

RENMIN Pre-sessional: Reading 2 (Nature 1) - KEY

The natural environment

(1) The natural environment encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally. The term is most often applied to the Earth or some part of Earth. This environment encompasses the interaction of all living species, climate, weather, and natural resources that affect human survival and economic activity.

(2) In contrast to the natural environment is the built environment. In such areas where man has fundamentally transformed landscapes such as urban settings and agricultural land conversion, the natural environment is greatly modified into a simplified human environment. Even acts which seem less extreme, such as building a mud hut or a photovoltaic system in the desert, modify the natural environment into an artificial one. Though many animals build things to provide a better environment for themselves, they are not human, hence beaver dams and the works of Mound-building termites are thought of as natural.

(3) People seldom find absolutely natural environments on Earth, and naturalness usually varies in a continuum, from 100% natural in one extreme to 0% natural in the other. More precisely, we can consider the different aspects or components of an environment, and see that their degree of naturalness is not uniform. If, for instance, in an agricultural field, the mineralogic composition and the structure of its soil are similar to those of an undisturbed forest soil, but the structure is quite different.

(4) The atmosphere of the Earth serves as a key factor in sustaining the planetary ecosystem. The thin layer of gases that envelops the Earth is held in place by the planet's gravity. Dry air consists of 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, 1% argon and other inert gases, such as carbon dioxide. The remaining gases are often referred to as trace gases, among which are the greenhouse gases such as water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and ozone. Filtered air includes trace amounts of many other chemical compounds.

(5) Air also contains a variable amount of water vapour and suspensions of water droplets and ice crystals seen as clouds. Many natural substances may be present in tiny amounts in an unfiltered air sample, including dust, pollen and spores, sea spray, volcanic ash, and meteoroids. Various industrial pollutants also may be present, such as chlorine (elementary or in compounds), fluorine compounds, elemental mercury, and sulphur compounds such as sulphur dioxide [SO₂].

Reading Comprehension (KEY)

Decide which of the 5 statements below are True/False based on the above text:

6. The term *Natural environment* only applies to the surface of the Earth. (False)
7. Man-made environments are not considered natural. (True)
8. Naturalness varies from one extreme to another. (True)
9. Less than one fifth of dry air is oxygen. (False)
10. Chlorine compounds are natural substances. (False)