

CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES

The Critical Reading sections test vocabulary and advanced reading comprehension. There are two question types: sentence completion (19 questions total) and passage-based reading (48 questions total).

For both question types, use your pencil as you read to circle key words and phrases. Use the process of elimination to narrow down your answer choices. Keep in mind that the questions progress from easiest to hardest and use your time efficiently: if you are stuck, circle the question and move on.

Sentence Completion

- Read the sentence carefully, and think of a word before looking at the answer options.
 - If you can't think of a specific word, decide whether the answer should have a positive or negative connotation.
 - Use context and familiar word roots, prefixes, and suffixes to decipher unfamiliar words.
 - Watch out for negative words and prefixes.
 - Watch for words that signal support, contrast, cause and effect.
 - Check all five options before making your final choice. Remember that you are being asked to find the *best* answer, even though other answers could seem to make sense.
 - For double blank sentences, test one blank at a time, not two.
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Passage-Based Reading

- Read the italicized information at the beginning of the passage. This contains important context to help you answer questions accurately.
- Tackle passages with familiar subjects first. Deal with one passage at a time.
- Try to read the passage in full before looking at the questions.
- For double passages, try tackling specific questions regarding the first passage first. As you go on to read the second passage, look for important similarities and differences in the author's argument, technique, or tone as compared to the first passage.
- **Active reading:** use your pencil as a guide to circle or underline 2-3 **main ideas** per paragraph. The goal is to gain a better sense of the overall passage structure and to make information easier to find when you are answering questions. You may also want to note the author's thesis, technique, or tone in the margins as you read. Questions about the passage will likely relate to the main ideas and main techniques of the argument, not irrelevant details.
- Use line references as a guide when looking for answers, making sure to review for context the material that comes before and after the specified lines.

- All answers come directly from the passage. You should always be able to support your answer choice with specific quotations from the author. Don't answer the questions by memory alone, and don't rely on your own knowledge or opinion of the subject.
- Use caution with extreme answer options, or answers that are too specific or broad.
- If you have difficulty concentrating, try moving your lips as you read.

Major Question Types: Passage-Based Reading

- **Main idea:** check the first and last sentences of every paragraph, or the first and last paragraphs in the passage. As you read, continually ask yourself what the main idea of the paragraph is, how that idea is explained or illustrated, and how that paragraph connects with the rest of the passage.
- **Specific details:** use line references when they are given. Make sure you are circling/underlining efficiently as you read so you can locate information quickly. Circle key words in the question and then scan the passage to find them or their synonyms.
- **Inferences:** choose an answer that logically expands on the information the author has provided. You should still be able to support these answers with specific text from the passage.
- **Vocabulary in context:** many of these words have multiple possible meanings, so you must always look back to the passage to decide how the author is using the word in context. Substitute each answer choice for the word in the sentence and see if it makes sense. For unfamiliar words, look for clues nearby in the passage.
- **Tone/attitude:** how is the author emotionally engaged with the subject? Know the following words: *aloof, ambivalent, apathetic, callous, candid, caustic, cautionary, condescending, contemplative, contemptuous, cynical, derisive, detached, didactic, disparaging, dispassionate, erudite, flippant, forthright, grudging, incredulous, indignant, indifferent, ironic, jaded, judicious, laudatory, malicious, naïve, nostalgic, patronizing, pedantic, pompous, pragmatic, prosaic, resigned, reverent, sardonic, satirical, skeptical, trite, vindictive, whimsical*
- **Technique:** how does the author structure his/her argument? Is the passage meant to teach, persuade, or describe? Is the argument objective or subjective? What is the author's thesis? What type of evidence is used? Does the author quote his sources, or simply cite their names or titles? Are the ideas concrete or abstract? Does the author give specific details or rely on generalizations?