Teacher's Key

Inside the K-pop Trainee System: Training, Contracts, Fans (Level B2)

Vocabulary Matching

1 from scratch = **N**
2 grueling = **A**
3 recruit = **H**
4 fall short = **L**
5 contentious = **G**
6 one-sided = **M**
7 caps = **I**
8 exclusive = **E**
9 template = **D**
10 enforcement = **O**
11 scrutiny = **J**
12 bolster = **K**
13 parasocial = **B**
14 polished = **C**
15 nothing to show for it = **F**

Fill in the Blank

1 from scratch
2 grueling
3 recruit
4 fall short
5 contentious
6 one-sided
7 cap
8 exclusive
9 template
10 enforcement
11 scrutiny
12 bolster
13 polished
14 nothing to show for it

True or False

1 **True.** The reading says nobody has promised the trainee a place in a group, and nobody can.
2 **True.** She joined at eleven and left more than a decade later.
3 **False.** The reading says there is no official figure for how long training lasts.
4 **True.** This is the limit introduced by the Fair Trade Commission.
5 **False.** They argued that a thirteen-year contract was too long and too one-sided.
6 **False.** The reading calls it a recommended template, not a law.
7 **True.** The reading gives this figure.
8 **False.** VCHA was formed from trainees chosen in Canada and the United States.
9 **True.** The bond feels personal to the fan, but the contact is mostly one-way.
10 **False.** The reading says roughly nine in ten live outside Korea.

Language Focus: Purpose Clauses: To, In Order To, and So That

Example answer: Trainees practice for many hours each day **in order to** improve their dancing.

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1 A trainee is a young person who has signed a contract with an agency in the hope of making a debut. Trainees usually take lessons in singing and dance, and often in foreign languages, acting, and how to behave on camera.

2 A debut depends on the agency's decisions, not only on the trainee's effort. Many trainees fall short of a debut altogether, and there is no official figure for how long training lasts.

3 Open answer. A strong answer notes that EJAE trained for more than a decade and was never placed in a group, so a long time in the system does not guarantee a debut, but the training still helped her later as a songwriter and singer.

4 They argued that a thirteen-year contract was too long and too one-sided. Afterward, Korea's Fair Trade Commission introduced a standard entertainment contract that caps exclusive deals at seven years.

5 It says a trainee deal should run for no more than three years in principle, although it can be renewed, and it puts the cost of training on the agency. It is only a recommended template, not a law, so details still vary from company to company.

6 Any two: limits on the working hours of young performers; a ban on getting in the way of their schooling; the January 2026 revision with clearer payment deadlines and wider mental health support.

7 Agencies hold auditions in many countries, and group members now come from Japan, China, Thailand, the United States, Australia, and other places. Agencies want talent that appeals to audiences abroad, and a member from abroad may bolster a group's popularity in that member's home country.

8 Agencies run apps where fans can read posts, watch live broadcasts, and buy merchandise in one place. Weverse, run by HYBE, has users in 245 countries and regions, and company figures suggest that roughly nine in ten live outside Korea.

9 Supporters point to the polished performances and the worldwide audience. Critics point to teenagers who spend their youth in practice rooms, to the many who leave with nothing to show for it, and to pressure on idols to keep fans loyal.

10 False. The reading says the standard trainee contract is only a recommended template, not a law.

11 Yes. The writer says that reliable public figures on how many trainees ever debut are hard to find, so any claim about the odds deserves caution.

12 Open answer. A strong answer says the opening puts the reader in the trainee's position, makes the daily routine feel real, and shows the uncertainty (no promised place in a group) before the reading explains the system.

Notes on the Evidence

- No source draft was supplied beyond the title, so the reading is original and built from the sources below. Checked in October 2026. Trainee training length: there is no official average. A fan site cited HYBE's average as 1.7 years and SM's as 3.2 years from investor material, but I could not trace that to a primary source, so the reading says only that there is no official figure. A site called Seoulz gave a cost of $765,000 per trainee and a 0.01 percent debut rate; neither could be traced, and both were left out. Reliable debut odds are not publicly available.
- EJAE: joined SM Entertainment at eleven; her contract ended in 2015 (CNN, February 2026). In a Korean TV interview in October 2025 she said she trained for 12 years; other reports say more than a decade, and the reading says more than a decade. “Golden” topped charts worldwide (Korea JoongAng Daily; CNN). Pronouns follow CNN and the JoongAng Daily.
- Contracts: three of five TVXQ members sued SM Entertainment in 2009 over a 13-year contract (Legal Cheek; Korea Herald, September 2025). The Korea Herald dates the Fair Trade Commission's standard contract capping exclusive deals at seven years to 2009; Wikipedia gives 2010, so the reading says only that the commission acted soon afterward. The Herald also reports that the seven-year curse is fading as more groups renew early (Itzy, TXT, Ateez in 2025). The standard trainee contract: the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism announced in December 2019 that trainee contracts should not exceed three years, with the agency bearing training costs, from 2020 (Soompi; allkpop, December 2019). A Joystoria explainer describes the limit as three years “in principle” and the contract as a recommended template, not law, and says how costs are deducted varies by contract; I used that wording. These secondary sources should be checked against the ministry or KOCCA pages.
- Recent rules: the Popular Culture and Arts Industry Development Act was amended in 2023 (limits on minors' working hours by age, a ban on interfering with education, income statements for artists) and again, effective August 1, 2025. Reported hour limits differ between outlets, so the reading gives no numbers. The standard trainee contract and supplementary juvenile agreement were revised from January 1, 2026: payment deadlines after termination and expanded mental health support (allkpop, December 31, 2025). The claim that enforcement is uneven comes from an academic paper on safeguarding minors in the trainee system (ResearchGate abstract) and some trainees' comments reported by a student publication; it is one view, not a measured finding.
- Global: HYBE said roughly 28 percent of trainees under its domestic labels were foreign nationals (Korea Herald, July 31, 2023). It gave no trainee count. Lisa (Thailand) and EXO's Chinese members at debut are named in the same article. Japan and China are the most common nationalities of foreign members (The Conversation, 2026); Australia is included because Stray Kids has Australia-born members (Felix; several fan and profile sites agree, none authoritative). VCHA: JYP's group of members from Canada and the United States chosen in North American auditions (Asia Times, May 2024). The claim that foreign members can boost a group in their home countries is a researcher's suggestion, not a measured result.
- Fans: Weverse reported 10 million monthly users in 245 countries and regions in 2023; figures for later years vary by source (11.6 million in Q3 2025 in one summary, 13.37 million in Q1 2026 in another). About 90 percent of users live outside Korea is a company-reported figure cited in an academic article (Yoon, Flow Journal, 2026) and a platform summary. The parasocial description follows the same article. The pressure on idols claim is attributed to critics because it rests on commentary, not measurement. Figures on fan platforms are several months old and may have changed.