

# Lesson 44

## OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

### MAIN IDEA, MAIN TOPIC, AND MAIN PURPOSE QUESTIONS

After almost every passage, the first question is an **overview question** about the main idea, main topic, or main purpose of a passage. **Main idea questions** ask you to identify the most important thought in the passage.

#### Sample Questions

- What is the main idea of the passage?
- The primary idea of the passage is. . . .
- Which of the following best summarizes the author's main idea?

When there is not a single, readily identified main idea, **main topic questions** may be asked. These ask you what the passage is generally "about."

#### Sample Questions

- The main topic of the passage is. . . .
- What does the passage mainly discuss?
- The passage is primarily concerned with. . . .

**Main purpose questions** ask *why* an author wrote a passage. The answer choices for these questions usually begin with infinitives.

#### Sample Questions

- The author's purpose in writing is. . . .
- What is the author's main purpose in the passage?
- The main point of this passage is. . . .
- Why did the author write the passage?

#### Sample Answer Choices

- To define . . . .
- To relate . . . .
- To discuss . . . .
- To propose . . . .
- To illustrate . . . .
- To support the idea that . . . .
- To distinguish between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- To compare \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Don't answer the initial overview question about a passage until you have answered the other questions. The process of answering the detail questions may give you a clearer idea of the main idea, topic, or purpose of the passage.

The correct answers for main idea, main topic, and main purpose questions correctly summarize the main points of the passage; they must be more general than any of the supporting ideas or details, but not so general that they include ideas outside the scope of the passages.

Distractors for this type of question have one of these characteristics:

1. They are too specific.
2. They are too general.
3. They are incorrect according to the passage.
4. They are irrelevant (unrelated) to the main idea of the passage.

If you're not sure of the answer for one of these questions, go back and quickly scan the passage. You can usually infer the main idea, main topic, or main purpose of the entire passage from an understanding of the main ideas of the paragraphs that make up the passage and the relationship between them.

## OTHER OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

A number of other questions are asked that require an overall understanding of the passage. These are often the last question in a set of questions.

**Tone questions** ask you to determine the author's feelings about the topic by the language that he or she uses in writing the passage. Look for vocabulary that indicates if the author's feelings are positive, negative, or neutral.

### Sample Questions

- What tone does the author take in writing this passage?
- The tone of this passage could best be described as. . .

### Sample Answer Choices

- |              |               |              |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| • Positive   | • Humorous    | • Worried    |
| • Favorable  | • Negative    | • Outraged   |
| • Optimistic | • Critical    | • Neutral    |
| • Amused     | • Unfavorable | • Objective  |
| • Pleased    | • Angry       | • Impersonal |
| • Respectful | • Defiant     |              |

If you read the following sentences in passages, would the tone of those passages most likely be positive or negative?

1. That was just the beginning of a *remarkable* series of performances by this *brilliant* actress.
2. Despite some minor problems, this device has a number of *admirable* features.
3. This practice is *a waste of time and money*.
4. At the time his poems were first published, they were very popular, but today most critics find them *simplistic and rather uninteresting*.

The italicized words in sentences 1 and 2 show a positive tone; in 3 and 4, the italicized words indicate a negative attitude. Notice that sentence 2 contains negative words ("minor problems") but the overall meaning of the sentence is positive. Sentence 4 contains positive language ("very popular") but overall, the tone is negative. (Words like *despite*, *but*, *although*, *however*, and similar words can "reverse" the tone of the passage.)

Most TOEFL reading passages have a neutral tone, but sometimes an author may take a position for or against some point. However, answer choices that indicate strong emotion—*angry*, *outraged*, *sad*, and so forth—will seldom be correct.

**Attitude questions** are very similar to tone questions. Again, you must understand the author's opinion. The language that the author uses will tell you what his or her position is.

What is the author's attitude toward smoking on airplanes as expressed in the sentence below?

Although some passengers may experience a slight discomfort from not smoking on long flights, their smoking endangers the health of all the passengers and crew.



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The author opposes smoking during flights. He admits that there is some argument in favor of smoking—some passengers may feel discomfort—but this is not as important as the fact that smoking can be dangerous to everyone on the flight. The use of the word *although* shows this.

### Sample Questions

- What is the author's attitude toward . . . .
- The author's opinion of \_\_\_\_\_ is best described as. . . .
- The author's attitude toward \_\_\_\_\_ could best be described as one of. . . .
- How would the author probably feel about. . . .

Another type of attitude question presents four statements and asks how the author would feel about them.

- Which of the following recommendations would the author most likely support?
- The author would be LEAST likely to agree with which of the following statements?
- The author of the passage would most likely be in favor of which of the following policies?

Organization questions ask about the overall structure of a passage or about the organization of a particular paragraph.

### Sample Question

- Which of the following best describes the organization of the passage?

### Sample Answer Choices

- A general concept is defined and examples are given.
- Several generalizations are presented, from which a conclusion is drawn.
- The author presents the advantages and disadvantages of \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author presents a system of classification for \_\_\_\_\_.
- Persuasive language is used to argue against \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author describes \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author presents a brief account of \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author compares \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Questions about previous or following paragraphs ask you to assume that the passage is part of a longer work: what would be the topic of the hypothetical paragraph that precedes or follows the passage? To find the topic of the previous paragraph, look for clues in the first line or two of the passage; for the topic of the following passage, look in the last few lines. Sometimes incorrect answer choices mention topics that have already been discussed in the passage.

### Sample Questions

- With what topic would the following/preceding paragraph most likely deal?
- The paragraph prior to/after the passage most probably discusses. . . .
- It can be inferred from the passage that the previous/next paragraph concerns. . . .
- What most likely precedes/follows the passage?

**EXERCISE 44.1**

**Focus:** Identifying correct answers and recognizing distractors in main idea/main topic/main purpose questions.

**Directions:** Read the passages. Then mark each answer choice according to the following system:

- S Too specific
- G Too general
- X Incorrect
- I Irrelevant
- C Correct

The first one is done as an example.

There are two main types of cell division. Most cells are produced by a process called mitosis. In mitosis, a cell divides and forms two identical daughter cells, each with an identical number of chromosomes. Most one-celled creatures reproduce by this method, as do most of the cells in multi-celled plants and animals. Sex cells, however, are formed in a special type of cell division called meiosis. This process reduces the number of chromosomes in a sex cell to half the number found in other kinds of cells. Then, when sex cells unite, they produce a single cell with the original number of chromosomes.

1. What is the main topic of this passage?

- S   (A) The method by which one-celled organisms reproduce
- C   (B) A comparison between mitosis and meiosis
- X   (C) Meiosis, the process by which identical cells are produced

The last gold rush belongs as much to Canadian history as it does to American. The discovery of gold along the Klondike River, which flows from Canada's Yukon Territory into Alaska, drew some 30,000 fortune hunters to the north. The Yukon became a territory and its capital of the time, Dawson, would not have existed without the gold rush. The gold strike furnished material for a dozen of Jack London's novels; it inspired Robert Service to write "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and other poems, and it provided the background for the wonderful Charlie Chaplin movie, *The Gold Rush*. It also marked the beginnings of modern Alaska.

2. This author's main purpose in writing is to

- (A) discuss the significance of mining in Canada and the United States
- (B) show the influence of the Klondike gold strike on the creative arts
- (C) point out the significance of the Klondike gold strike

The keystone arch was used by almost every early civilization. To build a keystone arch, stones are cut so that the opposite sides taper toward each other slightly. The upper and lower surfaces are carved so that when several stones are placed side by side, the upper and lower surfaces meet in smooth, continuous curves. Some form of scaffolding is built under the arch and shaped to accept the curved underside of the stones. Then the stones are fitted in place one by one. The keystone is the top center stone, the last to be dropped into position. Afterwards, the scaffolding is removed and the arch is self-supporting.

3. The passage mainly concerns

- (A) the basic principles of building keystone arches
- (B) the uses of arches in modern architecture
- (C) the role of scaffolding in building keystone arches

Circumstantial evidence is evidence not drawn from the direct observation of a fact. If, for example, there is evidence that a piece of rock embedded in a wrapped chocolate bar is the same type of rock found in the vicinity of the candy factory, and that rock of this type is found in few other places, then there is circumstantial evidence that the stone found its way into the candy during manufacture and suggests that the candy maker was negligent. Despite a popular notion to look down on the quality of



circumstantial evidence, it is of great usefulness if there is enough of it and if it is properly interpreted. Each circumstance, taken singly, may mean little, but a whole chain of circumstances can be as conclusive as direct evidence.

4. What is the main idea of the passage?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) A manufacturer's negligence can be shown by direct evidence only.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Enough circumstantial evidence is as persuasive as direct evidence.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Circumstantial evidence can be very useful in science.

The Northwest Ordinance was passed by Congress in 1787. It set up the government structure of the region north of the Ohio River and west of Pennsylvania, then called the Northwest Territory. It set the conditions under which parts of the territory could become states having equality with the older states. But the ordinance was more than just a plan for government. The law also guaranteed freedom of religion and trial by jury in the Territory. It organized the territory into townships of 36 square miles and ordered a school to be built for each township. It also abolished slavery in the Territory. The terms were so attractive that thousands of pioneers poured into the Territory. Eventually, the Territory became the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

5. What is the main topic of this passage?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) The structure of government  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (B) The provisions of an important law  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (C) The establishment of schools in the Northwest Territory

The story of the motel business from 1920 to the start of World War II in 1941 is one of uninterrupted growth. Motels spread from the west and the midwest all the way to Maine and Florida. They clustered along transcontinental highways such as U.S. Routes 40 and 66 and along the north-south routes running up and down both the East and West Coasts. There were 16,000 motels by 1930 and 24,000 by 1940. The motel industry was one of the few industries that was not hurt by the Depression of the 1930s. Their cheap rates attracted travelers who had very little money.

6. What does the passage mainly discuss?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) How the Depression hurt U.S. motels  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (B) The impact of transcontinental highways  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Two decades of growth for the motel industry

An old proverb states, "Beware of oak, it draws the stroke." This saying is handy during thunderstorm season. In general, trees with deep roots that tap into groundwater attract more lightning than do trees with shallow, drier roots. Oaks are around 50 times more likely to be struck than beeches. Spruces are nearly as safe as beeches. Pines are not as safe as these two, but are still much safer than oaks.

7. What is the author's main point?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Old proverbs often contain important truths.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Trees with shallow roots are more likely to avoid lightning than those with deep roots.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (C) The deeper a tree's roots, the safer it is during a thunderstorm.

Alternative history is generally classified as a type of science fiction, but it also bears some relation to historical fiction. This type of writing describes an imaginary world that is identical to ours up to a certain point in history, but at that point, the two worlds diverge; some important historical event takes place in one world but not in the other, and they go in different directions. Alternative histories might describe worlds in which the Roman Empire had never fallen, in which the Spanish Armada had been victorious, or in which the South had won the Civil War. Or they may suppose that some technology had been introduced earlier in the world's history than actually happened. For example: What if computers had been invented in Victorian times? Many readers find these stories interesting because of the way they stimulate the imagination and get them thinking about the phenomenon of cause and effect in history.



# Lesson 45

## FACTUAL QUESTIONS, NEGATIVE QUESTIONS, AND SCANNING QUESTIONS

### FACTUAL QUESTIONS

**Factual questions** ask about explicit facts and details given in the passage. They often contain one of the *wh-* question words: *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, *how much*, and so on.

Factual questions often begin with the phrases "According to the passage,..." or "According to the author. . . ." When you see these phrases, you know that the information needed to answer the question is directly stated somewhere in the passage (unlike answers for inference questions).

To answer factual questions, you have to locate and identify the information that the question asks about. If you are not sure from your first reading where to look for specific answers, use the following **scanning** techniques.

- Focus on one or two key words as you read the stem of each question. Lock these words in your mind.
- Scan the passage looking for the key words or their synonyms. Look only for these words. Do NOT try to read every word of the passage.
- It may help to use the eraser end of your pencil as a pointer to focus your attention. Don't reread the passage completely—just look for these words.
- When you find the key words in the passage, carefully read the sentence in which they occur. You may have to read the sentence preceding or following that sentence as well.
- Compare the information you read with the four answer choices.

The order of detail questions about a passage almost always follows the order in which ideas are presented in the passage. In other words, the information you need to answer the first detail question will usually come near the beginning of the passage; the information for the second will follow that, and so on. Knowing this should help you locate the information you need.

Correct answers for detail questions are seldom the same, word for word, as information in the passage; they often contain synonyms and use different grammatical structures.

There are generally more factual questions—twelve to eighteen per reading section—than any other type except (on some tests) vocabulary-in-context questions.

### NEGATIVE QUESTIONS

These questions ask you to determine which of the four choices is not given in the passage. These questions contain the words NOT, EXCEPT, or LEAST (which are always capitalized).

- According to the passage, all of the following are true EXCEPT
- Which of the following is NOT mentioned in the passage?
- Which of the following is the LEAST likely . . .

Scan the passage to find the answers that ARE correct or ARE mentioned in the passage. Sometimes the three distractors are clustered in one or two sentences; sometimes they are scattered throughout the passage. The correct answer, of course, is the one that does not appear.

Negative questions often take more time than other questions. Therefore, you may want to guess and come back to these questions if you have time.

There are generally from three to six negative questions per reading section.



## SCANNING QUESTIONS

These questions ask you to find where in the passage some particular information or transition is located. They are easy to identify: the answers are usually line numbers. They are usually easy to answer too. Scanning questions are often the last question in a set of questions about a passage. Use the same techniques for scanning given in Part A about detail questions.

### Sample Questions

- In what line does the author shift his focus to \_\_\_\_\_?
- Where in the passage does the author first discuss \_\_\_\_\_?
- A description of \_\_\_\_\_ can be found in . . .
- Where in the passage does the author specifically stress \_\_\_\_\_?
- In what paragraph does the author first mention the concept of \_\_\_\_\_?

In each reading section, there are generally from one to three scanning questions.

## EXERCISE 45.1

**Focus:** Scanning passages to locate answers for factual and scanning questions.

**Directions:** For each question, locate that part of the passage in which the answer will probably be found, and write down the line numbers in the blank at the end of the passage. Don't worry about answering the question itself, only about finding the information. The first one is done as an example. Do these scanning exercises as fast as you can.

### QUESTIONS 1-7

Line Antlers grow from permanent knoblike bones on a deer's skull. Deer use their antlers chiefly to fight for mates or for leadership of a herd. Among most species of deer, only the males have antlers, but both male and female reindeer and caribou have antlers. Musk deer and Chinese water deer do not have antlers at all.

5 Deer that live in mild or cold climates lose their antlers each winter. New ones begin to grow the next spring. Deer that live in tropical climates may lose their antlers and grow new ones at other times of year.

10 New antlers are soft and tender. Thin skin grows over the antlers as they develop. Short, fine hair on the skin makes it look like velvet. Full-grown antlers are hard and strong. The velvety skin dries up and the deer rubs the skin off by scraping its antlers against trees. The antlers fall off several months later.

The size and shape of a deer's antlers depend on the animal's age and health. The first set grows when the deer is from 1 to 2 years old. On most deer, the first antlers are short and straight. As deer get older, their antlers grow larger and form intricate branches.

1. How do deer primarily use their antlers? 1-2
2. In what way are reindeer and caribou different from other types of deer? \_\_\_\_\_
3. When do deer that live in temperate climates begin to grow their antlers? \_\_\_\_\_
4. According to the article, which of the following does the skin on deer's antlers most closely resemble? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which of the following factors influences the size and shape of a deer's antlers? \_\_\_\_\_
6. At what age do deer get their first antlers? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What happens to deer's antlers as the deer grow older? \_\_\_\_\_



## QUESTIONS 8-13

Line The trumpet player Louis Armstrong, or Satchmo as he was usually called, was among the first jazz musicians to achieve international fame. He is known for the beautiful, clear tone of his trumpet-playing and for his gruff, gravelly singing voice. He was one of the first musicians to sing in the scat style, using rhythmic nonsense syllables instead of lyrics.

5 Armstrong was born into a poor family in New Orleans. He first learned to play the cornet at the age of 13, taking lessons while living in a children's home. As a teenager, he played in a number of local jazz bands in New Orleans' rollicking nightlife district, Storyville.

10 In 1922, Armstrong moved to Chicago to play in Joe "King" Oliver's band. Two years later, he joined Fletcher Henderson's band. Then, from 1925 to 1928, Armstrong made a series of records with groups called the Hot Five, the Hot Seven, and the Savoy Ballroom Five. These records rank among the greatest recordings in the history of jazz. They include "Cornet Chop Suey," "Potato Head Blues," and "West End Blues."

15 Armstrong led a big band during the 1930s and 1940s, but in 1947, returned to playing with small jazz groups. He performed all over the world and made a number of hit records, such as "Hello, Dolly" and "Mack the Knife." Armstrong also appeared in a number of movies, first in *New Orleans* in 1947, *High Society* in 1956, and *Hello, Dolly* in 1969.

8. What was Armstrong's nickname? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Which of the following phrases best describes Armstrong's singing voice? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Where did Armstrong first learn to play the cornet? \_\_\_\_\_
11. In what city was Joe "King" Oliver's band based? \_\_\_\_\_
12. During what period did Armstrong record some of jazz's greatest records? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What was the first movie Armstrong appeared in? \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONS 14-23

Line In 1862, during the Civil War, President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act. The measure was named for its sponsor, Congressman (later Senator) Justin S. Morrill of Vermont. Popularly called the Land Grant Act, it provided each state with 30,000 acres of public land for each senator and each representative it had in Congress. It required that the land be sold, the proceeds invested, and the income used to create and maintain colleges to teach agriculture and engineering.

5 Although not all states used the money as planned in the act, some thirty states did establish new institutions. Purdue University, the University of Illinois, Texas A & M, Michigan State, and the University of California all trace their roots to the Morrill Act. Eighteen states gave the money to existing state universities to finance new agricultural and engineering departments. A few gave their money to private colleges. For example, Massachusetts used much of its funds to endow the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. One state changed its mind. Yale University was chosen to be funded in Connecticut, but farmers protested, and the legislature moved the assets to the University of Connecticut.

10 Most students chose to study engineering. Agriculture was not even considered a science until it had been dignified by the work of research stations. These were established at land-grant institutions in 1887 by the Hatch Act. Gradually, universities broke away from the narrow functions Congress had assigned them and presented a full range of academic offerings from anthropology to zoology.

20 Today there are some sixty-nine land-grant institutions in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. About one in five college students in the United States attends land-grant schools.



14. When was the Morrill Act signed? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Who sponsored the Morrill Act? \_\_\_\_\_
16. What position did the sponsor of the Morrill Act have at the time it was passed? \_\_\_\_\_
17. How much land did each state receive under the Morrill Act? \_\_\_\_\_
18. How many states used the money in the way it was intended by Congress? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Which of these states used its money to fund a private university? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Who objected to the way the Connecticut legislature initially decided to spend its funds? \_\_\_\_\_
21. What was one effect of the Hatch Act of 1887? \_\_\_\_\_
22. How many land-grant institutions are in operation at present? \_\_\_\_\_
23. What percent of college students in the United States currently attend land-grant institutions? \_\_\_\_\_

## EXERCISE 45.2

**Focus:** Answering factual, negative, and scanning questions about reading passages.

**Directions:** Read the following passages and the questions about them. Decide which of the choices—(A), (B), (C), or (D)—best answers the question, and mark the answer.

### QUESTIONS 1–9

line Mesa Verde is the center of the prehistoric Anasazi culture. It is located in the high plateau lands near Four Corners, where Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona come together. This high ground is majestic but not forbidding. The climate is dry but tiny streams trickle at the bottom of  
5 deeply cut canyons, where seeps and springs provided water for the Anasazi to irrigate their crops. Rich red soil provided fertile ground for their crops of corn, beans, squash, tobacco, and cotton. The Anasazi domesticated the wild turkey and hunted deer, rabbits, and mountain sheep.

For a thousand years the Anasazi lived around Mesa Verde. Although the Anasazi are not related to the Navajos, no one knows what these Indians called themselves, and so they are commonly  
10 referred to by their Navajo name, Anasazi, which means "ancient ones" in the Navajo language.

Around 550 A.D., early Anasazi—then a nomadic people archaeologists call the Basketmakers—began constructing permanent homes on mesa tops. In the next 300 years, the Anasazi made rapid technological advancements, including the refinement of not only basket-making but also pottery-making and weaving. This phase of development is referred to as the Early Pueblo Culture.

15 By the Great Pueblo Period (1100–1300 A.D.), the Anasazi population swelled to more than 5,000 and the architecturally ambitious cliff dwellings came into being. The Anasazi moved from the mesa tops onto ledges on the steep canyon walls, creating two- and three-story dwellings. They used sandstone blocks and mud mortar. There were no doors on the first floor and people used ladders to reach the first roof. All the villages had underground chambers called *kivas*. Men held tribal councils  
20 there and also used them for secret religious ceremonies and clan meetings. Winding paths, ladders, and steps cut into the stone led from the valleys below to the ledges on which the villages stood. The largest settlement contained 217 rooms. One might surmise that these dwellings were built for protection, but the Anasazi had no known enemies and there is no sign of conflict.

25 But a bigger mystery is why the Anasazi occupied these structures such a short time. By 1300, Mesa Verde was deserted. It is conjectured that the Anasazi abandoned their settlements because of drought, overpopulation, crop failure, or some combination of these. They probably moved southward and were incorporated into the pueblo villages that the Spanish explorers encountered 200 years later. Their descendants still live in the Southwest.



## SECTION 3: READING COMPREHENSION

1. The passage does NOT mention that the Anasazi hunted  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) sheep  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) turkeys  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) deer  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) rabbits
2. The name that the Anasazi used for themselves  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) means "Basketmakers" in the Navajo language  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) is unknown today  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) was given to them by archaeologists  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) means "ancient ones" in the Anasazi language
3. How long did the Early Pueblo Culture last?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) 200 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) 300 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) 550 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) 1,000 years
4. Where did the Anasazi move during the Great Pueblo Period?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) to settlements on ledges of canyon walls  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) to pueblos in the South  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) onto the tops of the mesas  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) onto the floors of the canyons
5. According to the passage, the Anasazi buildings were made primarily of  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) mud  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) blocks of wood  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) sandstone  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) the skins of animals
6. According to the passage, the Anasazi entered their buildings on the ledges  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) by means of ladders  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) from underground chambers  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) by means of stone stairways  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) through doors on the first floor
7. According to the passage, *kivas* were used for all the following purposes EXCEPT  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) clan meetings  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) food preparation  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) religious ceremonies  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) tribal councils
8. According to the passage, the LEAST likely reason that the Anasazi abandoned Mesa Verde was  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) drought  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) overpopulation  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) war  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) crop failure
9. Where in the passage does the author mention specific accomplishments of the Basketmakers?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A) Lines 5-6  
\_\_\_\_\_ (B) Lines 11-13  
\_\_\_\_\_ (C) Lines 15-16  
\_\_\_\_\_ (D) Lines 18-20



# Lesson 46

## INFERENCE QUESTIONS AND PURPOSE QUESTIONS

### INFERENCE QUESTIONS

As in the Listening Comprehension section, there are questions in the Reading Comprehension section that require you to make **inferences**. The answers to these questions are not directly provided in the passage—you must “read between the lines.” In other words, you must make conclusions based indirectly on information in the passage. Many test-takers find these questions the most difficult type of reading question.

Inference questions may be phrased in a number of ways. Many of these questions contain some form of the words *infer* or *imply*.

- Which of the following can be inferred from the passage?
- It can be inferred from the passage that . . .
- The author implies that . . .
- Which of the following does the passage imply? .
- Which of the following would be the most reasonable guess about \_\_\_\_\_?
- The author suggests that . . .
- It is probable that . . .

There will probably be from five to eight of these questions per reading section.

#### Sample Item

A star very similar to the Sun is one of the nearest stars to Earth. That star is Alpha Centauri, just 4.3 light-years away. Other than our own Sun, the nearest star to the Earth is a tiny red star, not visible without a telescope, called Proxima Centauri.

It can be inferred from this passage that

- (A) Proxima Centauri is similar to the Earth's Sun.
- (B) Proxima Centauri is the closest star to the Earth.
- (C) Alpha Centauri is invisible from the Earth.
- (D) Proxima Centauri is less than 4.3 light-years from the Earth.

(A)  (B)  (C)

Choice (A) is not a valid inference; Alpha Centauri is similar to the Sun, but Proxima Centauri is “a tiny red star.” Choice (B) also cannot be inferred; the closest star to the Earth is our own Sun. Nor can (C) be inferred; Proxima Centauri is invisible, but there is no information as to whether Alpha Centauri is. Since Alpha Centauri is 4.3 light-years away, it can be inferred that Alpha Centauri, the closest star, is less than that.



## PURPOSE QUESTIONS

These questions ask why the author of a passage mentions some piece of information, or includes a quote from a person or a study, or uses some particular word or phrase.

### Sample Questions

- Why does the author mention \_\_\_\_\_?
- The author refers to \_\_\_\_\_ to indicate that . . .
- The author quotes \_\_\_\_\_ in order to show . . .
- The phrase \_\_\_\_\_ in line \_\_\_\_\_ is mentioned to illustrate the effect of . . .

### Sample Answer Choices

- To strengthen the argument that \_\_\_\_\_
- To provide an example of \_\_\_\_\_
- To challenge the idea that \_\_\_\_\_
- To contradict \_\_\_\_\_
- To support the proposal to \_\_\_\_\_

There are usually from one to four purpose questions per reading section.

## EXERCISE 46.1

**Focus:** Identifying valid inferences based on sentences.

**Directions:** Read each sentence, then mark the one answer choice—(A), (B), or (C)—that is a valid inference based on that sentence.

1. A metal-worker of 3,000 years ago would recognize virtually every step of the lost-wax process used to cast titanium for jet engines.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Titanium has been forged for thousands of years.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (B) The lost-wax method of casting is very old.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Metal working has changed very little in 3,000 years.
2. When apple growers talk about new varieties of apples, they don't mean something developed last month, last year, or even in the last decade.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Apple growers haven't developed any new varieties in recent decades.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Some varieties of apples can be developed in a short time, but others take a long time.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (C) New varieties of apples take many years to develop.
3. Blood cholesterol used to be thought of as a problem only for adults.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Blood cholesterol is no longer a problem for adults.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Only children have a problem with blood cholesterol.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Blood cholesterol affects both adults and children.
4. Cities founded around the turn of the eighteenth century, such as Williamsburg, Annapolis, and especially Philadelphia, were laid out on a regular grid with public squares, while cities laid out in the mid-seventeenth century, such as Boston, remain chaotic to this day.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Philadelphia is today laid out more regularly than either Williamsburg or Annapolis.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Boston was not originally laid out according to a logical plan.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Philadelphia, Williamsburg, and Annapolis were founded before Boston.



5. There is more quartz in the world than any one kind of feldspar, but the feldspars as a group are five times more common than quartz.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) One type of quartz is five times more plentiful than feldspar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Quartz is less common than the feldspars.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) The most common type of feldspar is as plentiful as quartz.

6. Compared with the rest of its brain, the visual area of a turtle's brain is comparatively small since turtles, like all other reptiles, depend on senses other than sight.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) No reptile uses sight as its primary sense.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Animals that depend on sight all have larger visual areas in their brains than turtles do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) The visual areas of other reptile brains are comparatively smaller than those of turtles.

7. Contrary to popular belief, there is no validity to the stories one hears of initials carved in a tree by a young boy becoming elevated high above his head when he visits the tree as an old man.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Trees don't grow the way many people think they do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) If a child carves initials in a tree, it won't grow.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Over time, initials that are carved into a tree will be elevated.

8. That composer Philip Glass is more interested in rhythm than in melody or harmony becomes obvious when one listens to his works.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Most of Glass's listeners prefer melody and harmony to rhythm.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) It is not clear what Glass's musical interests are.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Rhythm is more important in Glass' works than melody or harmony.

9. Illegible handwriting does not indicate weakness of character, as even a quick glance at the penmanship of George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, or John Kennedy reveals.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Washington, Roosevelt, and Kennedy all had handwriting that was difficult to read.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) A person's handwriting reveals a lot about that person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) The author believes that Washington, Roosevelt, and Kennedy all had weak characters.

10. William Faulkner set many of his novels in and around an imaginary town, Jefferson, Mississippi, which he closely patterned after his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) William Faulkner wrote many of his novels while living in Jefferson, Mississippi.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) The town of Oxford, Mississippi, exists only in Faulkner's novels.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Faulkner actually wrote about his hometown but did not use its real name.

11. Most fish take on, to a certain degree, the coloration of their natural surroundings, so it is not surprising that the fish inhabiting warm, shallow waters around tropical reefs are colored all the brilliant tints of the rainbow.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) Tropical fish are unlike other fish because they take on the coloration of their environment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Tropical fish are brightly colored because they inhabit warm waters.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Tropical reefs are brightly colored environments.



12. Although sheepherding is an older and more beloved occupation, shepherds never caught the attention of American filmmakers the way cowboys did.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) There have been more American films about cowboys than about shepherds.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Films about shepherds were popular before films about cowboys.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Cowboys are generally younger than shepherds.
13. The Okefenokee Swamp is a fascinating realm that both confirms and contradicts popular notions of a swamp, because along with huge cypresses, dangerous quagmires, and dim waterways, the Okefenokee has sandy pine islands, sunlit prairies, and clear lakes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) People generally feel that swamps are fascinating places.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) The Okefenokee has features that most people do not associate with swamps.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Most swamps do not have huge cypresses, dangerous quagmires, and dim waterways.
14. As an architect, Thomas Jefferson preferred the Roman style, as seen in the University of Virginia, to the English style favored by Charles Bullfinch.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) The University of Virginia was influenced by the Roman style.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Bullfinch was an English architect.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Jefferson preferred to build in the English style of architecture.
15. In all cultures, gestures are used as a form of communication, but the same gestures may have very different meanings in different cultures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) No two cultures use the same gestures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) One gesture will never have the same meaning in two cultures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) A person from one culture may misunderstand the gestures used by a person from another culture.
16. Even spiders that do not build webs from silk use it for a variety of purposes, such as constructing egg sacs and nursery tents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (A) All spiders build webs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (B) Spiders that build webs don't build egg sacs or nursery tents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (C) Silk is used by all spiders.