

TASK 2

You are going to read an article about a place called *the anechoic chamber*. Read the text and the statements carefully.

I'VE BEEN TO THE QUIETEST PLACE ON EARTH by George Foy

The anechoic chamber, Orfield Laboratories, Minneapolis

The quieter the room, the more things you hear. You'll hear your heart beating, sometimes you can hear your lungs, hear your stomach gurgling loudly. In the anechoic chamber, you become the sound.

My search started when I was in the New York subway. My children, were whining, four trains came screaming into the station at once and I put my hands over my ears and cowered — the noise was deafening.

In cities, the ever-present dull roar of planes, cars, machinery and voices is a fact of life. There is no escape from it and I was beginning to be driven mad by it. I needed to find a place where I could recapture a sense of peace. The quieter this place was the more relaxing it would be. I decided to go on a mission to discover whether absolute silence exists. I travelled to a monastery, and a mine 2 km underground — both very quiet but not the quietest place on earth. The one place I was most excited about visiting was the anechoic chamber at Orfield Laboratories in Minnesota.

This is a small room, insulated with layers of concrete and steel to block out exterior sources of noise, and internally lined with buffers that absorb all sound. Even the floor is a suspended mesh to stop any sound of footfalls. If a soft whisper is measured at 20 decibels, the anechoic chamber is one sixteenth of that. The anechoic chamber is considerably quieter than any other place on earth. Ironically, far from being peaceful, most people find its perfect quiet upsetting. Being deprived of the usual reassuring ambient sounds can create fear or it explains why sensory deprivation is a form of torture. Astronauts do part of their training in anechoic chambers at NASA, so they can learn to cope with the silence of space.

The presence of sound means things are working; it's business as usual — when sound is absent, that signals malfunction. I had heard being in an anechoic chamber for longer than 15 minutes can cause extreme symptoms, from claustrophobia and nausea to panic attacks and aural hallucinations — you literally start hearing things. A violinist tried it and hammered on the door after a few seconds, demanding to be let out because he was so disturbed by the silence.

I booked a 45-minute session — no one had managed to stay in for that long before. I felt apprehensive for two reasons: would I go mad and tear off my clothes? Or would I simply be disappointed it wasn't as enjoyable as I'd hoped?

When the heavy door shut behind me, I was plunged into darkness (lights can make a noise). For the first few seconds, being in such a quiet place felt utterly peaceful, soothing for my jangled nerves. I strained to hear something and heard ... nothing.

Then, after a minute or two, I became aware of my own breathing. The sound became more and more noticeable, so I held my breath. The dull thump of my heartbeat became apparent — nothing I could do about that. As the minutes ticked by, I started to hear the blood rushing in my veins. Your ears become more sensitive as the place gets quieter, and mine were going overtime. I frowned and heard my scalp moving over my skull, which was eerie, and a strange, metallic scraping noise I couldn't explain. Was I hallucinating? The feeling of peace was spoiled by a little disappointment — this place wasn't quiet at all. You'd have to be dead for absolute silence.

Then I stopped being obsessed with my body and began to enjoy it. I didn't feel afraid and came out only because my time was up; I would happily have stayed longer in there. Everyone was impressed that I'd beaten the record, but having spent so long searching for quiet, I was comfortable with the feeling of absolute stillness. Afterwards I felt wonderfully rested and calm. The experience was nowhere near as disturbing as I had been led to believe.

My desire for silence changed my life. I found that making space for moments of quiet in my

day is the key to happiness — they give you a chance to think about what you want in life. How can you really focus on what's important if you're distracted by constant background noise? if you can occasionally become master of your own sound environment — from turning off the TV to moving to the country, as I did — you become infinitely more accepting of the noises of everyday life.

Decide whether statements 1-8 are TRUE or FALSE and mark the correct option (X) on the answer sheet. You must also write the FIRST FOUR WORDS of the sentence which justifies your answer on the answer sheet, as in example 0.

Only answers in which both the TRUE/FALSE and the FIRST FOUR WORDS of the sentence which justifies your choice are correct will be considered valid.

Answers must be based exclusively on the information in the text.

ITEM NO	STATEMENT	T	F	First four words
0.	In the anechoic chamber you can hear your body organs.	X		You'll hear your heart
1.	The author thought he was starting to go insane because of city noises.			
2.	The anechoic chamber is the quietest place in the world.			
3.	Lack of background noise usually makes people feel peaceful.			
4.	The author says no sound means things are working fine.			
5.	The author felt uncomfortable in the anechoic chamber at the very beginning.			
6.	The author stayed in the chamber longer than anybody had ever been.			
7.	After leaving the anechoic chamber, the author thought it had been more difficult than he had expected.			
8.	The author thinks that accepting noise is what makes him happy.			

You can also find this text in Empower C1 p. 21. It was originally published in The Guardian:
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/may/18/experience-quietest-place-on-earth>