

# Preparing for the SAT

## The Critical Reading Section



# Approaches to the Critical Reading Section

- Work on sentence completion questions first.
- Keep track of the questions you want to go back to by marking your test booklet.
- *When skipping questions, be sure to keep track of your place on the answer sheet!*
- Remember that the difficulty of sentence completion questions increases as you move through a question set.
- Use the process of elimination.
- Consider related words, familiar sayings and phrases, roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

# Sentence Completion:

## *Vocabulary-in-Context Questions*

- This type of question requires knowing how the words are used in the context of the sentence.
- Knowing the definitions of the words involved will give you a better chance of getting it right.
- There are both one-blank and two-blank vocabulary-in-context questions.

# Example 1

Ravens appear to behave -----, actively helping one another to find food.

(A) Mysteriously

(B) warily

(C) aggressively

(D) cooperatively

(E) defensively

This sentence asks you to look for a word that describes how the ravens behave.

The information after the comma restates and defines the meaning of the missing word.

## Example 2

Both ----- and -----, Wilson seldom spoke and never spent money.

(A) vociferous . . . generous

(B) garrulous . . . stingy

(C) effusive . . . frugal

(D) taciturn . . . miserly

(E) reticent . . . munificent

In this sentence, you are looking for two words that describe Wilson.

One of the words has to mean that he “seldom spoke” and the other that he “never spent money.”

*Taciturn* means “shy, unwilling to talk.”

*Miserly* means “like a miser, extremely stingy.”

# Sentence Completion: *Logic-Based Questions*

The following questions require knowing the meanings of the words, how they are used in context, and understanding the logic of a rather complicated sentence.

# Example 3

After observing several vicious territorial fights, Jane Goodall had to revise her earlier opinion that these particular primates were always ----- animals.

- (A) ignorant
- (B) inquisitive
- (C) responsive
- (D) cruel
- (E) peaceful

Follow the logical flow of the ideas in the sentence.

1. *After* gives an order to the events in the sentence.
2. *Revise* means that something is going to change *after* the events described in the beginning. So the beginning events cause the change.
3. This phrase tells what is changing.

## Example 4

Although its publicity has been -----, the film itself is intelligent, well-acted, handsomely produced, and altogether -----.

- (A) tasteless . . . respectable
- (B) extensive . . . moderate
- (C) sophisticated . . . amateur
- (D) risqué . . . crude
- (E) perfect . . . spectacular

First, notice that the sentence has two clauses.

The two parts have contrasting or conflicting meanings.

# Approaches to Sentence Completion Questions

- Start out by reading the entire sentence, saying *blank* for the blank(s).
- Always begin by trying to determine the standard dictionary definitions of the words in the sentence and the answers.
- Keep in mind that *introductory* and *transitional* words are extremely important.

but

yet

although

even though

however

# Approaches to Sentence Completion

## Questions (cont.)

- Be aware that some of the most difficult sentence completion questions contain negatives, which can make it hard to follow the logic of the sentences.
- Figure out what sort of word(s) should fill the blank(s) before looking at the choices; then look for a choice that is similar to the one(s) of which you thought.

## Example 5

Once Murphy left home for good, he wrote no letters to his worried mother; he did not, therefore, live up to her picture of him as her ----- son.

---

---

---

---

## Example 5

Once Murphy left home for good, he wrote no letters to his worried mother; he did not, therefore, live up to her picture of him as her ----- son.

(A) misunderstood

(B) elusive

(C) destructive

(D) persuasive

(E) dutiful

# Approaches to Sentence Completion Questions (cont.)

- With two-blank questions, try eliminating some answers based on just one blank.
  - Work with *one* of the blanks alone. Eliminate any choices in which the word doesn't make sense.
  - Work with the *other* blank alone. Eliminate any choices in which that word doesn't make sense.
  - Work on *both* blanks together only for any remaining choices.
  - Always read the complete sentence *with both words in place* to double-check that it makes sense.

# Example 6

Although its publicity has been -----, the film itself is intelligent, well-acted, handsomely produced, and altogether -----.

- *The first blank is not tightly controlled.*
- *The second blank is a list of positives. The word and indicates the next word should be positive.*

*intelligent, well-acted . . . and altogether respectable*

*intelligent, well-acted . . . and altogether moderate*

*intelligent, well-acted . . . and altogether ~~amateur~~*

*intelligent, well-acted . . . and altogether ~~crude~~*

*intelligent, well-acted . . . and altogether spectacular*

# Approaches to Sentence Completion Questions (cont.)

- Remember that the instructions for all the sentence completion questions ask you to choose the *best* answer.
- Check your choice by reading the entire sentence with the answer you have selected in place to make sure the sentence makes sense.

# Sentence Completion Sample Questions

Each sentence below has one or two blanks, each blank indicating that something has been omitted. Beneath the sentence are five words or sets of words that, when inserted in the sentence, best fits the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

## Example:

Hoping to ----- the dispute, negotiators proposed a compromise that they felt would be ----- to both labor and management.

- (A) enforce . . Useful
- (B) end . . Divisive
- (C) overcome . . Unattractive
- (D) extend . . Satisfactory
- (E) resolve . . acceptable

(A) (B) (C) (D) (X)

# Sample Question 1

A judgment made before all the facts are know must be called -----.

(A) harsh

(B) deliberate

(C) sensible

(D) premature

(E) fair

## Sample Question 2

Despite their ----- proportions, the murals of Diego Rivera give his Mexican compatriots the sense that their history is ----- and human in scale, not remote and larger than life.

(A) monumental . . accessible

(B) focused . . prolonged

(C) vast . . ancient

(D) realistic . . extraneous

(E) narrow . . overwhelming

# Sample Question 3

The research is so ----- that it leaves no part of the issue unexamined.

(A) comprehensive

(B) rewarding

(C) sporadic

(D) economical

(E) problematic

# Sample Question 4

A dictatorship ----- its citizens to be docile and finds it expedient to make outcasts of those who do not -----.

- (A) forces . . rebel
- (B) expects . . disobey
- (C) requires . . conform
- (D) allows . . withdraw
- (E) forbids . . agree

# Sample Question 5

Alice Walker's prize-winning novel exemplifies the strength of first-person narratives; the protagonist tells her own story so effectively that any additional commentary would be -----.

(A) subjective

(B) eloquent

(C) superfluous

(D) incontrovertible

(E) impervious

# Sample Question 6

The Supreme Court's reversal of its previous ruling on the issue of state's rights ----- its reputation for -----.

(A) sustained . . infallibility

(B) compromised . . consistency

(C) bolstered . . doggedness

(D) aggravated . . inflexibility

(E) dispelled . . vacillation

# Sentence Completion Recap

- Be familiar with the directions before test day.
- Answer as many easy questions as you can before spending time on the harder ones.
- Read the sentence, substituting the word *blank* for each blank, to give you an overall sense of the meaning of the sentence.
- Always begin by trying to determine the *standard* dictionary definitions of the key words in the sentence and the answer choices.



# Sentence Completion Recap (cont.)

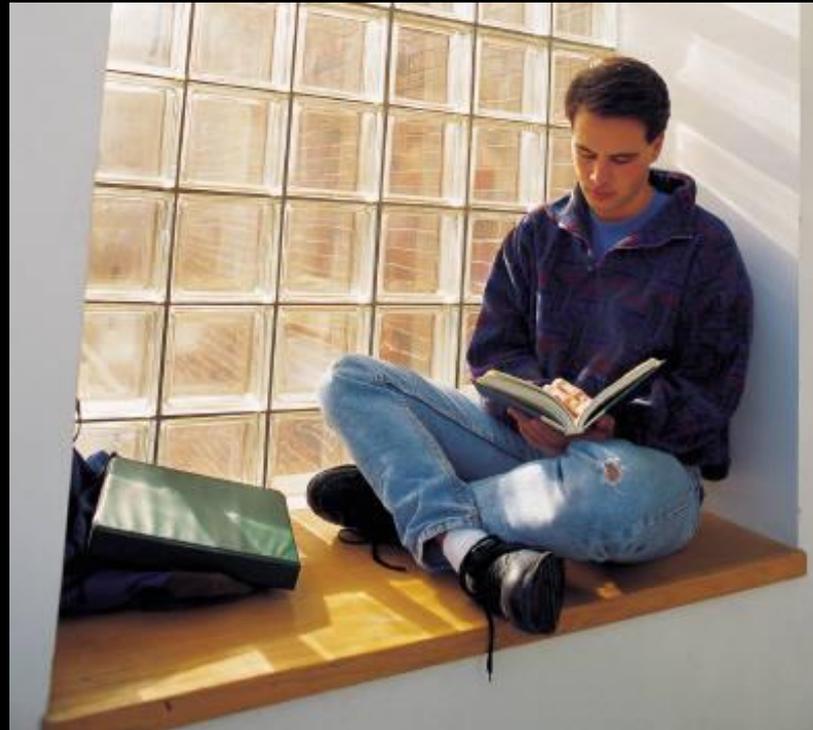
- Know your vocabulary: think carefully about the meaning of the words in the answer choices.
- Watch for key *introductory* and *transitional* words (e.g., *but*, *although*, *however*, *yet*, *even though*). These determine how the parts of the sentence relate. Also watch carefully for negatives.
- Think about the logic of the sentence without looking at the choices. Try figuring out words to fill in the blanks without looking at the answer choices. Then look for the choice that is most similar to the one of which you thought.
- Try answering two-blank questions one blank at a time. If you can eliminate one word in an answer, the entire choice can be eliminated.

# Sentence Completion Recap (cont.)

- Always check all the answer choices before making a final decision. A choice may seem okay, but it may still not be the best answer. Make sure that the answer you select is the *best* choice.
- Check your answer to make sure it makes sense by reading the entire sentence with your choice in place.
- Eliminate answers that you know are wrong, and make an educated guess from those remaining.

***Now Let's Practice!***

# Passage-based Reading Section



# Approaches to the Passage-based Reading Section

- Mark the passages or make short notes.
  - Be careful not to mark too much.
  - Scribble a short notes in the margin – a few words at most - that summarizes the paragraph or sentence.
  - Don't take too long. The idea is to *SAVE* time.
- Use your knowledge and experience carefully.
  - You must distinguish between what you think the writer *should* have said or what you would *like* the writer to believe and what the writer's words *actually* say or imply.
- Read actively.
- If you are having a hard time with the passage, read the questions before you finish the passage.

# Passage-based Reading: *Extended Reasoning Questions*

- Extended reasoning questions ask you to draw conclusions from or evaluate the information in the passage.
- The answers to these questions may not be directly stated but can be inferred.
- They also ask about the overall theme or meaning of the passage, the author's purpose or attitude, or the tone of the passage.
- They often include words or phrases like:

probably	suggests
apparently	it can be inferred
seems	the author implies

# Passage-based Reading: *Extended Reasoning Questions*

- To answer extended reasoning questions correctly, it helps to know the difference between facts, assumptions and inferences.
- **Facts:** Statements known to be true and that can be shown to be true are called facts.
  - There are 31 days in July.
  - It is against the law to drive over the speed limit.

# Passage-based Reading: *Extended Reasoning Questions*

- To answer extended reasoning questions correctly, it helps to know the difference between facts, assumptions and inferences.
- **Assumptions:** These are suppositions or propositions that writers make to reach their conclusions.
  1. “The principal has promised a big victory dance after the championship game next week.” Two possible assumptions are:
    - The principal hopes the team will win the championship game.
    - The principal is looking for a way to reward the whole school for the team’s success.

# Passage-based Reading: *Extended Reasoning Questions*

- To answer extended reasoning questions correctly, it helps to know the difference between facts, assumptions and inferences.
- **Assumptions:** These are suppositions or propositions that writers make to reach their conclusions.
  2. “Let’s have a picnic tomorrow.” Two possible assumptions here are:
    - The speaker would like to spend time with the person he or she is talking to.
    - Picnics are fun.

# Passage-based Reading: *Extended Reasoning Questions*

- To answer extended reasoning questions correctly, it helps to know the difference between facts, assumptions and inferences.
- **Assumptions:** These are suppositions or propositions that writers make to reach their conclusions.
  3. “Reducing the workforce will increase the profits.” Two possible assumptions are:
    - Profits are more important than people.
    - A connection exists between the number of employees and the amount of profit each employee produces.

# Passage-based Reading: *Extended Reasoning Questions*

- To answer extended reasoning questions correctly, it helps to know the difference between facts, assumptions and inferences.
- **Inferences:** These are conclusions you reach based on what has been said in a passage.

*The problems of junk mail has grown to epidemic proportions. I've counted no fewer than 616 pieces of junk mail in my mailbox in a given month! Not only is the sheer magnitude appalling, but the antics of these "post office pirates" are equally disturbing. For example, one enterprising salesman promised me prizes ranging from a car to a transistor radio if I would drive 200 miles to look at a piece of property. I wrote this con artist and told him I'd come if he paid for the gas, but I never heard from him.*

From all the personal pronouns, it can be inferred that all the examples are taken from the author's own life or from **personal experience**.

# Vocabulary-in-Context Questions

- Some passage-based reading questions ask about the meaning of a word as it is used in *context*.
- For example, the word smart has several meanings, such as “intelligent,” “stylish” and “sassy.”
- *“We knew his smart mouth would get him into a lot of trouble some day.”*
- From the context association of the words *smart* and *trouble* the meaning must be “sassy.”

# When answering vocabulary-in-context questions, keep the following in mind:

- One word can have many meanings. The answer choices will often include several different meanings of the word.
- Questions asking for the meaning of a word or phrase refer to the meaning in the context in which the word or phrase is used in the sentence.
- It helps to go back to the passage and reread the surrounding text of the word that is used. Read enough of the context to thoroughly understand the meaning of the word.

# Literal Comprehension Questions

For this type of question, you need to understand information directly presented in the passage. These questions measure a skill you'll be using a lot in college: reading to acquire information.

- Find the place in the passage where the detail is discussed. Reread enough of the text to find the answer that is *actually* stated in the passage.
- Recognized different ways of stating the same fact or idea.
- Cross out incorrect responses as you eliminate them.
- Read the question carefully, looking for words such as *except*, *not* and *only*, and other key words.
- Be sure you can support your answer by referring to words or phrases within the passage that support it.

# Questions Involving Paired Passages and Paragraphs

- In a pair of passages, they will have a common theme or subject: one will oppose, support or in some way relate to the other.
- When a question asks you to compare two passages, don't try to remember everything from both passages. Take one choice at a time. Review the relevant parts of each passage before selecting an answer.
- If a question asks you to identify something that is true in *both* passages, it is often easier to first eliminate choices that are *not* true for one of the passages.

# Sample Questions



# Approaches to Passage-based Reading Questions Recap

- Keep in mind that answers come from the passage.
- Remember, every word counts.
- Read the questions and answers carefully.
  1. Think about what the question is asking
  2. Look back at the passage for information that will help you with the question
  3. Think again about how you can use the information to answer the question correctly
- Don't forget that an answer choice can be both *true* and *wrong*.

# Approaches to Passage-based Reading Questions Recap (cont.)

- Make sure the reading passage supports your answer.
- Try eliminating choices.
- Double-check the other choices.
- Don't jump from passage to passage.
  1. Move around within a *set* of questions to find the ones you can answer quickly.
  2. Stay with a passage until you are sure you have answered as many questions as you can. If you return later, you'll likely have to read it again.
  3. Go back to any questions you skipped.

*Now Let's  
Practice!*

