SAT Reading Quick Summary

This is a one-page summary of the major relevant concepts from this section. Use it to evaluate your comprehension or jog your memory. For a more in-depth treatment of these ideas, see the rest of the section.

The Big Secret: The answer to every question comes directly from what's on the page. No interpretation whatsoever is involved.

The rules for Reading on the SAT are simple; the only challenging thing is making sure you follow them all the time, no matter what. Here they are:

- Correct answers are always directly restated or demonstrated in the text—no matter the kind of passage, and no matter the kind of question.
- Details are critical. The difference between right and wrong can be one word.
- There's always exactly one objectively right answer choice per question, and the other choices are objectively wrong. There aren't "good," "better," and "best," choices; there are only totally wrong choices and totally right choices.

Here are the most common wrong-answer patterns you'll see:

- Answer choice contains statements that might seem reasonable, but aren't actually stated in the text.
- Answer choices may mention concepts from the text but confuses the relationships among them.
- Answer choice is barely relevant to the text.
- Answer choice directly contradicts the text.
- Answer choice would be an acceptable literary interpretation if you were in a classroom setting.

Here's the general Reading process:

1. Read the brief passage introduction.
2. Skim, read, or skip the passage (whichever you're most comfortable with, as discussed earlier in this section).
3. Read the question and note any citation, then read the relevant text.
4. Find three wrong answers.
5. Confirm the remaining answer choice.

Special Notes:

- The word "humor" in an answer choice refers to something in the passage that is unexpected or can't be taken literally.
- If you think 2 or more answer choices are equally valid (or that none are valid), then you're overlooking some small detail. Consider skipping the question and coming back to it on a later pass, but make sure you mark an answer for every question on the section before time is called.
- Remember to invest your time in questions that will be easiest for you to answer!

See the many walkthroughs in the next section for demonstrations of these principles.

Critical Technical Terms for the SAT Reading Section

SAT Reading questions often involve certain words that might be unfamiliar for a lot of test-takers. It's important to have a decent grasp on these words if you want to answer every question on the Reading section with total certainty.

I've compiled a brief list of these words below, along with informal explanations of them. I encourage you to review them, even if you already feel that you know most of them. I've found in the past that many students develop slightly incorrect understandings of these kinds of words because most teachers never explicitly cover them.

(Notice that I'm not recommending you memorize these words and definitions exactly as they're laid out here, or that you make flashcards or anything like that. I just want to make sure that you're familiar with these terms, because you'll certainly see some of them on test day. If you read this list through twice and then refer back to it as needed in your training, you'll be in good shape.)

Abstract: "Abstract" is the opposite of "physical" or "concrete." For example, joy is an abstract idea since we can't see or touch it.

Acknowledge: To acknowledge something basically means to mention it.

Address ("address a concern," "address a question," etc.): To address something means to comment on it or respond to it. For example, I could address an issue by making a statement about that issue, or I could address a question by answering it.

Advance a view: To advance a view means to provide support for that view.

Adversarial: An adversarial relationship is one in which two sides work against each other, as adversaries.

Advocate for: To advocate for something means to argue in favor of that thing.

Allude: To allude to something just means to mention or refer to that thing.

Analysis: Analysis is the act of closely examining something in an attempt to understand or explain that thing.

Anomaly: An anomaly is an outlier—a situation or data point that differs from what we'd expect based on past experience.

Anticipate (an objection, a complaint, a criticism, etc.): To anticipate something in a passage means to address it before it's mentioned by someone else. On the SAT, we usually talk about anticipating a negative reaction from a reader who is still reading the passage. The author can "anticipate" that negative comment by responding to that reaction in the passage.

Argument: On the SAT, an argument is typically the position someone takes on an issue, and the support that person provides for her position. For example, in a discussion of school uniforms, an author's argument might be that schools shouldn't require uniforms because students need to learn to make decisions for themselves, and that includes deciding how to dress.

Articulate: To articulate an idea or position means to state it and explain some or all of its details.

Assert: To assert an idea means to state that idea.

Attribute: When used as a verb, to attribute something to someone means to say that the person is responsible for the thing. For example, if I attribute our successful meeting to Amy, I'm saying that Amy is the reason our meeting was successful.

Authority: Technically, an authority is any source of an idea or quote, whether that authority is recognized as an expert or not.

Capture: When we say that a word or phrase captures an idea, we're saying that the phrase expresses that idea.

Challenge: To challenge a statement means to say that you believe the statement isn't correct.

Characterize: To characterize means to describe something, or to be a typical example of something.

Conclusion: A conclusion is a brief summary of an argument that comes at the end of that argument.

Conducive: If a situation is conducive to a result, then the situation makes it easier for that result to happen. For example, we could say that prescription glasses are conducive to better eyesight.

Contend: When an author contends that something is true, the author is stating her argument or position.

Convey: To convey an idea means to express that idea.

Counter: Countering an idea or position involves presenting facts or reasoning that contradict the original idea or position.

Criticism, Criticize, Critique: A critique or criticism is a discussion of a concept, argument, or work of art. The person who writes the critique or criticism is a critic. A critique or criticism doesn't have to be negative .

Depiction: A depiction is just a description of something.

Develop/Development: To develop an argument means to express some or all of the ideas that make up the argument.

Dubious: If a claim is dubious, then people can easily doubt it.

Elaborate: To elaborate on something means to provide more information on it.

Establish: To establish an idea means to mention it for the first time in a given passage.

Evaluate: To evaluate an idea means to consider whether that idea is true.

Examine: To examine something means to consider it closely in an attempt to understand or explain it.

Explicit: Something that is explicit is stated clearly and directly.

Expose: To uncover or reveal, often said of something scandalous or unpleasant.

Highlight: To highlight something means to call attention to that thing.

Illustrate: To illustrate an idea means to describe the idea and/or provide examples of the idea.

Imply/implicit: To imply something is to state it indirectly. "Implicit" is an adjective meaning that something isn't stated directly. (Remember the text will directly restate or demonstrate the correct answer, even if the College Board uses the word "imply.")

Interpret: To interpret means to look for meaning in something beyond what is on the surface. In the context of a passage, to interpret means to find meaning beyond what is directly, literally stated in the passage.

Lament: If an author laments a situation, she's saying that she doesn't like the situation and wishes it would change.

Limitation: A limitation is a weakness or a downside.

Maintain: To maintain a position means to argue in favor of it, sometimes in spite of something that might weaken it.

Motive: A motive is what drives (or "motivates") a person to do something.

Outline: An outline of an argument or position is a relatively simplified description of the argument or position.

Perspective: A perspective can be an opinion or a point of view.

Phenomenon/Phenomena: A phenomenon is a situation or event, often involving something unexplained or misunderstood. "Phenomena" is the plural form of "phenomenon."

Plausible: Something that is plausible is believable, or sounds like it could be true.

Practical/Practicality: A practical idea is one that can be implemented. For example, if we discuss the practicality of a self-flying helicopter, we're talking about whether such a helicopter can actually be created and used in the real world.

Refute: To refute an idea means to prove that the idea isn't correct.

Reinforce: To reinforce an idea means to provide additional support for that idea.

Relate (a story): To relate a story means to tell a story.

Reservations: If someone has reservations about an idea, it means the person doesn't fully support the idea.

Reveal: To reveal an idea just means to show or express that idea.

Skeptic/Skeptical/Skepticism: A skeptic is someone who doesn't believe in a particular idea. The word "skeptical" is the adjective form that describes a skeptic. The word "skepticism" is the noun for the general philosophy of questioning new ideas.

Stance: A stance is a position that someone takes on an issue. For example, an author's stance on the question of changing speed limit laws might be that speed limits are fine as they are, but that existing speed limits just need to be better enforced.

Substantiate: To substantiate a claim or statement means to provide support for that claim or statement.

Summarize: To summarize a topic or story means to touch on all the major points related to it, without covering the details.

Support: To support a statement means to provide information that indicates the statement is valid.

Take a position on: To take a position on an issue means to indicate what your opinion is on that issue.

Tentative: If an argument or position is tentative, then it hasn't been firmly established or decided on yet.

Undermine: To undermine an idea means to provide reasons that the idea isn't correct.

Underscore: To underscore something means to highlight or emphasize it.

The General Process for Answering Reading Questions

Most Reading questions can be answered with a fairly simple process, which we'll discuss now. Later, I'll show you how to answer other types of questions that might seem a bit odd. (Actually, the process we'll use for *all* Reading questions is basically the same process with a few minor, occasional modifications, but I'll present them as unique scenarios because most students have already been taught to see them that way by other tutors or books.)

Don't worry if this process feels uncomfortable or strange when you first read it. In later sections of this Black Book, we'll go through a lot of questions from real SAT Practice Tests together, and you can see the process in action for yourself. You can also watch the videos at www.SATprepVideos.com to get a feel for the process.

For the moment, we're only going to talk about questions with line citations—that is, questions that tell you which part of the text to look at by mentioning a specific word, line, or paragraph. Then we'll cover the modifications for questions without them.

1. Always Read the Brief Introduction to Each Passage!

On the page where each passage starts, there is a brief introduction that appears *below* the bolded statement, but *above* the start of the passage itself, that says something like this:

Questions 1-10 are based on the following passage.

As we'll see in the walkthroughs of real SAT questions later in this Black Book, the introductions to each passage often contain critical information that identifies the author of the passage and the purpose for which the passage was written. As we discussed earlier, some prompts and answer choices will assume that you know this basic background information about the passage, and there won't be any way to determine that information without investing a few seconds in reading that introduction.

2. Read or Skim the Passage if You Want To. Keep in Mind the Strategies from Our Earlier Discussion on How to Approach Different Types of Passages.

There are a few different ways to approach reading the actual passage, as we discussed in "How to Handle Passages on the SAT" on page 64. Pick whichever approach works for you, whether it's one of the ones I explained, or your own approach that you've tested against real SAT questions.

3. Read the Question, Noting the Citation if There is One. Then Read the Relevant Text.

If the citation is a line citation and the cited line picks up in the middle of a sentence, go back up to the beginning of that sentence and start there. (It may also help to read one or two sentences before or after the cited text, but this isn't always necessary.)

4. Find Three Wrong Answers.

It's generally easiest to find wrong answers first. For one thing, there are three times as many of them; for another, it's usually easier to identify ways that answer choices differ from the text than it is to feel confident that a choice says exactly the same thing as the text. Expect to find that most (and possibly all) of the wrong answers you find will fit into one of the types I talked about in "What do Wrong Answers Do?" on page 61. (But remember that it's not really important to *classify* the wrong answers—it's only important to note that three of the choices aren't literally restated or demonstrated in the text, which means they must be wrong! The classifications we mentioned in the training are just tools to help you organize your thinking.)

If you end up not being able to eliminate three choices, then you're making some kind of mistake. It might be that you've misread the text or the question. It might be that your understanding of some of the words you read is slightly (or very) inaccurate. It's often the case that people who are left with 2 or 3 answer choices that seem to be restated or demonstrated by the text probably aren't being picky enough about sticking to *exactly* what each word on the page means to ensure an accurate restatement or demonstration.

If you end up eliminating all 4 answer choices from consideration, then, again, you've made some kind of mistake, but it might be a different kind of mistake. You may have been referring to the wrong part of the passage; you might also have misread or misunderstood one or more words in the question, passage, or answer choices.

5. Look at the Remaining Answer Choice.

See if the remaining answer choice fits the right answer pattern (in other words, see if it's restated or demonstrated by concepts and relationships from the relevant portion of the text). If it does, that's great.

If you still can't identify one choice that's clearly restated or demonstrated by the passage (and three choices that aren't), then you'll need to consider whether to hunch-guess right away, or skip the question and save it for a later pass. For more on this aspect of SAT-taking, see "Guessing on the SAT," on page 33 of this Black Book, and "Time Management on Test Day" on page 36.

Closing Thoughts on the SAT Reading Process

And that's it, believe it or not—the process for Reading questions typically isn't as complex as the processes for other SAT question types can be.

As I noted above, the simple process we just went through works on a large percentage of SAT Reading questions exactly as described. In a broader sense, it works on all Reading questions. But let's look at some specific, small adjustments we might make if the question isn't exactly a classic line-citation question.

What about Questions Without Citations?

When a question has no citation, very little actually changes in our approach to it. The answer to the question is still going to be spelled out somewhere in the passage, but now we have to figure out where, rather than having the convenience of being told which lines to look at.

Let me say that again: even though there's no specific citation, the answer is still going to be restated or demonstrated *somewhere* on the page. You should NOT try to answer a question with no citation by making a broad inference from the overall passage that isn't directly supported by actual phrases from the text.

The only challenging thing that separates these questions from the ones with citations is that it can sometimes be harder to locate the part of the text that contains the answer.

I generally recommend saving any questions without citations on a particular passage until after you've attempted the questions that have citations for that passage—in other words, I often skip around and do all the citation questions for a passage first, then come back and pick up the more general questions for that passage. I do this because answering the citation questions will typically cause me to go back through most of the text, and I'll often find that the answers to non-citation questions are right there in the citations for other questions. So I can save some time and energy by doing the citation questions first.

Even if answering the citation questions doesn't cause me to read the part of the text that contains the answer to a general question, I can still save a little time because I don't need to re-read or skim those areas of the text I've already seen when I go back to find the answers to the non-citation questions.

Again, the critical thing to remember with non-citation questions is that the answer is always clearly spelled out in black and white somewhere within the passage, even though the question lacks a citation. There is literally never a moment on a real SAT in which the only way to answer a question is to draw a general inference from the overall "feeling" of the text.

What about "Best Evidence" Questions?

The SAT Reading section includes some questions that ask you to identify the text that "provides the best evidence," either for the answer to the previous question, or for a statement in the question itself. Some untrained test-takers will be put off by this question type because it's not commonly used on other standardized tests. But, as trained test-takers, we know that finding the correct answer to these questions will come down to carefully reading the passage without literary interpretation, just as we would for any other SAT Reading question.

We need to keep a few things in mind for questions of this type.

1. As we just discussed, the correct answer will be the part of the text that's directly restated or demonstrated in the question we're being asked about—without literary interpretation, judgment calls, or outside knowledge from the test-taker.
2. The cited text in the correct answer is sometimes sort of a summary of evidence discussed in the paragraph where that citation appears. In other words, you may find that the text immediately before or after the citation repeats or elaborates on the evidence in the citation itself. So don't be put off if some statement of relevant evidence appears just before or after the cited text from the right answer to the "best evidence" question—even though the cited text in the correct answer will provide evidence for the statement in question, there may be some additional relevant evidence that shows up just outside of that cited text. We'll see that in the walkthroughs later in this book.
3. Finally, the correct answer to this type of question is typically pretty straightforward—often, only one of the four choices will seem to have any real connection to the statement in question. But, on the few questions when more than one choice seems plausible at first, we'll always find that only one choice refers to a part of the text that's specifically restated or demonstrated in the correct answer to the relevant question.

Remember—the best way to get comfortable with these "best evidence" questions (and with all SAT questions) is to practice with real questions of this type from the College Board, and review those questions with the walkthroughs later in this Black Book.

Is there a "best evidence" shortcut?

There's something else to keep in mind for this question type as well: when the "best evidence" question asks about the answer to the previous question, the "best evidence" question can sometimes also help us find the answers to *both* questions more quickly and easily.

Of course, one of the four answers for a "best evidence" question must be right—which, as we just discussed, means that the right answer must support the statement in the previous question with no literary interpretation or judgment calls involved.

Once we realize this, we have a potential shortcut for identifying the relevant text when we try to answer the preceding question: we can just look at the answer choices for the "best evidence" question that comes next, and then check those parts of the text to see which one restates or demonstrates an answer to the question we're working on.

For a real-life example of this strategic use for "best evidence" questions, let's consider questions 9 and 10 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #1. Question 9 asks why Akira calls his meeting with Chie "a matter of urgency" (line 32). If we check question 10, we can see that it refers back to question 9. This means one of the choices in question 10 MUST be the text that restates or demonstrates the correct answer for question 9. If we want, we can just check those quotations in 10 to find the right answer for 9, instead of looking through the whole passage on our own to try to answer 9. Sure enough, the quotation from choice (B) in question 10 includes this quote:

> '. . . I've received word of a position. I've an opportunity to go to America, as dentist for Seattle's Japanese community.'

This quote clearly supports choice (C) from question 9, which says that Akira

> has been offered an attractive job in another country.

That means (C) must be the right answer to question 9, and (B) must be the right answer to question 10. (For a complete discussion of these two questions, see their walkthroughs starting on page 83 later in this Black Book.)

Notice that we were able to use this strategy to find the right answer to both questions in less time than it would have otherwise taken to answer just question 9, because we didn't need to go back through the whole passage in order to answer either question.

Of course, you don't have to use this "shortcut" approach if you don't feel like it. Still, you should always make sure that your answer to a "best evidence" question makes sense in connection with your understanding of the question that the "best evidence" question is referring to.

What about "Most Nearly Means" Questions?

Some questions ask you how a word is used in the passage. They often read something like this:

> As used in line 14, "plotz" most nearly means . . .

When we deal with these kinds of questions, we need to understand that the College Board isn't just asking us to pick an answer choice with a similar meaning to the word in the prompt, even though untrained test-takers might think that.

Instead, the correct answer to a "most nearly means" question will nearly always restate some part of the relevant text. For example, consider question 3 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #1. The right answer is "without mediation," which restates the idea from the text of not using a "go-between." (In fact, the root of the word "mediation" is related to words like "median" and "medium," which signify the idea of being between two things. Of course, you don't have to recognize this etymology in order to find the right answer, but I'm pointing it out here to show how concretely and directly the right answers to this type of question often restate the text).

But in some situations, rather than restate the text, the correct answer might be the only choice that demonstrates the relevant text, or is demonstrated by the relevant text. (See page 59 in this Black Book for more on the difference between restatement and demonstration on the SAT.) As an example of this kind of answer, consider question 2 on the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #3. The relevant text of this question refers to the idea of someone taking a "turn or two up and down" the "length" of a "platform;" the correct answer indicates that the word "turn" most nearly means "short walk." We can tell this choice must be correct because it's the only choice that's demonstrated by the idea of a person going "up and down" the "length" of something, even if the phrase "short walk" doesn't literally restate the phrase "turn . . . up and down [the] length." We'll see more of this idea in the walkthroughs later in this book.

What about "Attitude" Questions?

Sometimes the College Board asks about the author's attitude, or about how a passage might be characterized, and so on. Untrained test-takers are usually tempted to answer these kinds of questions in the same way they would in a literature class: they usually just read the passage and make a subjective assessment of how it makes them feel, and then look for an answer choice that describes their feelings.

But, as we've mentioned repeatedly, the SAT wouldn't be a valid, reliable standardized test if it were based on subjectivity and inference.

So, even for "attitude" questions, the correct answer is going to be spelled out somewhere in the text.

For a real-life example of a question that asks about attitude, let's take a look at question 1 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #4. This question asks how the narrator's attitude changes during the passage.

The narrator says that he feels "a vast yearning" in line 2, and also that he doesn't "understand quite what it is that the yearning desires." This idea of not-quite-understanding restates the idea that the narrator is "uncertain[] of his motives," as described in choice (C). Later in the passage, he says he can "now see" that he's on the brink of knowing himself, and that the trip is "both a challenge to [his] egotism and a surrender to it." The idea of the narrator "now see[ing]" what his motives are is the same as saying he "recogni[zes] them," just as described in (C). So every part of choice (C) is restated by the text, which makes (C) correct. (For a complete discussion of this question, see its walkthrough on page 144 later in this Black Book.)

Notice that even though the prompt mentions "attitude," which most untrained test-takers see as a subjective idea, the correct answer was still directly restated by the text in an objective way.

So when you answer these kinds of questions, you're still just going to be looking carefully through the text to match phrases in the text with one of the answer choices—just as you do for all Reading questions, basically.

What about Questions with Figures?

As we discussed earlier in "Reading Graphs, Charts, Tables, and Other Figures" on page 44, the current version of the SAT is designed to incorporate skills related to reading and understanding figures with data. (Notice that I didn't say the SAT rewards us for *interpreting* data—this was a very deliberate choice of words on my part! The SAT Reading section always rewards us for picking answer choices that reflect exactly what's on the page, rather than trying to interpret anything we see and drawing our own conclusions. This important distinction extends to figure-based questions, too.)

When we see questions that refer to figures, we want to keep in mind the basic concepts that we discussed in "Reading Graphs, Charts, Tables, and Other Figures" on page 44 in this Black Book, and combine them with our awareness of the other rules and patterns of the SAT Reading section in order to identify the choice that's exactly restated or demonstrated by what appears on the page.

What about "Purpose" Questions?

Some SAT Reading questions ask you about the purpose of a text, or about the author's reason for doing something. By now, it's probably no surprise that we handle these questions exactly the same way we handle any other SAT Reading question: we look for the answer choice that's restated or demonstrated by the relevant text, rather than trying to read the author's mind or guess her intentions.

As an example of this kind of question, consider question 7 on section 1 of SAT Practice Test #1, which asks us to identify the purpose of a paragraph. Many untrained test-takers will assume incorrectly that the only way to answer the question is to try to guess what the author was thinking when she wrote it—but the right answer, (D), turns out to be the only choice that's directly present in the text. Choice (D) says the purpose is to "analyze a reaction," and we can see the paragraph directly demonstrating this idea when it asks what actions could have been taken by one character to cause another character to react differently. (For a full discussion of this question, see its walkthrough on page 82.)

What about "Yes-Yes-No-No" Questions?

Some questions may follow a pattern that I call "yes-yes-no-no," which includes the following elements:

- The prompt asks a question that can be answered with two opposing responses—usually "yes" or "no."
- Two of the answer choices begin with one of the two opposing responses (like "yes"), followed by a sentence or two explaining why that response could be the correct answer.
- The other two choices begin with the other opposing response (like "no"), followed by a sentence or two explaining why that response could be the correct answer.

There's no need to be especially worried about these questions, but I'm mentioning them here because some of my students are bothered by them before we start working together.

As trained test-takers, we need to remember that *every part of a correct answer choice has to reflect the text,* or else the choice is wrong. This applies to yes-yes-no-no questions, too, which means the following parts of the correct answer must both be valid:

- The "yes" or "no" part of the answer choice must be a correct answer to the question in the prompt, *and*
- the explanation in the choice must be accurately restated or demonstrated by the relevant part of the passage.

For this reason, many trained test-takers find it easier to attack these questions by focusing on the explanation portion of each answer choice, and identifying the explanations that are directly restated or demonstrated by the passage. If only one answer choice has an explanation that's restated or demonstrated by the passage, then we can quickly confirm that the "yes" or "no" at the beginning of that answer choice makes sense as an answer to the prompt, and select that choice.

But, occasionally, two or more of the answer choices will include explanation components that are restated or demonstrated by the passage; in these situations, you'll need to consider whether the correct answer to the first portion of the question should be "yes" or "no." You'll find that only one option is logical in light of the prompt; that option is the correct answer.

For a real-life example of a question with this kind of "yes-yes-no-no" answer choice pattern, let's take a look at question 29 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #1. That question asks whether

> the data in the table support the authors' proposed pairing of bases in DNA.

Choice (A) starts with "yes," and then says,

> for each organism, the percentage of adenine is closest to the percentage of thymine, and the percentage of guanine is closest to the percentage of cytosine.

When we look at the table, we can see that the statement that comes after "yes" is supported by that table. But choice (C) contains exactly the same statement as choice (A), except that (C) starts with "no" instead of "yes."

Now that we know the main statements in (A) and (C) are the same, and are supported by the figure, we need to figure out whether the correct answer should begin with "yes" or "no." When we look in the passage to find "the authors' proposed pairing of bases in DNA" as described by the prompt, we can see that lines 34 and 35 say,

> the only pairs of bases possible are: adenine with thymine, and guanine with cytosine.

If the percentage of adenine is closest to the percentage of thymine, then the author's proposed pairing of adenine and thymine would be logically supported: if adenine and thymine are paired together, then we'd expect them to be present in similar amounts. Along the same lines, if the percentage of guanine is closest to the percentage of cytosine, that would support the author's proposed pairing of guanine and cytosine, because if guanine and cytosine are paired together, we'd expect them to be present in similar amounts, too. So the data in the table *do* support the author's proposed pairing, which means "yes" is appropriate, and (A) must be correct. (See the walkthrough for this question on page 91 later in this Black Book if you'd like to read more about it.)

On any given test day, you're relatively unlikely to encounter a yes-yes-no-no question with two or more answer choices whose explanations are restated or demonstrated by the relevant part of the passage, so you usually won't have to worry about figuring out whether "yes" or "no" makes sense as an answer to the prompt. And even if you do see a question like that on test day, you'll find that the yes-no portion of the choices is usually clear once you've identified the choices whose explanations are restated or demonstrated by the passage, as we just saw.

What about "Central Claim" Questions?

You'll occasionally see a question that asks you to identify the "central claim" of a passage, or of some part of a passage. You may also see questions that ask about the "central purpose" or "main idea" of a cited text, and so on. These questions can basically be treated in the same way that any other SAT Reading question can: the correct answer will be the only choice that restates an idea from the relevant part of the text.

As an example, consider question 14 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #3. This question asks us for the central idea of the fourth paragraph, which is about public transport. The correct answer, choice (B), says,

> some public transportation systems are superior to travel by private automobile

which is a restatement of the following quotes from the relevant paragraph:

> public transport can be faster, more comfortable, and cheaper than the private automobile . . . In Latin America, China, and India, working people board fast-loading buses . . . [while] sedans and SUVs . . . [are] mired in dawn-to-dusk traffic jams

So we can see that the paragraph restates the idea that public transport can be better than traveling by private automobile. (For a complete discussion of this question, see the corresponding walkthrough on page 128 later in this Black Book.)

What about Summary and Development Questions?

Some questions will ask us to pick the answer choice that summarizes the cited text, or that describes the "development" of the text, or something along those lines. Whenever a prompt seems to be asking for something along these lines, we'll find that the correct answer will still be restated or demonstrated by key elements of the cited text in sequence, just like the correct answer to any other kind of SAT Reading question. In other words, we won't be required to interpret the cited text just because some people view summarizing as an act of interpretation.

For a real-life example of a question that asks about summarizing a text, let's take a look at question 1 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #2. The prompt asks us to select the answer choice that summarizes the passage.

The correct answer is (A), which says that

> a character describes his dislike for his new job and considers the reasons why.

This idea directly reflects what we see in lines 6 and 7: "I felt my occupation irksome." It's also demonstrated by the idea that the job is a "nuisance," which we find in line 10. The word "occupation" from the text restates the word "job" from the answer choice, and the speaker "describes his dislike" for the job when he calls it a "nuisance" and says that it's "irksome." In lines 9 through 27, he explains various aspects of the job that make it unpleasant (such as the "closeness, smoke, monotony, and joyless tumult" in lines 19 and 20). He then proceeds to describe his difficult relationship with his boss, and provide reasons why his boss hates him in lines 34 through 48. In short, we see that every part of (A) is directly restated or demonstrated by ideas we can find throughout the passage, just as the prompt requires. As trained test-takers, we see that the other choices seem generally related to the topic of the passage, but none of them simply restates the passage without adding extra ideas that don't appear in the passage, so we know they must be wrong. (For a complete discussion of this question, see the walkthrough on page 102 in this Black Book.)

What about "Humor?"

Sometimes an answer choice will mention the idea of humor or comedy. In order to evaluate these kinds of answer choices along the lines of the SAT, we have to know that the College Board uses these terms in very particular ways that don't really reflect their use in everyday speech.

When the College Board refers to part of a passage as "humorous," "comical," "funny," or anything else along those lines, we should understand that to mean one of two things:

1. either the text can't be true in a literal sense, or

2. the text involves something unexpected or unusual

Let's take a look at question 5 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #3 for an example of this idea. This question asks about a story from the passage in which Lady Carlotta sits and works on a sketch while a woman she knows is trapped by an angry boar in a tree nearby, and the text mentions in lines 12-14 that Lady Carlotta has a history of "interfering on behalf of a distressed animal."

The correct answer is (C), which calls the anecdote "a humorous insight into her character." We know the College Board would consider this story "humorous" because it's the opposite of what we would expect from the character, given the information in lines 12-14. (See this question's walkthrough on page 124 later in this Black Book for a full explanation of the rest of the question.)

Again, whether a real person would actually laugh at something doesn't matter on the SAT; all that matters is whether the text describes something that couldn't literally be true, or something that's unexpected. (By the way, if this discussion seems a little odd right now, don't worry—we'll see more examples of these ideas at work in real SAT questions from the College Board in just a bit.)

What about Paired Passages?

Sometimes the College Board asks you questions about two passages at once. These questions often ask how the author of one passage would respond to a statement from the other passage. When this happens, students often worry that they need to read an author's mind, which seems very subjective and unfair.

But we have to remember that every answer to a Reading question is spelled out somewhere in the text, and these questions are no exception, even if they seem to be asking you to guess how an author would feel in a hypothetical situation.

Whenever the SAT asks how an author would feel about something, it must always be true that the author's passage directly states how that author feels about that topic. So if the test asks,

> How would the author of Passage 1 respond to the claim in Passage 2 about banana cream pie?

then it must be the case that Passage 1 directly discusses claims about banana cream pie like the one in Passage 2.

This might sound a little complicated, but it's actually not that difficult in practice. Let's explore a real-life example of an SAT question that asks how the author of one passage would react to something from another passage. We'll take a look at question 38 from the Reading section of SAT Practice Test #4. This question asks how Edmund Burke (the author of Passage 1) would react to the comments in the final paragraph of Thomas Paine's passage, which is Passage 2.

When we look for the remarks in the final paragraph of Passage 2, we see that they say,

> circumstances . . . chang[e] . . . and as government is for the living . . . it is the living only that has any right in [government]. That which may be thought right and found convenient in one age, may be thought wrong and found inconvenient in another.

Since the prompt asks how Burke would react to this idea, there must be some specific wording in Passage 1 to tell us how Burke feels about government changing from one generation to the next. Sure enough, there is: Burke directly contradicts Paine's opinion when Burke says that people aren't

> morally at liberty…to separate and tear asunder the bands of their subordinate community

just because they think there might be a "contingent improvement" (37). (In other words, simply thinking that a change in government might make things better doesn't justify making significant changes to that government.)

So, in short, we see that Paine says people should be able to change aspects of government that used to be "convenient" (77) but are now "inconvenient" (79), while Burke says that people can't just change their government because they think the change might result in an "improvement" (37).

This contradiction between Burke's view and Paine's view is exactly restated in the right answer, (D), which says Burke would react

> with disapproval, because changing conditions are insufficient justification for changing the form of government.

Notice that answering this question with total confidence didn't require us to try to read Burke's mind, nor to make any guesses about how Burke would react to Paine's statements! Passage 1 directly told us exactly how Burke would feel about those statements, and we picked the answer choice that reflected Burke's position. (For a complete discussion of this question, see its walkthrough on page 159 later in this Black Book.)

Also note that we can use this approach whenever an SAT Reading question asks us how someone would respond to a claim, argument, or question—it doesn't only apply to questions that are about two distinct passages. For an example of this idea, see the walkthrough for question 15 on section 1 of SAT Practice Test #1, which appears on page 85 of this Black Book.

Conclusion

Now that we've discussed the best ways to approach every SAT Reading question in the abstract, we'll pause to summarize these ideas on the next page, and then dive in to walkthroughs of every Reading question on the first 4 SAT Practice Tests from the College Board, so you can see these concepts in action against the types of real test questions you'll encounter on test day.