



## **Sample Test Guide 2012**

Updated to reflect changes in **2013** to the listening section.

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## INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this sample test is to familiarize test takers with the three compulsory sections of the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB). These materials also give test takers the opportunity to test themselves to see whether their English is at the level required for these sections of the actual exam.

Some test takers take the MELAB before they have reached a level of proficiency suitable for their intended use of the test. We hope that these sample materials help test takers to better judge their preparedness for the exam. Test takers who intend to take the MELAB should use this guide to complete the sample test, mark it themselves, and see whether they feel their scores are sufficient for them to decide to register for an official

MELAB. It must be noted, however, that the scores received on the sample test do not guarantee that the same standards will be reached during an actual MELAB administration.

This guide includes instructions on how to take and score the sections of the sample test, as well as how to interpret the results.

## CONTENTS OF THE SAMPLE TEST

The following chart describes the format and content of the MELAB Sample Test:

| Section   | Time          | Description   |
|---|---------------|---|
| <b>Part 1: Writing</b>  | 30 minutes    | Test takers write an essay based on one of two topic choices.   |
| <b>Part 2: Listening</b>  | 35–40 minutes | <b>Part 1</b> (multiple choice)<br>A short recorded question or statement is accompanied by three printed responses. Test takers choose the statement that conveys a reasonable answer or response.   |
|   |               | <b>Part 2</b> (multiple choice)<br>A recorded conversation is accompanied by three printed statements. Test takers choose the statement that means about the same thing as what is heard.   |
|   |               | <b>Part 3</b> (multiple choice)<br>Four recorded interviews, such as those that might be heard on the radio, are each followed by recorded comprehension questions. The questions and answer choices are printed in the test booklet. Test takers choose the correct answer from the choices. |
| <b>Part 3:<br/>Grammar<br/>Cloze<br/>Vocabulary<br/>Reading</b> | 80 minutes    | <b>Grammar</b> (multiple choice)<br>An incomplete sentence is followed by a choice of four words or phrases to complete it. Only one choice is grammatically correct.   |
|   |               | <b>Cloze</b> (multiple choice)<br>Two passages with deletions are followed by choices of words and phrases to complete the text. Test takers must choose the word or phrase that best fills the blank in terms of grammar and meaning.  |
|   |               | <b>Vocabulary</b> (multiple choice)<br>An incomplete sentence is followed by a choice of four words or phrases to complete it. Test takers must choose the option that best completes the sentence in terms of meaning.   |
|   |               | <b>Reading</b> (multiple choice)<br>Four reading passages are followed by comprehension questions. Test takers choose the correct answer from the printed answer choices.   |

## HOW TO TAKE THE SAMPLE TEST

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It is important to take the MELAB Sample Test under proper test conditions. You should take it in a place with a table and chair that is quiet and free from distractions. Please allow at least 2 hours and 45 minutes of uninterrupted time. Please note that if you allow yourself longer than the time allocated for each section, you will not be able to use the score interpretations provided for the sample test.

Additionally, when you take the sample test you should follow these steps:

1. Gather all of the test materials:
  - a. The sample test paper for Part 1: Writing
  - b. The sample test booklet for Part 2: Listening and Part 3: Grammar, Cloze, Vocabulary, Reading (GCVR)
  - c. An answer sheet
  - d. A computer or other device on which to play the audio for the listening section (the audio file can be downloaded)
  - e. Pencils
  - f. A timing device such as a clock or stopwatch. It is important that you follow the time limits given for each section so that you get practice working under timed conditions.
2. Read the instructions for Part 1: Writing, including the two composition topics. When you have finished reading the instructions, circle the letter next to the topic you will write on and make a note of the time. You should allow yourself exactly 30 minutes to write a response on the topic you have selected. Do not use a dictionary or any other aid as you write. Stop writing after 30 minutes. Do not make any further changes to your composition. Continue immediately to Part 2: Listening.
3. Turn to the listening section instructions on page 1 of the test booklet and have the answer sheet at hand. Start the listening section audio recording. Once you start the listening section audio recording, do not pause it or stop it. By using the time permitted on the recording, you will get practice listening and responding in the set amount of time.
4. Mark your answers directly on the separate answer sheet, not in the test booklet. The audio includes a pause after each question so that you can mark your answer on the answer sheet. There is no additional time allowed later to transfer answers you may have written in the test booklet. Once the

audio recording has finished, do not replay it or change your answers. Either move on to the GCVR section immediately, or if you wish, you may take a 5-minute break.

5. Turn to the grammar, cloze, vocabulary, reading (GCVR) section instructions on page 11 of the sample test booklet. You will have 80 minutes for this section of the test. When you have finished reading the instructions, note the time you are starting this section and the time you must stop working on it. Then, turn to page 13 of the sample test booklet, and begin answering the questions. Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.
6. Stop writing after 80 minutes. Do not change any of your answers after the 80 minutes of test time is over.

## SCORING THE SAMPLE TEST

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### PART 1: WRITING

MELAB compositions are graded on how clearly and effectively ideas are communicated as well as on the range and accuracy of vocabulary and grammatical structures used. For the official MELAB, each composition is rated independently by at least two trained raters using the ten-level MELAB composition rating scale (available in the MELAB section of the CaMLA website). Raters' scores are averaged for the final composition score, making midpoint scores possible. Possible MELAB Part 1 scores are:

|    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|
| 97 | 87 | 77 | 67 | 57 |
| 95 | 85 | 75 | 65 | 55 |
| 93 | 83 | 73 | 63 | 53 |
| 90 | 80 | 70 | 60 |    |

If a composition does not address one of the two assigned topics, it will receive a mark of N.O.T. (not on topic), and no final MELAB score can be calculated.

To rate your composition, first read the descriptions of each of the ten levels of the MELAB composition rating scale (available online). Then read your composition carefully, comparing it to the descriptions. It may also be helpful to ask someone else, such as a teacher, to evaluate your composition. Award yourself the numeric score corresponding to the description that most closely fits your writing.

Read the **Interpreting Your Sample Test Scores** section of this guide for an explanation of how your sample composition score may be interpreted.

## PART 2: LISTENING AND PART 3: GCVR

When you have finished taking the sample listening and GCVR sections, you should have a completed answer sheet with one answer per question. Please follow these steps to score your responses.

1. Compare your answers with the answer key. If your answer matches the answer key, then award yourself one point. Please note that if you have marked more than one answer to a single question, you do not earn a point.
2. Add up all of your correct answers in the listening section. This is your listening section raw score.
3. Add up all of your correct answers in the GCVR section. This is your GCVR section raw score.
4. Read the **Interpreting Your Sample Test Scores** section of this guide for an explanation of how your raw score on these sample MELAB sections may be interpreted in terms of MELAB scaled scores, which are the official MELAB scores.

## INTERPRETING YOUR SAMPLE TEST SCORES

In this section you will find information helpful in understanding how your performance on this practice test is related to how you might perform on an official MELAB.

Your performance on an official MELAB will be reported in two ways: part scores and a final MELAB score. Institutions to which you submit your scores are advised to look both at the final score and the part scores. Some institutions will require a minimum score for each part of the MELAB; others will make decisions based only on the final score. The following sections in this guide provide information helpful in understanding what part scores you might expect to receive as well as what your final MELAB score might be.

### PART 1: WRITING

When you take an official MELAB, your part score for writing is the average of the scores awarded by two or more raters trained to apply the MELAB composition rating scale. If you strictly followed the administration procedures for the sample MELAB writing test and applied the MELAB composition rating scale appropriately, the score you awarded yourself will give you an approximation of the Part 1: Writing score you might achieve on an official MELAB. However, it is possible that CaMLA-trained evaluators might assign a different score to your writing than you did.

## PART 2: LISTENING AND PART 3: GCVR

When the MELAB is taken under examination conditions, the scores for Part 2: Listening and Part 3: GCVR are scaled scores, not simply the number of questions you answered correctly. These multiple-choice sections of MELAB are scored by computer using Item Response Theory (IRT) to arrive at scaled scores. This method ensures that the language ability required to receive a scaled score remains the same for all MELAB forms and that scores are comparable. IRT-based scaled scores are not the same as number-right scores or percentage scores, but there is a very high correlation between the number of correct answers (raw score) and the IRT-based scaled score.

In order to interpret your scores on the MELAB Sample Test, use the tables below.

### MELAB Part 2: Listening

| <b>Raw Score</b><br><i>(number of questions correct)</i> | <b>Part 2 Scaled Score</b> |
|--|----------------------------|
| 48–60  | Above 85                   |
| 43–47  | 81–85                      |
| 38–42  | 76–80                      |
| 33–37  | 71–75                      |
| 28–32  | 65–70                      |
| 0–27   | Below 65                   |

### MELAB Part 3: Grammar, Cloze, Vocabulary, Reading (GCVR)

| <b>Raw Score</b><br><i>(number of questions correct)</i> | <b>Part 3 Scaled Score</b> |
|--|----------------------------|
| 82–110   | Above 85                   |
| 72–81  | 81–85                      |
| 64–71  | 76–80                      |
| 57–63  | 71–75                      |
| 48–56  | 65–70                      |
| 0–47   | Below 65                   |

### MELAB FINAL SCORE

The MELAB Final Score is the average of the composition score and the listening scaled score and the GCVR scaled score. For example, if your score on Part 1 is 73, your scaled score on Part 2 is 78, and your scaled score on Part 3 is 75, your MELAB Final Score is 75.

**IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTE**

Your score on the sample MELAB composition and your scaled scores for the MELAB sample listening and sample GCVR sections should give you some idea of whether your writing, listening and reading skills are strong enough for you to register for an official MELAB. If you did well enough in one part but not in another, you may wish to focus your study in the weaker area before you take the MELAB.

Each section of this sample test is designed to be similar in difficulty to the corresponding section of an official MELAB and to give you a reasonable idea of what scores you can expect to receive. However, there is no guarantee that your scores on the sample test will be the same as the scores you receive when you take the MELAB.

## APPENDIX: LISTENING SECTION AUDIO SCRIPT

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### Michigan English Language Assessment Battery

#### Sample Test

#### Listening Section Instructions

In this section of the test, you will demonstrate how well you understand spoken English. There are three parts in this section with specific instructions for each part.

Mark all your answers on the separate answer sheet. Do not make any additional marks on the answer sheet. If you change your mind about an answer, erase your first answer completely. If you do not know the answer, you may guess. Try to answer as many questions as possible.

#### Part 1

In this part, you will hear questions and statements. After each question or statement, choose the best response and mark your answer on the separate answer sheet. You should mark A, B, or C.

For example, listen to the question and choose one of the answers below:

#### Example

M: When are you going on vacation?

The correct answer is “b. tomorrow,” because the speaker asked:

M: When are you going on vacation?

There are 18 items in Part 1. The questions and statements will not be repeated. Please listen carefully.

Turn to the next page.

1. F: How’s that paper you’ve been working on coming along?
2. M: Are we going to discuss the problem of class size at the meeting?
3. M: Wouldn’t you agree that Sarah is our most promising student?
4. M: How much effort do you think Susan actually put into her presentation?
5. M: It seems like they’ve been renovating that building forever.
6. M: Come on, let’s get the show on the road.
7. M: How much time had you spent on this report when Mary said we didn’t need it anymore?
8. F: Do you suppose John’ll mind if I don’t show up at today’s meeting?
9. F: Were they kidding when they suggested we spend the summer with them in California?
10. M: Why don’t you make yourself at home?
11. F: How often do you update that software on your computer?
12. M: Have you been stationed in London for long?
13. F: Shouldn’t you talk to the professor about the topic before starting any research?
14. M: Do you think it’s fair to raise our prices by 10 percent?
15. M: What happened to the report that you and John were working on?
16. F: I’ve been working on this program since ten o’clock and it’s still not coming out right.
17. F: Have you been able to keep up with your assignments this semester?
18. F: Hey, where do you think you’re going with that pie?



## Part 2

In this part, you will hear short conversations between two people. After each conversation, choose the answer which is true based on the conversation and mark your answer on the separate answer sheet. You should mark A, B, or C.

For example, listen to the conversation:

### Example

M: Let's go to the football game.

F: Yeah, that's a good idea. I don't wanna stay home.

The correct answer is "c. They'll go to a game," because the speakers said:

M: Let's go to the football game.

F: Yeah, that's a good idea. I don't wanna stay home.

There are 22 items in Part 2. The conversations will not be repeated. Please listen carefully.

Turn to the next page.

19. F: Hey, Joe. Did you get the report done in time for your meeting this morning?  
M: Right under the wire!  
F: Good for you.
20. M: We need to remind the staff to shut off the lights when they leave. I was the first one in this morning and all the lights were on.  
F: That's such a waste of money—and energy. I'll remind everyone at the staff meeting this morning.
21. M: Hello. I'd like to change 300 euros into dollars, please.  
F: OK. What denominations would you like?  
M: It doesn't really matter. Nothing too big though.
22. M: Excuse me, is this the line to buy tickets for the musical?  
F: No, we've all got tickets already, and we're waiting for the doors to open. You may be out of luck.
23. M: Who's gonna fill in for Marilyn while she's on vacation?  
F: I think Todd will. His projects are in a slow period right now.
24. F: Is it okay to leave those candles burning while we're out for dinner?  
M: Oh, you're right. Wait here a second and I'll put them out.
25. F: I think our research supervisor was really surprised by your comments.  
M: I know. I actually wish that I could take them back.  
F: Why? He's always said he appreciates openness and honesty.
26. M: Good afternoon. Granite Creek Water Company. How may I help you?  
F: I was wondering about this month's bill. I think I might've been overcharged.  
M: One moment while I connect you with billing.
27. M: I can't believe Ben's still at work—does he ever go home?  
F: I think he probably keeps a sleeping bag in his office.
28. F: Are your PowerPoint slides going to be ready in time, Peter?  
M: I don't know, Susan. I'm really bad with graphics.  
F: Ask Jean for help. I've seen her work wonders.
29. F: I hear Jane dropped out of the softball league.  
M: Yeah. She said she can't do it and keep up with all her lab work.
30. F: Excuse me professor. Do you have a moment?  
M: Sure, what is it?  
F: Well, I'm a little concerned about my grade, especially after that last paper.  
M: Oh, don't worry. You'll have plenty of time to make up for it.

31. F: Would you mind signing for this delivery?  
M: Where is it from?  
F: Central Office Supplies. I have that copy paper you guys ordered.  
M: Hold on a sec. Let me find the manager.
32. F: How's the math tutoring business going?  
M: Could be better . . . but I'm trying to stay positive.
33. M: Not having enough money is killing me. I'd love to get a part-time job this semester.  
F: Then why don't you? There are lots of places that are hiring.  
M: I know, but fitting a job in with a full course load might be really difficult.
34. F: This week's study group meeting can be at eight on Tuesday night or at noon on Wednesday. What do you think?  
M: It's all the same to me. Did you talk to anyone else yet?  
F: Just Mary. She prefers to meet during the day.
35. M: Hey, how do you like that book? It's on the reading list for one of my classes.  
F: Well, if it's not a requirement, I'd skip it.  
M: Unfortunately, it is. Now you've really given me something to look forward to.
36. M: Everybody looks so nice today. Is the chairman stopping by for a visit or something?  
F: We're taking our annual office photo today. We're supposed to meet in the cafeteria right before lunch.  
M: Oh, right. I forgot all about that.
37. F: Are you looking for something, Mark?  
M: Yeah, getting the university to put up enough bike racks is like pulling teeth.  
F: You know, you'd think they'd have gotten the idea by now.
38. F: Will you be teaching any classes this semester, Professor Williams?  
M: I was going to offer a couple of advanced seminars, but an opportunity came up for me to do some fieldwork in Costa Rica, so I'll be focusing on data collection this term.
39. F: Brian, I heard you left accounting.  
M: Right. I got a promotion in March and now I'm the financial manager in the marketing department.  
F: And how's that going?  
M: Not bad, just a lot harder than I expected.
40. F: I thought everyone in your office would be at the big convention this week.  
M: We had planned to, but with this last-minute project from Mr. Michaels, several of us really can't afford the time away.

### Part 3

In this part, you will hear four radio interviews. After each interview, you will be asked some questions about it. You should choose the best answer to each question from the choices printed in the test booklet and mark your answers on the separate answer sheet. You should mark A, B, or C.

There are 20 questions in Part 3. The interviews and questions will not be repeated. If you want to, you may take notes in your booklet as you listen. Please listen carefully.

Turn to the next page.

Now you will hear the first interview.

F1: In the United States, the disastrous collapse of a bridge in the state of Minnesota has raised many questions for engineers and the public alike. An apparently stable structure collapsed unexpectedly. What went wrong? What can be done to prevent something like this from happening again? Mary Jones reports.

F2: In the United States, buildings, bridges, and airplanes are all inspected regularly to check for wear and structural damage. But despite these inspections, failures can occur, such as with the bridge that collapsed in Minnesota. So how can structural inspections be improved? Engineering professor Robert Jacobson has developed a new technology that may help to answer that question.

M1: It's important to understand that currently, inspectors have to rely on what they can physically see to determine if there are weak points in a structure. If something draws their attention, they can request more testing. But potential problems, such as rusting or cracks in the materials, can remain hidden because they may be extremely small—and they may not occur in a part of the bridge that inspectors can easily see. So we've developed a new technology. It's a sort of "sensing skin" that can be applied to the surface of a structure to help inspectors track corrosion and damage from cracks.

F2: This new "skin" is created from several extremely thin layers of plastic. The whole thing is less than a millimeter thick. Each layer of the sensing skin has networks of tiny sensors in it. And each layer of the material measures something different. For example, one layer might measure levels of different pollutants and chemicals, while another might measure changes in temperature or humidity.

M1: Inspectors gather information from the skin by sending an electrical current through it. The sensors in each layer then transmit signals to a computer. These signals create a two-dimensional visual map showing where corrosion or rust is occurring, or where cracks are developing. These things are usually too small for the human eye to detect. Because an electronic sensing skin can send signals by itself, inspectors don't have to be near the bridge or the building they are inspecting—they can do their work remotely.

Use of sensors to check for damage isn't totally new—they have been used before, but in a limited way, only to detect damage at isolated points in a structure. The advantage of this new skin technology is that it gives a more complete picture of a large area, and a direct insight into the composition of building materials, like steel and concrete.

F2: Professor Jacobson believes this new technology might also be useful in space exploration. By using a sensing skin on a space shuttle, spacewalks—the risky act of leaving the shuttle to inspect for damage—might no longer be needed so often. In the meantime, this technology hopefully will have an immediate impact on the construction of bridges and buildings right here on earth.

41. Why do the reporters mention a bridge in Minnesota?
42. What is one disadvantage of the inspection method used most commonly today?
43. Why does the sensing skin contain many layers?
44. What does the sensing skin do?
45. How is human inspection different from sensing-skin inspection?

Now you will hear the second interview.

M1: Being relaxed and being a world-class athlete are two ideas that do not go hand-in-hand for most people. When many of us think about world-class swimmers or marathoners, we think of intensity and the determination needed to push one's body to its limit. We don't think about relaxation. However, according to one doctor, relaxation actually plays a bigger role in the ability to perform well than we might think.

F1: When exercise researcher and physical trainer Dr. Robert Simmons recently observed Martha Gordon swim her way to a gold medal, the thing that struck him most about the athlete was how relaxed she appeared, both before and during the race. Her movement, her body language, even her facial expression, all indicated a person who was relaxed. And according to Dr. Simmons, that's one of the reasons why she won.

M1: Relaxation is one of the keys to top athletic performances. When you're not relaxed, your body slows down; it acts less efficiently. This is because body tension causes muscles to tighten up—and it takes more effort to move tight muscles in the ways you need them—so that you can run fast, jump high, or kick a ball straight. A tense swimmer, for example, will actually take more strokes to get across a pool than a relaxed one. She just isn't moving as efficiently. This kind of physical tension is something that usually develops at a young age. When I observe elementary school kids running, their heads are often thrown back stiffly, their fists are tight—they think the harder or more rigidly they hold their body, the faster they run. So the first thing I have to teach the athletes I work with is that relaxation does not mean slowing down. It means moving your body in a way that allows it to do its best.

F1: So how do you get athletes to change their behavior? What sort of methods do you teach to make relaxation come more naturally when they're competing?

M1: Oh, there's a whole range of activities that can be used to increase one's ability to relax. But we need different approaches for different people—it depends a lot on their mindset, or their character. Some people tend to internalize stress more than others. For people like that, I encourage them to pay attention to how they hold their bodies—to make sure that their arms are loose while running—and to do this continually throughout a run. I also teach some mental exercises, such as asking them to remember their best-ever performance and to visualize that performance while running or swimming. In cases where athletes are a little bit more relaxed coming in, I might just teach them some breathing exercises to go along with their normal stretching and warming-up routines.

F1: Though Dr. Simmons spends most of his time working with professional athletes, his approach can be applied to all of us, no matter how serious—or unserious—we are about our exercise. If we can maintain a relaxed mindset before we line up for our next local five-kilometer run or neighborhood bicycle race, we might be surprised at how well we perform.

46. Why does the reporter mention Martha Gordon?
47. What does Dr. Simmons say about tension?
48. Why does Dr. Simmons talk about elementary school children?
49. Why does Dr. Simmons use different methods with different athletes?
50. What is the reporter's conclusion?

Now you will hear the third interview.

M1: Among the most powerful—and puzzling—forces of nature are tornadoes. Every year about eight hundred of these storms hit the United States, many of which occur in an area commonly called “tornado alley.” And it is to this area that hundreds of tornado chasers flock each year in their trucks equipped with weather radars and other sophisticated equipment. But why do scientists put so much effort into chasing tornadoes? Amanda Collins reports:

F1: Storm chases, or tornado-chasing projects, are serious scientific experiments conducted mainly during tornado season, from March through July each year. Because about 40 percent of the tornadoes occurring in the United States form in tornado alley—which includes parts of the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska—scientists often concentrate their efforts in that area. Professor John Adams from the University of Oklahoma has been involved in several of these chases. Professor Adams, what is the main goal of tornado chasing?

M2: Basically, our goal is to gather information about tornadoes, particularly about how they form. You see, the study of tornadoes is a relatively new field, and certain aspects of tornado formation are still a mystery. We now understand that warm air rising from the ground into the bottom of thunderstorm clouds combines with winds that change direction and speed. This is what initiates rotation, or, uh, that twisting motion we see in certain storm clouds in the sky. But exactly what causes some of these massive clouds to form wind tunnels that extend down all the way to the ground is still unclear.

The data we collect in storm chases is fed into computer programs that create simulations of how that last step in tornado formation might have come about. We hope that these models will eventually help us figure out which storm clouds will actually generate—or produce—tornadoes.

F1: Most tornado warnings in the United States rely on more than one hundred radar stations maintained by the National Weather Service. Now my question is, how does the information gathered during storm chases differ from that captured by these conventional weather radar stations?

M2: Well, because weather radar stations have fixed locations they have certain limitations. For instance, they lose focus over long distances and this affects their ability to capture storms forming far away from the station. Speed is also an issue. It takes a weather radar station five to six minutes to complete a 360-degree scan of the area surrounding it. During those precious minutes, dramatic changes can occur, and the radar will often miss the birth of a tornado while it’s completing its scanning cycle of that area.

In our chases—when we’re lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time—the weather radars mounted on our trucks are able to scan tornadoes at close range. Also, other equipment we carry can collect information that radar stations can’t capture, such as wind speed and pressure in the lower level of tornadoes, within the air tunnel that touches the ground.

F1: Warnings based on data from radar stations are currently issued around thirteen minutes before a tornado strikes. But with the efforts of tornado-chasing researchers like Professor Adams, it is our hope that forecasters will soon be able to give more advance warning of when tornadoes are coming, and also of how strong they will be.

51. What is the report mainly about?
52. Why does the report mention tornado alley?
53. What are tornado researchers still unable to explain?
54. Why does Professor Adams talk about storms forming far away from weather radar stations?
55. According to the report, how does tornado research hope to benefit people?

Now you will hear the fourth interview.

M1: When people think of shopping for food in Europe, they may conjure up images of elegant French cheese shops or colorful Italian farmers’ markets, but the reality can be quite different. Two German supermarket chains, Lidl and Aldi, are opening stores rapidly across Europe as a result of the rock-bottom prices that they offer. Susan Turner tells us more about these two “hard-discount” retailers.

F1: As the name suggests, hard-discount retailers want to offer heavily discounted goods. To keep prices as low as possible, you won’t find many famous brand names or staff to assist you. The stores won’t take credit cards, because that would cost them

too much and increase prices. And don't even think about someone packing your bags for you. Customers will find shopping carts and plastic bags for their groceries, but there is a charge for using either of those. I spoke with James Harrison, a business school professor, for further details of the two chains' success.

M1: Lidl and Aldi have expanded aggressively across Europe and their growth is driven by one factor: low prices. These hard-discount retailers stock a fraction of the goods that a normal supermarket offers. This means they buy a high volume of goods from fewer suppliers, resulting in massive cost advantages. They mainly sell private-label goods – so almost everything you can buy in the stores will come in Lidl or Aldi's own packaging. These private-label goods are more profitable than branded goods, where the brand owner takes a big percentage. Private-label goods are also more efficient. They can be stacked the same way and they all have the bar code in the same place, meaning less time at the register. The primary goal is to offer a limited selection of about 900 quality, basic-food items at the lowest possible price. In comparison, most supermarkets carry around 15,000 products.

F1: Both companies have recently recorded annual sales of over 60 billion dollars, so their strategies seem to be working. The big savings that they offer are winning over more and more customers, an increasing number of whom are high-income shoppers. This is great news for Lidl and Aldi, who had traditionally focused on poorer areas. So, Professor Harrison, are there any other secrets to the success of these retailers?

M1: These supermarkets cut costs wherever they can. Remember, they don't carry many products, so they tend to be much smaller than their competitors. This means they can save on construction costs, maintenance, electricity, and other such costs. Aldi is also ruthless when it comes to staffing. Each store has an average of only three full-time employees: a store manager and two assistants. Everybody helps to unload the stock, clean the store, and work on the register. This allows part-time staff to be kept to a minimum. The few full-timers are paid twice the industry average, but even so, Aldi's personnel costs are very low: they amount to only 3 percent of sales, while the figure is typically 9 percent at other supermarkets.

F1: So that's pretty much a perfect business model, all told. I'm still surprised that limiting customer choice hasn't harmed their bottom line. But the figures tell their own story.

56. What kind of goods are you unlikely to find at Lidl and Aldi stores?

57. What service do customers have to pay for at Lidl and Aldi stores?

58. Why did the reporter mention high-income shoppers?

59. According to Professor Harrison, why do Aldi store managers earn twice the industry average?

60. Why is the reporter surprised about Lidl and Aldi's business performance?

End of the listening test.