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Classic Lateral Thinking Exercises

Test yourself with these thinking exercises. The solutions are at the bottom of the page. **Don't be lazy. Try hard to figure these out before you look!** It'll be a lot more satisfying.

1. There is a man who lives on the top floor of a very tall building. Everyday he gets the elevator down to the ground floor to leave the building to go to work. Upon returning from work though, he can only travel half way up in the lift and has to walk the rest of the way unless it's raining! Why?

This is probably the best known and most celebrated of all lateral thinking puzzles. It is a true classic. Although there are many possible solutions which fit the initial conditions, only the canonical answer is truly satisfying.

2. A man and his son are in a car accident. The father dies on the scene, but the child is rushed to the hospital. When he arrives the surgeon says, "I can't operate on this boy, he is my son!" How can this be?
3. A man is wearing black. Black shoes, socks, trousers, coat, gloves and ski mask. He is walking down a back street with all the street lamps off. A black car is coming towards him with its light off but somehow manages to stop in time. How did the driver see the man?
4. One day Kerry celebrated her birthday. Two days later her older twin brother, Terry, celebrated his birthday. How?
5. Why is it better to have round manhole covers than square ones?

This is logical rather than lateral, but it is a good puzzle that can be solved by lateral thinking techniques. It is supposedly used by a very well-known software company as an interview question for prospective employees.



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6. A man went to a party and drank some of the punch. He then left early. Everyone else at the party who drank the punch subsequently died of poisoning. Why did the man not die?
7. A man died and went to Heaven. There were thousands of other people there. They were all naked and all looked as they did at the age of 21. He looked around to see if there was anyone he recognized. He saw a couple and he knew immediately that they were Adam and Eve. How did he know?
8. A woman had two sons who were born on the same hour of the same day of the same year. But they were not twins. How could this be so?
9. A man walks into a bar and asks the barman for a glass of water. The barman pulls out a gun and points it at the man. The man says 'Thank you' and walks out.

This puzzle claims to be the best of the genre. It is simple in its statement, absolutely baffling and yet with a completely satisfying solution. Most people struggle very hard to solve this one yet they like the answer when they hear it or have the satisfaction of figuring it out.

10. A murderer is condemned to death. He has to choose between three rooms. The first is full of raging fires, the second is full of assassins with loaded guns, and the third is full of lions that haven't eaten in 3 years. Which room is safest for him?



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- 11.** A woman shoots her husband. Then she holds him under water for over 5 minutes. Finally, she hangs him. But 5 minutes later they both go out together and enjoy a wonderful dinner together. How can this be?
- 12.** There are two plastic jugs filled with water. How could you put all of this water into a barrel, without using the jugs or any dividers, and still tell which water came from which jug?
- 13.** What is black when you buy it, red when you use it, and gray when you throw it away?
- 14.** Can you name three consecutive days without using the words Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or Sunday? (or day names in any other language)
- 15.** This is an unusual paragraph. I'm curious how quickly you can find out what is so unusual about it. It looks so plain you would think nothing was wrong with it. In fact, nothing is wrong with it! It is unusual though. Study it, and think about it, but you still may not find anything odd. But if you work at it a bit, you might find out.
- 16.** A graduate applying for pilot training with a major airline was asked what he would do if, after a long-haul flight to Sidney, he met the captain wearing a dress in the hotel bar. What would you do?
- 17.** What can you hold in your right hand, but not in your left?
- 18.** If you have two coins totaling 11p, and one of the coins is not a penny, what are the two coins?
- 19.** How many animals of each species did Moses take into the Ark?
- 20.** A man built a rectangular house, each side having a southern view. He spotted a bear. What colour was the bear?



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21. If you were alone in a deserted house at night, and there was an oil lamp, a candle and firewood and you only have one match, which would you light first?
22. What can you put into a wooden box that would make it lighter? The more of them you put in the lighter it becomes, yet the box stays empty.
23. Which side of a cat contains the most hair?
24. The 60th and 62nd British Prime Ministers of the UK had the same mother and father, but were not brothers. How do you account for this?
25. How many birthdays does a typical woman have?
26. Why can't a man living in Canterbury be buried west of the River Stour?
27. Divide 40 by half and add ten. What is the answer?
28. To the nearest cubic centimetre, how much soil is there in a 3m x 2m x 2m hole?
29. Is it legal for a man to marry his widow's sister?
30. If you drove a coach leaving Canterbury with 35 passengers, dropped off 6 and picked up 2 at Faversham, picked up 9 more at Sittingbourne, dropped off 3 at Chatham, and then drove on to arrive in London 40 minutes later, what would the name of the driver be?
31. A woman lives on the tenth floor of a block of flats. Every morning she takes the lift down to the ground floor and goes to work. In the evening, she gets into the lift, and, if there is someone else in the lift she goes back to her floor directly. Otherwise, she goes to the eighth floor and walks up two flights of stairs to her flat. How do you explain this?



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32. A window cleaner is cleaning the windows on the 25th floor of a skyscraper, when he slips and falls. He is not wearing a safety harness and nothing slows his fall, yet he suffered no injuries. Explain.
33. The band of stars across the night sky is called the "..... Way"?
34. Yogurt is made from fermented
35. What do cows drink?
36. A farmer has 15 cows, all but 8 die. How many does he have left?
37. If a red house is made of red bricks, and a blue house is made of blue bricks, what is a green house made of?
38. In what sport are the shoes made of metal?
39. If a plane crashes on the Italian/Swiss border, where do you bury the survivors?
40. If the hour hand of a clock moves $\frac{1}{60}$ th of a degree every minute, how many degrees will it move in an hour?
41. How many hands does the clock of Big Ben have?
42. How many degrees are there between clock hands at 3.15 pm?
43. John's mother has 3 children, one is named April, one is named May. What is the third one named?
44. A cowboy rode into town on Friday, spent one night there, and left on Friday. How do you account for this?
45. How can you throw a ball as hard as you can, and make it stop and return to you, without hitting anything and with nothing attached to it