

Critical Reading & the PSAT

Critical Reading

- Two types of questions
 - Sentence Completion – 13 questions
 - Passage-based Reading – 35 questions
- Skills
 - Determine meaning from word components
 - Determine meaning from context
 - Punctuation (colon, semi-colon)
 - Introductory and transitional words & phrases
 - Understand primary purpose/main idea
 - Understand tone & attitude conveyed
 - Understand use of rhetorical strategies
 - Recognize implications, make evaluations

Sentence Completion

Breaking with established artistic traditions, Dali' was a genius whose _____ works infuriated the traditionalists of his day.

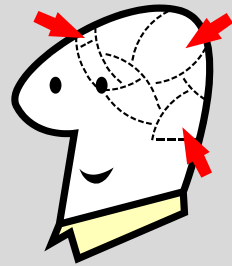
- (A) Derivative
- (B) Magnanimous
- (C) Insignificant
- (D) Uncontroversial
- (E) Heterodox

- Don't be like Joe Bloggs!
- He tries to solve these questions by rereading the sentence five times.
- He puts a different words into the blank each time, and picks the one that "sounds right."

What's wrong with Joe's method?

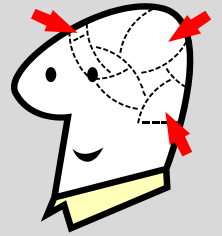
- His method takes *way too much time!*
 - Just go back and try to read a sentence five times, and you'll see what I mean.
- His method is not really reliable, because many answers often “sound right.”

You're Smarter Than You Think 1



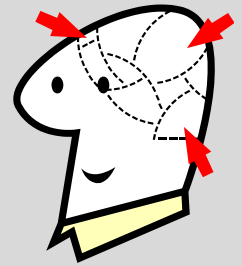
- Susan was _____ when the formula, which had worked just yesterday, failed to produce the expected result.
 - Plug a word into the blank – any word from your head that would complete the sentence correctly.
 - How did you know what word to plug in?

You're Smarter Than You Think 2



- Although she was never considered pretty as a child, Magaret grew up to be a _____ adult.
 - Plug a word into the blank – any word from your head that would complete the sentence correctly.
 - How did you know what word to plug in?

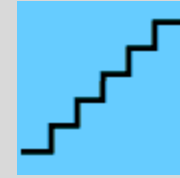
You're Smarter Than You Think 3



- Once a cheerful person, the years of fruitless struggle against government waste made him a very _____ man.
 - Plug a word into the blank – any word from your head that would complete the sentence correctly.
 - How did you know what word to plug in?



The Method



1. Cover the answer choices with your hand.

This will ensure that you don't do what Joe does, which is to read the sentence five times, trying one of the answer choices each time.
2. Speak for yourself.

Read the sentence, and write your own word in the blank.
3. Uncover the answer choices.
4. Pick the word that comes closest to the word that you came up with.

The Key is Finding the Clue 1



- Susan was _____ when the formula, which had worked just yesterday, failed to produce the expected result.
- The clue: *the formula, which had worked just yesterday, failed to produce the expected result.*
- So you know that the word has to be something like “perplexed” or “puzzled.”

The Key is Finding the Clue 2



- The park was so _____ that children could play in it for hours without getting bored.
- The clue: *children could play for hours without getting bored.*
- So you know that the word has to be something like “interesting” or “varied.”

Sentence Completion Practice #1

The practice of storytelling for entertainment and instruction was at one time so widespread that it was virtually _____ .

(A) rigorous

(B) universal

(C) elevating

(D) uncommon

(E) unknown

Sentence Completion #2

In a vitriolic message to his troops, General Patton insisted that he would _____ no further insubordination, no matter how brutal the ensuing engagements might become.

(A) impede

(B) brief

(C) denote

(D) brook

(E) expose

Sentence Completion – 2 blanks

- The word that goes in the first blank is dependent on the word in the second blank.
- The key is to focus on the relationship between the blanks – ***same*** or ***different***
 - Can eliminate choices based on the relationships
- May also eliminate choices based exclusively on the first or second blank

Sentence Completion Practice #3

Although some think the terms "bug" and "insect" are _____, the former term actually refers to _____ group of insects.

(A) parallel . . an identical

(B) precise . . an exact

(C) interchangeable . . a particular

(D) exclusive . . a separate

(E) useful . . a useless

Sentence Completion Practice #4

The author is reliably _____; every book he writes is more _____ than the one before.

- (A) dull...inspired
- (B) exceptional ...hackneyed
- (C) artistic...informed
- (D) imaginative...creative
- (E) original...lackluster



Reading Passages



- Long passages: 40-100 lines
 - 6-12 questions per passage
- Short passages: about one paragraph
 - 1-2 questions per passage
- Tackle the short passages first
- For each set of questions per passage there is no order of difficulty – decide which questions are easiest for you and do them first

4 Types of Passages

1. Science

- Discoveries
- Controversies
- Physics
- Chemistry
- Astronomy
- Biology
- Medicine
- Botany
- Zoology



4 Types of Passages

2. Humanities

- Art
- Literature
- Music
- Philosophy
- Folklore
- Artists
- Novelists
- Historical Figures



4 Types of Passages

3. Social Sciences

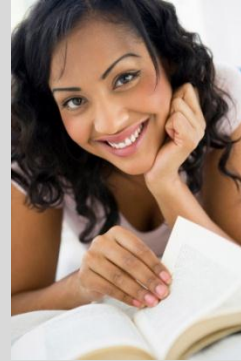
- Topics in politics



4 Types of Passages

4. Narrative

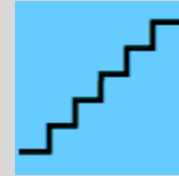
- Novels
- Short Stories
- Humorous Essays
- Poetry?



- According to *The Princeton Review*, there has never been a poem on the PSAT, but we might want to be prepared for one anyways.



The Method



1. Read the Blurb/Skim the Passage
2. Go to the Questions
3. Paraphrase the Question
4. Find the Answer
5. Answer in Your Own Words
6. Process of Elimination

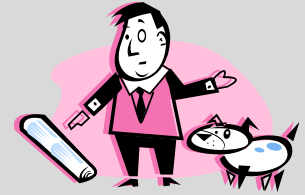
1. Read the Blurb/Skim the Passage

- Read *italicized* introduction.
 - This provides context for the passage.
- Take a minute to *skim* the passage.
 - Don't get bogged down.
 - Identify main idea.
 - Get a sense of the *structure* of the passage.
 - Identify *where* supporting details are (and not necessarily *what* they are just yet) so you can find them later.

2. Go to the Questions

- ◎ Unlike the sentence completion section, these questions are *not* arranged in order of set of difficulty.
 - Figure out which ones you will tackle first and which ones you will tackle last. **Remember passage-based questions follow the passage from top to bottom!**
 - Consider which ones you might skip
- ◎ 3 Types of Questions – Do in this order...
 - Literal Comprehension (“Go-Fetch” - easy)
 - Reasoning Questions (i.e. “author’s motive”)
 - Complex or “Weird” Questions

Literal Comprehension Questions



- Called “Go Fetch” questions because they ask you to go find information in the passage.
- Examples:
 - According to lines 8-9, why are malamutes stronger than huskies?
 - According to the passage, Type II diabetes is characterized by



Reasoning Questions

- ◎ Reasoning questions are similar to “Go-Fetch” questions, but might require some higher-level thinking skills – like making inferences.
- ◎ Examples:
 - The author quotes Dr. Silas as saying “The findings were surprising” (lines 18-22) to show
 - Which of the following best expresses the central theme of the passage?
 - Which of the following may be inferred from the author’s discussion of the Great Plains?



Weird Questions

- ◎ These questions require you not only understand the author's motives in writing something, but also that you apply that understanding to a new situation.
- ◎ Examples:
 - All of the following, if true, would undermine the author's argument in the second paragraph EXCEPT
 - Which of the following is a use of hyperbole most similar to that found in line 31?

3. Paraphrase the Question

- Put the question in your own words.
- Don't be afraid to actually write in the book.
- For example let's say a question asks:
 - The author mentions the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the last paragraph (lines 92-97) in order to
- You could rephrase it this way:
 - Israel vs. Palestine – Why mentioned?

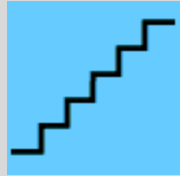
4. Find the Answer

- There is no opinion!
- There is *always* a *right* answer choice and four *wrong* answer choices.

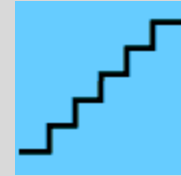


5. Answer in Your Own Words

- ◎ Remember how we covered our answers and jotted down our own words for Sentence Completions, so we wouldn't be distracted by the answer choices?
- ◎ You can use the same strategy for passage-based reading.
- ◎ For example, if you know the answer is in line 39, paraphrase the sentence that includes line 39 to know just what it means.



The Method



1. Read the Blurb/Skim the Passage
2. Go to the Questions
3. **Paraphrase** the Question
4. Find the Answer
5. **Answer in Your Own Words**
6. Process of Elimination

Let's Try to Paraphrase!

◎ We are told that the trouble with Modern Man is that he has been trying to detach himself from nature. He sits in the topmost tiers of polymer, glass, and steel, dangling his pulsing legs, surveying at a distance the writhing life of the planet. In this scenario, Man comes on as a stupendous lethal force, and the Earth is pictured as something delicate, like rising bubbles at the surface of a country pond, or flights of fragile birds.

Paraphrase

- Some say that the Earth is delicate and that Modern Man's detached from it and can really mess it up.

Let's Try Another Paraphrase

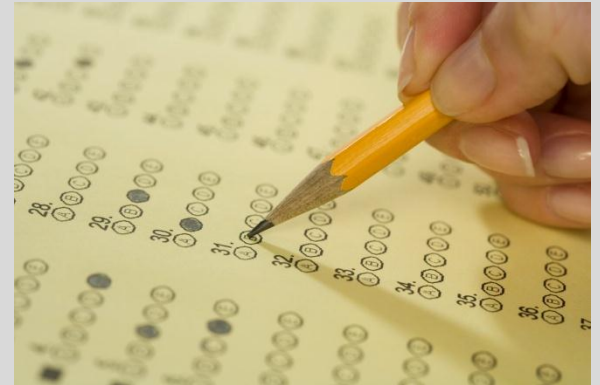
- ◎ When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with one another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to separation.

Paraphrase

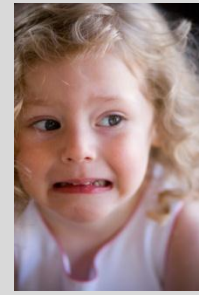
- When people declare independence, they'd better tell the world why.

6. Process of Elimination

- Evaluate every answer choice.
- Be aggressive.
- It's all about the passage.
- Beware exact phrasing.
- For general questions, pay attention to scope.
- Avoid extremes and give no offense.



Examples of “extreme” or “offensive” options



- You should always avoid things like this:
 - Everyone believes that Shakespeare was the greatest writer in history.
 - Nineteenth-century scientists were foolish and ignorant to believe in the existence of ether.
 - The judges deliberately undermined the constitution in the landmark case.
 - String theory fills in all the gaps between Newtonian physics and Quantum Mechanics.