Digital SAT Deep Dive: Reading Questions

A free, unofficial study guide to Craft and Structure, Information and Ideas, and Expression of Ideas. For real practice, use official Bluebook tests and the College Board Student Question Bank.

1. How the Reading Questions Work

- Passages are short, usually about 25 to 150 words, with one question each.
- Reading & Writing has 54 questions across two modules of 27.
- You need no outside knowledge. The correct answer is always supported by the passage.
- Question families covered here:
- Craft and Structure: words in context, text structure and purpose, cross-text connections.
- Information and Ideas: central ideas and details, inferences, command of evidence (text and data).
- Expression of Ideas: transitions and rhetorical synthesis.

2. Five Golden Rules

1. The correct answer is supported by the passage, not by what you know or believe.
2. Read the question first so you know your task.
3. Predict an answer before you look at the options whenever you can.
4. Eliminate answers that are too extreme, off topic, only partly true, reversed, or unsupported.
5. If two options seem right, return to the exact wording of the question.

3. Craft and Structure

Words in context

- Task: choose the word that best fits the meaning and tone of the sentence.
- Method: cover the choices, read the sentence, predict a simple word, then pick the closest option.
- Watch for secondary meanings, where a familiar word is used in a less familiar sense.
- Look for clue words such as although, because, however, and so that. They tell you whether the missing word agrees with or opposes the nearby ideas.

Example: The scientist's explanation was so ___ that even students new to the topic could follow every step. A) opaque B) lucid C) elaborate D) tentative.

Answer: B. The clue is that new students could follow every step, so the word means clear.

Lucid means clear.

Text structure and purpose

- Stems: What is the main purpose of the text? What is the function of the underlined sentence? Which choice best describes the overall structure?
- Method: summarize each sentence in a few words, then name the job it does (introduce, give an example, contrast, argue, explain, concede).
- Useful purpose verbs: describe, argue, explain, compare, introduce, challenge.

Example: Beekeepers have long believed that bees prefer sweet, bright flowers. A recent field study, however, found that bees often chose pale, nearly scentless blooms when nectar was richer there. The result suggests that nectar quality may outweigh appearance.

Question: Which choice best describes the overall structure?

A) It states a common belief, presents a study that challenges it, and offers a conclusion.

B) It defines a term and gives three examples.

C) It tells a story and ends with advice.

D) It compares two studies and favors neither.

Answer: A. The word however marks the shift from belief to challenge.

Cross-text connections

- Two short texts appear. The question often asks how the author of Text 2 would respond to a claim in Text 1.
- Method: state each author's position in one line, then name the relationship (agree, disagree, qualify, add evidence).

Example: Text 1: A critic argues that public libraries are becoming obsolete because books are available online.

Text 2: A librarian notes that libraries also provide internet access, quiet workspace, and classes that many residents cannot get elsewhere.

Question: How would the librarian most likely respond to the critic?

Answer: By arguing that libraries serve needs beyond lending books.

4. Information and Ideas

Central ideas and details

- The main idea covers the whole passage. Wrong answers usually cover only one detail or go beyond what the passage says.
- Ask: what would be a good title for this passage?

Example: Researchers recorded how often small birds visited feeders placed at different heights. Feeders hung at two meters drew twice as many visits as those at ground level, likely because the birds felt safer from predators.

Main idea: Small birds visited elevated feeders more often, possibly because they feel safer there.

Inferences

- Stem: Which choice most logically completes the text?
- Method: find the claim and choose the conclusion that is directly supported, nothing more.

Example: Coastal towns in the region report fewer storm injuries since adopting early warning systems, but the number of storms has stayed the same. This suggests that the early warning systems ___

A) have no effect on injuries

B) help residents prepare before storms arrive

C) cause storms to weaken

D) were adopted in every town.

Answer: B. Storms are unchanged but injuries fell, so the systems must help people prepare.

Command of evidence (text)

- Stems ask which finding would support or weaken a claim, or illustrate a general statement.
- Method: restate the claim in your own words. The correct answer must connect to every part of the claim.

Example claim: Reading aloud to children improves vocabulary growth. Which finding most directly supports the claim?

A) Children who were read to daily learned more new words over a year than children who were not.

B) Many parents enjoy reading to children.

C) Libraries lend more picture books each year.

D) Some children prefer cartoons.

Answer: A. It links the cause (reading aloud) to the effect (vocabulary growth) with a comparison.

Command of evidence (quantitative)

- Check the title, axis labels, units, and time period before you read the options.
- Match each answer to exact data points. Beware of options that are only partly supported.

Example data: average daily museum visitors were 120 on Monday, 135 on Tuesday, 150 on Wednesday, 210 on Thursday, and 290 on Friday. Which statement is supported?

A) Friday attendance was more than twice Monday's.

B) Wednesday had the lowest attendance.

C) Thursday attendance was lower than Tuesday's.

D) Attendance was constant all week.

Answer: A. 290 is more than twice 120 (240).

5. Expression of Ideas

Transitions

- Decide the relationship between the two ideas first, then choose the word.
- Contrast: however, nevertheless, yet, in contrast, on the other hand.
- Addition: moreover, furthermore, also, in addition.
- Cause and effect: therefore, as a result, consequently, thus.
- Example: for instance, for example, specifically.
- Sequence: first, then, finally, meanwhile, subsequently.
- Concession: admittedly, granted.

Example: Maria trained for months. ___ she finished the marathon in under four hours.

A) However, B) As a result, C) For example, D) Meanwhile,

Answer: B. Her training caused the result.

Rhetorical synthesis

- Stem: A student took notes (bullet points) and wants to accomplish a goal. Which choice best does it?
- Method: underline the goal (emphasize X, introduce Y to an unfamiliar audience, compare A and B). Choose the sentence that uses only the relevant notes and uses them accurately.

Example notes: The red panda lives in the eastern Himalayas. It eats mostly bamboo. It is classified as endangered. Goal: emphasize the red panda's conservation status.

A) The red panda, which eats mostly bamboo, lives in the eastern Himalayas.

B) The red panda is found in the Himalayas.

C) Although it lives in the eastern Himalayas and eats mostly bamboo, the red panda is classified as endangered.

D) The red panda eats mostly bamboo.

Answer: C. It is the only choice that features the endangered status.

6. Wrong-Answer Patterns

- Too extreme: uses words like always, never, completely, or only when the passage is more cautious.
- Off topic: true in real life but not discussed in the passage.
- Half right: starts correctly and then adds something unsupported.
- Reversed: says the opposite of the passage.
- Too narrow: describes one detail instead of the whole passage.
- Too broad: claims more than the passage supports.

7. Pacing Tips

- Aim for about 70 seconds per question.
- Use Bluebook's annotation tool and the eliminate-answer feature.
- Flag a stubborn question, make your best guess, and move on. You can come back within the module.
- Do not reread the entire passage multiple times. Read the question, then target the relevant sentence.

8. Practice Drills

1. The mayor's response was deliberately ___, avoiding any direct answer to the reporter's question.

A) evasive B) generous C) blunt D) enthusiastic

2. Despite her ___ appearance, the new coach quickly proved to be demanding.

A) mild B) severe C) athletic D) formal

3. Passage: Many people assume that cities are always noisier than rural areas. Yet measurements taken over a week at three farms showed average noise levels comparable to a quiet city street, driven largely by machinery and livestock. What is the main function of the second sentence?

A) It offers evidence that challenges a common assumption.

B) It repeats the first sentence.

C) It describes how farms are built.

D) It defines noise.

4. Passage: Students who took short walking breaks between study sessions scored higher on a memory test than students who studied continuously. The researchers suggest the breaks gave the brain time to consolidate what had been learned. Which best states the main idea?

A) Walking is more effective than studying.

B) Short breaks may improve memory after studying.

C) All students should walk daily.

D) Memory tests are unreliable.

5. All of the plants in the greenhouse were watered on the same schedule, yet only those near the south window flowered. This suggests that flowering in these plants depends on ___

A) watering frequency B) light exposure C) the greenhouse's size D) the plants' color

6. Claim: Urban green spaces lower residents' stress. Which finding best supports the claim?

A) Residents who lived within a five-minute walk of a park reported lower stress scores than residents who did not.

B) Parks require regular maintenance.

C) Some cities have more parks than others.

D) Stress is common in busy workplaces.

7. The experiment's first trial failed to produce a result. ___ the team adjusted the temperature and tried again.

A) For example, B) Consequently, C) Similarly, D) Nevertheless,

8. Notes: The library opened in 1925. It has 40,000 books. It is housed in a former train station. Goal: highlight the building's unusual origin.

A) The library, which opened in 1925, has 40,000 books.

B) Housed in a former train station, the library opened in 1925.

C) With 40,000 books, the library is large.

D) The library opened in the 1920s.

Answers

1. A. Avoiding a direct answer describes an evasive response.

2. A. Despite signals contrast: a mild appearance, yet demanding.

3. A. Yet introduces evidence against the assumption.

4. B. It covers the whole finding and keeps the researchers' cautious tone.

5. B. Watering was the same, so the difference points to light near the window.

6. A. It connects green space proximity to lower stress with a comparison.

7. B. The failure caused the adjustment.

8. B. It puts the unusual origin first.

Next step: practice 20 to 30 official questions from each family in the College Board Student Question Bank, and write one line explaining why each wrong option is wrong.