

# THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS

READING PRACTICE SETS

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## TOEFL iBT READING PRACTICE SET

**Directions:** Read the passage and answer the questions. Give yourself 18 minutes to complete this practice set.

### THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS

- 1 Evidence suggests that an important stimulus behind the emergence of early civilizations was the development of settled agriculture, which unleashed a series of significant changes in the organization of human communities that **culminated in** the rise of large ancient empires.
- 2 The exact time and place that crops were first cultivated successfully is uncertain. Many prehistorians believe that farming may have emerged independently in several different areas of the world when small communities, driven by an increase in population and a decline in available food resources, began to plant seeds in the ground in an effort to guarantee their survival. The first farmers, who may have lived as long as 10,000 years ago, undoubtedly used simple techniques and still relied primarily on other forms of food production, such as foraging, i.e., hunting and gathering. The real breakthrough took place when farmers started to cultivate crops along the floodplains of river systems. The key advantage was that crops grown in such areas were not as dependent on precipitation and therefore produced a more reliable harvest. An additional benefit was that the sediment carried by the river waters deposited nutrients in the soil, thereby enabling the farmer to cultivate a single plot of ground for a large number of years without moving to a new location. Thus, the first truly sedentary, i.e., nonnomadic, societies were born. As time went on, such communities gradually learned to direct the flow of water to enhance the productive capacity of the land, while the introduction of the iron plow eventually led to the cultivation of heavy soils not previously susceptible to agriculture.
- 3 The spread of this river valley agriculture in various parts of Asia and Africa was the decisive factor in the rise of the first civilizations. The increase in food production in these regions led to a significant growth in population, while efforts to control the flow of water to maximize the irrigation of cultivated areas and to protect the local inhabitants from hostile forces outside the community provoked the first steps toward cooperative activities on a large scale. The need to oversee the entire process brought about the emergence of an elite that was eventually transformed into a government.
- 4 The first clear steps in the rise of the first civilizations took place in the 4th and 3rd millennia B.C.E. in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China. How the first governments took shape in the aforementioned areas is not certain, but anthropologists studying the evolution of human communities in various parts of the world have discovered that one common stage in the process is the emergence of “big men” within a single village or a collection of villages. By means of their military prowess, dominant personalities, or political talents, these people gradually emerged as the leaders of their communities. In time, the “big men” became formal symbols of authority and passed on that authority to others within their own family. As the communities continued to grow in size and material wealth, the “big men” assumed hereditary status, and their close allies and family members were transformed into a hereditary monarchy.
- 5 The appearance of these sedentary societies had a major impact on the social organizations, religious beliefs, and ways of life of the peoples living within their boundaries. **[A]** With the increase in population and the development of centralized authority came the emergence of cities. **[B]** While some of these urban centers were identified with a particular economic function, such as proximity to gold or iron deposits or a strategic location on a major trade route, others served primarily as administrative centers or the sites of temples for the official cult or other ritual observances. **[C]** Within these cities, new forms of livelihood appeared to satisfy the growing need for social services and consumer goods. **[D]** Some people became artisans or merchants, whereas others became warriors, scholars, or priests. In some cases, the physical division within the earliest cities reflected the strict hierarchical character of the society as a whole, with a royal palace surrounded by an imposing wall to separate the rulers from the remainder of the urban population. In other instances, such as the Indus River Valley, the cities lacked a royal precinct and the ostentatious palaces that marked their contemporaries elsewhere.

1. The phrase **culminated in** in the passage is closest in meaning to
  - (A) reached a high point with
  - (B) logically followed from
  - (C) partly contributed to
  - (D) marked
  
2. According to paragraph 2, which of the following statements is true of early farmers?
  - (A) They used farming to supplement other food sources.
  - (B) They were driven out of small communities.
  - (C) They were victims of flooding.
  - (D) They farmed several plots of land at once.
  
3. According to paragraph 2, what are TWO reasons why farmers chose river valleys for cultivation? To receive credit, you must select TWO answer choices.
  - (A) The soils in river valleys were rich in nutrients.
  - (B) The crops grown in river valleys were not completely dependent on rainwater.
  - (C) Farming techniques could not be easily applied to soils far from rivers.
  - (D) The heavier weight of river soil resulted in more reliable harvests.
  
4. According to paragraph 3, which of the following is NOT a reason why governments first arose among agricultural communities?
  - (A) A significant increase in population
  - (B) The desire to control water resources for irrigation
  - (C) The need for protection from outside forces
  - (D) The demand for organized communication with other communities
  
5. According to paragraph 4, what is not known about the rise of the first civilizations?
  - (A) Where the first steps toward civilization took place
  - (B) Who was allowed to replace “big men” after the “big men” died
  - (C) Why some individuals became recognized as leaders
  - (D) How governments emerged
  
6. Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in paragraph 5? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.
  - (A) Some cities were associated with economic activities, while others were government or religious centers.
  - (B) Emerging cities generally served strategic administrative, economic, and religious purposes.
  - (C) The creation of an economic or administrative activity resulted in the emergence of an urban center for its proper supervision.
  - (D) Some cities emerged as economic centers and later became the sites of administrative or religious activities.

7. Which of the following is suggested in paragraph 5 as a consequence of the emergence of cities?
- (A) The decentralization of authority
  - (B) An increase in religious activity
  - (C) The emergence of service- and production-related jobs
  - (D) A decreased reliance on mineral resources
8. According to paragraph 5, why were huge walls built around early royal palaces?
- (A) To protect the inhabitants from invaders
  - (B) To mark the urban areas
  - (C) To separate the ruling class from the rest of the population
  - (D) To represent the prosperity of a city
9. Look at the four squares [A-D] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

**This was accompanied by increased professional specialization.**

Where would the sentence best fit?

10. **Directions:** An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the **THREE** answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. **This question is worth 2 points.**

**The practice of settled agriculture in some areas of Asia and Africa was crucial to the development of early civilizations.**

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**Answer Choices**

- (A) Prehistorians disagree as to whether early farmers first cultivated crops along floodplains or first tried cultivating crops in less successful environments.
- (B) Cultivation in fertile river valleys resulted in predictable harvests, which meant that farmers no longer needed to migrate constantly in search of food.
- (C) Because crops could be cultivated more successfully where farmers were not completely dependent on rainfall, hostilities between groups arose over control of the river systems.
- (D) The need to organize the effort to ensure the food supply and defend the land led to the formation of elite supervising groups that eventually became the first governments.
- (E) Increasingly centralized forms of administration resulted in the emergence of social classes and in the development of cities as trade, administration, or religious centers.
- (F) Unlike other early civilizations, those that developed in the Indus River Valley did not have any spectacular palaces or areas for exclusive use by the authorities.