

## THE DESERT SURVIVAL PROBLEM

### Communication activity

This is a problem to be solved by groups of 5—8 people. The situation described is based on over 2,000 actual cases in which men or women lived or died depending on the survival decisions they made. Your own 'life' or 'death' will depend on how well your group can share its knowledge to reach decisions.

It is approximately 10.00 am in mid-July and you have just crash-landed in the Sonora Desert, South West USA. Your light twin-engine plane containing the bodies of the pilot and co-pilot has completely burnt out, only the frame remaining. None of the rest of you has been injured.

The pilot was unable to notify anyone of your position before you crashed. However, ground sightings taken shortly before the crash suggested that you are about 65 miles off course from your originally filed flight plan. A few moments before the crash the pilot indicated that the nearest known habitation is a mining camp 70 miles away in a North-North-East direction.

The immediate area is quite flat and appears to be rather barren except for the occasional cactus. The last weather report indicated that the temperature would reach 110°F. (43°C)

You are dressed in light-weight clothing, short-sleeved shirts, shorts, socks and leather shoes. Everyone has a handkerchief. Collectively your pockets contain \$1.25 in change, \$81 in notes, a packet of cigarettes and a ball-point pen.

**Before the plane caught fire, your group was able to salvage the 15 items listed below.**

1. As an individual, rank these items in order of their importance for your survival, starting with "1" for the most important, down to "15" for the least important. You may assume that the number of survivors is the same as the number of members in your group and that they have decided to stick together. Write the numbers in the first column and do not discuss your ranking with anyone else at this stage.
2. Now get together with the other members of your group to discuss the problem and write down the numbers for the new order of importance which you have agreed in the second column.

**Scoring:** Your teacher will give you the "official" ranking.

Compare the ranking which you as an individual gave each item and subtract the lower figure from the higher one. Write the difference in the column headed Individual Difference Score. When you have finished, add up all the figures in that column and make a note of the total. Do the same for the ranking which your group decided noting the difference in the column "Group Difference Score" and write down the total.

Compare the two results. The lower figure represents the greater chance of survival. Which seems to have been more effective – individual or group decision?

Items	Individual Ranking	Group Consensus Ranking	“Official” Ranking	Individual Difference Score	Group Difference Score
Torch (4 battery size)					
Jack knife					
Sectional air map of the crash area					
Plastic rain coat (large size)					
Magnetic compass					
Bandage kit with gauze					
45 Calibre Pistol (loaded)					
Parachute (red and white)					
Bottle of salt tablets (1,000)					
1 litre of water per person					
Book entitled Edible Animals of the Desert					
2 pairs of sunglasses per person					
2 quarts of 180 proof Vodka					
1 overcoat per person					
Cosmetic mirror					
Total					