

STRATEGY SUMMARY

READING STRATEGIES

My Notes

Understanding the three levels of reading comprehension and how they relate to the seven Reading item-types will help you to quickly identify the question that is being asked by a particular item.

Level 1— General Theme

The first level of reading, appreciation of the general theme, is the most basic. Main Idea items test whether you understand the passage at the most general level. The first sentence of a paragraph—often the topic sentence—may provide a summary of the content of that paragraph. Also, the last sentence of a paragraph usually provides concluding material that may also be helpful in understanding the general theme of the passage.

Main Idea items ask about the central theme that unifies the passage(s):

- Which of the following is the main point of the passage?
- The primary purpose of the passage is to....

Level 2— Specific Points

The second level of reading, understanding specific points, takes you deeper into the selection. Explicit Detail, Vocabulary, and Development items all test your ability to read carefully. Since this is an “open-book” test, you can always return to the selection. Therefore, if something is highly technical or difficult to understand, do not dwell on it for too long— you can always come back to it later if necessary.

Explicit Detail items ask about details that are specifically mentioned in the passage. This type of item differs from a Main Idea item in that explicit details are points provided by the author in the passage. Explicit Detail items provide “locator words” that identify the required information in the passage.

- The author mentions which of the following?
- According to the passage,...?

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Vocabulary items test your understanding of a word or phrase in context. The nature of the Vocabulary items indicates two points. First, the correct answer choice will make sense when it is substituted for the referenced word. Second, the correct answer choice may not be the most commonly used meaning of the word; in fact, if it were, then what would be the point of including the item on the test? Thus, the general strategy for this type of item is to favor the less commonly used meaning.

- The word —— in line ## means...
- In line ##, what is the best definition of the word ——?

Development items ask about the overall structure of the passage or about the logical role played by a specific part of the passage.

- The author develops the passage primarily by....
- The author mentions...in order to...

Level 3— Evaluation

The third level of reading, evaluation of the text, takes you even deeper into the selection. Implied Idea, Application, and Voice items ask not just for understanding, but also require a judgment or an evaluation of what you have read. This is why these items are usually the most difficult.

Implied Idea items don't ask about what is specifically stated in the passage; rather, Implied Idea items ask about what can be logically inferred from what is stated in the passage. For example, the passage might explain that a certain organism (X) is found only in the presence of another organism (Y). An accompanying Implied Idea item might ask the following question: "If organism Y is not present, what can be inferred?" Since the passage implies that in the absence of Y, X cannot be present, the answer would be "X is not present." Since this type of item generally builds on a specific detail, "locator words" for identifying information in the passage are often provided in the item stem.

- The passage implies that....
- The author uses the phrase "... " to mean...

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Application items are similar to Implied Idea items, but they go one step further: examinees must apply what they have learned from the passage to a new situation.

- With which of the following statements would the author most likely agree?
- The passage is most probably taken from which of the following sources?

Voice items ask about the author's attitude toward a specific detail or the overall tone of the passage.

- The tone of the passage can best be described as....
- The author regards...as....

GENERAL STRATEGIES

My Notes

Reading strategies are not an exact science. Practice is essential to mastering the following techniques:

Preview the Passage

Read the first sentence of each passage in the Reading Test. After reading the first sentence of each passage, label each passage as either "Easy" or "Hard" based on your initial understanding of the material and your level of interest. Analyze the easier passages first.

Preview each Paragraph

Preview the first and last sentences of each paragraph. There is usually an introductory paragraph for excerpted passages that identifies the author and provides a brief description of the selection. First, read this introductory material to gain clues about the author's point of view. Then, preview the first and last sentences of each paragraph, as they often provide paragraph summaries.

Read the Passage

After previewing each paragraph, ask what the author is attempting to describe, especially in the case of Evaluation items. Bracket difficult material, either mentally or with some sort of a mark, and then simply revisit it if necessary or if time permits. Instead of wasting time re-reading, attempt to understand the context in which the author introduces a particular concept.

Code in Groups

GENERAL STRATEGIES

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Circle the answers to the items in the test booklet, and transcribe the answers to all the items for a passage to the answer sheet after finishing each passage. This approach helps increase accuracy and makes checking your work easier and more efficient. Only when the time limit approaches should you transcribe each answer individually.