

READING AND USE OF ENGLISH

Part 6

You are going to read four extracts from articles by book reviewers about autobiographies. For questions 37–40, choose from the reviews A–D. The reviews may be chosen more than once.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

Reviewing Autobiographies

Four book reviewers discuss their thoughts and approaches to reviewing autobiographies.

- A** It is very common for reviewers to look down on autobiographies as a literary form, perhaps because so many we review are by people enjoying what will be very brief fame. Many are hastily thrown together and the style, even if the subject has been assisted by a ghost writer, often leaves a lot to be desired. But my view is that this matters much less than other features, such as whether the story told is a genuinely interesting one, particularly the part dealing with the subject's rise to fame or prominence and exactly how that came about. The entertainment factor is of the utmost importance, and that is what explains the high sales of certain autobiographies, regardless of how well-written they are.
- B** I tend to judge these books on how well they cover the early days, before the subject became the person they are known as. The whole thing stands or falls on that for me. That is where you learn the true nature of the person ... that's the really interesting part. I'm also interested in the style. It has to be readable, it has to engage the reader, and quite a few are too poorly written for that. When you look at the success of some of these books, it's not hard to see the appeal, whatever criticisms I may have. They hold a fascination for the reading public, particularly the celebrity ones, and to be fair, some of those are surprisingly well written. When that's the case, we reviewers are happy to acknowledge that in our reviews.
- C** When someone buys a celebrity autobiography, I am almost certain they are not expecting a work comparable to that of the literary greats. Autobiographies probably only achieve such high sales because of massive publicity campaigns. Therefore it is important to recognise them for what they are: a guilty pleasure. That said, I have read one or two that were absolutely appalling and should never have seen the light of day. This wasn't completely due to a lack of skill, rather the stars in question went on and on about their pre-fame struggles – frankly I couldn't care less. I have never really bought into the idolisation of celebrity and what an inspiration they can be. Surely all people (myself included) want is a bit of Hollywood gossip.
- D** It's easy for critics to sneer at celebrity autobiographies, dismissing them as poorly written by here-today, gone-tomorrow nobodies. But that strikes me as unfair. Why should these books attract such disapproval while an unreadable, so-called literary novel that hardly anyone will buy or read is so highly valued? People buy celebrity autobiographies in large numbers because they provide a bit of harmless escapism from daily life. And it's inspiring to read about the success of someone whose early life might well have been every bit as ordinary as your own. Who cares if these books have poor style? They serve their purpose, and there's too much snobbery from critics when it comes to reviewing them and pointing out their stylistic flaws.

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Which reviewer

differs from the others in their view about the early life of the author of an autobiography?

37

agrees with reviewer D about writing style in an autobiography?

38

takes a different view from the others on the reason for the success of best-selling autobiographies?

39

shares reviewer A's opinion regarding the attitude of reviewers towards celebrity autobiographies?

40