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Task 1

Speaker A

The only good thing about my experience with the driving test was my ever-cheerful instructor. By the time I eventually passed it, I'd had hundreds of lessons and had spent thousands of pounds. My skills may not have been perfect, but I'm not convinced there was that much wrong with my driving. What I do know is that the driving test authorities kept moving the goalposts and with every new reform of the system, the prospect of success receded into the distance. I'm all in favour of safe roads and safe drivers, but some tasks learner drivers are required to perform nowadays seem bizarre. It would not surprise me if the test eventually included knowing how to carry out a full engine change on the side of the public highway. No wonder the pass rate for the driving test has dropped like a stone in recent years.

Adapted from: www.theguardian.com

Speaker B

The theory test wasn't a problem for me, but I found the practical part incredibly challenging. It requires you to be constantly aware of your surroundings. You need to use signals appropriately, anticipate potential hazards and have eyes in the back of your head. I was making some progress, but the worst thing was the ever-present fear of failure, which hugely affected my performance. Apart from taking driving lessons, I started going to a therapist and finally managed to navigate and pass the practical test, but this happened only after I'd accepted the fact that I had to endure those 40 minutes of stress and learned to focus on following the examiner's instructions regardless of my internal emotions.

Adapted from: www.blog.ingenie.com

Speaker C

When I got into the car that day, I noticed my instructor was in a bad mood. We were practising roundabouts and halfway round one of them, he started gesturing at a different exit than the one I thought I had been asked to take. He suddenly grabbed the wheel, which made me swerve unexpectedly, and the car brushed a concrete post. I was really shaken up and couldn't help crying! To make matters worse, instead of comforting me, the instructor muttered, "I meant the other exit". I knew it wasn't my fault, but the experience was so intimidating that I rang the test centre and cancelled my test which was due to take place the following week. For a few weeks I couldn't stand the thought of driving, but then I returned to the driving school and requested a change of instructor.

Adapted from: www.thestudentroom.co.uk

Speaker D

I was desperate to pass the driving exam, but my beginnings were tough. The first time I took my driving test, I drove for at least 5 minutes without noticing the handbrake was on. When the smell of burning rubber became overpowering, the examiner ordered me to return to the testing centre, and then informed me I had "not been successful". To the man's apparent discomfort, I burst into tears, not from disappointment, as he probably imagined, but from relief that the ordeal was at last over and that I could finally get out of the vehicle. A few

years and driving tests later, I finally did get my driving licence but the feeling of insecurity remained. From a strictly statistical perspective, I may be one of the safest “road users” in the United Kingdom as I hardly ever sit at the wheel of a vehicle and never venture out on roads I am not familiar with. But I can fully understand why the number of people deciding to take the driving test is at its lowest for 10 years. Why would people put themselves through such an expensive and difficult ordeal if they didn’t absolutely have to?

Adapted from: www.theguardian.com

Task 2

Text 1

Interviewer: Today we’re talking to Amanda, the manager of Madame Tussauds in London, about the way the wax figures are created and taken care of. Amanda, how does the process of creating a figure begin?

Amanda: Well, it starts with a sitting. This is when all the measurements of the celebrity’s body and musculature are recorded. We take around 500 measurements in a traditional way but our artists also take thousands of pictures, record video footage and even use scanners to capture a 360-degree image of the celebrity in an agreed pose. During the sitting the celebrity’s eyes, hair and skin are also colour-matched from samples, so that the team doesn’t face any problems in the following stages.

Interviewer: And how are the figures actually created?

Amanda: After all the relevant measurements are obtained, a clay mould is created. Because wax shrinks, the mould must be 2% bigger than the actual measurements. Once a head cast is created, melted wax is slowly poured into the mould to avoid air bubbles which would spoil the final look. The body of each figure is moulded in the same way. However, it is made from fibreglass instead of wax for durability. Then, strands of real human hair are inserted individually into the wax head, including eyebrows and eyelashes. Next, the hair is cut and styled to match the desired look and the teeth and eyes are added. Finally, skin colour is established on the figure by the application of 10 layers of paint.

Interviewer: And the last question. Does your work finish the moment you put the figure on display?

Amanda: As we don’t cordon off our exhibits from visitors, occasionally some minor damage does happen. That’s why our artists constantly monitor the figures. Every morning they go from sculpture to sculpture to check the condition of our exhibits. When necessary, they paint skin or curl hair. Outfits require regular steaming or dry cleaning. Our artists must also update the figures by introducing all the changes in the celebrity’s appearance that are reported. So, for example, when a celebrity has a new tattoo done, it is subsequently carefully reproduced on the figure. We can even age a celebrity’s likeness by carving crow’s feet or shading the skin to replicate the merciless passage of time. When it comes to the sculptures at Madame Tussauds, the artists’ job is never done.

Interviewer: Amanda, thank you for talking to us.

Adapted from: www.khaleejtimes.com; www.huffpost.com

Text 2

It was a sunny day in July and I felt as though I was standing on a film set. The whistle of the steam train sounded as I set foot on the impeccably preserved Victorian platform at the station in Alresford. The pale yellow and green station palette, barley twist lamp posts and original signage was virtually the same scene as 100 years ago, and colourful blooms amplified the serene setting. The sound of the train marked the beginning of my journey back in time to when the county's famed watercress began to spread nationwide.

Although watercress may not be a plant frequently used worldwide, in Britain, where it's been grown commercially for hundreds of years, it is still commonplace at mealtimes. Its Latin name is aptly translated as 'nose twister', to which anyone crunching on its punchy, peppery leaves can attest. These days it's mainly used as the base of watercress soup or to perk up salads and sandwiches, while more fancy uses in classy eateries include watercress pesto and hummus. However, in the past, watercress used to be a symbol of poverty. In fact, in Victorian times, when street sellers in London sold bunches of it in paper cones to be eaten as a snack, watercress was nicknamed 'the poor man's bread'. And in the 20th century, especially during both world wars, watercress sandwiches became a national institution as people rejoiced in inexpensive, homegrown, healthy produce.

During my visit to the town of Alresford I discovered that the area provides a constant supply of crystal-clear chalk spring water in which the watercress grows. The water comes out of the ground at a constant 10 to 11 degrees Celsius. This is essential for proper growth as it protects this fragile crop when the temperature outside becomes more extreme in winter or in summer.

The handsome market town of Alresford has been the home of watercress for centuries. However, watercress was far too perishable to be transported by horse and cart along poor roads. That's why, in 1865, the railway link connecting Alresford to London was opened. This meant that watercress could be rapidly transported to the capital and beyond and owing to the huge quantities sent to London's Covent Garden Market each day, the service was soon dubbed the 'Watercress Line'.

Although the line was closed in 1973 due to British Rail discontinuing loss-making branch lines, volunteers raised finances and eventually reopened it in 1985, this time as a heritage line, running a 10-mile route from Alresford to Alton. Today, crowds of visitors who flock to Alresford to travel on the 'Watercress Line' are lured by the quintessentially English countryside, the Georgian town with its pastel-coloured mansions, and the opportunity to learn about the history of the region.

During my July visit, I noticed what used to be the busy goods yard where the watercress would have been unloaded onto railway wagons. Farmers would bring the watercress by horse and cart and pack it into wooden boxes with ice and water to keep it fresh *en route*. As a sign of the times, the old goods yard now serves as the station car park.

Adapted from: www.bbc.com

Task 3

With my train to London running late, I decided to cancel a restaurant reservation which I had made a few days earlier. I rang the restaurant a full five hours before my family and I were due to take our seats, so I thought that everything was OK. But then, a few days later, I looked at my bank statement and saw that a cancellation fee of £25 for each person had been charged to the credit card whose details I'd given when making the reservation.

It turns out that I was the unwitting victim of current reservation rules that a significant proportion of restaurants have now adopted in the UK. If you cancel your booking too late or don't show up, you will be charged a fee. That fee can be as high as a full meal. And a cancellation fee can, in some top restaurants, apply as far in advance as two weeks before the booked date.

Of the 100 venues listed in the latest edition of National Restaurant Awards, more than 90 charge this fee. The amount which has to be paid ranges from £20 to £375. And it is not just high-end places – local venues where you can get well fed for £30 are also imposing such penalties.

The process of booking a table has changed significantly in recent years. With apps allowing multiple reservations for the same time on the same night, unscrupulous diners can make a final choice of venue less than 3 hours before their visit or even at the very last minute. The introduction of fees for no-shows, deducted from debit or credit cards required at reservation, is a consequence of this practice, say restaurateurs, who face significant losses if they have empty tables. Paul Foster, the owner of the restaurant "Salt" in Stratford-upon-Avon says that his restaurant charges £30, half the price of its dinner menu, if the table is cancelled less than 48 hours beforehand. Restaurants with fewer tables typically charge less, usually with a one-day cancellation period.

Adapted from: www.observer.co.uk