

READING COMPREHENSION

B2 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary | 45-60 minutes

Topic: Shopping | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

Read the text carefully. Then answer the questions on Page 2.

The Price of Free Delivery

The bakery's website advertised free delivery on orders above twenty pounds. For customers living nearby, this seemed a welcome alternative to collecting bread before work. Within weeks, online sales rose sharply. The owner, Saira, initially assumed the offer had attracted people who would otherwise have bought from a larger supermarket.

A closer look at the orders complicated that picture. Many came from regular customers who previously walked to the shop. Several added items they did not particularly want to reach the free-delivery **threshold**. Meanwhile, the driver was making **scattered** trips across town, sometimes carrying a single small bag to a distant street.

Saira could have raised all prices slightly to cover the expense. However, that would also charge customers who still collected their purchases. A flat delivery fee seemed fairer in one sense but would make a small essential order expensive for someone unable to leave home. There was no obvious price that treated every situation equally.

She tested a different system. Customers could receive cheaper delivery on fixed neighbourhood days or pay more for a specific time. Collection remained free, and the website explained how combining deliveries reduced separate journeys. Saira also arranged a small number of **supported** deliveries through a local volunteer group, using a clearly limited weekly budget.

Some customers disliked losing the simple promise of "free". Others welcomed the explanation and adapted their orders. Sales fell a little, but delivery costs fell more. Saira judged the new arrangement an improvement, while recognising that the supported service could not meet every need.

The case does not show that delivery should always be charged separately. It shows how a price can hide decisions about who pays, who benefits and which journeys take place. Removing a visible fee does not remove those decisions; it merely makes them harder to see.

Key vocabulary

threshold - the level that must be reached before a rule applies

scattered - spread across different places rather than grouped together

flat fee - a fixed charge that does not change with the amount used

supported - helped through funding or practical assistance

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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Answer in complete sentences. Support interpretations with evidence from the text.

1. What did Saira initially assume about the increase in sales?

2. What evidence complicated that assumption?

3. Why might raising every price be unfair to some customers?

4. How did the revised system encourage fewer separate journeys?

5. Why did Saira consider the change an improvement despite lower sales?

6. What does the final paragraph suggest about the word 'free'?

Discuss with a partner

- When is a fixed fee fair, and when is it unfair?
- Would you accept a limited delivery day in return for a lower price?

ANSWER KEY

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Suggested full-sentence answers. Accept other supported interpretations where appropriate.

1. What did Saira initially assume about the increase in sales?

She assumed the offer had attracted customers who would otherwise shop at a supermarket.

2. What evidence complicated that assumption?

Many orders came from existing customers who previously collected their bread, rather than from new customers.

3. Why might raising every price be unfair to some customers?

It would make customers who collected their purchases contribute to delivery costs.

4. How did the revised system encourage fewer separate journeys?

It offered cheaper delivery on fixed neighbourhood days so orders could be grouped together.

5. Why did Saira consider the change an improvement despite lower sales?

Delivery costs fell more than sales, making the arrangement more manageable.

6. What does the final paragraph suggest about the word 'free'?

It suggests that a service can have real costs and distributional choices even when customers see no separate fee.

Teaching notes

Read once for the main idea, then reread for evidence. Compare answers before discussing the two open questions. Interpretive answers may vary; ask learners to justify their reading.

Language and reading focus: Comparing alternatives; conditional reasoning and hidden assumptions.

Text: Original commentary using a fictional scenario. Discussion questions have no fixed answers.