

# Reading and speaking: Canyonlands



Canyonlands National park, Utah, USA

Pic: [Myrabella](#) (CC)

## Speaking

Look at the picture and read the text about Canyonlands. Then discuss the questions with your partners.

- 1 How would you describe the landscape in Canyonlands?
- 2 Imagine you were planning to make a day trip to Canyonlands in the summer. What activities would you choose to do?
- 3 List as many potential problems as possible.
- 4 What would you take with you for a day trip and what precautions would you take?

## Vocabulary

What do you understand by these words in the text? First discuss with your partner and then check your ideas with the Word List on page 5.

- eroded** (paragraph 1)  
**countless** (paragraph 1)  
**canyon** (paragraph 1)  
**rugged** (paragraph 2)  
**precipitation** (paragraph 4)

Canyonlands National Park is located in southeastern Utah, near the town of Moab. A colourful desert landscape eroded by rivers into countless canyons, it has been described as 'the most weird, wonderful, magical place on earth.'

The park is a popular recreational destination, attracting more than 400,000 visitors each year. Hikers, mountain bikers, backpackers, and four-wheelers all enjoy travelling the rugged, remote trails.

Covering over a thousand square kilometers, Canyonlands is home to a variety of wildlife. Mammals, such as black bears, coyotes, foxes, kangaroo rats and mule deer can be found, as well as at least 273 species of birds, eleven species of lizards and eight species of snakes, including the prairie rattlesnake.

Average July temperatures range from 18.8 to 32.6 degrees Celsius. The highest recorded temperature was 41 degrees on July 15, 2005; the lowest was minus 25 degrees on February 6, 1989. Average annual rainfall is 230 mm and there are over 300 days a year with no measurable precipitation.

# Reading: Escape from the canyon



Aron Ralston

Pic: [Michael Alvarez, Aron Ralston \(CC\)](#)

Early in the morning of April 26, 2003, Aron Ralston left his home in the city of Aspen, Colorado, and headed west across the desert in his truck.

A **passionate** climber, 28-year-old Ralston was making for the Canyonlands National Park in the neighbouring state of Utah, where he'd planned a day hiking alone in the Blue John **Canyon**.

Five hours later he passed through the town of Moab, known locally as 'the end of the world'. He was about to enter one of the **remotest** parts of the American West.

With the **magnificent** desert landscape stretching for miles all around, he parked the truck and continued on his bike until the track ended.

For many it would be difficult **terrain** for hiking, but the experienced Ralston leaped confidently over the smooth rocks. For him it was an easy day's **outing**.

He was just starting to climb down into the canyon when he put his hand on a **boulder** and it came loose. He lost his balance for a second and slipped down to the bottom of the canyon. The boulder came crashing after him and landed on his arm. In a few seconds the outing had turned into a **nightmare**.

Above, a **sliver** of blue sky was all he could see of the world outside. He knew that shouting for help would be pointless. To make matters worse, he had no mobile phone and he hadn't told anyone where he was going. All he had was 350 ml of water, two sandwiches and a small knife.

It didn't take him long to realise that he wouldn't be able to pull himself free or move the rock, which was later weighed at 360 kilograms. His only chance of survival would be to do something almost **unthinkable**: he would have to cut off his own arm. But there was no way his tiny knife could cut through the bone.

The nightmare continued for five days as he tried to keep his spirits up and think of a solution. But by the fifth day the situation was clearly hopeless. His arm was **decomposing**, and he knew that without medical attention he would soon die.

Certain that the end was coming, he carved **RIP** in the wall of the canyon and made a goodbye video for his family.

Then, on the sixth day, he had a **brainwave**: he realised that he could use the weight of his body to bend his arm until the bone broke. He could then cut through the flesh with his knife and he'd be free.

He later said that this was the most beautiful moment of his life. The knowledge that he'd soon be out of the canyon gave him strength to tolerate the **appalling** pain. In an hour he was free from the rock. But it was still a thirteen-kilometre walk back to his car and he had lost a litre and a half of blood. He knew he could survive for half an hour at the most.

Amazingly, he managed to **rappel** down a 20-meter cliff one-handed and get out of the canyon. He then started walking towards the road, but he was getting weaker by the minute. For all his bravery and determination, it looked as though he was going to die in the desert after all. But at this critical point luck **intervened**, and a Dutch family who were hiking nearby saw him and raised the alarm. Minutes later a rescue helicopter arrived and took him to the hospital in Moab.

\* \* \*

Aron Ralston made a complete recovery, and in 2011 a film was made about his adventure - *127 Hours*. He has praised the film's accuracy, saying it was 'as close to a documentary as you can get and still be a drama.' Ralston is now married with a young son and lives in Boulder, Colorado. He continues to hike and climb.

# Reading: comprehension, vocabulary and grammar

## Comprehension

Decide if the following statements are true or false.

- 1 Aron Ralston had little experience hiking in difficult conditions.
- 2 He climbed to the bottom of the canyon and couldn't get out.
- 3 He didn't call for help because nobody would hear him.
- 4 He knew he would have to cut off his arm but he was too afraid.
- 5 He suddenly realised he could get free by breaking his arm bone.
- 6 Once his arm was free, his problems were solved.

## Vocabulary

Match words from the text on the left with the meanings on the right.

terrain	An area of land with particular physical features.
rappel	A large rock.
boulder	Get down a steep slope with a rope.
sliver	A small, thin strip of something.
brainwave	Very bad or shocking.
decompose	Valley with very steep sides.
appalling	To rot or decay due to action by bacteria or fungi.
canyon	A sudden clever idea.

## Grammar 1

Match the events on the left with their results on the right.

He put his hand on a loose boulder.	He couldn't call for help.
He didn't bring a mobile phone.	He was rescued.
He didn't leave his family a note.	He escaped from the canyon.
He had a little water.	He lost his balance.
He cut off his own arm.	His family didn't know where to look for him.
A Dutch family were hiking nearby.	He was able to survive for five days.

## Grammar 2

Complete the sentences using information from Exercise 1 above.

- 1 If he'd brought a phone
- 2 If he'd left a note....
- 3 If it hadn't been for the loose boulder...
- 4 If he hadn't had some water...
- 5 If he hadn't cut off his arm...
- 6 If a family hadn't been hiking nearby

### More on conditionals

Online **grammar notes on the third conditional** (and other conditionals) can be found at <https://www.eltbased.com/notes-53-third-conditional>

Online **practice quizzes and other material** on conditionals can be found at <https://www.eltbased.com/53-third-conditional>

# Answers

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## Page 1

### Speaking

1. Possible adjectives include rocky, dry, arid, wild, remote, hilly, mountainous, and rugged.
2. Activities might include hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, orienteering and bird watching.
3. Problems include getting lost, getting sunstroke, becoming dehydrated, getting bitten by a snake
4. Answers should include plenty of water, phone, map, compass, suitable hiking shoes, hat, sunscreen, first aid kit and telling someone where you were going in case you got lost.

## Page 3

### Comprehension

1. False. He was an experienced and passionate climber.
2. False. He slipped to the bottom of the canyon when he lost his balance.
3. True. He was in a remote place and knew shouting would be pointless.
4. False. His knife wasn't big enough to cut off his arm.
5. True. He had a brainwave.
6. False. He still had to get out of the canyon.

## Vocabulary

### terrain

An area of land with particular physical features.

### rappel

Get down a steep slope with a rope.

### boulder

A large rock.

### sliver

A small, thin strip of something.

### brainwave

A sudden clever idea.

### decompose

To rot or decay due to action by bacteria or fungi.

### appalling

Very bad or shocking.

### canyon

Valley with very steep sides.

## Grammar 1

### He put his hand on a loose boulder.

He lost his balance.

### He didn't bring a mobile phone.

He couldn't call for help.

### He didn't leave his family a note.

His family didn't know where to look for him.

### He had a little water.

He was able to survive for five days.

### He cut off his own arm.

He escaped from the canyon.

### A Dutch family were hiking nearby.

He was rescued.

## Grammar 2

1. he could have called for help.
2. his family would have known where to look for him.
3. he wouldn't have lost his balance.
4. he wouldn't have been able to survive five days.
5. he wouldn't have escaped from the canyon.
6. he wouldn't have been rescued.

# Word list

<b>appalling</b>	<i>adjective</i>	Extremely bad or shocking.
<b>boulder</b>	<i>noun</i>	Large rock.
<b>brainwave</b>	<i>noun</i>	Sudden clever idea.
<b>canyon</b>	<i>noun</i>	Valley with very steep sides.
<b>countless</b>	<i>adjective</i>	Large number of something.
<b>coyote</b>	<i>noun</i>	North American wild animal, like a dog.
<b>decompose</b>	<i>verb</i>	When a living or dead thing rots or decays due to the action of bacteria etc.
<b>erode</b>	<i>verb</i>	When the sea or wind slowly destroys rock etc. over a long time.
<b>intervene</b>	<i>verb</i>	(1) Deliberately become involved in order to change something; (2) happen between one event and another.
<b>magnificent</b>	<i>adjective</i>	Very impressive or beautiful (view, countryside, building, dress, work of art etc.).
<b>mammal</b>	<i>noun</i>	Basic type of animal that has warm blood and produces milk for its babies.
<b>nightmare</b>	<i>noun</i>	Very bad dream or experience.
<b>outing</b>	<i>noun</i>	Trip for pleasure.
<b>passionate</b>	<i>adjective</i>	Having strong feelings about something in particular, or generally having and showing strong feelings.
<b>prairie</b>	<i>noun</i>	Large area of flat land without trees in North America.
<b>precipitation</b>	<i>noun</i>	Scientific word for rain, snow or hail.
<b>rappel</b>	<i>verb</i>	Get down a steep slope with a rope.
<b>rattlesnake</b>	<i>noun</i>	Poisonous American snake that makes a noise with its tail.
<b>remote</b>	<i>adjective</i>	A long way from other places where people live.
<b>RIP</b>	<i>phrase</i>	Rest In Peace, words that are sometimes written on the grave of a dead person.
<b>rugged</b>	<i>adjective</i>	(Of land) not smooth; not easy to travel over.
<b>sliver</b>	<i>noun</i>	Thin strip of something.
<b>terrain</b>	<i>noun</i>	An area of land with particular physical features.
<b>trail</b>	<i>noun</i>	Narrow path through countryside, forest etc.
<b>unthinkable</b>	<i>adjective</i>	Very shocking, surprising or bad; impossible to imagine.
<b>weird</b>	<i>adjective</i>	Very strange or unusual.

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### Canyonlands



**Myrabella**

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### Escape from the canyon



**Michael Alvarez, Aron Ralston**

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