



Independent Schools  
Examinations Board

# ENGLISH PRACTICE EXERCISES 11+

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# Part one: Comprehension

## Exercise 1.1

Read the passage and answer the questions which follow, using proper sentences.

### **Brave Pilot**

#### **from *Battle of Britain* by Chris Priestley (2002)**

*The extraordinary courage of our pilots during the Second World War is recorded here in this gripping account of one expedition across the English Channel.*

1 As we moved off across the grass in the early morning light, the clumsy bumping finally gave way to that great feeling of floating: dull old earth giving way to air and soaring flight. It got me every time, every single time.

5 Off over the rooftops and steeples, the orchards, the hedgerows in blossom, the hop fields; over the cliffs and the closed-off beaches, out across the sea to the War beyond the slate-grey waters of the Channel.

10 We flew in tight formation and I tried to concentrate on maintaining my position as we approached the soot-black skies of Dunkirk. A huge wall of black smoke rose in front of us, a filthy cloak that turned day into night. Then a shaft of sunlight cut a slit through the clouds, hitting the sea like a searchlight. In the sea there were boats and big ships and wrecks sticking out of the waves like jawbones. Near the beach the water was flecked with the floating wreckage of ships and men, the beach studded with those who were waiting for escape. It was a Bible scene, if ever I saw one. Like the Israelites at the Red Sea with Pharaoh at their back, waiting for some kind of deliverance.

15 We patrolled the coast, but though we saw plenty of action going on on the ground, we saw no sign whatsoever of the Luftwaffe, though we could see evidence of their handiwork all around. We were at the limits of our range here and we got the order to return to base before we ran out of fuel.

20 I have to say I felt relieved. Good, I thought, it's over and not a scratch. I banged the inside of the cockpit and grinned. I'd heard of chaps in France who only went up the one time and got blasted; bang, end of story. Not me, though.

25 Then a Messerschmitt shot straight past in front of me, blasting away at the Spit to my starboard. Then there was another, and another. I looked wildly around me. The radio was full of shouting and swearing. 'Behind you!' someone shouted. Behind who?

Behind who?

Me109s were coming down on us from all over the place, dropping out of the clouds above us. I found myself ducking, ridiculously, inside my cockpit, twitching nervously as if I was being buzzed by hornets.

30 A sixth sense told me there was one on my tail and I lurched wildly to avoid it, almost crashing into another Spit as I did so. I decided to loop back and try and get some kind of view of what the heck was going on.

The sea and sky spun round together like a kaleidoscope until I righted myself. I tried to get my bearings but I couldn't see a thing. I heard someone screaming. Screaming and screaming in my headphones.

35 I looked about, craning my neck. Nothing. Then I saw it: an Me109 coming straight at me from above. I rolled away as it blasted at me. A Spit shot by, coughing smoke, with flames in the cockpit. A German aircraft following behind, blasting like fury. I fired at him but missed by miles. Debris was flying past, clipping my wing.

40 They were all around me but never in my gun sight. I could feel myself almost crying with the frustration of it. It just felt like sooner or later I was going to get hit and go down. They were better than me. It was as simple as that. The Spitfire might have been the better plane, but not with me in the cockpit.

I swung round and suddenly a Messerschmitt shot across in front of me. I fired off a quick squirt and caught the tail fin. Then there was nothing to fire at. As fast as the  
45 Germans had come they were gone, and we were left to limp back to base.

1. '*It got me every time. Every single time.*' (line 3)  
What do you think the pilot is referring to here? (1)
2. There is a clear difference in the landscapes and skies either side of the Channel.  
How has the author used descriptive language to highlight this contrast?  
Refer closely to the passage in your answer. (4)
3. Why does the sixth paragraph (lines 22–25) come as such a surprise to the reader? (2)
4. What do you think is meant by the term '*sixth sense*' in line 29? (2)
5. Describe, using your own words, the scene on the beaches at Dunkirk. (3)
6. '*... though we could see evidence of their handiwork all around.*' (lines 16–17)  
What is the author referring to here? (2)
7. The author uses repetition often in the passage.  
Give one example and describe its effect. (2)
8. In the second paragraph a long, complex sentence is used to describe the beginning of the pilot's journey. Later in the passage short sentences and phrases are used.  
How does this change in style affect the tone of the passage?  
What do you think the author was hoping to achieve? (4)
9. What impressions do you get of the pilot's character from the whole passage?  
Use evidence from the text to illustrate your opinions. (5)

[Total marks 25]