

Lost at Sea

(Surviving the Titanic)

Name _____

Group _____

Welcome to an exercise of judgment and values. Using all of your imagination, you are suddenly adrift on the Titanic in the waters of the Atlantic. As a consequence of the collision with the iceberg and of a fire of unknown origin, much of the Titanic and its contents have been destroyed. The ship is sinking. Your location is unclear because of the destruction of critical navigational equipment and because you are approximately one thousand miles southwest of the nearest land. Below is a list of fifteen items that are intact and undamaged after the collision. In addition to these articles, you have a serviceable boat (with oars) large enough to carry yourself, ten survivors, and all the items listed below. The total contents of all the survivors' pockets are the following:

- a package of cigarettes
- several books of matches
- 5 one-dollar bills

Your task is to rank the fifteen items below in terms of their importance to your survival. Place a number 1 by the most important item, then number 2 by the second most important item, and so on through 15.

- _____ Five gallon can of water
- _____ Maps of the Atlantic Ocean
- _____ Mosquito netting
- _____ One case of survival "C" rations
- _____ One quart of 160-proof Puerto Rican rum
- _____ Seat cushion flotation device approved by the Coast Guard
- _____ Sextant
- _____ Shark repellent
- _____ Shaving mirror
- _____ Small transistor radio
- _____ Twenty square feet of opaque plastic
- _____ Two gallon can of oil/gas mix
- _____ Fifteen feet of nylon rope
- _____ Two boxes of chocolate bars
- _____ Fishing kit

Lost at Sea Answers and Rationale

According to the "experts," the basic supplies needed when a person is stranded in mid-ocean are articles to attract attention and articles to sustain survival until rescuers arrive. Articles for navigation are of little importance. Even if a small life raft were capable of reaching land, it would be impossible to store enough food and water to subsist during that period of time. Therefore, of primary importance are the shaving mirror and the two-gallon can of oil-gas mixture. These items could be used for signaling a rescue. Of secondary importance are items such as water and food, e.g., the case of sea rations. A brief rationale is provided for the ranking of each item. These brief explanations obviously do not represent all of the potential uses for the specified items, but rather the primary importance of each.

1. **Shaving mirror**—Critical for signaling any form of rescue.
2. **Two-gallon can of oil-gas mixture**—Critical for signaling, the oil-gas mixture will float on the water and could be ignited with a dollar bill and a match (obviously outside the boat)
3. **Five-gallon can of water**—Necessary to replenish lost water weight and for thirst.
4. **Case of survival "C" rations**—Provides basic food intake.
5. **Twenty square feet of opaque plastic**—Utilized to collect rain water, provide shelter from the elements.
6. **Two boxes of chocolate bars**—A reserve supply of food.
7. **Fishing kit**—Ranked lower than the candy bars because "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." There is no assurance that you will catch any fish.
8. **Fifteen feet of nylon rope**—May be used to lash equipment together to prevent it from falling overboard.
9. **Floating seat cushion**—If someone fell overboard, it could function as a life preserver.
10. **Shark repellent**—Obvious
11. **One quart of 160-proof Puerto Rican rum**—contains 80 percent alcohol, enough to use as a personal antiseptic for any injuries incurred; of little value otherwise: will cause dehydration if consumed.
12. **Small transistor radio**—Of little value since there is no transmitter (unfortunately); you are out of range of your favorite radio stations.
13. **Maps of the Atlantic Ocean**—Worthless without additional navigational equipment - it does not really matter where you are but where the rescuers are.
14. **Mosquito netting**—There are no mosquitoes in the mid-Atlantic.
15. **Sextant**—Without tables and a chronometer, relatively useless—and does anyone even know what it is or how to use it?

The basic rationale for ranking signal devices above life-sustaining items (food and water) is that without signaling devices there is almost no chance of being spotted and rescued. Further more, most rescues occur during the first thirty-six hours, and one can survive without food and water during this period.

Special Note: The United States Merchant Marines ranked the above items and provided the "correct" solution to this task. Taken from the standard ocean survival section of basic training. USMM.Sec.B-41C.1996