

PSAT READING TEST



TEST OVERVIEW

- First section of the test
- 60 minutes long
- 47 questions total
 - approximately 9 questions **defining words in context**
 - approximately 4 questions on **graph analysis**
 - approximately 10 questions related to **finding evidence in the passage**
 - remaining 24 questions a **mixture of sentence level, paragraph level, and whole passage comprehension**

PASSAGES

- 1 fiction passage (a short story or excerpt from a novel)
- 1 social science passage (sociology, economics, psychology, etc.)
- 1 “great global conversation” (typically a **historical document** related to the ideas of democracy)
- **2 science passages** (could be articles or book excerpts about biology, geology, astronomy, etc.)
- **1 passage will be made of two smaller selections that must be compared.**
- Questions are in random order of difficulty. What does that mean for you?
- Questions generally follow the order in the passage.

TIPS FOR ANSWERING QUESTIONS

- Try to answer the question *before* looking at the answer choices. Come up with a general idea first. This saves you time from having to fully consider every possible choice.
- Correct answers are 100% right. Small flaws, sometimes even one word, can keep an answer from being the right choice.
- Trust yourself. You should take time when answering the questions, but if you feel confident about your choice, move on.

PACING

- In general, you should spend:
- 5 minutes reading each passage
- 7 minutes answering questions

BUT

If a passage is easier for you, you should aim to finish it more quickly so that you can spend more time on the more difficult passages and questions.

THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE STUDENTS TROUBLE

- The text may use an unusual definition for a commonly used word.

For instance, in the following sentences, what is the meaning of “criminal?”

Currently rates are next to nothing, which was a fine solution during the crisis of 2008 and 2009. But, the stock market no longer is in a state of crisis; in fact, both equities and bonds are criminally priced.

- A. Exorbitantly
- B. Unlawfully
- C. Illicitly
- D. Feloniously

THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE STUDENTS TROUBLE

- Don't get caught up in the small details when being asked for the bigger picture.

Ex: What is the primary purpose of the paragraph in lines 17-22?

Some of the answer choices may provide a summary or ideas from excerpts. Look for the one that provides the larger purpose.

THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE STUDENTS TROUBLE

- Where is the evidence questions
- There will be approximately **9** “**where is the evidence**” follow-up questions.
- If you are having trouble answering a primary purpose question, you can look at the “where is the evidence” question that follows it for clues.

THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE STUDENTS TROUBLE

- Students pick an answer that generally fits instead of one that fits *precisely*.

Ex: The general attitude of the author of passage 1 toward the state of the stock market in 2016 can best be described as

- A. Steadily optimistic
- B. Mostly apathetic
- C. Generally concerned
- D. Totally panicked

The last three are negative, but the student needs to figure out which most accurately describes the tone of the passage.

FINAL TIPS

- Don't try to remember everything when you read. You **may** underline and annotate, but it's most important to gain a good, general understanding. You can go back and look for details based on the questions.
- Some like to read in a certain order. For instance, if I'm comfortable with science, maybe I will do those first to gain confidence and momentum and to make sure that I get the most correct answers out of what I'm good at instead of running out of time. (If this stresses you out, though, going in order is just fine.)
- Know that there is a right answer. There are no "trick questions." One piece of "contamination" can ruin the whole answer.