

THE MAN IN THE WATER

Not an Ordinary Man



On January 13, 1982, a severe snowstorm hit Washington, D.C. The temperature fell to the mid teens. Driving snow made it hard to see. Flights out of Washington's National Airport were delayed while snowplows cleared the runways. Air Florida Flight 90, with its 79 passengers, was no exception. It was originally scheduled to depart at 2:15 p.m. Clearing the runways, however, took over an hour. At 3:37, the pilot was finally allowed to move the plane into position for takeoff. But 15 other planes were lined up ahead of it. Another 20 minutes went by before Flight 90 could roll out onto the runway.

² While Flight 90 was waiting for the runways to be plowed, the ice that had formed on its wings was removed. But new ice began to form immediately. As the pilot waited for the 15 other planes to take off, the ice grew heavier. Ice buildup on a plane's wings is dangerous. It makes the plane heavier and disturbs the normal flow of air over the wings. Despite the fresh layer of ice, Flight 90 roared down the runway when its turn came at 3:59 p.m.

A rescue helicopter lifts a survivor of the crash of Air Florida Flight 90 from the icy waters of the Potomac River in Washington, D.C.

3 As the jet took off, it shuddered.

Something was wrong. It was not gaining altitude as it should. One of the passengers, who was also a pilot, said, "We're not going to make it."

4 Meanwhile, traffic on the Fourteenth Street Bridge over the Potomac River was heavy. It was rush hour, and the workers who lived outside the city were headed home. Suddenly the blue, green, and white form of an Air Florida 727 appeared out of the clouds. Flight 90 was going down, and it was heading straight for the crowded bridge. The motorists on the bridge could do nothing but watch in horror as the airplane fell from the sky and smashed across the northbound lane. The tops of several cars were sheared off. Four motorists were killed before the plane plunged into the frigid Potomac and broke in two.

5 Rescue workers arrived on the scene quickly. Their searchlights revealed a hideous sight. Many of the passengers could be seen still strapped in their seats at the bottom of the Potomac. Only six passengers were still alive. They clung to a piece of the tail section that stuck out of the water. One of the people was a balding man with a large mustache. He seemed to be more alert and less severely injured than any of the others.

6 Speed was essential if the six people were to be saved. A person can survive only a few minutes in such cold water. The rescue was made difficult by the fact that there was only enough room for one helicopter to get between the Fourteenth Street Bridge and another bridge nearby.

7 A rescue helicopter arrived and quickly lowered its lifeline and flotation ring to the balding man. The man grabbed it, but instead of using it himself, he passed it on to one of the other passengers. As that person was lifted out of the freezing water, the balding man fought to keep his grip on the tail section. His body temperature was dropping, and the numbing cold of the water was sapping his strength. When the rescue helicopter returned, the lifeline was again dropped to him. Bystanders watched in amazement as the man once again passed the lifeline on to someone else. For the second time, he was giving up a chance to save himself in order to allow another person to be saved.

8 After a nerve-racking 10 minutes, the three other passengers had been taken safely to the shore. Only the balding man was left in the river. But when the helicopter returned to pick him up, he was gone. He had been in the icy water too long.

9 For several days, the selfless hero was known simply as "the man in the water." No one knew who he was. But when the passenger list was compared with the description of the man, it was determined that he was Arland Williams, a 46-year-old bank examiner from Atlanta, Georgia.



Arland Williams began the flight as an ordinary passenger and became a hero in the waters of the Potomac River.

¹⁰ When Arland Williams boarded Flight 90, he was an ordinary person on an ordinary flight. There was nothing special about him. Even his mother described him as "just average." He was simply another face in the crowd.

¹¹ Like anyone else, Arland Williams wanted to live. In fact, he always insisted on sitting in the back of the plane "because it's safer back there." But at 4:01 p.m. on a stormy January day, when the plane he was on slammed into a bridge and tumbled into the Potomac, Williams chose to risk his life to save the lives of others. We don't know what he was thinking when he found himself hanging on to the tail section of that broken airplane. But he must have known that the longer he stayed in the water the more certain it was that he would die. Yet he

did stay in the cold, black water and pass his lifeline on to others.

¹² The "man in the water" became a national hero. He had given up his life so that other people might live. 🐼

If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words-per-Minute table on page 71 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 72.

Reading Time: Sample Lesson

_____ : _____
Minutes Seconds

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea B—Too Broad N—Too Narrow

- M _____ 1. Arland Williams, an average person, became a hero when he died in the Potomac River because he twice passed his lifeline on to save others. [This is the *main idea*. It tells who the story is about and what he did.]
- N _____ 2. Arland Williams died in the icy Potomac River after the plane he was on crashed on takeoff. [This statement is *too narrow*. It doesn't tell anything about Williams's heroism.]
- B _____ 3. A bank examiner from Georgia became a hero when he died by putting the lives of others ahead of his own. [This statement is true, but it is *too broad*. It doesn't tell who the man was or exactly what he did.]

15 _____ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.
10 _____ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.
25 _____ **Total Score: Finding the Main Idea**

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

1. The plane crash took place in
☐ a. Florida.
☐ b. Atlanta.
☒ c. Washington, D.C.
2. Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the Potomac River
☒ a. right after takeoff.
☐ b. 30 minutes after takeoff.
☐ c. as it was attempting to land.
3. Immediately after the crash, there were only
☐ a. two passengers alive.
☒ b. six passengers alive.
☐ c. five passengers alive.
4. Arland Williams died because he
☐ a. had suffered head injuries in the crash.
☐ b. did not know how to swim.
☒ c. had been in the icy water too long.
5. Arland Williams always insisted on sitting
☒ a. in the back of the plane.
☐ b. near the exit doors.
☐ c. in the front of the plane.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

25 _____ **Total Score: Recalling Facts**

C Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference F—Faulty Inference

1. The crash of Air Florida Flight 90 was caused, at least in part, by the delayed takeoff. [This is a *correct* inference. Waiting in line for the other planes to take off allowed the ice to build up again on the wings.]
C
2. If the rescue workers had arrived on the scene sooner, most of the 79 passengers could have been saved. [This is a *faulty* inference. The rescue workers did arrive quickly. Most of the passengers died on impact or within just a minute or two.]
F
3. If two helicopters had been able to operate at the scene of the crash, Arland Williams would have been saved. [This is a *correct* inference. If one helicopter could save five out of six people, then two helicopters would probably have been able to rescue all six people.]
C
4. Arland Williams's job prepared him to handle such an emergency. [This is a *faulty* inference. He was a bank examiner, not a rescue worker.]
F
5. Arland Williams had always wanted to be a hero. [This is a *faulty* inference. Before the crash, Arland Williams was an ordinary person. He did not go out of his way to seek danger.]
F

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

25 Total Score: Making Inferences

D Using Words Precisely

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key. Do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

1. Despite the fresh layer of ice, Flight 90 roared down the runway when its turn came at 3:59 P.M.
C a. in spite of
O b. on the other hand
O c. because of
2. Their searchlights revealed a hideous sight.
O a. strange
O b. appealing
C c. dreadful
3. Speed was essential if the six people were to be saved.
O a. impossible
C b. necessary
O c. unimportant
4. His body temperature was dropping, and the numbing cold of the water was sapping his strength.
O a. restoring
C b. draining
O c. freezing

5. But when the passenger list was compared with the description of the man, it was determined that he was Arland Williams, a 46-year-old bank examiner from Atlanta, Georgia.

0 a. remained uncertain
 b. written down
C c. concluded

15 Score 3 points for each correct C answer.
10 Score 2 points for each correct O answer.
25 **Total Score: Using Words Precisely**

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

- What does the author mean by the statement "But when the helicopter returned to pick him up, he was gone"?
 - ☐ a. Someone had rescued the balding man.
 - ☒ b. The balding man had fallen into the water and drowned.
 - ☐ c. The balding man had mysteriously disappeared.
- The main purpose of the first paragraph is to
 - ☒ a. explain the impact of the weather on Flight 90.
 - ☐ b. inform the reader about the effect of severe weather on air travel.
 - ☐ c. convey a fearful mood.
- Which of the following statements from the article best describes Arland Williams?
 - ☒ a. "Williams chose to risk his life to save the lives of others."
 - ☐ b. "Like anyone else, Arland Williams wanted to live."
 - ☐ c. "He was simply another face in the crowd."
- The author probably wrote this article in order to
 - ☐ a. describe the passengers' terrifying experience on Flight 90.
 - ☐ b. identify the "man in the water."
 - ☒ c. relate the story of an ordinary man who became a hero.

4 Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 74.

Enter the four total scores in the spaces below, and add them together to find your Reading Comprehension Score. Then record your score on the graph on page 73.

Score	Question Type	Sample Lesson
<u>25</u>	Finding the Main Idea	
<u>25</u>	Recalling Facts	
<u>25</u>	Making Inferences	
<u>25</u>	Using Words Precisely	
<u>100</u>	Reading Comprehension Score	

Summarizing and Paraphrasing

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer for question 1. Follow the directions provided for the other questions.

- Below are summaries of the article. Choose the summary that says all the most important things about the article but in the fewest words.
 - ☐ a. After his plane crashed, Arland Williams became a hero. [This summary doesn't tell why Williams was a hero.]
 - ☒ b. After Flight 90 crashed into the Potomac River, passenger Arland Williams gave up his own life to save others. [This summary contains all the most important information in the article.]
 - ☐ c. After Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the Potomac and broke in two, Arland Williams died after repeatedly passing a helicopter's lifeline to other passengers. [This summary contains important information from the article but includes too many details.]

- Read the following statement about the article. Then read the paraphrase of that statement. Choose the reason that best tells why the paraphrase does not say the same thing as the statement.
 Statement: Although ice had been removed earlier from the wings of the airplane, a fresh layer had formed while the plane sat waiting on the runway.
 Paraphrase: While the plane sat on the runway, all of the ice on its wings was removed.

- ☐ a. Paraphrase says too much.
- ☐ b. Paraphrase doesn't say enough.
- ☒ c. Paraphrase doesn't agree with the statement about the article. [The paraphrase contradicts the statement; the ice formed while the plane sat on the runway.]

- Choose the best one-sentence paraphrase for the following sentence from the article:

"As that person was lifted out of the freezing water, the balding man fought to keep his grip on the tail section."

- ☐ a. The balding man struggled to hold on as he was lifted out of the water. [This paraphrase is incorrect; the balding man was not lifted out of the water.]
- ☐ b. After someone was lifted from the water, the tail section moved and the balding man had trouble holding on to it. [This paraphrase is incorrect; the tail section did not move.]
- ☒ c. The balding man's strength continued to drain as another passenger was lifted to safety. [This sentence correctly paraphrases the sentence from the article.]

3 Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 74.

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical Thinking

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer for questions 2, 3, and 4. Follow the directions provided for the other questions.

- For each statement below, write O if it expresses an opinion and write F if it expresses a fact.
 - O a. Arland Williams was an ordinary man. [This sentence is an opinion because it presents a view or judgment.]
 - F b. Williams always sat in the back of the plane because he believed he would be safer there. [This sentence states a fact—something that can be proved.]
 - O c. Traveling by airplane is more dangerous than traveling by car. [This sentence is an opinion because it expresses a belief.]