



SCHOLAR COACH, INC.

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

MCQ Reading Questions: 12 Question Types Step by Step

This guide teaches you how to recognize and solve every kind of Reading question on Section I of the AP English Language and Composition exam. Work through it type by type: read the sample stems, learn the method, study the worked example, then try the two practice items. All answers are in the Answer Key at the end. Use it alongside a timer once you know the methods.

Before You Start: What the Reading Questions Are

Section I of the exam is 45 multiple-choice questions in 60 minutes, worth 45 percent of your score. Since 2025 the exam is delivered in the **Bluebook** app and every question has **four answer choices (A–D)**. There is no guessing penalty.

The 45 questions come in five sets. Two sets are **Reading** sets: each is anchored to a published nonfiction passage (an essay, speech, letter, memoir excerpt, or piece of journalism) with a short italicized note giving the author, date, and genre. Together the two Reading sets carry **23–25 questions**, usually 11–14 per passage. The other three sets are Writing sets built on student drafts; those are covered in the companion guide, *MCQ Writing Questions: 10 Question Types Step by Step*.

Every Reading question maps to one of the four “reading” skill categories in the Course and Exam Description (CED):

SKILL CATEGORY	WHAT THE QUESTIONS TEST	SHARE OF SECTION I
1 Rhetorical Situation (1.A, 1.B)	exigence, audience, purpose, context, message; how an argument reflects audience values	11–14%
3 Claims and Evidence (3.A–3.C)	thesis, claims, evidence, qualification, counterargument	13–16%
5 Reasoning and Organization (5.A–5.C)	line of reasoning, organization, methods of development	13–16%
7 Style (7.A–7.C)	word choice, comparisons, syntax, tone, clause relationships	11–14%

The twelve question types below are a practical sorting of what those skills look like as actual questions. A single stem can blend two types (a “function” question that is really about tone, for instance), so learn the methods as tools, not as rigid boxes.

The Universal Method (Use It on Every Reading Question)

1. **Read the orienting note first.** Author, date, genre, and audience are given to you. A 1905 speech to a suffrage convention and a 2019 memoir excerpt reward different expectations.
2. **Read the whole passage once, actively, in about 3 minutes.** Do not annotate every line. Mark only four things: the **thesis** or main claim, any **shift** (look for *but, yet, however, still, and yet, of course*), the **tone** in one or two words, and anything that **surprised** you.
3. **Read the stem carefully and classify it.** Which of the twelve types is it? What exactly is being asked: the function of a sentence, the meaning of a word, the writer’s attitude?
4. **Go back to the text before you look at the choices.** Reread the referenced sentence plus the sentence before and after it. Predict the answer in your own words.
5. **Eliminate, do not select.** Cross off every choice that contains a flaw (see the distractor patterns below). The correct answer is the one left standing, not the one that “sounds best.”
6. **If two remain, apply the tie-breaking rules.**
7. **Answer every question.** Flag anything unresolved after about 60 seconds and return to it.

The Ten Distractor Patterns

Wrong answers on this exam are not random. Learn these ten patterns and you will recognize most wrong choices on sight.

PATTERN	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	YOUR TELL
Overreach	Turns “some critics object” into “critics universally reject”	<i>always, never, all, only, proves, completely</i>
Half-right	First half paraphrases the text accurately; second half adds an unsupported effect	Check every clause of a two-part answer
Out of scope	True of the whole passage when the stem asks about one paragraph (or the reverse)	Does the answer match the <i>unit</i> the stem names?
Opposite	Reverses the writer’s tone or stance; often one of a matched pair	If two choices are opposites, one is probably right
True in the world, not in the text	Tempts you with outside knowledge	Can you point to the lines that support it?
Device not present	Names a strategy (anecdote, statistics, analogy) the cited lines do not contain	Verify the device exists before considering the effect

PATTERN	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	YOUR TELL
Right device, wrong effect	Correctly names the move but misstates what it does for the argument	Ask "does the text actually do this?"
Recycled language	Repeats a memorable phrase from the passage in a misleading way	Familiar words are not evidence of correctness
Too literal	Reads a figurative or ironic statement at face value	Especially dangerous on tone and word-in-context items
Vague but unobjectionable	Could describe almost any passage ("to engage the reader")	Specific-to-this-passage beats generic

The "Two Best Answers" Tie-Breaking Rules

Almost every student reports the same frustration: "I could always get it down to two." Here is what to do at that point, in order.

1. **Reread the stem word by word.** Half of all ties come from answering a slightly different question than the one asked (the writer's *purpose* instead of the *effect on the audience*; the function of a *sentence* instead of a *paragraph*).
2. **Check every clause of each remaining choice.** If one choice has two parts and one part is wrong, the whole choice is wrong. The half-right distractor is the most common tie-maker.
3. **Prefer the more specific, passage-anchored choice.** If one choice could describe any essay and the other could describe only this one, the specific one wins.
4. **Prefer the more moderate choice on tone and claim questions.** AP passages are written by thoughtful adults; "measured skepticism" beats "contempt" unless the text is plainly contemptuous.
5. **Prefer the choice that is consistent with your other answers.** Correct answers never contradict one another. If you are confident the passage's purpose is to defend libraries, a tone answer of "dismissive" is almost certainly wrong.
6. **On function questions, prefer the choice that connects the part to the writer's argument** over the choice that merely describes what the part says.
7. **If you still cannot decide, pick and move on.** Mark it for review. A 50 percent chance on one question is worth less than the two questions you would otherwise lose to the clock.

Pacing Plan for the 60 Minutes

BLOCK	TIME	WHAT TO DO
Reading set 1	0:00–12:00	3 min read, ~9 min for 11–13 questions
Reading set 2	12:00–24:00	Same
Writing set 1	24:00–33:00	Read stems first; ~8 questions
Writing set 2	33:00–42:00	Same

BLOCK	TIME	WHAT TO DO
Writing set 3	42:00–50:00	Shorter set, 4–6 questions
Review	50:00–60:00	Return to flagged items; confirm nothing is blank

This works out to roughly 80 seconds per question. Two adjustments are worth making. First, if you are a slow reader of older prose, do the Writing sets first; they are faster and build confidence. Second, hold yourself to a hard rule: **no question gets more than 90 seconds on the first pass**. In Bluebook, the clock turns red at five minutes remaining and the proctor gives no verbal warnings, so check the clock at each set boundary.

The Practice Passages Used in This Guide

The worked examples and practice items below draw on three short passages. All three were written for this guide and are original; they are modeled on the genres the exam uses (an op-ed, a memoir excerpt, and a public lecture). Read them now and refer back to them as needed.

Passage A (original, written for this guide)

The following is adapted from an opinion essay by a small-town newspaper columnist, published in 2018.

1. Every town I have ever lived in had a hardware store with a cat in it. The cat was not for sale. It slept in the window among the snow shovels in January and the seed packets in April, and it regarded customers with the mild contempt of a creature that has never once been asked to find a three-eighths-inch washer. The store itself was dim and crowded and smelled of cut keys and fertilizer. You could not find anything. You did not need to. You described your problem to a man named Dale, and Dale walked you to the thing you did not know you needed.
2. Those stores are closing, one every few weeks across the state, and the usual explanation is price. The big-box retailer twelve miles up the highway sells the same washer for less, and the internet sells it for less still, and so the story goes: the market has spoken, and what it has said is that Dale was overhead.
3. But price is only part of it, and perhaps not the largest part. What the hardware store sold was not washers. It sold the conversation in which you discovered that your leaking faucet was actually a worn valve seat, that the valve seat could be reground for four dollars rather than replaced for forty, and that your neighbor two streets over had the same problem last spring. It sold, in other words, a kind of local knowledge that does not scale and cannot be shipped.
4. I do not pretend that nostalgia is an economic policy. No one is obliged to pay more for a washer out of sentiment, and the families who run these stores would be the first to say so. Yet we might at least be honest about the trade we are making. We are not simply buying cheaper washers. We are deciding, one purchase at a time, that the knowledge of how things in our own houses work is something we would rather rent from a search engine than keep among ourselves.

Passage B (original, written for this guide)

The following is adapted from a memoir by a physician, published in 2015, recalling her first year of medical training.

1. The first thing they teach you is the names. There are two hundred and six bones, and you learn them in Latin, and then you learn the muscles, and the nerves, and the vessels, until the body becomes a map so dense with labels that the territory beneath it almost disappears. I was good at the names. I had always been good at names.
2. The second thing they teach you, though no one calls it teaching, is how to stand in a room with a frightened person and not be frightened yourself. This is harder. There is no Latin for it. I learned it, if I learned it at all, from a nurse named Mrs. Okafor, who had worked the night shift on the fourth floor for twenty-two years and who, when a patient began to cry, did not reach for a chart or a word of comfort but simply pulled a chair to the bedside and sat down. The sitting down was the whole of it. It said: I have time. It said: you are not an interruption.
3. I think of that chair often now. Medicine has grown more precise since I trained, and more hurried; we can see a tumor the size of a grain of rice and we have eleven minutes in which to say so. The names have multiplied. The chairs, I notice, are being removed from patient rooms, because they take up space and the space is needed for machines.

Passage C (original, written for this guide)

The following is adapted from a public lecture on the history of timekeeping, delivered to a general audience at a science museum in 2012.

1. We like to say that the clock was invented. It is more accurate to say that it was surrendered to. For most of human history, time was something that happened to you: the sun rose, the tide turned, the bread was done when it was done. The medieval monastery changed this, not because monks were interested in time for its own sake, but because they had promised to pray at fixed hours and needed, in the dark of a northern winter, a device that would wake them. The first mechanical clocks did not have faces. They did not show time. They rang it.
2. Consider what that means. A clock with no face is a clock that cannot be consulted; it can only be obeyed. It announces that the hour has arrived, and the community rises, or eats, or kneels. Only later, when clocks acquired dials and moved from the bell tower to the town square to the mantelpiece to the wrist, did time become something a person could *check*, and therefore something a person could be *late for*.
3. Historians disagree about how much to make of this. Some argue that the mechanical clock produced the modern worker, the factory whistle, the very idea that an hour of a human life is a thing that can be bought. Others point out that the Romans sold labor by the hour long before anyone had a gear train, and that we should not mistake a convenient instrument for a cause. I find the second group more careful and the first group more interesting, and I suspect, as is often the case in history, that the truth is dull enough to disappoint both.

Type 1: Main Idea and Purpose

What it looks like

- "The primary purpose of the passage is to..."
- "Which of the following best describes the passage as a whole?"

Step-by-step method

1. Before looking at the choices, finish this sentence in your own words: "The writer wants readers to _____.
Use a verb (*reconsider, recognize, question, admire*) and an object.
2. Locate the thesis. In an argumentative passage it is often at the end of the first paragraph or at the turn (*but, yet*) in the middle. In a reflective passage it may be implied and stated only at the end.
3. Check the choices against the **whole** passage, not the part you remember best. The right answer must cover the opening and the ending.
4. Eliminate choices that are too narrow (true of one paragraph), too broad (true of any essay on the topic), or opposite in stance.

Distractor patterns to expect: too narrow (names a supporting example as the purpose), too broad, opposite (describes the view the writer argues against), and "vague but unobjectionable" ("to inform readers about hardware stores").

Worked example (Passage A)

The primary purpose of the passage is to

- A. explain the economic forces that have caused independent hardware stores to close
- B. argue that consumers should pay higher prices to support local businesses
- C. suggest that the loss of local stores involves a cost that is not captured by price
- D. celebrate the eccentric personalities of small-town shopkeepers

Thinking: My one-sentence summary: "The writer wants readers to recognize that when hardware stores close we lose local knowledge, not just a place to buy washers." Paragraph 2 names the economic explanation but paragraph 3 begins "But price is only part of it," so (A) describes the view the writer complicates; it is too narrow and partly opposite. (B) is overreach and contradicted by paragraph 4 ("No one is obliged to pay more"). (D) is too narrow; Dale and the cat are the hook, not the purpose. (C) matches the thesis in paragraph 3 and the "trade we are making" in paragraph 4. **Answer: C.**

Practice items

1.1 (Passage B) The passage as a whole is best described as (A) an argument that medical schools should require courses in patient communication (B) a reflection on a form of care that technical training does not teach and that modern medicine is crowding out (C) a tribute to a nurse whose methods the writer adopted in her own practice (D) an account of how the writer overcame her fear of frightened patients

1.2 (Passage C) The speaker's primary purpose in the passage is to (A) settle a long-standing dispute among historians about the origins of industrial labor (B) explain why medieval monasteries were the first institutions to measure time precisely (C) invite the audience to reconsider the relationship between people and the clocks they built (D) argue that modern anxieties about time are a direct result of the mechanical clock

Type 2: Function of a Sentence or Paragraph

What it looks like

- "The function of the second paragraph in the passage as a whole is to..."
- "Which of the following best describes the function of the sentence 'The cat was not for sale'?"

Step-by-step method

1. Read the sentence or paragraph in question, then read what comes **immediately before and after** it. Function is about relationship.
2. Ask the two function questions: *What does this part do?* (introduce, qualify, illustrate, concede, pivot, summarize, complicate) and *What does it do it to?* (the thesis, the previous claim, the reader's expectations).
3. Match your answer to the **unit** the stem names. The function of a sentence is usually local; the function of a paragraph is usually structural.
4. Prefer choices whose verb describes a **move** (concedes, anticipates, redirects) over choices that merely restate the content.

Distractor patterns to expect: content restatement dressed as function ("describes the hardware store"), over-reading a small move as a large one ("establishes the central thesis" for a one-line joke), out of scope (describing what the whole passage does), and right-move-wrong-target (says the paragraph qualifies the thesis when it qualifies the preceding example).

Worked example (Passage A)

The function of the second paragraph is to

- A. present the conventional explanation that the writer will go on to complicate
- B. provide statistical evidence that hardware stores are closing at an accelerating rate
- C. concede that the writer's own nostalgia has distorted her judgment
- D. shift the focus from one particular store to the national economy

Thinking: Paragraph 2 says "the usual explanation is price" and ends with the story "the market has spoken." Paragraph 3 opens "But price is only part of it." So paragraph 2 sets up a view in order to push against it. (B) is a device not present; "one every few weeks" is an observation, not statistics, and nothing suggests acceleration. (C) is the move of paragraph 4, not 2. (D) is half-right: the paragraph does widen the lens, but "national economy" overreaches ("across the state") and misses the setup function. **Answer: A.**

Practice items

2.1 (Passage B) The sentence "The sitting down was the whole of it" (paragraph 2) primarily serves to (A) summarize the medical procedure the nurse was performing (B) emphasize that the nurse's gesture, though simple, was itself the entire act of care (C) suggest that the writer found the nurse's methods inadequate (D) introduce the contrast between the nurse and the writer's professors

2.2 (Passage C) The third paragraph functions primarily to (A) resolve the question raised in the first paragraph about who invented the clock (B) present two scholarly positions and locate the speaker's own view in relation to them (C) dismiss the arguments of historians as irrelevant to a general audience (D) provide historical evidence that Roman labor practices anticipated the factory

Type 3: The Rhetorical Situation (Exigence, Audience, Purpose)

What it looks like

- "The passage is best understood as a response to which of the following situations?"
- "The speaker's reference to 'a convenient instrument' most directly appeals to an audience that..."

Step-by-step method

1. Start with the orienting note: it tells you genre, date, and often the audience. Everything in the passage was shaped by that situation.
2. Identify the **exigence**: what happened, or what is happening, that made the writer write *now*? Look for present-tense observations of change ("Those stores are closing"; "The chairs, I notice, are being removed").
3. Identify the **audience** from the inside: what does the writer assume the reader already believes or values? Which objections does the writer anticipate?
4. Identify the **purpose** as a change the writer wants in the audience (to reconsider, to notice, to act).
5. Check the choice against all three. Distractors usually get one right and one wrong.

Distractor patterns to expect: "true in the world" (a plausible exigence the passage never mentions), confusing the writer's audience with the writer's subject (the patients are the subject of Passage B; general readers are the audience), overreach about purpose ("to demand that hospitals...").

Worked example (Passage B)

The passage is best understood as a response to which of the following?

- A. A public controversy over the cost of medical education
- B. The writer's observation that medical practice has become faster and more technological at the expense of unhurried attention
- C. A request from Mrs. Okafor that the writer record her methods
- D. The writer's realization that she had memorized anatomy incorrectly

Thinking: The exigence is stated in paragraph 3: medicine has grown "more precise... and more hurried," and "the chairs... are being removed." (A) is true in the world, not in the text. (C) invents an event. (D) misreads paragraph 1; she was "good at the names." **Answer: B.**

Practice items

3.1 (Passage A) In the fourth paragraph, the writer's statement that "the families who run these stores would be the first to say so" most likely assumes that readers (A) are themselves owners of small businesses (B) might suspect the writer of sentimentality and would be reassured by the shopkeepers' own realism (C) have never shopped at an independent hardware store (D) believe that large retailers are morally superior to small ones

3.2 (Passage C) The speaker's remark that monks "needed, in the dark of a northern winter, a device that would wake them" primarily serves the rhetorical situation by (A) establishing the speaker's credentials as a historian of religion (B) giving a general audience a concrete, human reason for an invention they might assume was abstract (C) criticizing the monks for their lack of scientific curiosity (D) proving that clocks could not have been invented in warmer climates

Type 4: Claims and Evidence

What it looks like

- "The writer uses the example of the valve seat primarily as evidence that..."
- "Which of the following best states the overarching thesis of the passage?"

Step-by-step method

1. Distinguish **claim** (something the writer asserts and must support) from **evidence** (example, fact, anecdote, authority, comparison) and **commentary** (the writer's explanation of what the evidence shows).
2. For an evidence question, find the claim the evidence sits **closest to**. Writers usually place evidence right after the claim it supports or right before the generalization it leads to.
3. For a thesis question, find the sentence that the *rest of the passage would be needed to prove*. A thesis is debatable; a fact is not.
4. Beware of evidence that supports an **adjacent** claim. The valve-seat story in Passage A supports "what the hardware store sold was not washers," not "hardware stores are closing."

Distractor patterns to expect: adjacent-claim swap, choosing an obvious statement of fact as the thesis, overreach (evidence "proves"), and recycled language.

Worked example (Passage A)

The writer's account of the leaking faucet in paragraph 3 primarily serves as evidence that

- A. independent stores charge less for repairs than large retailers
- B. most plumbing problems can be solved without professional help
- C. the hardware store provided practical knowledge that cannot be delivered at scale
- D. the writer's neighbors were unusually generous with advice

Thinking: The example sits between "What the hardware store sold was not washers" and "It sold, in other words, a kind of local knowledge that does not scale." (A) is a half-right trap: the four-dollar regrind is cheaper, but the point is knowledge, not price, and the passage concedes big-box stores are cheaper. (B) overreaches from one example. (D) misreads the neighbor detail. **Answer: C.**

Practice items

4.1 (Passage C) Which of the following best states the central claim of the passage? (A) The mechanical clock was invented in medieval monasteries. (B) Humans did not so much create the clock as reorganize their lives around it. (C) Historians who connect the clock to industrial labor are mistaken. (D) The first clocks had bells rather than faces.

4.2 (Passage B) The detail that the writer "had always been good at names" (paragraph 1) functions as evidence that (A) the writer was unusually well prepared for the technical part of medical training (B) medical schools reward memorization over compassion (C) the writer lacked the ability to connect with patients (D) anatomical terminology is more difficult than most students expect

Type 5: Line of Reasoning and Organization

What it looks like

- "Which of the following best describes the line of reasoning the writer develops across paragraphs 2 through 4?"
- "The organization of the passage is best described as moving from..."

Step-by-step method

1. Write a three-to-five-word label for **each paragraph** in the margin (or in your head): "hook: cat/Dale," "usual explanation: price," "real loss: knowledge," "concession + the trade."

2. Read your labels in order. The line of reasoning is the logic that connects them: *example* → *conventional view* → *counter-view* → *qualified conclusion*.
3. Compare the choices to your labels. The correct answer describes the **sequence** accurately and in the right order.
4. Watch for choices that describe a sequence that would make sense but is not the one in the passage (e.g., “problem → solution” when the writer never proposes a solution).

Distractor patterns to expect: plausible-but-absent structures, correct parts in the wrong order, descriptions that fit one paragraph rather than the movement among them.

Worked example (Passage C)

The organization of the passage is best described as moving from

- A. a surprising reframing of a familiar idea, to an explanation of its implications, to an assessment of competing interpretations
- B. a historical narrative, to a personal anecdote, to a call for further research
- C. a definition of the clock, to a list of its technical components, to a critique of modern timekeeping
- D. a scholarly debate, to the speaker’s resolution of it, to a summary of the evidence

Thinking: Labels: P1 “invented vs. surrendered to; faceless clocks,” P2 “no face = obeyed; later checked, late,” P3 “historians disagree; my view.” (B) has no personal anecdote or call for research. (C) has no list of components. (D) puts the debate first; it is last, and the speaker does not resolve it. **Answer: A.**

Practice items

5.1 (Passage A) Which of the following best describes the writer’s line of reasoning? (A) She describes a beloved institution, rejects the standard account of its decline, identifies what is actually being lost, and acknowledges the limits of her own position. (B) She establishes her authority as a columnist, surveys economic data, and proposes a policy to protect small businesses. (C) She narrates her personal history with hardware stores, blames consumers for their closure, and predicts their disappearance. (D) She defines “local knowledge,” gives three examples of it, and concludes that it is more valuable than low prices.

5.2 (Passage B) The relationship between the first and second paragraphs is best described as follows: (A) The first paragraph states a problem; the second proposes a solution. (B) The first paragraph describes what is formally taught; the second describes what is learned without formal teaching. (C) The first paragraph praises the writer’s education; the second criticizes it. (D) The first paragraph presents a general claim; the second offers statistical evidence for it.

Type 6: Tone and Attitude

What it looks like

- “The writer’s tone in the final paragraph is best described as...”
- “The writer’s attitude toward the ‘usual explanation’ in paragraph 2 can best be described as...”

Step-by-step method

1. Separate **tone** (the writer’s attitude toward the subject or audience) from **mood** (the feeling the passage creates) and from the **subject’s** feelings. A passage about grief can have a clinical tone.

2. Locate the exact lines the stem points to. Tone often **shifts**, and a whole-passage tone word must fit the beginning *and* the end.
3. Find the words that carry attitude: evaluative adjectives, ironic understatement, qualifiers, exclamation, deliberate repetition.
4. Decide on **temperature first** (warm/cold, approving/disapproving), then **intensity** (mild/strong). Most AP passages are moderate; extreme words (*contemptuous, furious, ecstatic*) are usually wrong.
5. For two-word choices ("wry but affectionate"), test **both** words. One wrong word sinks the choice.

Distractor patterns to expect: opposite tone, right temperature but wrong intensity ("scornful" for "skeptical"), reading irony literally, and one-word-wrong in a paired answer.

Worked example (Passage A)

In the first paragraph, the writer's description of the cat is best characterized as

- A. affectionately humorous
- B. coldly analytical
- C. bitterly resentful
- D. anxiously nostalgic

Thinking: "mild contempt of a creature that has never once been asked to find a three-eighths-inch washer" is a joke told with fondness. (B) is opposite in temperature. (C) is far too intense and the wrong direction. (D) is tempting because the essay is in some sense nostalgic, but nothing in paragraph 1 is anxious; the second word fails. **Answer: A.**

Practice items

6.1 (Passage C) The speaker's attitude toward the two groups of historians in paragraph 3 is best described as (A) hostile toward both (B) deferential toward the first and dismissive of the second (C) appreciative of each for different reasons, and gently skeptical of both (D) indifferent to their disagreement

6.2 (Passage B) The tone of the final sentence ("The chairs, I notice, are being removed...") is best described as (A) outraged (B) quietly regretful (C) relieved (D) clinically neutral

Type 7: Word in Context

What it looks like

- "In context, the word 'overhead' (paragraph 2) most nearly means..."
- "As used in paragraph 1, 'surrendered to' most directly suggests that..."

Step-by-step method

1. **Cover the word** and reread the sentence. What word would you put in the blank? Write it down before looking at the choices.
2. Check the surrounding sentences for **contrast or restatement cues** ("not X but Y"; "in other words").
3. Eliminate the **most common dictionary sense** if it does not fit the sentence. AP word-in-context items almost always test a secondary, figurative, or older sense.
4. Plug your finalist back into the sentence and read it aloud in your head. It must keep both the meaning and the tone.

Distractor patterns to expect: the modern or most-common sense trap, a sense that fits the word but not the sentence, a word associated with the topic but not with the slot.

Worked example (Passage A)

In context, "overhead" (paragraph 2) most nearly means

- A. a ceiling or roof structure
- B. a recurring business expense that does not directly generate revenue
- C. a manager who supervises employees
- D. an advantage held over competitors

Thinking: "the market has spoken, and what it has said is that Dale was overhead." The market treats Dale, the knowledgeable employee, as a cost rather than a product. (A) is the literal trap. (C) and (D) do not fit the sentence. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

7.1 (Passage C) In context, "surrendered to" (paragraph 1) most nearly suggests that people (A) were defeated in battle by clockmakers (B) gradually gave up control of their days to the clock's authority (C) willingly purchased clocks as soon as they became available (D) stopped resisting the scientific study of time

7.2 (Passage B) In context, "territory" (paragraph 1) refers to (A) the hospital ward where the writer trained (B) the field of medicine as a profession (C) the actual human body beneath its anatomical labels (D) the geographic region the medical school served

Type 8: Shift

What it looks like

- "A major shift in the passage occurs at which of the following points?"
- "The writer's shift in paragraph 3 from narration to reflection serves to..."

Step-by-step method

1. Hunt the **turn words**: *but, yet, however, still, though, of course, and yet, consider, now*. Also watch for a change in **tense** (past to present), in **person** (I to we), in **mode** (story to argument), or in **tone**.
2. Decide what changes **on each side** of the turn: from what, to what? Name both.
3. Ask what the shift accomplishes for the argument. Usually: moves from setup to thesis, from concession to counterclaim, from example to generalization, or from past to present stakes.
4. If the stem asks *where* the shift occurs, test each candidate line by reading one sentence on either side of it. The right one will show a clear change; the wrong ones are continuations.

Distractor patterns to expect: a minor local pivot offered as "the major shift," a line that is a continuation rather than a turn, and mislabeling the direction of the shift (from X to Y reversed).

Worked example (Passage B)

The shift that occurs at the beginning of the third paragraph is best described as a move from

- A. the writer's past training to the present state of medicine
- B. praise for Mrs. Okafor to criticism of her

- C. technical terminology to emotional language
- D. first-person narration to third-person analysis

Thinking: Paragraph 2 is past tense ("I learned... she pulled a chair"); paragraph 3 opens "I think of that chair often now" and "Medicine has grown." Past to present, with new stakes. (B) is opposite. (C) describes paragraphs 1 to 2, not 2 to 3. (D) is wrong; the writer still says "I." **Answer: A.**

Practice items

8.1 (Passage A) A major shift in the passage occurs at the beginning of which paragraph? (A) Paragraph 2 ("Those stores are closing") (B) Paragraph 3 ("But price is only part of it") (C) Paragraph 4 ("I do not pretend that nostalgia") (D) The final sentence ("We are deciding")

8.2 (Passage C) The sentence "Consider what that means" (paragraph 2) marks a shift from (A) historical description to an invitation to interpret (B) argument to anecdote (C) the speaker's view to the historians' views (D) present-day concerns to medieval history

Type 9: Function of a Comparison or Analogy

What it looks like

- "The comparison of the body to 'a map so dense with labels' primarily emphasizes..."
- "The writer's analogy between hardware stores and a search engine serves to..."

Step-by-step method

1. Name the **two things** being compared (the tenor and the vehicle). In Passage B: the body (tenor) and a map (vehicle).
2. Ask what **quality** of the vehicle the writer is transferring to the tenor. Not everything about a map is relevant; here it is "labels so dense the territory disappears."
3. Ask what the comparison does for the **argument**: clarifies an abstract idea, makes an evaluation, creates a tone, or sets up a later point.
4. Reject choices that describe some *other* feature of the vehicle, or that treat the comparison as literal.

Distractor patterns to expect: wrong-feature transfer (focusing on a map's usefulness rather than its density), literal reading, right comparison but wrong effect, and overreach about what the comparison "proves."

Worked example (Passage B)

The comparison of the body to "a map so dense with labels that the territory beneath it almost disappears" (paragraph 1) primarily suggests that

- A. anatomy is too complex for most students to master
- B. the sheer volume of technical knowledge can obscure the living person it describes
- C. medical training should rely more heavily on visual aids
- D. the writer preferred geography to medicine

Thinking: The transferred quality is density of labeling that hides what is underneath. That sets up the whole essay's contrast between names and the frightened person. (A) is about difficulty, not obscuring. (C) is a literal, off-topic reading of "map." (D) is absurd. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

9.1 (Passage A) In the final paragraph, the writer's contrast between knowledge "we would rather rent from a search engine" and knowledge we "keep among ourselves" primarily emphasizes (A) the superior accuracy of information found online (B) the difference between knowledge that is owned and shared by a community and knowledge that is temporarily accessed from an outside source (C) the high cost of internet subscriptions in rural areas (D) the writer's refusal to use modern technology

9.2 (Passage C) The speaker's description of the clock as something that "cannot be consulted; it can only be obeyed" (paragraph 2) uses the contrast to (A) argue that early clocks were poorly designed (B) show that the faceless clock made time a command rather than a piece of information (C) suggest that medieval communities were unusually obedient (D) prove that modern wristwatches are superior to bell towers

Type 10: Style and Syntax Effect

What it looks like

- "The series of short sentences at the end of paragraph 1 ('They did not show time. They rang it.') creates an effect of..."
- "The writer's repetition of 'It said' in paragraph 2 primarily serves to..."

Step-by-step method

1. Identify the syntactic feature: sentence length (short after long, or long after short), repetition (anaphora), parallel structure, a fragment, a list, a question, a parenthetical, a dash.
2. Describe its **immediate effect** in plain words: slows, speeds, emphasizes, isolates, accumulates, balances, interrupts.
3. Connect that effect to **meaning**: what idea gets the emphasis, and why does the writer want it emphasized here?
4. Verify the feature exists exactly as the choice describes it. If a choice says "a series of rhetorical questions" and there is one question, the choice is out.

Distractor patterns to expect: device not present, right device wrong effect, generic effects ("adds emphasis") that fit any sentence, and effects that contradict the passage's tone.

Worked example (Passage C)

The two short sentences that end paragraph 1 ("They did not show time. They rang it.") primarily serve to

- A. summarize the technical workings of early clocks
- B. deliver the paragraph's central surprise with blunt emphasis after a long explanatory sentence
- C. create a humorous contrast with the seriousness of the monks
- D. signal that the speaker is uncertain about the historical record

Thinking: The preceding sentence is long and historical; these two are four words and three words. The contrast isolates the key idea (clocks were heard, not seen) that the whole lecture builds on. (A) is content restatement and wrong (nothing technical). (C) misreads tone. (D) is opposite; the short sentences are confident. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

10.1 (Passage B) The repetition of "It said" in paragraph 2 ("It said: I have time. It said: you are not an interruption.") primarily (A) imitates the nurse's actual spoken words (B) translates a silent gesture into the messages it communicated, giving each one its own weight (C) suggests that the nurse repeated herself unnecessarily (D) indicates the writer's difficulty remembering the event

10.2 (Passage A) The pair of short sentences in paragraph 1 ("You could not find anything. You did not need to.") achieves its effect primarily through (A) a sudden shift into formal diction (B) an extended metaphor (C) two short, parallel sentences in which the second reverses the expected implication of the first (D) an appeal to statistical evidence

Type 11: Speaker's Assumptions and Audience Inference

What it looks like

- "In the sentence beginning 'No one is obliged,' the writer most likely assumes that readers..."
- "The speaker's use of 'we' in paragraph 1 suggests that she regards her audience as..."

Step-by-step method

1. An **assumption** is something the writer treats as already accepted without arguing for it. Find what the sentence takes for granted.
2. Ask: *Who would need to hear this sentence?* A concession ("I do not pretend that nostalgia is an economic policy") is written for a reader who was about to raise that objection. That tells you what the writer thinks the reader believes.
3. Look at pronouns and address. "We" includes the audience in the writer's group; "you" puts them in a scene; "they" holds a group at a distance.
4. Choose the inference that is **required** by the text, not merely compatible with it.

Distractor patterns to expect: inferences that are plausible but not required, overreach about what the audience believes, confusing the audience with the people described in the passage.

Worked example (Passage A)

The writer's concession in paragraph 4, "I do not pretend that nostalgia is an economic policy," suggests that she anticipates readers who

- A. have never experienced nostalgia
- B. are likely to dismiss her argument as mere sentiment unless she acknowledges the economic realities
- C. believe that economic policy should be based on sentiment
- D. are economists by profession

Thinking: The concession exists to disarm an objection. The objection is "you're just being sentimental." (A) and (C) are nonsensical or opposite. (D) overreaches; a general newspaper readership. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

11.1 (Passage C) The speaker's use of "We like to say that the clock was invented" (paragraph 1) assumes that the audience (A) has already studied the history of horology (B) shares a common, unexamined way of talking about inventions that the speaker intends to challenge (C) disagrees with the speaker's thesis (D) is composed primarily of engineers

11.2 (Passage B) The writer's remark that "no one calls it teaching" (paragraph 2) implies that (A) the writer believes Mrs. Okafor was not qualified to teach (B) the medical profession does not formally recognize the kind of learning the writer describes (C) the writer's professors forbade her from learning from nurses (D) the skill the writer describes cannot be learned at all

Type 12: Relationship Between Paragraphs

What it looks like

- "The relationship between the third and fourth paragraphs is best described as..."
- "The discussion of Mrs. Okafor in paragraph 2 is connected to the final paragraph by..."

Step-by-step method

1. Label both paragraphs (as in Type 5). Then write the **connector** between them: *therefore, however, for example, in contrast, similarly, which raises the question, admittedly*.
2. Common relationships and their signals: **claim** → **support** ("for instance"), **claim** → **qualification** ("admittedly, but"), **general** → **particular** or the reverse, **past** → **present**, **problem** → **consequence**, **concession** → **counterclaim**.
3. Check the **direction**. "Paragraph 3 qualifies paragraph 2" is not the same as "paragraph 2 qualifies paragraph 3."
4. Eliminate choices that describe one paragraph correctly but misstate the other, or that describe a relationship the writer never creates.

Distractor patterns to expect: reversed direction, half-right (one paragraph described correctly), plausible-but-absent relationships (e.g., "problem → solution" where no solution is offered).

Worked example (Passage A)

The relationship between the third and fourth paragraphs is best described as follows:

- A. The third paragraph makes the writer's central claim; the fourth concedes a limit to that claim and then restates it in sharper terms.
- B. The third paragraph offers evidence; the fourth paragraph draws a contradictory conclusion.
- C. The third paragraph describes the past; the fourth paragraph predicts the future.
- D. The third paragraph raises a question; the fourth paragraph answers it.

Thinking: P3 = "what the store really sold: local knowledge" (the thesis). P4 = "I don't pretend nostalgia is policy... Yet we might at least be honest... We are deciding..." That is concession followed by a return to the thesis with higher stakes. (B) says "contradictory"; the fourth paragraph agrees. (C) misreads tense. (D) finds no question in P3. **Answer: A.**

Practice items

12.1 (Passage B) The discussion of Mrs. Okafor's chair in paragraph 2 is connected to the final paragraph in that (A) the final paragraph reveals that Mrs. Okafor has retired (B) the chair that embodied unhurried care in paragraph 2 becomes, in paragraph 3, the object literally being removed by a hurried profession (C) the final paragraph argues that chairs are no longer necessary because of medical technology (D) the final paragraph shifts attention away from the chair to the writer's own career

12.2 (Passage C) The relationship between the second and third paragraphs is best described as follows: (A) The second paragraph presents the speaker's interpretation; the third tests it against the views of historians. (B) The second paragraph presents a historical fact; the third disproves it. (C) The second paragraph is humorous; the third is solemn. (D) The second paragraph describes the medieval period; the third describes the Roman period.

Quick-Reference: The Twelve Types at a Glance

TYPE	FIRST MOVE	MOST COMMON TRAP
1 Main idea/purpose	Summarize in one sentence before reading choices	Too narrow
2 Function	Read the sentence before and after	Content restatement
3 Rhetorical situation	Start from the orienting note	True in the world, not the text
4 Claims and evidence	Find the nearest claim	Adjacent-claim swap
5 Line of reasoning	Label every paragraph	Plausible-but-absent structure
6 Tone	Temperature, then intensity	Too extreme
7 Word in context	Cover the word and predict	Most-common-sense trap
8 Shift	Hunt the turn words	Minor pivot as major shift
9 Comparison	Name the transferred quality	Wrong feature of the vehicle
10 Syntax effect	Verify the device exists	Generic "adds emphasis"
11 Assumptions	Ask who needed to hear this	Plausible but not required
12 Paragraph relationship	Write the connector word	Reversed direction

How to Practice With This Guide

- **Week 1–2:** Do one type per day. Read the method, do the worked example with the answer covered, then the two practice items. Write a one-sentence reason for every elimination, not just for your choice.
- **Week 3–4:** Take any released or practice reading set under time. After scoring, classify each question you missed by type and reread that section.
- **Ongoing:** Keep a "miss log" with three columns: question type, distractor pattern that caught you, and the rule you will apply next time. Most students discover that 70 percent of their misses come from two or three patterns.

Answer Key

ITEM	ANSWER	EXPLANATION
1.1	B	The passage reflects on unhurried attention (the chair) as something not formally taught and now being squeezed out. (A) overreaches into a policy argument never made. (C) is too narrow and unsupported; she never says she adopted the method. (D) misstates the arc; the essay is not about overcoming fear.
1.2	C	The lecture reframes “invented” as “surrendered to” and asks the audience to reconsider. (A) is opposite; she declines to settle the dispute. (B) is too narrow. (D) overreaches; she is skeptical of the strong causal claim.
2.1	B	The sentence isolates the gesture as the complete act of care. (A) is a device not present. (C) is opposite. (D) invents a contrast with professors.
2.2	B	The paragraph presents two camps and places the speaker between them. (A) is wrong; the question of invention is reframed, not resolved. (C) is opposite in tone. (D) is too narrow and treats one camp’s point as the paragraph’s purpose.
3.1	B	A concession about sentiment disarms a skeptical reader. (A) and (C) are not required by the text. (D) is unsupported.
3.2	B	A general museum audience gets a concrete motive (praying at fixed hours in the dark). (A) is not established. (C) is opposite. (D) is absurd overreach.
4.1	B	The thesis is the reframing: people reorganized their lives around the clock. (A) and (D) are facts, not claims. (C) overreaches; she finds that view “interesting,” not mistaken.

ITEM	ANSWER	EXPLANATION
4.2	A	The detail supports the contrast: she excelled at the taught, technical skill. (B) is out of scope for this detail. (C) overreaches; she says the second skill was harder, not that she lacked it. (D) is unsupported.
5.1	A	Matches the paragraph labels in order. (B) invents data and a policy. (C) is wrong on blame and prediction. (D) invents three examples and a definition structure.
5.2	B	"The first thing they teach you" versus "the second thing they teach you, though no one calls it teaching." (A), (C), (D) describe relationships the text does not create.
6.1	C	"More careful" and "more interesting" are appreciations; "dull enough to disappoint both" is gentle skepticism. (A) is too hostile. (B) reverses who gets what. (D) is wrong; she engages the disagreement.
6.2	B	"I notice" and the matter-of-fact explanation convey regret without raised voice. (A) is too intense. (C) is opposite. (D) ignores the evaluative weight the whole essay gives the chair.
7.1	B	The sentence contrasts "invented" (we acted) with "surrendered to" (we yielded). (A) is literal. (C) and (D) do not fit the slot.
7.2	C	Map/territory: the labels are the names, the territory is the actual body. (A), (B), (D) are literal or off-slot senses.
8.1	B	"But" pivots from the conventional explanation to the writer's own. Paragraph 2 continues the setup; paragraph 4 is a concession within the already-established thesis; the final sentence restates.

ITEM	ANSWER	EXPLANATION
8.2	A	The imperative invites the audience to interpret what has just been described. (B), (C), (D) misname the two sides.
9.1	B	Rent versus keep: temporary outside access versus owned community knowledge. (A) is unsupported and off-point. (C) is literal and absent. (D) overreaches.
9.2	B	Consulted = information; obeyed = command. (A) is a value judgment not made. (C) is a half-right overreach. (D) is absent.
10.1	B	The repetition converts a wordless act into two distinct messages. (A) is literal and wrong; she said nothing. (C) and (D) misread tone.
10.2	C	Two short parallel sentences; the second ("You did not need to") undercuts the expected complaint in the first. (A), (B), (D) name devices not present.
11.1	B	"We like to say" names a shared habit she will then correct. (A) and (D) are unsupported. (C) is wrong; the audience has not yet heard the thesis.
11.2	B	The skill is learned but not formally labeled as teaching. (A) and (C) are unsupported. (D) is opposite; she did learn it.
12.1	B	The chair is the through-line: the symbol of care in P2 is the thing being removed in P3. (A) is invented. (C) is opposite to the writer's attitude. (D) is wrong; the paragraph stays on the chair.
12.2	A	P2 is the speaker's reading of the faceless clock; P3 sets it beside the historians' positions. (B) is wrong; nothing is disproved. (C) and (D) are half-right descriptions that miss the relationship.

Want a plan built around **your** student?

BOOK NOW →