

A Brief History of the Olympics

Language Focus: 24 words - **Level:** Intermediate - Advanced

There is no such thing as a “**brief**” history of the Olympics. That's because the Olympics started thousands of years ago in Ancient Greece. Greek city-states used to send athletes **to compete against** each other with the reputation of the city and its people **on the line**. These ancient games helped create peace among the cities by bringing people together for friendly competitions.

The modern Olympics began in 1896, but the first one was very different to the Olympics we know today. Only 14 countries and 176 athletes, all of them men, competed in the games, which were hosted in Athens. Still, the Olympics were successful and helped to improve cooperation between nations. Just four years later women competed in the 1900 Olympics in Paris.

Over time the Olympics grew more popular and more nations started sending competitors. In 1924, the winter Olympics was started. The first winter Olympics was hosted in Chamonix, France. Only 16 nations and 258 athletes participated, competing in just 16 different events. Like the summer Olympics, however, the winter games **gradually** became more popular.

Following World War II, the Olympics became an important part of **the Cold War** and were **vital** in maintaining world peace. During the Cold War, the world was divided between communism and capitalism, with the Soviet Union and United States competing intensely with each other. The Olympics were one of the main ways in which these two nations competed.

At the same time, many new nations were coming into existence. With the colonial empires of France, the United Kingdom, and others **crumbling**, new countries were **founded**. Many of these countries wanted **to prove themselves to the world**, and the Olympics was one way to do so.

From **humble beginnings**, the Olympic games have evolved into the **grandest** games on earth. In fact, the Rio Olympics saw 205 countries and over 10,000 athletes competing in 302 separate events.

Furthermore, while the Olympics was **predominantly** hosted by developed countries through much of their modern history, the recent games have been hosted in developing nations, such as Brazil and China. Many **up-and-coming** nations now view the Olympics as a way to announce their **prosperity** to the world.

Currently, the United States **dominates** the world stage, and has taken home the most medals in nearly every summer Olympics over the past few decades. During the Beijing Olympics in 2008, China came close to taking home the most medals but couldn't quite beat the United States.

Recently, criticism over the costs and **burden** of the games has increased. Norway **pulled out** of a winter Olympics **bid** just a few years ago because its citizens didn't want to **deal with the hassle**. **Meanwhile**, the summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro faced many **setbacks** and challenges.

So, what does the future hold for the Olympics? They'll almost certainly continue to be hosted, but given these issues, reform may be **inevitable** for the games.

Language Focus : Vocabulary + Expressions

1. **brief** - (adj) short, not lasting a long time
2. **to compete against sb** - (verb) to try to be better than someone in sth
3. **on the line** - if sth is “on the line” it means it at risk or in danger of sth bad happening to it
4. **gradually** - (adverb) - slowly, sth happens over time
5. **the Cold War** - war between 1947 and 1991 between US and Soviet Union
6. **vital** - (adj) - essential, absolutely necessary or extremely important
7. **crumbling - to crumble** - (verb) to fall apart or break down - the empires were slowly falling apart or breaking down
8. **founded** - created or established - **to found** - to create or establish (verb)
9. **prove themselves to the world - to prove oneself** - (reflexive verb) to show your ability in sth to others
10. **humble beginnings** - starting off small or with little money
11. **grandest** - (superlative adj) most magnificent
12. **furthermore** - (adverb) in addition, besides
13. **predominantly** - (adverb) mainly
14. **Up-and-coming** - new and starting to become successful in sth
15. **prosperity** - (noun) state of being successful
16. **dominates** - (verb) has power and influence over
17. **burden** - (noun) responsibility causing worry or distress
18. **pulled out** - (phrasal verb) to withdraw participation in something - decide not to take part in something
19. **bid** - (noun) effort made to try to win (contract) or buy something
20. **to deal with** - (phrasal verb) to handle or cope with something
21. **hassle** - (noun) problem, inconvenience
22. **meanwhile** - (adverb) in the intervening time
23. **setbacks** - (noun) something that reverses progress - a difficulty or problem.
24. **inevitable** - (adj) certain to happen, unavoidable.

Language Focus: Exercises

Comprehension Questions

Find the answers to these questions in the article..

1. Why were the Olympic games invented?
2. Why do developing nations like to host the olympics?
3. Were the winter olympics an instant success?
4. What role did the olympics play in the Cold War?
5. What country has had the most success at the olympics?

Comprehension Questions: True or False ?

Say whether the following statements are true or false. If they are false, say why.

1. Women only recently were allowed to compete in the olympics
2. The summer and winter olympics became more popular over time.
3. China always win the most medals at the olympic games.
4. Norway didn't host the Olympics because of financial problems
5. Developing countries don't want to host the Olympic Games.
6. There were many problems in Rio de Janeiro for the Olympics.
7. The Olympic Games are unlikely to change in the future.

Complete the sentences: EXERCISES

Complete these sentences with a **highlighted** word or phrase from the article.

1. When I was starting my business I had many(*difficulties, problems*)
2. In the early 1970's Steven Spielberg was just an Filmmaker. (*new and starting to become successful in sth*)
3. Ireland is a Catholic country. (*mainly, for the most part*)
4. Young men often feel they have to to their friends. (*show their ability in sth*)
5. The 2008 economic crisis in the USA and Europe was (*certain to happen, unavoidable*)
6. The president's speech was very(short)
7. Mary didn't change Bank because it was a (*problem, inconvenience*)
8. Having a mortgage for a house is a big financial for families. (*responsibility causing worry or distress*)
9. The singer of the music tour due to personal problems. (*decide not to take part in something*)
10. Although he is a billionaire today he came from..... (*a family with little money*)

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ANSWERS

Comprehension Questions: **ANSWERS**

1. *...they were created for competition and also to help create peace among cities.*
2. *.....to announce their prosperity to the world.*
3. *No, only 16 nations and 258 athletes participated in the first winter Olympics, but they gradually became more popular.*
4. *The games were a way for the Soviet Union and the US to compete with each other.*
5. *USA*

True or False ? : **ANSWERS**

1. FALSE: women first competed in the 1900 Olympics in Paris.
2. TRUE
3. FALSE: the US has won the most medals.
4. FALSE: the citizens didn't want to deal with the hassle.
5. FALSE: They want to host the games to to announce their prosperity to the world.
6. TRUE
7. FALSE: the article says change may be inevitable for the games.

Complete the sentences: **ANSWERS**

1. setbacks
2. Up-and-coming
3. Predominantly
4. prove themselves
5. inevitable
6. brief
7. hassle
8. burden
9. pulled out
10. humble beginnings