

READING COMPREHENSION

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

Topic: Entertainment | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

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

A Review with No Stars

The editor of a small cultural magazine removed star ratings from its reviews. Her explanation was straightforward: a novel's achievements and limitations could not be adequately represented by a number. She hoped readers would attend to the argument rather than use the final score as a shortcut. Reviewers, many of whom had argued over half-stars in the past, welcomed the decision.

The immediate response was mixed. Some readers found the reviews more thoughtful without a **verdict** printed above them. Others said the magazine was making them work harder to obtain information they needed. A reader with money for one theatre ticket wanted a practical recommendation, not an invitation to admire complexity. The editor recognised that her preference for sustained attention assumed time and patience not everyone could spare.

Nor did removing the numbers remove judgment. An enthusiastic opening could function as a score, while a carefully qualified review might sound negative beside a simpler **endorsement**. Publicists continued to extract favourable phrases, separating them from the **reservations** that followed. The magazine had changed the format in which evaluation appeared, not escaped evaluation itself.

It experimented with a short box describing who might particularly value a work and what might limit its appeal. A demanding novel could be recommended to readers interested in experimental narration without pretending that difficulty was either a universal virtue or an automatic defect. This approach introduced its own risk: predicting audiences too confidently might discourage someone from trying something unfamiliar.

The editor kept the experiment, including space for reviewers to challenge the audience categories. The resulting pages were less uniform than before. That inconsistency was inconvenient for quick comparison, but it made some of the grounds for comparison more explicit.

The most defensible case for removing stars was therefore not that numbers always distort and prose never does. It was that this particular magazine wanted the reasons behind a judgment to remain **contestable**, rather than allowing the apparent precision of a score to settle the discussion before it began.

Key vocabulary

verdict - a final judgment or decision

endorsement - an expression of approval or recommendation

reservations - doubts or qualifications about something

contestable - open to reasonable challenge or disagreement

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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

1. What change in reading behaviour did the editor hope to encourage?

2. What limitation in her assumption did readers expose?

3. Why did judgment remain after the ratings were removed?

4. What benefit and risk accompanied the audience boxes?

5. Why does the writer reject a simple opposition between numbers and prose?

6. What is the strongest justification offered for the experiment?

Discuss with a partner

- When are ratings more useful than detailed reviews?
- Can recommendations describe likely audiences without limiting their choices?

ANSWER KEY

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

1. What change in reading behaviour did the editor hope to encourage?

She hoped readers would engage with the reasons in a review rather than rely on its numerical score.

2. What limitation in her assumption did readers expose?

They showed that some readers lacked the time or money to explore lengthy, nuanced recommendations.

3. Why did judgment remain after the ratings were removed?

Tone, opening statements and selected quotations still communicated approval or disapproval.

4. What benefit and risk accompanied the audience boxes?

They made recommendations more specific, but could discourage readers by predicting their tastes too rigidly.

5. Why does the writer reject a simple opposition between numbers and prose?

Both formats can distort or simplify, so removing numbers does not guarantee a fairer judgment.

6. What is the strongest justification offered for the experiment?

The experiment keeps the reasons for evaluation visible and open to challenge rather than treating a score as decisive.

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: Evaluative language; concessions and reframing an argument.

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