

“Bail”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

Directions: Read the story. Then answer the questions below.

The phone rang at Pratt Taylor’s house at nearly three in the morning.

Pratt fumbled for the phone in the dark. He answered groggily after the fourth ring.

“Hello,” Pratt mumbled into the receiver.

“Mr. Taylor. Thank goodness. I need your help.”

Pratt knew the voice, for sure. But still **drowsy**, he could not quite place it.

“Mr. Taylor!” the man said again in a raspy, loud whisper. “I am in jail. I was allowed one phone call. I’m calling you.”

Then, the fog cleared. Although nearly ten years had passed since their last encounter, Pratt was able to discern something familiar in this voice. It belonged to a boy named Martin Hall, easily one of the most brilliant math students he had ever taught. But while Pratt recalled that Martin possessed an enviable **aptitude** for math, he also had a knack for getting into trouble.

Still, they had forged a strong student-teacher bond, and when Martin graduated from Linebrook High School, Pratt had told him, “Call me if there is anything you ever need.”

So here it was – the call in the middle of the night.

“Yes, Martin. Is that you?”

“Yes, Mr. Taylor. Can you help?”

“What do you need?”

“Bail money.”

“What did you do?”

“We’ll talk about that later. Can you get me one thousand bucks?”

Pratt knew he could, but he was **hesitant**. What had Martin done? What was Pratt getting himself into? Pratt’s belief in honoring his word determined his decision. “Yes, I can. Where shall I bring it?”



"I'm at Jessup in Maryland. My brother will come by your place in the morning. Give the money to him, and he will come and bail me out."

"Okay."

Upon hanging up the phone, Pratt was overcome by a dreadful feeling – his intuition told him that the decision to bail Martin out would be one that would **vex** him for a very, very long time.

Questions:

1) "Pratt fumbled for the phone in the dark. He answered groggily after the fourth ring."

Which of the following is the best way to combine the above sentences while keeping their original meaning as used in the story?

- A. Pratt fumbled for the phone in the dark, he answered groggily after the fourth ring.
- B. Pratt fumbled for the phone in the dark and answered groggily on the fourth ring.
- C. While Pratt fumbled for the phone in the dark, he answered groggily after the fourth ring.
- D. Pratt answered the phone groggily after the fourth ring, fumbling for the phone in the dark.

2) As used in the beginning of the story, if someone is feeling **drowsy**, how might he or she most likely act?

- A. irritated
- B. sleepy
- C. anxious
- D. frustrated

3) The beginning of the story states: "*Then, the fog cleared.*" What is meant by this sentence?

- A. The weather had finally improved.
- B. A light had been turned on in the room.
- C. Something bad had happened to Martin.
- D. Pratt had gained understanding.

4) As used in the middle of the story, which is the best synonym for **aptitude**?

- A. characteristic
- B. passion
- C. ability
- D. certainty

5) As used at the end of the story, which is the best antonym for **hesitant**?

- A. comfortable
- B. decisive
- C. relaxed
- D. secure

Questions (continued):

- 6) Which best explains why Pratt decided to get the money for Martin?
- A. Pratt had the money to give.
 - B. Pratt believed Martin was innocent.
 - C. Pratt had promised help many years ago.
 - D. Pratt feared Martin would hurt him if he did not comply.
- 7) Which best describes the Martin who Pratt remembers?
- A. He was the smartest student he had ever had.
 - B. He was a straight A student with little work ethic.
 - C. He was a gifted student with a propensity for trouble.
 - D. He was a kid from a bad neighborhood trying to get out.

- 8) How does Pratt's mood change from the beginning to the end of the passage?
- A. from sleepy, to forgetful, to giving
 - B. from uncertain, to committed, to furious
 - C. from groggy, to clearheaded, to regretful
 - D. from proud, to reminiscent to ambivalent
- 9) What does the last line of this passage seem to suggest?
- A. that someone gets hurt
 - B. that something bad happens
 - C. that Martin's brother never shows up
 - D. that Martin spent a very long time in jail

- 10) As used at the end of the story, which is the best antonym for **vex**?
- A. excite
 - B. heal
 - C. humble
 - D. please

If you were Mr. Taylor, would you have bailed Martin out? Why or why not?

Answers and Explanations

1) **B**

The two sentences can be combined using *and*, a coordinating conjunction, while keeping the sense that Pratt answers the phone *after* he fumbles for it. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Both “Pratt fumbled for the phone in the dark” and “He answered groggily after the fourth ring” are complete sentences, also known as independent clauses. This means they cannot be combined with a comma. Putting two independent clauses together requires stronger punctuation such as a period, a semi-colon, or a colon. Since it is grammatically incorrect, **(A)** is incorrect. Both **(C)** and **(D)** give the sense that Pratt fumbles and answers at the same time, which is impossible. Therefore both **(C)** and **(D)** are incorrect.

2) **B**

drowsy (*adjective*): half-asleep; sleepy; lethargic.

In paragraph 2, Pratt answers the phone *groggily* at 3 in the morning. We can understand that he was still asleep when the phone rang. In paragraph 5, he is described as drowsy. Pratt is talking, so he is not asleep. He is still sleepy, however. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Irritated means bothered, but there is no evidence in the story that Pratt is bothered by being woken up, so **(A)** is incorrect. *Anxious* means worried. Although someone might be worried to receive a phone call in the middle of the night, there is no evidence in the story that Pratt is worried. Also, he cannot place the voice because he is too sleepy to remember, not because he is too worried. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Frustrated* means discouraged. There is no evidence in the story that Pratt is discouraged, so **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **D**

In paragraph 7, the sentence, “Then, the fog cleared” is followed by Pratt’s realization that he is talking to his former student. The author states, “Pratt was able to discern something familiar in this voice.” *Discern* is a synonym for *understand*. Pratt gained an understanding of the person who was calling him. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

The literal meaning of the phrase, “the fog cleared” indicates an improvement in the weather. However, in this case, the phrase is being used figuratively, as an expression to illustrate the confusion clearing from Pratt’s mind. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. There is no mention of a light turned on in the story, so **(B)** is incorrect. Although something bad has happened to Martin, that is not what is meant by “the fog cleared.” Pratt does not know yet what has happened when he figures out who is speaking. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

4) **C**

aptitude (*noun*): capability, ability, quickness in learning.

In paragraph 7, Martin is described as a *brilliant* math student. The author then calls his aptitude in mathematics *enviable*. We can understand that Martin has a particular talent for math. Having an aptitude for something means having a special ability to do that thing well. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Characteristic means a feature or trait. Being good at math is a characteristic of Martin's, but the word is not a synonym for aptitude or ability, because characteristics in general can be good or bad. Therefore, **(A)** is incorrect. *Passion* means a powerful emotion. Martin could be good at math without feeling powerfully about it, so **(B)** is incorrect. *Certainty* means being sure, without doubt. Being good at something does not mean being without doubt, so **(D)** is incorrect.

- 5) **B**
hesitant (*adjective*): uncertain; slow; indecisive; lacking confidence.

In paragraph 16, the author describes Pratt as hesitant. This description is followed by a series of questions Pratt asks himself. It is clear that Pratt is not sure what to do. He is hesitant, or uncertain, of what course to take. The antonym, or opposite, of hesitant is decisive. To be decisive is to know what to do and make a decision rapidly, not to hesitate and wonder. Therefore, **(B)** is correct.

Comfortable means free from stress or physical discomfort. Although Pratt is unsure, he is not necessarily feeling stress or physical discomfort. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Relaxed* means easy and informal in manner. Informal is not the opposite of indecisive, so **(C)** is incorrect. *Secure* means free from danger or safe. Being uncertain does not mean being in danger, so **(D)** is incorrect.

- 6) **C**
In paragraph 8, the author writes, "Pratt had told Martin, 'Call me if there is anything you ever need.'" In paragraph 16, we learn that Pratt believes in honoring his word. Because Pratt promised to help Martin and believes in keeping his promises, he agrees to give Martin the money. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Pratt does have the money to give Martin, but that is not the reason he feels like he should. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The story does not give us any information about whether Pratt thinks Martin is innocent or guilty, so **(B)** is incorrect. The story does not give us any information that would make us think Martin would hurt himself. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

- 7) **C**
In paragraph 7, the passage states, "But while Pratt recalled that Martin possessed an enviable aptitude for math, he also had a knack for getting into trouble." Therefore **(C)** is correct. The story does not contain information to support choices **(A)**, **(B)** and **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

8) **C**

At the beginning of the passage, Pratt answers the phone *groggily*. Towards the middle of the passage, Pratt's earlier confusion *clears* as he realizes who is calling him. At the end of the passage, Pratt is overcome by a *dreadful* feeling regarding his decision and begins to regret it. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Pratt is sleepy at the beginning, and he does promise to give the money to Martin, but he does not become forgetful in the middle. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Pratt is uncertain at the beginning, and then becomes committed, but he never gets furious. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Although Pratt does reminisce about his former student, he does not show that he feels proud or ambivalent. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

9) **B**

In the final paragraph, Pratt is "overcome by a dreadful feeling." He realizes that the decision to give Martin the money will vex, or bother, him for a long time. The content and tone of the last paragraph lead the reader to believe that something bad will happen in the future, though we do not know what that thing is. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Someone getting hurt is a specific bad thing, but there is no evidence in the story for this particular prediction, so **(A)** is incorrect. There is no evidence in the story for either **(C)** or **(D)**, so they are incorrect.

10) **D**

vex (*verb*): frustrate; worry; irritate; bother.

In the last paragraph, the fact that Pratt is overcome by a "dreadful" feeling about the decision he has made indicates that his decision will have negative consequences. When Pratt thinks that his decision will vex him, it is clear that he is not pleased with it. In this context, please is the antonym, or opposite, of vex. Pratt's decision will trouble him; it will not please him. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Excite means to arouse a strong feeling. Vexed is an example of a strong feeling, not the opposite. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Humble* means not arrogant or prideful, which is not connected to being bothered or worried. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Heal* means to restore to health. Being bothered or worried is not the same as being unhealthy. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.