

Tackling the ACT reading section

Basic Strategies

- **Answer out of order.**
The passages are always in the same order. Determine what you are best at and start there.
- **Read with purpose.**
Answer questions without reading in the tradition way.
- **Allow questions to guide reading.**
Questions contain clues as to passage's topic, focus, and patterns.
- **Use POE.**
Rely on process of elimination: identify incorrect answer choices and cross through them quickly.
- **Look for synonyms and rephrasing.**
Correct answer choices are often reworded parts of the text and are rarely direct quotations from the text.
- **Don't be deceived.**
Identify the distractor answer choices and eliminate them.

Passage 1: Prose Fiction

- an excerpt from a short story or novel
- opposite in style to the natural science passage (little examination of details required)
- filled with hints and suggestions about characters and their motivations
- most questions require you to make inferences about characters and the way they feel or behave

Passage 2: Social Sciences

- about history, economics, psychology, political science, or anthropology
- in some ways a cross between natural science and prose fiction passages
- two types of questions:
 - (1) requiring inference about how the author views the subject discussed
 - (2) requiring you to examine details

Passage 3: Humanities

- about art, music, architecture, or dance
- in some ways a cross between natural science and prose fiction passages
- two types of questions:
 - (1) requiring inference about how the author views the subject discussed
 - (2) requiring you to examine details

Passage 4: Natural Sciences

- about biology, chemistry, physics, or physical science
- opposite in style to the prose fiction passage (few inferences required)
- filled with details and technical descriptions
- questions require you to examine the passage and extract specific information

Reading Step 1 (30 seconds)

Read questions first (but not choices). Identify crucial information.

- Circle verbs—and their modifiers.
- Underline the focus and specific concepts.

Examples:

1. According to the passage, Renoir differs from Daleur in that:
2. It can be most reasonably inferred that the author believes modern sculpture is:

Reading Step 2 (30 seconds)

Scan the passage quickly for significant concepts from the questions. Do not read.

- Underline the focus and specific concepts.

Example:

- In the questions, you note these words: *Cezanne, Rodin, new art, and modern sculpture.*

Yet it is largely Cezanne, not Rodin, who was artistic ancestor to Picasso, Gonzalez, Brancusi, and Laurens, and they are unquestionably the first lights in the “new art” of sculpture. This “new art” is the sculpture we call “modern.”

Reading Step 3 (1 minute)

Skim the passage. In the margin next to each paragraph, note what the paragraph is basically about. You are NOT reading for understanding.

Example:

- If we were to start fresh in the study of sculpture or any art, we might observe that the record is largely filled by works of relatively few contributors. Next to the influences of these great geniuses, time periods themselves are of little significance. The study of art and art history are properly directed to the achievements of outstanding individual artists, not the particular decades or centuries in which any may have worked.
- **WRITE:** *artists > time periods*

Reading Step 3 tips

Pay attention to textual word clues. They often signal a change, cause-and-effect, or opposition.

Despite

In spite of

However

Nonetheless

Ironically

Notwithstanding

But

On the other hand

Yet

On the contrary

Rather

Unfortunately

Therefore

Consequently

Hence

Reading Step 4 (40 seconds/question)

- Go to the first question that points to an answer. Read it carefully. Reword it for yourself if necessary.
- Locate the appropriate part of the passage (underlined from step 2 OR identified by line number or paragraph number in the question), and read it carefully.
- Formulate your own answer, and then go back to the choices to select the one that resembles your own.
- Use POE if none of the choices matches your own.

Special Types of Questions

State of Mind

- author's attitude
- character's feelings
- *Approach these choices each as true/false.*

Vocabulary in Context

- _____ is used to mean
- *Replace the word in the text with one of your own that fits best or use POE.*

EXCEPT/NOT/LEAST

- *Leave these for last because they take more time.*
- *Use POE for each answer choice.*

Roman Numeral

- *Examine I, II, and III separately.*
- *Use POE.*

Synonyms and Rephrasing

within text

- *significant role*
- *gifts and penalties*
- *deserves*
- *begs the historian to ask*
- *misery*
- *treated as insignificant*

within answer choice

- *important force*
- *burdens and benefits*
- *merits*
- *should provoke historical inquiry*
- *pain*
- *diminishing the importance of*