

Accuplacer
Reading Comprehension
Review



Overview

The Reading Comprehension section of ACCUPLACER contains 20 multiple choice questions that fall into two categories:

1. A reading passage followed by a question based on the text. Both short and long passages are provided.
2. Sentence relationships presenting two sentences followed by a question about the relationship between these two sentences.

Testing Tips

- ✓ Do not rush. Take your time and make sure you understand what you are reading.
- ✓ Read carefully. Sometimes, one word in the passage can change the entire meaning.
- ✓ Double check your answer before moving to the next question.
- ✓ Understand what the test question is asking about the passage before attempting to answer. In many cases, reviewing the passage and answer choices will help.

Concepts & Practice Questions

Six skills prepare students to become better readers and for reading in college-level courses:

- ❖ recognizing main ideas
- ❖ identifying supporting details
- ❖ recognizing implied main ideas and the central point
- ❖ understanding relationships that involve addition and time
- ❖ understanding relationships that involve illustration, comparison or contrast, and cause and effect
- ❖ understanding purpose and tone

Main Idea

In order to become a better and faster reader, recognizing the main idea is the most important skill you can develop.

Think of the **main idea** as an umbrella--it is the author's primary point about a topic. All other material in the paragraph fits under the main idea. In a paragraph, authors often present the main idea to readers in a single sentence called the **topic sentence**.

Consider this example:

TV violence does affect people in negative ways. Frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others. Heavy TV watchers are less upset about real-life violence than non-TV watchers. TV violence increases aggressive behavior in children.

You will see the word **topic** used in two different ways. First, topic can be used generally to mean the subject of the reading. Second, it can be used as a part of the phrase '**topic sentence**.' In this example, the first sentence tells the reader the general subject, or topic, of the passage. The second sentence is the **topic sentence**, and in this case also gives the author's main idea. This sentence tells the reader what the passage is about and gives the main point the author is making.

Supporting Details

Supporting details are reasons, examples, steps, or other kinds of factual evidence that explain a main idea.

Consider this example:

Main idea: Our government should phase out the penny in the economy.

Supporting detail 1: Pennies take up more space than they are worth.

Supporting detail 2: Pennies are a nuisance to the business community.

Supporting detail 3: Pennies cost the nation as a whole.

In this case the supporting details give reasons to support the main idea.

Recognizing Implied and Stated Ideas

Sometimes a selection lacks a topic sentence, but that does not mean it lacks a main idea. The author has simply decided to let the details of the selection suggest the main idea. You must figure out what the implied main idea is by deciding upon the point made by all of the details when they are all added together.

Passages that imply an idea give supporting details first. The reader must make an educated guess in order to understand the main idea. In these sorts of passages, the main idea is the general statement that all of the details make when they are considered as a whole. The main idea must be general enough that **all** of the details fit into it.

Consider this example:

1. The smaller a group is, the more opportunities we have to get to know other people well and to establish close ties with them.
2. Two-person groups are the setting for many of our most intense and influential relationships.
3. In three-person groups, coalitions become possible, with two members joining forces against a third member.
4. Five-person groups are large enough so that people feel they can express their emotions freely and even risk antagonizing one another, yet they are small enough so that members show regard for one another's feelings and needs.

Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea of the above sentences?

- a. Two-person groups are an important part of our lives.
- b. A five-person group is better than a two-person group
- c. The number of people in a group affects relationships within the group.**
- d. Groups play a central part in every human activity, within family, the workplace, and the government.

Explanation:

- a. Answer *a* is too narrow to be the implied idea. It is based on only one of the four supporting details, statement 1.
- b. Answer *b* covers only statements 2 and 4; therefore, it is too narrow to be the implied main idea. In addition, it is a conclusion that is not based on the given facts, which say nothing about one group always being better than another.
- c. Answer *c* is a general statement about the number of people in a group and how that number affects a group. It is illustrated by all four of the supporting details. **The answer c is the implied main idea.**
- d. Answer *d* is true, but it is not what the supporting details are discussing. The supporting details do not address the part that groups play in society.

The topic of the supporting ideas above is the number of people in a group. Ask yourself the question, “What are the supporting details saying about the number of people in a group?” As you think about the four statements, try to find a point about the number of people in a group that is general enough to cover all of the specific details.

Understanding Relationships That Involve Addition and Time

To help readers understand the main points, authors use two common methods to show relationships among ideas and to make ideas clear: transitions and patterns of organization.

Transitions are words or phrases (ex: first of all) that show relationships between ideas. Two types of transitions are words that show:

- ❖ addition, contrast, exception
- ❖ time or sequence

Addition words tell you that writers are adding to their thoughts. The writers are presenting one or more ideas that continue along the same line of thought as a previous idea. Addition words include: furthermore, additionally, next, in addition, etc.

Contrast words show differences between two or more items being compared. Contrast words include: on the other hand, in contrast, despite.

Exception words point out an unusual or unique feature of one item that is otherwise part of the same main category. Exception words include: however, nevertheless, with the exception of, in the case of.

Time words provide chronological organization to writing. Time words include: later, a decade, a year, a month, a week, a century such as the 90's, the nineteenth century.

Sequential words provide step-by-step organization to writing. Sequential words include: next, first, second, after, before.

Understanding Relationships That Involve Illustration, Comparison or Contrast, and Cause and Effect

Illustration is one method of clarifying our ideas. Writers often use examples and illustrations introduced by a phrase such as *for example* or *for instance* to demonstrate the point they are trying to make.

Which of these two statements is easier to understand?

1. Even very young children can do household chores. They can run a duster along baseboards or fold napkins for dinner.
2. Even very young children can do household chores. For instance, they can run a duster along baseboards or fold a napkin for dinner.

The second item is easier to understand because the phrase “For instance” tells the reader that there is a relationship between the first and second sentence. The second sentence offers an example of the point the author makes in the first sentence.

Comparison and Contrast

Comparison shows similarities. Contrast shows differences. Writers often use comparison and contrast together as a way of explaining and/or analyzing the relationship between or among items, ideas, or people.

Consider the relationship among these sentences as an example of how comparison and contrast can be used together and notice the role that the underlined transitions play in making this relationship clear to the reader:

1. Advertising is part of the strategy manufacturers use to sell their products.
2. Manufacturers use advertising as a way to market established products as well as new products.
3. New products are generally advertised differently from established products.
4. New products are often introduced with “informational” advertising telling what the products are, why they are needed, and where they are available.
5. Established products on the other hand can rely on “reminder” advertisements, which provide little hard information about the product.

The first sentence gives the general, or main, idea. The second sentence uses “as well as” to signal that the writer is showing a similarity between the way new and established products are advertised. The word “differently” in the third sentence and “on the other hand” in the fifth sentence shows that the writer is also demonstrating differences in the way these two types of products are advertised.

Cause/Effect

Information that falls into a cause-effect pattern addresses the question “Why does an event happen?” and “What are the results of an event?” Often, authors try to tell about events in a way that explains both what happened and why.

Consider how this passage reflects the relationship between cause and effect:

In 1970, about sixty small and medium-sized factories in the United States adopted a four-day work week. According to the plan, workers work forty hours but instead of the usual five-day week, they now work only four days. Workers are enthusiastic about the three-day weekly vacation. According to management, productivity has increased about 18% since the inception of the new plan. Absenteeism has dropped by 69% and lateness is almost non-existent.

What are the effects being discussed in this passage?

- A. shorter work weeks
- B. sixty small and medium-sized factories decided to try the four-day work week
- C. the seventies were a time of change
- D. increased productivity and decreases in absenteeism and tardiness**

Explanation:

- a. Answer *a* gives the topic of the passage but does not discuss cause or effect.
- b. Answer *b* explains who was involved in this experiment, but does not show a cause/effect relationship.
- c. Answer *c* is true, but is not discussed in this passage.
- d. Answer *d* explains the results of the four-day workweek.

Tone

A writer’s tone reveals the attitude he or she has toward a subject. Tone is expressed through the words and details the author selects. Just as a speaker’s voice can project a range of feelings, a writer’s voice can project one or more tones or feelings: anger, sympathy, hopefulness, sadness, respect, dislike and so on. Understanding tone is an important part of understanding what an author has written.

To illustrate the difference a writer can express in tone, consider the following comments made by workers in a fast food restaurant.

“I hate this job. The customers are rude, the managers are idiots, and the food smells like dog chow.” (Tone: bitter, angry)

“I have no doubt that flipping burgers and toasting buns will prepare me for a top position on Wall Street.” (Tone: mocking, sarcastic)

“I love working at Castle Burger. I meet interesting people, earn extra money, and get to eat all the chicken nuggets I want when I go on break.” (Tone: enthusiastic, positive)

Words that express tone reflect a feeling or judgment. Some words that describe tone include: amused, angry, ashamed, praising, and excited.

Sample Test Questions

Answer each of the following 10 questions. To review the questions you missed, return to the reading strategies area in parentheses following the correct answers on the answer key.

1. Read the statements below and then choose the best answer to the question from the list of lettered choices that follow.

Sometimes when we don't get enough sleep we become very short-tempered.

It is important to set a time to go to bed that is realistic.

How are these two sentences related?

- A. The first sentence explains the meaning of the second.
 - B. The second sentence explains why a lack of sleep affects us.
 - C. The second sentence contradicts the first.
 - D. The second sentence proposes a solution.
2. Read the statements below and then choose the best answer to the question from the list of lettered choices that follows.

Most people collect *Star Wars* toys for sentimental reasons.

Some people collect them strictly to make money.

What is the relationship between the two sentences?

- A. cause & effect
 - B. contrast
 - C. repetition
 - D. statement & example
3. Answer the question based on what is stated or implied.

There are two kinds of jewelry that I do. There is commercial jewelry - class rings, necklaces, the kinds of things most people wear. I sell these items to meet my expenses for raw materials, supplies, and to make my living. The other more creative work I do, makes me feel that I am developing as a craftsperson.

The author of this passage implies that:

- A. artists are poor.
- B. there is no market for creative work.
- C. rings and necklaces cannot be creative.
- D. commercial and creative work fulfill different needs for the artist.

4. Read the statements below and then choose the best answer to the question from the list of lettered choices that follows.

Jenny does not like cake.

She does not like to bake it, to ice it, or to eat it.

What does the second sentence do?

- A. It states the cause of the first.
- B. It emphasizes what is stated in the first.
- C. It compares the three things Jenny does not like about cake.
- D. It draws a conclusion about Jenny.

5. Read the sentences below and then choose the best answer to the question from the list of lettered choices that follows.

When we write a check that we know is going to “bounce,” we are in fact performing a criminal act.

It is a crime to knowingly write a “hot” check, one in which we know we don’t have sufficient funds to cover.

What does the second statement do?

- A. It provides supporting evidence for the first statement.
- B. It draws a conclusion from the first sentence.
- C. It restates the central idea of the first sentence.
- D. It provides a contradictory point of view.

6. Read the passage below and then choose the best answer to the question from the list of lettered choices that follows.

Scuba diving is the most exhilarating experience I have ever had. The first time I went, the dark mirror of the water beckoned me to drop from the side of the boat. I jumped feet first and entered a brightly colored world populated with fish, plants, and objects I had never dreamed of.

Which of the following best describes the mood of the author after having this experience?

- A. Bored
- B. Anxious
- C. Excited
- D. Serene

7. Read the passage below and then choose the best answer to the question.

Huge beasts such as the dinosaur have never really become extinct. Mothra, a giant caterpillar who later becomes a moth, destroys Tokyo, and stars in the 1962 Japanese film named for him. Mothra is born, dies, and reborn regularly on classic movie channels. In Japan, Mothra is one of the most popular films ever made. Mothra has survived the creation of more current scary creatures such as giant apes, extraterrestrial beings and swamp creatures. More than 30 years after his creation, Mothra still lives.

The main subject of the passage is:

- A. the reasons that fads do not endure.
- B. the lasting appeal of Mothra.
- C. the difficulty of marketing good horror movies.
- D. old models for creatures are still used because making new monsters is expensive.

8. Two underlined sentences are followed by a question or statement. Read the sentences, and then choose the best answer to the question or the best completion of the statement.

Anxious to ensure that America would depart from European traditions regarding religion and royalty, the early U.S. could be described as a place that focused more on work than on the entertainment offered by spectacle and ceremony in the Old World.

However, national celebrations such as the lighting of the White House Christmas Tree and the ceremonies used to swear in new federal officials give the American people some experiences that are based upon national tradition.

What does the second sentence do?

- A. It cancels the meaning of the first sentence
- B. It provides an example of the first sentence.
- C. It adds more detail to the first sentence.
- D. It offers an exception to the information given in the first sentence.

9. Two underlined sentences are followed by a question or a statement. Read the sentences, and then choose the best answer to the question or the best completion of the statement.

Public speaking is very different from everyday conversation.

First of all, speeches are much more structured than a typical informal discussion.

How are these sentences related?

- A. Sentence two offers support for the statement made in the first sentence.
- B. Sentence two contradicts the statement made in the first sentence.
- C. Sentence two shows an exception to the first sentence
- D. Sentence two compares two kinds of speeches.

10. Read the passages below, and then choose the best answer to the question. Answer the question on the basis of what is stated or implied in these passages.

Many people who have come close to death from drowning, cardiac arrest, or other causes have described near-death experiences - profound, subjective events that sometimes result in dramatic changes in values, beliefs, behavior, and attitudes toward life and death. These experiences often include a new clarity of thinking, a feeling of well-being, a sense of being out of the body, and visions of bright light or mystical encounters. Such experiences have been reported by an estimated 30 to 40 percent of hospital patients who were revived after coming close to death and about 5 percent of adult Americans in a nationwide poll. Near-death experiences have been explained as a response to a perceived threat of death (a psychological theory); as a result of biological states that accompany the process of dying (a physiological theory); and as a foretaste of an actual state of bliss after death (a transcendental theory).

The primary purpose of this passage is to:

- A. entertain
- B. persuade
- C. inform
- D. express disbelief in the afterlife

ANSWER KEY

Review the questions you missed in the Reading Strategies sections indicated in parentheses following the correct answer.

- 1. D (Cause/Effect)
- 2. B (Comparison/Contrast)
- 3. D (Implied and Stated Ideas)
- 4. B (Supporting Details)
- 5. C (Main Idea)
- 6. C (Tone)
- 7. B (Main Idea)
- 8. D (Exception)
- 9. A (Supporting Details)
- 10. C (Main Idea)