



Academic Skills Center

Study Packet

Next Generation

Preparation for the Reading Comprehension Assessment

Six skills that will help to prepare students to become better readers for college-level courses include:

1. Recognizing main ideas.
2. Identifying supporting details.
3. Recognizing implied main ideas and central points.
4. Understanding relationships that involve addition and time.
5. Understanding relationships that involve illustration, comparison & contrast, cause & effect.
6. Understanding tone and purpose.

1. Recognizing main ideas

The main idea is the chief topic of a passage. In order to become a better and faster reader, recognizing topics and the main idea are the most important skills you can develop. Think of the main idea as an “umbrella” idea. It is the author’s primary point about a topic. All other material in the paragraph fits under the main idea. In a paragraph, authors often present the main idea to readers in a single sentence called the topic sentence.

Consider this example: TV violence affects people in negative ways. Frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others. Heavy TV watchers are less upset about real-life violence than non-TV watchers. TV violence increases aggressive behavior in children.

The first sentence, “TV violence does affect people in negative ways” is the main idea of the paragraph because it is the author’s primary point.

2. Identifying supporting details

Supporting details are reasons, examples, steps, or other kinds of factual evidence that explain a main idea.

Consider this example: Our government should phase out the penny in the economy. Pennies take up more space than they are worth. Pennies are a nuisance to the business community. Pennies cost the nation as a whole.

The first sentence, “Our government should phase out the penny in the economy” is the main idea of the paragraph. The three sentences following the main idea are supporting details. In this case, the supporting details give reasons to support the main idea.

3. Recognizing Implied and Stated Ideas

An implied main idea is one that is *suggested* but not said. Sometimes a passage lacks a topic sentence, but that does not mean it lacks a main idea. The author has simply decided to let the details of the passage suggest the main idea. You must figure out what that implied main idea is by deciding upon the point all of the details make when they are all added together.

Passages that imply an idea give supporting details first. The reader must infer (or make an “educated

guess”) in order to understand the main idea. In these sorts of passages, the main idea is the general statement that all of the details make when they are considered as a whole. The main idea must be general enough that all of the details fit into it.

Consider this example: The smaller a group is, the more opportunities we have to get to know other people well and to establish close ties with them. Two-person groups are the setting for many of our most intense and influential relationships. In three-person groups, coalitions become possible, with two members joining force against a third member. Five-person groups are large enough so that people feel they can express their emotions freely and even risk antagonizing one another, yet they are small enough so that members show regard for one another’s feelings and needs.

Which statement below best expresses the unstated main idea of the above sentences?

- Two-person groups are an important part of our lives.
- A five-person group is better than a two-person group
- The number of people in a group affects relationships within the group.
- Groups play a central part in every human activity, within family, the workplace, and the government

Explanation:

- ! Answer *a* is too narrow to be the implied idea. It is based on only one of the four supporting details, statement 1.
- ! Answer *b* covers only statements 2 and 4; therefore, it is too narrow to be the implied main idea. In addition, it is a conclusion that is not based on the given facts, which say nothing about one group always being better than another.
- ! Answer *c* is a general statement about the number of people in a group and how that number affects a group. It is illustrated by all four of the supporting details. **Therefore, answer c is the implied main idea.**
- ! Answer *d* is true, but it is not what the supporting details are about. The supporting details do not address the part that groups play in society.

If you have trouble focusing in on an implied main idea, remember that finding the topic may help. For instance, you probably soon realized that the topic of the supporting ideas above is the number of people in a group. Then you could have asked yourself, “What are the supporting details saying about the number of people in a group?” As you thought about the four statements, you would try to find a point about the number of people in a group that is general enough to cover all of the specific details.

4. Understanding relationships that involve addition, time, and sequence

Addition words tell you that writers are adding to their thoughts. The writers are presenting one or more ideas that continue along the same line of thought as a previous idea. Addition words include: furthermore, additionally, next, in addition, etc..

Time words provide chronological organization to writing. Time words include: later, during a specific time period such as a decade, a year, a month, a week, or a century e.g. the 90’s, the nineteenth century.

Sequential words provide step-by-step organization to writing. Sequential words include next, first, second, after, before.

5. Understanding relationships that involve Illustration, Comparison & Contrast, Cause &

Effect.

Illustration means to show by example and this is one method of clarifying our ideas. Writers often use examples and illustrations introduced by a phrase such as, *for example*, or *for instance*, to demonstrate the point they are trying to make.

Below are two examples that use illustration to clarify the ideas. Which of these two statements is easier to understand?

1. Even very young children can do household chores. They can run a duster along baseboards or fold napkins for dinner.
2. Even very young children can do household chores. For instance, they can run a duster along baseboards or fold a napkin for dinner.

Explanation: The second item is easier to understand because the phrase “For instance” tells the reader that there is a relationship between the first and second sentence. The second sentence offers an example of the point the author makes in the first sentence.

Compare and Contrast

Compare is the opposite of contrast. When you compare two or more things, you show their similarities. When you contrast two or more things, you show the differences. Writers often use comparison and contrast together as a way of explaining or analyzing the relationship between or among items, ideas, or people.

Consider the relationship among these sentences as an example of how comparison and contrast can be used together and notice the role that the underlined transitions play in making this relationship clear to the reader:

Advertising is part of the strategy manufacturers use to sell their products.
Manufacturers use advertising as a way to advertise established products as well as new products. New products are generally advertised differently from established products. New products are often introduced with “informational” advertising telling what the products are, why they are needed, and where they are available. Established products on the other hand can rely on “reminder” advertisements, which provide little hard information about the product.

Explanation:

The first sentence of this paragraph gives the general, or main, idea. The second sentence uses “as well as” to signal that the writer is showing a similarity between the way new and established products are advertised. The word “differently” in the third sentence and “on the other hand” in the fifth sentence shows that the writer is also showing differences in the way these two types of products are advertised.

Cause

Cause indicates why an event happens, whereas effect indicates the results of an event. Information that falls into a cause-effect pattern addresses itself to the question —“why does an event happen?” and —“what are the results of an event?” Often authors try to tell about events in a way that explains both what happened and why.

Consider this example and how this passage reflects the relationship between cause and effect:

In 1970, about sixty small and medium-sized factories in the United States adopted a four-day workweek. According to the plan, workers work forty hours but instead of the usual five-day week, they now work only four days. Workers are enthusiastic about the three-day weekly vacation. According to management, productivity has increased about 18% since the inception of the new plan. Absenteeism has dropped by 69% and lateness is almost non-existent.

What are the effects being discussed in this passage?

- A. shorter work weeks
- B. sixty small and medium-sized factories decided to try the four-day work week
- C. the seventies were a time of change
- D. increased productivity and decreases in absenteeism and tardiness

Explanation:

- ! Answer *a* gives the topic of the passage but does not discuss cause or effect.
- ! Answer *b* explains who was involved in this experiment, but does not show a cause/effect relationship.
- ! Answer *c* is true, but is not discussed in this passage.
- ! Answer *d* explains the results of the four-day workweek.

6. Understanding tone and purpose

A writer’s tone reveals the attitude he or she has toward a subject. Tone is expressed through the words and details the author selects. Just as a speaker’s voice can project a range of feelings, a writer’s voice can project one or more tones, or feelings: anger, sympathy, hopefulness, sadness, respect, dislike and so on. Understanding tone is then an important part of understanding what an author has written.

To illustrate the difference a writer can express in tone, consider the following comments made by workers in a fast food restaurant.

- ! “I hate this job.” The customers are rude, the managers are idiots, and the food smells like dog chow. “(Tone: bitter, angry.)
- ! “I have no doubt that flipping burgers and toasting buns will prepare me for a top position on Wall Street. “ (Tone: mocking, sarcastic.)
- ! “I love working at Burger Barn. I meet interesting people, earn extra money, and get to eat all the chicken nuggets I want when I go on break. “(Tone: enthusiastic, positive.)

Words that express tone reflect a feeling or judgment. Some words that describe tone include: amused, angry, ashamed, praising, and excited.

Understanding Purpose

The author’s purpose is the reason he wrote the text. Often an author writes to inform, entertain or persuade.

Consider the following examples, which illustrate the different purposes an author writes.

- ! Charter schools must do more than make parents feel good. Fostering high standards and improving student achievement must be the primary goals. Those schools failing to do so cannot be tolerated. State officials, and we the public, must make sure they are not. (**Purpose:** persuade)

- ! The Plague had eliminated as much as a third of European population over a five-year period. Widespread resistance reduced the losses to local impacts of about 10 percent. Introduction of smallpox to America rapidly depleted the population. (**Purpose:** inform)

- ! Frankly, it seems pretty easy to come up with a new exercise. You just take something people are already doing like eating and add “ercise”. So hows about: R. C. Colaerobics: Soda shopping? Don’t just grab a Coke. Stretch waaay down to reach the Royal Crown! Your abs will be glad-and so will your wallet! (**Purpose:** entertain)

Reading Practice Test

Below you will find brief passages followed by questions related to what you read that may be used to practice what you have learned in this packet. The answers are found on the last page of the reading section. Each answer is followed by the reading skill that was emphasized in the passage. If you did not get the correct answer, it would be wise for you to review that section of the packet.

Please read the statements below and select the best answer to each question from the list of lettered choices that follows.

1. There are two kinds of jewelry that I make. There is commercial jewelry—class rings, necklaces, the kinds of things most people wear. I sell these items to meet my expenses for raw materials, supplies, and to make my living. The other, more creative work I do makes me feel that I am developing as a craftsman.

The author of this passage implies that:

- A. Artists are poor.
 - B. There is no market for creative work.
 - C. Rings and necklaces cannot be creative.
 - D. Commercial and creative work fulfills different needs for the artist.
2. Did you know that the U.S. postal service handles 40% of the world's mail volume? Japan is the second largest carrier of cards and letters, but it handles only 8% of the world's mail. Perhaps the reason that the U.S. handles such a large volume of mail is the large number of personal letters American citizens write. Personal letters do not require a strict format, but they do have a few guidelines. The date should be written at the top of the letter, either in the center or in the right-hand corner. The salutation, "Dear _____," should begin the letter and should be followed by a comma instead of a colon which is used in the salutation of a business letter. The body of the letter should sound like you, and say the things you intend to say. Unlike in a business letter, you can use slang words, dashes, smiley faces, sentence fragments, and other kinds of casual forms of communication. Closings for personal letters are also a matter of personal preference. While a business letter requires you to use more formal closings such as "Sincerely," "Regards," or "Best Wishes," a personal letter can end with more casual phrases such as "Later," "Talk to you Soon," or "Bye." As with the rest of the letter, the closing should express your own feelings.

Which of the following organizational patterns did the author use in this paragraph?

- A. Cause and effect
 - B. Example
 - C. Comparison and contrast
 - D. Humor
3. Before the invention of automobiles and airplanes, travel was a slow process. When traveling long distances families would be out of communication until the travelers reached their destination. Sometimes

people lost touch with each other permanently.

The author would most likely continue the passage with which of the following sentences?

- A. Advances in communication have helped travelers stay in communication.
- B. Airplanes make travel more fun
- C. Driving a car helps families stay in touch.
- D. Cars can be used to travel comfortably.

4. Scuba diving is the most exhilarating experience I have ever had. The first time I went, the dark mirror of the water beckoned me to drop from the side of the boat. I jumped feet first and entered a brightly colored world populated with fish, plants, and objects I had never dreamed of before this.

Which of the following best describes the mood of the author after having this experience?

- A. Bored
- B. Anxious
- C. Excited
- D. Serene

5. Did you know that a half-gallon milk container holds about \$50.00 in pennies? While all investment counselors realize that we must accumulate money in order to save, most recommend different kinds of investments for people who are in different stages of life. Older investors, those with limited funds to invest, or people with greater financial and family commitments, should take fewer risks. Younger, wealthier, and unmarried investors can afford to venture into the unknown.

Which of the following best describes the main idea of this passage?

- A. A penny saved is a penny earned.
- B. Our ages and stage of life are part of what determines the investments that are best for us.
- C. Old people have the most money.
- D. Young people should concentrate on collecting pennies.

6. Experienced truck drivers often travel in a convoy—a group of trucks that are traveling to the same part of the country. Convoys can help truckers to stay alert.

The author implies that professional long-distance truck drivers may avoid traveling alone because:

- A. They might drive too fast.
- B. They want to arrive before anyone else.
- C. Accidents happen more frequently to lone truck drivers than to car drivers who travel alone.
- D. Long-distance travel can cause drowsiness.

7. Huge beasts such as the dinosaur have never really become extinct. Mothra, a giant caterpillar that later becomes a moth, destroys Tokyo, and stars in the 1962 Japanese film named for him. Mothra is born, dies, and is reborn regularly on classic movie channels. In Japan, Mothra is one of the most popular films ever made. Mothra has survived the creation of more current scary creatures such as giant apes, extraterrestrial beings and swamp creatures. More than 30 years after his creation, Mothra still lives.

The main subject of the passage is:

- A. The reasons that fads do not endure
- B. The lasting appeal of Mothra
- C. The difficulty of marketing good horror movies
- D. Old models for creatures are still used because making new monsters is expensive.

- 8.. Anxious to ensure that America would depart from European traditions regarding religion and royalty, the early U.S. could be described as a place that focused more on work than on the entertainment offered by spectacle and ceremony in the Old World. However, national celebrations such as the lighting of the White House Christmas Tree and the ceremonies used to swear in new federal officials give the American people some experiences that are based upon national tradition.

What does the second sentence do?

- A. It cancels the meaning of the first sentence
 - B. It provides an example of the first sentence.
 - C. It adds more detail to the first sentence.
 - D. It offers an exception to the information given in the first sentence.
9. The Earth's past climate—including temperature and elements in the atmosphere—has recently been studied by analyzing ice samples from Greenland and Antarctica. The air bubbles in the ice have shown that, over the past 160,000 years, there has been a close correlation between temperature changes and level of natural greenhouse gases carbon dioxide and methane. One recent analysis from Greenland showed that at the end of the last glacial period (when the great ice sheets began to retreat to their present position), temperatures in southern Greenland rose from 5 to 7 degrees in about 100 years. Air bubbles are not the only method of determining characteristics of the Earth's ancient climate history. Analysis of dust layers from ancient volcanic activity is another such method; as is the study of ice cores, which interpret past solar activity that may have affected our climate.

This passage states that:

- A. The Greenhouse effect is destroying the planet's atmosphere.
 - B. Temperatures in Greenland have been unusually stable over the past 100 years.
 - C. there is more than one kind of information that scientists can use to determine the characteristics of the Earth's early climate.
 - D. Solar energy is the wave of the future.
10. Before video cameras were widely used, home and business owners had to rely only on written reports and photos as a way to document their valuables for insurance purposes. This form of documentation was difficult for some insurance policy holders. They found it was easy to lose lists, forget to add new items they purchased, or delete items they no longer had. As a result, these insurance inventories were often inaccurate. While videotaping is not an option for every home or business owner, this kind of insurance documentation is helpful for some.

How are these sentences related?

- A. They repeat the same idea.
- B. They contradict one another.
- C. They compare two forms of written documentation.
- D. They present a problem and a solution.

11. Public speaking is very different from everyday conversation. First of all, speeches are much more structured than a typical informal discussion.

How are these sentences related?

- A. Sentence two offers support for the statement made in the first sentence.
 B. Sentence two contradicts the statement made in the first sentence.
 C. Sentence two shows an exception to the first sentence
 D. Sentence two compares two kinds of speeches.
12. French physicist Charles Fabry found ozone gas in the atmosphere in 1913. At room temperature, ozone is a colorless gas; it condenses to a dark blue liquid at -170° F. At temperatures above the boiling point of water, 212° F, it decomposes. Ozone is all around us. After a thunderstorm, or around electrical equipment, ozone is often detected as a sharp odor. Ozone is used as a strong oxidizing agent, a bleaching agent, and to sterilize drinking water. This gas is also highly reactive. For example, rubber insulation around a car's spark plug wires will need to be replaced eventually, due to the small amounts of ozone produced when electricity flows from the engine to the plug.

These passages imply that:

- A. Ozone is the result of pollution.
 B. High ozone levels in the atmosphere will cause large numbers of people to buy new car batteries.
 C. Ozone has no practical uses.
 D. Ozone is a natural part of the Earth's atmosphere.
13. Many people who have come close to death from drowning, cardiac arrest or other causes have described near-death experiences as profound, subjective events that sometimes result in dramatic changes in values, beliefs, behavior, and attitudes toward life and death. These experiences often include a new clarity of thinking, a feeling of well being, a sense of being out of the body, and visions of bright light or mystical encounters. Such experiences have been reported by an estimated 30 to 40 percent of hospital patients who were revived after coming close to death and about 5 percent of adult Americans in a nationwide poll. Near-death experiences have been explained as a response to a perceived threat of death (a psychological theory); as a result of biological states that accompany the process of dying (a physiological theory); and as a foretaste of an actual state of bliss after death (a transcendental theory).

The primary purpose of this passage is to:

- A. entertain
 B. persuade
 C. inform
 D. express disbelief in the afterlife
14. In most cases, little birds lay little eggs. The kiwi is an astonishing exception to this rule—it is a smallish bird that lays a big egg. The kiwi, a flightless bird found in New Zealand, weighs about four pounds, and its egg weighs, believe it or not, about one pound. That is one-fourth of the bird's body weight! If an ostrich laid an egg that was in the same proportion to the ostrich as the kiwi egg is to the kiwi, an ostrich egg would weigh a whopping seventy-five pounds instead of the usual three pounds.

Which statement below best describes the organizational method used in this passage?

- A. Description
 B. Comparison /Contrast.
 C. Chronological

D. Cause/effect

15. The rise in personal debt in recent years is due largely to aggressive and unwarranted hustling by credit card companies. Between 1990 and 1996, credit card debt doubled. Today it is still rising. Credit cards with interest rates reaching nearly 20 percent are a remarkably lucrative part of the loan business. Debtors pay an average of \$1,000 a year in interest and fees alone, money that could instead have been used for a college or retirement fund. Using subtle tactics to tempt unwary consumers to borrow, credit-card companies have led consumers to hold more cards and to fork over a bigger and bigger fraction of their income to the companies.

Which statement best reflects the organization used in this passage?

- A. Cause/effect
- B. Comparison/contrast
- C. Description
- D. Explanation

16. The following sentence has a blank indicating that something has been left out. Beneath the sentence are four words or phrases. Choose the word or phrase that, when inserted in the sentence, best fits the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

Deciding that none of the nominees was _____ the award, the film committee began reviewing a new group of candidates with better qualifications.

- A. Known for
- B. Pleased with
- C. Worthy of
- D. Interested in

Here is an example of a question with 2 paired passages which are both related by the subject discussed. These questions measure the test taker's ability to synthesize across the multiple texts. Based on the text and question complexity, these are moderately challenging questions. The following questions are considered answers 17-20 in the answer key.

Passage 1

Green Bank, West Virginia, is a tech-savvy teenager's nightmare. In this tiny town in Pocahontas County—population 143—wireless signals are illegal. No cell phones. No WiFi. No radio. No Bluetooth. No electronic transmitters at all. You're not even allowed to cozy up to an electric blanket.

The remote town is smack in the center of the National Radio Quiet Zone, a 13,000 square mile stretch of land designated by the Federal Communications Commission to protect two government radio telescopes from human-made interference. The rules are most strict in Green Bank. So strict that a police officer roves the streets listening for forbidden wireless signals.

It's necessary, though. The town is home to the Green Bank Telescope, the largest steerable radio telescope in the world—and arguably our most powerful link to the cosmos. Scientists there listen to radio energy that has journeyed light years, unlocking secrets about how the stars and galaxies formed. A rogue radio signal could prevent potential discoveries, discoveries that could answer big questions about how the universe ticks.

Adapted from Lucas Reilly, "The West Virginia Town Where Wireless Signals Are Illegal." ©2013 by Mental Floss, Inc.

Passage 2

Lawn mowers seem to have little in common with astronomy, but they are keeping astronomers at the National Radio Astronomical Observatory up at night. A new type of robotic lawn mower has been proposed that uses beacons to train the lawn mower to stay within property lines. The beacons, placed around the yard, transmit at the same wavelength as interstellar molecules astronomers study to understand how stars form. Humans wouldn't notice the tiny amount of energy given off by the beacons, but the Green Bank Telescope—the size of a football stadium—is so sensitive it can detect the energy given off by a snowflake as it melts. By simply mowing the lawn, a homeowner runs the risk of interfering with one of our greatest tools for studying the universe.

The manufacturer of one "lawnbot" requested a waiver to operate within the National Radio Quiet Zone. Astronomers countered with the suggestion that the beacons be reprogrammed to transmit at another wavelength not emitted by interstellar molecules. Alternately, astronomers want global positioning system (GPS) devices added to each lawnbot to prevent them from operating within the Quiet Zone.

5. The main purpose of the last paragraph of Passage 1 is to offer
 - A. criticism
 - B. justification
 - C. exemplification
 - D. comparison
6. Which conclusion can reasonably be drawn about the status of the "lawnbot" issue at the time of the writing of Passage 2?
 - A. The manufacturer has received a waiver to operate within the National Radio Quiet Zone.
 - B. The manufacturer has changed the wavelength at which the lawnbot's beacons transmit.
 - C. Astronomers have succeeded in getting GPS devices added to each lawnbot.
 - D. The manufacturer and astronomers have yet to resolve their conflict.
7. Which choice best describes the relationship between the two passages?
 - A. Passage 1 mainly discusses the National Radio Quiet Zone in general, while Passage 2 mainly discusses a particular threat to the zone's integrity.
 - B. Passage 1 focuses on Green Bank, West Virginia, while Passage 2 focuses on the National Radio Quiet Zone surrounding the town.
 - C. Passage 1 evaluates drawbacks of the National Radio Quiet Zone, while Passage 2 evaluates benefits of the zone.
 - D. Passage 1 offers praise for astronomers, while Passage 2 offers criticism of astronomers.
8. Given the evidence in the passages, with which statement would the authors of both passages most likely agree?
 - A. Radio telescopes could be used to measure snowfall amounts.
 - B. The Green Bank Telescope can detect extremely small amounts of energy.
 - C. Increased sales of robotic lawn mowers may require the creation of more radio quiet zones.
 - D. The lack of modern technology has made people move away from Pocahontas County.

Additional Resources

<http://sites.austincc.edu/tsiprep/reading-review/>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/>

The following is a link to supplemental reading exercises, which you may use to practice your reading skills

Open the Internet and copy and paste this link into your browser

http://college.cengage.com/devenglish/resources/reading_ace/students/

Or

1. Open the Internet and go to <http://google.com> and search for **Houghton Mifflin ACE Practice Tests**
2. When your search results appear on the screen, scroll down until you locate the link for the Houghton Mifflin College website. Click on this link
3. When you are in the Houghton Mifflin College website, on the left side of the screen choose [Reading: ACE Practice Tests](#) by clicking on the link

You will need a printer in order to complete the practice tests.

Please feel free use the computers in the open lab here at NEIT located at the library if you do not have access to a printer.

Follow the following steps:

1. Select practice test number one.
2. **Print** Paragraph before reading it
3. You can now read the paragraph and begin answering the questions. To access the questions you will need to use the little blue box located at the top left of the computer screen. There are several questions relating to the paragraph. You will need to refer back to the PRINTED paragraph in order to answer the questions accurately.
4. When you have completed practice test number one **CLICK THE VIEW/SAVE PROGRESS** button at the bottom left of the computer screen to view test results. You can choose to print the results if you want to.
5. Close out the test result box by selecting the red x box at the top right corner. Close practice test number one by selecting the red x box at the upper right corner of the computer screen. This will bring you back to the start and you can then select test number two and so on for more practice.

Using the answers below, grade your practice test and review the questions you missed in the Reading Skills sections listed next to the correct answer.

1. D
2. A
3. A
4. C
5. B
6. D
7. B
8. D
9. C
10. D
11. A
12. D
13. C
14. B
15. A
16. C
17. B
18. D
19. A
20. C