

Cambridge English Advanced. Practice Tests Plus 2

Practice Test 1

Reading Part 7

Learning to be an action hero

Alex Benady has a lesson in fitness from a film stuntman.

'Now see if you can touch your toes,' says Steve Truglia. As a former Army physical training instructor, he is used to dealing with less than sharp trainees. But how hard can that be? Fifteen seconds of blind confusion ensue before I finally locate my feet. The truth is I can't reach much past my knees and the effort of doing even that seems to be rupturing my kidneys.

41

These days, Steve is one of Britain's top stuntmen. You might have seen him in various well-known action movies. Although I have no real desire to enter rooms through the ceiling or drive into walls at high speed like him, I wouldn't mind looking a bit more like an action hero, so Steve is showing me exactly how he stays 'stunt fit'. 'It's a very particular, very extreme kind of fitness,' he explains, 'consisting of stamina, flexibility, strength and core stability, balance and coordination.'

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Right now, we are working on spatial awareness, a subset of coordination which he says is key to being a stuntman. 'It's easy to get disorientated when you are upside down. But if you have a high fall and you don't know exactly where your body is, you won't be able to land safely. If you are lucky, you'll just end up with some serious injuries.' From where I'm hanging, that sounds like a pretty positive outcome. Yet it had all started so well.

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He usually does this at the end of the session. 'On set, you can guarantee that if you have a big dangerous stunt, you won't do it until the end of the day, when you are completely

exhausted. So I design my training regime to reflect that.' At first, this part of the session consists of standard strength-building exercises: dips – pushing yourself up and down on the arms of a high chair, for triceps and chest; some bench presses, again for chest; lower back exercises; and curls to build up biceps. Then Steve introduces me to the chinning bar, which involves movements for building strength in your back and arms.

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We move on to balance and coordination, starting by walking along three-inch-wide bars. Not easy, but do-able. 'Now turn round,' says Steve. Not easy and not do-able. I fall off. Now he shows me how to jump on to the bar. Guess what? I can't do that either. Then he points to a two-inch-wide bar at about waist height.

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Now it's outside for some elementary falls. He shows me how to slap the ground when you land, to earth your kinetic energy. He throws me over his shoulder and I arc gracefully through the air, landing painlessly. But when it's my turn, I don't so much throw him as trip him up and he smashes into the ground at my feet, well short of the crash mat. Sorry, Steve.

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At least I'll never suffer from an anatomical anomaly – which is what happens when your thighs are so massive, the other parts of your anatomy look rather small by comparison.

A 'We'll just warm up first,' says Steve as we enter the Muscleworks Gym in East London. Five minutes on the recumbent cycle and I'm thinking this stunt lark is a piece of cake. Then we start some strength work, vital for hanging off helicopters, leaping off walls, etc.

B It's clear that I have some work to do before I am ready to amaze the world with my dripping physique and daredevil stunts. But I have taken one comforting piece of knowledge from my experience.

C Instead, we work on what he calls our 'cores'. 'All powerful movements originate from the centre of the body out, and never from the limbs alone,' he says. So we'll be building up the deep stabilising muscles in our trunks, the part of the body from the waist to the neck.

D He reckons anyone can get there with a couple of gym sessions and a couple of runs a week. 'The key is variety: do as many different types of exercise as possible. Even 20 minutes a day will do.'

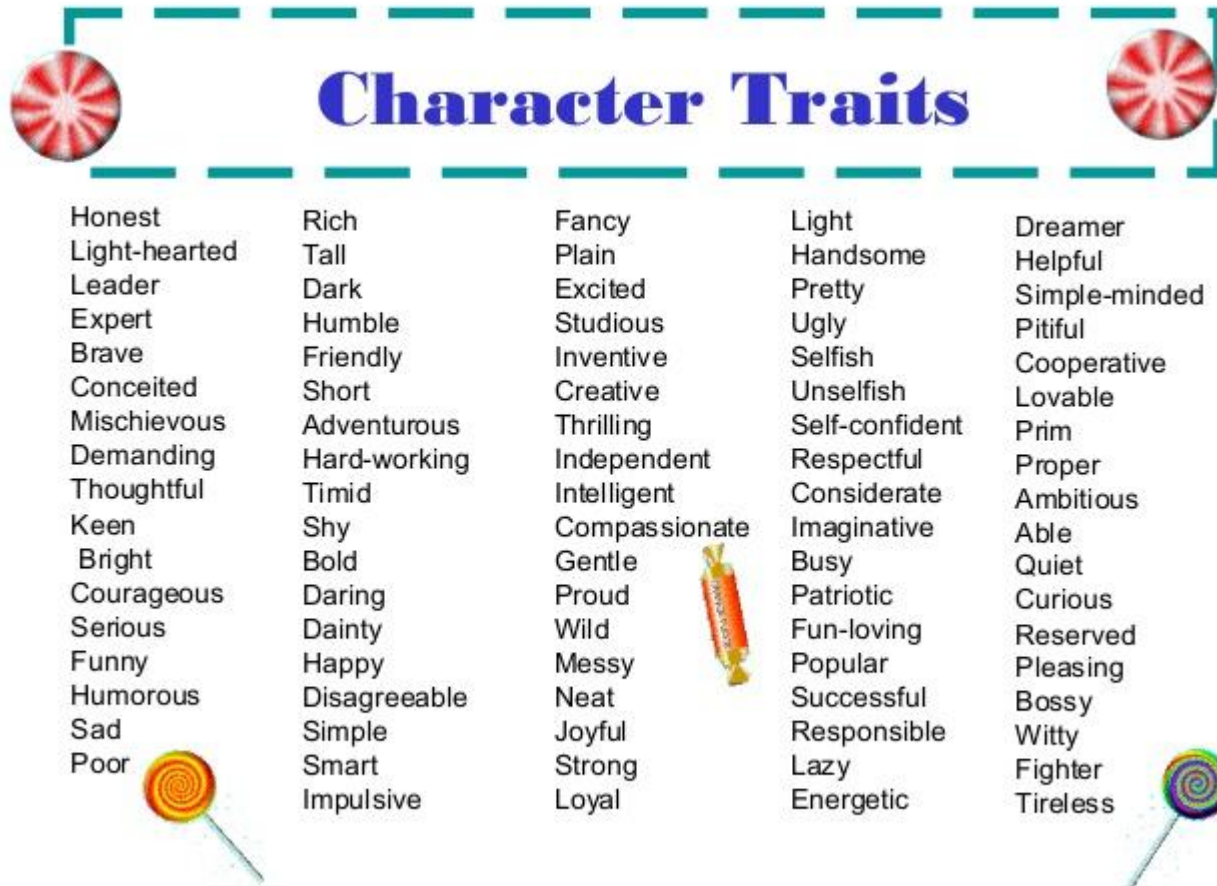
E Much to my surprise, I can actually do a few. Then he says innocently: 'Just raise your legs so they are at 90 degrees to your body.' Pain, pain, pain. 'Now open and close your legs in a scissor motion.' I manage to do that once.

F You may think that this sounds a bit feeble. But I was dangling upside down at the time, suspended from a bar by a pair of gravity boots.

G With feet firmly together, he leaps on, balances himself, leaps off, on, off. For good measure he circuits the gym, leaping from one to another, using his thighs to generate the power to leap and the power to stop himself from falling when he lands. Despite his heavy build, he has the feet of a ballerina.

Discussion

1. Do you tend to watching action films? Why?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a stuntman job?
3. Would you like to have a lesson in fitness from a film stuntman? Why?
4. What traits of character should a person have to become a stuntman?
5. Do you think that actors should do the tricks themselves



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to rupture
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to suspend
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subset
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a piece of cake
dip
bench press
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How can/should stuntmen prepare for such tricks?

Which is the most dangerous? Why?

Which is the most spectacular? Why?

Would you like to try any?



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Can you describe a day of a sharp trainee taking a fitness lesson from a stuntman (based on the text)? Use as many topical vocabulary as possible. Speak in turns.

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Why should stuntmen have these qualities?

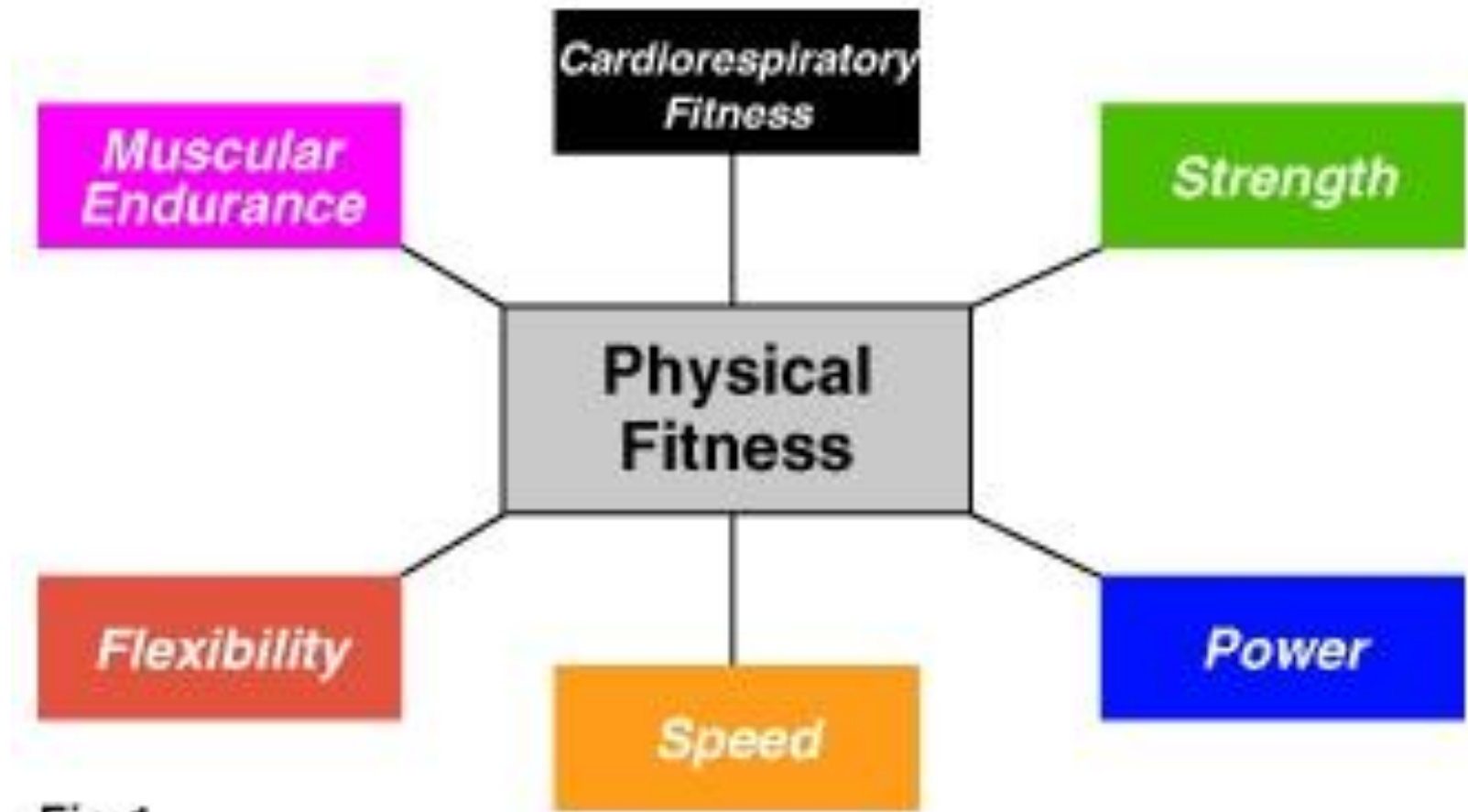


Fig 1

Which one is the most important?