
UNIT 20

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20.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall give you further practice in reading comprehension by

(i) giving you a narrative passage to read : 'A High Dive' by L. P. Hartley, and

(ii) giving a glossary of difficult words and questions on comprehension.

We shall also set exercises on selected items of vocabulary.

In the section on grammar and usage we shall discuss the non-finite verbals.

We shall also ask you to write a short compositions based on the passage read.

After completing the unit you should be able to

- read and appreciate passages;
- use non-finite verbals correctly, and
- write short compositions based on the passage read.

20.1 READING COMPREHENSION

20.1.1 Passage for Reading

'A High Dive'

by L. P. Hartley

1. The circus-manager was worried. Attendances had been falling off and such people as did come—children they were, mostly—sat about listlessly, munching sweets or sucking ices, sometimes talking to each other without so much as glancing at the show. Only the young or little girls, who came to see the ponies, betrayed any real interest. The clown's jokes fell flat, for they were the kind of jokes that used to raise a laugh before 1939, after which critical date people's sense of humour seemed to have changed, along with many other things about them. The circus-manager had heard the word 'corny' flung about and didn't like it. What did they want? Something that was, in his opinion, sillier and more pointless than the old jokes; not a bull's-eye on the target of humour, but an outer or even a near-miss—something that brought in the element of futility and that could be laughed at as well as with : an unintentional joke against the joker. The clowns were quick enough with their patter but it just didn't go down : there was too much sense in their nonsense for an up-to-date audience, too much articulateness. They would do better to talk gibberish, perhaps. Now they must change their style, and find out what really did make people laugh, if people could be made to; but he, the manager, was over fifty and never good himself at making jokes, even the old-fashioned kind. What was this word that everyone was using—'sophisticated'? The audiences were too sophisticated, even the children were : they seemed to have seen or heard all this before, even when they were too young to have seen and heard it.
2. 'What shall we do ?' he asked his wife. They were standing under the Big Top, which had just been put up, and wondering how many of the empty seats would still be empty when they gave their first performance. 'We shall have to do something, or it's a bad look out.'
'I don't see what we can do about the comic side,' she said. 'It may come right by itself. Fashions change, all sorts of old things have returned to favour, like oldtime dances. But there's something we could do.'
'What's that ?'
'Put on an act that's dangerous, really dangerous. Audiences are never

bored by that. I know you don't like it, and no more do I, but when we had the Wall of Death.....

Her husband's big chest-muscles twitched under his thin shirt.

'You know what happened then.'

'Yes, but it wasn't our fault, we were in the clear.'

He shook his head.

'Those things upset everyone. I know the public came after it happened—they came in shoals, they came to see the place where someone had been killed. But our people got the needle and didn't give a good performance for I don't know how long. Proposing another Wall of Death wouldn't stand—besides, where will you find a man to do it?—especially with a lion on his bike, which is the great attraction.'

'But other turns are dangerous too, as well as dangerous-looking. It's *being* dangerous that is the draw.'

'Then what do you suggest?'

Before she had time to answer a man came up to them.

'I hope I don't butt in,' he said, 'but there's man outside who wants to speak to you.'

'What about?'

'I think he's looking for a job.'

'Bring him in,' said the manager.

3. The man appeared, led by his escort, who then went away. He was a tall, sandyhaired fellow with tawny leonine eyes and a straggling moustache. It wasn't easy to tell his age—he might have been about thirty-five. He pulled of his old brown can and waited.

'I hear you want to take a job with us,' the manager said, while his wife tried to size up the newcomer. 'We're pretty full up, you know. We don't take on strangers as a rule. Have you any references?'

'No, sir.'

'Then I'm afraid we can't help you, but just for form's sake, what can you do?'

As if measuring its height the man cast up his eyes to the point where one of the two poles of the Big Top was embedded in the canvas.

'I can dive sixty feet into a tank eight foot long by four foot wide by four foot deep.'

The manager stared at him.

'Can you now?' he said. 'Diving is the very thing we want. Are you prepared to let us see you do it?'

'Yes,' the man said.

'And would you do it with petrol burning on the water?'

'yes.'

'But have we got a tank?' the manager's wife asked.

'There's the old Mermaid's tank. It's just the thing. Get somebody to fetch it. While the tank was being brought the stranger looked about him.

'Thinking better of it?' said the manager.

'No, sir,' the man replied. 'I was thinking. I should want some bathing-trunks.'

'We can soon fix you up with those,' the manager said, 'I'll show you where to change.'

Leaving the stranger somewhere out of sight, he came back to his wife.

'Do you think we ought to let him do it?' she asked.

'Well, it's his funeral. You wanted us to have a dangerous act, and now we've got it.'

'Yes, I know, but—' The rest was drowned by the rattle of the trolley bringing in the tank—a hollow, double cube like a sarcophagus. Grunting a muttering to each other the men slid it into position, a few feet from the pole. The a length of hosepipe was fastened to a faucet, and soon they heard the sound of water swishing and gurgling in the tank.

'He's a long time changing,' said the manager's wife.

'Perhaps he's looking for a place to hide his money,' laughed her husband, and added, 'I think we'll give the petrol a miss.'

4. At length the man emerged from behind a screen, and slowly walked towards them. How tall he was, lanky and muscular. The hair on his body stuck out as if it had been combed. Hands on hips he stood beside them, his skin pimpled by goose-flesh. A fit of yawning overtook him.

'How do I get up?' he asked.

The manager was surprised, and pointed to the ladder. 'Unless you'd rather climb up, or be hauled up! You'll find a platform just below the top, to give you a foot-hold.'

He had started to go up the chromium-plated ladder when the manager's wife called after him : 'Are you still sure you want to do it?'

'Quite sure, madam'.

He was too tall to stand upright on the platform, the awning brushed his head. Crouching and swaying forty feet above them he swung his arms as though to test the air's resistance. Then he pitched forward into space, unseen by the manager's wife who looked the other way until she heard

a splash and saw a thin sheet of bright water shooting up.

The man was standing breast-high in the tank. He swung himself over the edge and crossed the ring towards them, his body dripping, his wet feet caked with sawdust, his tawny eyes a little bloodshot.

'Bravo!' said the manager, taking his shiny hand. 'It's a first-rate act, that, and will put money in our pockets. What do you want for it, fifteen quid a week?'

The man shook his head. The water trickled from his matted hair on to his shoulders, oozed from his borrowed bathing-suit and made runnels down his sinewy things. A fine figure of a man : the women would like him.

'Well, twenty then.'

Still the man shook his head.

'Let's make it twenty-five. That's the most we give anyone.'

Except for the slow shaking of his head the man might not have heard. The circus-manager and his wife exchanged a rapid glance.

'Look here,' he said. 'Taking into account the draw your act is likely to be, we're going to make you a special offer—thirty pounds a week. All right?'

Had the man understood? He put his finger in his mouth and went on shaking his head slowly, more to himself than at them, and seemingly unconscious of the bargain that was being held out to him. When he still didn't answer, the knot of tension broke, and the manager said, in his ordinary, brisk voice.

'Then I'm afraid we can't do business. But just as a matter of interest, tell us why you turned down our excellent offer.'

The man drew a long breath and breaking his long silence said, 'It's the first time I've done it and I didn't like it.'

With that he turned on his heel and straddling his long legs walked off unsteadily in the direction of the dressing-room.

The circus-manager and his wife stared at each other.

'It was the first time he'd done it,' she muttered. 'The first time.' Not knowing what to say to him, whether to praise, blame, scold or sympathize, they waited for him to come back, but he didn't come.

'I'll go and see if he's all right,' the circus-manager said. But in two minutes he was back again, 'He's not there,' he said. 'He must have slipped out the other way, the crack-brained fellow!'

20.1.2 Glossary

1. **'listlessly** : without interest or activity
'munching : eating with a strong movement of the jaw, especially making a noise
clown : a performer who dresses funnily and tries to make people laugh by his jokes, tricks, or actions
'corny : old-fashioned; simple; repeated too often
'bull's eye : the circular centre of a target that people try to hit when shooting
fu'tility : uselessness
'patter : very fast continuous amusing talk
ar'ticulateness : the ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly
'gibberish /'dʒɪbərɪʃ/ : meaningless sounds
so'phisticated : having a knowledge of social life and behaviour
2. **'look-out (n)** : a prospect
twitched /twɪtʃt/ : moved suddenly and quickly without conscious control
shoals : large numbers
butt 'in : interrupt
3. **'sandy** : yellowish brown in colour, like sand
'tawny : having a brownish yellow colour
'leonine /'li:ənəm/ : like those of a lion
'stragglings : untidy
'rattle : a lot of quick little noises as of small hard objects hitting each other
cube : a solid object with six equal sides
sar'cophagus : a stone box for a dead body
'faucet : a tap
'swishing : making a sharp whistling noise
4. **'lanky** : very thin and ungracefully tall
'pimpled : with small raised diseased spots on the skin
'goose-flesh : a condition in which the skin is raised up in small points where the hairs grow out
'yawning : opening the mouth wide and breathing in deeply, as when tired or uninterested
'awning : a movable covering, especially one made of canvas
'crouching : lowering the body close to the ground by bending the knees and back

quid : a whole pound in money

'runnels : small streams

'sinewy : having strong muscles

'straddling : standing or moving with the legs out at the sides

'crack-brained : foolish, stupid.

20.1.3 Comprehension Questions

Exercise 1

Answer the following questions :

1. Why did it worry the manager if people did not laugh at the clown's jokes?

2. Guess why after 1939 people were no longer interested in the clowns' jokes.

3. What, in the manager's opinion, did people want?

4. (a) What suggestion does the manager's wife offer?

- (b) Does he accept it readily? If not, why?

5. "Thinking better of it?" The manager said this when the stranger was about to show his act. He meant.

- (a) Are you wondering how best to show the act to impress everyone?

- (b) Are you thinking of joining a better circus?

(c) Are you, on second thoughts, unwilling to show your act?

Choose the correct answer.

6. Pick out the sentence from the text which shows that the manager liked the stranger's demonstration very much.

7. How much did the stranger say he wanted for his act?

8. The manager's final offer was very good. Still the stranger didn't accept it. Why?

20.2 VOCABULARY

Exercise 2

1. The following phrases and sentences occur in the text. Keeping in mind the contexts in which each of the italicized words and phrases occurs, choose its correct meaning.

Tick (✓) the correct answer.

(a) Attendances were *falling off*.

(i) dwindling

(ii) developing

(iii) disturbing

(b) The clown's jokes *fell flat*.

(i) couldn't be heard

(ii) couldn't be understood

(iii) couldn't have the desired effect

(c) It didn't *go down*.

(i) leave its place

(ii) meet the approval of the audiences

(iii) explain the main point

(d) It's a bad *look-out*.

(i) possibility

(ii) proposal

(iii) prospect

(e) We were *in the clear*.

(i) not to speak openly

(ii) not to say anything

(iii) not to blame for it

(f) She tried to *size up* the new-comer.

(i) form an opinion of

(ii) be pleasant to

(iii) measure the height of

- (g) It's *his funeral*.
 (i) He is sure to die
 (ii) The responsibility is entirely his
 (iii) He is going to fail
- (h) We'll give the petrol *a miss*.
 (i) We won't give him our petrol
 (ii) We'll accept a dive without petrol
 (iii) We'll call it a petrol dive
- (i) The *crack-brained* fellow
 (i) intelligent
 (ii) sensitive
 (iii) crazy

Exercise 3

The following words occur in the text :

look-out, breast-high, bathing-trunks, old-fashioned, near-miss.

These are compound words. Each consists of two parts joined by a hyphen. Not all compound words have hyphens and some have more than two parts. Sometimes the two parts are written as separate words but treated as a compound word. Remember that a compound word, though a combination of two words, it treated as *one* word like any ordinary word in the language.

Make compound words from the words given below according to the definitions given against each. Use the given word as the first part of the compound.

Example :

- play (i) dramatist
 (ii) piece of land for children to play on
 (iii) one who often goes to the theatre playwright; playground; playgoer
- (a) Stop (i) an instrument for recording the time taken for a race, etc.
 (ii) a temporary substitute
-
- (b) foot (i) sound of footsteps
 (ii) a row of lights along the front of a stage
 (iii) a safe place for the foot, especially when climbing
-
- (c) hand (i) metal rings on a prisoner's wrists
 (ii) not made by machine
-

- (d) show (i) place where goods are displayed
(ii) something produced mainly for show
-
- (e) fire (i) made of material that will not burn
(ii) company or group of men who put out fires
-
- (f) eye (i) one who has himself seen something happen
(ii) something that brings enlightenment or surprise
(iii) a mere substitute or formality and not the real thing
-

Exercise 4

Words like *manager* and *new-comer* appear in the text.

Notice how by adding *-er* to certain verbs, nouns can be formed, such as *make + er = maker* (a watch-maker), *use + er = user*; *hear + er = hearer*, etc.

Fill in the blanks in the following sentences with words formed by adding *-er* to verbs. Use the clue against each sentence.

- (i) I need _____ more than _____ to complete this project on time. (those who work, those who offer sympathy)
- (ii) The minister was unable to satisfy every _____ at his last press conference. (one who asks questions)
- (iii) The lecture starts at five. _____ will not be admitted into the hall. (those who come late)
- (iv) Tenzing, who passed away a few months ago, was a famous. _____ (one who climbed mountains)
- (v) If your watch is giving you trouble, take it to Mr. Lal, who is the best _____ in town. (one who repairs watches)

20.3 GRAMMAR AND USAGE

Non-finite Verbals

A finite verbs changes its form according to tense and subject. For example, the verb *be* has the finite forms *am, is, are, was, were* and the non-finite forms *being* and *been*.

20.3.1 *to* + infinitive

The form of the verb that can be used after other verbs and with *to* before it (such as *go* in *I can go*, *I want to go*, and *It is important to go*) is called in infinitive.

Exercise 5

Insert *to*, where necessary, before the verbs in brackets.

1. Do you know how (repair) a watch?
Yes, I do, but my mother wouldn't let me (touch) hers.
2. Why did you make us (wait) for so long outside?
3. I am sorry (inform) you that the company finds itself unable (let) you (file) your claim before the end of the year.
4. If you are not attentive. I'll make you (do) it all over again.
5. Would you like (join) the army?
6. He seems (know) that whole area.
7. He tried very hard (make) me (believe) that he sincerely wanted me (learn) how (swim).
8. Please tell me where (keep) this vase in the drawing room.
9. Is it necessary for me (attend) the meeting? I'd much rather (stay) at home.
10. It is up to you (accept) or (reject) this offer, unless you want me (tell) you why you should accept it.

Exercise 6

Combine each of the following pairs of sentences into one sentence using the pattern '*too* *to*-infinitive', as in the examples.

Examples : It is very cold. We can't go out.

It is *too cold to go out*.

He is very tired. He can't work.

He is *too tired to work*.

Remember '*too tired to work*' means '*so tired that he can't work*'.

1. He is very young. He won't understand this story.

2. He was quite angry. He couldn't speak.

3. It was very dark. I didn't see the signpost clearly.

4. He is very timid. He can't get married.

5. He is very busy. He won't see you now.

Exercise 7

Replace the *italicized* words by a phrase with *to*-infinitive.

Examples :

It is necessary *that we should do* something.

It is necessary for us to do something.

He was the first person *who congratulated me* on my birthday.

He was to congratulate me

1. There was no place *where we could hide*.

2. It is necessary *that people should know* the truth.

3. It is better *that he should receive* it from his father.

4. I was surprised *when I heard* that he had left the party.

5. I was the only one *who recognised* him in the dark.

The Infinitive of Purpose

Read the following sentence :

People dig up clay to make bricks, and another sort of clay to make earthenware and china.

(a) We use '*to + infinitive*' to talk about the purpose of doing something (that is, why someone does something) :

(i) Badrinath went out *to buy* stamps.

(because he wanted to buy stamps)

(ii) My friend shouted 'Look out!' *to warn* me of the speeding bus.

(b) We use '*to + infinitive*' to talk about the purpose of something, or why someone has/wants/needs something :

- (i) This fence is *to keep* stray animals out of the garden.
- (ii) The Prime Minister has a number of body-guards *to protect* him.
- (iii) We need a match *to light* this stove.

Exercise 8

Answer these questions in complete sentences, using the words given in brackets.

Example :

Why did Kusum phone you? (invite me to her birthday party)

She phoned to invite me to her birthday party.

1. Why did Azhar go the bank? (cash a cheque)

2. Why are you going to Paris? (learn French)

3. Why does Srinivas need a bag? (put these vegetables in)

4. Why was Jayant gone to the police station? (report that his bicycle has been stolen)

5. Why do the Reddys want a bank loan? (buy a house)

6. Why are you going to the post office? (send a money order)

7. Why did Susheela go to the chemist? (get some medicine)

8. Why does Mr. Sharma have a Secretary? (type his letters)

9. Why did the Minister want an aircraft? (take him to the site of the accident)

10. Why are you going into hospital? (have an operation)

20.3.2 Gerunds

A gerund is a verbal noun, that is, a noun which describes an action or experience and has the form of present participle (the *-ing* form).

Example :

'building' in the sentence

The building of the bridge was show work.

Exercise 9

Rewrite the following by adding *-ing* to the verbs in brackets :

1. He gave up (smoke) a long time ago.

2. I don't feel like (work) after lunch; I prefer (sleep).

3. Who enjoys (go) to hospital?

Patients, of course.

4. Is it worth (bother) about?

5. (See) is (believe).

6. Why did he go to prison?

He was accused of (pass) secret information to the enemy.

7. (Smoke) is not allowed inside the hall.

8. You can't make an omelette without (break) eggs.

9. Try to avoid (make) a noise.

10. Aren't you looking forward to (meet) your family after so many months?

Exercise 10

Change the verbs in brackets by adding *-ing* or inserting *to*, whichever is appropriate, as in the examples :

Examples :

(i) You still have a lot (learn), if you'll forgive my (say) so.

You still have a lot *to learn*, if you'll forgive my *saying* so.

(ii) Would you mind (come) with me to Mohan's house; I wish (congratulate) him on his (win) an award in the Quiz Contest.

Would you mind *coming* with me to Mohan's house; I wish to *congratulate* him on his *winning* an award in the Quiz Contest.

1. You'll never regret (help) a friend need.

2. The doctor asked him (leave) the room without (give) him a chance (say) what his problem was.

3. Your hair wants (cut); why don't you find time (go) to the barber?

4. Fancy (have) (work) for a crazy person like him; I'd rather be without a job.

5. The doctor advised him (stop) (drink).

6. He grew a beard (avoid) (be) recognised by the police.

7. Don't forget (switch) off the light before (go) to bed.

8. Yesterday I was fined for (exceed) the speed limit; the constable said it was (make) me remember the rule for ever.

20.3.3 Participles

Participles are the two forms of a verb (called **present participle** and **past participle**) which may be used in compound forms of the verb or as adjectives.

Examples :

Why *are we going there?*

(present participle used to form present continuous tense)

The problems *can also be considered.*

(past participle used to form the passive voice)

a *loving* mother (present participle used as an adjective)

He had a *worried* look.

(past participle used as an adjective)

Exercise 11

Fill in the blanks in the following sentences using the verbs given below. Add *-ing* to each verb before using it.

revolve, smile, slide, nag, move

1. We need a _____ door here.
2. He had a serious accident while getting off a _____ bus.
3. A _____ chair is better than an ordinary one, but it is much more expensive.
4. It is as uncommon for a peevish person to have a _____ face as it is for a cheerful person to have a peevish one.
5. His wife is always complaining about something. No wonder people call him 'the husband of a _____ wife'.

Exercise 12

Write five phrases each of the type verb + *-ing* + noun (e.g., *a pressing problem, a moving train*) and verb + *-ed* + noun. (e.g., *a tired man, caged birds*)

20.4 WRITING

Exercise 13

Write a letter to a friend describing your visit to the circus to town. Call it 'The Great Circus of India', and mention the following :

- (i) A lion jumping through a burning hoop.
- (ii) A man on horseback standing on his head.
- (iii) A clown riding a bicycle on a metal string. (about 200 words)

or

Imagine you are one of the performers at a circus. Yours is a dangerous item like a high dive or blindfolded motorcycling. Write a short essay expressing your honest thoughts about your work. For instance, are you happy or unhappy? Are you in it because you love it, or because you are unfit for anything else? What may cost you your life is entertainment to the audience. Does it ever make you angry? etc.

(about 200 words)

20.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have given you practice in

- reading and understanding a narrative passage;
- using the non-finite verbals correctly, and
- writing a short composition based on the passage read.

20.6 KEY WORDS

'finite 'verb (in grammar) : a verb changing according to tense and subject, e.g., the verb *be* has the finite forms *am, is, are, was, were* and the non-finite forms *being* and *been*.

'gerund (in English grammar) : a verbal noun, that is, one which describes an action or experience and has the form of a present participle, e.g., *swimming* in the sentence : *Some people enjoy swimming*.

in'finite : the form of the verb that can be used after other verbs and with *to* before it (e.g., *go* in *You can go. He wants to go.*)

'participle : the present participle or the past participle form of a verb, which may be used in compound forms of the verb or as an adjective.

20.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. It meant that the circus, which was his means of livelihood, was becoming unpopular. Also, as the manager it was his professional duty to make the show interesting.
2. Perhaps the second world war had changed people's outlook completely. They were no longer interested in the old jokes.
3. They wanted harmless, silly stuff to laugh at. Even meaningless jokes would be more welcome than the old calculated ones.
4. (a) She said they shouldn't worry about the comic side, but should introduce a new item which was exciting and dangerous.
(b) No, because a dangerous item, the Wall of Death, had killed one of his men in the past. Moreover, it would be difficult to find someone to perform a dangerous act.
5. (iii)
6. 'Bravo! It's first-rate act, that, and will put money into our pockets.'
7. He didn't want anything. The manager misunderstood his silence.
8. It was the stranger's first high dive, and he didn't like the experience at all.

Exercise 2

1. (a) i, (b) iii, (c) ii, (d) iii, (e) iii, (f) i, (g) ii, (h) ii, (i) iii.

Exercise 3

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| (a) (i) stopwatch | (ii) stopgap |
| (b) (i) footfalls | (ii) footlights (iii) foothold |

- (c) (i) handcuffs (ii) handmade
 (d) (i) show-room/show-case (ii) showpiece
 (e) (i) fireproof (ii) fire-brigade
 (f) (i) eye-witness (ii) eye-opener (iii) eyewash

Exercise 4

- (i) workers, sympathisers (ii) questioner (iii) late-comers (iv) climber (v) watch-maker.

Exercise 5

1. to repair 3. to inform, to let 5. to join
 6. to know 7. to make, to learn, to swim
 8. to keep 9. to attend 10. to accept, to tell

Exercise 6

1. too young to understand
 2. too angry to speak.
 3. too dark to see
 4. too timid to get
 5. too busy to see

Exercise 7

1. for us to hide 2. for people to know.
 3. for him to receive 4. to hear
 5. to recognize

Exercise 8

1. He went to the bank to cash a cheque.
 2. I am going to Paris to learn French.
 3. Srinivas needs a bag to put these vegetables in.
 4. Jayant has gone to the police station to report that his bicycle has been stolen.
 5. The Reddys want a bank loan to buy a house.
 6. I am going to the post office to send a money order.
 7. Susheela went to the chemist to get some medicine.
 8. Mr. Sharma has a secretary to type his letters.
 9. The Minister wants an aircraft to take him to the site of the accident.
 10. I am going into hospital to have an operation.

Exercise 9

1. smoking 2. working, sleeping 3. going
 4. bothering 5. seeing, believing 6. passing
 7. smoking 8. breaking 9. making
 10. meeting

Exercise 10

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. helping | 2. to leave, giving, to say |
| 3. cutting, to go | 4. having, to work |
| 5. to stop, drinking | 6. to avoid, being |
| 7. to switch, going | 8. exceeding, to make |

Exercise 11

1. helping 2. moving 3. revolving 4. smiling 5. nagging

Exercise 12

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) blinding light | (b) corrugated cardboard |
| founding fathers | hidden meaning |
| leaning tower | a disputed issue |
| hanging gardens | a besieged city |
| sleeping beauty | commuted pension |