NMAT 2026 Reading Comprehension Practice Pack

3 original passages, 12 questions, answer key and a timing log

How to use this pack

Section reference	NMAT Language Skills: 36 questions in 28 minutes
RC share reported	Recent analyses report 3 passages with 4 questions each (12 questions)
Time for this pack	13 minutes for all three passages (about 4 minutes 20 seconds each)
Per passage	About 100 seconds to read, then about 40 seconds per question
Marking	NMAT has no negative marking, so answer every question

Steps: set a 13-minute timer, read each passage once with a purpose, predict the answer before you read the options, and mark your answers on the page. Check the answer key only after the timer ends. These passages and questions are original practice material written by CatMock to match NMAT length and style. They are not actual NMAT questions. Confirm the current pattern on the official NMAT page (mba.com/exams/nmat).

Passage 1

Along many tropical coastlines, mangrove forests once stood as an unremarked boundary between land and sea. Their tangled roots slow incoming waves, trap silt and give young fish a place to shelter. For decades, however, planners treated these forests as wasteland. Cleared for shrimp ponds and construction, they vanished faster than most protected habitats of comparable size.

The cost of that decision became visible only after storms. In several districts where mangroves had been replaced by concrete embankments, repair bills climbed year after year, while neighbouring villages that kept their forests lost fewer homes. Economists who later studied the pattern did not claim that mangroves are a perfect shield; a powerful cyclone can flatten even a healthy belt of trees. Their argument was narrower: a living barrier costs little to maintain, repairs itself and improves with age, whereas a wall of concrete begins to decay on the day it is finished.

Restoration, though, is harder than protection. Replanting a cleared shoreline often fails because seedlings placed in the wrong tidal zone drown or dry out. Programmes that succeed usually start by restoring the flow of water and then let the forest return on its own, supplementing it with planting only where natural recovery stalls. They also involve local fishing communities from the start, since people who depend on the forest for their income guard it more carefully than any patrol.

None of this makes engineering irrelevant. Seawalls still protect dense ports and cities where no forest can grow. The lesson is a modest one: before building a barrier, planners should ask what the coast was already doing for free, and whether that service can be kept.

Q1. Which statement best captures the main idea of the passage?

(a) Mangroves should replace every seawall along tropical coasts.
(b) Shrimp farming is the main cause of cyclone damage.
(c) Mangroves offer low-cost coastal protection that planners overlooked, but restoring them takes care and does not remove the need for engineering.
(d) Restoring mangroves is too difficult to be worth attempting.

Q2. According to the passage, successful restoration programmes usually begin by:

(a) Restoring the natural flow of water.
(b) Planting dense rows of seedlings along the shore.
(c) Building a concrete embankment first.
(d) Banning fishing in the area.

Q3. Which of the following can be inferred about the economists' argument?

(a) They believe mangroves can withstand every cyclone.
(b) They think concrete barriers are never useful.
(c) They want shrimp ponds banned everywhere.
(d) They compared the long-term upkeep of living and concrete barriers, not their absolute strength.

Q4. The author's tone in the passage is best described as:

(a) Alarmist.
(b) Balanced and measured.
(c) Sarcastic.
(d) Nostalgic.

Passage 2

Shoppers usually say they want more choice. A well-known style of experiment suggests the story is more complicated. In several studies, researchers set up tasting tables with either a few varieties of a product or a large display. The bigger display attracted more visitors, yet the smaller one produced more actual purchases. Later studies found the effect is not universal; in some settings, more options made no difference at all.

Researchers have offered an explanation based on effort. Each additional option must be compared against the others, and the comparison drains attention. When the options are very similar, the effort rises while the reward of choosing the best one shrinks. People then do one of three things: they postpone the decision, they pick the first acceptable item or they leave without choosing. Afterwards, those who did choose from a large set often feel less satisfied, because they imagine the options they rejected.

Not everyone is equally affected. People who already know what they want, such as an expert buying a familiar tool, scan a large range quickly and rarely feel overwhelmed. Novices, by contrast, have no filter and treat every option as equally relevant. Designers of shops and websites have responded by grouping choices, offering sensible defaults and showing a short list of recommendations first.

It would be a mistake to conclude that fewer options are always better. A restaurant with a single dish would please almost no one. The useful finding is that the number of options matters less than how easily a person can sort them. A long menu divided into clear sections feels simpler than a short one jumbled together.

Q5. What is the main point of the passage?

(a) The effect of choice depends on how easily people can sort options, so more choice is not automatically better or worse.
(b) Large displays always reduce sales.
(c) Experts are poor decision-makers.
(d) Shops should sell a single product.

Q6. According to the passage, people who choose from a large set often:

(a) Buy more items than planned.
(b) Become experts in the product.
(c) Feel less satisfied afterwards.
(d) Avoid shops altogether.

Q7. Why do experts rarely feel overwhelmed by a large range?

(a) They have more money to spend.
(b) They already have a filter for what is relevant.
(c) They dislike variety.
(d) They choose at random.

Q8. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a response by designers of shops and websites?

(a) Grouping choices.
(b) Offering sensible defaults.
(c) Showing a short list of recommendations first.
(d) Charging a fee for browsing.

Passage 3

A cafeteria places fruit at eye level and sweets on a lower shelf. Sales of fruit rise. Nothing has been banned, no price has changed and every item is still available. Policy designers call this a nudge: a small change in how choices are presented that steers people in a predictable direction without removing their freedom to choose otherwise.

Supporters point to its low cost and its respect for individual choice. A ban removes options; a tax changes prices; a nudge only changes the starting point. Because many people accept the default setting on a form, switching the default can have large effects. When a workplace pension scheme enrols employees automatically, with an easy way to opt out, participation is typically far higher than when employees must sign up themselves.

Critics raise two objections. The first concerns transparency: if people do not notice the nudge, can they be said to have chosen freely? The second concerns who decides the direction. A nudge toward saving may seem harmless, but the same technique could serve less benign aims. Defenders reply that every choice is presented in some way, so a neutral presentation does not exist; the real question is whether the design is open to scrutiny and serves the person's own interest.

A fair reading of the debate is that nudges work best as a complement, not a substitute. They cannot replace rules where harm to others is serious, and they cannot fix problems that stem from poverty or lack of access. Yet where the stakes are modest and people mainly need a push to do what they already intend, a well-designed default can achieve more than a long public campaign.

Q9. Which option best summarises the passage?

(a) Nudges can be a low-cost complement to rules, though they raise fair questions about transparency and purpose.
(b) Nudges are manipulative and should be banned.
(c) Pension schemes are the only successful nudge.
(d) People never notice default settings.

Q10. In the cafeteria example, the nudge works by:

(a) Banning sweets.
(b) Raising the price of sweets.
(c) Offering a discount on fruit.
(d) Changing how items are placed.

Q11. In the passage, the phrase 'less benign aims' most nearly means:

(a) More secret purposes.
(b) Less harmless purposes.
(c) More expensive purposes.
(d) More ambitious purposes.

Q12. The defenders' reply in the passage most directly supports which idea?

(a) Nudges must stay hidden to work.
(b) A neutral presentation of choices is easy to achieve.
(c) Any presentation of choices influences people, so openness and benefit to the person matter most.
(d) Rules are never needed.

Answer key and explanations

Q	Ans	Why
1	(c) Mangroves offer low-cost coastal protection that planners overlooked, but restoring them takes care and does not remove the need for engineering.	The passage praises mangroves, admits restoration is hard and says engineering still has a role. The other options go too far or ignore parts of the text.
2	(a) Restoring the natural flow of water.	The third paragraph says successful programmes start by restoring water flow and let the forest return on its own.
3	(d) They compared the long-term upkeep of living and concrete barriers, not their absolute strength.	The economists said a living barrier costs little to maintain and improves with age, while concrete decays. They did not claim mangroves are a perfect shield.
4	(b) Balanced and measured.	The author gives benefits, limits and a modest closing lesson. Nothing in the text is alarmist, sarcastic or nostalgic.
5	(a) The effect of choice depends on how easily people can sort options, so more choice is not automatically better or worse.	The final paragraph states that sorting ease matters more than the number of options. The other options overstate the findings.
6	(c) Feel less satisfied afterwards.	The second paragraph says they often feel less satisfied because they imagine the options they rejected.
7	(b) They already have a filter for what is relevant.	The third paragraph says experts know what they want and scan quickly, while novices have no filter.
8	(d) Charging a fee for browsing.	Grouping, defaults and short recommendation lists appear in the third paragraph. A browsing fee does not.
9	(a) Nudges can be a low-cost complement to rules, though they raise fair questions about transparency and purpose.	The passage presents benefits, objections and a balanced conclusion. The other options distort it.
10	(d) Changing how items are placed.	The first paragraph says nothing is banned and no price has changed. Only the placement differs.
11	(b) Less harmless purposes.	'Benign' means harmless or well-meaning, so 'less benign' means less harmless.
12	(c) Any presentation of choices influences people, so openness and benefit to the person matter most.	Defenders say a neutral presentation does not exist and the real test is scrutiny and benefit to the person.

Timing log

Passage	Time taken	Correct (out of 4)	Main mistake type
Passage 1			
Passage 2			
Passage 3			
Total		/ 12	

Score guide: 10 to 12 is strong, 8 to 9 is good, and below 8 means you should review the question types where you lost marks. Mistake types to note: misread the detail, extreme option, wrong inference, ran out of time. Prepared by CatMock (www.catmock.com).