

PART A: READING COMPREHENSION

STAND-ALONE TEXT

7 multiple-choice questions
1 written-response question
Value: 23%

Suggested Time: 25 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the following passage, “An Ode to the User-Friendly Pencil,” and answer the multiple-choice questions. For each question, select the **best** answer and record your choice on the **Answer Sheet** provided.

adapted from **An Ode to the User-Friendly Pencil**

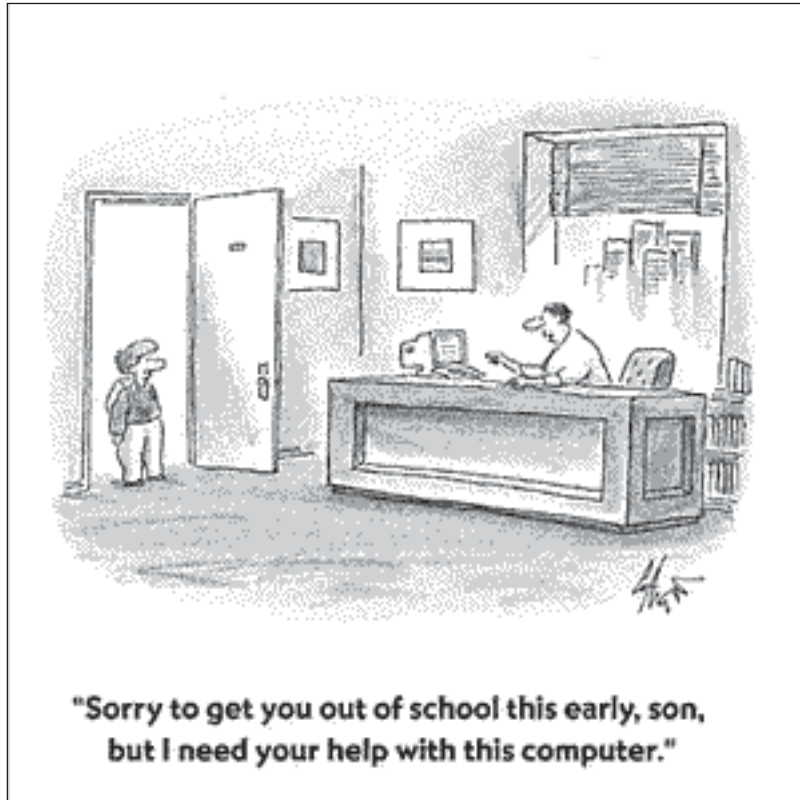
by Bonnie Laing

- 1 Recently I acquired a computer. Or perhaps I should say it acquired me. My therapist claims that acknowledging the superior partner in a destructive relationship is the first step toward recovery. I should point out that prior to this acquisition, my idea of modern technology at its best was frozen waffles. My mastery of business machines had advanced only as far as the stapler.
- 2 I was persuaded to make this investment by well-meaning friends who said the word-processing capacity of a computer would make me a better writer, make me a more productive writer, and make me a richer writer. I pointed out that Chaucer was a pretty good writer even though he used a quill, and Dickens managed to produce 15 novels and numerous collections of short stories without so much as a typewriter. But I have to admit that option C got to me, even if I couldn't figure out how spending \$3,000 on a piece of molded plastic was going to make me wealthier.
- 3 To date, my association with the computer has not been too successful. It has proven to be very sensitive to everything but my needs. At the last breakdown (its, not mine) the service man commented that it should have been called an Edsel,¹ not an Epson, and suggested an exorcist be consulted. Needless to say, I am not yet in a position to open a numbered Swiss bank account.
- 4 But they say hardship teaches you who your friends are. And so, my computer experience has forced me to spend a lot more time with an old friend, the pencil. Its directness and simplicity have proven to be refreshing. In fact, the more I wrestled with my microchips (whatever they are), the more convinced I became that the pencil is superior to the computer. Allow me to cite a few examples.
- 5 To start with the purchase decision, you don't have to ask for a bank loan to buy a pencil. Since most pencils are not manufactured in Japan, you don't feel you're upsetting the nation's balance of trade by buying one.
- 6 In fact, pencils are constructed in part from that most Canadian of natural resources — wood. By buying pencils you create employment and prosperity for dozens of people in British Columbia. Well, a few anyway.
- 7 Of course, like most people I rarely *buy* a pencil, preferring to pick them up free from various places of employment, in the mistaken belief that they are a legitimate fringe benefit. It's best not to make that assumption about office computers.

¹ Edsel: *an unreliable car*

- 8 Operationally, the pencil wins over the computer hands down. You can learn to use a pencil in less than 10 seconds. Personally, at the age of 2, I mastered the technology in 3.2 seconds. To be fair, erasing did take a further 2.4 seconds. I've never had to boot a pencil, to interface with it or to program it. I just write with it.
- 9 Compared to a computer, a pencil takes up far less space on a desk and it can be utilized in a car, bathroom or a telephone booth without the aid of batteries. You can even use one during an electrical storm. Pencils don't cause eye strain and no one has ever screamed, after four hours of creative endeavour, "The - - - pencil ate my story!"
- 10 Pencils are wonderfully single-minded. They aren't used to open car doors, make the morning coffee or remind you that your Visa payment is overdue. They're user-friendly. (For the uninitiated, see comments on vocabulary.)
- 11 Of course, the technologically addicted among you will argue that the options of a pencil are rather limited. But the software of a pencil is both cheap and simple, consisting of a small rubber tip located at one end of the unit. A pencil is capable of producing more fonts or typefaces than any word processor, depending on the operator's skill.
- 12 Its graphic capability is limited only by the operator's talent, an element referred to as the Dürer² or Da Vinci Factor. Backup to a pencil can usually be found in your purse or pocket. Although a pencil has no memory, many of us who write badly consider that to be an advantage.
- 13 But it's in the area of maintenance that the pencil really proves its superiority. Should a pencil break down, all you have to do to render it operational again, is buy a small plastic device enclosing a sharp metal strip, a purchase that can be made for under a dollar. A paring knife, a piece of broken glass or even your teeth can be used in an emergency. For the more technically advanced, an electronic pencil sharpener can be obtained, but I should point out that these devices don't run on electrical power but by devouring one-third of the pencil.
- 14 You never have to take a pencil to a service department located on an industrial site on the outskirts of Moose Factory. Neither do you have to do without them for two weeks before discovering that the malfunction is not covered by the warranty and that the replacement part is on a boat from Korea.
- 15 What finally won me over to the pencil was its lack of social pretension. For instance, very few people suffer the nagging doubt that their intelligence is below that of a pencil. No one has ever claimed that a pencil put them out of a job. And the pencil has not created a whole new class of workers who consider themselves superior to, let's say, crayon operators. At parties, you meet very few people who will discuss pencils with a fervour normally found only at student rallies in Tehran. Fewer people boast about being 'pencil literate.'
- 16 Of course, the pencil is not without its flaws. It has a nasty habit of hiding when most needed. If located beside a telephone, it will break spontaneously if a caller wishes to leave a message. Those aspiring to be professional writers should note that editors are unreasonably prejudiced against submissions in pencil.
- 17 But a pencil won't argue with you if you wish to write more than 50 lines to the page. It won't insist on correcting your whimsical use of grammar, and it won't be obsolete 10 seconds after you mortgage your first-born to buy one. Just in case you remain unconvinced, I ask you, can you imagine chewing on a computer while balancing your cheque book? And what do computer operators use to scratch that place in the middle of the back where they can't reach? The defence rests.

² Dürer: *a famous European artist*



www.cartoonbank.com

Figure 1