

## ACADEMIC READING EXAMPLE

Read the free sample text below from **IELTS Academic Practice Test 16** ([High Scorer's Choice series](#)). Answer the questions on pages 3 and 4. The correct answers are on page 5.

### READING PASSAGE 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 1 - 13**, which are based on Reading Passage 1 below.

#### Meditation

Meditation is a mind and body practice that has a long history of use for increasing calmness and physical relaxation, improving psychological balance, coping with illness, and enhancing overall health and well-being. There are many types of meditation, but most have four elements in common: a quiet location with as few distractions as possible; a specific, comfortable posture (sitting, lying down, walking, or in other positions); a focus of attention (a specially chosen word or set of words, an object, or the sensations of the breath); and an open attitude (letting distractions come and go naturally without judging them).

Although there is little recorded history on meditation, its roots go back to ancient times. Teacher and practitioner Mary Rogers explains: "Researchers speculate that primitive hunter-gatherer societies may have discovered meditation and its altered states of consciousness while gazing at the flames of their fires. Then, over thousands of years, meditation evolved into a structured practice." It seems meditation was first popular in the East with Indian scriptures known as 'tantras' mentioning meditation techniques five thousand years ago. Meditation took thousands of years to spread to Western societies and it was not until the twentieth century when it finally started to gain popularity in the West. Historian David Luttlery describes how this happened: "Meditation spread to the West initially due to an increase in the popularity of Buddhism. Meditation being a central part of this religion meant that as Buddhism spread, other countries and cultures soon adopted many different forms of meditation."

Supporters of meditation claim that it can be a part of people's lives in different ways and is often practiced to acquire balance in people's physical, emotional, and mental states. Oliver Sachs, an Australian businessman, is an ardent fan. "I find that the deep rest that meditation gives me enables me to make better choices. I can work better all through the day and I sleep better at night." Meditation has also been used to help people quit smoking and conquer drug and alcohol addictions. Doctor Kristina Smith has researched meditation and found that there are definite biological and psychological benefits. "Proficient meditative practices help to integrate the brain functions and regulate various physiological mechanisms resulting in a state of mental and physical well-being."

One of the most important claimed benefits of meditation is how it releases stress from people's bodies. Psychologist Angela Matthews is an expert in this field and has theorised that there is a connection to mankind's development over time due to evolution. "When people's bodies are exposed to a sudden threat, they respond with the characteristic fight or flight reaction that is known as an adrenaline rush. If people are in extreme danger, these reactions are of great assistance and gain to them. The same response is now triggered in our daily lives when people are in a traffic hold-up or someone irritates us at work. If people do not confront things (and some things are beyond their control), they end up being in a permanent state of stress."

Related to stress, a recent study found that meditation helped college students decrease psychological distress and increase coping ability. These kinds of students are also at high risk for developing hypertension, and the meditation was also associated with decreases in blood pressure. The study's researchers randomly assigned students to a meditation group or a control group. They also created a high-risk subgroup, based on blood pressure readings, family history, and weight. The meditation group received a seven-step course in meditation techniques, with invitations to attend refresher meetings, and kept track of how often they practised meditation. At the beginning of the study and after three months, researchers tested all participants for blood pressure and psychological measures. The study's director, Anton Hayden, was happy with the results, but also gave another suggestion. "These findings suggest that young adults at risk of developing hypertension may be able to reduce that risk by practicing meditation. However, we recommend that future studies of meditation in college students evaluate long-term effects on blood pressure and psychological distress, so that our short-term results can be endorsed."

Finally, it seems that meditation can have various beneficial effects on the brain. Long-term meditators apparently have better-preserved brains than non-meditators as they age, as well as an increase in the thickness of the hippocampus, which governs learning and memory. Meditators also have more development in the areas of the brain that play roles in emotion regulation and self-referential processing. Younger developing brains can also be beneficially affected and there has been increasing interest from educators and researchers in bringing meditation to school kids, who are dealing with the usual stressors inside school, and often additional stress and trauma outside school. San Francisco high school principal, Nicola Roberts, explains how her school has been transformed. "Although I was sceptical at first, we started a twice daily meditation program and saw suspensions decrease, GPA's increase and absenteeism decrease."

Although meditation has many detractors, those who practise it are vociferous in their support. More and more people are starting to take up meditation at home and work and increasing numbers of doctors are starting to prescribe it. Additional studies are also being conducted about the effects of meditation and, as more expertise is gathered, meditation will become a more accurately and frequently approved treatment.

### Glossary

Hypertension - abnormally high blood pressure

## Questions 1 – 7

Look at the following statements (questions 1 - 7) and the list of people below.

Match each statement with the correct person's initials.

Write the correct initials in boxes 1 - 7 on your answer sheet.

- 1 Meditation can help people enjoy a better night's sleep.
- 2 More research is required to confirm the effectiveness of meditation at lowering hypertension in young adults.
- 3 It is theorised that early civilisations developed what is now called meditation by staring into their fires.
- 4 Properly conducted meditation can lead to more effective performance in the brain.
- 5 Religion is theorised to be responsible for meditation first coming to the West.
- 6 Meditation has allowed attendances to increase in at least one US school.
- 7 Modern lifestyles can create situations of permanent stress for some people.

<b>MR</b>	Mary Rogers
<b>DL</b>	David Luttlely
<b>OS</b>	Oliver Sachs
<b>KS</b>	Kristina Smith
<b>AM</b>	Angela Matthews
<b>AH</b>	Anton Hayden
<b>NR</b>	Nicola Roberts

### Questions 8 – 13

Complete the sentences below.

Write **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes **8 - 13** on your answer sheet.

- 8** Meditation only became popular in the West in the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 9** One expert feels that the changes people have experienced from their \_\_\_\_\_ can result in reactions that lead to constant high stress.
- 10** Those participants in the college student stress study that were not in a meditation group were placed into a group used for \_\_\_\_\_.
- 11** Participants in the college student stress study had their \_\_\_\_\_ taken and their psychological well-being tested.
- 12** If the \_\_\_\_\_ of the hippocampus is enlarged, this can indicate long-term meditation use.
- 13** Meditation will probably be more commonly prescribed when there is more \_\_\_\_\_ available.

## ANSWERS

1. OS
2. AH
3. MR
4. KS
5. DL
6. NR
7. AM
8. **twentieth century**
9. **evolution**
10. **control**
11. **blood pressure**
12. **thickness**
13. **expertise**

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