



Reading Strategies

I have found that simplicity is the best route towards success. While I could have put dozens of strategies in here and overcomplicated it, I thought it would be the most effective to only mention strategies that always work. Since my strategies require you to build off of the base skills that are required to succeed in the SAT, it is virtually impossible to apply these strategies and not improve your score.

Keep in mind that the SAT reading portion is meant to test your ability in two main areas:

1. Craft and Structure
2. Information and Ideas.

This means that you are looking at the overall structure of the passages, or the overall ideas. **Do not get caught up in the details.** You will see this in later examples.

Strategy #1: “Change the statements to questions, then look for the answers in the passage.”

Example:

“In the passage, Akira addresses Chie with. . .”

Change to:

“What does Akira address Chie with?”

Strategy #2: “Never infer anything.”

Remember, this is “Evidence-based Reading and Writing” so every answer will be somewhere in the passage. There will be questions that tell you to infer an answer. A common example is comparing two passages. Questions are often phrased, “How would person A, respond to what person B said in their passage?” I promise “College Board” is not asking for your opinion. You must find what the evidence suggests.

Strategy #3: “Choose the MOST right answer.”

Often it seems like you are at a crossroads between two or more answers. The main function of this issue is missing a main concept or idea in the passage. It is best to find what you are missing in the passage. However, sometimes you are limited on time. When this occurs, simply ask yourself: Which answer is the MOST right?

Strategy #4: “If you have to guess choose one letter.”



If you have found yourself in the unfortunate situation where you must guess, do not guess option A for one, and Option B for the next one, etc. Statistically, if you only guess one letter, you have a higher chance of getting more answers right.

Strategy #5: “Create mini summaries for each sentence if necessary.”

Often when students struggle with reading comprehension, they use large amounts of brainpower focusing on the small details in a passage. However, the SAT tests on structure and ideas. Creating small summaries of what happens in each sentence can help give a better idea of what is happening, especially in confusing passages.

Example:

Passage: *“Black beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) are a nutritionally dense food, but they are difficult to digest in part because of their high levels of soluble fiber and compounds like raffinose. They also contain antinutrients like tannins and trypsin inhibitors, which interfere with the body’s ability to extract nutrients from foods. In a research article, Marisela Granito and Glenda Álvarez from Simón Bolívar University in Venezuela claim that inducing fermentation of black beans using lactic acid bacteria improves the digestibility of the beans and makes them more nutritious.”*

Mini summaries: Black beans healthy, hard to digest, high soluble fiber and raffinose. Tannins and trypsin inhibitors in black beans make it harder for the body to extract nutrients. Improve digestibility by fermenting them with lactic acid, and more nutritious.

Larger summary: Black beans are nutritious, but something makes them hard to digest. Certain fermentation can make them easier to digest, and more nutritious.

Another way to use this strategy is to associate words with terms in the passage. “Black Beans = nutritious and hard to digest”.

Bonus Strategy: “Apply for accommodation if you can.”

If you have dyslexia or ADHD or another type of learning disorder, it is smart to apply for accommodation. Accommodation can include: 1.5x-2.0x time on your test, additional breaks, assistive technology, reading and seeing accommodation and more. If you are taking the test at your school, the school normally administers accommodation, however if you are taking it at a separate testing facility, a form will have to be filled out on the College Board’s website 7-weeks in advance.



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General Approach for Reading Questions

Step 1: Read the question.

Step 2: Rephrase the question.

Step 3: Treasure hunt.

Step 4: Draw your own conclusion.

Step 5: Compare your conclusion with the answers.

This system is designed to be useful for ALL reading questions. However, if you desire more specific examples for each problem type, I will provide those as well.

I have left the answers out of the original example problem to illustrate the system. I will demonstrate how this system works with the problem below:

Example Problem 1:

*“Some animal-behavior studies involve observing wild animals in their natural habitat, and some involve capturing wild animals and observing them in a laboratory. Each approach has advantages over the other. In wild studies, researchers can more easily presume that the animals are behaving normally, and in lab studies, researchers can more easily control factors that might affect the results. But if, for example, the results from a wild study and a lab study of Western scrub-jays (*Aphelocoma californica*) contradict each other, one or both of the studies must have failed to account for some factor that was relevant to the birds’ behavior.”*

“Which choice best states the main idea of the text?”

Step 1: Read the question.

“Which choice best states the main idea of the text?”

Step 2: Rephrase the question.

Whenever you rephrase a question (or a statement) you want to do so in a way that requires you to find the answer in the text, which naturally leads to the third step.

“Which choice best states the main idea of the text?”

“What is the main idea of the text?”

Simple enough right?

Step 3: Treasure hunt.



Now it is time for you to read the passage and answer the question. Remember you are looking at overall structure and ideas.

Step 4: Draw your own conclusion.

In sentence one, the author contrasts two different ways to conduct an experiment. Next, he states how they both have advantages. He continues to go into detail about the advantages and disadvantages of both choices. And then he gives an example about how one or both systems might be faulty.

From this information, my conclusion would be: “The main purpose of this text is to contrast the pros and cons of different ways to do an experiment.”

Time for the next step.

Step 5: Compare your conclusion with the answers.

My conclusion was, **“The main purpose of this text is to contrast the pros and cons of different ways to do an experiment.”**

the answers that were given are the following:

- A. *When the results of a natural-habitat study and those from a lab study of a wild animal such as the Western scrub-jay conflict, the study in the natural habitat is more likely than the lab study to have accurate results.*
- B. *Studying wild animals such as the Western scrub-jay in both their natural habitat and lab settings is likely to yield conflicting results that researchers cannot fully resolve.*
- C. *Wild animals such as the Western scrub-jay can be effectively studied in their natural habitat and in the lab, but each approach has drawbacks that could affect the accuracy of the findings.*
- D. *Differing results between natural-habitat and lab studies of wild animals such as the Western scrub-jay are a strong indication that both of the studies had design flaws that affected the accuracy of their results.*

Option A suggests that the “Main Point” of the text is about the results, so A is wrong.

Option B is also about results.

Option C talks about the contrasts and conflicts of two different experiments and how each has their drawbacks. Option C is a very good option, but let’s check Option D just to make sure.



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Option D puts on emphasis on design flaws but does not accurately give a picture of the overall outline of the passage.

Option C is the correct answer!

It is important to remember that the even if an answer makes sense based on the material in the passage, it is only right if it appropriately addresses the question that is being asked. In the question above, answer D could be logically sound, but it does not appropriately address the main structure of the text. This is why reading the question first and rephrasing it in a way that you can remember is the most important step.

**For more example problems, view the link to “Reading Examples”. **