Open Cloze

Reading between the records

Full exam-style task: eight one-word gaps, C2 Proficiency Part 2. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

Read the whole passage, then write one word in each gap. Pay attention to inversion, linking expressions and the writer's qualifications.

When the project began last winter, little (1) _____ the archivists realise how misleading the collection's catalogue was. Had it not (2) _____ for a visitor's enquiry, several letters would have remained attributed to the wrong author. The team decided to examine every item, regardless (3) _____ whether its description had previously been questioned.

Such (4) _____ the volume of material that progress initially seemed negligible. Researchers soon discovered that, no (5) _____ how carefully they read individual letters, some references made sense only alongside records held elsewhere. That meant arranging access to several other collections and comparing dates that were not always clearly written.

Be that as it (6) _____, the slow pace was no reason to abandon the investigation. The evidence was nowhere (7) _____ as straightforward as the original catalogue suggested. The team agreed that on no (8) _____ should an uncertain identification be presented as a fact. Their revised catalogue therefore distinguished established findings from plausible interpretations and openly acknowledged the questions that remained unanswered.

Your answers

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

Answers & explanations

Question 1 | did

"Little did the archivists realise" means that they failed to appreciate the extent of the problem. Initial negative little triggers auxiliary-subject inversion; began last winter establishes a past narrative, so did carries the tense and realise stays in its base form. Had would require realised, not realise. Notice that little here limits their awareness, not the size of the archive.

Question 2 | been

"Had it not been for a visitor's enquiry" means "if it had not been for a visitor's enquiry". The sentence imagines a different past: without that enquiry, the attribution would have remained wrong. Had requires the past participle been. Being cannot complete a past perfect form. This inverted conditional does not also take if.

Question 3 | of

"Regardless of whether its description had previously been questioned" includes both possibilities: questioned and unquestioned. Regardless takes of before a noun phrase or whether-clause. Despite can introduce a different concessive construction, but cannot follow regardless as a replacement for of. Here the phrase defines how comprehensively the collection was examined.

Question 4 | was

"Such was the volume of material that progress initially seemed negligible" emphasises the amount of material. The ordinary meaning is "the volume was so great that ...". The subject volume is singular, and seemed locates the consequence in the past, so was fits. Were would disagree with volume; the following noun material does not control the verb.

Question 5 | matter

"No matter how carefully they read individual letters" means "however carefully they read them". The next clause shows that careful reading alone was insufficient because records elsewhere were also needed. The fixed sequence is no matter how + adverb/adjective. Although cannot follow no to make this construction. Read the whole concession, not only the verb beside the gap.

Question 6 | may

"Be that as it may" acknowledges the difficulty before maintaining that the work should continue. May belongs to this fixed concessive expression, roughly meaning "even so". Might is possible in many ordinary modal clauses but does not complete this established expression. That refers back to the slow progress, which the writer accepts rather than denies.

Question 7 | near

"Nowhere near as straightforward as" means very much less straightforward than. Near completes the degree expression nowhere near, while the two occurrences of as form the comparison. Almost would not work after nowhere in this pattern. The revised catalogue's separation of facts from interpretations confirms that the evidence was considerably more complex.

Question 8 | account

"On no account should an uncertain identification be presented as a fact" is an absolute prohibition. On no account means "under no circumstances"; the negative phrase placed first causes should to precede the subject. Circumstances belongs after under no, not on no. The prohibition concerns how uncertainty is reported, not whether uncertain items may be investigated.