

Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills Mock Test

Passage I (Questions 1–7)

The claim that every work of art must be judged solely by the standards of its own time has gained wide currency. According to this historicist view, a modern critic who faults a medieval altarpiece for lacking Renaissance perspective is simply committing an anachronism. Yet the same critics who insist on historical relativism often continue to rank certain works as greater than others, even across distant periods. This practice suggests that some criteria of excellence—coherence of design, intensity of expression, technical mastery—may transcend particular historical moments. If such criteria exist, then the absolute historicist position is overstated. Conversely, if all standards are strictly period-bound, then cross-cultural or cross-temporal evaluation becomes impossible, and the very notion of a canon collapses. A moderate position holds that while many values are historically conditioned, a limited set of formal and expressive qualities can still be recognized, with appropriate caution, across different eras. This moderated stance preserves the possibility of meaningful comparative judgment without denying the importance of historical context.

Question 1

The author's primary purpose is to:

- a) Defend absolute historicism
- b) Examine the tension between historicist relativism and the practice of ranking works across periods
- c) Argue that no work of art can ever be evaluated
- d) Provide a history of medieval painting

Correct Answer: b) Examine the tension between historicist relativism and the practice of ranking works across periods

Explanation:

The passage presents the historicist claim, notes the inconsistency in practice, and explores a moderate alternative.

Question 2

According to the passage, absolute historicism implies that:

- a) Modern critics should freely apply Renaissance standards to medieval art
- b) Cross-temporal evaluation is impossible
- c) Technical mastery is the only valid criterion
- d) All art is equally valuable

Correct Answer: b) Cross-temporal evaluation is impossible

Explanation:

If every standard is strictly period-bound, then ranking works from different eras becomes impossible.

Question 3

The "moderate position" described in the passage:

- a) Rejects all historical context
- b) Accepts some trans-historical criteria while still valuing context
- c) Insists that only contemporary critics may judge a work
- d) Claims that the canon is entirely arbitrary

Correct Answer: b) Accepts some trans-historical criteria while still valuing context

Explanation:

The moderate stance allows limited formal and expressive qualities to be recognized across eras without denying historical conditioning.

Question 4

The author suggests that the continued ranking of works across periods indicates that:

- a) Historicist critics are simply inconsistent
- b) Some criteria of excellence may transcend particular historical moments
- c) All ranking is illegitimate
- d) Medieval art is superior to Renaissance art

Correct Answer: b) Some criteria of excellence may transcend particular historical moments

Explanation:

The text states that ranking practice suggests that some criteria of excellence may transcend particular historical moments.

Question 5

Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the absolute historicist position?

- a) Critics from different centuries consistently agree on the greatest works
- b) No formal quality prized in one era is ever valued in another
- c) Technical mastery appears in every major artistic tradition
- d) Museums continue to display works from many periods side by side

Correct Answer: b) No formal quality prized in one era is ever valued in another

Explanation:

Complete discontinuity of standards would support the claim that all criteria are strictly period-bound.

Question 6

The passage implies that the notion of a canon would collapse if:

- a) Artists stopped producing new work
- b) All evaluative standards proved to be strictly period-bound
- c) Museums increased their educational programs
- d) Critics learned more about historical context

Correct Answer: b) All evaluative standards proved to be strictly period-bound

Explanation:

The text states that under absolute historicism “the very notion of a canon collapses.”

Question 7

The author’s attitude toward absolute historicism is best described as:

- a) Unqualified endorsement
- b) Unqualified rejection
- c) Critical but open to a moderated alternative
- d) Indifferent

Correct Answer: c) Critical but open to a moderated alternative

Explanation:

The author finds absolute historicism overstated yet explores a moderate position that retains some comparative judgment.

Passage II (Questions 8–13)

Environmental historians have recently turned their attention to the ways in which urban populations have reshaped local hydrology. Cities do not merely occupy land; they reorganize water. Impervious surfaces accelerate runoff, buried streams disappear from public awareness, and engineered channels replace meandering waterways. These changes are often presented as technical necessities, yet they also reflect political choices about whose flooding risks will be reduced and whose will be increased. In many cases the benefits of flood-control infrastructure have accrued disproportionately to wealthier districts, while lower-income neighborhoods have absorbed residual hazards. Recovering the buried history of urban waterways, some scholars argue, can reopen questions of environmental justice and suggest alternative designs that restore ecological function while redistributing risk more equitably. Others caution that nostalgia for pre-urban hydrology may overlook the genuine public-health gains achieved by modern drainage systems.

Question 8

The author’s main purpose is to:

- a) Argue that all urban drainage systems should be dismantled
- b) Present scholarly perspectives on the social and political dimensions of urban hydrological change
- c) Provide engineering specifications for flood control
- d) Claim that wealthier districts never benefit from infrastructure

Correct Answer: b) Present scholarly perspectives on the social and political dimensions of urban hydrological change

Explanation:

The passage surveys how cities reorganize water, notes distributional consequences, and records both justice-oriented and cautionary views.

Question 9

According to the passage, changes in urban hydrology:

- a) Are purely technical and politically neutral
- b) Reflect political choices about the distribution of flood risk
- c) Have no effect on ecological function
- d) Occur only in lower-income neighborhoods

Correct Answer: b) Reflect political choices about the distribution of flood risk

Explanation:

The text states that such changes “also reflect political choices about whose flooding risks will be reduced and whose will be increased.”

Question 10

The scholars who advocate recovering the history of buried waterways primarily hope to:

- a) Restore every stream to its pre-urban course
- b) Reopen questions of environmental justice and alternative design
- c) Prove that modern drainage has no public-health value
- d) Increase property values in wealthy districts

Correct Answer: b) Reopen questions of environmental justice and alternative design

Explanation:

The passage attributes exactly these aims to those scholars.

Question 11

The caution against nostalgia for pre-urban hydrology emphasizes that:

- a) Modern systems have produced genuine public-health gains
- b) All engineering is inherently unjust
- c) Buried streams should never be studied
- d) Ecological function is unimportant

Correct Answer: a) Modern systems have produced genuine public-health gains

Explanation:

The final sentence notes that nostalgia “may overlook the genuine public-health gains achieved by modern drainage systems.”

Question 12

The passage suggests that the benefits of flood-control infrastructure have often been:

- a) Distributed equally across all neighborhoods
- b) Accrued disproportionately to wealthier districts
- c) Non-existent
- d) Limited to rural areas

Correct Answer: b) Accrued disproportionately to wealthier districts

Explanation:

The text states this distributional pattern explicitly.

Question 13

Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the environmental-justice critique presented in the passage?

- a) Flood-control projects have consistently reduced risk more in low-income areas than in wealthy ones
- b) Impervious surfaces increase runoff
- c) Some streams have been buried for over a century

d) Public-health statistics improved after modern sewers were installed

Correct Answer: a) Flood-control projects have consistently reduced risk more in low-income areas than in wealthy ones

Explanation:

Evidence of progressive rather than regressive risk distribution would undercut the claim of disproportionate benefit to wealthier districts.