TOEFL Reading Practice

Full-Length Passage with 10 Questions | Academic Level

Time Limit	20 Minutes
Passage Length	~450 Words
Questions	10 Multiple Choice
Difficulty	TOEFL iBT Academic

READING PASSAGE

The Decline of Coral Reefs

Coral reefs are often called the "rainforests of the sea" due to the extraordinary biodiversity they support. Covering less than one percent of the ocean floor, these ecosystems are home to more than 25 percent of all marine species. Yet despite their ecological significance, coral reefs around the world are experiencing unprecedented rates of decline, threatening both marine biodiversity and the millions of people who depend on healthy reefs for food, coastal protection, and income.

The primary driver of coral reef degradation is climate change. As greenhouse gas emissions warm the planet, ocean temperatures rise alongside atmospheric ones. Coral organisms are highly sensitive to temperature — a sustained increase of just 1 to 2 degrees Celsius above normal summertime maxima is sufficient to trigger mass coral bleaching. During bleaching events, corals expel the photosynthetic algae living within their tissues, called zooxanthellae, turning white and becoming vulnerable to disease and death. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia experienced back-to-back bleaching events in 2016 and 2017, resulting in the death of approximately 50 percent of shallow-water corals in some sections.

Ocean acidification compounds the threat. When the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, carbonic acid forms, lowering the pH of seawater. This process interferes with the ability of corals and other marine organisms to build and maintain calcium carbonate skeletons and shells. Research suggests that if current emission trends continue, ocean acidity could increase by 150 percent by the end of the century, making it nearly impossible for corals to calcify at the rates necessary for reef maintenance.

Human activities at the local level also inflict serious damage. Overfishing removes key species such as herbivorous fish that graze on algae and keep reef ecosystems in balance. Agricultural runoff introduces excess nutrients into coastal waters, promoting algal blooms that smother corals and block sunlight. Coastal development destroys nearshore habitats and increases sedimentation, which smothers coral polyps and reduces light penetration. The physical damage caused by careless tourism — including anchor drops and contact with divers — further stresses reef communities already weakened by systemic

threats.

Conservation efforts are underway on multiple fronts. Marine protected areas, when effectively enforced, have shown the capacity to increase fish biomass and support reef recovery. Scientists are also exploring coral restoration techniques, including coral gardening — growing resilient coral fragments in underwater nurseries before transplanting them onto degraded reefs. Additionally, researchers are selectively breeding heat-tolerant coral strains in an attempt to produce organisms capable of surviving warmer future oceans. While these interventions offer hope, experts widely agree that meaningful emissions reductions remain the most critical step toward ensuring the long-term survival of coral reef ecosystems worldwide.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Choose the best answer for each question based on the passage above.

1. According to the passage, what percentage of marine species live in coral reefs?

A) Less than 1 percent

B) About 10 percent

C) More than 25 percent

D) More than 50 percent

2. What term describes the process by which corals expel zooxanthellae during thermal stress?

A) Ocean acidification

B) Coral bleaching

C) Calcification failure

D) Algal bloom

3. The word "compounds" in paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to:

A) reduces

B) explains

C) worsens

D) replaces

4. What is the main function of zooxanthellae in coral organisms?

A) They regulate ocean acidity.

B) They provide photosynthetic support.

C) They build calcium carbonate skeletons.

D) They protect corals from algal blooms.

5. According to the passage, what could happen to ocean acidity by 2100 if current trends continue?

A) It could decrease by 50 percent.

B) It could increase by 50 percent.

C) It could increase by 150 percent.

D) It could remain stable.

6. Which of the following local human activities is NOT mentioned as a threat to coral reefs in the passage?

A) Agricultural runoff

B) Noise pollution

C) Coastal development

D) Overfishing

7. What is the role of herbivorous fish in reef ecosystems, as described in paragraph 4?

A) They consume coral polyps.

B) They graze on algae and keep ecosystems balanced.

C) They reduce sedimentation near shores.

D) They prevent ocean acidification.

8. The phrase "coral gardening" in paragraph 5 refers to:

A) Planting seagrass around reefs.

B) Growing coral in nurseries before transplanting them.

C) Designing marine protected areas.

D) Breeding heat-resistant fish species.

9. What does the author suggest is the MOST critical long-term solution for coral reefs?

A) Banning all recreational diving near reefs.

B) Establishing more marine protected areas.

C) Reducing greenhouse gas emissions significantly.

D) Introducing more herbivorous fish to reefs.

10. What is the primary purpose of this passage?

A) To argue that coral reefs cannot be saved.

B) To explain the causes of coral reef decline and ongoing conservation responses.

C) To compare coral reefs in different regions of the world.

D) To describe the history of marine protected areas.

ANSWER KEY & EXPLANATIONS

#	Answer	Explanation
1	**C**	The passage states corals are home to "more than 25 percent of all marine species."
2	**B**	Paragraph 2 explains that corals expel zooxanthellae and turn white in a process called bleaching.
3	**C**	"Compounds the threat" means it makes the threat worse/more severe.
4	**B**	Paragraph 2 calls them "photosynthetic algae living within their tissues."
5	**C**	Paragraph 3 states acidity "could increase by 150 percent by the end of the century."
6	**B**	Noise pollution is not mentioned. Paragraph 4 lists overfishing, runoff, coastal development, and tourism.
7	**B**	Paragraph 4 states herbivorous fish "graze on algae and keep reef ecosystems in balance."
8	**B**	Paragraph 5 defines coral gardening as "growing resilient coral fragments in underwater nurseries before transpl
9	**C**	"Meaningful emissions reductions remain the most critical step," per the final sentence.
10	**B**	The passage covers threats (Paragraphs 1-4) and conservation efforts (Paragraph 5).

TOEFL Reading Tips from Typogrammar.com

Skim first, read carefully second. Read quickly to grasp structure, then return for detail when answering.

Identify paragraph topics. Each paragraph usually has one main idea — understanding it helps with purpose and inference questions.

Watch for paraphrasing. TOEFL answer choices rarely copy exact words from the passage — they rephrase ideas.

Eliminate wrong answers. Two choices are often clearly wrong; focus on the remaining two.

Don't bring outside knowledge. All answers must be supported by information in the passage only.