Reading Test 2

The Northern Pivot: Canada's Economic and Environmental Strategy in 2026

Paragraph 1 In the first quarter of 2026, Canada finds itself at a critical juncture, navigating a complex web of global geopolitical instability and internal economic recalibration. The Bank of Canada recently announced its decision to maintain the key interest rate at 2.25%, a move that reflects a cautious "wait-and-see" approach. This stability is intended to provide a buffer against the volatile energy prices triggered by ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, which have threatened to destabilize the global oil market. While inflation remains within the target range of 1-3%, the central bank's leadership remains wary of "choppy waters" ahead, particularly as trade uncertainties with major partners persist.

Paragraph 2 Central to this period of transition is the leadership of Prime Minister Mark Carney, who has prioritized a "Strategic Response" to the rising cost of living. A cornerstone of this policy is the introduction of the Canada Groceries and Essentials Benefit, a revamped version of previous tax credits designed to provide immediate relief to low-income households. By boosting these credits by 25% for a five-year period, the government aims to insulate the most vulnerable citizens from the inflationary pressures of food insecurity, which have been exacerbated by global supply chain disruptions and recent trade probes.

Paragraph 3 Parallel to these social measures, Canada is undergoing a significant shift in its immigration policy. Recognizing that immigration accounts for nearly 100% of the nation's labour force growth, the federal government has refined its Express Entry system to be more "surgical" in its selection process. The 2026 categories now prioritize high-skill sectors such as healthcare, transport, and research. Notably, a new pathway has been carved out for foreign medical doctors and military personnel, reflecting a strategic intent to fill critical gaps in the domestic infrastructure while maintaining sustainable overall immigration levels.

Paragraph 4 Technological innovation, specifically the proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), has emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity for the Canadian energy sector. A recent report by the Canada Energy Regulator suggests that power demand is projected to surge by up to 100% by 2050, driven largely by the "thirst" of AI data centres. This projection has forced a re-evaluation of the national grid, with policymakers looking toward renewable sources to meet the burgeoning demand. The report highlights that wind energy is poised to become the primary driver of new power capacity, marking a definitive pivot away from traditional fossil fuel reliance.

Paragraph 5 The cultural implications of this AI revolution have not gone unnoticed. In mid-March 2026, Canada hosted its first-ever National Summit on Artificial Intelligence and Culture. This gathering brought together leaders from the academic, creative, and technological sectors to discuss the preservation of Canadian heritage in a digital age. The summit

emphasized the need for a "shared vision" that protects the intellectual property of creators while leveraging AI to enhance the reach of Canadian arts on the global stage.

Paragraph 6 Geopolitical concerns have also reached the Arctic, a region increasingly central to Canadian sovereignty. In response to external threats regarding the annexation of northern territories, Canada has moved to strengthen its presence in Greenland by opening a new consulate. This diplomatic move is part of a broader $35 billion investment plan for defence and infrastructure in the North. By reinforcing its ties with Denmark and investing in northern transport links, Canada is asserting its role as a key guardian of the Arctic's strategic and environmental future.

Paragraph 7 Domestically, the political landscape is characterized by a shifting tide in provincial-federal relations. Recent by-elections and floor-crossing by Members of Parliament suggest a volatile electorate. In Alberta, the provincial government has scheduled a referendum for late 2026 to address long-standing grievances regarding federal resource policies. These internal tensions reflect a broader national debate over the balance between provincial autonomy and the federal government's mandate to implement nationwide environmental and economic standards.

Paragraph 8 The Canadian manufacturing sector is also undergoing a quiet transformation, supported by regional investment initiatives. In Quebec and Ontario, federal funding has been directed toward businesses specializing in the recycling of electronic components and the production of armoured vehicles. The latter has become particularly relevant as Canada continues to support international allies in Eastern Europe. This "dual-track" industrial strategy seeks to foster a domestic economy that is both environmentally responsible and capable of contributing to global security.

Paragraph 9 Ultimately, the narrative of Canada in 2026 is one of resilience and adaptation. Whether through the careful management of interest rates, the strategic selection of skilled immigrants, or the massive expansion of wind energy, the nation is attempting to forge a stable path through an era of "global upheaval." The success of these initiatives will depend on the government's ability to maintain public confidence in price stability and national security, ensuring that the "Northern Pivot" results in long-term prosperity rather than just short-term survival.

Questions 1–6

Complete the summary below.

*Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.*

Write your answers in boxes 1–6 on your answer sheet.

Canada's Strategic Shifts in 2026

In light of international instability and the risk of **1** ..... within the global energy market, the Bank of Canada has kept interest rates at 2.25%. To assist the public, the government has increased **2** ..... by 25%, specifically to aid households with lower incomes.

In terms of the labour market, the federal government has adopted a more **3** ..... approach to immigrant selection, prioritizing vital sectors such as healthcare and research. Simultaneously, the growing energy requirements of **4** ..... have led to a shift toward renewables, with **5** ..... predicted to provide the bulk of new power capacity. Additionally, Canada is strengthening its position in the **6** ..... region by establishing a consulate in Greenland to safeguard its sovereignty.

Questions 7–13

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the Reading Passage?

In boxes 7–13 on your answer sheet, write

- ***TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information*
- ***FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information*
- ***NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this*

---

7 The Bank of Canada anticipates that energy prices will remain stable throughout the rest of 2026.

8 The Canada Groceries and Essentials Benefit is a completely new financial initiative introduced by Mark Carney's government.

9 Immigration is currently the primary source of growth for the Canadian workforce.

10 Foreign military personnel are among those given priority under the updated Express Entry categories.

11 The Canadian government plans to reduce the number of AI data centres to lower electricity consumption.

12 The National Summit on Artificial Intelligence and Culture resulted in new legislation regarding intellectual property.

13 Canada has allocated more than $30 billion for northern development and security.

The Cognitive Architecture of Decision-Making

A For decades, the mechanism by which humans make choices has been a central pillar of psychological inquiry. Traditional economic models once operated on the "Rational Actor" theory, which posits that individuals consistently make decisions that maximize personal utility through logical calculation. However, as the 21st century progressed, this rigid framework began to crumble under the weight of empirical evidence suggesting that human logic is frequently bypassed by deeper, more subconscious processes.

B A transformative shift occurred with the work of Dr. Aris Thorne, a behavioral economist who challenged the notion of pure rationality. Thorne introduced the Theory of Affective Heuristics, suggesting that most human decisions are not the result of data processing but are instead driven by "gut feelings" or immediate emotional responses. According to Thorne, the human brain utilizes emotional shortcuts to conserve energy, especially when faced with complex variables that would otherwise lead to "analysis paralysis."

C Expanding on the limitations of the human mind, Professor Elena Vance proposed the Environmental Constraint Model. Vance's research focuses on how physical surroundings dictate the quality of cognitive output. She argues that decision-making is not an isolated internal process but is "situated" within a specific context. Her studies demonstrated that individuals in high-stress, cluttered environments consistently make more impulsive choices compared to those in minimalist, quiet settings, suggesting that the environment acts as a "silent architect" of our intentions.

D In contrast to the focus on environment, Dr. Julian Kwong has dedicated his career to the biological basis of choice. Kwong's Neuro-Chemical Priming Theory suggests that our decisions are largely predetermined by fluctuations in dopamine and cortisol levels before a conscious thought is even formed. Kwong's longitudinal studies indicate that individuals with higher baseline levels of cortisol are significantly more risk-averse, regardless of the potential logical gains of a particular situation. This implies that "personality" may simply be a byproduct of a specific chemical temperament.

E The social dimension of decision-making was further explored by Dr. Sarah Al-Farsi, who developed the Social Mimicry Hypothesis. Al-Farsi asserts that in uncertain conditions, humans default to a "herd mentality," subconsciously mirroring the choices of the majority to ensure social cohesion. Her experiments showed that even when an individual knows a choice is objectively incorrect, they are likely to adopt it if it is endorsed by a perceived "in-group." For Al-Farsi, the desire for belonging often overrides the drive for accuracy.

F Critiquing the idea that we are slaves to our biology or social groups, Professor Marcus Thorne (no relation to Aris Thorne) advocates for the Metacognitive Regulation Theory. He believes that while subconscious impulses exist, the "higher-order" brain—the prefrontal cortex—has the capacity to veto these urges. Thorne's research focuses on "mindfulness-based intervention," showing that individuals trained in metacognition (thinking about one's own thinking) can bypass their initial emotional biases to reach a truly rational conclusion.

G Recent advancements in technology have introduced a new variable: Artificial Intelligence. Dr. Lin Mei, a researcher in Human-Computer Interaction, has proposed the Algorithmic Delegation Theory. Mei suggests that as we become more reliant on predictive algorithms—from GPS to shopping recommendations—our "decision-making muscles" are atrophying. Her data suggests that the younger generation feels an increasing sense of "decisional anxiety" when forced to make choices without the aid of a digital intermediary, marking a fundamental shift in human autonomy.

H As these various theories converge, it becomes clear that the "Rational Actor" model is an oversimplification of a much more intricate reality. From Aris Thorne's emotional shortcuts to Lin Mei's digital dependencies, the study of how we choose remains a dynamic field. Understanding these cognitive layers is not merely an academic exercise; it is essential for navigating a world where our choices are increasingly influenced by hidden internal and external forces.

Questions 14–19

*The Reading Passage has eight paragraphs, **A–H**.*

Which paragraph contains the following information?

*Write the correct letter, **A–H**, in boxes 14–19 on your answer sheet.*

14 A reference to the way physical surroundings can act as a "silent architect" of human intentions.

15 An explanation of how "herd mentality" can lead individuals to choose an incorrect option.

16 A description of the "Rational Actor" theory and its historical role in economic models.

17 The suggestion that a younger generation is experiencing "decisional anxiety" due to technology.

18 Evidence that specific chemical levels in the body can determine if a person is risk-averse.

19 The assertion that the prefrontal cortex allows humans to veto subconscious emotional urges.

Questions 20–26

Look at the following statements (Questions 20–26) and the list of researchers below.

*Match each statement with the correct researcher, **A–F**.*

*Write the correct letter, **A–F**, in boxes 20–26 on your answer sheet.*

NB *You may use any letter more than once.*

List of Researchers

A Dr. Aris Thorne

B Professor Elena Vance

C Dr. Julian Kwong

D Dr. Sarah Al-Farsi

E Professor Marcus Thorne

F Dr. Lin Mei

20 People often use emotional shortcuts to avoid the exhaustion of over-analyzing data.

21 High levels of a specific stress hormone can lead to a more cautious approach to decision-making.

22 The human ability to choose is being weakened by a growing dependency on digital guidance.

23 A cluttered or stressful physical setting is likely to result in more hasty or thoughtless choices.

24 Individuals are frequently willing to accept a wrong answer if it helps them stay aligned with their social group.

25 Specific training in self-reflection can enable the brain to override its natural emotional biases.

26 Human choices are often driven by immediate "gut feelings" rather than a logical review of facts.

The Elasticity of Moments: Perspectives on Temporal Perception

The human experience of time is often likened to a constant, linear progression—a relentless ticking of an invisible clock that governs every facet of biological and social existence. However, recent developments in cognitive neuroscience suggest that our internal experience of duration is far from objective. Unlike the standardized measurements of seconds and minutes defined by atomic clocks, the human brain perceives time as a flexible construct, stretching and contracting based on emotional states, environmental stimuli, and the neurological processing of novel information.

This phenomenon, frequently referred to as "chronostasis," illustrates how the mind can momentarily suspend the perception of time's passage. A common example occurs when one first glances at a ticking clock; the first second often appears significantly longer than those that follow. Researchers argue that this is due to the brain's rapid intake of high-quality data when a new stimulus is encountered. To maintain a seamless narrative of reality, the brain "backdates" the experience, effectively overestimating the duration of the initial observation to compensate for the time taken to process the image.

The role of emotion in temporal distortion is perhaps the most relatable aspect of this abstract field. During life-threatening situations or moments of extreme adrenaline, individuals frequently report that the world appears to move in "slow motion." This is not because the brain's processing speed actually increases, but rather because the amygdala—the brain's emotional core—becomes hyper-active. It records memories with far greater density and detail than usual. When these memories are later retrieved, the sheer volume of information tricks the consciousness into believing the event lasted much longer than it truly did.

Conversely, the sensation of time "flying" during periods of deep enjoyment or "flow" can be attributed to the way attention is allocated. When a person is intensely focused on a challenging and rewarding task, the brain ignores the periodic "pulses" of the internal pacemaker. Because fewer cognitive resources are dedicated to monitoring the passage of time, the interval is perceived as shorter. This suggests that time perception is intrinsically linked to the level of engagement an individual has with their immediate reality.

Age also appears to play a significant role in how the "width" of time is measured. For a child, a single summer can feel like an eternity, whereas, for the elderly, decades seem to evaporate with alarming speed. One leading theory for this discrepancy is the "proportionality' model," which suggests that a year represents a much larger percentage of a child's total life experience than it does for an adult. To a five-year-old, one year is 20% of their existence; to a fifty-year-old, it is a mere 2%. This relative scaling creates a subjective acceleration of the timeline as one matures.

Furthermore, the "oddball effect" highlights how novelty influences our temporal judgment. In laboratory settings, participants shown a series of identical images followed by one unique,

different image consistently report that the "oddball" image stayed on the screen longer. This happens because the brain requires more energy and time to categorize an unfamiliar stimulus. In a life characterized by routine, time appears to speed up because the brain has less new data to record; in a life filled with new experiences, the subjective timeline expands.

Cultural factors also impose a secondary layer of abstraction onto time perception. In "monochronic" cultures, time is viewed as a commodity that can be spent, saved, or wasted, leading to a high-pressure perception of the "now." In contrast, "polychronic" societies often view time as a cyclical, repeating rhythm where multiple events occur simultaneously. These cultural blueprints dictate not only how people schedule their lives but also how they internally weigh the importance of a single moment versus a long-term historical arc.

Ultimately, the study of temporal perception reveals that time is not merely an external force to be measured, but an internal experience to be interpreted. As we move through our lives, the "clock" in our heads is constantly being recalibrated by our feelings, our memories, and our environment. Understanding this elasticity allows for a deeper appreciation of the human condition, suggesting that while we cannot stop the literal passage of time, our minds possess the extraordinary ability to transform how we inhabit it.

Questions 27–32

*Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**. Write the correct letter in boxes 27–32 on your answer sheet.*

---

27. What does the phenomenon of 'chronostasis' demonstrate about the human brain?

A. The brain's processing speed increases during high-stress events.

B. The brain can temporarily pause its perception of time passing.

C. The brain is unable to distinguish between different seconds on a clock.

D. The brain relies exclusively on atomic clocks to govern social existence.

28. According to the passage, why does time appear to move in 'slow motion' during life-threatening moments?

A. The internal pacemaker begins to pulse at a much faster rate.

B. The individual is too focused on the task to monitor the time.

C. The brain's physical ability to process data is literally accelerated.

D. The amygdala records a higher volume of detailed information.

29. The 'proportionality model' suggests that older people perceive time as moving faster because

A. their cognitive resources are focused on novel stimuli.

B. a year constitutes a smaller fraction of their total life experience.

C. they have stopped using their 'decision-making muscles'.

D. their internal pacemakers naturally slow down as they age.

30. What is the primary effect of 'novelty' on time perception as described in the text?

A. Unfamiliar stimuli require more energy to categorize, expanding the subjective timeline.

B. Routine activities cause the brain to record more detailed memories.

C. New experiences lead to a state of 'flow' that makes time fly.

D. Novelty forces the brain to ignore pulses from the internal pacemaker.

31. How do 'polychronic' cultures differ from 'monochronic' ones in their view of time?

A. They experience a higher pressure to maximize the present moment.

B. They rely more heavily on atomic clocks to schedule their lives.

C. They see time as a repeating rhythm rather than a limited commodity.

D. They believe that time is a linear progression that cannot be changed.

32. The author concludes that while we cannot alter the passage of time, we can

A. physically slow down time by using mindfulness techniques.

B. influence how we experience and inhabit the moments we have.

C. rely on technology to measure the elasticity of our internal clocks.

D. eliminate the influence of the amygdala on our memories.

Questions 33–36

Complete the summary below.

*Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.*

Write your answers in boxes 33–36 on your answer sheet.

The Perception of Time Intervals

The human brain does not perceive time as a fixed unit; instead, it treats it as a **33** ..... that changes according to various factors. One example is "chronostasis," where the brain overestimates the length of a new stimulus to ensure the individual experiences a **34** ..... of reality.

Furthermore, the allocation of **35** ..... plays a major role in how fast time seems to pass. When a person is fully immersed in a task, they often fail to notice the internal **36** ..... that track duration, leading to the sensation that time is accelerating.

Questions 37–40

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in the Reading Passage?

In boxes 37–40 on your answer sheet, write

- ***YES** if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer*
- ***NO** if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer*
- ***NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this*

---

37 The phenomenon of "chronostasis" occurs because the brain is attempting to bridge a gap in visual information.

38 The objective speed of the human brain's processing increases significantly during an adrenaline-fueled event.

39 The "proportionality model" is the only valid explanation for why children and adults experience time differently.

40 People living in polychronic cultures are generally more productive than those in monochronic cultures.

Check Answers to this Reading Test Here:

https://upscoreielts.com/most-difficult-ielts-reading-question-band-9-practice/

Other Free Resources by UpScore IELTS

IELTS Reading Practise Test 1:
https://upscoreielts.com/ielts-reading-test-1-recent-real-exam-2026/

Latest IELTS Speaking Part 2 Cue Cards (2026): Recently Reported Questions:
https://upscoreielts.com/ielts-speaking-cue-cards-2026-reported-questions/

IELTS Speaking Part 3 Ultimate Guide (2026) – 200+ Band 9 Sample Answers:
https://upscoreielts.com/ielts-speaking-part-3-ultimate-guide-band-9-sample-answers/

Recent IELTS Writing Task 2 Questions with Sample Answers (Updated 2026):
https://upscoreielts.com/ielts-writing-task-2-recent-questions-answers-vocabulary/

IELTS Line Graphs Guide (2026): High-Band Vocabulary & Sample Answers:
https://upscoreielts.com/ielts-writing-task-1-line-graphs/

IELTS Writing Task 1: Bar Graphs Guide (2026) – Structure & Band 9 Samples:
https://upscoreielts.com/ielts-writing-task-1-bar-graphs/

IELTS Writing Task 1 Pie Charts | Step-by-Step Guide, Vocabulary & Band 9 Sample:
https://upscoreielts.com/ielts-writing-task-1-pie-charts-guide-vocabulary-sample/

Join Our WhatsApp Channel Here:
https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VbCTqZM4inon7MhFT91U