

**T**he reading passages make up 50 percent of the verbal section, so make sure you can do these well. However, it is difficult to study for this section in any direct way. Indirectly, you can study by improving your ability to read and comprehend.

We will start with the assumption that you know how to read. If, however, this is not a valid assumption, perhaps the first words that you should learn are *two hundred*, which is short for having to go to college in the Yukon Territory.

The ability to read fast can be a big advantage. So read only those words that start with *w*. "Hold it," you say, "but then I won't understand anything." To which we respond, "Oh yeah, you're right, sorry," and then suggest, "Try reading everything very carefully and make sure that you comprehend it all." To which you respond, "But then I won't have time to finish the test."

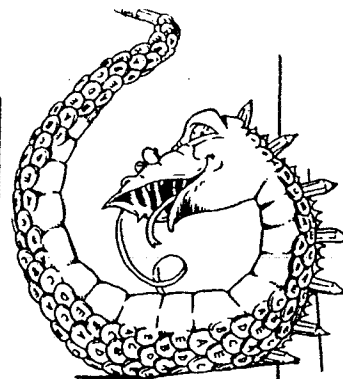
This is the heart-wrenching conflict that you must deal with on the critical reading section: to speed or not to speed. All we can say is, do as many practice tests as you possibly can so that you know how fast you can read and still understand as much as possible.

Fancy speed-reading tricks probably won't help much. Psychologists have found that speed-reading tricks really only teach you how to skim a text by skipping details. But for reading questions you have to know the details.

In order to improve your comprehension, we recommend that you expand your reading horizons. If your reading matter is presently limited to cereal boxes and the phone book, it's time to explore new possibilities. Caution: *Do not attempt to switch cold turkey!* Many a student has gone into intellectual shock after attempting to jump straight from *Teen Beat* to *The Plasma Physicist's Quarterly*. We suggest that you work up to quality reading material using this one-week plan:

Day 1: *Tattooed Bikers and Their Ladies* (this is a real mag!)

Day 2: *Teen Beat*



Day 3: *Pro-Wrestling Weekly*

Day 4: *The National Enquirer*

Day 5: *Soap Opera Digest*

Day 6: *Sassy*

Day 7: *People*

Now you should be ready to tackle the kind of reading that you are likely to find on the SAT. Read things like: *The New York Times*, *American Heritage*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *National Geographic*, *Sports Illustrated*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Vogue*, and *Forbes*.

## Attitude

The critical reading section is the one place where you should abandon negative thinking. As impossible as this may sound, it is important to assume a positive attitude toward the critical reading section. Why is this? Well, remember the chapter on oral hygiene in the health textbook you had in sixth grade? No, because it was boring and you didn't *want* to read it. But do you remember the chapter on sex? Yes, because you did want to read it. It's the same way with reading passages. You won't remember them if you have the attitude that they are boring and useless. (They are boring and useless, but that's not the point.) Instead, you must convince yourself that you are dying to read them because you are passionately interested in whatever they are about. Get psyched to read them. Treat them as you would a love letter. Treat them as you would a passage from a piece of great literature. Treat them as you would a section of *Up Your Score*.

There is sound psychological backing for this claim. Scientists have shown that comprehension and retention levels are much higher when people are interested in what they are reading than when people aren't. Your brain just doesn't bother remembering stuff that it finds totally dull.

OH BOY!  
CELERY  
DEVELOPMENT!



## Strategies for the Critical Reading Section



The following six strategies can be of help to you when taking the test. You probably shouldn't use all of them because that would take a lot of time. Which strategies you choose is a matter of personal preference. Try them all and see which ones you like.

### Strategy #1

Skim the questions before reading the passage. This gives you an idea of what to look for while you read. Follow the four guidelines below if you use this method:

a. Only read the questions; don't read the answers, too. If the question is about a specific line in the passage, mark that line so that when you read the passage you will know to focus on the marked lines. (This is especially helpful for the vocabulary-in-context questions.)

b. When you see a question that asks for something general such as, "Which is the best title?" or "The main idea of the passage is . . .," disregard it and go on to the next question. Why? Because you should always assume that there will be at least one question like that so you don't even have to bother reading it.

c. As you read the passage, circle anything that is an answer to one of the questions. Don't immediately go and answer the question because that will break your concentration and interfere with your comprehension.

d. Make sure that when you read the passage, you don't get so caught up in looking for the answers to the questions that you fail to understand the overall meaning.

### Strategy #2

After you read a paragraph, ask yourself, "Self, what was that paragraph about?" Spend about two to six seconds summarizing the contents of the paragraph in your head. It helps to look at the paragraph while you are doing this because then you will remember where things are located in the passage.

This can save time later when you have to look for the answers. If you are a flake who, like Larry, can read an entire passage before realizing that you weren't paying attention and that you have no idea what it was about, then this strategy might be of help in forcing you to concentrate.

### Strategy #3

Usually the passage will be composed of a few sentences that state the author's main idea and others that contain facts to support the main idea. As you read the passage, underline any sentence that is purely a statement of the author's main idea. It is guaranteed that there will be at least one question relating to these sentences and if you underline them, you won't have to waste time looking for them. We highly recommend that you use this strategy.

### Strategy #4

While you are reading, underline the main sentence in each paragraph. The sound of your pencil will distract the other test-takers, making them lose concentration and improving your score in comparison. And when you are answering the questions, the underlining will automatically draw your attention to the main idea of each paragraph.

### Strategy #5

*The Princeton Review* suggests that if you are having trouble finishing the verbal sections, you should skip the last reading passage. They argue that it takes several minutes to do the last section and, since it's the hardest passage, a lot of students get the questions wrong anyway. If you skip it, you will have much more time to devote to the rest of the questions that take less time, are easier, and are worth the same number of points.

### Strategy #6

Read the passage, then translate the whole thing into Swedish. (This will only help if you are Swedish.)

There are four reading passages on the SAT (actually five, because one is a double passage—more on that later). One passage runs between 450 and 600 words, one between 600 and 800 words, and two (one, plus the double passage) between 800 and 950 words. The number of questions relating to each passage is between five and 13. There is always a passage on something scientific and a passage that is an excerpt from a narrative, which could be fiction or nonfiction. The other passage topics include something historical, something about an art form, or something about a minority group. Each passage has a short introduction in italics. Read the introductions. They help you understand the passage, and often they define words or identify names that you need to know.

### The Scientific Passage

Do not be intimidated by scientific jargon. The scientific passage will inevitably have some far-out scientific terms that you have never heard of. Don't worry. *You don't need to know scientific terms.* Either the terms will be totally irrelevant or they will be explained in the passage. Take for example the following excerpt from an actual SAT:

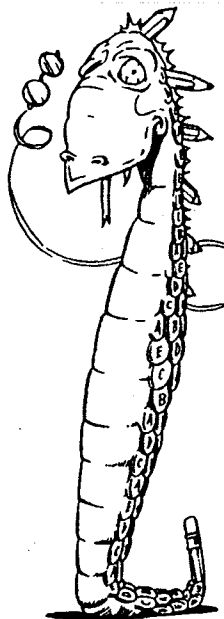
"... Kinematic studies of such objects show them to be receding from us at a rate proportional to their distance. . ."

Some students might panic when reading this sentence because of the word *kinematic*. However, there is no need to panic. You don't have to know what *kinematic studies* are to answer the questions correctly.

The second reason why this sentence could be intimidating is that it refers to proportions. Proportions are math and math is intimidating. Once again, there is no need to worry. If you read the sentence that follows the above sentence in the passage you will see that it explains the math so that you don't have to do any thinking:

"That is, those galaxies most distant from us have larger recessional velocities."

## The Passages



*The author  
will never say,  
"Beethoven sucks."*

(You don't have to know what a *recessional velocity* is, either.) The expression, "that is, . . ." clues us in to the fact that this sentence is going to explain the previous sentence. You will frequently find this sort of thing in the scientific passages. If you don't understand a sentence, look at the sentences that precede and follow it. Chances are, one of them explains whatever you don't understand.

### The Historical Passage

The historical passage will discuss a particular trend or period in history. The author will be making her own interpretation of that trend or period. She will support her interpretation with examples. When the author starts listing examples, read the first example, then skip the rest of the examples and put an "EX" (for "EX"ample) in the margin near the list of examples. In many cases, the author will also support her interpretation by referring to other historians who agree with her. In other cases, she will refer to other historians who disagree with her so that she can refute their interpretation. Circle the names of historians the author refers to—there will probably be a question about them.

### The Art Passage

The art passage will be about literature, painting, sculpture, crafts, music, etc., or a particular artist, musician, craftsman, writer, etc. In *all* of the examples that we looked at, the author had a positive attitude toward the artist or art form. The author might have some specific criticisms but the overall point of the passage will be complimentary. The author will never say, "Beethoven sucks." (This rule does not apply to the Double Passage.)

### The Fiction Passage

The literature passage will be an excerpt from some piece of literary fiction. It is hard to predict what these passages will be like. Don't skim these too quickly. You have to read them carefully so that you pick up the subtleties. However, when

you go to answer the questions, do not read too deeply. You might have to interpret the figurative meanings of parts of the passage, but don't try to be profound and read things into the passage that aren't there. Also, make sure that you pay attention to the author's style and tone. There will almost certainly be a question about that.

### The Minority Passage

The ETS has been accused of being biased against minorities. In the 1970s, the ETS decided to respond to these accusations by putting a reading passage about minorities on each SAT. This is a pointless politically correct gesture on their part because it doesn't make the SAT any less culturally biased. (For more on the SAT and bias, see page 263.)

As far as we're concerned, the minority passage makes the SAT easier for everyone—minorities and majorities. This is because the ethnic passage is incredibly predictable. You *know* that the ETS is going to say good things about the minority group. That's the whole point of the passage. Therefore, many of the questions are giveaways, for example this one from a real SAT:

The author's attitude toward the Chinese achievements mentioned in lines 1–45 is best described as one of

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| (A) disbelief | (B) admiration  |
| (C) anxiety   | (D) ambivalence |
| (E) apathy    |                 |

The only one of these choices that expresses a clearly positive attitude toward the Chinese is (B). Of course, (B) is the right answer.

### The Double Passage

The Double Passage consists of two separate passages, which according to ETS, “oppose, support, or in some way complement” each other.

The selection is set up like this: an introduction, the first passage, the second passage, questions on the first passage, questions on the second passage, then questions on both passages.

Don't do it in this order. Here is our suggestion for the best order:

1. Read introduction
2. Read *first* passage
3. Do *first* passage questions
4. Read *second* passage
5. Do *second* passage questions
6. Do *both* passage questions

The reason is, the questions on the first passage will have nothing to do with the second passage. Therefore, it makes more sense to do the first passage questions immediately after reading the first passage. Likewise for the second passage. Then, after you have read and answered questions on both passages, you will have such a thorough knowledge that you will ace the questions on both passages.

You should be able to tell easily whether the two passages agree or disagree. Often, the introduction will help by saying that the two passages have “much in common” (in which case they'll probably agree) or “present two views” (in which case they'll probably disagree). If you're having trouble figuring out the relationship or you're running out of time, follow this general rule: If the context and subject matter of the two passages seem different, then what they say will almost certainly be similar, and vice versa. For instance, in some of the passages we've looked at, a speech from ancient Greece and a speech from the Civil War had the same view on war, and an essay on silent film and one on mime (two different art forms) showed the similarities between the two forms. However, another selection had two passages on architecture, both from the twentieth century, and they disagreed. So if the two passages were written in different times or places or if they concern different subjects, they probably agree. If they talk about the same subject and were written in the same time or place, they probably disagree. (Note: The passages will rarely strictly agree or disagree. One passage might concern only one point discussed in the other, or they may present two non-conflicting views on a subject.)



## The Six Types of Questions

The ETS is not particularly creative in making up the questions for the reading section. He uses the same basic questions over and over. They fall into six main categories.

### Type #1: General (main idea)

1. The author is primarily concerned with . . .
2. Which of the following titles best summarizes the passage?
3. The primary purpose of the passage is to . . .

Hint: Look at the topic paragraph and the concluding sentence.

### Type #2: Explicit (facts)

1. According to the fourth paragraph, some economists feel that . . .
2. According to the passage, an atom of which of the following substances will split, releasing energy and more neutrons?
3. According to the passage, Margaret asked Mrs. Horn's opinion because she . . .

### Type #3: Implicit (inferences, reading between the lines)

1. It can be inferred that the guilds were organized as they were because . . .
2. It can be inferred that each of the following applies to the *perfecti* except that they . . .
3. With which of the following statements about marketing would the author most likely agree?

### Type #4: Author's Logic

1. What tone does the author take toward the chickens?
2. Which of the following best describes the development of the passage?
3. The author cites specific examples of the work of slave artisans primarily to . . .

### Type #5: Vocabulary-in-Context

1. The word "obtrusive" is used in line 12 to mean . . .
2. The phrase "underlying themes" (line 7) refers to the . . .
3. Which of the following best captures the meaning of the word "alliance" in line 32?

Hint: Don't give up if you don't know the word; you should be able to figure it out from the context. Also, be careful—it may not be the most common definition of the word.

### Type #6: Comparison (only on the Double Passage)

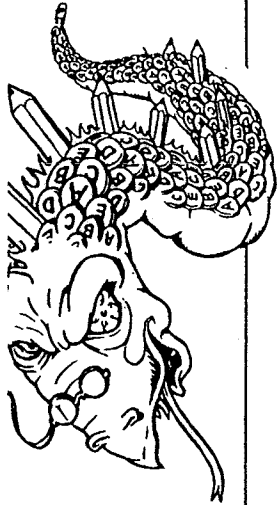
1. Which statement from Passage 1 does not have a parallel idea in Passage 2?
2. How would the author of Passage 1 respond to the idea of the "crazy spoons" in Passage 2?
3. Which statement is best supported by the two passages?

*A note about outside knowledge:*

Critical reading questions refer to what is "stated or implied in the passage." You aren't supposed to use any outside information. So if the passage is about the history of celery and you happen to be an expert on that subject, you still have to read the passage. However, the passages almost never contradict accepted outside knowledge. You won't ever see a passage that claims that the Earth is flat. So never choose an answer that you know is making a false statement. On the other hand, never assume that you know the right answer just because you know that a statement is true. There might be other true statements among the choices that are more applicable to the passage.

Now it's time to attempt a sample passage. Following the passage are examples of the different types of questions and the answer choices that would accompany them.

## A Serious Sample Passage



*If Spot happens to have died in a crouched pose, he can be placed on the lawn and used as a security device.*

The following passage is an excerpt from a scientific journal about a recent scientific breakthrough.

Modern science has brought us many wonderful inventions—the television, the waterbed, “I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter,” and Michael Jackson. Many more marvelous technological breakthroughs loom on the horizon. The latest development in the field of applied science is no exception. Today, scientists have invented a process through which deceased family pets can be freeze-dried and saved for millennia.

Every pet owner knows that pets are integral parts of the household. When they have been around for so long, and have had such an influence on family members, it’s hard to let them go when they pass on. Now, through freeze-drying, Fido or Fluffy can remain a household member forever.

When your pet dies, its lovable body will be kept intact. You can keep it on the mantel and take it down to pet it at your leisure—and a dehydrated pet does not require feeding, walking, or litter boxes. It emits much less of an odor than regular dead pets, and looks much better, also.

The projected uses for freeze-dried pets are numerous. If Spot happens to have died in a crouched pose, he can be placed on your lawn as a security device. Snookums can be used as a decorative centerpiece. Market analysts predict a boom in gerbil paperweights, goldfish refrigerator magnets, and poodle hood ornaments. They could even become collectors’ items: You could trade them like baseball cards.

Detractors claim, however, that the dehydration wears off after several years, as moisture from the air enters the animal corpse and causes decomposition. This, it is feared, would attract bacteria into the home. Another flaw in the freeze-drying process is that the pet becomes brittle and breaks easily. For a young child, finding Ginger shattered on the living room floor could be extremely traumatic. Finally, it is feared that people who dislike their pets will have them freeze-dried before they actually die.

Although there are problems with the procedure, the concept of freeze dried pets is a valuable one. If the method is

perfected, it will allow a pet to remain an everyday part of the lives of its loved ones and, indeed, it will permit pets to be passed from generation to generation as family heirlooms.

1. This passage is primarily
  - (A) a scientific description of the freeze-drying process
  - (B) an essay on the religious and moral questions associated with the freeze-drying process
  - (C) a general discussion intended to acquaint the reader with the subject of freeze-drying pets
  - (D) an expression of someone’s opinion
  - (E) an advertisement pushing the freeze-drying process
2. The first paragraph is best described as
  - (A) descriptive
  - (B) introductory
  - (C) irrelevant
  - (D) sophomoric
  - (E) existential
3. The word “detractors” in the fifth paragraph most nearly means
  - (A) farm implements
  - (B) critics
  - (C) supporters
  - (D) pet owners
  - (E) scientific experts
4. According to the passage one of the most specific problems associated with the process is
  - (A) a freeze-dried pet attracts viruses
  - (B) cost is high
  - (C) the lack of qualified individuals to perform the task
  - (D) freeze-dried pets are not shatterproof
  - (E) the fear the freeze-dried pets will stick to the wallpaper

5. The author seems to believe that
- (A) freeze-drying is a worthless process when applied to animals
  - (B) the difficulties of freeze-drying outweigh the benefits
  - (C) it would be easier to freeze-dry an armadillo than a pine cone
  - (D) If you give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day; if you give a man two fishes, he'll eat for two days
  - (E) the goals of freeze-drying are worth striving for

Answers: 1. (●) 2. (●) 3. (●) 4. (●) 5. (●)

Now you have an idea of what the critical reading passages are all about. However, most passages won't be that interesting, that short, or that easy. (We couldn't help it; we're also interesting, short, and easy.) For practice, do the reading passages in *Real SATs*. The *Taking the SAT* booklet available at your high school guidance office will also have some reading passages.

Speak for  
ourselves, guys.  
-Lisa

## The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant

