

# READING COMPREHENSION

C2 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary | 45-60 minutes

Topic: Discussion | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

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

## Agreement in the Minutes

The minutes recorded that the panel had reached a consensus. Anyone reading them would reasonably infer that disagreement had been discussed and overcome. Those who had attended the meeting might have offered a more qualified account. The final wording had been accepted because each **faction** believed its preferred interpretation remained available, provided nobody asked the question too directly.

The dispute concerned a grant for a public arts project. One group wanted priority given to work rooted in the neighbourhood; another resisted what it saw as a disguised preference for familiar styles and established networks. After an hour, the chair proposed supporting work that "engages meaningfully with local experience". The phrase was broad enough to accommodate both a long-standing community choir and an experimental installation by an artist who had recently arrived. Everyone could imagine a successful application. Nobody had yet agreed on what to do when there was money for only one.

It is tempting to dismiss such language as **evasive**. Yet an insistence on complete conceptual agreement might have prevented a useful programme from beginning. Participants need not share every reason for cooperating, and a formulation that leaves room for development can do more than a definition that settles the matter prematurely. Ambiguity sometimes buys time in which relationships, evidence and practice can improve the argument.

But time is not free of distributional consequences. In this case, applicants spent weeks preparing proposals before discovering how individual assessors understood "meaningful". Those with informal access to panel members could obtain guidance unavailable to others. The disagreement had not disappeared; it had been relocated from the meeting room to a process in which some people were better equipped to navigate it.

The following year, the panel retained the phrase but published contrasting examples, explained unresolved tensions and paid applicants for a short initial proposal. The result was neither a definitive criterion nor a guarantee against favouritism. It did, however, make the cost of uncertainty less exclusively the applicant's responsibility.

Consensus is not discredited by containing ambiguity. It becomes misleading when the record treats a **provisional accommodation** as if it were a shared conclusion, and when the practical burden of discovering the difference falls on people absent from the room.

### Key vocabulary

**faction** - a group within a larger body with a distinct position

**evasive** - avoiding a clear statement or direct answer

**provisional** - temporary and subject to revision

**accommodation** - an arrangement that allows differing positions to coexist

# COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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

1. What distinction does the opening draw between recorded and experienced agreement?

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2. Why was the chair's phrase attractive before individual awards had to be made?

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3. What genuine value does the writer concede to ambiguity?

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4. How was uncertainty distributed unequally among applicants?

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5. Why does the revised process fall short of resolving the underlying disagreement?

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6. What makes consensus misleading according to the final paragraph?

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## Discuss with a partner

- When is ambiguous wording a useful compromise rather than an evasion?
- Who should bear the costs of testing an unclear selection criterion?

# ANSWER KEY

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

**1. What distinction does the opening draw between recorded and experienced agreement?**

The minutes imply that disagreement was resolved, whereas participants accepted wording that preserved incompatible interpretations.

**2. Why was the chair's phrase attractive before individual awards had to be made?**

Each group could imagine its preferred project qualifying, without yet confronting a choice between competing applications.

**3. What genuine value does the writer concede to ambiguity?**

Ambiguity can enable cooperation and leave time for relationships and practical evidence to develop without demanding complete agreement first.

**4. How was uncertainty distributed unequally among applicants?**

Applicants bore the preparation costs, while those with informal access could clarify assessors' expectations more easily.

**5. Why does the revised process fall short of resolving the underlying disagreement?**

Examples and payment reduce uncertainty's costs but do not create a definitive criterion or eliminate the risk of favouritism.

**6. What makes consensus misleading according to the final paragraph?**

It is misleading when provisional coexistence is presented as settled agreement and outsiders bear the burden of discovering the unresolved conflict.

## 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:** Argumentative concession; institutional language and distributional inference.

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