

ACT CHALLENGE: SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT

Directions: In the ACT-like passage that follows, certain words and phrases are underlined and numbered. In the right column, you will see suggested corrections for each underlined part. For the most part, you are to choose the option that best expresses the idea, makes the statement appropriate for standard written English, or is worded most consistently with the style and tone of the passage as a whole. “NO CHANGE” is a valid option if you think the original is the best choice. Along with grammar, there will also be questions about the passage’s content; choose the best answer choice. You may also find questions about a section of the passage or about the entirety of it. These questions do not refer to any underlined part of the passage but are identified by numbers in a box.

Read the passage thoroughly before answering the questions. For some questions you must read several sentences beyond the question to determine the correct answer.

Passage 1

Shooting an Elephant

1

I stood at the edge of the road, rifle in hand, hesitating¹ before the watching crowd. To act as they expected—to assert authority—was my only recourse, even though shooting the elephant against my will felt like betraying my own reason. [A] In moments like this, when the weight of expectation presses down, one realizes how fragile your freedom² becomes. With the rifle poised against my shoulder, I found myself torn between conscience and duty—between telling the truth of my heart and doing what was proper.

2

The elephant, standing eight yards from the road, began tearing up grass, beating the tufts against its knees to clean them, then³ stuffing the blades into its mouth. Watching it from a distance, I sensed a peacefulness that contradicted its size. To let it wander off, rather than controlling the spectacle, would have been both merciful and wise. But to choose mercy—to choose to stand aside—felt impossible, given the sea of expectant faces crowding around me with their eyes fixed on my act.

1. Which choice makes the sentence most grammatically acceptable?

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. road, rifle in hand. Hesitating
- C. road, rifle in hand; hesitating
- D. road. Rifle in hand, hesitating

2. Which choice makes the sentence most grammatically acceptable?

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. one's freedom
- C. their freedom
- D. our freedom

3. Which choice makes the sentence most grammatically acceptable?

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. then stuffed
- H. then to stuff
- J. then stuffing up



3

I remembered marching down the hill, feeling like a fool, rifle slung carelessly over my shoulder, among the jeering crowd behind me. To appear resolute, to look unwavering, was what they had demanded. [B] Yet, knowing that I ought not to shoot, I still held the rifle ready. In that moment, I realized how imperialism—turning people into performers for an indifferent audience—destroys not only the oppressed but the oppressor as well.

4. Which choice makes the sentence most grammatically acceptable?

- A. **NO CHANGE**
- B. demanded.
- C. have demanded.
- D. would demand.

4

I felt the two thousand wills behind me, pushing me forward into the role I did not want. Shooting this elephant, standing in its calm innocence, should not have been my fate. And yet, to back down—to retreat without doing what was expected—would have invited derision. In the eyes of the crowd, pulling back would have been a sign of weakness. [C]

5

So I raised the rifle, preparing to fire in front of two thousand pairs of eager eyes. The elephant looked no more dangerous than a grazing cow: with its massive body relaxed, its trunk-guided meal undisturbed. To pull the trigger, I thought, would be to destroy not only an animal but the last vestige of my integrity. Yet, the burden of expectation weighed more heavy than the burden of killing.

5. Which choice makes the sentence most grammatically acceptable?

- F. **NO CHANGE**
- G. cow, with its
- H. cow; with its
- J. cow. With its

6. Which choice makes the sentence most grammatically acceptable?

- A. **NO CHANGE**
- B. more heavily
- C. heavier
- D. most heavily

6

To shoot was to pretend; to continue pretense was to lose myself. I squeezed the trigger slowly, feeling the recoil through my hands and down to my resolve. In fleeing afterward, walking away from the lifeless form, I carried the stain of that moment,

7. Which choice most effectively maintains the essay's tone?

- A. **NO CHANGE**
- B. —walking away from the lifeless form—
- C. ; walking away from the lifeless form
- D. —walking away from the lifeless form,

the knowledge that my act had been dictated by the masses, not by my moral judgment. [D]

Later, in quietness away from prying eyes, I reflected on what I had done. To stand for something greater—justice, empathy, reason—no longer seemed possible under the mask I had worn. I had performed my duty for appearance's sake, and I realized that to please the crowd was to betray myself.

8. Which choice makes the sentence most grammatically acceptable?

- F. **NO CHANGE**
- G. appearances sake
- H. appearances' sake
- J. appearance sake

Questions 9-10 ask about the preceding passage as a whole.

9. The writer wants to add the following accurate sentence to the essay:

“He cowered,” they would say, “he failed to embody the firmness of his station.”

This sentence would most logically be placed at:

- A. Point A in Paragraph 1
- B. Point B in Paragraph 3
- C. Point C in Paragraph 4
- D. Point D in Paragraph 6

10. Suppose the writer’s primary purpose had been to describe the benefits of imperialism while composing a personal essay. Would this essay accomplish that purpose?

- A. Yes, because it shows how imperialism strengthened the narrator’s authority before the crowd.
- B. Yes, because it emphasizes the order and stability imperialism created in the colony.
- C. No, because the essay instead highlights the destructive and dehumanizing effects of imperialism.
- D. No, because the essay focuses on the narrator’s internal conflict and sense of betrayal rather than any benefits of imperialism.

Source: Orwell, G. (1936). *Shooting an Elephant*. The Orwell Foundation. <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/shooting-an-elephant/>

