



How Can I check that I Understand the Passage Correctly?

Aim: This section is designed to help you with some essential skills to check your understanding of reading passages.

Problems: Many people, when they read in a second language, tend to translate the text into their own language as best as they can and this often leads to confusion and misunderstanding.

This section will show you how you can use quite limited English to check how much of the passage you actually understand.

Below is a short passage about Songkran, a festival in Thailand. It is about half the length of an actual IELTS reading passage. There are four paragraphs (A – D).

With two of the paragraphs we have summarized them for you very briefly and simply to give an overall idea of what kind of information is contained in the paragraphs they refer to. They are:

- i) There are several meanings for the word 'Songkran'
- ii) The different types of activities that people do during the festival

Can you match them to the paragraphs they refer to? You can check in the [Answer Key](#).

Now, try to write a brief summary of the other two paragraphs IN YOUR OWN WORDS – do not copy phrases from the text. There are suggested answers in the Answer Key.

PASSAGE

A. Thailand celebrates at least three New Years. There's the usual year's end celebrations on 31st December and just like the west there are many New Year's Eve parties. Then there's the Chinese New Year, which is a 'moveable' feast. This year it's on 28th January and starts the Year of the Tiger. The Thai New Year is the Songkran Festival and their new year's day falls on 13th April.

B. Songkran comes from an old Sanskrit word meaning 'Beginning of the Solar Year'. The summer solstice in these latitudes falls in April and in ancient times the festival was probably much like the 'mid summer' festivals which originated from pagan times in Europe. It is variously referred to here as 'The Beginning of the Lunar Year', 'The Start of the Returns of the Rains' and of course 'Thai New Year'.

C. These days the Thais clean their houses thoroughly prior to the Songkran celebrations, and on Songkran day merit (offerings) is made at Buddhist temples. Children show their respect to elders by performing the water ceremony, by pouring water into the palms of parents and older relatives' hands. In the streets, people splash water on one another. Songkran lasts for 3 days and is called 'Home Coming Day', as families have a get-together.

D. The most visible sign is this 'splashing of water' in the streets. It goes on all day from dawn till dusk. It's usually far more than 'splashing' and in my experience anyone who ventures out is in for a



good soaking, and a liberal coating of perfumed powder on the face! It's a good natured day with almost everybody joining in. People fill the backs of pickup trucks with huge containers of water, buckets, water cannons, friends and family and join a slow moving procession through the streets. Even the policemen, in full uniform, gladly submit to a soaking, the only concession being to keep their hand radios in a plastic bag!

Tips: Summarising the overall content of paragraphs in your own words is called 'paraphrasing' and it is an extremely useful skill to have because of the following reasons:

- You can check how much of the passage you understand in English
- It is very useful for locating where information is in a passage
- It is very good for answering 'Paragraph Matching/Heading' questions

If you don't try to paraphrase you can:

- Fail to understand what it is you're reading about
- Translate incorrectly in your own language
- Spend too long trying to find where information is located

Check answers using the [Answer Key](#).

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