

# Writing Test: Informational

## Question 1

Read the passages and answer the questions that follow. Then write a response to the writing prompt.

### Passage 1

Excerpt from “Biography of Ernest Shackleton”

by Tejvan Pettinger

Sir Ernest Shackleton (1874–1922) was a great explorer who made ground breaking explorations of the South Pole.

Ernest Shackleton was born 15 February 1874 in County Kildare, Ireland. His father was part of the Anglo Irish aristocracy, though his father Henry had given up his life as a landowner to study medicine at Trinity College, Dublin. In 1884, the family moved to Sydenham in the suburbs of London.

The young Ernest was a voracious reader, but easily bored of contemporary education. A weak student, he left school at age 16 to work as a merchant navy officer.

By 1901, Shackleton had been appointed to his first Antarctic expedition — the Discovery expedition led by Robert Falcon Scott. He placed an ad in a paper for fellow adventurers.

“Men Wanted: For hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.”

The expedition was partly to make scientific experiments and analysis, but also to test walking across the Antarctic as a precursor to a later bid to reach the South Pole. Shackleton was a key figure in the team and became popular with other members. However, he suffered ill health during the expedition and on return to the ship was sent home by Scott to recuperate. It is suggested that Shackleton took exception to his treatment by Scott and resolved to pursue his own expeditions to rival Scott's.

In between Antarctic expeditions, Shackleton was in high demand as a public speaker and celebrity. He made frequent visits to satisfy the curiosity of the new generation and the age of exploration. Shackleton was able to raise substantial funds through his public engagements, though he often lost these on ill-fated business adventures.

In 1907 he returned to the Antarctic on the *Nimrod* expedition. The expedition included the first successful ascent of Mount Erebus and the discovery of the approximate location of the magnetic South Pole. However, the journey back was a struggle and the party was forced on to half rations. Typically of Shackleton, he chose to forgo part of his own rations to give it to the ailing team member Frank Wild. It was this concern and sacrifice to his own team members that brought great loyalty to Shackleton as a leader.

On his return home, his fame grew even more and he was made Knight of the British Empire, becoming Sir Ernest Shackleton. He also received a Gold medal from the Royal Geographical society. The only shadow on the expedition were the large debts the expedition left. Despite a grant from the government, many debts were allowed to expire.

After Roald Amundsen had reached the South Pole in 1912, Shackleton turned his attention to the last great Antarctic expedition — a journey across the continent via the South Pole. He began his Imperial Trans-Antarctic expedition in 1914, just before the outbreak of the First World War.

By January 1915, his ship the *Endurance* had become frozen on an ice floe. This was a potential dangerous outcome as it would remain stuck in ice until the next spring. His worst fears were confirmed in November when the stricken ship was sunk and the men had to resort to camps on the ice. After a harrowing journey across ice and in lifeboats, they finally made solid ground at Elephant Island in April of 1916. From Elephant Island five crew members made an audacious journey through stormy seas to reach the cliffs of South Georgia. From there, they had to make a daring land crossing over the mountainous terrain to reach the whaling stations on the north coast. The next successful crossing of South Georgia was not until 1955; those who completed the journey in 1955 remarked how unbelievable it was that they managed the crossing, given their limited equipment and supplies.

On reaching a whaling station, Shackleton sent a boat to rescue his men on Elephant Island. All 22 men were eventually evacuated. It was a daring and epic rescue. If it had not been for the First World War, his expedition would undoubtedly have received more coverage.

Returning to Britain in 1917, he applied to go to the Western Front, but instead was given a diplomatic mission to South America. In 1919, he published an account of the *Endurance* journey.

After the war, in 1922, he began one last great expedition, but suffered a fatal heart attack whilst the expedition was in South Georgia.

After his death, the reputation of Shackleton was largely overshadowed by the more famous Scott. But, interests in the exploits of Shackleton revived after the publication of Alfred Lansing's *Endurance — Shackleton's Incredible Voyage*.

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Passage 2

Excerpt from *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the Endurance*

by Jennifer Armstrong

As the last days of 1914 ran out, *Endurance* continued to creep southward through the Weddell Sea. The course was never a straight one. Sometimes the ship found a lead of open water to the south and followed that with all speed. Other times, Worsley, the skipper, had to sail the ship west along the edge of the pack searching for open water to enter, even sailing north from time to time when the pack was impenetrable, or standing still, waiting for a lead. Feeling like a rat in a trap, Worsley looked for leads from the crow's-nest and signaled the course to the man on the bridge. Iceblink, a white glare on the underside of the clouds, indicated pack ice ahead. A water sky, a dark reflection on the clouds, showed where the open water lay.

Shackleton explained, "Worsley, Wild, and I, with three officers, kept three watches while we were working through the pack, so that we had two officers on deck all the time. The carpenter had rigged a six-foot wooden semaphore on the bridge to enable the navigating officer to give the seamen or scientists at the wheel the direction and the exact amount of helm required. This device saved time as well as the effort of shouting."

Occasionally, when the frigid atmosphere was charged with water, every rope and spar on the ship was frosted white, making *Endurance* look like another species of sparkling white iceberg as it nosed its way through the pack. When the sun came out, icicles fell from the shrouds and shattered like glass on the decks below. Sometimes open leads of water in all directions were wreathed with wisps of frost smoke as the water began to freeze, and Shackleton commented that the effect resembled the smoke from a prairie fire. The sun never set, and even when there was fog it was never dark. Often the crystalline air formed mirages, and the sailors saw icebergs suspended upside down on the horizon. These mirages made navigation around the bergs very dangerous, because it was often hard to tell what was a real iceberg and what was a phantom. Knowing the difference was critical, especially since *Endurance* often passed more than 400 bergs in a twenty-four-hour period: it was a crowded sea.

On New Year's Eve, they crossed the Antarctic Circle at last, and some of the men gathered on the bridge to sing "Auld Lang Syne" with an accompaniment of dog howls. The ice grew denser, and open water became harder and harder to find. There was no sign that the pack was opening up at all. Day and night, ice growled and scraped along the sides of the ship. The men heard it grinding while they slept, while they ate or played cards, while they stoked the engines or read the charts.

When fog and ice made progress impossible, Shackleton ordered the ship moored to a large iceberg or floe. Then the men and dogs could take advantage of the wide, flat floes to get some exercise. Hockey and soccer games were the sport of choice among the men. As for the dogs, they could chase penguins and run wild without going too far — on all sides was the frigid sea, where

killer whales cruised in search of a meal. "These beasts have a habit of locating a resting seal by looking over the edge of a floe, and then striking through the ice dam below in search of a meal; they would not distinguish between a seal and a man," Shackleton noted.

On one occasion, when *Endurance* was moored to a floe, the crew hauled out the motor sledge. Orde-Lees, the motor expert, got the machine going, and Marston pretended it was an ice cream wagon. Several sailors did imitations of boys begging for a treat as Marston hammed it up as an ice cream vendor. When the kidding was done, however, the men gave the motor sledge a test run. On the uneven surface of the ice, the machine turned out to be awkward and impractical, and plans to use it were abandoned.

As the days went on, *Endurance* crept forward through leads that closed in behind her. Open water was becoming harder and harder to find: a shifting mass of ice stretched from one horizon to the next.

Two and a half weeks into the new year, Hurley wrote in his diary, "It is now seven weeks since we first entered the pack ice, and since then it has been almost an incessant battle." The weather was not improving, and the ice showed no signs of opening. On the next day, January 19, the fist of the Antarctic closed around the ship: *Endurance* was surrounded by ice pack, with no open water in sight. They had sailed 12,000 miles from London. They had picked their way through 1,000 miles of ice pack. Now they were less than 100 miles from the continent itself, but *Endurance* would never reach it.

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### Writing Prompt

You have just read two passages about explorer Ernest Shackleton. Write a multi-paragraph informational essay explaining Shackleton's adventures and achievements during his career.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- plan your essay and do some prewriting using your scratch paper.
- write your essay in the response box in Nextera.

Be sure to

- use details from both passages.
- avoid over-relying on one passage.

Your written response should be in the form of a multi-paragraph informational essay.

Write your essay in the response box in Nextera. Anything you write that is not in the response box in Nextera will NOT be scored.