

Exercise 4

- 14** Read the article about a type of animal called a sloth, which lives in forests in parts of Central and South America.

Write a summary about the features of sloths' bodies that enable them to live in trees.

Your summary should be about 100 words long (and no more than 120 words long). You should use your own words as far as possible.

You will receive up to 8 marks for the content of your summary and up to 8 marks for the style and accuracy of your language.

Sloths

The sloth is an animal that spends most of its time high up in the trees of Central and South America. There are different species of sloths, including the brown-throated sloth and the endangered pygmy sloth.

The word 'sloth' means inclined to laziness, and these relaxed and very slow-moving creatures certainly appear to live up to the name. With the help of their extremely specialised claws which curve toward the wrist creating four large, natural hooks, they can hang upside down from a tree branch for days without effort. This is also possible as they have less muscle mass than you might expect – 30% less than other mammals of equal size. In fact, they eat, sleep, breed and give birth while hanging from tree branches. You would expect that being born high above the ground might cause problems if the babies slip, but they are born with such strong skeletons that a fall from the trees will generally not hurt them. Sloths exist almost entirely on a diet of leaves which they pull from the trees using their long sticky tongues. These leaves are such a poor source of nutrition and energy that eating is central to the creatures' whole lifestyle, and they spend almost every waking moment doing it.



Due to the amount of effort needed to obtain enough nutrients, the sloth's metabolism (the chemical process in the body that breaks down food) is amazingly slow. In fact, it is the slowest in the entire animal kingdom, meaning that a leaf that is consumed might take weeks to pass through the sloth's body.

The time spent eating means a lack of time spent on maintaining clean fur, which in turn allows an organism called algae to grow on the sloths during the rainy season. This gives their fur a greenish colour which is useful as they spend as much as 95% of their lives in the trees, where the colour helps hide them from other animals. The fur has another important benefit: in most mammals, hair grows downwards, towards the feet, but because sloths spend so much time hanging upside down with their legs above their bodies, the outer hairs grow in the opposite direction, away from the feet. This provides protection against the rain, creating a natural path for water to flow off the animal.

Sloths have also adapted internally for an upside-down life. All their internal organs, including the heart, liver and stomach, are arranged inside in a different pattern from that seen in most mammals. This means that nothing gets crushed or obstructed when the animal is hanging motionless for extended periods of time. Even with the ability to remain still and hidden among the leaves, it is still important to know what's going on around you. Sloths therefore possess an extra bone in their neck which allows them to turn their head nearly 270 degrees. This enables them to look down at the forest floor while hanging from a tree.

Many sloths need to move to sunny spots to warm up when it is cold. In such weather, their temperature drops and they find it harder to move because they are so cold. This can be dangerous for sloth populations because they must move around in the tree to eat in order to survive.

Exercise 4

The following general instructions, listed Content points, and Marking criteria, all apply to Exercise 4:

- You should decide on a mark for Content and Language **separately**.
- **Content** points are listed below.
- **Language** covers **organisation** and **coherence**, and **range** and **accuracy** of language. When deciding on a mark for Language, first gain an impression of the response, then focus on the level descriptors in order to decide on the best fit. If all three bullet points within the band are fulfilled then it is likely that you will award the higher mark within that band.
- If the response exceeds 120 words, a maximum of 6 marks can be awarded for Language.

Question	Answer	Marks
14	Up to 8 marks to be awarded for Content (Reading) Features of sloths' bodies that enable them to live in trees. 1 (extremely) specialised claws / claws curve towards wrist / claws create (natural) hooks 2 less muscle mass than other mammals of equal size 3 (born with) strong skeletons 4 long tongues / sticky tongues 5 slow metabolism 6 greenish colour fur helps hide them from other animals / algae growth helps them hide from other animals 7 (outer) hairs grow away from the feet / (outer) hairs provide protection against the rain 8 internal organs arranged in different pattern / internal organs arranged so that nothing gets crushed or obstructed 9 extra bone in neck means it can turn head nearly 270 degrees / extra bone in neck means it can look down at forest floor	8
	Up to 8 marks to be awarded for Language (Writing). See generic marking criteria for Exercise 4.	8

A* Model Answer / Feb March 2019 Paper 22

Sloths are animals which are physically adapted to live in trees. Not only do they possess specialised hook-like claws, but also have less muscle mass, making them very light. These creatures have a very tough skeleton which protects them from falling off high altitudes. Their elongated, gluey tongue enables them to eat leaves from the trees. Moreover, the green fur coat of sloths allows them to stay hidden from predators and the upward growth of hair away from their feet acts as a protective barrier against the rain. Finally, sloths which have an additional bone allowing them to rotate their heads by 270°, have internal organs that are acclimated to an upside-down life. (113 words)

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