One word, many meanings

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
INTERMEDIATE | B1-B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Tick the correct meaning for each use of the word 'run'.

Sentence	Move quickly	Operate/manage	Flow	Extend/continue

1 She runs a small business. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

2 He ran to catch the bus. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

3 The river runs through the valley. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

4 The contract runs for two years. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

5 The machine runs on electricity. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

6 Tears ran down her face. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

7 She runs the marketing team. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

8 The road runs alongside the coast. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

2 Correct the mistake in each sentence.

1 She run a successful company. _____

2 He running fast to catch the train. _____

3 The river run through the city. _____

4 The offer runs during for three weeks. _____

5 The car runs of on petrol. _____

6 Water was run down the window. _____

7 She run the entire department. _____

8 The path run along of the cliff. _____

3 Choose the meaning that best fits each sentence.

1 'The train runs every hour.' - operate on a schedule / move quickly on foot.

2 'He runs five kilometres every morning.' - move quickly on foot / manage.

3 'She runs a charity.' - manage/lead / flow.

4 'The offer runs until Friday.' - continue for a period / move quickly.

5 'Colour ran from the wet fabric.' - flow/spread / operate.

6 'The fence runs along the border.' - extend in a line / move quickly.

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4 Complete the sentences with the correct meaning of 'run' from the box.

continues | extends | flows | manages | moves quickly | operates

1 The river that 1 _____ through the town provides drinking water.
2 She 2 _____ a small bakery near the station.
3 The machine 3 _____ on solar power.
4 He 4 _____ to catch the last bus home.
5 The sale 5 _____ until the end of the month.
6 The wall 6 _____ the entire length of the garden.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Why one word can mean so many things

Linguists studying polysemy, the phenomenon of a single word carrying multiple related meanings, note that common, everyday words tend to accumulate far more meanings over time than rare, specialised ones. The word 'run', for instance, can describe physical movement, the management of a business, the operation of a machine, or the flow of liquid, among dozens of other senses. This flexibility usually causes little confusion in practice, since context reliably signals which meaning is intended, though language learners often find polysemous words considerably harder to master than words with a single, fixed meaning, since each new context effectively requires learning a new usage.

1 What is polysemy? _____
2 What kind of words tend to accumulate more meanings over time? _____
3 Give three different meanings of 'run' mentioned in the text. _____
4 What usually signals which meaning of a word is intended? _____
5 Why do language learners often find polysemous words harder to master? _____
6 What does each new context effectively require, according to the text? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the correct sense of the word in capitals.

1 The company is managed by her uncle. RUNS _____
2 Liquid moved down the wall after the storm. RAN _____
3 The film continues for almost three hours. RUNS _____
4 He moved quickly across the field. RAN _____

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OVER TO YOU

Write a 100-120 word account explaining how a single word (such as run, light or book) can carry several different meanings, with examples.

[ ] Use at least ten target expressions. [ ] Include polite, precise wording. [ ] Organise the account clearly.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Categories

1 Operate/manage 2 Move quickly 3 Flow 4 Extend/continue 5 Operate/manage 6 Flow 7 Operate/manage 8 Extend/continue

2 Corrections

1 She runs a successful company. 2 He ran fast to catch the train. 3 The river runs through the city.
4 The offer runs for three weeks. 5 The car runs on petrol. 6 Water ran down the window.
7 She runs the entire department. 8 The path runs along the cliff.

3 Suitable meanings

1 operate on a schedule 2 move quickly on foot 3 manage/lead 4 continue for a period 5 flow/spread 6 extend in a line

4 Sentences

1 flows 2 manages 3 operates 4 moves quickly (ran) 5 continues 6 extends

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 The phenomenon of a single word carrying multiple related meanings.
2 Common, everyday words.
3 Any three: physical movement, management of a business, operation of a machine, flow of liquid.
4 Context.
5 Because each new context effectively requires learning a new usage.
6 Learning a new usage.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 Her uncle runs the company. 2 Water ran down the wall.
3 The film runs for almost three hours. 4 He ran across the field.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check range, respectful register and clear organisation.