

ACT Reading: Pick the answer directly supported by the text without any interpretation

This portion of the test is not about YOUR interpretation of the reading. This portion of the test is about what information is present in the text.

All questions on the ACT must be “bulletproof” and objective. This means, the correct answer will restate something already said in the text.

Questions may be phrased in ways that sound like they’re open to interpretation – THEY’RE NOT! Think of the prompts as questions about the evidence in the passage. If there is no direct evidence in the passage, then you’re interpreting the answer.

Clues to look for:

Is anything in the answer directly restated in the text?

Wrong Answer Choice Patterns

Pattern 1: Reasonable Assumption (find the support)

The answer sounds reasonable, but is not directly supported by the text.

Answer choices that make assumptions that are not directly supported by the text are wrong.

Pattern 2: Confused Concept (read carefully and find the support)

The concept is from the text but will confuse the way it fits into the text.

Answer choices that use concepts differently than presented in the text are wrong.

Pattern 3: Exact Opposite (read carefully)

The answer choice is the exact opposite from what is presented in the text.

Answer choices that directly contradict the text are wrong.

Pattern 4: Completely Irrelevant (don’t be subjective)

The answer choice doesn’t apply to the given/stated facts in the passage.

Answer choices that are not found in the text are wrong.

How To Read Passages On The ACT Reading Section

- read them anyway you want as long as you have time to finish the section and select answers with confidence.
- don’t take notes on the passage

There are always specific words and phrases in the passage that match the correct answer. There is NO BENEFIT to reading the entire passage for the overall impression.

Three Ways To Find Answers

Method 1: Read the entire passage before attempting to answer the questions, don’t take notes or try to understand it as a whole – read it once and move on to the questions

Method 2: Skip the reading, move to the questions. Start with the questions that have specific line citations and read the applicable section to answer that question. Once you’re done with those questions, you move on to the ones without citations. The reading you did for the citation questions should help you know where to find the relevant information. If the question asks about something you don’t recognize, skim the portions you haven’t read to find the key terms/phrases.

Method 3: Skim the passage to create a roadmap of where to find key terms/phrases NOT for comprehension. Roadmap helps for the questions that do not have a citation.

General Process for Answering ACT Reading Questions

STEP 1: Read or skim the passage if you want to.

Pick the approach that works best for you.

STEP 2: Read the question, noting the citation. Then read the citation.

Find the citation in the text. Read it the entire sentence or paragraph (as applicable).

STEP 3: Find three wrong answers.

Normally, it's easiest to find the wrong answers first. Can't eliminate 2 or 3? Be sure you're using the text to support your answer choices.

STEP 4: Confirm the remaining answer choice.

Does the remaining answer choice fit the correct answer pattern? Does it restate the concepts/relationships without changing the meaning? Yes? Awesome, answer and move on. No? Okay. Mark it a 2nd or 3rd pass question and move on.

What about...

questions without citations?

- The answer to the question will still be spelled out somewhere in the passage.
- Do NOT make a broad inference that is not directly supported by the text.
- Save general (non-citation) questions for last.

main idea questions?

- The correct answer will still restate something that is in the text.
- On these types of questions, there may be two answer options that reflect information from the text. The correct answer is the one that appears more frequently.

“except” questions?

- The correct answer will be the choice that does NOT appear in the passage.
- Be sure to read all four answer choices to help avoid mistakes.

“vocabulary in context” questions?

- Look for the answer choice that restates something from the passage (but not just the original word in the passage – a few answer choices will probably do that).

This resource sheet was adapted from ACT Prep Black Book “The most effective ACT strategies ever published” by Mike Barrett.