

General task

- ❖ Read a passage
- ❖ Answer questions
 - ❖ Multiple-choice
- ❖ May re-read text

Reading comprehension:
very useful skill

“No world outside the passage”

- Answer all questions about the information in a passage on the basis of what is stated or implied in that passage.
- Do not pick an answer simply because it is a true statement.

Example: question about a word meaning

Important: how the word is used in the passage

Words: different context → different meaning

coach (bus; trainer), record (achievement; item; vinyl)

- ❖ Many choices might correctly define the word.
- ❖ You need the answer(s) that fit(s) the context:
 - Observe how the word is used in the passage.
 - Plug in the possible answers and check if they work.

Active reading

Underline:

- ❖ Key words
- ❖ Sentences that contain the main idea

- ❖ Is the author taking a side?
 - Mark with + or -
 - Remind yourself later what his or her position is
- ❖ ...

Holy Grail search vs. Understanding

Few questions

- read them before the passage
- search for answers inside the passage
- stop reading when answers are found

Many questions

- analyze the passage carefully before reading and trying to answer the questions

Read questions carefully

(Unlike reading passages which can be skimmed/ summarized)

- ❖ Read all answer choices before selection.
 - ◆ Even if you think the first answer is correct
- ❖ Make sure to understand the question exactly.
 - ◆ What is being asked?
 - ◆ What kind of response is required?
 - A number?
 - An adjective?
 - ...

Reading comprehension

Evaluate each answer separately

- ❖ Read one answer at a time—do not look at the other answers simultaneously.
- ❖ Don't be misled by choices that are partially true or partially answer the question.
- ❖ Often more than one choice rings true.
- ❖ Only 1! will specifically and best answer the question...
...unless the question asks for several choices ;)
 - ❖ where evaluating each answer separately is even more crucial!

Reading comprehension

Question types: wide variety

❖ What was it about?

- General idea
- Essential info

❖ Details

- Word meaning
- Purpose
- Inference

❖ “Editorial”

- Insert a sentence
- Complete the summary
- Complete the table

❖ Assess evidence to support or weaken points made in text

❖ ...

Several formats

- ❖ Select one answer
- ❖ Select more than one answer
 - Select all that apply
- ❖ Choose correct column in a table for each option
- ❖ Match answers
- ❖ ...

Vocabulary

What to do?

Which of the answer options is closest in meaning to a word or phrase in the passage.

Understand the meaning of the word as it is used in the passage.

Example

The stone was promptly dispatched to Cairo's Institute of Egypt for further study by Napoleon's scholars, where it was christened 'The Rosetta Stone', for obvious reasons. Although it quickly became clear that the same message was indeed engraved in three different languages, only the bottom script, in Greek, could be read. The top script consisted of fourteen rows of hieroglyphics, followed by thirty-two rows of an undecipherable Egyptian writing that was simply termed 'demotic'.

Question

The word promptly in the passage is closest in meaning to

- A. purportedly
- B. secretly
- C. forcefully
- D. hastily

Answer: (D) hastily

Promptly = without delay

Hastily = fast

Purportedly = apparently happened

Secretly = without other people knowing

Forcefully = done with physical force

Detail

What to do?

Identify factual information.

- ✿ Usually given 1! time in the passage
- ✿ Not about a general theme or idea

Sample prompts

- According to the paragraph, which of the following is true of DETAIL?
- The author's description of DETAIL mentions which of the following?
- According to paragraph 2, why did DETAIL do _____ ?
- According to the paragraph, how did DETAIL do _____ ?

Reading comprehension

Example

Finally, for a fear to truly be a phobia, it must be recurring. That is, if the man on the plane had flown before without incident and continued to use planes after this one panic attack without experiencing further bouts of unreasonable fear, then he would not be said to be suffering from a phobia. A true aviophobic could never contemplate flying in any form without experiencing severe symptoms of acute nervousness. In this case, the man's single onset of severe panic would most likely be viewed as symptomatic of some other mental disorder, perhaps brought on by unrelated stresses in his life. Obviously, the fact that phobias are recurring fears, or rather, that they involve constant fear of the object of the phobia, should not be taken to mean that the fear can never be overcome. A person who is suffering from a phobia may, either through great effort of will, or, more likely, through a course of psychiatric treatment, conquer his phobia and cease to be frightened of whatever it was he was formerly afraid of.

Question

According to the author what might be one cause of a single instance of a phobic-like episode?

- A. Seeing plane crashes on the news
- B. Watching too much violent television
- C. Possessing a desire for public attention
- D. Having too much stress in one's life

Answer: (D) Having too much stress

Stated directly in the text.

(A), (B) and (C) are not mentioned in the passage.

Purpose

What to do?

Understand why detail/idea/argument is used.

Good writing: everything has a reason for being included.

The question is not why the entire passage is organised as it is—but what are logical connections between certain sentences/paragraphs.

Often: “why” in the question

Other possibilities:

- "The author begins paragraph # with _____ in order to..."
- "The author uses _____ as an example of..."

Reading comprehension

Example

Thus, American slaves soon found that music was one of the few methods of expressing themselves that their masters would permit and even encourage, as many of the slave owners found it pleasant to have slaves who could play music for them in the evenings. However, the plantation owners naturally wished to listen to music from their own culture, as well as to what they considered slave work songs. As a result, many slaves learned to play Western instruments and began to pick up Western songs, such as European dance music. European dance music at that time was characterized by harmony, or the playing of notes simultaneously to create a pleasing sound, an element previously lacking in the slave songs. It did not take long for blacks to begin experimenting with ways in which harmonic elements could be fused with the more tribal rhythms of the music of their own culture. The result of these experiments was the first type of jazz, known as the blues. The blues took their name from the reliance on blue notes, which are notes that are played at a lower pitch than would normally be expected in classical European music.

Question

Why does the author mention European dance music in paragraph 2?

- A. To describe one influence that helped turn African slave songs into jazz
- B. To argue that European dance music was inferior to jazz's antecedents
- C. To provide an example of a type of music that contrasts sharply with jazz
- D. To explain why slave owners found the music of their slaves refreshing

Answer: (A) To describe influence...

Point of the passage: trace the development of jazz music.

(B) is illogical: European dance music was one of jazz's antecedents

(C) is wrong: The author does not explicitly compare European dance music to jazz

(D) is incorrect: European dance music was familiar to the slave owners, not new and refreshing

Negative factual info

What to do?

Choose single wrong option:

- ❖ Detail or idea that is not in the passage
- ❖ Stated inaccurately

Read over all paragraphs carefully.

Try to find the option saying something you cannot recall reading.

Verify it is indeed not in the text.

The prompt features "EXCEPT" or "NOT."

Example

Their demise also resulted in the extinction of a half-dozen species of forest insects and the severe crippling of other animal populations such as the wild turkey: these all relied on the American Chestnut as a source of habitat and food. Affected wildlife attempted to adapt to their disrupted environment by looking to other species of trees, such as the Acorn, and seed-bearing plants for food. This placed great ecological pressure on those species, as none could equal the American Chestnut in its ability to provide a consistently abundant crop of nuts. The problems the American Chestnut blight engendered thus show the ripple effects that can occur within any ecosystem when new elements are introduced in an unsound manner.

Question

According to paragraph 3, all of the following were results of the wide disappearance of American Chestnut trees EXCEPT:

- A. The loss of creatures who required the tree's resources for their survival.
- B. Overuse of other types of trees by wildlife attempting to compensate for the change.
- C. A reduction in the total output of harvested nut crops within many major American forests.
- D. Macro-changes to the environment in which the trees previously flourished.

Reading comprehension

Answer: (C)

The American Chestnut produced lots of nuts so the loss of the trees does mean a loss in tree nuts; however, there is no mention of its nuts being a harvested crop.

(A): a restatement of the first sentence in paragraph 3—some insects became extinct and the wild turkey population drastically declined due to the loss of the American Chestnut as a food and habitat source.

(B): restates what is in the second and third sentences of the paragraph.

(D): covers the last sentence in the paragraph—the loss of the American Chestnut caused changes, had negative effects, upon the land and animals within the environment of where the American Chestnut had thrived

Insert a sentence

What to do?

Decide where a new sentence fits best among places marked in the text.

Tests understanding of:

- ❖ Logic in the text
- ❖ Connections from one sentence to another

Reading comprehension

Example

Their demise also resulted in the extinction of a half-dozen species of forest insects and the severe crippling of other animal populations such as the wild turkey: these all relied on the American Chestnut as a source of habitat and food. (A) Affected wildlife attempted to adapt to their disrupted environment by looking to other species of trees, such as the Acorn, and seed-bearing plants for food. (B) This placed great ecological pressure on those species, as none could equal the American Chestnut in its ability to provide a consistently abundant crop of nuts. (C) The problems the American Chestnut blight engendered thus show the ripple effects that can occur within any ecosystem when new elements are introduced in an unsound manner. (D)

Question

Where would the following sentence best fit?

In fact, is it widely believed that the scope of its devastation far eclipses even that of the fungal disease, also accidentally introduced, that ravaged Dutch Elm trees across Europe and North America, from 1910 to 1928.

Answer (D)

Expands upon the last sentence.

(C): kinda breaks the flow [could still be OK]

(A) or (B): disrupts description of effects of the demise

Essential info

What to do?

A sentence is **highlighted** in the text or is referred to from the question

Choose answer option = **highlighted sentence**

- ❖ Correct sentence: simpler than **highlighted**
 - But still conveys all the important information
- ❖ Incorrect sentence:
 - Leaves out an important detail
 - Represents detail/concept inaccurately
 - Changes the original meaning of the sentence
 - ...

Example

Men are more likely to manifest recessive biological traits than women are, because some traits are what scientists call Xlinked. This means that the genes responsible for expressing the recessive trait are found only on the X chromosome. Men are much more likely to express these recessive traits, because the male genome consists of an X and a Y chromosome, whereas the female genome consists of two X chromosomes. If the male X chromosome contains any genes capable of expressing recessive traits, those genes will therefore be free to manifest themselves, as there will be no corresponding genes to interfere with them.

Reading comprehension

Question

Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence?

- A. The two X chromosomes in the female genome makes women more likely to express recessive traits than men because the male genome has two different chromosomes.
- B. The two different chromosomes in the male's genetic make-up, instead of the same two chromosomes in the female genome, makes men likely to have more dominant traits than women.
- C. Women are less likely than men to have recessive traits due to the differences between their genes.
- D. The male genome is comprised of an X and a Y chromosome which allows recessive traits to be more readily found in men than in women as the female genome has two X chromosomes.

Answer (D)

All correct info is included: Men will likely have more recessive traits than women because the male genome has an X and a Y chromosome. The two X chromosomes in the female genome makes women less susceptible.

(A): mixes up the genders, saying women will have more recessive traits while it is men.

(B): states men will have more dominant traits while it should be recessive traits.

(C): does not give enough details [could still be OK]

Another example

In the history of European painting, there is a shift in pictorial representation that occurs around the year 1420 CE. As a result of this shift, paintings became more realistic and vivid. Subjects appear in much brighter light, which is depicted in a photographically 'correct' manner. Up until recently, there was no satisfactory art historical explanation for how, all of a sudden, painters began to see light in a different way, but it is now widely believed that 400 years before the invention of photography, painters were using simple cameras to reproduce realistic images on canvas.

Question

Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in the passage?

- (A) Only recently have art historians acknowledged the reason why painting shifted around 1420 CE.
- (B) 400 years before the invention of photography, painters were painting photographic-like images on canvas.
- (C) The theory of optics has become widely accepted in art history circles.
- (D) Art historians now believe that the discovery of simple cameras is responsible for the shift in pictorial representation around 1420.

Answer (D)

The essential info was: the use of simple cameras by painters in order to paint more realistic images.

Reference

What to do?

Vocabulary:

Highlighted word (usually a pronoun)

- ❖ What does it refer to?
- ❖ What word the pronoun is replacing?

Example

The astrological nature of the Mayan use of astronomical data explains in part why so few written records exist of that data. The Mayans believed that the passage of the sun continued throughout the night, only, then **it** was traveling through the underworld. This was believed to be a perilous journey, with many demonic figures lurking in the darkness, waiting to ambush the sun to prevent it from returning to the sky at dawn.

Question

The word **it** in the passage refers to

- A. night
- B. sun
- C. passage
- D. data

Answer (B)

The sentence describes the path taken by the sun.

The other answer choices, though they are all words that appear in the paragraph, do not refer to things that are traveling.

Inference

What to do?

Words

- ❖ "infer"
- ❖ "imply"
- ❖ "suggest"

in the question prompt something that is only suggested, not directly stated.

- Understand all the concepts in the text.
- Deduce what the author is trying to imply.

Reading comprehension

Example

Derived from the penicillium mold, penicillin is one of the most powerful antibacterial agents ever developed. Penicillin and its derivatives have saved countless millions of lives by reducing once lethal infections to the status of minor inconveniences. Countless others have kept limbs that once would have needed amputating to stop the spread of an infection because penicillin stopped that spread in its tracks. The history of the discovery of such a wondrous medicine is long and complicated, but the man who normally gets the credit for discovering it is Alexander Fleming, who published papers on penicillin in 1928. It is well-known that several others, including a French medical student and a Costa Rican scientist, had noted the mold's antibacterial properties prior to Fleming. However, it was Fleming who drew the attention of the Western scientific establishment to the mold, and whose work eventually led to penicillin being developed into a potent medicine.

Question: What can be inferred from paragraph 1?

- A. Mortality rates from infections are much lower today than they were in the 1920s.
- B. Penicillin has proven very useful but can also have potentially deadly side effects.
- C. Alexander Fleming was disorganized in several aspects of his professional life.
- D. A Costa Rican scientist should really get the credit for first discovering penicillin.

Answer (A)

Penicillin wasn't discovered until 1928, hence people in the 1920s died more often from infections that are now commonly treated by penicillin.

(B): The focus is on penicillin, not on the side effects.

(C): Fleming is mentioned in connection with the discovery, not because of his work habits.

(D): a French student also recognized the mold's properties, but neither scientist went so far as to share their findings with the scientific community.

General Idea

What to do?

- ❖ Summarize
- ❖ Get overall
 - Gist
 - Substance
 - Essence
- ❖ Evaluation of a situation

NB: Author's

- View
- Opinion
- Attitude
- Feeling
- ...

not yours!

Reading comprehension

Example

For all her strong capitalist sympathies, Ayn Rand displayed in her fiction many indications of an ideology that had been shaped by the very communist ideals that she purported to reject. This theory, discussed by R. Merren in his groundbreaking classic “The Marxist Beneath,” raises some interesting questions about the role of communal living in Rand’s novel *Atlas Shrugged*. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the denizens of “Galt’s Gulch” are able to work in their chosen fields, achieving great success and being rewarded for that success by financial gain. However, the “gain” is nominal, really more symbolic than anything else. And the freedom to pursue one’s gifts is granted, in part, by the harmony that comes from a system in which everyone’s strengths and talents are encouraged. Merren argues persuasively that, although Rand was justifiably adamant about her aversion to the Soviet Communist regime under which she grew up, her writing displays an adherence to communist ideals dressed in the clothes of capitalism.

Reading comprehension

Question

Which of the following situations is most similar to R. Merren's view of Ayn Rand, as presented in the passage?

- (A) An actor is publicly opposed to appearing in a certain type of film, but later in his career accepts a role in one.
- (B) A professor is very critical of a student's work in a class, but chooses not to give a failing grade because she respects the student's viewpoint.
- (C) A politician votes for the passage of several laws, but he does not personally support all elements of them.
- (D) A small startup company advertises its rejection of the norms of corporate culture, but all its employees work in cubicles.
- (E) An author writes a series of books along a certain theme, but later distances herself from the ideas in that series.

Answer (D)

A: She didn't change what she was willing to do.

B: She doesn't criticize communism; she does not include it in her writing due to respect.

C: This is perhaps the reverse; she supports communism rejection, but on some level also adheres to its principles.

D: What the company says is partially undermined by what it does.

E: She did not distance herself from the ideas in her books.