



Chapter 6

Reading Comprehension: An Open-Book Test

Questions based on reading passages make up about 70 percent of the Critical Reading sections of the test. These questions may ask you to restate a piece of information from the passage, draw an inference, determine a definition, or to recognize the purpose of a piece of writing. This chapter will introduce you to these different types of questions and provide you with a strategy to handle the long reading passages.

Passive Reading:
Whatever!

Active Reading:
Keep your eye on the prize

SAT READING COMPREHENSION: CRACKING THE SYSTEM

You read every day. So what's the difference between plain old reading and reading on the Critical Reading section of the SAT? Often, when you read, you read *passively*. When you read a street sign or a magazine (or even sometimes your school books), you are reading just to figure out what the words stand for and to see what might strike you as interesting or important.

On the SAT, you should read *actively*. You will read with an eye toward finding specific information that you need in order to answer a question. Once you've found the necessary information, you need to know not only what the words stand for, but also what they are *really saying*. Sometimes SAT passages are clear and logical, but other times facts, ideas, and opinions are stated indirectly.

Your Task, as Given by ETS

The majority of questions on the Critical Reading sections of the SAT are what we call reading comprehension questions, which refer to a passage or passages. The passage appears first, followed by a series of questions that relate to it. The first two passages you will see in two of the Critical Reading sections will be short; the rest of the passages will be longer.

Let's look at the instructions that ETS gives you for reading comprehension questions:

Each passage below is followed by questions based on its content. Answer the questions on the basis of what is stated or implied in each passage and in any introductory material that may be provided.

In other words, use the passage! No outside knowledge is required.

An Open-Book Test

Great news—the SAT is an open-book test! How can you take advantage of this fact? It's easy. Don't waste time carefully reading the passage. Instead, follow the strategies we're going to teach you here. You can find the information to answer the questions without spending lots of time getting bogged down in the details of that long, boring passage.

Don't Be Like Joe

ETS writes the reading comprehension section hoping you will act just like Joe Bloggs. Here's what he does—and what you should avoid doing.

- Joe wastes time reading stuff he doesn't need.
- Joe doesn't make sure he knows what the questions are really asking.
- Joe reads carelessly when looking for the answer to a question.
- Joe looks at the answer choices before he has any idea what the answer should look like.
- Joe falls for trap answers designed just for him.

READING COMPREHENSION: YOUR BASIC STRATEGY

To avoid being like Joe, here's how you should approach the reading comprehension questions. Don't worry! We'll come back to this list often!

1. **Read the Italicized Blurb.** It's short, and it helps with the main idea.
2. **Work the passage.** For some passages, you can go right to the questions. (We'll go over how to decide whether or not to do that in a minute.) If you do read the passage, try not to spend more than two minutes on it. Don't get bogged down in the details. Just get a sense of the passage as a whole.
3. **Select a Question.** You should look at the questions in the order they appear and—mostly—you will answer them in order. Reading Comprehension questions don't go in order of difficulty, though, you may want to skip hard ones, at least at first. *Make sure you know what a question is asking* before you answer it. Then *always* go back to the passage before looking at the answer choices.
4. **Read only what you need.** Most of the answers will be located in a small portion of the passage. Sometimes the answer is a couple sentences away from the line reference in the question. A good rule of thumb is to read 5 lines on either side.
5. **Answer the Question.** If possible, use your own words before you go to the answer choices.
6. **Use POE.** Eliminate the four worst answers.

Now, let's put these steps into practice. A sample passage and questions appear on the next two pages. Don't start working the passage right away. In fact, you can't—the answer choices are missing (they'll be revealed later). Just go ahead to page 58, where we will begin to go through each of these six steps using the following passage on the next two pages as an illustration.

The Fact Bank

Somebody once asked notorious thief Willie Sutton why he robbed banks. "Because that's where the money is," he replied. While reading comprehension is safer and slightly more productive than larceny, the same principle applies: Concentrate on the questions and answer choices because that's where the points are. The passage is just a place for ETS to stash facts and details. You'll find them when you need to. What's the point of memorizing all 67 pesky details about plankton if ETS asks you about only 12?

Sample Passage and Questions

Here is an example of what a reading comprehension passage and questions look like. We will use this passage to illustrate reading comprehension techniques, so you don't need to do the questions right now, but you may want to stick a paper clip on this page to make it easier to flip back to it.

Questions 17–24 are based on the following passage.

The following is an excerpt from an essay published in a weekly San Francisco newspaper column. The author discusses his visit to a beached whale.

I went out, several days ago, to see the whale—I speak in the singular number, because there was only one whale on the beach at that time. My comrade was not well; consequently we travelled slowly, and conversed about distressing diseases and such other matters as I thought would be likely to interest a sick man and make him feel cheerful. Instead of commenting on the mild scenery, we spoke of the ravages of the cholera in the happy days of our boyhood; instead of boasting of the swiftness of our horse, as most persons similarly situated would have done, we chatted gaily of consumption; and when we caught a glimpse of long white lines of waves rolling in silently upon the distant shore, our hearts were gladdened by fond memories of sea-sickness. It was a nice comfortable journey, and I could not have enjoyed it more if I had been sick myself.

When we got to the Cliff House we were disappointed. I had always heard there was such a grand view to be seen there of the majestic ocean, with its white billows stretching far away until it met and mingled with the bending sky; with here and there a stately ship upon its surface, ploughing through plains of sunshine and deserts of shadow cast from the clouds above; and, near at hand, piles of picturesque rocks, splashed with angry surf and garrisoned by drunken, sprawling sea-lions and elegant, long-legged pelicans.

It was a bitter disappointment. There was nothing in sight but an ordinary counter, and behind it a long row of bottles with Old Bourbon, and Old Rye, and Old Tom, and the old, old story of man's falter and woman's fall, in them. Nothing in the world to be seen but these things. We stayed there an hour and a half, and took observations from different points of view, but the general result was the same—nothing but bottles and a bar. They keep a field-glass there, for the accommodation of those who wish to see the sights, and we looked at the bottles through that, but it did not help the matter any to speak of; we turned it end for end, but instead of increasing the view it diminished it.

We left the hotel, then, and drove along the level beach, drowsily admiring the terraced surf, and listening to the tidings it was bringing from other lands in the mysterious language of its ceaseless roar, until we hove in sight of the stranded whale. We thought it was a cliff, an isolated hill, an island—anything but a fish, capable of being cut up and stowed away in a ship. Its proportions were magnified a

thousand-fold beyond any conception we had previously formed of them. We felt that we could not complain of a disappointment in regard to the whale, at any rate.

Then the light of inspiration dawned upon me, and I knew what I would do if I kept the hotel, and the whale belonged to me. I would not permit any one to approach nearer than six or eight hundred yards to the show, because at that distance the light mists, or the peculiar atmosphere, or something, exaggerates it into a monster of colossal size. It grows smaller as you go towards it. When we got pretty close to it, the island shrunk into a fish—a very large one for a sardine, it is true, but a very small one for a whale. Distance had been lending immensity to the view. We were disappointed again somewhat; but see how things are regulated! The very source of our disappointment was a blessing to us: As it was, there was just as much smell as two of us could stand; and if the fish had been larger there would have been more, wouldn't there?

The whale was not a long one, physically speaking—say thirty-five feet—but he smelt much longer; he smelt as much as a mile and a half longer, I should say, for we traveled about that distance beyond him before we ceased to detect his fragrance in the atmosphere. My comrade said he did not admire to smell a whale; and I adopt his sentiments while I scorn his language. A whale does not smell like magnolia, nor yet like heliotrope or “Balm of a Thousand Flowers”; I do not know, but I should judge that it smells more like a thousand pole-cats.

These are the questions for the passage. We've removed the answers because, for now, we just want you to see the different question types the SAT will ask. Don't worry about answering these yet.

17. The author and his traveling companion discussed illnesses because

20. It can be inferred that the author chose the distance of "six or eight hundred yards" (lines 49–50) because it

18. The cause of the "bitter disappointment" (line 25) was that

21. The author would most likely agree with which one of the following about the "blessing" (line 58)?

19. The author mentions "a cliff, an isolated hill, an island" (lines 41–42) in order to

22. As used in line 67, "admire" most nearly means

23. The final sentence of the passage serves to

24. The author's tone can best be described as

The Strategy

1. Read the blurb.

The Blurb

You should always begin by reading the blurb (the italicized stuff above the passage). The blurb tells you whether the passage is fiction or nonfiction and gives you a sense of what the passage will be about. Sometimes the blurb won't be very helpful. It may only tell you the most basic information about the passage, such as where the passage came from. (*"The following passage is adapted from a magazine article written by a biologist."*) But, for most passages, the blurb will give you crucial information about the overall topic of the passages. (*"In this passage from a novel, a Korean-American woman recalls her childhood in the 1980s. Her family had traveled to Texas from Korea after her father was hired by an electronics company. Here the author describes meeting her father's new boss."*) Although you will never be able to answer a question by only reading the information in the blurb, the blurb will often help you understand the passage better and give you necessary background information to answer certain questions.

Read the blurb at the beginning of the passage on page 56. Based on the blurb, what do you think the passage will be about? Write your answer in the space below.

The Strategy

1. Read the blurb.
2. Work the passage.

Work the Passage

For some passages, some people are comfortable going right to the questions. Let's give it a try with this one! For all passages if you feel that you need to read the passage first, get through the passage, but read it quickly. Remember: There is no way you can be asked about every single detail in the passage, and you have to go back to the passage for each question anyway. So, don't get stuck in the details.

The Strategy

1. Read the blurb.
2. Work the passage.
3. Select a question.

Select a Question and Read Only What You Need

It may seem as though there are lots of different types of questions with very similar and subjective answer choices, but as you will see, almost all questions can be treated in the same way. Let's first take a look at the order in which the questions appear and where in the passage you will find the answers you need.

Difficulty and Chronology

In most sections of the SAT, questions appear in an increasing order of difficulty—but not in reading comprehension. Instead, the questions follow the chronology of the passage. For this reason, you will want to work the questions in the order they appear; as you answer questions, you will be going through the passage from beginning to end. However, don't get stuck on a hard question. If you're having trouble, move on—other questions are likely to be easier. You can always come back to the questions you skipped.

Once you have selected a question, be sure you understand exactly what it is asking.

Line References and Lead Words

Nearly all questions have line references, which makes it easier to find the relevant information. If there is no line reference in a question, you can get an idea of where in the passage to find the answer based on the line references used in the questions before and after—you'll be looking somewhere in between. Also, use names, dates, quotes, italicized words, and easily spotted phrases to help you find the correct part of the passage within the chronological range. We call these Lead Words.

Take a look at the first question:

17. The author and his traveling companion discussed illnesses because

Where do you expect to find the answer to this question? Notice that the next question refers to line 25, so our question should refer to information before line 25. Because it is the first question, it would make sense to start by looking in the first paragraph. Use Lead Words to narrow down the search. From the blurb, you know that the passage is about a visit to a beached whale. The question, however, focuses on illnesses, a topic unlikely to appear much in the passage. So, you can scan the first paragraph looking for something about sickness. It turns out the entire first paragraph is about illnesses. Now you know what to read!

Once you know where to look in the passage, don't make one of Joe's biggest mistakes: reading only the line or sentence mentioned in the question. Usually, the answer to the question will appear a couple of lines above or below the line to which you are sent. In fact, that specific line from the question may very well contain trap answers. Generally, you should read 10 to 15 lines of text, although sometimes a bit more is needed. Think in terms of paragraphs. When you are writing, you start a new paragraph because you have a new idea, right? The authors of the passages used in the SAT start new paragraphs for the exact same reason. So, you will typically be able to find the answer within the paragraph mentioned. Remember that 10 to 15 lines, or about a paragraph, is a good guideline, but it is only a guideline. Sometimes you'll have to read more.

Answer the Question

Before you look at the answer choices, you should try to answer the question in your own words. You won't be able to answer every question in your own words. Sometimes the questions are so open-ended that you will have to use the answers given and see what is supported by the text. However, for many of the questions you will be able to find the answer to the question in the passage. We'll use the passage on page 56 to learn about the different types of reading comprehension questions, and how to determine and articulate the answers. Later, we will look at the answer choices and consider POE.

The Strategy

1. Read the blurb.
2. Work the passage.
3. Select a question.
4. **Read only what you need.**

The Strategy

1. Read the blurb.
2. Work the passage.
3. Select a question.
4. Read only what you need.
5. **Answer the question.**

Remember this; it's important! *Almost all the questions are going to refer to specific text in the passage.* Don't be creative and don't read too much into the passage. Just find what the author actually wrote.

Detail Questions

Many questions just ask for details about the passage. Let's take a look at Question 17 again.

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17. The author and his traveling companion discussed illnesses because

Here's How to Crack It.

This question asks what the author says about why he and his friend talked about illnesses. Go to the first paragraph of the passage with that question in mind. When you have an answer, write it down in the empty space provided under the question.

You should have noticed that in lines 3 to 6 the author explains that his friend was not well and the author thought it would make the friend feel better to discuss illnesses. The correct answer to question 17 will contain that information.

Let's try another detail question.

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18. The cause of the "bitter disappointment" (line 25) was that

Here's How to Crack It

This question asks what the author says about what caused a "bitter disappointment." Go to the passage, find what you need, and write down the answer to the question. Remember that the answer is unlikely to appear in line 25, but should be in the lines either before or after it. Look at the paragraph containing line 25. Here, the author tells us that all he could see was an old bar, no beautiful views at all.

Purpose Questions

Many questions on the SAT ask why the author wrote something. These questions typically have the words “in order to” or “serves to.” At first you might think that these questions require more effort than going to the passage and finding the relevant details—you might think you have to do a lot of generalization or re-read the whole passage. But you don’t! An author’s purpose will appear in the passage—you just have to find that part.

Let’s take a look at a purpose question.

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19. The author mentions “a cliff, an isolated hill, an island” (lines 41–42) in order to

Here’s How to Crack It

This question asks you why the author mentioned the cliff, hill, and island. Go to the passage and find out what the author actually said about why he mentioned those things.

The paragraph as a whole explains that the whale was much larger than anything the author expected. The author mentioned the cliff, hill, and island in order to explain how surprisingly large the whale was: “Its proportions were magnified a thousand-fold beyond any conception we had previously formed of them.”

What’s the Big Picture?

Be careful! ETS will try to trip you up in purpose questions by including answer choices that are about specific details in the relevant line. But you are looking for *the reason* the author used those details, not the details themselves.

We will see another purpose question later (number 23), but for now let’s continue working in order and looking at other question types.

Suggest/Infer/Imply/Agree Questions

Many questions on the SAT ask what the passage “suggests,” what is “implied” by the passage, what “inference” can be drawn from the passage, or with which answer the author “would most likely agree.” This all seems to invite creativity and reading between the lines, doesn’t it? Don’t fall for that trap! Just as with Detail and Purpose questions, the answer must be supported by the *actual text* of the passage.

There *is* one important difference between these question types and Detail questions. With Detail questions, the question is usually narrow enough that you can find the precise answer right away. With Support/Infer/Imply/Agree questions, the answer is often about a fairly minor point that you might not have focused on when you first read the passage. In that case, you might have to do a little more work during the POE step, as we’ll see.

Let's take a look at one of these questions.

20. It can be inferred that the author chose the distance of "six or eight hundred yards" (lines 49–50) because it

Read the fifth paragraph of the passage and jot down your impressions about why the author decided he wouldn't permit anyone closer than six or eight hundred feet. When we evaluate the answer choices, you will see whether the correct answer actually relates to detail on which you thought to focus.

Question 21 is another Suggest/Imply/Infer/Agree question, asking which statement about the blessing the author would most likely agree with. Read around line 58 and jot down what you think the author is saying. We'll discuss the question further in the POE section.

Vocab-in-Context Questions

We call questions that ask what a particular word "most nearly means" (or a similar variation on the phrase) Vocab-in-Context questions. These questions are very similar to Sentence Completion questions. In fact, it's a good idea to use a technique like the ones in the Sentence Completion chapter here: Cross out the word in the passage and come up with your own word based on the clues and triggers.

If you take the time to figure out how the author is using the word, these questions tend not to be very difficult; but Joe Bloggs has trouble with them. He picks the answer choice that contains the most common definition of the word, rather than the answer that accurately reflects how the author is using the word.

Let's take a look at a Vocab-in-Context question.

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22. As used in line 67, "admire" most nearly means

Here's How to Crack it

Read a few lines around line 67, and go all the way to the end. Cross out the word *admire*, and write a word that could go into the blank, based upon the clues and triggers in the sentence, and the surrounding sentences.

The paragraph is generally about the terrible stench of the whale. The author's friend said that he "did not _____ to smell a whale," and the author agreed given the bad odor. A good word for the blank might be "want" or something similar.

Question 23 is another Purpose question. It asks why the author wrote the final sentence. Although you've already read that sentence for Question 22, read it (and

several additional lines) again with Question 23 in mind, and write down your answer. We will discuss this question in the POE section.

Tone/Attitude Questions

In most nonfiction passages, attitude and tone questions usually relate to the author's feeling or opinion about the subject matter. But in some nonfiction passages, such as the one on page 56, attitude or tone questions can relate to the author's overall "voice." (In fiction passages, such questions often relate to a character's feeling about someone or something.)

Arriving at your own answer to a Tone or Attitude question is often pretty straightforward, but as we'll see in the POE section (which is coming up next, we promise!), the answer choices can contain trap answers and new or difficult vocabulary words.

Let's take a look at Question 24.

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24. The author's tone can best be described as

Here's How to Crack It

Hopefully, the work you did while answering the previous questions gave you enough information to come up with an answer to this question. (If not, this is the time to read the passage again.) Write down some words that come to mind about the author's tone.

You might have written down something such as "light-hearted" or anything along those lines.

Use Process of Elimination

All right. Now we're ready to finally get into the mechanics of POE and the Reading Comprehension section. You should remember the basics of POE from Chapter 2: Once you have an idea of how a question should be answered, you can eliminate the answer choices that don't fit. As we'll see, there are several ways an answer can be incorrect, but they all boil down one key fact: The answer choice is not supported by the text of the passage.

Let's look at the questions for the passage on page 56, this time with the answer choices. As we evaluate the answer choices, we'll go over how to recognize and avoid the types of trap answers that appeal to Joe Bloggs.

Reading Passage Vocabulary

Many questions in the reading passages heavily rely on your vocabulary. Tone questions commonly have hard vocabulary. Often, if you know merely whether the word is positive or negative, you can use POE and get down to just one or two choices. If so, guess aggressively.

The Strategy

1. Read the blurb.
2. Work the passage.
3. Choose and translate a question.
4. Read only what you need.
5. Answer the question.
6. Use POE.

POE: The Answer Choice Is Not Supported

Let's take another look at question 17, this time with the answers.

17. The author and his traveling companion discussed illnesses because
- (A) the cholera epidemic of the era was a concern to the travelers
 - (B) the author hoped to avoid discussing the reason for the journey
 - (C) the author supposed that the topic would be welcomed by his friend
 - (D) the travelers were mocking the pretensions of elite society
 - (E) the traveling companion worried about the author's deteriorating health

Here's How to Crack It

From our earlier practice, we know that the answer to this Detail question is that the author believed that his sick friend would feel better if they discussed illnesses.

Did you notice that answer choice A refers to a detail—cholera—mentioned in the relevant part of the passage? Watch out for words that are recycled from the passage. The more closely the words of an answer choice track the passage, the more careful you must be, because this is probably ETS trying to trip you up. Answer choices B and D have nothing to do with anything in the passage.

Avoid Trap Answers!
Recycled Words
Half Right = All Wrong

Let's look at answer choice E a little more closely. This choice contains a reference to health, which is related to what we want in the correct answer. But this answer choice gets the details wrong. It was the friend, not the author, who was sick. Answer choices that are only half right (or any amount right other than all right) are all wrong.

Only answer choice C is anywhere close to the answer we're looking for. While it may not have a lot of detail, remember that that's not a problem here—it is correct, and that's all that matters. Knowing the answer in advance makes POE much easier.

Let's try the next question.

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18. The cause of the "bitter disappointment" (line 25) was that
- (A) the whale that the author and his friend had traveled to see was no longer on the beach
 - (B) the previously warm weather had turned rainy and cold, forcing the companions to return home
 - (C) the hotel in which the author intended to lodge was much older than he had expected
 - (D) the traveling companions were looking for natural beauty where it would not likely be found
 - (E) the author's personality limited enjoyment of a scene that all others would appreciate

Here's How to Crack It

This Detail question was a bit more difficult to answer, but, again, having the answer in mind already makes evaluating the answer choices easier. The author was disappointed because the panoramic views at the beach he expected to see were not visible while he was inside the hotel, remember? Answer choice D provides this answer.

Did you see that answer choice C uses recycled words? Joe might have picked it, because the lines immediately following line 25 talk about the aging bar. But a careful reading of those lines showed us that the bar itself was not the nature of the disappointment.

Answer choice E might also appeal to Joe, because he's likely to read more into a question than he needs to. Leaving aside that the passage provides no support for this answer, the answer is also too extreme. To say that the author cannot enjoy beauty or that all others would enjoy a certain scene goes way too far.

Avoid Trap Answers!

Extreme
Goes too Far

Now let's look at question 19, our Purpose question.

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19. The author mentions "a cliff, an isolated hill, an island" (lines 41–42) in order to
- (A) describe the nearby scenery as they traveled to the whale
 - (B) indicate the size of the whale relative to the nearby scenery
 - (C) show his bravery in traveling over dangerous terrain
 - (D) express a desire to visit lands brought to mind by the waves
 - (E) emphasize that the actual size of the whale was unexpected

Here's How to Crack It

Our expected answer to this Purpose question was that the author wanted to emphasize the surprisingly large size of the whale. This is exactly what we find in answer choice E. Did you notice the Recycled Words in answer choice D?

Also, notice that answer choice B starts off well but goes too far. The author initially may have thought the whale *was* a cliff or hill from far away, but he never *compared* it to the actual scenery or stated that the whale was in fact as large as an island. ETS loves to use answer choices that go a bit too far, because Joe usually falls for the trap!

On to the Suggest question.

20. It can be inferred that the author chose the distance of "six or eight hundred yards" (lines 49–50) because it
- (A) hides necessary information
 - (B) exaggerates a particular quality
 - (C) underscores the fragrance of the whale
 - (D) reveals an unusual aspect
 - (E) highlights the small size of the whale

Here's How to Crack It

As we discussed, it's sometimes hard to predict how an open-ended Suggest question like this will be answered. You should read the relevant part of the passage to keep the details fresh, but the real work will take place when you do POE. You need to ask yourself whether each answer choice is actually supported by the text.

Watch out for all the usual traps.

In the passage, the author says that he would keep people far away from the whale *because at that distance the light mists, or the peculiar atmosphere, or something, exaggerates it into a monster of colossal size*. So the author wants to keep people away from the whale because it seems larger when he is farther away.

Answer choice A is incorrect because the distance doesn't hide *necessary* information, it just alters how people perceive the whale. Answer choice C isn't discussed in this part of the passage: the fragrance is discussed later on. Answer choice E doesn't answer the question. Although the author states that, close up, the whale seems small, the question is asking about how the whale looks from a distance.

This leaves answer choices B and D. Answer choice D is incorrect because the author never says that it is *unusual* that the whale seems larger when he is farther away from it. He says, simply, that it was *disappointing*.

The only answer left, then, is B. The distance *exaggerates a particular quality*. In this case, the quality exaggerated is the whale's size.

See how the answer to the question still comes directly from the passage? For all Infer/Imply/Suggest questions, the answer is stated, or nearly stated, in the passage.

Let's move on to the next question.

21. The author would most likely agree with which one of the following about the "blessing" (line 58)?
- (A) An even larger whale would smell worse than the whale on the beach.
 - (B) Existing regulations would not prevent the author from seeing a larger whale up close.
 - (C) After the earlier disappointment in the hotel, the author was pleased to have found the whale.
 - (D) The author was amused that his reaction to the whale was consistent with his personality.
 - (E) The author's companion would not have reacted well had the whale been much larger.

Here's How to Crack It

Finding the answer to this question might have taken a bit of detective work, because you needed first to figure out what the “source of the disappointment” was before finding out why it was a blessing. The source of the disappointment, as revealed in the lines just before line 58, was the whale’s size—the whale was smaller than they had thought when they saw it from a distance. So, why was the smaller size a blessing? The author tells us after line 58 that the whale had a terrible stench, and a larger whale would have smelled even worse!

If you thought about the question in this way, you already know that answer choice A is correct. The remaining answer choices are simply not supported by the text of the passage. Which one do you think Joe might choose? (Hint: Read the sentence just before line 58.)

Next up, we'll look at the Vocab-in-Context question.

22. As used in line 67, “admire” most nearly means

- (A) respect
- (B) marvel
- (C) desire
- (D) prize
- (E) regard

Here's How to Crack It

When we worked on this question earlier, we understood that the author used admire to mean something like want. Answer choice C—desire—is correct. Vocab-in-Context questions are usually not difficult, so they provide a very quick way to gain a point. Don't skip these questions! If you're running low on time, and see a Vocab-in-Context question near the end, give it a shot. Even on the hardest Vocab-in-Context questions, you will be able to eliminate a couple answers easily, leaving you with a good guess for the answer.

Next up, our other Purpose question:

23. The final sentence of the passage serves to

- (A) display the author's knowledge
- (B) draw a meaningful contrast
- (C) express a burning concern
- (D) disagree with a position
- (E) articulate an intention

Here's How to Crack It

You probably said the author's purpose was to explain how bad the whale smelled. Notice, however, that the answer choices are more abstract than what we anticipated. As you go through each answer choice, you will still look for the same reasons to eliminate. However, because each answer is more abstract, you just won't end up liking the correct answer as much.

In the sentence, the author stated that the whale does not smell like various flowers, but rather smells like pole-cats. The author is contrasting things that smell good (flowers) to things that smell terrible (pole-cats) to make his point. Answer choice B, therefore, is correct.

Answer choice A is incorrect because, although the author may be showing off his knowledge, that is not the purpose of the sentence. Likewise, notice that the author disagreed with his friend's choice of words, but he did not disagree with his friend's sentiments about the smell ("I adopt his sentiments while I scorn his language")—so answer choice D is wrong.

Just about done! We'll finish the passage with the Tone question.

24. The author's tone can best be described as

- (A) indignant
- (B) grave
- (C) ambivalent
- (D) sardonic
- (E) serene

Here's How to Crack It

Earlier, our answer to this question was *sarcastic* or *light-hearted*, remember? Choice D is correct.

What if you didn't know the meaning of sardonic? On Tone and Attitude questions, remember to put a ? next to any word you can't immediately define. Many times, you may not know the definition of the correct answer choice, but if you can eliminate the other four, you can be sure that the remaining answer choice with a ? next to it is correct. If you don't know two or three words, then you will still be able to eliminate enough answers to make a good guess.

Here, even though the author spoke of disappointments, it's way too extreme to say that his tone was indignant or even grave. Likewise, the author is not ambivalent; he had a great time writing his essay!



Need More Help?

For video instruction, go to www.princetonreview.com/cracking.

Finally, know your Tone/Attitude vocabulary—the words mentioned above and these words:

apathetic	contemptuous	didactic	disdainful	earnest
equivocal	ironic	nonchalant	nostalgic	qualified
resigned	solemn	unabashed	whimsical	wistful

POE: Last Words

Sometimes, you might find it hard to decide between two or even three answers. In that case, it's more important than ever to stick with POE; your task is to look for wrong answers, not the right one—and there are always going to be more wrong answers than right ones! Remember what trap answers look like and try to eliminate those types of answer choices. Sometimes a single word or small phrase is enough to make an answer choice wrong.

We've gone over the four major types of trap answers in this chapter already, but here they are again:

- Recycled Words
- Half Right = All Wrong
- Extreme Language
- Goes Too Far

Remember that the typical trap answers for Tone/Attitude questions are as follows:

- Extreme
- Uncaring
- Unknowledgeable

Finally, remember that some questions are just harder than others. It is okay to guess after you have gone as far as you can with POE, or to skip a particularly tricky question and come back later if there is time.

Drill 1

The paragraphs on the following pages are excerpts from different passages. For each question, read what you need, write down or say the answer to yourself, and use POE to find the answer. You can check your work on pages 369–370.

Line
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35
... Even casual fans of the sport of baseball are likely to recognize the impact Babe Ruth had on the sport. Of course, Ruth's feats on the baseball diamond are well-documented: Ruth is among the all-time leaders in home runs, runs batted in, and walks. In addition, he helped the New York Yankees win seven pennants. But what few people realize is the significant impact Babe Ruth had off the field. His larger than life persona and his distinctive physical appearance captured the imaginations of fans of all ages and helped to revitalize the sport of baseball.

14. In lines 33–37, the author suggests that
- (A) Babe Ruth succeeded in baseball in part due to his physical size
 - (B) Babe Ruth hit more home runs than any other player of his time
 - (C) children of Babe Ruth's era enjoyed watching him play baseball
 - (D) because of Babe Ruth, the rules of baseball were changed
 - (E) Babe Ruth had more influence off the field than on the field

Line
25
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... In 1770, it is said that an English engineer, Edward Naime, writing at home, accidentally picked up a chunk of this rubber instead of the breadcrumbs commonly used then to remove pencil marks, and discovered its possibilities as an erasing tool. He eventually sold his "rubber squares" throughout the continent. The only inadequacy of those early erasers was that, like food, they spoiled quickly—a problem that remained until 1839, when Charles Goodyear learned to "cure" the rubber to prevent spoilage, and the new and improved eraser became even more popular. . .

12. According to the passage, a problem with early erasers was that they
- (A) were costly to ship outside of the continent
 - (B) tended to rot before they were fully used
 - (C) lacked the popularity of breadcrumbs
 - (D) were less effective than rounded erasers
 - (E) required nearly 70 years to cure

Line
15
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... The annals of scientific history are filled with names of great import. August names such as Mendeleev, Darwin, and Einstein dominate their respective fields, and the majority of science textbooks sing their praises as well. But what of the names J.L. Meyer, A.R. Wallace, and Hermann Minkowski? These names are not revered, but instead have been relegated to the dustbin of science, known only to the most diligent of scientific scholars. Yet these men developed their own important theories, often at the same time as their better known contemporaries. . .

10. The author mentions "Mendeleev, Darwin, and Einstein" (lines 14–15) in order to
- (A) examine an important discovery
 - (B) praise a developing trend
 - (C) revise a questionable theory
 - (D) illustrate a repeating pattern
 - (E) illustrate a contrast

Line
40
45
... Since 1980, hyaluronan has been used to treat humans in a variety of ways: to protect the cornea during eye surgery, to reduce arthritic inflammation, and to prevent formation of scar tissue after surgery. Hyaluronan occurs naturally in humans, but it was originally discovered in the eyes of cows in the 1930s. At the time, there was no commercially viable way to extract hyaluronan to test its therapeutic potential. Years later, scientists not only discovered the compound was contained in rooster combs but also developed a method to extract it from them. Veterinarians used hyaluronan for years before the extraction method patent was sold to a major pharmaceutical company in 1980.

17. It can be inferred from lines 43–49 that
- (A) after 1980, veterinarians were prohibited from using hyaluronan
 - (B) scientists did not initially anticipate that hyaluronan would be useful
 - (C) hyaluronan has been extracted from humans, cows and rooster combs
 - (D) a financial impediment relating to hyaluronan has been resolved
 - (E) hyaluronan's most important use is to prevent scar tissue after surgery

Line . . . When he sat at that desk he would be taking up, he
60 thought of not his own career, but the career of the entity
who had occupied the office through generations, and would
occupy it in perpetual succession. Vaguely he began to miss
something. The sensation was like that of one who has long
worn a ring on his finger, but omits to put it on one morning.
65 For that person there is a vague sense of something missing
throughout the day. Bonbright did not know what he felt the
lack of—it was his identity.

24. The word “omits” (line 64) most nearly means

- (A) removes
- (B) deletes
- (C) neglects
- (D) desists
- (E) forbears

. . . Yet, the original *Star Wars* trilogy offers much more
than fantasy and adventure. The movies remind us of our
noblest instincts—and our basest. Darth Vader’s iron rule
recalls many totalitarian regimes throughout history, and
Line 45 Yoda’s wisdom and innate goodness reflects heroes such
as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. The ramshackle
freedom fighters mirror seemingly doomed but ultimately
successful revolutionaries, from George Washington to
Lech Walesa. We relate to the innocence of Luke, the raffish
50 attitude of Han Solo, and the strength of Leia. Yes, *Star Wars*
may take place “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” but
it continues soundly to resonate in the here and now. . .

19. The author’s attitude toward *Star Wars* can best be
described as

- (A) complete adoration
- (B) sincere admiration
- (C) certain indifference
- (D) qualified aversion
- (E) blatant distaste

Line . . . The word *telescope* literally means “far-seeing,” but
45 all telescopes do not “see” in the same way. While the most
common types of telescope use a system of mirrors and
lenses to gather light from distant objects, other telescopes
employ very different ways of seeing. Radio telescopes, for
example, do not “see” at all; rather, they use antennae to pick
50 up radio waves emitted by celestial objects. Other telescopes,
such as X-ray telescopes, infrared telescopes, and ultraviolet
telescopes, can see wavelengths imperceptible to the human
eye. NASA’s next major telescope project—heralded as a
breakthrough—will rely on a combination of these types of
methods . . .

21. The author’s mention of “X-ray telescopes, infrared
telescopes, and ultraviolet telescopes” (lines 51–52)
serves to

- (A) demonstrate that the mechanisms by which
telescopes receive information differ
- (B) provide evidence that the design of NASA’s
upcoming telescope will be innovative
- (C) underscore the importance of revising the accepted
definition of how telescopes “see”
- (D) establish that telescope technologies using
imperceptible wavelengths are essential
- (E) support the thesis that the use of mirrors and lenses
in telescopes has become outdated

Line . . . Originally used for architecture, terra-cotta was
20 transformed into an artistic material during the Renaissance.
Sculptors in particular began to use the fired clay to make
“bozzetti,” rough drafts of sculptures that would later be
created out of stone, bronze, or other more traditional
25 materials. These rough drafts, however, often created more
interest than the finished works. During the eighteenth
century, art aficionados began collecting terra-cotta models
for exhibitions in their homes and at salons. Collectors
maintained that the models presented a more accurate
30 representation of an artist’s talent, and created a sustainable
market for larger sculptures. . . .

15. It can be inferred from the passage that in the eighteenth
century

- (A) collectors were finally able to recognize a sculptor’s
talent
- (B) terra-cotta’s use for architecture remained
fashionable
- (C) some finished sculptures continued to interest
collectors
- (D) there was no sustainable market for smaller
sculptures
- (E) artists sometimes used terra-cotta for a finished
work

Line
15

... Because Western classical music encompasses such a variety of styles and spans more than a thousand years, it is difficult to identify the genre's primary characteristics. A monastic chant that relies solely on the human voice and an orchestral symphony utilizing multiple instruments are both classical, yet neither sounds remotely like the other. Even the title "classical" is misleading, given that music historians uniformly recognize the years from A.D. 1750 to 1827 as the Classical era of classical music. Despite this inability to definitely pinpoint the nature of classical music, people of all musical backgrounds continue to find the label useful. . .

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11. The author would most likely agree with which one of the following statements?

- (A) People will never reach agreement about the proper use of the term classical music.
- (B) A useful label must definitively pinpoint the nature of the object the label describes.
- (C) The year in which a piece of music was created is a useful indicator of the music's genre.
- (D) It is necessary that classical music utilize instruments.
- (E) Not all music labeled as classical must share similar characteristics and rhythms.



Summary

- Reading comprehension questions account for more than two-thirds of all the points on the Critical Reading sections.
- Reading comprehension questions are *not* presented in order of difficulty, but they are in chronological order. Don't be afraid to skip a hard question, and don't worry if you can't answer every question. Most people can't.
- Reading comprehension is like an open-book test. Instead of reading through the whole passage carefully, seek out the information you need based on the questions.
- Approach reading comprehension passages by reading the blurb first. Then, decide whether you will go right to the questions or skim the passage.
- Translate the questions into your own words. You can't answer a question if you don't understand what it's asking.
- Use line references, lead words, and chronology to help you find ETS's answer in the passage. Always start reading a few lines above the line reference or the lead words and read until you have the answer.
- Answer the questions in your own words before you read ETS's answers. You will avoid Joe Bloggs answer choices by knowing what the answer is before you read any of the choices.
- Use POE to get rid of choices that don't match yours. Cross out incorrect choices as you go. If you don't cross out incorrect choices, you'll waste time and energy rereading wrong answer choices.
- When using POE, look for answers with the following characteristics:
 - not mentioned in the passage
 - recycled words
 - half-right, half-wrong
 - extreme language
 - the opposite of what is said in the passage