

READING COMPREHENSION

C1 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary | 45-60 minutes

Topic: Discussion | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

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

The Quiet Work of Maintenance

The opening of the footbridge was accompanied by speeches, photographs and a plaque naming those who had made it possible. Six years later, the council's proposal to fund its repainting attracted a rather different response. Why, residents asked, was money being spent on a bridge that was already there? The question was understandable. A new structure offers a visible addition; **maintenance** seems to purchase the continuation of something everyone has learned to take for granted.

The maintenance team struggled to explain what its work prevented. A photograph of a damaged railing could justify an urgent repair, but a railing treated before damage appeared supplied no equivalent image. Success left little evidence of its own necessity. The more consistently the team worked, the easier it became to imagine that the bridge required no attention.

To strengthen its case, the council commissioned a report on the cost of **neglect**. The report was useful, but it introduced a second problem: maintenance now had to present itself as an exceptional rescue. Routine inspections acquired the language of crisis prevention. Staff worried that tasks with less dramatic consequences would become harder to defend, even if they were inexpensive and clearly worthwhile.

A proposed public dashboard listed every completed inspection. Some residents welcomed the transparency; others treated the growing list as evidence of excessive bureaucracy. A team member pointed out that counting checks revealed little about their quality. One careful inspection might matter more than several hurried ones, yet the numbers gave them equal weight.

The eventual budget protected a regular maintenance allowance without requiring each task to compete against a new building project. Major exceptions still required explanation, and inspection findings remained public. This was hardly an exciting reform. It replaced the demand for repeated demonstrations of urgency with a modest degree of **institutional** trust.

Such trust should not become immunity from **scrutiny**. The point is narrower: if public work must continually resemble a launch or a rescue to secure support, the patient activity that makes both less necessary will remain structurally disadvantaged.

Key vocabulary

maintenance - work that keeps something in good condition

neglect - failure to give necessary care or attention

scrutiny - close and critical examination

institutional - relating to the established practices of an organisation

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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

1. What contrast does the opening establish between construction and maintenance?

2. Explain the paradox that success left little evidence of its necessity.

3. What risk arose from describing routine work as crisis prevention?

4. Why was the inspection count an inadequate performance measure?

5. How did the budget reform change the basis on which maintenance was funded?

6. How does the final paragraph qualify the argument for trust?

Discuss with a partner

- How can an organisation make preventive work visible without exaggerating its impact?
- What evidence would justify reducing or increasing a maintenance budget?

ANSWER KEY

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

1. What contrast does the opening establish between construction and maintenance?

Construction creates a visible addition that attracts recognition, whereas maintenance preserves a benefit people already take for granted.

2. Explain the paradox that success left little evidence of its necessity.

Effective maintenance prevented visible damage, so its success removed the evidence that might have demonstrated why it was needed.

3. What risk arose from describing routine work as crisis prevention?

Less dramatic but worthwhile tasks risked being undervalued because they could not be presented as exceptional rescues.

4. Why was the inspection count an inadequate performance measure?

The count treated careful and hurried inspections equally and therefore did not establish the quality of the work.

5. How did the budget reform change the basis on which maintenance was funded?

It protected a regular allowance instead of requiring each task to prove urgency or compete with a new construction project.

6. How does the final paragraph qualify the argument for trust?

It rejects exemption from scrutiny while arguing that constant demands for dramatic justification disadvantage routine preventive work.

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: Concession, abstract reference and paradox; identifying a qualified argument.

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