

READING CURRICULUM

ACT

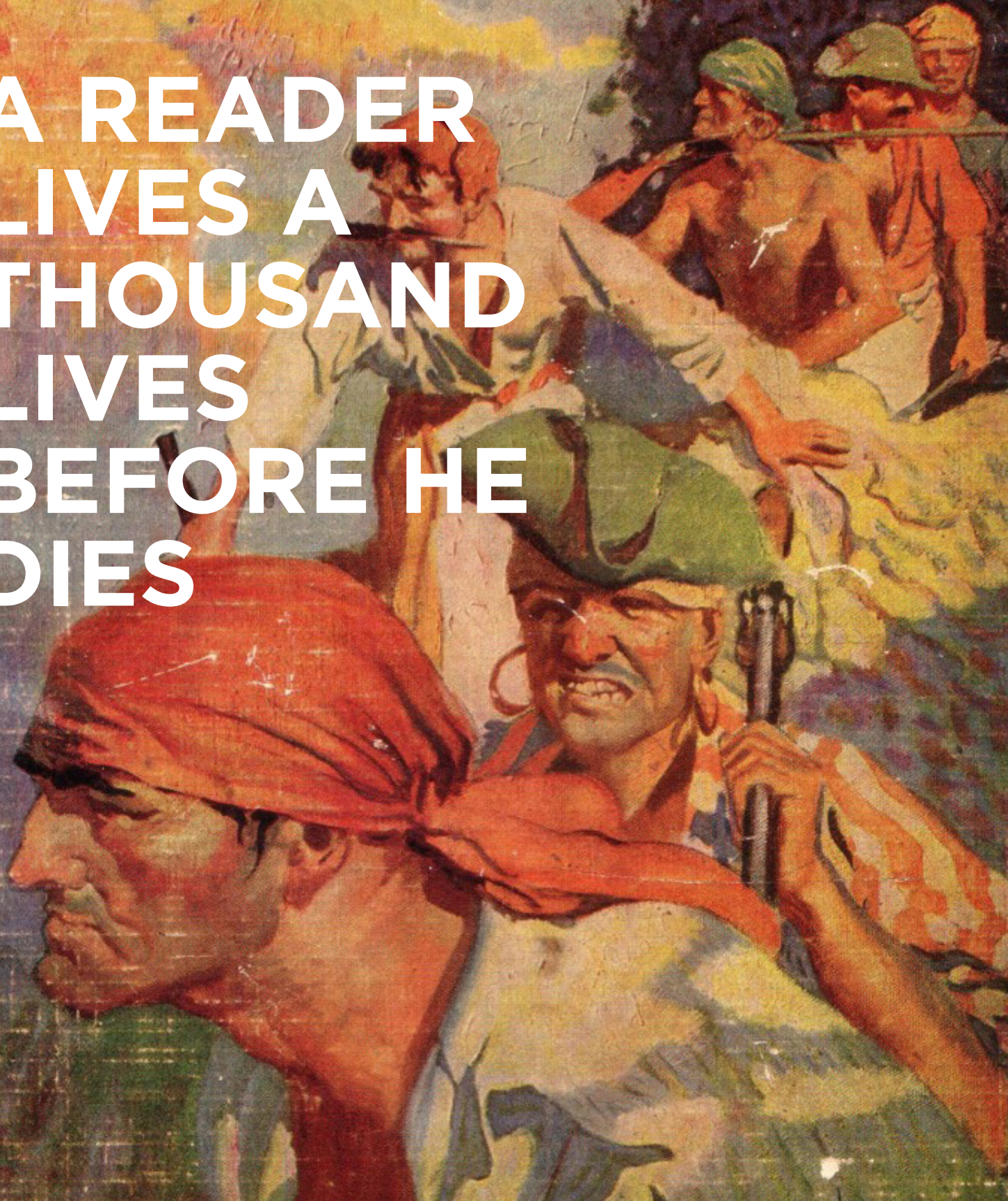


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TREASURE ISLAND

A READER
LIVES A
THOUSAND
LIVES
BEFORE HE
DIES



INTRODUCTION

The ACT Reading Test measures your reading comprehension and provides an example of content you might see during your first year of college. You will have 35 minutes to read 4 passages of approximately 750 words each and complete 40 questions. The Reading Test is broken down into four passage types: Literary Narrative, Social Science, Humanities, and Natural Science. Each reading test presents the four passages in this exact order, and each passage will be followed by 10 questions.

The questions will ask you to:

- 1 Identify and interpret details**
- 2 Determine the main idea of passages**
- 3 Understand relationships between characters**
- 4 Make generalizations**
- 5 Analyze vocabulary in context**
- 6 Draw conclusions about author's voice and method**

Note also that timing is demanding on the ACT Reading Test. To read and understand four passages then analyze and correctly answer 40 questions in 35 minutes is a challenging task. Any proper strategy shouldn't be focused simply reading the passages, but rather reading them efficiently in a way that will set you up to answer each question correctly.

If you read all of this and feel only dread or boredom, don't worry. That actually means you are exhibiting the best skill an ACT test taker can hone: active reading. You have already comprehended rather bland information, analyzed its implications, and predicted what will come next. (If, however, you have spent the last five minutes staring at the wall, we may have reason to be concerned). Over the course of your ACT preparation, you will focus on honing your active reading skills so that you can approach each passage like a test maker.

A note before we discuss our suggested strategy: there are several different reading approaches. No one reading strategy works best for ALL students and any strategy should be adaptable depending on the content in a particular passage and your relative strengths as a reader. We will teach the basic strategies that we feel are most effective, but you should work with your academic mentor to find and tailor the best strategy for you.

THE SUGGESTED STRATEGY

Imagine if you walked into a house you had never been in before and were given three minutes to explore it and draw a floor plan. Would you focus on the color of the wallpaper in the guest bedroom or the orientation of the toilet paper in the hall bathroom? Probably not. Instead, you would focus on the biggest items, such as the relative locations and sizes of each room in the house.

That is the same approach you should have for each ACT passage. Your goal should not be to understand and interpret every fact, statistic, or character in your initial reading. In fact, doing so can actually hurt your score! Rather, you should determine the author's purpose(s) for writing the passage and develop a general outline. Figure out the main ideas of the passage and of each paragraph so that you can always answer, "Why did the author write this?" and "What is the author's main argument?" Don't worry about the specifics yet -- If asked, you can always refer back to figure out whether the toilet paper unrolls upwards or downwards.

The Goal: After reading the passage, you should have a general understanding of the purpose of the passage, its main components (think main ideas of paragraph), and should have set yourself up to answer more detailed questions by leaving short notes in margins or circling key words!

Step 1: Read the introduction

A passage's introduction will always tell you who the author is and when it was written. In addition, it can often provide clues as to the setting or subject of the passage. While this information can help clear up some possible ambiguities in a passage, its greatest contribution is that it can serve as a buffer between passages. Reading the introduction allows you to clear your mind of the previous passage and refocus on the passage at hand. Here's an example of what an introduction looks like:

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from the article "Wherever He Went, Joy Was Sure to Follow" by Stanley Crouch (©2000 by The New York Times Company). *Tin Pan Alley* is a district famous for its composers and publishers of popular music.

Step 2: Annotate the passage

This is the step that makes or breaks scores on the ACT Reading Test. It is crucial to keeping you focused on what you're reading, helping you rephrase the main ideas the passage in your own words, and setting you up to answer questions quickly and correctly. The question is, what should you look for in each type of passage?

Literary Narrative Passage

The first passage on every ACT Reading Test is a Literary Narrative passage. This passage is taken from a work of fiction and usually contains extended dialogue and significant characterization. **Annotate parts that reveal the character's traits and underline clues about the relationships between them.** Questions will usually center on the characters, tone, literary elements, and author's intention.

Humanities, Social Science and Natural Science Passages

The Humanities, Social Science and Natural Science can be grouped together because the best strategy involves a quick, investigative read before diving into the questions. Find and annotate the thesis and main ideas of each paragraph to guide your understanding of the passage. Look to topic and concluding sentences as they usually indicate the main idea of each paragraph. While literary elements will be tested, more questions center on the author's main idea(s) and the construction of those arguments.

Try jotting short phrases in the margins that point towards the answers to the following questions:

1. Who is the narrator/author?
2. What is the conflict?
3. What relationships are presented?
4. What is the main idea?
5. What is the purpose/significance of the passage?

Circle Proper Nouns!

ACT Reading passages will ask you "refer" questions, or questions that require you refer back to the passage to locate specific information. These questions are time-sucking traps, meant to trick you to waste precious time sifting through the passage to find information. To help you cut down the time you spend on these questions, **circle all proper nouns (people, places, dates, events) that are mentioned in the passage.** Doing so will create an index of key terms that will help you locate this information extremely quickly if one of the proper nouns are mentioned in a question! It is MUCH faster to find a term out of 10-15 circled terms rather than to search through a whole passage.

Step 3: Glance through annotations

Quickly reread your annotations before looking at the questions. You should only spend several seconds doing it but it can remind of you just what you took away from the passage before you dive into the questions and apply your takeaways.

Use the information you have pulled from the passage to help you work through the questions. While some may advocate going to the questions before reading the entire passage, that strategy is harder to implement on the ACT than on the SAT, as the ACT is less likely to give you line numbers for specific questions and doesn't always present its questions in sequential order. This means that reading the questions first is generally a waste of time.

Step 4: Eliminate Wrong Answer Choices

Read through the answers and eliminate clear incorrect choices. You can usually quickly cross off one or two choices. Then keep working. It is often easier and more accurate to proceed with a cynical eye and explain why an answer is wrong rather than why the correct answer is right. Look for specifics in the answer choices. For instance, if an answer choice says, “author introduces two theories on evolution” and you only found one theory, eliminate that answer choice.

Step 5: Answer questions correctly

Use the question type model to practice anticipating what is going to be asked on the ACT Reading Test. The more you know before you go into the test, the more comfortable you will feel on test day, and you will answer more questions correctly.

If you are stuck between a couple of answers, take your best guess and move on. You should circle the question on your booklet or note it on your answer sheet but you should not dwell on it. Time is of the essence and easier questions are usually waiting. If you have additional time later, come back to it.

Let's practice steps one through four on the Literary Narrative passage on the next page, and then examine the types of questions we will be faced with answering on the ACT Reading Test.

READING TEST

35 Minutes - 40 Questions

DIRECTIONS: There are four passages in this test. Each passage is followed by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

Passage I

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from the short story “The Threshold” by Cristina Peri Rossi (original Spanish version ©1986 by Cristina Peri Rossi; translation ©1993 by Mary Jane Treacy).

5 The woman never dreams and this makes her intensely miserable. She thinks that by not dreaming she is unaware of things about herself that dreams would surely give her. She doesn't have the door of dreams that opens every night to question the certainties of the day. She stays at the threshold, and the door is always closed, refusing her entrance. I tell her that in itself is a dream, a nightmare: to be in front of a door which will not open no matter how much we push at the latch or pound the knocker. But in truth, the door to that nightmare doesn't have a latch or a knocker; it is total surface, brown, high and smooth as a wall. Our blows strike a body without an echo.

15 “There's no such thing as a door without a key,” she tells me, with the stubborn resistance of one who does not dream.

“There are in dreams,” I tell her. In dreams,

doors don't open, rivers run dry, mountains turn around in circles, telephones are made of stone. Elevators stop in the middle of floors, and when we go to the movies all the seats have their backs to the screen. Objects lose their functionality in dreams in order to become obstacles, or they have their own laws that we don't know anything about.

25 She thinks that the woman who does not dream is the enemy of the waking woman because she robs her of parts of herself, takes away the wild excitement of revelation when we think we have discovered something that we didn't know before or that we had forgotten.

30 “A dream is a piece of writing,” she says sadly, “a work that I don't know how to write and that makes me different from others, all the human beings and animals who dream.”

She is like a tired traveler who stops at the threshold and stays there, stationary as a plant.

35 In order to console her, I tell her that perhaps she is too tired to cross through the doorway; maybe she spends so much time looking for her dreams before falling asleep that

she doesn't see the images when they appear because her exhaustion has made her close those eyes that are inside of her eyes. When we sleep we have two pairs of eyes: the more superficial eyes, which are accustomed to seeing only the appearance of things and of dealing with light, and dream's eyes; when the former close, the latter open up. She is the traveler on a long trip who stops at the threshold, half dead with fatigue, and can no longer pass over to the other side or cross the river or the border because she has closed both pairs of eyes.

"I wish I could open them," she says simply.

Sometimes she asks me to tell her my dreams, and I know that later, in the privacy of her room with the light out, hiding, she'll try to dream my dream. But to dream someone else's dream is harder than writing someone else's story, and her failures fill her with irritation. She thinks I have a power that she doesn't have and this brings out her envy and bad humor. She thinks that the world of dreams is an extra life that some of us have, and her curiosity is only halfway satisfied when I am finished telling her the last one. (To tell dreams is one of the most difficult arts; perhaps only author Franz Kafka was able to do so without spoiling their mystery, trivializing their symbols or making them rational.)

Just as children can't stand any slight change and love repetition, she insists that I tell her the same dream two or three times, a tale full of people I don't know, strange forms, unreal happenings on the road, and she becomes annoyed if in the second version there are some elements that were not in the first.

The one she likes best is the amniotic dream, the dream of water. I am walking under a straight line that is above my head, and everything underneath is clear water that doesn't make me wet or have any weight; you don't see it or feel it, but you know it is there. I am walking on a ground of damp sand, wearing a white shirt and dark pants, and fish are

swimming all around me. I eat and drink under the water but I never swim or float because the water is just like air, and I breathe it naturally. The line above my head is the limit that I never cross, nor do I have any interest in going beyond it.

She, in turn, would like to dream of flying, of slipping from tree to tree way above the rooftops.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTION TYPES

Details

It can reasonably be inferred from the passage that the woman most strongly desires to attain which of the following qualities from dreaming?

- A. Relaxation
- B. Self-awareness
- C. Entertainment
- D. Self-control

Detail questions ask you identify a characteristic of a person, place, thing or idea. This particular question also asks you to interpret and infer a detail about the idea of dreaming. Note that while this question refers to a very specific point in the passage, those line numbers are not given. This is common on the ACT.

The author says of the woman, “She thinks that by not dreaming she is unaware of things about herself that dreams would surely give her” (lines 2-5). She wants to receive this awareness.

We can quickly eliminate D because nowhere does the passage mention that dreaming increases self-control. We can also eliminate C, because, although the woman does listen to the narrator’s dreams over and over, she doesn’t do them for entertainment but so that she can then learn to dream too. Lastly, we can also eliminate A because as the narrator says, “a woman who does not dream robs her of parts of herself... [not dreaming] takes away the wild excitement of revelation when we think we have discovered something we didn’t know before or had forgotten” (lines 26-30. This is not about relaxation, but finding something within oneself.

The correct answer is B, Self-awareness.

Relationships

Based on the passage, which of the following statements best describes the overall attitudes of the narrator and the woman?

- A. The woman is frustrated and despairing, while the narrator is supportive and reassuring.
- B. The woman is bitter and resentful, while the narrator is detached and uninterested.
- C. The woman is lonely and resigned, while the narrator is optimistic and relaxed.
- D. The woman is dismayed and miserable, while the narrator is discontented and angry.

Vocabulary in context

As it is used in line 55, the word *humor* most nearly means:

- A. personality.
- B. whim.
- C. mood.
- D. comedy.

Relationship questions will often ask how a character's actions cause another character to react a certain way. In this example, the woman is seeking answers to the questions she has about her own ability to comprehend dreams, while the narrator is providing the answers.

Now let's look at the answers and start with **D**. The woman may be dismayed, but the narrator doesn't seem discontented or angry. In fact he seems to try his best to help her by repeatedly explaining his dreams to the woman. **C** doesn't appear right either. The woman is not resigned as she keeps trying to learn to dream. **B** also looks incorrect as the narrator is far from detached and uninterested as he explains the woman's issues with dreaming and his attempts to help her.

The correct answer is **A**. The author uses the phrase, "In order to her [woman] console her..." to establish the relationship where the narrator supports and reassures the woman.

Vocabulary in context questions ask you to determine what a word means from a specific context. Look at the sentences before and after the sentence in which the word is and this will clue you to the word in question. The specific sentence says, "She thinks I have a power that she doesn't have and this brings out her envy and bad humor" (lines 57-58). The passage is identifying the differences in characteristics between the woman and the narrator, specifically alluding to the woman's inability to interpret dreams. This inability frustrates the woman and puts her in a bad mood. When looking at the answers, we see that mood is present. None of the other ones would be appropriate. The correct answer is **C**.

Author's Voice and Method

Based on the narrator's account, the woman's approach to dreaming the narrator's dreams is best described as:

- A. confrontational and powerful.
- B. enthusiastic and playful.
- C. precise and confident.
- D. self-conscious and secretive.

Voice relates to author's point of view and attitude. **Method** focuses on the craft of writing—the main purpose and how each portion synthesizes to create the function and meaning for the entire work.

Why does the woman try to dream the narrator's dreams? To give herself the ability to dream. She thinks that practicing might help her do it on her own.

Looking at the answers, **A** would not be right. It is too strong, plus we know trying to dream others' dreams is not very effective. **B** is not right either. She doesn't do this out of excitement, but rather disappointment that she can't do it on her own. The same applies to **C**. It is not a confident approach.

The correct answer is **D**. The author describes the woman in the passage as self conscious of her inability to dream. We also learn that she tries to dream his dream "in the privacy of her room, with the light out, hiding..." (lines 53-54). This question exemplifies the author's voice, as the author's attitude of the woman's character is presented in this question.

Before we look at the final types of questions, let's practice reading and annotating the Humanities passage on the next page.

READING TEST

Passage III

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from the article “Wherever He Went, Joy Was Sure to Follow” by Stanley Crouch (©2000 by The New York Times Company). *Tin Pan Alley* is a district famous for its composers and publishers of popular music.

As a jazz trumpeter and a singer, Louis Armstrong asserted a level of individuality in musical interpretation, recomposition and embellishment far more radical than any that had preceded it in Western music. When faced with a musical theme, Armstrong improvised an arrangement that boldly rephrased it, dropping notes he didn't want to play and adding others. His featured improvisations brought the role of the jazz soloist to the fore. The immaculate logic of his improvised melodies, full of rhythmic surprises and virtuosic turns, influenced showtune writers, jazz composers, big band arrangers and tap dancers. His harmonic innovations, as fellow trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has noted, were the most brilliant in the history of jazz: Armstrong figured out how to articulate the sound of the blues through Tin Pan Alley popular music tunes without abandoning their harmonic underpinnings. “Louis Armstrong took two different musics and fused them so that they sounded perfectly compatible,” Mr. Marsalis says.

It was during the 1920's and 30's that Armstrong's reputation took off. He set the music scene in his home town of New Orleans on fire before traveling to Chicago in 1921 to join his mentor, the cornetist King Oliver. For a year he went to New York, where

he joined Fletcher Henderson's jazz orchestra and turned the rhythm of the music around with his conception of playing with a swinging beat. Now almost a national musical terror, Armstrong returned to Chicago, then finally settled in New York in 1929.

From 1925 through the early 1930's, he recorded dozens of masterpieces with large and small bands, popularized scat singing (jazz singing that uses non-sense syllables) and took on Tin Pan Alley, introducing one tune after another into jazz, where they became part of his repertory. His tone could be broad, soft and luminous or vocal or comical, or suddenly and indelibly noble, and when his music conquered Europe in the 30's, it carried the tragic optimism of the American sensibility into the world at large. Wherever he went, swing was sure to follow. He almost single-handedly began a new spirit of freewheeling but perfectly controlled improvisation, tinged with playfulness, sorrow and sardonic irony.

Like all innovators, Armstrong was also called upon to perform superhuman feats. Armstrong had endless energy and could play and play and play with the evangelical fire and charisma that brings a new art into being. He extended the range of his instrument, asserted unprecedented rhythmic fluidity and had the greatest endurance of any trumpet player who ever lived. As a young man, he could play five shows in a theater a day, be the featured soloist on virtually every piece and end each show with 100 high C notes. His glissandos—rapid slides up or down a musical scale—were so pronounced that trumpeters of the London Philharmonic Orchestra had to inspect his horn to be convinced that it was

55 not made differently from theirs.

By his death in 1971, Armstrong had influenced the entirety of American music, instrumentally and vocally, inspiring his own generation and successive ones. I can recall some 30 years ago talking with a concert
60 percussionist who knew Armstrong and the rest of the people who were rising to the top during the middle and late 20's. Referring to a certain concert piece, which had a more extensive drum part than usual, he said, "When I get that going, I can put my Louis Armstrong influence in and,
65 without them even knowing it, the orchestra starts to swing for a bit." On a more recent occasion, unless I was imagining it, I even heard rapper Heavy D slip a phrase over the mechanical hip-hop beat that had an Armstrong arch to it.

70 To get right down to it, no one in jazz ever played with greater emotional range than Armstrong, whose New Orleans experiences meant that he worked every-thing from christenings to funerals. In the streets, he picked up all the folk chants and songs. While traveling
75 around town, he heard traces of French and Italian opera that suffused his sensibility and his memory. But beyond all that, what Armstrong wanted to give his listeners was the kind of pleasure music gave him, which is what most artists are after. When he wrote or talked of New Orleans, of
80 being out there with his horn or following the parades or listening to mentors like Joe Oliver, Armstrong never failed to project a joy so profound that it became an antidote to the blues of daily living. He had a determination to swallow experience whole and taste it all and only then to spit out the bitter parts.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTION TYPES (CONT'D)

Main Ideas

Which of the following statements best expresses the main idea of the passage?

- A. Armstrong was an exceedingly gifted musician whose emotional range was nonetheless somewhat narrow.
- B. One of the greatest jazz trumpeters of all time, Armstrong is best known for his soft and luminous tone.
- C. Armstrong has had a profound effect on music, one that has been both wide ranging and long lasting.
- D. A pioneering jazz trumpeter and singer, Armstrong recorded numerous masterpieces in the mid to late 1920s.

The focus of the passage was on Louis Armstrong and his contributions to music. Looking at the answers we can easily rule out several. First option A- Armstrong was exceedingly gifted but most of the essay is about the expansiveness of his range, not the narrowness. This is out. Option B seems slightly off too. While Armstrong was one of the greatest jazz trumpeters of all time, “His tone could be broad, soft and luminous, or vocal or comical, or suddenly and indelibly noble...” (lines 35-37). That is one broad tone, so this doesn’t seem right. Option D is mostly right (he was a pioneering jazz trumpeter and singer who recorded numerous masterpieces) but the main idea of the passage is not just about those masterpieces he recorded in the 20s—It is about his legacy to music. For that reason, the correct answer is C. The author notes musical contributions such as, “interpretation, individuality, recomposition, improvisation, and melodies, in order to show the wide-ranging effects on music (Paragraph 1). The author also says, “By his death in 1971, Armstrong had influenced the entirety of American music...” (lines 58-60). The author believes Armstrong’s effect is long lasting.

Generalizations

The passage suggests that Armstrong's most important contribution to jazz was his:

- A. musical conquest of Europe.
- B. emphasis on improvisation.
- C. work with King Oliver.
- D. invention of the blues sound.

Generalization questions asks you to boil down a lot of information into a more concise form. In this case, you need to determine Louis Armstrong's **most important** contribution, in a passage full of his contributions. This one is especially tough because most of these answer choices are mentioned. This is where our annotations might help us. Though A and C are mentioned, they are briefly mentioned. D is not mentioned.

The correct answer is B. Go back to the first paragraph and notice the repetition of instances of improvisation. Next, notice the adjectives used to describe his improvisation, these are strong describing words that emphasize the grandiosity his improvisation had on jazz music. Note that while generalization questions are the most tempting to look for outside information, you never need to do so.

Voice

Which of the following words best describes how the orchestra referred to in the fifth paragraph (lines 58-71) is said to have started to swing?

- A. Reluctantly
- B. Intentionally
- C. Unconsciously
- D. Optimistically

It says the orchestra started to swing a bit "without them even knowing it" (line 67-68). We can rule out answers here or we can jump right to the correct one. The correct answer is C. This question is an example of author's method.

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Books are a uniquely
portable magic

– Stephen King



THE TIMING CONUNDRUM

Timing is by far the biggest roadblock to scoring highly on the ACT Reading Test. Reading and annotating a passage and then answering ten tough questions in 8:45 is an extremely tall task! With dedicated practice, you should be able to get your timing close to the 9-minute mark. But what happens if you accidentally spend too much time on one passage on test day and need to make up for it elsewhere? What should you do if you just can't your timing down no matter how hard you try?

The Inside Out Strategy

The goal of the Inside Out strategy is to answer the majority of a passage's questions correctly in a relatively short amount of time, so that you can avoid blindly guessing on a lot of questions.

When to use: When you reach the Natural Science passage with only a few minutes left, or have an average of 5 minutes or less left for each passage on the test (i.e. 10 minutes remaining after Social Science passage).

How to use: This strategy is best used on Natural Science passages, which are usually chocked full of dense information that either supports or refutes an author's main argument. Our strategy focuses on knowing what the dense information is going to support rather than the information itself, and skipping over it almost entirely. Below are the main steps in detail:

1. **Read the Introduction** – this step does not change from our previous strategy.
2. **Breeze through the passage to circle keywords**– take 90-120 seconds to skim through the passage with the main goal of circling every proper noun and number you see. Ideally, you should briefly read the introduction and the first sentence of each sentence to get a vague idea of what the passage is about, but you may not have enough time to do so if you only have a few minutes remaining. Remember, DON'T worry about memorizing any details.

3. Strategically attack the questions – Unlike the rest of the passages, you should not attempt to do these questions in order. Instead, try to answer questions in the following order:

1. Vocabulary in Context Questions
2. Questions with line references
3. Refer Questions with proper nouns in the question or answer choices
4. Main Idea of Paragraph or Passage/Generalization Questions
5. Refer Questions without proper nouns

These questions are in order of how long they should take you to answer correctly. In addition, by answering more local questions first, you will also gain a greater knowledge of the passage as a whole, which should give you a greater chance at answering the later global questions correctly!

Note: When answering any question, circle the correct answer in your book. Do not put them on your answer sheet immediately, as you are prone to make a bubbling error when you do questions out of order.

4. Bubble in your answers – With a minute remaining, you should record the answers to the questions you were able to answer in your booklet, and guess on any questions you were unable to get to.

Now that we've reviewed the steps, let's take a look at this strategy in action on a Natural Science passage.

Passage IV

NATURAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from *Consider the Eel* by Richard Schweid (©2002 by Richard Schweid)

The known facts, as they are pretty much universally accepted among biologists and naturalists today, are that all the eels in all the rivers of eastern North America and the Caribbean countries, and all the eels in all the rivers of eastern and western Europe, are born in the same area of the Sargasso Sea, a huge area within the Atlantic Ocean, between Bermuda and the Azores, the surface of which is frequently covered with sargassum seaweed. In fact, the word “Sargasso” comes from the Portuguese sargaço, meaning seaweed. The sea is about 2,000 miles long and 1,000 miles wide, set off from the surrounding waters of the Atlantic by strong currents. It includes the area known in popular legend as the Bermuda Triangle.

Eels hatch in the Sargasso as larvae and are carried by the ocean currents to either Europe or the United States, a journey that can cover thousands of miles and take years. Where they end up depends on which of two similar species they belong to. Those that are *Anguilla anguilla* invariably wind up in European rivers, and those that enter North American rivers always belong to the species *Anguilla rostrata*. The first person to find eel larvae in the Sargasso Sea was Danish researcher Johannes Schmidt, who published his findings in 1924, after spending 18 years hauling nets in search of eels.

The larvae of both species are shaped like small oval leaves and are called leptocephali. Each leptocephalus begins to assume the form of a tiny eel, called an elver or glass eel, when it gets close to the coasts of either Europe or the Americas. By the time it reaches brackish water, where fresh and salt water mix,

it is thin and transparent, hardly bigger than a hair, with a pair of eyes like black dots at one end.

From the estuaries and mouths of rivers, the tiny eels frequently continue upstream, particularly the females, who sometimes go great distances inland. American eels have been found as far up the Mississippi River system as the rivers of Iowa. They keep going upriver until something tells them they’ve reached home, and then they stop. Whatever it is that signals to eels that they are home is definitive—they settle in and live there for as long as 20 years, growing up to a yard long before beginning their journey back to the Sargasso Sea. Scientists determine an eel’s age using a microscope to read the growth rings of its otolith—a small, hard calcium deposit at the base of its skull.

In preparation for the return journey to the Sargasso, sexually mature female eels feed voraciously and change color from the muddy-yellow/green of adult eels, often called yellow eels, to a darker green on top and snow-white on their bellies. At this stage, they are called silver eels. They swim downriver in the fall, on the first leg of their journey to the Sargasso, and when they reach estuarine waters, they rest, completing their final transformation as silver eels. They will have eaten heavily and will be about 28 percent body fat. They will never eat again, and their digestive systems will atrophy. Their pupils will expand and turn blue. They will need a new kind of sight adapted to the depths of the sea, where there is little light. They will also have to go through a drastic adjustment, via osmosis, in their blood chemistry, to prepare for the tremendous change in water pressure, going from some 14 pounds of fresh-water pressure per inch of their bodies to over a ton of ocean pressure per inch. Once they are back in the Sargasso Sea, the females produce eggs for the males to fertilize, and then the adults die.

At least that is what today’s marine biologists and naturalists tell us, although adult eels have never been seen

swimming, reproducing, or dying in the Sargasso. In fact, live adult eels have never been seen there at all. The only two
70 adult eels ever reported in the Sargasso Sea were dead, found in the stomachs of other fish. The eel's migration back to its birthplace and what it actually does when it gets there are assumed to take place far below the water's surface and, as of the year 2001, were still completely unobserved.
75 However, the eel larvae—the leptocephali that Schmidt found in the Sargasso—were so small that it was certain they had been born recently, and nearby. Such small larvae have never been seen elsewhere, and while eels have never been observed reproducing in the Sargasso, they have
80 never been seen doing so anywhere else either. Scientists believe the larvae hatch out of eggs at a depth of 100–300 yards and rise slowly toward the light at the sea's surface.

31. One of the main ideas established by the passage is that:
- A. researchers have nearly exhausted their resources after spending decades investigating the Sargasso Sea.
 - B. significant gaps still remain in researchers' understanding of the life cycle of eels.
 - C. eels live their entire lives in the Sargasso Sea, but no one has ever seen them there.
 - D. female eels turn into silver eels toward the end of their lives.
32. Learning about which of the following had the largest impact on scientists' current understanding of where eels breed?
- A. The direction in which ocean currents carry eel larvae
 - B. The relationship of the yellow eel stage to the silver eel stage
 - C. Schmidt's discovery of eel larvae in the Sargasso Sea
 - D. The adult eels found in the stomachs of other fish
33. The main purpose of the fourth paragraph (lines 34–47) is to describe the:
- A. eels' transition from freshwater to the ocean.
 - B. method of determining the age of eels.
 - C. complexity of the Mississippi River system.
 - D. river stage of the eel life cycle.
34. The passage states that the Sargasso Sea is set off from the rest of the Atlantic Ocean by:
- A. the Azores.
 - B. several Caribbean countries.
 - C. powerful winds.
 - D. strong currents
35. The passage notes that the Sargasso Sea includes:
- A. the eastern North American shore.
 - B. the Bermuda Triangle.
 - C. certain coastal estuaries.
 - D. the mouth of the Mississippi River.
36. As it is used in line 13, the word popular most nearly means:
- A. well liked.
 - B. commonly known.
 - C. scientifically accepted.
 - D. most admired.
37. As it is used in line 45, the word read most nearly means to:
- A. learn from print.
 - B. observe.
 - C. think about.
 - D. predict.

38. The passage indicates that female eels' pupils expand and turn blue because the eels:
- A.** must adapt to see in an environment with much less light than they are used to.
 - B.** are about to undergo a change in their blood chemistry.
 - C.** no longer need to be able to recognize food sources since they have stopped eating.
 - D.** need to be able to recognize the male eels that will fertilize their eggs.
39. The passage most strongly emphasizes that the process of osmosis is necessary for the eels' transition from:
- A.** shallower to deeper water.
 - B.** feeding to nonfeeding.
 - C.** immature to mature form.
 - D.** elver to yellow eel.
40. According to the passage, which of the following characteristics of the eel larvae found by Schmidt provided the best evidence that the larvae were hatched in the Sargasso Sea?
- A.** Size
 - B.** Shape
 - C.** Color
 - D.** Species

The WONDER- FUL WIZARD of OZ

BY
L. FRANK BAUM
PICTURES BY
W. W. DENSLOW



To learn to read is to
light a fire

— Victor Hugo

THE INSIDE OUT STRATEGY – A WALKTHROUGH

Step 1: Read the Introduction

We don't learn too much from the introduction of the passage, but we do learn that it will be about eels. Exciting!

Step 2: Blaze Through the Passage

As you can see in the passage, we have circled a vast number of proper nouns to use for questions. It may seem like a lot of circled items at some places, but we want to make sure we are thorough in this step. Missing a proper noun and having it mentioned in a question turns a potentially easy question into an extremely time-consuming one!

As for the information we can gather while skimming quickly, we don't have to extract too much information. It looks like the passage is discussing the life cycle of eels. Again, don't worry about not having more information than that!

Step 3: Strategically Attack the Questions

Let's separate the questions into the levels we created above:

1. Vocabulary in Context Questions: 36 and 37

These are questions that you should be able to answer quickly and correctly with *extremely* little knowledge of the passage:

36. As it is used in line 13, the word *popular* most nearly means:
- A. well liked.
 - B. commonly known.
 - C. scientifically accepted.
 - D. most admired.

In the sentence “It includes the area known in *popular* legend of the Bermuda Triangle”, popular most nearly means commonly known. Answer choice B is correct.

37. As it is used in line 45, the word *read* most nearly means to:

- A. learn from print.
- B. observe.
- C. think about.
- D. predict.

In the sentence “Scientists determine an eel’s age using a microscope to read the growth rings of its otolith”, read most nearly means observe. Answer choice B is correct.

2. Questions with line references - NONE

This is an important distinction to make. Though question 33 involves a line reference, it is actually a Main Idea question! Don’t fall for this trap.

3. Refer Questions with proper nouns in the question or answer choices: 32, 34, 35, 40

This is where circling keywords pays off! We should be able to cycle through our circled terms to answer these questions.

32. Learning about which of the following had the largest impact on scientists’ current understanding of where eels breed?

- A. The direction in which ocean currents carry eel larvae
- B. The relationship of the yellow eel stage to the silver eel stage
- C. Schmidt’s discovery of eel larvae in the Sargasso Sea
- D. The adult eels found in the stomachs of other fish

We don't have a lot to go off of here, but we do see that Schmidt and Sargasso Sea are mentioned in choice C. We circled Schmidt in line 29, which says that Schmidt found larvae in the Sargasso Sea after searching for 18 years. Good enough! Let's choose answer choice C and move on.

34. The passage states that the Sargasso Sea is set off from the rest of the Atlantic Ocean by:
- A. the Azores.
 - B. several Caribbean countries.
 - C. powerful winds.
 - D. strong currents.

We need to find a place in the passage that mentions the Sargasso Sea and the Atlantic Ocean close to each other. This occurs in the first paragraph in multiple places. We see in line 7 that the Sargasso Sea is a “huge area within the Atlantic Ocean, between Bermuda and the Azores”, but that does not answer the question. We also circled “Atlantic” in line 12, where the passage says that the sea is set off from surrounding waters by strong currents. There is our answer! Answer D is correct.

35. The passage notes that the Sargasso Sea includes:
- A. the eastern North American shore.
 - B. the Bermuda Triangle.
 - C. certain coastal estuaries.
 - D. the mouth of the Mississippi River.

After answering question 36, question 35 becomes MUCH easier! The correct answer is located in the sentence we already interpreted. Answer choice B is correct. If you didn't recognize this, simply look for the proper nouns in the answer choices to determine whether each answer choice is correct or incorrect.

40. According to this passage, which of the following characteristics of the eel larvae found by Schmidt provided the best evidence that the larvae were hatched in the Sargasso Sea?
- A. Size
 - B. Shape
 - C. Color
 - D. Species

In this question, the proper nouns “Schmidt” and “Sargasso Sea” are mentioned. Schmidt is mentioned in line 24 as the first person to find eel larvae, which doesn’t address the question. He is also mentioned in line 79 along with “Sargasso”, and the sentence mentions that larvae were so small that they had to have been born recently and nearby. Boom! Answer choice A is correct.

4. Main Idea/Generalization Questions – 33, 31

You will inevitably have to do some guessing on these questions, but you should try to eliminate some wrong answer choices based on the passage or your knowledge of common types of wrong answer choices. Note that we will attack question 33 first, because it only asks about a portion of the passage and has a line reference.

33. The main purpose of the fourth paragraph (lines 34-47) is to describe the:
- A. eels’ transition from freshwater to the ocean.
 - B. method of determining the age of eels.
 - C. complexity of the Mississippi River system.
 - D. river stage of the eel life cycle.

This main idea question only relates to a paragraph, so it should be pretty manageable. Answer choice C is not related to eels, so eliminate it. We know that the age of eels is mentioned because we read the final sentence of this paragraph in question 37, but it is only at the end of the paragraph. Similarly, we know that we mention the Mississippi River in the paragraph and rivers in Iowa, but we don’t see any mentions of an ocean. Answer choice D mentions the life cycle that is part of the main idea of the whole passage, and mentions rivers, so let’s go with that.

31. One of the main ideas established by the passage is that:
- A. researchers have nearly exhausted their resources after spending decades investigating the Sargasso Sea.
 - B. significant gaps still remain in researchers' understanding of the life cycle of eels.
 - C. eels live their entire lives in the Sargasso Sea, but no one has ever seen them there.
 - D. female eels turn into silver eels toward the end of their lives.

This is a classic main idea question pertaining to the entire passage, so let's try and eliminate some answer choices based on our limited knowledge of the main idea: that we are discussing the life cycle of eels. Answer choice A is focused on the researchers' efforts. We know that we only have one researcher mentioned, and we never saw anything about not having any further resources, so let's eliminate it. Answer choice B makes a bit more sense: It mentions the lifestyle, and says that we have a lot more to learn. We can't eliminate B just yet. Answer choice C uses extreme language (entire) and we have a bunch of different places, such as Mississippi River, circled. Let's eliminate it. Finally, answer choice D is a rather small detail, and we have not seen anything to support it in our admittedly sparse review of the passage. B seems to be best, so let's circle it in our books and move on.

5. Refer Questions without proper nouns –38, 39

Chances are that, at this point, you will only have enough time to come up with a super quick guess to these questions. We have no idea where these answers are in the passage either. But that's okay! We've already answered 8 out of 10 questions correctly. Any correct guesses here are a bonus.

Step 4: Bubble in your Answers

Starting with question 31, bubble in your answer choices. Don't forget to put in your guesses to Questions 38 and 39!

BASICS:

4 passages and 40 questions
Time: 35 minutes
Average time per passage: 8:45

Order of Passages:

1. Literary Narrative
2. Social Sciences
3. Humanities
4. Natural Sciences

KEY RESOURCES:

[ACT Reading Curriculum](#)

[ACT Reading Quizzes](#)

Question Types:

Refer Questions: require you to locate information that is clearly stated in the passage.

Reasoning Questions: require you to use your interpretation/understanding of the passage to answer complex questions.

GENERAL STRATEGY:

1. Read the introduction to extract information regarding the author, time period, and definitions of any obscure terms that are used in the passage.
2. Read the passage in 3-5 minutes and circle all proper nouns, dates, numbers, and other key terms.
 - a. Your overall goal is to determine the main idea of a passage and how that main idea is developed throughout the passage.
3. While reading, annotate and make sure you understand:

<p><i>Literary Narrative</i> Character Traits and Plot Character opinions & feelings Relationships between characters Narrator's tone</p>	<p><i>Social Studies, Humanities, Natural Science</i> Main Idea of body paragraphs Author's goal or intent Author's feelings toward topics he/she discusses</p>
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4. Read each question carefully and determine what the answer is in your own words.
5. Use your annotations, circled words or line references to locate necessary information.
6. Use the answer you came up with to eliminate wrong answer choices.
 - a. If any part of an answer choice is incorrect, eliminate it.
7. If you cannot eliminate three answer choices, select the best answer choice from those remaining and move on to the next question. Do not fixate on any one question for longer than one minute!

EXTRA TIPS:

1. Embrace your inner cynic! Your goal is to find the least wrong answer choice. You are much more likely to find the correct answer when looking for what is wrong with each answer choice rather than what is right.
2. Make sure you fully understand the topic sentence of each body paragraph. When in doubt, refer to this sentence when answering a question that pertains to the paragraph.
3. Keep track of your timing, and have a backup plan! If you take too long on one passage and are short on time, try the Inside Out Strategy for the Natural Science Passage.
4. Don't give half of an effort when circling key words. Being thorough can change any difficult and time-consuming Refer question into a quick and easy one.
5. Beware of Time Wasters!
 - a. Any Refer question for which you cannot quickly locate the answer in the passage.
 - b. Any question that has an EXCEPT in it.
6. If you are faced with a Refer question without a key term that you would have circled, check if any answer choices contain key terms.
7. Beware of answer choices that contain extreme language (words like always, never, all, none, completely) or are outside the scope of the passage (these usually sound too good to be true).
8. Keep an eye out for predictive language and things listed in threes (very helpful for EXCEPT questions).