
SAT 2018 READING

OVERVIEW

When reading an SAT passage, determine its:

- purpose
- central idea
- structure
- functional elements
- tone

3 KEY QUESTIONS

PURPOSE

As you read any SAT Reading passage, first ask, “**What is its overall purpose?** To present

- **objective information?**
Expository prose presents **objective information** and is organized around a **guiding question**, such as “What happened in the Battle of Bull Run?” or “What is polarized light, and what is it used for?” (Examples of expository prose include news articles and science textbooks.)
- **a point of view?**
Rhetorical prose presents **an author’s personal point of view** and is organized around a **thesis**, such as “We have an exaggerated perception of gang violence”, or “Hiking is good for the soul”. (Examples of rhetorical prose include Op-Ed essays, blog posts, and some magazine articles.)
- **a (fictional or nonfictional) story?**
Narrative prose presents **a fictional or nonfictional story** and is organized around a **protagonist and a transformative struggle**, such as “Jean Valjean struggles to redeem himself”, or “King Lear struggles to establish a legacy.” (Examples of narrative prose include memoirs, short stories, biographies, and novels.)

Always confirm your theory about purpose by carefully reading the final paragraph. If the final paragraph focuses on describing an interesting fact, the passage is probably expository. If it focuses on a proposal, evaluation, or suggestion, the passage is probably rhetorical. If it describes a person’s resolution of a problem, the passage is probably a narrative. **Most passages confirm their overall purpose in the final paragraph.**

CENTRAL IDEA

Once you have determined the **general purpose of the passage**, focus immediately on finding the **central idea**. The purpose and central idea are intimately linked.

- The central idea of any **expository essay** is a **guiding question**, such as “What is the carbon cycle?”
- The central idea of any **rhetorical essay** is a **thesis**, such as “Perseverance is more important to success than skill is”.
- The central idea of any **narrative** is the **protagonist’s transformative struggle**, such as “The narrator discovers how to be an artist”.

The central idea is often, but not always, revealed at the beginning of the passage and reinforced at the end of the passage. Sometimes your first guess about the main idea, based on the first paragraph, may be wrong and need to be revised.

Many SAT Reading questions ask about the **purpose** of particular words, phrases, or references. Here are some examples:

The author uses the word “debacle” in order to emphasize her belief that . . .

The quotation in lines 42–51 primarily serves to . . .

To attack these questions, first remind yourself of the **overall purpose and central idea** of the passage, and remember that **every portion of the passage must help convey the central idea of the passage**.

STRUCTURE

The **structure** of a passage depends very much on its **purpose**:

To read analytically, you must pay attention to the functional structure of the passage. In other words, think about how each paragraph serves the central idea.

Expository essays can be structured in many possible ways in order to answer the guiding question. They may include background information, illustrations of concepts, examples of general claims, relevant data, anecdotes, or discussions of implications. Of course, any of these elements may be omitted, supplemented, or rearranged.

Narratives have a fairly consistent structure: (1) the struggle is introduced, (2) the struggle is developed, and (3) the struggle is resolved, transforming the protagonist. The details may differ dramatically from narrative to narrative, but the overall structure probably will not.

Rhetorical essays can also be structured in many possible ways. A **rhetorical argument** is likely to describe a position, then refute it with a counterargument. A **rhetorical narrative** tells a story in order to highlight a particular point of view. Rhetorical essay can include paragraphs dedicated to logical analysis of a claim, explanation, illustration, discussion of implications, modification of a claim, and so on.

3 SECONDARY QUESTIONS

HOW DOES THE AUTHOR USE LANGUAGE?

WORD-IN-CONTEXT QUESTIONS

In line 24, the word “decline” most nearly means . . .

Check your answer by rereading the sentence with the replacement word or phrase. Make sure the resulting sentence sounds okay, that is, it conveys the proper meaning and tone, and it follows Standard English idiom.

TONE QUESTIONS

The author’s attitude toward the “critics” (line 22) can best be described as

When attacking tone questions, make sure to first recall the *overall* tone of the passage, and think about how the specified portion fits the overall tone. For instance, imagine that a question asks about the tone of a discussion about “voodoo practices”. In an expository essay about Caribbean anthropology, this discussion may have an “objective” tone. In a rhetorical essay about the dangers of superstitious behavior, it may have a “disdainful” tone. In a narrative about a woman’s fond recollections of her grand-mother’s rituals, it may have an “affectionate” tone. **Don’t assume that the author’s attitude toward a topic matches your own.**

Before choosing an answer that suggests a very strong tone, like “alarmism”, “glorification”, or “disgust”, **make sure that you can justify your choice with literal evidence from the passage.**

When answering tone or attitude questions, **pay attention to the voice of the speaker.** Does the line in question represent the opinion of the author, or the opinion of someone else? Does it represent a point of view the author agrees with, or disagrees with?

IF THE PASSAGE IS AN **EXPOSITORY** ESSAY, IT HAS AN **OBJECTIVE** OVERALL PURPOSE. THIS MEANS THAT THE AUTHOR’S POINT OF VIEW IS NOT AT ISSUE.

LIST OF COMMON TONE VOCABULARY

- 1) sombre: solemn, grave, serious
- 2) wry: amusing and ironic, dry, cynical
- 3) prosaic: banal, mundane, dull, lacking imagination
- 4) didactic: educational, instructional
- 5) celebratory: festive
- 6) reverent: respectful
- 7) platitude: banal statement, a pointless or unoriginal empty comment
- 8) deliberate: on purpose, planned, calculated
- 9) defiant: challenging aggressively, disobedient, tending to confront or challenge, adamant
- 10) disdain: scorn, contempt, extreme disgust
- 11) aloof: unfriendly, uninvolved or unwilling to become involved, distant, detached
- 12) ambivalent: undecided, unsure, having mixed feelings, uncertain
- 13) prosaic: boring, common place

- 14) eclectic: deriving from a broad and diverse range of sources
- 15) laudatory: expressing praise
- 16) glib: slick, superficial, marked with ease and formality
- 17) derisive: mocking, showing contempt or ridicule, scathing, irreverent
- 18) evocative: bearing strong remembrance, nostalgic
- 19) sardonic: sarcastic
- 20) condescending: harsh, regarding as inferior
- 21) flippant: disrespectful
- 22) indignant: characterized by disapproval
- 23) satirical: mockery of objects in a often humorous and ironic manner.
- 24) convoluted: hard to follow
- 25) tempered: moderate.
- 26) antiquated: ancient
- 27) serenity: marked with grace
- 28) frivolous: carefree, not serious
- 29) atypical: unusual, not representative
- 30) pretentious: not modest, showy
- 31) underhanded: dishonest, clandestine
- 32) pragmatic: practical
- 33) perplexing: confusing
- 34) fortuitous: happening by chance
- 35) unsubstantiated: not established as accurate
- 36) eccentric: unusual
- 37) esoteric: something that is intended for a particular group of people
- 38) ephemeral: lasting for a short time
- 39) equivocal: open to many interpretations, ambiguous.
- 40) factitious: artificially created
- 41) irate: extremely angry
- 42) quizzical: mild or amused puzzlement
- 43) ebullient: very enthusiastic
- 44) concession: to acknowledge or offer something, often to one particular group.
- 45) assertion: to declare or affirm something
- 46) conjecture: judgment without complete evidence, an inference
- 47) idiosyncratic: deviating from that which is customary, a trait characteristic of an individual
- 48) pedagogical: relating to teaching or education
- 49) arbitrary: determined by individual choice rather than law or reason, a whim
- 50) sentimental: prompted by sadness or nostalgia
- 51) admonition: advice, warning
- 52) insolent: rude, lacking respect
- 53) digression: to leave the main subject temporarily
- 54) diffident: shy, timid
- 55) profound: great and intense
- 56) resilient: capable of withstanding difficult conditions
- 57) whimsical: odd, playful, lighthearted
- 58) impetuous: impulsive and passionate
- 59) callous: apathetic, insensitive
- 60) remiss: negligent, careless
- 61) tentative: not fully worked out, uncertainty
- 62) multifaceted: covering many different aspects or qualities

- 63) jargon: words or phrases that are intended to only be understood by a particular occupation
- 64) morose: sullen, ill-tempered
- 65) incredulous: unwilling to accept something as true
- 66) heretical: deviating from accepted principles, radical, unorthodox
- 67) preconception: an opinion formed in advance of knowledge, bias
- 68) wistful: longing for something, often in a sad way, reminiscent.
- 69) inapt: not appropriate
- 70) misgiving: a feeling of doubt, apprehension
- 71) impartial: unbiased
- 72) mandate: a command, a course of action
- 73) bemusement: confusion, bewilderment
- 74) sanguine: optimistic, cheerful
- 75) surly: menacing, threatening
- 76) trepidation: a fear of something that will happen
- 77) objective: uninfluenced by emotions or personal beliefs
- 78) pervasive: spreading fast to an area
- 79) appraisal: an evaluation, usually of the value of something
- 80) antithetical: in opposition to
- 81) petulant: peevish, ill-tempered
- 82) chagrin: a feeling of annoyance caused by failure or disappointment
- 83) blithe: lacking concern, casual
- 84) vindictive: disposed to see revenge
- 85) concurrence: in agreement

HOW DOES THE AUTHOR USE EVIDENCE?

LITERAL EVIDENCE QUESTIONS

Example Question

Q. The author regards the examples listed in lines 5–7 as

- A. scientific frauds
- B. astonishing discoveries
- C. faulty conclusions
- D. quaint traditions

Solution:

Lines 5–7 list the following examples: *frogs appeared to arise from damp earth, mice from putrefied matter, insects from dew, and maggots from decaying meat.*

In line 1, the author indicates that these are things that *people commonly believed* in ancient times. But the passage then goes on to explain that these beliefs are mistaken, and that life in fact does not arise that way. Therefore, the answer to question 1 is C: *faulty conclusions*.

Q. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A. Lines 1–4 (“In ancient . . . material”)
- B. Lines 7–10 (“Warmth . . . organisms”)
- C. Lines 21–23 (“In 1861 . . . matter”)
- D. Lines 30–32 (“But when . . . proliferate”)

Solution:

What literal evidence best shows that the author regards these statements as *faulty conclusions*? In lines 21–23, the author states that *in fact, living organisms cannot so easily arise from non-living matter*. Notice that this is a **clear, direct statement** that the author regards the beliefs listed in lines 5–7 as *faulty conclusions*. Therefore, the correct answer to question 2 is C. Choice A is incorrect because lines 1–4 simply state that ancient people believed these things, not that the author disagrees. Choice B is incorrect because lines 7–10 just give details about these beliefs, but no indication that the author doesn’t share them. Choice D is incorrect because lines 30–32 just give a detail about Pasteur’s experiment, and no direct indication that the author disagrees with the list of beliefs.

Example Question

Q. The authors of this passage would most likely agree with which of the following statements?

- A. anthropological research should adopt higher standards of evidence
- B. physical weakness is not necessarily a disadvantage in the fight for survival
- C. Neanderthals lacked the vocal ability to develop sophisticated language
- D. modern humans could not have achieved as much without the help of the Neanderthals

Solution:

The answer to question 2 is B: *physical weakness is not necessarily a disadvantage in the fight for survival*. How do we know? Because this is a direct implication of the main thesis that humans came to dominate the Neanderthals by taking advantage of their intellectual abilities rather than relying on their physical strength.

Q. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A. Lines 24–26 (“Equal certainty . . . did not”)
- B. Lines 30–33 (“Indeed, hunters . . . everyday life”)
- C. Lines 40–42 (“It is not . . . the Neanderthals”)
- D. Lines 43–47 (“The reason . . . our minds”)

Solution:

Where is the best literal evidence for this? In lines 43–47, where the authors state their main thesis: *The reason we—anatomically modern humans—won out lies, we suspect, not in being brighter or better able to speak but in our very physical frailty and our resulting need to exploit our minds*. Therefore, the correct answer to question 3 is choice D. Choice A is incorrect because this sentence merely states that scientists disagree about the length of the Neanderthal vocal chamber. Choice B is incorrect because this sentence merely states that hunters sometimes find it helpful to communicate silently. Choice C is incorrect because this sentence merely states that the ability to speak cannot explain our dominance over the Neanderthals.

QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE QUESTIONS

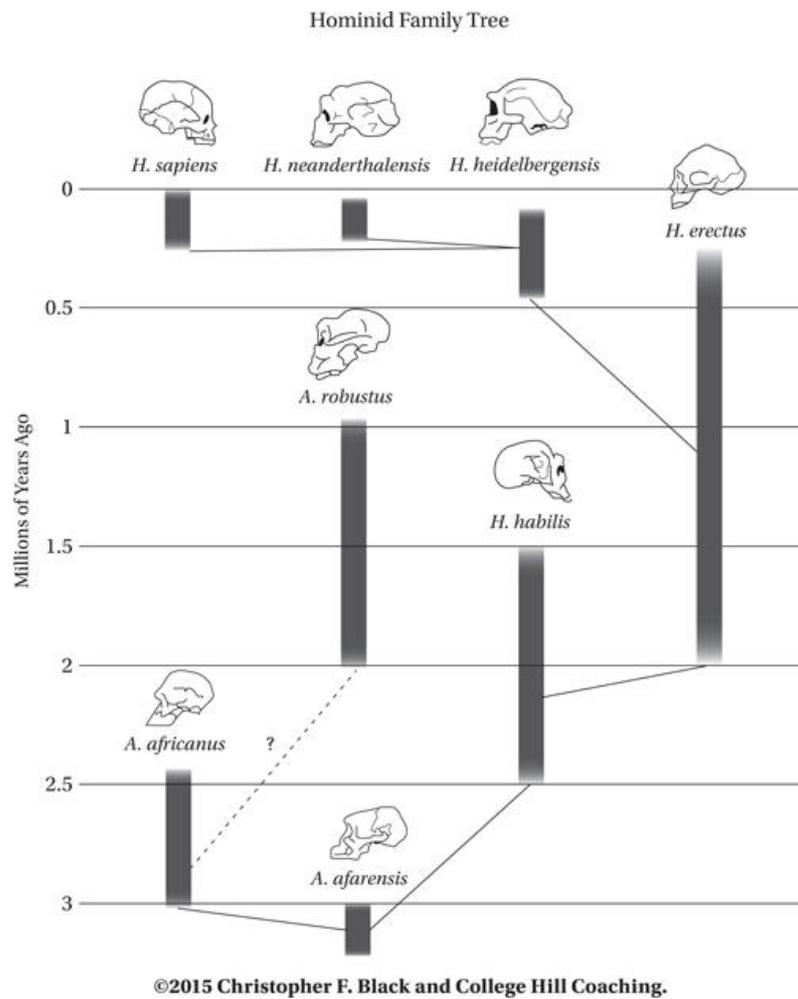
Which claim about the United States prison population is best supported by the graph in Figure 1?

Which of the following best describes how Figure 1 supports the main argument of this passage?

As with literal evidence questions, quantitative evidence questions require you to identify the **clear and direct** evidence contained in the graph, table, or diagram.

When interpreting data, remember that **correlation does not imply causation**: the mere fact that quantity B goes up at the same time that (or soon after) quantity A goes up does **not** mean that A **causes** B.

Example Question



Q. The term *Cro-Magnon* refers to the earliest members of the species *H. sapiens*. Which of following statements is most justified by the diagram in Figure 1?

- A. The *Cro-Magnon* are direct descendants of *H. neanderthalensis*.
- B. The *Cro-Magnon* and *H. heidelbergensis* both share *A. afarensis* as a common ancestor.**
- C. Competition with the *Cro-Magnon* led to the extinction of *H. erectus*.
- D. The *Cro-Magnon* and *A. robustus* both descended from *H. habilis*.

Q. If the fossil record indicated in the diagram in Figure 1 is assumed to be accurate and complete, what is the longest period of time that any single hominid species lived on the earth?

- A. 1,000,000 years
- B. 1,250,000 years
- C. 1,750,000 years**
- D. 2,000,000 years

Q. Which of the following best describes how Figure 1 supports the main argument of this passage?

- A. It shows that hominid species have existed for over 2,000,000 years.
- B. It shows that *H. neanderthalensis* had a long vocal chamber.
- C. It shows that *H. sapiens* and *H. neanderthalensis* both existed between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago.**
- D. It shows that *H. sapiens* and *H. neanderthalensis* had a common ancestor.

Solution:

Although statements A and D are both valid conclusions based on the information in the diagram, neither of these facts supports the main argument of the passage, which is found in lines 43–47: *The reason we—anatomically modern humans—won out [in our competition with the Neanderthals] lies, we suspect, not in being brighter or better able to speak but in our very physical frailty and our resulting need to exploit our minds.* Therefore, the argument rests on the fact that *H. sapiens* coexisted with *H. neanderthalensis*. The diagram clearly shows that both species lived in the period between approximately 100,000 years ago and 40,000 years ago, and so could have been in direct competition. It also shows that *H. neanderthalensis* appears to have gone extinct, because its vertical bar does not reach all the way up to the 0 mark.

HOW DOES THE AUTHOR USE RHETORICAL DEVICES?

Ad hominem is an attack “on the person” rather than an attack of his or her ideas or reasoning.

- For example, "Her political opinions can't be trusted because she is just an actor" is not an argument about the merits of her ideas, but merely an ad hominem.

Allusion is an implicit reference to something, usually to a piece of literature or a well-known historical event.

- For example, the statement "He's gone down the rabbit hole" is an allusion to the bizarre and fanciful episodes in the story *Alice in Wonderland*, and a reference to Benedict Arnold is an allusion to historical betrayal.

Analogy is an illustrative comparison between things that have a similar function or structure, usually with the use of the words *like* or *as*.

- For example, the levels of processing in a computer provide an analogy for understanding levels of processing in the human brain.

Anecdote is an illustrative story.

- For example, a story about a friend whose headache went away after he stood on his head for ten minutes is anecdotal evidence, not scientific evidence, for the health benefits of inversion.

Aphorism is a widely accepted truth.

- For example, the aphorism "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" can provide a concise argument against spending a lot of money on a new program. Aphorisms are also called *maxims*, *adages*, or *proverbs*.

Appeal to authority is a suggestion that the reader should agree with an idea because a respected authority happens to believe it.

- For example: "The world's greatest scientist, Sir Isaac Newton, believed that iron could be turned into gold, so who are we to question the idea?"

Appeal to emotion (pathos) is an attempt to persuade the reader through an emotionally charged anecdote or allusion.

- For example, a story about an infuriating experience with an insurance salesman may be an effective way to argue against aggressive sales tactics.

Characterization is the use of imagery, diction, or description to convey a particular attitude toward a person, thing, or idea.

- For example, referring to your opponent's proposal as a *scheme* characterizes it as being deceitful, harmful, or secretive.

Euphemism is a term that makes something seem more positive than it is.

- For example, salespersons or political canvassers often use the term *courtesy call* as a euphemism for an unwanted disruption, and military technicians use the term *collateral damage* as a euphemism for human casualties.

Hyperbole is deliberate exaggeration for persuasive effect.

- For example, saying that "Molly's comma usage is a catastrophe" is almost certainly hyperbole.

Irony is a deliberate reversal of expectations in order to surprise a reader, often for persuasive effect.

- For example, Christopher Hitchens justified his attitude toward free will by using irony when he said, "I believe in free will, because I have no other choice."

Metaphor is an application of a word or phrase to something it doesn't literally apply to.

- For example, calling a refusal a "slap in the face" uses metaphor to emphasize its harshness.

Rhetorical parallelism is the use of repeated grammatical form to emphasize a point.

- For example, John F. Kennedy used parallelism in his inaugural address when he said "we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Personification is the attribution of personal qualities to something that is not a person.

- For example, we are using rhetorical personification when we say that an idea is, "on its last legs or gave its last gasp."

Simile is a comparison using *like* or *as*.

- For instance, Irena Dunn used rhetorical simile when she said, "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle."

Understatement encourages the reader to embrace a point by underemphasizing its intensity, which is taken to be obvious.

- For instance, someone saying, "It's a little windy outside" during a tornado would be an example of understatement.

THE “PREEMPTIVE ATTACK” STRATEGY FOR SAT READING

- **Attack the passage before it attacks you.** Some test takers try to outsmart the SAT Reading Test by reading the questions first before reading the passage, so they have a “head start”. The problem with this strategy is that **it forces you to read inefficiently and incompletely by wasting time on details, thereby putting you at a disadvantage on “main purpose” or “main idea” questions.** If, instead, you read with your attention on **purpose, central idea,** and **structure,** you will be more prepared for any reading question the SAT may throw at you.
- **Attack the question before it traps you.** That is, formulate your own answer to each reading question before looking at the answer choices. Some test takers think they are saving time by reading the answer choices immediately after reading each question. The problem with this strategy is that **those who read the answer choices too soon tend to fall for the “traps”.** The “traps” are the wrong answer choices that are included to catch careless readers. They sound plausible because they include words or ideas that remind you of the content of the passage, but they do not answer the question correctly. If, instead, you formulate a reliable answer in mind before reading the choices, you will avoid the traps.

Example Question

- Q. The authors mention “cell phones” and “diplomacy” (line 56) primarily as examples of
- A. universally admired commercial products
 - B. effective means of global communication
 - C. goods and services based on intellectual resources
 - D. activities that require little physical strength

Solution:

This question can easily trip you up if you do not use the preemptive attack strategy. If you try to answer it without understanding the “big picture”, you will focus on the sentences in the vicinity of line 56. This paragraph mentions that these are *products and services* (line 55) coming from *Switzerland, Finland, Singapore, and Japan* (lines 51–52), so choice A: *universally coveted commercial products* may seem reasonable. It is also obvious that *cell phones* and *diplomacy* are *effective means of global communication*, so choice B also may seem reasonable. The paragraph also mentions using *physical strength rather than tapping the potential of their brains* (lines 49–50), so choice D may seem reasonable, as well.

But all of those choices are traps.

Instead, attack this question “preemptively”. First, read the passage and summarize it in terms of the three key questions: it is a **rhetorical essay** arguing for the **thesis** that *the reason [Homo sapiens won out over the Neanderthals] lies, we suspect, not in being brighter or better able to speak but in our very frailty and our resulting need to exploit our minds.* Then translate question 9 into an open-ended question: *the authors mention “cell phones” and “diplomacy” primarily as examples of what?* If these

examples serve the purpose of the essay (which of course they do), then they are examples of how countries also *exploit their minds* rather than relying on natural resources. Therefore the correct answer is C: *goods and services based on intellectual resources*. Notice that choices A, B, and D don't fit at all with the purpose of the paragraph.

ATTACKING PAIRED PASSAGES

Step 1. Read Passage 1 as you would any other SAT Reading passage, focusing on the three key questions and annotating each paragraph.

Step 2. Once you have finished reading, analyzing, and summarizing Passage 1, go directly to the questions, find any that pertain exclusively to Passage 1, and answer those first.

Step 3. Now read, annotate, and summarize Passage 2, focusing not only on the three key questions, but also on four additional questions:

- Do the passages emphasize different topics? If so, what are they?
- What are the important points of agreement between the two passages?
- What are the important points of disagreement between the two passages?
- How do the two passages differ in tone and attitude?