



Advanced (CAE)

Reading and Use of English

Test 2

Time

1 hour 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Read the instructions for each part of the paper carefully. Answer all the questions.

Read the instructions on the answer sheets.

Write your answers on the answer sheets. Use a pencil.

You **must** complete the answer sheets within the time limit.

There are 53 questions in this paper.

Questions **1 – 24** carry one mark.

Questions **25 – 30** carry up to two marks.

Questions **31 – 43** carry two marks.

Questions **44 – 53** carry one mark.

Part 1

For questions 1 – 8, read the text below and decide which answer (A, B, C or D) best fits each gap.
There is an example at the beginning (0).

Example

0 A adequately B merely C little D somewhat

0	A	B	C	D
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Desert Flowers

Cactuses are (0) emblematic of the brutal desert environments that we recognize from westerns, and indeed many other iconic works of the screen that are set in and around the (1) climes of the south-western United States. They have found their way onto salsa bottles, licence plates and even the Mexican national flag, and there is no doubting their wide appeal. But what is it about this humble plant that has inspired such affection across the world?

First and (2) among their loveable characteristics is their sheer variety. Breeds of cactus come in all shapes and sizes. Some are squat and round, others tall and skinny, more sprout flowers or (3) fruit. The one thing they can all be said to have in common, however, is their ability to thrive in some of the most (4) environments on earth. Indeed, some cactus breeds can live as long as 200 years and they have evolved over time to develop many ingenious ways to both collect and (5) water, allowing them to survive for up to two years without a drop of rain. Among such tricks is their use of spines which, besides helping to keep them safe from predators, are able to catch microscopic (6) of water from the wind.

Due to the many challenges presented by their environment, cactuses usually take a very long time to grow. The saguaro cactus, for example, can take up to ten years to grow a (7) inch and a half, making it the slowest growing plant on Earth.

Fascinating and bizarre in equal (8), cactuses have found a place in many hearts, coming to symbolise both the merciless brutality and the poetic beauty of the environments in which they can be found.

- | | | | | |
|---|---------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | A arid | B dry | C parched | D dusty |
| 2 | A utmost | B foremost | C uppermost | D topmost |
| 3 | A bloom | B grow | C give | D bear |
| 4 | A unforgiving | B unrelenting | C unmerciful | D unforgiveable |

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 5 A subserve | B preserve | C conserve | D reserve |
| 6 A remnants | B scraps | C traces | D morsels |
| 7 A mere | B slight | C bare | D sheer |
| 8 A length | B measure | C judgement | D value |

Part 2

For questions 9 – 16, read the text below and think of the word which best fits each gap. Use only one word in each gap. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Example: 0

W	A	S																	
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Dead Malls

The term *mall* (0)..... originally used to refer to a promenade or walkway but by the late 1960s had become widely used as a generic term for indoor shopping centres, the likes of (9) have become a feature of towns and cities across the world. Recent decades have seen a steep decline in the fortunes of such places, and many have gone the way of the so-called ‘dead mall’, falling victim to abandonment and neglect, and becoming something very distinct from the limitless paradise that they might once (10) been.

It is this decline – and the melancholy environments it produces – that has inspired a surprising number of authors, filmmakers and videogame producers. Perhaps the most iconic (11) these inspirations is that which moved George R Romero to set his seminal work “Dawn of the Dead” in a shopping mall. (12) the obvious comedic effect of having zombies pushing shopping trolleys about, there was also something distinctly unsettling about it too. At around the time of the 1978 original, Romero is said to (13) claimed that it was in part a comment on consumerism. There is no doubt that the sight of the mindless denizens shuffling around the aisles possesses a certain familiarity. It remains (14) to us what we wish to take away from such commentary.

In more recent times, the apocalyptic shopping mall has emerged (15) than a few times in the world of videogames. Perhaps the most memorable of these emergences is as part of the beloved 2013 game “The Last of Us”, where the protagonist Ellie must navigate (16) flesh-eating infected while contending with all manner of villains who plague the landscape. There are no shopping trolleys this time, but the melancholic tribute to a culture of consumerism remains much the same as that of Romero’s vision thirty-five years later.

Part 3

For questions 17 – 24, read the text below. Use the word given in capitals at the end of some of the lines to form a word that fits in the gap in the same line. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Example: 0

S	P	E	L	L	I	N	G								
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Doughnuts

Doughnuts – or donuts as the more simplified (0) has it – are a favourite sweet snack of millions around the world. The most common (17) are the ring doughnut and the filled doughnut, which is usually injected with fruit preserves. Other shapes include balls, twists and crushed or (18) spheres. Once fried, a doughnut might then be added to with a glaze of sugar, a chocolate spread or a cinnamon topping, to name but a few of the (19) possibilities available.

SPELL
VARY
FLAT
END

The history of the doughnut may date back as far as 1485, when a deep-fried doughball was (20) by Cato the Elder in his treatise “On Agriculture”. A recipe for ‘dow nuts’ was found in a book of domestic tips published in around 1800 but it seems that the traditional spelling did not come into use until a few years later, in a cookbook (21) “The Frugal Housewife”, in which ‘doughnuts’ are listed in an appendix.

FEATURE
TITLE

In modern times, they have come to be associated mainly with US fast food culture and the inherent (22) that this implies. But like any other guilty pleasure, the (23) doughnut is unlikely to have much of a detrimental impact on your health, and much as periods of (24) from the sweet and calorific is probably advisable, it would be a shame never to enjoy a snack that has delighted people the world over for centuries.

NEGATIVE
OCCASION
ABSTAIN

Part 4

For questions 25 – 30, complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between three and six words, including the word given. Here is an example (0).

Example:

0 James would only speak to the head of department alone.

ON

Jamesto the head of department alone.

The gap can be filled with the words 'insisted on speaking', so you write:

Example: 0

25 Charlie took charge of the department after Bob retired.

FOR

Charlie has _____ Bob's retirement.

26 I regret not preparing more carefully.

ONLY

If _____ care with the preparation.

27 People say he inspired his entire generation.

HAVE

He is _____ inspiration to his entire generation.

28 You really should consider changing your job.

GAVE

It's high _____ to changing your job.

29 Although he was wise, he could not understand the issue.

HIS

Despite _____ to understand the issue.

30 I discovered the broken window immediately upon my arrival.

HAD

No _____ I discovered the broken window.

Part 5

You are going to read an extract from an autobiography. For questions **31 – 36**, choose the answer (**A, B, C or D**) which you think fits best according to the text.

The White City

Before visiting Tel Aviv, I hadn't known what to expect and as such I had done my best to keep an open mind. Even so, nothing could have prepared me for how I felt upon leaving Ben-Gurion airport and stepping out into somewhat soulless surroundings that greeted me. Even the sun felt unwelcoming. I remember the force of it, close and angry, as if silently fuming at my presence. It wasn't long before I realized that my attempt at an open mind had always been a vain hope, that every sight, sound and smell was always going to be tainted with the tales I had been told about this famously brutalized region and that there really was no escaping the preconceptions I had formed over the years.

Reflecting on this uncomfortable truth, I set about trying to find a taxi. It had occurred to me that my much-vaunted adventurous spirit dictated that I should take up the gauntlet of public transport, but my courage failed me almost immediately and I decided that running the risk of getting lost at this early stage was simply asking for trouble. After a few moments of scanning my surroundings, I spotted a cluster of taxis, lined up against a rank at which a large family was struggling with a trolley full of suitcases. I ambled over towards them and suddenly found myself strangely terrified of having to deal with a driver that didn't speak my language. Such a predicament had never bothered me before; smiles and gestures will normally get you far enough in most cases. But there was something about where I found myself – and for where I was destined – that rendered me especially timid and anxious.

I needn't have worried. No sooner had I got within a few metres of the rank than a chirpy character hopped out of a taxi to greet me. Beaming warmly, he opened the boot of his car, warbling away in Hebrew in the manner of someone who knows he is not being understood but is more comfortable talking than not. Thankfully, it turned out that his English was not at all bad and once the warbling had subsided, he introduced himself as Yehuda. He nodded sagely when I handed him a piece of paper with my destination scrawled across it and within minutes we were on our way, cruising effortlessly out of the airport and onto the highway towards the pearl-coloured horizon of Israel's second city.

On my approach to the city, I was struck by the dominion of human engineering over what would otherwise be a parched and inhospitable landscape. Ropes of highway cut through chalky soil in all directions, carrying traffic through corridors of cultivated greenery that stood in the unrelenting sun, protected and nourished only by the ingenuity and dedication of the human hand. As the great glistening tower blocks of Tel Aviv grew ever closer, I began to feel bizarrely unsettled at the sight of such monuments to civilisation and technology. It was a feeling that endured within me for many months: the recognition of the effort and skill it took to keep such a city maintained. I began to feel deeply indebted. Many people I would never meet had toiled for years to build this place, and others would continue to do so day and night in order that I be adequately fed, watered and sheltered. It was a humbling thought.

My sense of humility gave way to a gentle sense of awe as we made our way along the boulevards and

promenades of Tel Aviv, with their proud pearl-coloured towers, bleached apartment buildings and crystalline skyscrapers. Soon, the aquamarine horizon of the Mediterranean yawned out to the west. The air smelled different here, soupy with the salty tang of sun-drenched sea water. I looked about me at the people, families walking dogs, young couples strolling, terraces buzzing with life. It felt so incongruous next to the images I had built up in my mind's eye of a blighted, war-weary land of struggle. But this disconnect changed for me at the sight of a little girl, trotting between her parents towards the beach, with a gigantic straw hat on her head and an equally huge beach ball held in her arms. It dawned on me that this was why I had come here, to take the war and the violence onto my own shoulders so children could play and young couples could stroll. That was how this nation worked. Some built the bridges, some farmed the crops, and everyone took their turn to stand on the wall. I suddenly felt very proud to be part of it all.

The taxi and its chatty driver left me at the door of what would be my home for the next few months, a rather austere cluster of blocks, huddled together within a walled square to form a house. Palm trees spilled their leaves about the low roof in explosive blooms and there was a sense that whoever lived within preferred to remain out of sight and far from the company of others. I rang the bell and a shape emerged through the fogged glass of door before a click and a creak heralded the sight of Lior, the gushing matriarch of the Shalev household, who would later become as valued a friend and confidante as any I had ever had. When I first set eyes on her, I was taken aback at her majestic beauty. Her silver hair and ice blue eyes gave her an almost magical quality. Brought to mind were the exquisite works of art in fantasy epics that I had studied as a in my boyhood and at the sight of the elfin, ageless Lior Shalev I began to wonder if I had found myself at last in my very own epic tale.

31 How did the writer feel upon arriving in the city?

- A He realised that he would be unable to rid himself of long-held prejudices.
- B He doubted that he would be able to enjoy his stay.
- C He was looking forward to having his beliefs changed.
- D He was concerned that the weather would affect his health.

32 What influenced his decision to take a taxi?

- A The place he was travelling to.
- B The lowered chances of a negative outcome.
- C The fact that other travellers had chosen to take a taxi too.
- D His lack of language skills.

33 What observation does the writer make about Yehuda, the taxi driver?

- A He is more cheerful than most taxi drivers he has met.
- B He has a very professional attitude.
- C He is indifferent to the fact that he is not being understood.
- D He is an expert driver.

34 How does the writer feel upon his approach to the city?

- A He is worried that he won't fit in.
- B He is surprised by the agricultural feel of his surroundings.
- C He is impressed by the skill of the engineering.
- D He feels gratitude for the efforts of others.

35 How does the writer react to the sight of the little girl with the beach ball?

- A He has a clearer understanding of his reason for being in the country.
- B He is surprised at how peaceful the country seems.
- C He feels guilty for making incorrect assumptions
- D He regrets his decision to come.

36 What is his first impression of Lior Shalev?

- A She seems to be someone who does not enjoy the company of others.
- B She reminds him of a family member.
- C She brings back fond childhood memories.
- D She looks like someone who can be trusted.

Part 6

You are going to read four writers expressing their views on social media. For questions 37 – 40, choose from the reviews A – D. The reviews may be chosen more than once.

A Click Away

Four writers give their views on social media.

A

An often-repeated question is whether art imitates life or if life imitates art. But these days perhaps a more pertinent question is if life imitates social media. While I wouldn't go that far, there's no denying its somewhat malign influence on how we see the world. An interesting effect of social media is to make us believe that what we are witnessing within those endless threads of memes and video clips is a fair reflection of reality itself. It isn't of course. I prefer to think of it more as a filter, built by us through our preferences and our settings, through which we look on at the virtual world. What shape that filter takes is up to us. Such filters may render our collective reality skewed and exaggerated – to the point where it can't be said to reflect reality at all – and this is sure to bode ill for what lies ahead. Whether you like it or not, thanks to the ever-evolving algorithms that dictate what content you see, what stares back at us from the screen is, in some way at least, a more accurate reflection of we are – and who we are likely to become - than we realise.

B

It had such promise, such potential, and yet here we are, wondering who opened Pandora's box and if there's any way we can close it back up again. We are only just beginning to understand the horrendous damage that social media causes and I have no doubt that the full horror of this phenomenon has yet to reveal itself. Research remains in its infancy, but it is already clear that regular use of social media platforms has grave consequences for mental health, most notably among adolescents, who are already going through the horrendous stresses and strains already traditionally associated with that life stage. Worse still is the effect on young children, and even babies. What does the future hold for an entire generation which has been brought up on instant news and cheap shocks? No longer will patience be a virtue and nor will good things come to those who wait. Perhaps most worrying of all, one person's 'truth' will be just as valid as the next person's and in a world where objective truth no longer exists how will we not lose sight of what is right and what is wrong?

C

Don't believe anything you read on the Internet! This seems to be reasonable advice until you give it some thought. I mean... why not? Sure, we all know that the Internet can be used to prove literally anything and as such is a bottomless source of deceit, dishonesty and embellishment, but in among all of that there has to be some truth, hasn't there? And as time goes by, we're beginning to question not only the mainstream legacy media itself – the estranged grandfather of online social media – but the very idea that any one source can be trusted at all. Who made the newspapers the arbiters of what constitutes news? Well, the newspapers did, of course. So nowadays we the people have a chance to find the truth if we care to. We're all well aware of how much deceit we'll have to get

through in order to find the truth but - mixed though it may be - social media is a blessing, opening our eyes to the world around us like never before, and promising to bring us the truth, which since the dawn of the printing press, has been held tightly in the hands of a privileged few.

D

When the subject of social media comes up, I am reminded of a birthday present I received as a child. It was a battery-powered robotic dinosaur that one was expected to build. I spent painful days trying to put it together myself but without help it proved impossible. Once my father had time to help me in its assembly, however, it took pride of place in my bedroom and I spent many happy hours watching it walk about my home, grinding and clicking as it went. But every night, as the light faded in the street outside, it would make me feel uncomfortable, casting a shadow across the wall that pervaded my nightmares for months. In the end, I gave it away and was not sad to see it go. I feel that social media is much the same: fascinating and complex but with a darkness within that will only become clear to us much later. There's no doubt that, just like my robot dinosaur, it is both fun and fascinating, but it seems to already be growing into something dark and sinister, just like those terrifying shadows that crept up my bedroom wall all those years ago.

Which writer...

agrees with B about that the negative consequences of social media are yet to be understood?

37	
----	--

has a different opinion to the others about how social media may contribute to a better future?

38	
----	--

agrees with A about how reality can be manipulated on social media?

39	
----	--

agrees with D about how social media can be both good and bad?

40	
----	--

Part 7

You are going to read an article. Six paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A – G** the one which fits each gap **(41 – 46)**. There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.

Behind Bars Beyond the Stars



It's not an original idea. From the first errant sailor to be abandoned on a desert island, leaders, nations and civilisations have sought to send their undesirables as far away as possible. In the seventeenth century, the British colony of Virginia saw the importation of some 20,000 unfortunates, most of whom would never see their homeland again.

41

After a journey of six months and one week which began on 13 May 1787, the first convict fleet to the distant shore arrived at Botany Bay on 17 January 1788, having travelled an unprecedented distance of around 15,000 miles. The early years of the penal colony saw horrific rates of disease and food shortages, but in time it would develop into a thriving colony in which free persons outnumbered convicts as early as the 1830s.

42

The idea has fascinated authors and filmmakers throughout modern times. Off world prisons have featured in Superman, in Star Trek and in a numberless array of dystopian sci-fi movies over the years. Who could forget the grim world of Fiorina 161, setting of an oft-maligned entry to the *Alien* movie franchise? A rag-tag crew of space convicts, expecting to live out their last years among the forgotten carcass of a once heavily populated prison colony, are paid a visit from the eponymous creature with predictably gruesome results.

43

But could such a place exist beyond the realms of our imagination? Putting aside the very real problem of space travel itself, the distances of which are so immense as to be unimaginable to most of us, the main obstacle to the establishment of off-world prisons is the immense expense of maintenance and supply. Let us imagine that we set out to build our penal colony on the nearest inhabitable planet to our own, currently accepted to be Proxima Centauri b. Proxima b is at a distance

44

from Earth of 4.22 light years.

It is tempting to say that nothing at all would merit such efforts, but the very same question would have been put to the architects of the Australian project in the eighteenth century. If we return to this same example for a moment, we may find the answer we're looking for.

England in the eighteenth century had a very serious problem with crime. There was no police force to speak of and urban populations were exploding.

45

With crime once again on the rise, present-day citizens may well be persuaded of a similar logic and be happy to pay for it too.

The problems don't stop there, of course. The aforementioned Proxima b is thought to be technically habitable but only at a subterranean level and may not even have an atmosphere. Even if an artificial environment could be constructed to shelter our convicts, on what would they subsist? Would they be dependent on supply from afar, only to rot away light years from Earth just to keep populations voting the way we would like them to? We're getting into the moral questions now, which would have been just as relevant in George III's time as they are today.

46

On the other hand, punishment could be meted out in all sorts of ways, both more affordably and with far less unnecessary cruelty. And if we believe rehabilitation to be at least part of our goal, what could possibly be the rehabilitative value in banishing someone light years away to a grim existence on an inhospitable planet, with little hope of seeing their loved ones ever again?

Perhaps fiction will one day become reality, but before it does, not only will we have to unlock some very tricky technological problems, but we will need to face up to enduring moral ones too.

A

Such was the anger towards criminal elements in those years that a thirst for justice had given way to a desire to be rid of such people for good. The logic went, if criminals could simply be removed to unimaginably distant places, with no possible chance of returning, surely life for the rest would be much improved.

B

The success of such an undertaking should not be underestimated. A contemporary correlation would be to send a large company of unwilling individuals to settle on the moon, and it is by way of such a comparison that we are logically brought around to the concept of the off world penal colony.

C

Perhaps more familiar to most than this sad story is the establishment of the eighteenth-century prison colony in Australia. In an attempt to rid herself of her burgeoning criminal population, Great Britain deported around 800 convicts, which included numerous children – who became more numerous along the way.

D

The concept of such a policy would no doubt have horrified many more liberal citizens, as it no doubt would today but if we are to punish wrongdoers while at the same time protecting the public, the notion of removal to far flung lands – or indeed worlds – might be more than just the stuff of science fiction. It might even be the answer we've been looking for.

E

Perhaps the most important of these is this: what are prisons for? Do they exist to remove the offender, to punish him or to rehabilitate? If the first, an off-world colony is certainly an effective solution. There is no possible way that someone incarcerated light years away could find his way home without the means to do so, and with those means controlled by the state, he would be troubling no one ever again

F

Assuming it were one day possible, with contemporary understandings of physics, a single trip across such an expanse would demand a vast level of resources. Surely, when a wide range of alternatives already exist, what could possibly warrant such expense for the upkeep of a mere prison?

G

While it received much criticism for its glaring plot holes and confusing script, the environment in which it was set remains one of the most arresting in the history of cinema. Blending imagery of the Soviet gulag with the signature industrial brutality of the preceding works, the movie's backdrop remains one of the most iconic in science fiction cinema history.

Part 8

You are going to read a section of an online blog in which five people share their opinions of Christmas. For questions 47 – 56, choose from the contributors (A – E). The contributors may be chosen more than once.

Which contributor mentions...?

How the meaning of Christmas has changed over the years.	<input type="text" value="47"/>
A view that differs from that of the majority.	<input type="text" value="48"/>
A childhood memory of behaviour he/she didn't like.	<input type="text" value="49"/>
How much they miss their childhood experience of Christmas.	<input type="text" value="50"/>
A factor that was usually unpleasant but that added to the enjoyment of the season.	<input type="text" value="51"/>
A stark contrast in someone else's attitude to Christmas.	<input type="text" value="52"/>
Social pressure to overeat.	<input type="text" value="53"/>
Criticisms they have received due to their attitude to Christmas.	<input type="text" value="54"/>
A feeling of being left out.	<input type="text" value="55"/>
Inaccurate memories of what the weather was like at Christmas time.	<input type="text" value="56"/>

A

Christmas was a magical time for me as a child. Before December had even begun, I would start counting the days. Winters are always pretty grim where I'm from, but at Christmas the lack of light and the bitter temperatures took on an enchantment all of their own. I used to love sitting by the fire, listening to the crackle and fizz of the flames, while carols played on the record player and the snow fell outside. Of course, the snow didn't always fall, in fact a White Christmas was quite a rare occurrence, but that's how the picture I have of it: that as boy I lived in a winter wonderland, the like of which you might as well have plucked straight off a greetings card. As adulthood encroaches, the magic inevitably ebbs away, and although I don't miss much about being a child, I often find myself pining for the Christmas magic of all those years ago. Nothing these days compares to it, and even with my advanced years I would give anything just to revisit those sensations just one more time.

B

Christmas was never much of an event in our household. In fact, celebrations of any kind were looked upon with something resembling disdain. Even birthdays were something of a perfunctory affair; you were lucky to get much more than a couple of quid and a chocolate chip muffin with a candle stuck in it. My wife is horrified at such stories. Christmas has always been a huge deal for her. She comes from a large and very loving family who have always used any excuse to bring out the fine china. Their Yuletide celebrations can go on for days; it's a far cry from what I was used to as a child, and I can't say I'm a hundred percent comfortable with it even now after twelve years of being married to her. I won't deny I enjoy such events, but mainly because of the people I'm with rather than all the ceremony. I certainly don't feel that I missed out on anything. My childhood was actually very happy and I don't feel that tinsel and carols would have made it any happier. We just weren't into such things as a family, and that's fine by me. People are welcome to their seasonal excesses but they're not necessarily for everyone.

C

I can see the fun of Christmas and I certainly don't want to be a Scrooge, but there is a side to it that I find a little unpleasant. It seems to me that when Christmas comes around, all manner of excess is suddenly excused, to the extent that many people who are the model of temperance and self-discipline go to town on everything from the mulled wine to the mince pies. I suspect that in most houses across the UK, there's at least one family member who is sozzled by noon, and come Christmas dinner, if you don't stuff your face to sickening levels, you're liable to be accused of being a party pooper. We're all aware of the guilt and regret that inevitably follows over subsequent days but none of us seem to learn. I miss the days of more frugal times, when a leg of turkey was a real event and there was no need to make every table in the land groan under the weight of confectionery and alcohol. It's easy to forget that it was once a religious festival, given the cynical consumerism that now pervades the season.

D

As a festival, it doesn't mean much to me at all. I wasn't brought up in a churchgoing household, so the religious side of things is certainly not relevant, but even the more secular side of the season – the presents, the parties, the

interminable Christmas songs – rings pretty hollow to me. Come November when the decorations start going up everywhere, I start to feel like some sort of solitary outsider looking in on a world I don't understand, and as the fateful day grows nearer, it's not unusual for people to start having a go at me for my lack of interest in the whole thing, which I have to say does upset me a little. I'm perfectly happy for other people to enjoy themselves – in fact I'm glad that people have such fun - it's just that personally I don't see what all the fuss is about. There are times when the pressure to have a good time can become pretty intense. I get the feeling that people feel that if I can't enjoy myself, I should at least have the good manners to pretend. It all seems so silly. At least when I was a child people left me alone. Nowadays, I never hear the end of how much people resent my failure to see the delight in Christmas trees and mince pies. It all gets a bit much, to be honest.

E

To be honest, I'm getting a bit sick and tired of all the complainers. Christmas is what you make it, no more, no less. Don't like the materialism? Ignore the advertising. Don't like the office parties? Don't go. Don't like the excess? Well, no one is forcing you to have that fourth glass of sherry. People are just so miserable. It's as if disliking Christmas marks you out as particularly intellectual or cool. It reminds me of the kids at school who went to the disco just to hang around outside, as if everyone would be really impressed that they were too cool for the dancing and the fizzy drinks. I just thought they were silly party poopers, and decades on I feel much the same way about the Christmas complainers now. Christmas is simply a time to have some fun. Spend it with friends, spend it with family, spend it on your own if you want to. It's a bit of harmless fun and a way to celebrate the close of the year with a glass of wine and a mince pie. In any case, what else is there to look forward to in the winter months?