A

A's final sentence distinguishes calculating consequences "with extraordinary precision" from knowing whether an assumption fits the real world. The software's calculation was not itself faulty. C questions the adequacy of a success indicator, but does not discuss the logical relationship between a model's premises and its calculations.

Question 6 | C - Writer C

The trainee notices the patient's caring responsibilities and proposes a different timetable "before I had considered it". This is a useful contribution from a person C supervises. A benefits from a technician's observation, but does not say the technician is a trainee or under A's instructional responsibility.

Question 7 | B - Writer B

The publisher wants a "fluent, unequivocal phrase", whereas B wants to preserve the reader's difficulty in judging the speaker. The final sentence contrasts commercial expectation with artistic demands. D's funder prefers a historical story, but the conflict there concerns factual evidence, not an intended artistic effect.

Question 8 | D - Writer D

D regrets "how many questions we had failed to ask while it seemed secure". Once the initial story was revised, less prominent donors became subjects of investigation. A also held a mistaken assumption, but does not describe a whole range of unasked research questions caused by a secure narrative.

Question 9 | B - Writer B

B's interviews with speakers "did not eliminate the ambiguity: they confirmed it". The research distinguishes a real regional ambiguity from the translator's lack of knowledge. C's consultation uncovers a patient's priorities, not two legitimate meanings of an expression.

Question 10 | A - Writer A

After exposing the simulation's limitation, A remains "impatient with suggestions that intuition can replace" sophisticated models. The criticism narrows the tool's authority without abandoning it. C similarly retains clinical standards, but the question specifically concerns a specialist tool whose limitation has been discovered.