Teacher's Key

Super El Niño: What a Forecast Can and Cannot Tell Us (Level B2)

Vocabulary Matching

1 intensify = **N**
2 shifts = **A**
3 declares = **H**
4 threshold = **L**
5 disrupts = **G**
6 drought = **M**
7 exceptions = **I**
8 likelihood = **E**
9 contributed = **D**
10 persist = **O**
11 severe = **J**
12 trigger = **K**
13 hazards = **B**
14 anticipate = **C**
15 vulnerable = **F**

Fill in the Blank

1 intensify
2 shifts
3 declares
4 threshold
5 disrupts
6 drought
7 exceptions
8 likelihood
9 contributed
10 persist
11 severe
12 trigger
13 anticipate
14 vulnerable

True or False

1 **True.** This was the September 2026 forecast.

2 **False.** It is an informal label used by news outlets.

3 **True.** Fishermen named the current after the Christ child.

4 **False.** The winds weaken, and warm water shifts east.

5 **True.** That is the threshold for a very strong event.

6 **False.** Australia tends to be drier than normal.

7 **True.** This happened during one of the strongest El Niños.

8 **False.** The WMO says no two events are alike.

9 **True.** Some outside economists have said so.

10 **False.** The repairs were made before expected floods.

Language Focus: Describing Tendencies and Probability: Tend To and Likely

Example answer: Winters in this region **tend to be** mild. It **is likely to rain** on Saturday.

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1 NOAA said the El Niño was continuing to intensify and gave a greater than 90 percent chance that it would become very strong by the end of 2026. “Super El Niño” is a label used by news outlets, not an official category.

2 In the nineteenth century, Peruvian fishermen named a warm current that appeared around Christmas after the Christ child. Scientists later used the name for years when the warming is much stronger.

3 The trade winds weaken, and the warm surface water shifts east instead of staying in the west. NOAA calls an event very strong when the warming passes a threshold of 2.0°C.

4 Indonesia, Australia, and southern Africa tend to be drier than normal. The coasts of Peru and Ecuador tend to be wetter. In India, a weak monsoon and drought are more likely.

5 A weak monsoon is more likely during El Niño, but in the study described in Down to Earth, rainfall was below normal in only 10 El Niño years and normal in 13, so El Niño does not decide the result.

6 In 1997, during one of the strongest El Niños, India’s monsoon was slightly above normal. In 2015-16, NOAA outlooks favored a wet winter in Southern California, but it stayed dry while rain fell farther north. A Columbia study suggested the warmest water sat farther west than in earlier strong events.

7 Other ocean patterns such as the Indian Ocean Dipole, and long-term warming from greenhouse gases. El Niño’s effect on global temperature tends to be strongest in the year after it begins, and the WMO names greenhouse gases as the main cause of the recent heat.

8 They measure different things. The World Bank estimate counted about $45 billion in costs to governments, while the Dartmouth study counted lost income from slower growth over at least five years, which gave $5.7 trillion. Some economists think the Dartmouth figure is too large.

9 Open answer. A strong answer notes that the figure comes from the FAO’s own assessments, not an independent study, and asks how benefits were measured, over what period, and whether similar results appear in other countries and events.

10 False. The study counted 10 El Niño years with below-normal rainfall and 13 with normal rainfall, so below-normal rainfall happened in fewer than half of them.

11 No. The writer says the forecast “gives a probability, not a map of damage” and that each region’s result will be known only after its rainy season is measured.

12 To show that even strong El Niños do not always produce the expected effects. The examples make the reader treat forecasts as probabilities and support the writer’s point that a high likelihood is not a promise.

Notes on the Evidence

- Sources checked (27 September 2026). NOAA Climate Prediction Center ENSO Diagnostic Discussion of 10 September 2026 (El Niño Advisory; greater than 90 percent chance of a very strong event in fall and winter 2026-27; 75 percent chance of a historic event in October to December; next discussion 8 October 2026). Merriam-Webster (origin of the name). Down to Earth (2012) summarizing K. Krishna Kumar, IITM, for 1880 to 2004 (13 El Niño years with normal monsoon rainfall, 10 below normal); the original study was not read. Srinivasan and Nanjundiah (2002), Meteorology and Atmospheric Physics, abstract only (strong 1997 El Niño, no adverse effect on the 1997 monsoon; Down to Earth gives 101 percent of the long-period average).
- EARTH Magazine (2018) and Jong et al. (Columbia University, Journal of Climate, 2018) on the 2015-16 Southern California winter; NOAA outlooks gave about 50 to 60 percent odds of a wetter than normal winter depending on the outlook date, so the reading gives no number. WMO releases of 2023 and 2024 (strength does not directly match impacts; no two events alike; temperature effect usually in the year after onset; greenhouse gases the main cause) and a WMO press briefing in 2026 (the 2023-24 El Niño contributed to 2024 being the warmest year). Callahan and Mankin (2023), Science 380: 1064-1069, abstract and news coverage ($4.1 trillion for 1982-83, $5.7 trillion for 1997-98; World Bank estimate of $45 billion in costs to governments; some outside economists called the estimates too large, per AP). FAO releases of 2023 and 2024 (Shabelle River repairs, about 4,600 meters and almost 40,000 hectares; more than $7 return per $1, from FAO assessments).
- Evidence limits. The India and Southern California exceptions are examples, not a full analysis of how often forecasts fail. The Krishna Kumar figures are secondhand. The FAO return figure is the agency's own estimate. The Dartmouth figure is a model-based estimate of lost income, not measured damage, and is disputed. NOAA declares El Niño using both an ocean temperature index and atmospheric response; the reading simplifies this.
- Revision (September 2026). The previous version was a snapshot of the 2026 forecast and early impacts (NOAA and WMO probabilities, India's 2026 monsoon deficit, Indonesian fire hotspots, Central America crop losses, South Korea's winter outlook, the WFP hunger estimate, and the WMO's mobilization). It would date within weeks, so it was rebuilt around a durable question: what a strong El Niño forecast can and cannot tell us. The 2026 forecast is kept only as a dated hook. Corrections: "El Niño" means "the child" (named for the Christ child), not "the little boy"; the Language Focus named is expected to, is likely to, and is set to, but none of its quotes used those structures, and its model answer was awkward; the True/False/Not Given model answer said "False or Not Given"; "earlier very strong events also trigger" had a tense error. Vocabulary: amplify (near-synonym of intensify) and unprecedented were dropped; exceptions and vulnerable were added. Translations of shifts were changed to intransitive forms, and trigger (Hindi, Arabic) and severe (Russian) were revised.
- Scope and caution. The unit gives general information, not disaster advice, and does not cover coral bleaching, fisheries, or health effects in detail. Discussion questions ask for opinions, not personal information. The Hindi and Arabic translations have not been checked by a native speaker.