

# 2023-2024 ELA

Get Ready for the SHSAT ELA Exam:  
A STEM-BASED APPROACH



**TestPrepSHSAT**  
STUDY SMARTER

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## Introduction

### Explanation of the SHSAT

The Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) is a standardized test that is used to determine admission into specialized high schools in New York City. If you are in 6th–9th grade and are interested in attending one of these schools, it is important to understand what the SHSAT is and how it works.

The SHSAT is a two-part test that is divided into English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics sections. The ELA section is divided into three parts: Revising/Editing Part A designed to test your grammar and syntax, Revising/Editing Part B to test your organization and writing style skills with passage related questions, and Reading with six separate fiction and non-fiction passages designed to assess your comprehension and ability to analyze information in poetry, literary excerpts, history, science, social science, biographies, and more.

To prepare for the ELA section of the SHSAT, it is important to develop strong reading comprehension strategies. This includes learning how to read actively, make inferences, and identify main ideas and supporting details. You should also understand the elements of good writing, such as organization, clarity, and coherence. **In short, you will need to learn the exam design and related approaches to consistently identify correct answers. Unlike math, quantity of practice exams will not easily lead to improvement** unless you develop a deeper understanding of the reading exam.

In addition, it is important to have a strong grasp of grammar and syntax. This includes understanding basic grammar rules, such as subject-verb agreement, and being able to identify and correct common errors, such as run-on sentences and fragments.

To succeed on the SHSAT, it is also important to develop effective test-taking strategies. This includes managing your time carefully and pacing yourself throughout the test. It is also helpful to practice with SHSAT-specific exercises to become familiar with the types of questions you will encounter on the test.

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Finally, the SHSAT requires critical thinking skills, which involve analyzing information, making connections, and drawing conclusions. This is an important skill to develop not just for the SHSAT, but for academic success in general.

In conclusion, the SHSAT is an important test for students who hope to attend specialized high schools in New York City and the new ELA exam is, more than ever, a key differentiating factor for success, not merely a breakeven result to complement your singular focus on math. By developing strong reading comprehension strategies, writing skills, grammar and syntax knowledge, test-taking strategies, and critical thinking skills, you can increase your chances of success on the ELA section of the SHSAT.

## Importance of preparing for the ELA section

The English Language Arts (ELA) section of the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test (SHSAT) is a critical component of the exam. The ELA section measures your ability to understand and interpret various texts, modify sentences, and apply grammar and syntax effectively. Preparing for this section is not only helpful but also essential to achieving an elite score on the overall SHSAT exam.

One of the most important reasons to prepare for the ELA section is to improve your reading comprehension skills; stand-alone reading questions comprise 40-45+ out of 57 ELA questions. The SHSAT reading section requires you to read and analyze a variety of texts, including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Without adequate preparation, you may find it challenging to understand the content and answer the related questions. Therefore, it's crucial to develop strong reading comprehension strategies that will help you comprehend the texts and answer the questions with accuracy. These skills require an understanding of the exam design, including repetitive question types, wrong answer types, and the knowledge to solve each.

Another reason to prepare for the ELA section is to enhance your writing and organization skills. You'll be required to evaluate and modify one or two passages to combine, order, eliminate sentences or even find the best fit between related ideas. Good writing skills will help you organize your thoughts and structure the passages. Preparing for the Revising/Editing Part B section (5-10 questions) will also help improve your chances of scoring high on the reading section where you will encounter many of the same concepts.

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Grammar and syntax are also important when it comes to the ELA section only less so as grammar related questions typically comprise only 4-6 ELA exam questions out of 57. The SHSAT Revising/Editing Part A section assesses your ability to apply grammar rules and use syntax correctly. Developing your grammar and syntax will help you write clear and concise sentences and paragraphs, which are essential for effective communication.

Test-taking strategies are crucial for any exam, and the SHSAT is no exception. Preparing for the ELA section involves learning how to manage your time effectively, pace yourself, and remain focused throughout the test. Critical thinking skills are also essential to answer the questions accurately.

In conclusion, preparing for the ELA section of the SHSAT is crucial for any 6th-9th grade student who wants to achieve success on the exam. Reading comprehension strategies, writing skills, grammar and syntax, test-taking strategies, SHSAT-specific practice exercises, time management, and critical thinking skills are all essential components of effective preparation for this section. By mastering these skills, you'll increase your chances of getting accepted into a specialized high school and pave the way for a successful academic future.

## Overview of book contents

The SHSAT, or Specialized High Schools Admissions Test, is an exam taken at the end of October each year by over 25,000 8th-grade students in New York City and several thousand 9th graders who wish to apply for admission to one of the city's nine specialized high schools. These schools are known for providing an outstanding education and preparing students for top-tier colleges and universities. This book is specifically designed for 6th-9th grade students who are planning to take the SHSAT. If you're an aspiring student looking to get into one of these schools, then you'll need to be well-prepared for the English Language Arts section of the SHSAT.

## What makes this guide unique?

There are numerous practice books and resources for SHSAT math, but comparatively few resources for the ELA exam section, which is striking to us at TestPrepSHSAT because the new ELA exam has shifted in importance from an afterthought in overall exam strategy to a leading way for students to excel overall. Moreover, the few ELA books available seem to follow the math-centric prep model of quantity, quantity, quantity. Reading success depends on exam design and understanding. Unlike math, most students could repeat dozens of practice exams and still improve very little because they do not understand the underlying principles and will not pick them up in most cases from individual answer explanations.

We have taken a STEM-based approach to diagnose and understand the new ELA reading exam. The new SHSAT ELA exam has changed in ways you need to understand to be effective on the exam. For instance, the presentation format for reading questions is almost entirely different than the old exam and many guides still refer to the old prompts. You can improve your score significantly by understanding how these new questions are formatted and, most importantly, how to answer each correctly with greater consistency. Students spend thousands of dollars on tutoring courses and fail to learn these lessons about the new exam design.

Our objective is to create a study guide in the spirit of Erica Meltzer's reading series for the SAT (the most popular and acclaimed reading guide for the SAT). Meltzer's reading books do not provide full-length practice tests or advertise 1,000+ problems. The focus is on exam design and understanding. The objective is to teach the exam through principles and related examples--quality, not quantity.

This SHSAT ELA guide is a perfect complement to SHSAT Academy Pro, our powerful SHSAT study platform available for only a few dollars. If you want to practice with dozens of official and more challenging math and ELA SHSAT exams, capture your results real-time, and access unparalleled analysis of your weaknesses and strengths along various metrics, then Academy Pro should be your first choice for SHSAT prep. It is, in our opinion, a "no brainer." Furthermore, it is a great segue way to our innovative \$100-150 monthly topic based tutoring classes. Buy only the services you need for however long you need them and save hundreds if not thousands of dollars on your SHSAT prep while maintaining the highest quality standards and admission rates. Our mission is to help you study smarter.



# Get Ready for the SHSAT: English Language Arts Edition for 6th-9th Grade Students

The first section of this book focuses on the most important reading section of the ELA exam and related strategies for the SHSAT. This instruction includes tips on how to read and analyze passages, how to identify key information, and how to approach different types of questions and consistently find the correct answer.

The second section of the book is all about writing style and organization skills for the SHSAT. This covers everything from basic skills, such as sentence structure and paragraph development, to more advanced topics like argumentative writing and literary analysis.

The third section of the book is dedicated to grammar and syntax for the SHSAT. This includes a review of key grammar rules, such as subject-verb agreement and punctuation, as well as tips on how to identify and correct common grammar errors.

Throughout the book, you'll also find tips and strategies for developing critical thinking skills. These skills are essential for success on the SHSAT, as they will help you to analyze passages, identify key information, and make informed decisions about how to answer questions. Feel free to subscribe to Academy Pro at [testprepshsat.com](https://testprepshsat.com) to practice on official exam problems while you digest the information in this book.

Overall, this book combined with an Academy Pro subscription is a comprehensive guide to preparing for the English Language Arts section of the SHSAT. Whether you're a 6th-9th grade student looking to get into one of New York City's specialized high schools, or simply looking to improve your reading comprehension, writing, and critical thinking skills, this book will help you succeed.

## Reading Strategies for the SHSAT

### Understanding the format

The reading comprehension section of the SHSAT tests your ability to understand and analyze written passages. To succeed in this section, it's important to understand the format of the questions and how they are presented.

The reading comprehension section consists of multiple passages, each with a set of accompanying questions. The passages may come from a variety of sources, including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. The questions will ask you to identify main ideas, draw inferences, make connections between ideas, and analyze the author's purpose and tone.

The questions are presented in a multiple-choice format, with four possible answers for each question. It's important to remember that there is only one correct answer, so take your time and read each question carefully before selecting your answer.

When reading the passages, it's important to pay attention to details and make notes as you go along. Look for key words and phrases that indicate important ideas or themes. You can also underline or highlight important sentences or passages to help you remember them.

To prepare for the reading comprehension section, it's important to practice reading a variety of texts and answering questions about them. This will help you develop the critical thinking and analytical skills necessary to succeed on the SHSAT.

When taking the test, it's important to manage your time wisely. You will have a limited amount of time to read each passage and answer the accompanying questions, so make sure to pace yourself accordingly. Don't spend too much time on any one question, but also don't rush through the questions too quickly.

Overall, the reading comprehension section of the SHSAT is designed to test your ability to understand and analyze written passages. By understanding the format of the questions and practicing your critical thinking skills, you can succeed on this section of the test.

## Lesson 1 – How to Study for the ELA Reading Exam

The SHSAT reading exam fundamentally tests two broad areas:

### Summarize the ideas from the text + Identify the relationships between ideas

a) How well do you understand what the story is about?

**Literal comprehension** – The first challenge is to understand what the story is about. What is the argument? Can you effectively identify particular factual information from the passage when asked? Do you recognize the ideas presented by the specific words and phrases?

b) How well do you understand the organization of ideas in the story?

**Rhetorical strategy** – SHSAT reading is not just a test about what the story says. Few students realize it is also a test of how the various parts of the text are constructed to convey ideas. Can you identify how various ideas in a passage relate to each other? What does each part of the text do? Fortunately, reading for function is an acquirable skill; it just takes practice. In this course, you will learn to succinctly summarize the ideas from the text and identify how key transition words and punctuation can be used to help identify the relationships of ideas.

## 1a) Evidence Based Reading Exams

### Evaluate Evidence

One of the most important skills that you'll need to master for the SHSAT English Language Arts section is the ability to evaluate evidence. This means that you need to be able to read a passage and determine whether the information presented is accurate, credible, and relevant to the question at hand.

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Standardized reading exams like the SHSAT, state exams, or the SAT are all “evidence-based.” That description means the exam is more objective than most people realize. Students are not rewarded for speculative creativity in the same way they might be in literature class. **Every correct answer on a standardized reading exam must be supported by evidence in the text, whether directly or indirectly by valid inference. A plausible option is not by itself sufficient to be the correct answer.** The correct answer must be the one evidenced by the text. Beyond assuring the validity of the test itself, one benefit of this design is that students can learn the exam and techniques to arrive at the objective “evidenced” answers. You do not have to be born with special literary talents.

## Avoid Biases

This course will begin to teach you techniques to improve your literal comprehension. For starters, it may help to focus your reading analysis on the literal words or text and let that guide your summary of ideas. Pretend you are Sherlock Holmes looking for clues and driven only by the evidence, not personal biases or false assumptions. Be critical. This advice may sound simple (it is), but too many students start with a different frame of mind, projecting common assumptions or jumping to conclusions that may not be in the passage. For example, you may assume a friend who failed to help another friend out in time of trouble was “neglectful” or “mean” instead of “considerate” enough to follow the advice given to her by friends, according to the text, to “butt out” of their business.

Let the evidence guide you. If you ever asked a perfect scorer on the SAT reading exam, “How he/she did it,” you will typically get an answer like, “I followed along with the stories and answered what they asked.” At first blush, this answer might seem disappointing for anyone searching for that special secret, but it is actually extremely insightful. Chances are the perfect scorer did not do what most of you are doing. They kept it simple, carefully assessed the question conditions, and followed the evidence from the text. Nothing more.

## Summarize Key Ideas

### Answer in your Own Words First

Try to answer each question in your own words before reading the answer choices. Once you understand the question condition(s), find the appropriate area of the text that addresses the question, summarize “what is going on” in the relevant text and attempt to identify how the core idea answers the question. Try it for every question on your next exam.

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If you approach each question with the answer in your words, then it is more likely you will be able to quickly identify the correct answer in the words of the test. You will be less likely to fall for the typical trap answer choices provided on the SHSAT, and you can more quickly answer the question without the need to flip back and forth between the passage text and the answer choices. If test takers approach the list of answer options without a predicted solution in mind, then their thought process often meanders along the following lines.” Answer A is not bad. I could possibly interpret it in a way that works. B is definitely out. Answer C might work, but answer D is similar and it too might work, but it isn’t exactly clear. “ The test taker has fallen into the designed trap of the SHSAT. The exam is designed to muddle answer choices such that test takers who either do not comprehend the passage or do not follow closely to the letter of the text will tend to get confused. Many students find approaching the answer choices with a predicted answer not only improves confidence and accuracy, but it also has a significant positive impact on time management.

If you can’t formulate a reasonable answer choice in your words in a matter of seconds, then chances are you do not understand the question prompt or did not comprehend the relevant parts of the passage. Take note of either issue and keep in mind you will have to find a way to correct it in your SHSAT preparation for reading. The lesson on skim reading provides additional advice and practice to improve your big picture reading comprehension.

**Let’s take a quick look at a “difficult” level SHSAT reading question to demonstrate the point.**

How does Margaret’s experience in paragraph 9 emphasize a theme of the excerpt?

Background paragraphs:

The frustrated main character Margaret gets off a train in the dark in the wild west. She believes it is a station stop, but the train begins to move and pull away while she is standing next to the tracks.

(paragraph 9) “A moment of useless screaming, running, trying to attract some one’s attention, a sickening sense of terror and failure, and the last car slatted itself past with a mocking clatter, as if it enjoyed her discomfort. “

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- A. It confirms Margaret’s understanding that she cannot rely on help from anyone else.
- B. It leads Margaret to realize that her efforts to change her situation are ineffective.
- C. It causes Margaret to believe that her own actions led to an unfavorable outcome.
- D. It reinforces Margaret’s frustration about her lack of control over her surroundings.

*Students can justify any of the answers as reasonable, which results in inconsistent answers. After all, it is a hard question.*

How can you, as a student, more consistently answer questions like this correctly? Rather than work from the answers backward, let’s try to start with a simple “literal” read of “what’s going on” in the text.

(paragraph 9) “A moment of useless screaming, running, trying to attract some one’s attention (*Margaret tries to flag down someone on the train*), a sickening sense of terror and failure (*she feels terror*), and the last car slatted itself past with a mocking clatter, as if it enjoyed her discomfort. (*Her efforts fail and the train passes*)”

Summary: Margaret tries to flag somebody down on the train, but she fails and the train passes. She feels terror.

Practice your ability to accurately summarize parts of paragraphs and passages. It is an essential skill to develop. Let’s use this summary to test the answer options. Unfortunately, no answer option mentions the idea of “terror”, but the options that suggest different feelings like “frustration” in option D are probably wrong. Margaret is terrified, not frustrated according to the paragraph 9 text. She did feel frustrated earlier in the passage, but **do not mix the evidence with earlier ideas**. Which answer reflects the idea that Margaret tried to get the attention of people on the train but failed? The correct answer is option A. The answer rephrases the text idea, and it is a valid statement based on the actual text. Margaret tried to get help from people and that effort failed. Therefore, it is appropriate to conclude from this example that Margaret cannot rely on others (people on the train in this instance) for help. The other answers do not follow from the “literal” read unless you attempt to read more into the idea that is not in evidence in paragraph 9. Grant us some of your time and effort and we will teach you how to answer reading questions correctly with greater consistency.

## Learn to Connect Text to Abstract Ideas

In the example above, we noted that “others” in the answer was demonstrated by “the people on the train” directly in the text. Good comprehension for the SHSAT namely involves the ability to move between specific wording and more abstract or general ideas. For example, the abstract word “assertion” in one line of a passage might refer to an earlier claim in the text that “youth are gravitating more toward public transportation rather than using automobiles as much as their parents.” In another example, “a notion” mentioned in one answer option could refer to lines in the passage (perhaps about Charles Darwin) where the text states, “Evolution is a fact.” Another common way the text connects words to ideas is to use pronoun-antecedent noun relationships. Pronouns (he, she, it, this, that, etc.) substitute for other nouns to avoid repetition. For example, “this quick animal” refers back to a specific animal identified in the text earlier in the passage, perhaps a cheetah described in an earlier paragraph.

On the SHSAT reading section, students are required to connect these abstract nouns like “assertion” or “notion” or even pronouns like “this” to the exact text evidence that represents the idea. Moreover, they are asked to make these connections several times in each reading passage, in many questions, and also when summarizing main ideas into their own simpler abstractions. When students fail to comprehend a passage or “don’t understand what is going on” in a passage, it is usually because they missed this connection between the text and the idea it represented. Connecting the abstract phrases to specific topics in the text is an ongoing challenge for test-takers. The ability to recognize the relationship between abstract nouns and the ideas that they refer to is central to making sense out of many passages.

Let's practice summarizing the key ideas in a passage and answering in our own words first.

Heaven has appointed to one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate **station**, and this without any reference to the character or conduct of either. It is therefore as much for the dignity as it is for the interest of females, in all respects to conform to the duties of this relation....But while woman holds a subordinate relation in society to the other sex, it is not because it was designed that her duties or her influence should be any the less important, or all-pervading. But it was designed that the mode of gaining influence and of exercising power should be altogether different and **peculiar**....

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A man may act on society by the collision of intellect, in public debate; he may urge his measures by a sense of shame, by fear and by personal interest; he may coerce by the combination of public sentiment; he may drive by physical force, and he does not outstep the boundaries of his sphere. But all the power, and all the conquests that are lawful to woman, are those only which appeal to the kindly, generous, peaceful and benevolent principles. Woman is to win everything by peace and love; by making herself so much respected, esteemed and loved, that to yield to her opinions and to gratify her wishes, will be the free-will offering of the heart. But this is to be all accomplished in the domestic and social circle. There let every woman become so cultivated and refined in intellect, that her taste and judgment will be respected; so benevolent in feeling and action; that her motives will be revered;—so unassuming and unambitious, that collision and competition will be banished;—so “gentle and easy to be entreated,” as that every heart will repose in her presence; then, the fathers, the husbands, and the sons, will find an influence thrown around them, to which they will yield not only willingly but proudly... A woman may seek the aid of cooperation and combination among her own sex, to assist her in her appropriate offices of piety, charity, maternal and Domestic duty; but whatever, in any measure, throws a woman into the attitude of a combatant, either for herself or others—whatever binds her in a party conflict—whatever obliges her in any way to exert coercive influences, throws her out of her appropriate sphere. If these general principles are correct, they are entirely opposed to the plan of arraying females in any Abolition movement.

## Exercise: Practice Your Summaries

Read the following questions and write your answer in your own words before proceeding.

1. What does the author suggest about a combative woman?
2. What point does the author make about the status of women relative to that of men?
3. The author implies that women’s effect on public life is mainly what?
4. In line 1, “station” most nearly means what?
5. On line 6, “peculiar” most nearly means what?

Multiple Choice Question Options: Select one option based on your predicted answer.



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1. What does the author suggest about a combative woman?
  - A. Society should frown upon her.
  - B. She should join the abolition movement.
  - C. She should be obliged to exert whatever coercive influences she can.
  - D. She will be out of place.
  
2. What point does the author make about the status of women relative to that of men?
  - A. Women depend on men for their safety and security, but men are largely independent of women.
  - B. Women are inferior to men, but women play a role as significant as that played by men.
  - C. Women have inferior rights than men do, but women also have fewer responsibilities.
  - D. Women are superior to men, but society requires women to be obedient.
  
3. The author implies that women’s effect on public life is mainly what?
  - A. overlooked because men are generally uninterested in women’s political ideas
  - B. indirect because women exert their influence within the home and family life
  - C. inconsequential because men are able to govern society themselves
  - D. symbolic because women tend to be more idealistic about politics than men are
  
4. In line 2, “station” most nearly means what?
  - A. region
  - B. studio
  - C. district
  - D. rank
  
5. On line 12, “peculiar” most nearly means what?
  - A. weird
  - B. surprising
  - C. unique
  - D. infrequent

## Correct Answers:

1. (D) She will be out of place. Evidence (Paragraph 4): “but whatever, in any measure, throws a woman into the attitude of a combatant, either for herself or others—...throws her out of her appropriate sphere.” A combative woman is out of her sphere or place.
2. B) Women are inferior to men, but women play a role as significant as that played by men. Evidence (Paragraph 1): “But while woman holds a subordinate relation in society to the other sex, it is not because it was designed that her duties or her influence should be any the less important, or all-pervading.” Women are inferior, but they assume an equally important role.
3. (B) indirect because women exert their influence within the home and family life. Evidence (Paragraph 3): “But this is to be all accomplished in the domestic and social circle. There let every woman become so cultivated and refined in intellect...then, the fathers, the husbands, and the sons, will find an influence thrown around them, to which they will yield not only willingly but proudly. . . .” The main idea represented by these lines of text is that women can influence public life through their indirect influence on men.
4. (D) rank Evidence (Paragraph 1): “to one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate station (rank).” “Superior” and “subordinate” indicate higher and lower levels: rank.
5. (C) unique Evidence (Paragraph 1): “But it was designed that the mode of gaining influence and of exercising power should be altogether different and peculiar.” “Peculiar” should be synonymous with the word connected by the and condition in the same sentence, “different”. “Unique” is the correct expression of “different”. Other answer options imply a slightly different connotation. Weird, for example, is not simply different, but strange or bizarre.

How close was your predicted answer to the actual multiple choice answer? Did the answer “in your own words” help you answer the question more confidently?

## 1b) Identify the Relationship Between Ideas

### Rhetorical Strategy

The SHSAT not only tests the ability to comprehend *what* is written in a passage but also *how* it’s written. Unlike literal comprehension questions, which require you to identify a paraphrased version of an idea contained in the passage, other questions like function questions require you to move beyond understanding the literal meaning of specific content in the passage to understanding the more abstract role of that content within the larger context of the passage or paragraph.

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Understanding the relationships between ideas in any passage on the SHSAT reading exam section is critical to success. The majority of the questions tend to be based on the places in a passage where ideas come into contact with one another—that is, where new information is introduced or where there is a change in focus, point of view, or tone. The relationships between these ideas are frequently indicated through the use of specific words/phrases and punctuation. These transition clues and strong punctuation provide insight into the method of development used by the author. We run into the different methods of paragraph development and related keywords/punctuation in the revising/editing (writing & language) part of the ELA test also.

Recognizing correct relations between ideas is a key skill with which students must familiarize themselves. Get to know the different methods of paragraph development, the transition words that identify them, and how to use this information to improve your comprehension for better test results. The chart below lists some of the more common methods of development of ideas including key words, phrases, and types of punctuation, along with the functions that they typically indicate.

## Methods of Paragraph Development

There are a few basic types of transition ideas and a host of more focused transition words associated with each. A few of the most common relationships are shown below:

**Additive** - sentences provide additional information about a topic

**Comparison** - sentences highlight how "alike" two objects are

**Contrasting** - sentences highlight the "differences" between objects

**Sequential (Chronological)** - one sentence follows the prior in order (often time order)

**Cause/Effect** - one sentence is the result of the prior sentence

**Illustrative/Examples** - one sentence is an example of the idea in the prior sentence

**Emphasis** - sentences emphasize the previous one

Associated Transition Words:

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## **Addition/Support**

Furthermore  
Also  
Too  
Moreover And  
In addition  
As well as

## **Similar/Comparison**

Likewise  
By the same token  
Similarly  
As much as  
As  
Just as

## **Sequential**

To begin  
Subsequently  
Next  
Then  
Finally

## **Conflict/Contrasting**

But  
However  
Nevertheless  
Although  
On the other hand  
Whereas  
While  
In contrast

## **Illustrative/Explains**

For example  
That is  
Colon  
Dash

## **Clarification/Define**

In other words  
That is  
Properly speaking  
Colon  
Dash  
Parentheses

## **Cause/Effect**

Hence  
Therefore  
Consequently  
Thus  
So  
Because  
As a result

## **Emphasis**

Indeed  
In fact  
Even more  
Above all  
Let me be clear  
Italics  
Capital letters  
Exclamation Mark  
Repetition (of words)

Let's take a look at some examples of relationship ideas in reading questions.

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(Passage Excerpt) Hundreds of years before Christ, two philosophies became influential. One was Epicureanism founded in Greece and the other was Stoicism which hailed from Cyprus. Both taught that the highest good can be achieved through a state of inner peace. Both were materialistic and determined that everything is composed of matter, even the soul. They did not recognize a spiritual world, although Stoics believed reason came from a dynamic force in the soul that made all people equal and connected to each other. That equality and connectedness compelled a person to act with brotherly love to others. Wisdom and justice were crucial to Stoicism. Epicureanism taught that pleasure is the ultimate goal of life. True pleasure depends on inner security and intellectual pleasure, including freedom from fears. Epicurus, the founder, maintained it is important to conquer fear of death and the gods. Death is just the end of existence and therefore not frightening and the gods are too far removed from human life to have any impact.

According to Stoicism, why should people treat others with brotherly love?

- A. Because there is a divine order in the universe.
- B. Because wisdom and justice are important virtues.
- C. Because there is no spiritual world and people must depend on each other.
- D. Because all people are related and equal.

The correct answer is option D., "Because all people are related and equal." The passage states, "equality and connectedness(synonym for related) should lead a person to act with brotherly love."

Let's analyze the incorrect answers to this multiple choice question. A. "Because there is a divine order in the universe." This statement is Not in the Passage. B. "Because wisdom and justice are important virtues." This statement is in the passage about Stoicism, but it is not an example of why people should treat each other with brotherly love. It is irrelevant to the question asked. Wisdom is an example of another virtue extolled by Stoics. C. "Because there is no spiritual world and people must depend on each other." The absence of a spiritual world is a statement in the passage that applies to Stoicism, and it seems compelling to infer that people must depend on each other as a result, but the inference is Not in the Passage. Nowhere does the passage state or suggest the absence of a spiritual world leads to brotherly love.

Which of the following is a similarity between Stoicism and Epicureanism?

- A. Belief in a universal order ordained by the gods.
- B. Rejection of the idea of a spiritual world.
- C. Belief in reason as a force driving the soul.
- D. The ideal of brotherly love.

The correct answer is, B. "Rejection of the idea of a spiritual world." The passage states, "They(both philosophies) did not recognize a spiritual world."

Option A. "Belief in a universal order ordained by the gods," is Not in the Passage. C. "Belief in reason as a force driving the soul," is not a shared similarity. It applies to only Stoicism or one part of the passage, so it is Too Narrow. D. "The ideal of brotherly love." This answer is also too narrow and applies to only Stoicism, one part of the passage.

## **1c) Elimination. Find Three Wrong Answers**

Make sure to find three wrong answers for every reading question by applying the same rigid evidence-based reading technique in the last lesson. No wrong answer will fully restate the text or demonstrate examples described in the text. The incorrect answers will do something else. They may only be off by one detail or even a single word.

Every student knows to use elimination, but most students do not apply the technique to full effect with the other solution techniques above. Be careful. Elimination doesn't require as much effort as rolling up your sleeves, finding the evidence, summarizing the correct idea, and matching it to the correct answer option. As a result, many students fall into the trap of primarily using elimination in an inconsistent manner. They eliminate based on their hunches or imperfect recollections without searching for evidence, and they start off eliminating the correct answer—a big procedural mistake that is hard to correct real time.

A better, more consistent elimination strategy takes advantage of the reading test design: wrong answers can be organized into a few categories or wrong answer types that repeat throughout the reading exam. While it is not essential to identify any wrong answer type to get the correct answer, it is useful to learn these categories of repetitive mistakes to improve your ability to eliminate the wrong answer choices. Develop a process that not only includes finding and identifying the text evidence but also uses rigorous criteria for elimination based on the typical wrong answer types. Make sure your answer option falls into one of the typical wrong answer types below. If so, then elimination is likely justified and more consistent results can be obtained.

## Cannot Decide Between Two or More Answers

Have you ever been caught between two plausible answer choices that seem to reflect the same idea? You are not alone. Everyone has confronted this situation on a standardized reading exam—repeatedly. How do you resolve the problem? How do you find the correct answer? If you are like most students, you will make your best guess and move on. Please do not take that inconsistent approach. Instead, follow a strategy to more consistently arrive at correct answers. Make a vertical scan between the answer choices and identify specific differences between the words in the answer choices. Although the answers may seem broadly alike, there will be differences in certain details in every case. Return to the relevant text in the passage and test each specific, different detail against the text. Which detail(s) is evidenced in the text? Which specific answer part is not present, false, or wrong according to the text. Eliminate the answer with incorrect detail(s). This approach will lead to consistently correct answers and help students identify details they frequently did not identify at first blush. You will find this technique comes in handy over and over on every reading exam and leads to improved scores.

## Typical Wrong Answer Types

Get to know your wrong answer types intimately and become an elimination master.

**1. Not In Passage (but true)** – Perhaps the most common wrong answer choice occurs when the answer describes something that is not in the passage. If you have had any prior test prep experience, then you have probably heard the statement, “If it isn’t in the passage, it can’t be the correct answer.” This may seem straightforward and easy to detect and sometimes it is, but be careful because it is often not that simple for untrained test takers. The answer choices are frequently written to discuss some aspect of the topic in the passage and also sound like a reasonable statement that anyone familiar with the subject would assess as correct. Unfortunately, if the answer is not evidenced in the text, then it must be wrong even if true. Watch out for these traps in science and history passages especially. There is one exception where you can use outside knowledge, however. A correct answer will never contradict well-known historical or scientific facts. i.e. an answer choice that indicates the “South” won the Civil War must be wrong even if that detail is not mentioned in the passage.

Let's see an example of typical wrong answers of the type Not in Passage

### Question 1:

Paragraph 1 contributes to the setting of the excerpt by establishing that...

(Paragraph 1) ” In the moon of Ta- Yum, the hottest days of summer, when salmon spawn in the little streams and huckleberries ripen in the high mountains, people from many villages of the Chopunnish Nation gathered in the Oyaip Prairie for the work and festivities of their annual camas (edible wild plants) harvest.”

Wrong Answer: The story’s plot begins as The People are observing their land and what it offers them.



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Reason Incorrect:

Although part of the answer seems okay, another part is incorrect. The People are present on the land, and the land does offer streams with salmon and mountains with berries to harvest, but the text does not indicate The People are *observing* the land. The passage is written in the 3rd person and paragraph 1 represents the author’s description of the bountiful land, where the harvest and meeting of the People occurs. A plausible answer is not necessarily correct. Correct answers must be evidenced by the text.

## Question 2:

How do paragraphs 7 and 9 convey a central idea of the excerpt?

(Paragraph 7) ” Everyone helped in some way. Most of the men fished or hunted for meat. While many of the women dug and roasted camas, other women and older children picked and dried berries.”

(Paragraph 9) ” This sun, happiness, peace, and quiet blessed the Red Bear camp. All were busy with their daily tasks, until sudden cries came from the children playing by the trail. ”

Wrong Answer: by suggesting that The People are influenced by the weather, which shows their close relationship with nature

Reason Incorrect:

The text describes everyone working in paragraph 7 and at peace in paragraph 9. It is easy to assume that the single reference to the Sun implies the people are influenced by the weather. After all, other parts of the passage indicate The People gather before the weather gets cold (but not these paragraphs). Also, it is easy to assume natives working on the land have a close relationship with nature. I personally envision breathtaking scenes from the movie “Dances with Wolves.” However, the text only states The People are harvesting and hunting. There is no evidence they have a close relationship with nature—no discussion of how their culture or religion or ideas derive from nature, the observations that would support the idea of a “close relationship” with nature. The above answer seems plausible, but it is not in evidence on an “evidenced-based” exam. Try to ask yourself, “What is literally going on in this section of text before you infer conclusions.” The basic summary of events is usually the best place to start to consistently identify valid conclusions.

**2. Invalid Conclusions** – These answer choices are designed to trap students who have not fully digested the big secret of SHSAT reading and are still trying to approach answers in a subjective manner rather than trying to identify the one objectively correct answer evidenced by the text. The level of interpretation or subjectivity may be surprisingly subtle because students are accustomed to making these judgments and inferences every day in class and that habit has been reinforced over years. The answers often include symbolism, a metaphor, or a character analysis. For example, a story about a main character who thwarted an attack on her hometown might include an answer choice that states the hero loves her country and is a proud patriot, but that statement is an interpretation of the story, not evidence in the text. It may mistakenly appear obvious and reasonable to untrained test takers, but trained test takers will only choose the answer if it restates text from the actual passage or an example in the passage demonstrates the answer to be true on all points. Thwarting an attack is an example of heroic behavior, but how do you know the character loves her country or that she is a proud patriot in the absence of additional text evidence?

Let's see an example of typical wrong answers of the type Invalid Conclusion.

## Question 1:

In paragraph 20, the phrases “trophies of their hunt” and “paraded around” affect the paragraph by

(Paragraph 20) “The hunters rode up to the welcoming crowd, proud to show off the loads of meat, hides, and other trophies of their hunt. They paraded around the encampment for all to see how strong their Hunting Power had been— what great hunters they, themselves, were.”

Wrong Answer: suggesting that the hunters are rewarded for their leadership.

Reason Incorrect:

It seems plausible that successful hunters would be rewarded. However, nothing in the text mentions that the hunters are rewarded.

In the absence of evidence the answer option above is incorrect.

**3. Mixed Facts – Confused Relationships** – Mixing facts or relationships between ideas catches students who fail to comprehend different parts of the text. Remember, SHSAT reading success is about comprehending the text and correctly identifying relationships between ideas. The confused relationship answer choice will include ideas or facts mentioned in the passage, but mix up the relationship between them. Untrained test takers often fall into this trap. If the student only loosely recalls the main concepts and does not comprehend the details of cause-effect, sequential, or other various relationships, then he or she will be vulnerable to this repetitive incorrect answer type. If this is a weak area, learn to better identify relationships.

Let's see an example of typical wrong answers of the type Mixed Facts - Confused Relationships.

**Question 1:**

How does paragraph 1 introduce the ideas that ravens may perceive time and plan for the future?

(Paragraph 1) “In Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Raven,” a raven visits a lonely man’s home and responds to the man’s pleading questions with only the word “nevermore.” The poem’s narrator interprets the word as a prediction of doom for his future. A talking, prophetic raven may seem to be the wild imaginings of the poet, but a new study published in the journal *Science* hints that one particular idea behind the poem might not be as far-fetched as it seems. For most of human history, people assumed that animals do not understand the passage of time in the same way people do. Some people believed that animals might remember events from the past and that instinct might drive them to make preparations in order to guarantee survival, but most people did not think that animals had the ability to plan. At Lund University in Sweden, researchers argue that ravens may be able to think ahead and even plan for the future”

Wrong Answer: It mentions a poem that led people to believe that ravens are aware of the future and then explains that this belief prompted scientists to study ravens’ ability to plan.

Reason Incorrect:

The answer option above indicates a cause-effect relationship that does not exist in the text. The poem “The Raven” is mentioned in the text and researchers do suggest that Ravens have an ability to plan in paragraph 1, but nothing suggests the researchers’ studies are a *result* of the poem. The poem is used merely as a hook to engage the reader at the start.

## Question 2:

What is the best way to combine sentences 3 through 5 to clarify the relationship between ideas?

(Sentences 3-5) (3) People who code have to learn this language. (4) They can construct programs that will perform detailed tasks. (5) The programs can also perform complex tasks.

Wrong Answer: People who code have to learn this language because they can construct programs that will perform detailed and complex tasks.

Reason Incorrect:

The answer option reverses the cause-effect relationship. It suggests that people who can construct programs to perform complex tasks already have this capability prior to learning how to code, but coding is the first step logically, which leads to the ability to create programs. This answer option reads close to the correct answer: "People who code have to learn this language so they can construct programs that will perform detailed or complex tasks." The answer choices only differ by the word "so" vs. "because" and many students make a mistake as a result. **Make sure the *idea* of the answer choice matches the *idea* of the text. Matching words does not always mean the idea represented by the text and the answer option are the same.**

**4. True but Irrelevant** – Some answers will make statements that are barely relevant to the question being asked. These answers can include ideas that are not in the text, but agree with the main idea and seem reasonable to untrained test takers who do not rigorously critique every part of every answer to determine if the answer restates or demonstrates the text in the passage. Alternatively, irrelevant answers can cite a line or restate a part of the passage that is not applicable to the question asked. In most cases, the wrong answers do not contradict the main idea and often make sense to untrained test takers who recall reading the exact same words in the text, but fail to confirm if it is relevant to the question prompt. For example, the text may say, "The city is a constant celebration." One deceptively compelling but wrong answer to the question, "How does the line impact the passage?" might be **"it demonstrates how city life is hectic"**. **That is, in fact, what the line says, but this option does not answer the question, which is, "How does it impact the passage?" A better answer might be "it contrasts the idea that country life mentioned earlier in the passage is more relaxed and city life is different–hectic.** This answer option shows how the line in question relates to other ideas in the passage. It answers the question being asked.

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Let's see an example of typical wrong answers of the type True but Irrelevant.

## Question 1:

Read this sentence from paragraph 1. At Lund University in Sweden, researchers argue that ravens may be able to think ahead and even plan for the future.

Which sentence from paragraph 4 provides support for this argument?

Wrong Answer: A. Later, the researchers presented the ravens with a group of items, including small treats and the bottle cap.

Reason Incorrect: Answer option A is a true statement from the text, but it fails to answer the question. Researchers did present the ravens with items indicated, but that does not support or explain why researchers believe ravens can plan ahead.

## Question 2:

Read these sentences from paragraph 2. For example, many animals hoard food so that they will not run out later, but scientists who study animals would not call hoarding a decision to plan for the future. This action is merely instinctual.

Which statement describes the effect of the phrase “merely instinctual” in the passage?

Wrong Answer: It suggests that animals often store more food than they will be able to consume.

Reason Incorrect: The lines of text do claim animals “hoard” (store more than they can consume) food. The answer option is the idea from the highlighted text, so many students will select this answer with confidence without realizing it does not answer the question. The question does not ask what the main idea of the text is in this case. It asks what the effect of the words “merely instinctual” is. The answer option above is irrelevant to the actual question provided. Did you notice the difference? Did you really understand the question condition? The words “merely instinctual” mean the birds hoard by habit, genetic behavior that dictates their actions rather than premeditated thought. The correct answer to this question is different than shown.

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**5. False** – Contradicts Text – False answer choices that contradict the text may seem like an obviously incorrect answer type, but they can be effective because these answers often make students question whether they have read the passage correctly or confused some relationship. As a result, students will often go back to the passage to find relevant sections to read again. This soaks up precious time even if the student does identify the answer as incorrect. The test taker will have fallen into the trap—time will be wasted.

Let's see an example of typical wrong answers of the type False.

## Question 1:

How do paragraphs 11– 13 affect the plot of the excerpt?

(Paragraph 11) “Were they friends or enemies? Did they bring good news or bad? ”

(Paragraph 12) ““Who can it be? What brings them here?” were the questions in every mind.

(Paragraph 13) ” ‘Could they be the four hunters who had gone to Buffalo Country two summers past? Would they have news of the families who had gone long ago to Buffalo Country and never returned?’ ”

Wrong Answer:

- A. They lead to a turning point by describing the moment that the crowd realizes why the strangers have come.
- B. They explain the cause of the main conflict by providing background information about the strangers.

Reason Incorrect:

The second part of both answer options is false. In paragraphs 11 and 13, the crowd does not realize why the strangers have come. The text at this point indicates the crowd only wonders why. The strangers in paragraphs 11-13 are still just that, strangers. The crowd could not possibly have background information about them or know why they have come. We only learn these details in later paragraphs.

## Question 2:

In paragraph 20, the phrases “trophies of their hunt” and “paraded around” affect the paragraph by

(Paragraph 20) "The hunters rode up to the welcoming crowd, proud to show off the loads of meat, hides, and other trophies of their hunt. They paraded around the encampment for all to see how strong their Hunting Power had been— what great hunters they, themselves, were."

Wrong Answer: emphasizing that The People are dependent on the hunters for food.

Reason Incorrect:

The passage earlier describes the bountiful land where the people hunt and harvest before the cold months. These details indicate The People did not depend on the hunters for food. Moreover, the hunters were gone for two years and the people survived in the hunters' absence. The answer option is false in light of the text evidence.

**6. Extreme Statements – Too Broad/Too Narrow** – This incorrect answer choice results from overly restrictive conditions and can be identified by words like "most", "worst", "best", "proven", "always", etc. Take care to identify more forgiving conditions in answer choices like "some" versus extreme options like "none" or "all". Extreme claims can occasionally be correct, but only if they are restated or demonstrated by the text. Questions about the main idea will almost always provide incorrect answers that are either too broad or too narrow in scope and thus do not reflect the actual central idea of the passage. For example, the correct main idea for a general passage about dogs will not include specific references to Lassie or Snoopy even if these particular dogs are mentioned in the passage. The scope of an answer mentioning only Lassie and Snoopy is too narrow to be the main purpose. Likewise, an answer choice about pets will be too broad in scope and also incorrect.

Let's see an example of typical wrong answers of the type Extreme- Too Broad/Narrow.

**Question 1:**

How do paragraph 7 and 9 convey a central idea of the excerpt?

(Paragraph 7) Everyone helped in some way. Most of the men fished or hunted for meat. While many of the women dug and roasted camas, other women and older children picked and dried berries.

(Paragraph 9) This sun, happiness, peace, and quiet blessed the Red Bear camp. All were busy with their daily tasks, until sudden cries came from the children playing by the trail.

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Wrong Answer: by revealing that The People must complete many tasks, which shows the necessity of being organized

Reason Incorrect:

Words like “must” complete tasks and “necessity” of being organized are extreme words. They leave no room for doubt, and there is no text evidence to suggest the extreme ideas. You might surmise that the natives will starve in the winter if they do not finish their work, or that they need to be organized to complete their work. The text only states The People are working. It does not comment on their organization. It actually suggests they are not feeling pressured to finish. The extreme conditions presented in the answer above are too restrictive to be correct.

### Question 2:

Read this sentence from paragraph 4. In both experiments, the ravens waited patiently for up to seventeen hours for the researcher to return.

How does this sentence fit into the overall structure of the passage and contribute to the development of ideas?

(Paragraph 4) “For the first experiment, the researchers showed the birds how to use a small stone to open a box and get treats. Once the ravens learned the behavior, the researchers presented the birds with four stones. Only one stone was the right size to open the box. The birds learned to select that stone and set it aside until the researchers presented the box. The second experiment involved bartering. A researcher would trade the ravens a large treat for a bottle cap. Later, the researchers presented the ravens with a group of items, including small treats and the bottle cap. The ravens chose the bottle cap over the treats and waited for the original researcher to trade with them again so that they could get more treats. In both experiments, the ravens waited patiently for up to seventeen hours for the researcher to return.”

Wrong Answer: It reveals how the ravens solved the problems posed in the experiments, proving that ravens have the ability to plan ahead.



Reason Incorrect:

The highlighted lines reveal that the ravens had patience. It suggests they do not merely act on instinct. The ravens did solve the problems in the experiments. The first part of the answer option is correct. That fact, however, is not enough to “prove” that ravens plan ahead. “Prove” is an extreme word just like always, never, most, worst, etc. It is a red flag that the answer is likely incorrect unless the text actually evidences the extreme language.

**7. Wrong Detail** – One word out of place – Although this may not be a “type” like the typical incorrect answer choices mentioned above, it is a particularly nasty and familiar presentation of answer choices like the ones above: everything in the answer choice restates the text accurately except one detail or one word. The mistake may include an extreme adjective like “most” boys versus “many” boys stated in the passage. The wrong answer option could include a singular “boy” versus many “boys” in the text. It could be the word “proud,” which is a natural feeling a reader might assign to a hero even if it is never mentioned in the passage. The wrong word or phrase may be harder to identify still. As a result, we separate this example to remind students that they must analyze every word in every answer choice. For example, “many boys, especially poor young men” had difficulty getting an education is different than the answer choice that states “common citizens” faced obstacles.

Let's see an example of typical wrong answers of the type Wrong Detail.

## Question 1:

In paragraph 8, the author repeats the word “played” most likely to?

(Paragraph 8) “And the younger children played. They played at hunting. They played with the babies. They played with their horses and puppies. They learned how to live through their play.”

Wrong Answer: how everyone enjoys being at the gathering

Reason Incorrect:

“Play” correctly suggests enjoyment; however, the subject of the lines in 8 is the “younger children”, not “everyone.” The answer must present the correct subject in the correct number (singular or plural) as indicated in the text. Be careful of these subtle differences.

## Question 2:

How do paragraphs 11– 13 affect the plot of the excerpt?

(Paragraph 11) "Were they friends or enemies? Did they bring good news or bad?"

(Paragraph 12) "Who can it be? What brings them here? "were the questions in every mind.

(Paragraph 13) "Could they be the four hunters who had gone to Buffalo Country two summers past? Would they have news of the families who had gone long ago to Buffalo Country and never returned?"

Wrong Answer: They establish a feeling of mystery by presenting different points of view about the arriving people.

Reason Incorrect:

Generally, question marks in the text denote curiosity or confusion. Does the repeated punctuation create a feeling of “mystery” in this case? Perhaps. Perhaps the word is not quite precise. You decide. That said, there is another problem, which should lead to a more definitive elimination of the above answer. Many students will accept that mystery indicates uncertainty and note that there are “different points of view”: good news or bad, friends or enemies, hunters who left two years ago. However, these options in the text are not “different points of view” held by different individuals. They are the questions “in every (each person’s) mind,” according to the text. “Different” points of view is a wrong detail easily overlooked, but it alone makes the answer given incorrect. Be careful of these subtle differences.

## Question 3:

Which quotation from the excerpt best supports the idea that The People maintain a connection to members of their group in spite of distance?

Wrong Answer: As was their custom since wahk-kee-ma, a time far back beyond the memory of man, they set up their camps in the same locations their parents and grandparents had occupied before them.” (paragraph 5)

Reason Incorrect:

The answer given above suggests a possible connection between modern tribe members and their grandparents before them. It is a potential connection “across time” that many students will select as correct. That phrase is, however, incorrect and eliminates the answer because the question condition stipulates a connection “across distance,” not “time.” It may seem subtle, but one wrong detail will make the answer incorrect.

## 1d) Traditional Reading Exam Questions

Up until this point, we have reviewed repetitive wrong answer types, but equally important, if not more so, you must also learn to diagnose the different repetitive question formats on any standardized reading exam and understand how to solve each. Most courses begin with four main question formats: main idea, fact/detail, tone/attitude, and inference questions. This is a good starting point.

### Main Idea

What is the main idea? Certain questions will ask about the “central claim” or “main idea” of the passage, and, traditionally, these questions appear immediately after passages. The main idea is more than just the topic, and it is more than just a summary of the events of the passage, which are two typical responses students provide when asked about the main idea. Main ideas combine the main topic with the reason we readers should care about what the author says on the topic. It encompasses the main argument the author is attempting to get across.

**Main Idea = Topic + Why should we care?**

For example, a main idea is the helpful roles dogs play in the household. It is not just dogs—the topic. On the other extreme, it is not simply a regurgitation of the events in the passage. e.g. “First, the German Shepherd guarded the house, then the friendly Golden Retriever helped raise a young boys spirits, and lastly the small terrier kept the house clean of vermin.” The goal is not to repeat all events, but rather generalize the key points in a few short words. There are two parts to the main idea: the topic and the reason the author is telling us about the topic. In this case, the topic is pet dogs, and the events demonstrate that pet dogs can play many helpful roles in a household.

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The non-fiction passage main idea can be identified from the introduction (introduces the main claim) and the conclusion (restates the thesis claim). Additionally, supporting evidence for the main idea will repeat throughout the passage. Each paragraph has its own main idea, highlighted in the first topic sentence. Even tables and graphics have their own main idea. You should pay close attention to how the main idea from one paragraph relates to the ideas of the adjoining paragraphs for each paragraph in the passage. You are probably familiar with organizing your own five paragraph essays in writing class. Use this knowledge to reverse engineer the author's ideas. It is likely she organized the passage with a logic not entirely different than the essays you write. The better you understand the different ideas and how they relate, the better you are likely to do on the reading exam. The following highlights the main idea(s) in one passage.

**Paragraph 1:** Anyone who has watched TV news coverage of a hurricane has seen how destructive wind energy can be. But the power of the wind can also be put to constructive use. From sailboats to old-fashioned windmills to the high-tech, modern wind machines called turbines, people have devised ways to harness wind energy for thousands of years.

**Paragraph 2:** The first known attempt to use wind power was the sailboat. Ancient shipbuilders understood how to use forces like lift and momentum, even if they could not explain those forces scientifically. The principles behind sailing led to the development of the windmill. The first known windmills originated in Persia, an area that is now Iran, as early as a.d. 500. They were created to help with the demanding chores of grinding grain and pumping water. By the tenth century, windmills were used throughout central Asia; they were used in China as early as the thirteenth century.

**Paragraph 3:** In Europe, windmills came into widespread use during the twelfth century. As in other parts of the world, they were used for milling grain and pumping water. Windmills replaced the water wheel, which was turned by the movement of running water over paddles mounted around a wheel. The windmill was more adaptable and efficient than the water wheel and quickly became popular. For example, Holland, famous for its windmills, used the machines to pump seawater away from low-lying coastal bogs. This allowed the Dutch to reclaim large areas of land from the sea. Windmills eventually became sophisticated enough for use in a broad range of work, from sawmills and drainage pumping to processing goods such as dyes, tobacco, cocoa, and spices.

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**Paragraph 4:** In the 1700s, as steam engines gained in popularity, the use of wind machines for many types of work declined. However, windmills still played an essential role in pumping water on farms throughout the American West and Midwest. Between 1850 and 1970, over six million small windmills were installed on American farms for watering livestock and meeting other water needs. In many remote areas even today, livestock production would be impossible without the use of windmills to provide water.

**Paragraph 5:** Beginning in the late nineteenth century, windmills were adapted to generate electricity. During the 1930s and '40s, thin-bladed windmills provided electricity for hundreds of thousands of farms across the United States. By the 1950s, however, power lines connected almost every household in America to a central power source, such as a utility company. After that, there was little need for wind turbines until the energy crisis of the 1970s. At that time, interest in wind turbines was renewed due to rising energy costs and concern about the future availability of fossil fuels such as oil, coal, and natural gas. The last several decades have seen the development of “wind farms,” clusters of wind turbines that generate electricity. Efficient, clean, and fairly inexpensive to operate, wind farms may prove to be as important in the future as earlier windmills were in the past.

Note, the passage above is a typical non-fiction example. The underlined sections above from skim reading provide a useful outline of the passage even if it lacks all the details. The topic is wind power and the argument is that humans have harnessed the wind for centuries. Each paragraph highlights examples, chronologically, of humans making constructive use of the wind. The conclusion provides a modern example that suggests humans will continue to do so.

In 2018, fiction passages were added to the reading exam, and the approach to finding the main idea is somewhat different for fiction passages.

## How to Find the Main Idea in Fiction

The main idea or big picture for fiction passages is generally more challenging to identify because fiction passages are not based on arguments or organized in the same structured way as non-fiction. Adding to that challenge, most standardized reading passages drop the reader into a small excerpt from the overall fictional story, requiring readers to make sense of what is going on. For these reasons, the main idea for fiction passages on standardized tests simply looks and sounds different than the main idea of non-fiction passages.

The main idea of a fiction passage is often a concise, sequential summary of the key ideas/events. It is not normally a clear, focused claim like non-fiction. The big picture for fiction answers the questions, “What happened? What is this passage about?” Students will not find the answer in the introduction in most cases. In fact, the conclusion is far more likely to be the place where the author conveys essential ideas. The less predictable organization of fiction probably also means students will have to read more of the text closely. To better understand some of these concepts, it helps to recall writing lessons for narrative essays, which follow a typical storyline much like fiction. They begin, build to a climax, and wind down. Narratives frequently include dialogue and fiction passages like poetry will employ more figurative language.

## **Too Broad, Too Narrow**

For main idea questions in particular, scope becomes a useful tool to precisely identify the correct answer. Ask yourself, “Is the answer choice too broad or too narrow in scope to be correct?” A main idea answer that mentions pets would be too broad for a passage that explains the role of dogs in a household. An answer about specific dogs mentioned in the passage would probably be too narrow.

Main idea questions will almost always provide incorrect answers that are either too broad or too narrow in scope to summarize the main idea. These answers will reflect a part of the passage accurately, which makes them tricky. For example, a typical passage structure is Old Concept-New Concept. The first part discusses an old idea, and the second part of the passage reviews the new, often better idea. The answer option that accurately summarizes the Old Concept only and the other answer option that correctly summarizes the New Concept only will appear correct and compelling to untrained test takers. However, they are only partial answers (Too Narrow) that do not summarize the main idea in full.

## Primary Purpose vs. Main Idea

The new SHSAT reading section will often ask students what is the primary purpose of a passage rather than the main idea. What is the difference? One difference is that answer options will begin with verbs and seem completely different because primary purpose questions are asking about the function or rhetorical strategy of the passage. The answer options will attempt to answer the question “What does it do?” Does the passage explain, contradict, call attention to, etc. For example, suppose a passage begins with the sentence, “Lack of sleep, it turns out, is detrimental to long term health.” The passage continues with specific examples of the consequences of lack of sleep. The main idea in this case corresponds directly to the first sentence. The topic is lack of sleep and the argument or reason we should care is the claim that lack of sleep is bad for your health longer term. Suppose you were asked the following question about the primary purpose instead of, “What is the main idea?”

The primary purpose of the passage is to

- A. call attention to the harmful nature of a behavior and describe some of its effects.
- B. describe the results of a study and explain how its findings can be applied.
- C. outline the history of a condition and point to one of its consequences.
- D. discuss the results of Professor ABC’s research and its reception by the scientific community.

The answer options look very different than main idea answers. They begin with active verbs, often in pairs e.g. describe and explain. The language is more general: few or no specifics are included, and if they are, as in option D, the answer tends to be wrong. That said, the main idea can be useful to identify that option A is correct. The author’s purpose is not merely to describe, outline, or discuss. It is to call attention to a problem: the harmful nature of the behavior of not regularly getting enough sleep. The details in the passage go on to describe the effects of no sleep. Option A rephrases the correct function of the key ideas expressed in a general way.

## Big Picture Skills Apply to All Parts of the Reading Exam

Central claim questions can also apply to a paragraph or section of the text rather than the entire passage. Big picture skills (the ability to capture the essential ideas and relationships in a short, focused summary) tend to be useful and often essential for answering many different types of questions. Big picture skills to reading are analogous to word problems on the SHSAT math exam: most questions require students to execute the skill effectively to be successful on the exam. The following example shows big picture skills in action for paragraph analysis.

“It doesn’t have to be like this. Done right, public transport can be faster, more comfortable, and cheaper than the private automobile. In Shanghai, German-made magnetic levitation trains skim over elevated tracks at 266 miles an hour, whisking people to the airport at a third of the speed of sound. In provincial French towns, electric-powered streetcars run silently on rubber tires, sliding through narrow streets along a single guide rail set into cobblestones. From Spain to Sweden, Wi-Fi equipped high-speed trains seamlessly connect with highly ramified metro networks, allowing commuters to work on laptops as they prepare for same-day meetings in once distant capital cities. In Latin America, China, and India, working people board fast-loading buses that move like subway trains along dedicated busways, leaving the sedans and SUV s of the rich mired in dawn-to-dusk traffic jams. And some cities have transformed their streets into cycle-path freeways, making giant strides in public health and safety and the sheer livability of their neighborhoods—in the process turning the workaday bicycle into a viable form of mass transit.”

The central idea of the paragraph is that

- A. European countries excel at public transportation.
- B. some public transportation systems are superior to travel by private automobile.
- C. Americans should mimic foreign public transportation systems when possible.
- D. much international public transportation is engineered for passengers to work while on board.



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Option B is the correct answer because it restates the text in the paragraph—particularly the thesis claim of the paragraph. “Done right, public transport can be faster, more comfortable, and cheaper than the private automobile.” In this case, the “superior” claim in option B is justified as a restatement of “faster, more comfortable, and cheaper”. Option A may seem like an appropriate answer choice supported by the text to an untrained test taker. After all, several sentences use examples of German, French, Spanish and Swiss public transport to justify the claim that public transport can be superior to private autos. However, option A is missing one subtle idea—a comparison to autos. Every part of the answer choice must be restated in the text and vice versa, but option A only includes one part of the thesis. The positive examples of excellent Latin public transportation also indicate that the claim made in option A is too narrow in scope and does not include all parts of the text. Latin countries also excel at public transport. Option C, Americans should mimic foreign public transportation systems when possible, is an interpretation. It may be good advice, but it is not a conclusion supported in the text.

Option D, much international public transportation is engineered for passengers to work, is also not the correct main idea. An example is provided in the text of public transport engineered to allow passengers to work, but the word “much” in option D is too extreme a claim. One example in the text does not justify “much”. Note, this answer option is a typical example of invalid logic. Just because something is true for one, that doesn't mean it is true for many or all.

In summary, big picture skills allow students to correctly summarize essential ideas and their relationships. Check the introduction and conclusion. Look for repeat words throughout. Strong big picture skills will help you predict the correct answer in your own words. In many cases, the ability to capture essential ideas will also help eliminate three wrong answer choices. For main idea or primary purpose questions, the scope of one or two incorrect answers will be either too broad or too narrow.

## Fact/Detail (Little Picture)

Little picture questions ask test takers to find specific facts or details from the relevant text in the passage and then select the paraphrased answer choice. Do not look to find the exact same words from the passage in the correct answer choice. More often than not, the exact words raise a red flag that the answer option provided may be wrong. For these questions, the exam is testing whether you understand the ideas presented by the specific words, not just your ability to do a keyword search to find the correct details in the passage. Often, the question prompts begin with the phrase “according to the passage,” or something similar. Sometimes the relevant line numbers are cited and other times the student must find the location of the text presented in the question prompt through a keyword search or based on their comprehension of how the passage is organized. The SHSAT, more so than the SAT, fails to provide line citations in question prompts, which provides an added challenge to SHSAT test takers. Fortunately, the SHSAT reading passages are typically 10–20 lines shorter, making the task a little easier for test takers.

Let’s look at some examples. The following little picture/detail question does not cite a line number.

According to researchers at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, why is the surface of ice “liquid-like” rather than “liquid”?

- A. because electrons rebound from the ice surface because the molecules vibrate only up and down
- B. because the ice surface is wet because the ice surface is slipperier than a liquid surface
- C. because the ice surface is frozen solid

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A student’s first challenge for this problem is to find the relevant evidence in the absence of a line citation. Two key phrases might stand out from the question: “liquid-like” and Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory. Test takers might recall that both appear in the latter half of the passage and the word “liquid-like” appears many times, in too many locations to be useful for a keyword search. The name Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory is the more specific information that provides a better keyword search from the question. It appears first on line 54. “For example, in 1996, a chemist at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory shot electrons at an ice surface and recorded how they rebounded. The data suggested that the ice surface remained “liquid-like,” even at temperatures far below freezing. Scientists speculate that **water molecules on the ice surface are always in motion** because there is nothing above them to hold them in place. **The vibration creates a slippery layer of molecules.** According to this interpretation of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory experiments, **the molecules move only up and down; if they also moved side to side, they would constitute a true liquid.**

Option A, because the molecules vibrate only up and down, is the only answer choice that restates the relevant text from the passage. The first part of the text confirms the statement is according to the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory as outlined in the question prompt. While the subject of the question may seem obvious in this case, test takers too often forget to pick up on the subject making the claim or statement and that can result in mistakes, so **take care to develop the habit of confirming every aspect of the question prompt** in the text. The prompt continues to ask why the surface is “liquid-like” versus “liquid”. The text addresses this point directly by explaining the molecules display vertical only vibration. If it were also horizontal, then the molecules would form a liquid. In several cases, the little picture/detail question will ask which information or fact is not included in the passage. In this case, more effort is generally required of the test taker because they must locate several answer choices in the text to eliminate them all until only one choice is left.

Let's see an example.

(Passage excerpt) “Howling apparently serves several purposes. Wolves howl to keep track of one another’s location or to reestablish contact, especially when roaming in unfamiliar territory. Howling also serves to reinforce the cohesion of the pack. Wolves howl to assemble the members before a hunt and to celebrate success after a hunt. In addition, howling may be a way to mark the boundaries of a pack’s territory, in the same way that some birds use birdsong to warn other birds away. A group howling session may continue for as long as an hour.”

Which of the following statements is not supported by the passage?

- A. Howling communicates territorial boundaries.
- B. Wolves communicate only within their own pack.
- C. Howling sessions sometimes last up to an hour.
- D. Wolves sometimes celebrate by howling.

Fortunately, the relevant text is grouped together in this case, but that is not always true. Option A restates “howling may be a way to mark the boundaries of a pack’s territory” from the text. Option C restates “A group (of wolves) howling session may continue for as long as an hour”. Option D and restates “Wolves howl..before a hunt and to celebrate success after a hunt”. Only option B is not restated in the text, so it is the correct answer. All the above options are supported by text evidence. Note, option B includes the extreme qualifying word “only.” Unless the text clearly supports that wording, extreme words like only, always, never, etc. are typically wrong answers, which provides a short-cut to the correct answer in this case. Wolves communicate in their pack, but the text does not indicate they "only" communicate in their pack. In fact, the text says howling can be used to mark territory, which suggests they are howling to other animals outside the pack.

## Infer

Whereas little picture/detail questions ask students to identify the ideas represented by the literal text, inference questions ask students to identify the ideas that are suggested by the text—*the unstated assumptions* from the passage. Be careful because inference questions are also supported by evidence in the passage. You must use evidence from a text to make an educated guess about what is not directly stated. For example, if a text mentions that the character is wearing a raincoat and carrying an umbrella, you can infer that it is raining outside. To make an accurate inference, you must pay close attention to details and use your background knowledge to fill in the gaps. The inference questions are designed to lure students into making interpretations much like they do in literary classes, but there is no need to get inside the author’s head or make creative assumptions. Even correct answers to inference questions must be valid conclusions based on specific evidence.

Let’s look at an example from the SHSAT.

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Introduction: On Monday evening, September 26, 1960, sixty million Americans turned on their TV sets to view the first televised political debate in a campaign for the presidency of the United States. As of that date, it was by far the largest number ever to witness a political discussion. The novelty of the event drew even those with little or no interest in politics. The candidates, Republican Vice President Richard M. Nixon and Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy, had agreed to face each other and the nation in four one-hour sessions that the press dubbed the “Great Debates.” Many expected Vice President Nixon to win the debates easily. He was ahead in the newspaper poll.

Conclusion: Kennedy ultimately won the election, but it was by the narrowest popular vote margin in more than eighty years.

Which of the following would have been the most likely result if the candidates had not debated on television in 1960?

- A. Kennedy would have won the election anyway.
- B. The election results would have been much closer.
- C. Nixon would have had a better chance of winning the election.
- D. The candidates would not have debated at all.

The question asks what the result would have been if the debate did not occur on television. Pay careful attention to wording. “On television” indicates the question is not limiting the scenario to no debates, but only to no debates on television. **Most students think they understand every question, and they probably do understand most. However, that hubris leads to mistakes on many other questions, and the numerous examples in this guide hopefully provide you with a greater appreciation of the need to correctly identify the question conditions.** The key idea to identify from the text is that Nixon was ahead in the polls and better known than Kennedy. Applied to the hypothetical scenario where television did not broadcast Kennedy’s successful performance to homes throughout the country, it is reasonable to deduce that Nixon would have remained in the lead.

## Logical Fallacies:

There are several common fallacies students make when answering inference questions. As mentioned earlier, plausible answers are not correct unless they are supported by the passage or unless the idea is a well-known fact like FDR was President during the Depression. In fact, all wrong answer types like extreme words (never, always, most, worst) are essentially logical fallacies. A few other typical fallacies that appear frequently include...

**Fallacy of Composition:** Another logical mistake is to assume because something is true in one case that it must be true in all cases. While tempting to believe, it is faulty reasoning.

**Wrong Subject:** If one paragraph describes how the *river* below Niagara Falls changes from calmness to tumult, then the answer cannot be, "the excerpt signals a change from the positive aspects of the *Falls* to the negative aspects." The topic of the paragraph is the river, not the falls. The idea might be correct, but the subject or topic in the answer is not correct. **This deception appears more frequently on the new exam than most other fallacies.**

**Not Conditions:** Questions that include "not" conditions are tricky in two ways. Many students will miss the negative condition entirely after answering so many affirmative question prompts. It is hard to switch gears to find the false answer unless you are alert to the question condition. Also, a correct answer to the "not" condition logically requires finding three true answers by elimination. Answers that include "not" conditions can be hard to diagnose correctly. For instance, "Jane is unreluctant and not without happiness." This quote means Jane accepts her situation happily. Double negatives make a positive.

**Correlation vs. Causation:** Correlation does not necessarily mean causation. If one sentence follows another, there is likely a relation, but it may not be valid to deduce cause-effect.

There are many opportunities for students to leap beyond the text without even realizing it. Remember to stay as true to the ideas in the text as possible, and don't try to twist answers to make them work. Make sure your conclusions are valid; they must follow logically from the premise.

## Inference (Speculation)

One type of inference question asks students to identify an *unstated assumption* from the passage. Frequently, this question will appear in science passages where the student is asked to recognize the underlying hypothesis. The approach to these questions is similar to other inference questions.

Let's see an example.

(Passage) **There is a classic debate about how birds learned to fly.** The ground theory assumes birds were quick-footed ground dwellers that hunted prey by jumping and flapping their upper limbs. The tree theory assumes they were tree climbers that glided among branches.

One professor, Ken Dial, noticed an interesting behavior in how young pheasants, quail, and other ground birds ran along behind their parents. "They jumped up like popcorn," he said, describing how they would flap their not yet fully-formed wings and bounce into the air. So when a group of graduate students challenged him to come up with a new take on the classic debate, **he designed a project to see what clues might lie in how baby game birds learned to fly.**

Which statement best captures Ken Dial's central assumption in setting up his research?

- A. Dial believed he had strong evidence to support the ground theory and set out to prove his hypothesis.
- B. The acquisition of flight in young birds sheds light on the acquisition of flight in their evolutionary ancestors.
- C. The tendency of certain young birds to jump erratically is a somewhat recent evolved behavior.
- D. The graduate students were confident their professor's theory could resolve an age-old controversy.

Option B is the correct answer. The first paragraph indicates current theories have not yet resolved the question of how birds began to fly. Ken designed an experiment to gain “clues” to how baby birds learn to fly. The underlying assumption or unstated hypothesis is that explanations of how baby birds first learn to fly will help us learn how the ancestors of birds first learned to fly. Option A is wrong. The text never actually indicates Dial believes the ground theory is accurate and the presumption that his observations of baby birds hopping on the ground somehow indicates his favor for the ground theory is faulty logic. Moreover, option A can be eliminated based on the word “prove,” which is considered too extreme. The exam generally does not favor simple black and white outcomes like prove or disprove. Option C is incorrect. No text suggests the hopping behavior of the baby birds is a “recent” phenomenon. Option D sounds plausible, but it is a fallacy on many levels. One, the text never indicates Dial was the graduate students’ professor. Two, the students challenged Dial, which does not indicate their level of belief or disbelief in Dial. Thirdly, Dial did not express any theory in the text; he only made observations without any explanation.

## **Inference (Deduction)**

This question type requires you to examine the facts and come up with a logical explanation for them. For instance, if a text mentions that a character is sneezing and has a runny nose, you can deduce that they have a cold. In many cases, the goal is essentially to fill in the missing blanks. For example, a question might ask, "The role of physicists in the passage is most similar to which of the following..."

How to approach solving these questions:

1. Read only the lines in question.
2. Figure out and rephrase the idea of those lines of text (not other ideas in the passage). This is essentially the logic that will be applied to the hypothetical scenario.
3. Apply the idea from the text to the new, hypothetical scenario in the question. What would be the result?
4. Summarize that result in a more succinct, general way, so you will be better prepared to review the answer options.
5. Check the answers for the same essential result. That will be the correct answer.



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Inference “Analogy” questions are similar to the previous example, but students will take the idea from the particular situation described in the passage and, rather than apply the logic to another scenario, find the scenario among the answer options that is most alike given the relationship of ideas in the particular section of the passage. The solution process is also similar. Compare your answer (in your own words) to the answer options to identify which scenario captures the same essential ideas.

“Problem-Solution” questions are another inference question type on the SHSAT that asks the reader to deduce the underlying idea that leads to the solution of a problem-solution scenario.

Let's review an example.

e.g., Which statement describes how the author’s use of problem-and-solution in paragraph 5 contributes to the development of ideas in the passage?

Excerpt from Chapter 5: At first she shivered in the bone-chilling water even though she had covered her body in eight layers of grease for insulation. Her limbs felt stiff. Her strokes were irregular. Driving forward, she fought to clear her mind and find what she called her “sphere,” a place where the sea became her only companion and the shrieks of gulls and the humming of boat engines faded away. Using a new overhand stroke called the American crawl, Ederle eventually settled into a steady pace, briskly breaking through waves.

How to approach solving these questions:

1. First, identify the problem and the solution. Incorrect answer choices will often describe the wrong solution. For example, the problem in chapter 5 is the cold water and waves. The solution presented is Ederle’s ability to find her own “sphere.” Answer option A, “Detailing the challenges that the cold channel waters presented highlights how effective Ederle’s training was,” correctly identifies the problem, but it presents a solution that is not addressed in the paragraph. While a seemingly plausible solution, Ederle’s training is not mentioned in the text, so option A is wrong.

2. Secondly, summarize the solution in your own words and ask yourself what aspect of the solution was essential to solving the problem. The question asks how this problem-solution helps to develop the ideas in the passage, not merely what the problem and solution are. You might summarize the problem-solution by saying Ederle’s ability to find her “sphere” denotes her ability to block out the distractions to her goal. This ability suggests that mental strength, not just physical strength was required to overcome the problem of the channel waters. Option D, “Illustrating Ederle’s process of blocking out her discomfort shows that swimming the channel was both a mental and a physical challenge,” best paraphrases the core idea illustrated by the solution.

## **Tone/Attitude**

Analyzing the author's purpose and tone is an essential skill for the SHSAT English Language Arts section. Understanding why an author wrote a particular piece and how they feel about the topic can help you answer questions more accurately and quickly.

The author's purpose refers to why they wrote the piece. There are four main purposes: to inform, to persuade, to entertain, and to describe. When you're reading a passage, try to figure out what the author's purpose is. If they're trying to persuade you to agree with their point of view, they might use strong language and emotional appeals. If they're trying to inform you about a topic, they might use facts and statistics. If they're trying to entertain you, they might use humor or suspense.

### “Attitude”

Attitude questions ask the reader to examine the author’s attitude or how she might characterize a certain passage or phrase. Recall, the SHSAT passages are relatively neutral. Answer choices that reflect strong opinions are likely to be too extreme to be correct. For example, if the author’s attitude is positive, then you will see correct answers use words like appreciative, agreement, approving, proud, sympathetic rather than excited, awed, amused. A negative attitude would be considered skeptical, ambivalent, tentative, uncertain or dubious rather than alarmed, mocking, hostile, sarcastic or angry. Neutral attitudes will be analytical, informative, objective rather than apathetic, indifferent, or resigned. Remember, author’s always care about the topic they write about, so apathetic or indifferent is a sure sign the answer is wrong unless it refers to a character in the passage, not the author, that is apathetic.

How do we answer “Tone-Attitude” questions?

One approach to answering these questions is to play positive-negative. Even if you cannot identify the exact viewpoint of the author from the text, chances are you will gain a sense of the author’s attitude as positive, negative or neutral based on various descriptive words in the text. Compare this to the language of the answer options. Are the words in the answer choices also similarly positive, negative, or neutral? If you understand the main idea of the passage or paragraph, then there is a good chance you will also know the author’s viewpoint unless the question narrows in on specific lines of text. In that case focus on the ideas only in those lines of text.

Let’s review an example of an attitude question.

Introduction: “In many cultures, **the ugly physical appearance of the bat has given it an unearned reputation** as an evil and **vicious bearer of diseases**. Many people, for example, believe that the American brown bat carries rabies. In fact, it is no more likely to transmit the disease than other animals, such as dogs.”

Conclusion: “Conservation groups and government agencies in many countries are attempting to change people’s attitudes toward bats. **When people learn that bats pollinate the trees and crops that provide their livelihood, they are more likely to appreciate and protect the bats in their area. There are also effective, non-harmful ways to deal with troublesome bats.** Orchard owners can cover their trees with netting to discourage the bats, and there are humane methods for moving bats from places where they are not wanted. For the sake of the rainforests and for life-forms everywhere that depend on them, it is urgent that people apply a new twist to an old adage and realize that ugliness is only skin deep.”

Which statement best describes the author’s opinion about bat conservation?

- A. Allowing bats to occasionally eat crops and fruit from cultivated trees is a good way to prevent bats from becoming endangered.
- B. Because bats can support the growth of many different species, they should be relocated to areas with struggling ecosystems.
- C. Although bats may seem to be a nuisance, it is vitally important that they are protected and managed in humane ways.
- D. Protecting the bat population takes priority over concerns about bats ruining cultivated trees and crops.

All parts of Option C, “although bats may seem to be a nuisance, it is vitally important that they are protected and managed in humane ways,” restates the text in the passage. The first part of answer choice C, “seems to be a nuisance,” is restated in the introductory sentence. “The ugly physical appearance of the bat has given it an unearned reputation as an evil and vicious bearer of diseases.” The last part of option C indicates, “(bats should be) protected and managed in humane ways.” This restates the lines in the concluding paragraph that indicate, “there are humane methods for moving bats from places where they are not wanted.” Lastly, option C indicates “it is vitally important” to protect the bats. This restates the final sentence “For the sake of the rainforests and for life-forms everywhere that depend on them (bats), it is urgent that people apply a new (outlook on bats).” This example also highlights that every part of the answer choice must be reflected in the text, so read carefully. Success is in the details.

## “Tone” Questions

Students frequently interchange attitude with tone, but the two are different. Attitude is the authors’ opinion based on what the author says. Tone describes how the author writes. Does the author use strong language, uncertain phrases, formal language, irony or humor? Below we briefly discuss the concepts of tone (the feelings) that often appear on the exam.

## Certain or Ambivalent

Certain language includes short declarations (Don't do it!) or more extreme language (no, always, never, definite), and it is described by tones like emphatic, decisive, resolute, or determined on the exam. Lack of certainty or ambivalence will be represented by qualifiers in the passage (might, maybe, sometimes) that denote a hesitant, tentative, or cautious tone. Questions in the passage can also represent uncertainty denoting puzzled, perplexed, or ambivalent tone. Speculative Words like could, might, or probably denote a speculative tone and frequently describe hypothetical situations.

## Humorous, Ironic

Humor does not reflect the positive funny "ha-ha" definition you might have come to expect. That is too subjective. Instead, on the SHSAT, it is often described as sarcastic and associated with a negative attitude. Humor denotes an unexpected event or an unexpected meaning that is the opposite of the primary use of a word or phrase. For example, if a main character complains that they are loved and adored too much, another character might respond by saying, "That's so awful," when she really means "I don't feel for you at all because love and adoration are good things." Humorous or ironic tone may require inferences based on context, so it is often harder to identify. Just remember humor is an unexpected behavior, not something that will make you laugh.

## Defensive

If the narrator begins a discussion about themselves, especially if they are attempting to justify a position or action, there is a good chance they are expressing a defensive tone.

## Nostalgic

Have you ever heard your parents say they weren't influenced by video games or mobile phones when they were young. They played outside as kids and went over to a friend's home if they wanted to communicate, as if those behaviors were intrinsically better. Guess what? Their tone is nostalgic. Anytime an author refers to another time or place as better than the current one, their tone will be described as nostalgic.

## Register – Formal or Informal

Formal language usually includes longer sentences and more sophisticated vocabulary. A typical example might be a history passage with long prose, which would be characterized as lofty or elevated. A science passage written in the third person (an outsider looking in) is also typically formal and described as objective or analytical. Informal tone includes more familiar speech used in an every day setting. For example, a Mark Twain excerpt from Huck Finn where the character is quoted as saying, “Now, set up straight!” might be considered casual or colloquial in tone. The first person, denoted by the liberal use of the subject pronoun “I,” is also generally considered informal and described as personal. In many cases, the first person also denotes a pensive or reflective tone if the main character is thinking about something. If the main character is teaching or instructing, then the tone might be described as didactic (in the manner of a teacher).

## 1e) New ELA Reading Question Prompts

**STOP! I don't recognize those questions on the new SHSAT ELA reading exam.**

Perhaps you have taken a new format ELA practice exam lately. The question prompts for main idea, infer, tone, and fact/detail questions have changed on the new ELA exam. The traditional question prompts do not exist. In addition, there are a host of new question prompts.

- Main idea questions do not appear first, and they no longer begin with phrases like, "The main idea of passage A is..."
- Infer questions no longer begin with phrases like "...most likely suggests."
- The question prompt, "According to the text," that typically denotes Fact/Detail questions almost never appears on the new ELA exam.

How then do we identify the types of questions on the new exam and answer them correctly? Do main idea, fact/detail, inference, or tone questions no longer exist? Are there new, different question types on the new ELA exam? What should students do?

## Identifying the New Reading Exam Questions

Students who have trained to identify only the old prompts will fail to correctly diagnose the new ELA question formats and lack the techniques to solve reading questions. The basic repetitive question types like main idea, fact/detail, tone, and infer still exist, but the presentation format of the questions has changed. **Moreover, there are several other types of questions and presentations that have become more relevant for the new ELA reading section that includes fiction passages like poetry and literary excerpts.**

We have taken an organized, STEM-based approach to identifying and categorizing the different types of question presentations that appear on the new ELA reading exam. We started with the exam where there are currently enough official practice examples to make a learned assessment. We identified the most frequently appearing question presentations and outlined typical solution strategies for each. We hope the following insights will prove more useful to you in practice than the typical "old" ELA course mentality, which does not seem to have changed very much despite the new exam format. Let's take a look at the new SHSAT ELA reading question prompts.

## Overall Structure (Function)

Questions on the new ELA reading exam that ask about the "overall structure" are essentially function questions, and they are far more prevalent with poetry and narratives in the new ELA exam. Function questions ask what the effect of a phrase is rather than what a phrase means, which is an inference question. Let's explore the difference a little more closely. For example, suppose the main character in the audience at a comedy club said, "That's terrible!" while heaving up and down drenched in tears. An inference question might ask what did the author mean by the word "terrible". The correct answer might be "good" or "funny". The character was being sarcastic. A function question would ask, "The author included the phrase 'That's terrible!' in order to?" The correct answer would probably be "to suggest that the character feels the opposite is true". The answer options in a function question describe the effect of the phrase. Typically, the answer choices begin with a verb like, "to suggest that the character...(blank)."

How to solve function questions:

Function questions essentially ask the question why an author included a particular phrase or idea in the text, and that often elicits a desire on the part of test takers to get into the mind of the author—something that is not possible or even desirable on a standardized reading exam like the SHSAT. Furthermore, on these questions, it is often unhelpful to rephrase the question to, “Why did the author include (blank)?” The answer to the above question *why* might be as useless as, “...because the author wanted to.” That response will not prove useful. Instead, rephrase the question to ask, “What does the reference to (blank) do? This question phraseology is more likely to lead to a practical, useful answer.

Take the following example from the SHSAT:

“The pressure theory claims that pressure from a skate blade melts the ice surface, creating a slippery layer of water. The water refreezes when the pressure is lifted. Science textbooks typically cite this explanation, but many scientists disagree, claiming that the pressure effect is not great enough to melt the ice. Nor can the pressure theory explain why someone wearing flat-bottomed shoes—which have a greater surface area than skate blades and thus exert less pressure per square inch— can glide across the ice or even go sprawling.”

The author includes details about the pressure theory in the third paragraph in order to

- A. highlight that there are different ideas regarding this theory about the slipperiness of ice.
- B. describe the most recently accepted theory for the slipperiness of ice.
- C. emphasize that this theory has been tested by scientists who study the slipperiness of ice.
- D. show that there is scientific support for a plausible theory about the slipperiness of ice.

The correct answer is demonstrated by option A, to highlight that there are different ideas regarding this theory about the slipperiness of ice. The pressure theory is one example of several hypotheses described in the passage, including the friction theory mentioned in the paragraph before and the Faraday hypothesis in the paragraphs that follow the discussion of the pressure theory. Function questions often require you to identify the ideas before and after the cited text to identify how the cited text fits into the organization of the paragraph or passage.



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Good big picture skills are important to answering even function questions. Readers must correctly diagnose the relationship of ideas to understand how the passage develops. In this case, they must assess that the passage in question is an explanatory essay—attempting to explain why ice is slippery. Like many explanatory essays, the passage will employ additive or sequential transitions to explain idea 1 then idea 2 then idea 3 etc. Understanding the structure of the passage will help test takers understand the function of the different parts of the passage. If you are interested in learning more about how passages are structured, turn to the lesson on skimming passages or identifying relationships between ideas. Each includes a more detailed discussion of the typical transitions used for different methods of passage development because good big picture skills are essential for test takers who employ a skim reading strategy—probably the most important reading technique to develop.

Overall Structure Prompt:

The most common presentation format for function questions on the new ELA reading exam includes reference to "the overall structure." Questions that ask how a paragraph or certain lines contribute to the "overall structure" of the passage are really asking students to identify the correct transition idea from the passage denoted by the cited paragraph. Only rarely do SHSAT reading questions directly ask about "transitions". **The overall structure presentation is far more common and should immediately have you thinking about transition ideas.** In order to answer the question correctly, students need to identify the idea from the previous paragraph and how it relates to the paragraph cited. Occasionally, it might be important to also summarize the paragraph that follows the cited text to assess the correct transition. Let's see an example.

(paragraph 1) Hundreds of years after the first sightings of the platypus, the animal still captures our imagination anew and irresistibly attracts the attention of science writers everywhere. The May 2008 Nature report detailing the DNA insides of the duck-billed platypus invited colorful tales from just about every mainstream media outlet.

(paragraph 2) But cuteness and weirdness aside, the platypus research results are a gold mine for medical researchers. The findings cement what may have seemed totally obvious but turned out to be a bit of a scientific surprise: platypus DNA is a patchwork of genes from reptiles, birds, and mammals.

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The sentence "But cuteness and weirdness aside, the platypus research results are a gold mine for medical researchers," contributes to the overall structure of the excerpt by

- A. shifting the focus of the excerpt from the platypus's unique appearance to its physiology.
- B. highlighting how the platypus's unusual appearance has attracted scientists' attention.
- C. revealing current ideas about the genetic background of the platypus.
- D. introducing the platypus's scientific significance that the rest of the excerpt develops.

Paragraph 1, before the cited text, outlines the cute and interesting weirdness of the platypus. The cited lines of text include the contrasting transition word "But," so the direction of the argument in the passage will switch in the following paragraph. The lines of text afterward point out the platypus is of scientific interest. In short, the progression of ideas indicate the platypus is cute, but more importantly, it is useful to science. The correct answer option for this question captures the correct transition. " introducing the platypus's scientific significance that the rest of the excerpt develops."

## Paragraph Idea

Most questions in the new ELA format will ask about specific paragraphs. **The paragraph is the new building block for the reading exam.** If you can do one thing well, chances are you want to perfect your ability to accurately identify the main idea of each paragraph and stanza. Nearly half of all reading questions ask how paragraph A (or A and B) develop the central idea or contribute to the excerpt. Moreover, almost half of the line citation questions (How do lines 5-10 convey..) can be approached in the same manner as the paragraph idea questions. In all, these questions combine for approximately 3 out of 5 reading questions. Wow! In most every case, the question can be answered correctly by identifying the core idea of the paragraphs, which most often presents in the topic sentence of each paragraph.

Let's see an example.

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Question: How do paragraphs 7 and 9 convey a central idea of the excerpt?

(Paragraph 7) “Everyone helped in some way. Most of the men fished or hunted for meat. While many of the women dug and roasted camas, other women and older children picked and dried berries.”

(Paragraph 9) “This sun, happiness, peace, and quiet blessed the Red Bear camp. All were busy with their daily tasks, until sudden cries came from the children playing by the trail..”

Answer Options:

E. by explaining that The People often explore different areas, which shows the value of trying new things

F. by revealing that The People must complete many tasks, which shows the necessity of being organized

G. by suggesting that The People are influenced by the weather, which shows their close relationship with nature

H. by demonstrating that The People work together, which shows the importance of contributing to the community

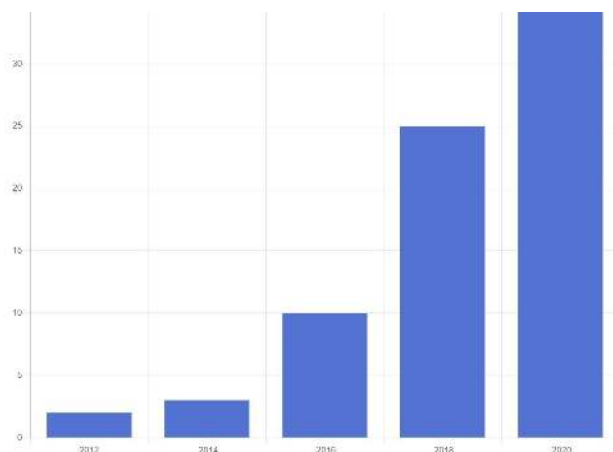
Option H is the correct answer because it paraphrases the key idea in each paragraph. The main idea of paragraph 7 is that everyone worked, everyone contributed. Paragraph 9 adds the idea that everyone was at peace while they were busy. Do not be lured into seemingly plausible answers that do not reflect the main ideas of the paragraphs in question. While it may be true that Native American tribes working outside at a seasonal harvest festival before winter sets in “are influenced by the weather,” the text does not clarify “a close relationship with nature”, which also is not the main idea of the paragraphs in question. The paragraphs focus on a community working together in peace.

Extra Notes:

Correct execution requires you try to understand the progression of ideas paragraph by paragraph or stanza by stanza (the rough paragraph equivalent for a poem). Improve your ability to summarize the central idea of any text (the topic + why we care), whether it is a few lines, a paragraph, or a complete passage.

## Charts/Table Idea

Number of smartphones used by American teenagers:



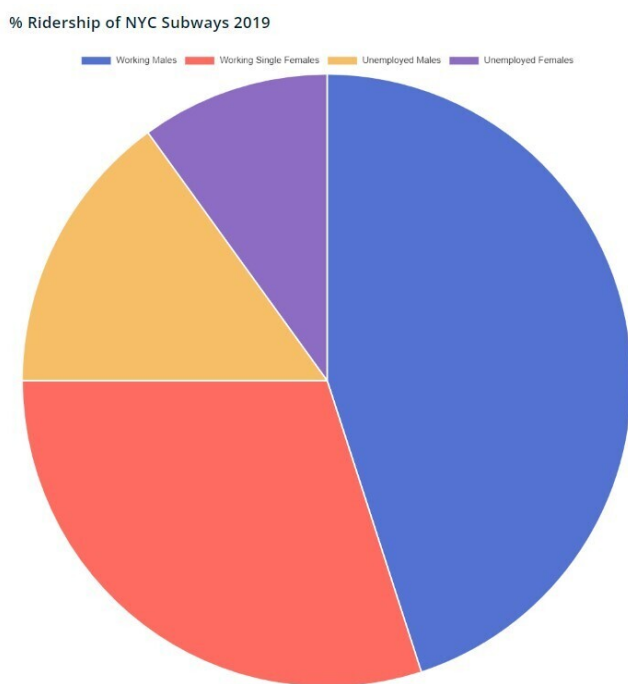
The above bar chart has a point: it tells the story of the dramatic growth in the use of smartphones by American teenagers. Students can often identify the point by observing the pattern of the bars or lines in a chart. Are they rising? falling? how quickly? If there are several lines do they intersect? diverge? At what point? Figures come in many shapes and forms: bar charts, line charts, pie charts, tables, and even paired figures. Besides diagnosing the story behind the trends and changes in the lines and bars of the graph, there are a few things to keep in mind for graphics.

Details to Watch For in Figures:

The units or axis measurements are often labeled with unfamiliar or vague names that students often do not fully understand. e.g. Kilojoules or % Effectiveness. Do not be thrown off by the “tricky” names because the name itself is usually relevant only to matching the same detail in an answer choice. Focus on the magnitudes and numerical values. Names aside, do make sure you read all the labels and understand the scope and nature of the information presented. Wrong answers will often mix up these details without students even recognizing the trick that is being played.

## Total Amount vs. Change:

One answer might present correct figures and trends from the chart but present a reference to changes rather than totals. e.g. Smartphone use among teenagers grew by 45 million in the two years leading up to 2020. That answer option is wrong because the number of smartphones grew to 45 million. The increase was only  $45 - 25 = 20$  million. Make sure the direction of the change is also correct. A reduction of 20 million would also not describe the graph accurately. Similar differences can occur between amounts and frequencies or probability.



## Number vs. Frequency/Probability:

A pie chart depicting different groups' ridership numbers on the subway may say nothing about the likelihood or frequency of that group riding the subway. The following answer option would be incorrect: "Employed males are more likely to take the NYC subway."

The chart presents percentage ridership numbers by group. Total percent values may not be indicative of probability or likelihood or perhaps even frequency. It might be that employed men are less likely to take the subway, but they outnumber the other groups resulting in their high percentage of total subway ridership. The concepts sound interchangeable, but they are distinct. Pay careful attention to what the graph denotes and what the answer options actually indicate.

# Get Ready for the SHSAT: English Language Arts Edition for 6th-9th Grade Students

Pay Attention to the Scope:

What is the universe covered by the graph? An answer choice that states, “the use of smartphones has grown dramatically around the world,” is not correct in relation to the first chart above. The chart only depicts smartphone use among American teenagers. Likewise, an answer option that indicates, “Employed females ride the NYC subway less frequently on workdays than employed males,” is also incorrect. The chart provides total ridership data for a given period, not workdays. The frequency for any different period, like workdays, may be very different.

General vs. Specific Answers:

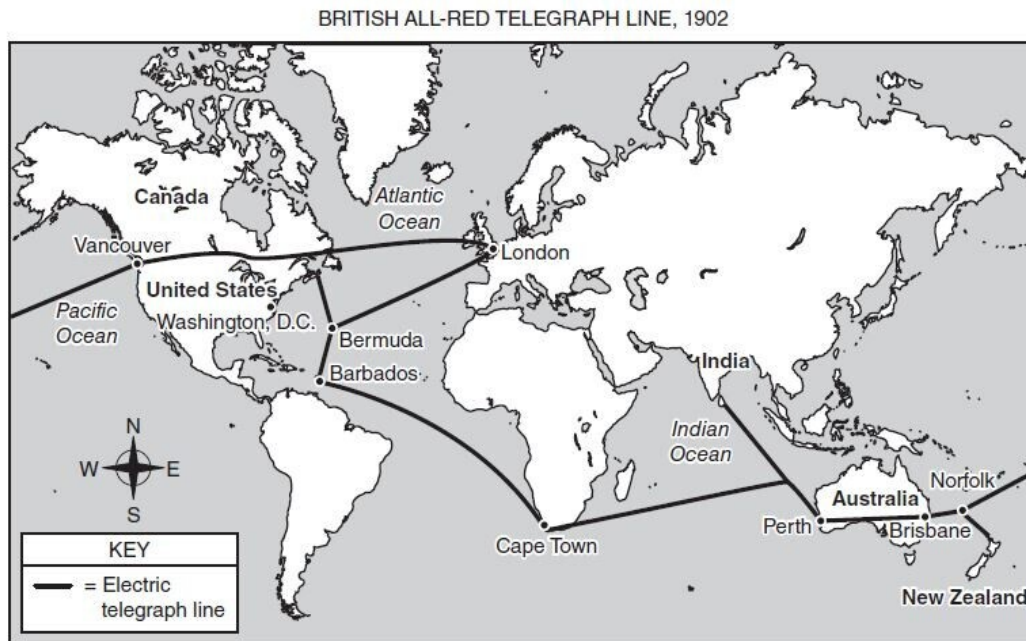
Suppose you had the following question related to the first bar chart.

Which information best summarizes the information in the graph?

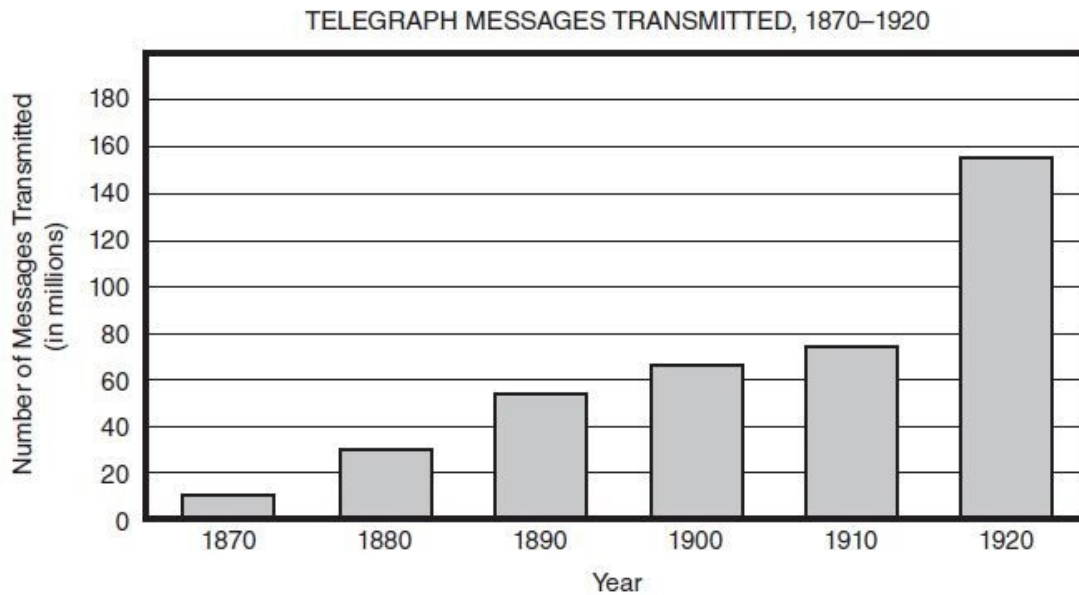
- A. More than 20 times the number of American teenagers use smartphones in 2020 than only one decade earlier.
- B. Smartphone usage by teenagers increased 150% from 2016 to 2018.
- C. The number of current (2020) American teenagers that use smartphones exceeds the combined number of American teenagers who used smartphones throughout the decade leading up to 2020.
- D. The growth rate of smartphone usage by American teenagers has been dramatic in the last decade.

All the answers present correct information from the graph, but only one answer choice summarizes the information. The question itself is general in nature. Answer options A to C provide specific details that do not answer the question asked. Only option D presents general language that summarizes the graph. It is not only factually correct but also relevant to the question. That difference can be particularly important for questions that relate the graph to concepts presented in the passage.

Paired Figures: Review the following new SHSAT figure and related question.



The first transatlantic electric telegraph message was sent in 1858, and by 1902 the British All-Red Line connected most of the world.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 2. Washington, D.C., 1975.*

How does the graph support the ideas in paragraph 8?

- A. It indicates how welcome the improvement of long-distance communication was in the United States.
- B. It provides evidence of the dramatic increase in the number of telegraph messages as Morse’s system expanded across the United States.
- C. It reveals that by the twentieth century millions of people had used the telegraph despite earlier hesitations about the system.
- D. It shows how improvements that allowed Morse code to be read in real time made relaying telegraph messages faster and increased the system’s usage.

Paragraph 8: Soon, as overhead wires connected cities up and down the Atlantic coast, the dots-and-dashes method that recorded messages on a long moving strip of paper was replaced by the operator’s ability to interpret the code in real time. . . . Telegraph lines soon extended westward, and within Morse’s own lifetime they connected the continents of Europe and America.

Paired graphics tell a combined story that must be pieced together by both figures unlike simple, individual graphics. That doesn’t mean it is complicated to figure out, but be careful about the details. In this case, the two figures demonstrate expansion geographically and also in the number of messages sent: both ideas supported in paragraph 8 of the passage.

The correct answer to the question, option B, seems to lack any mention of international expansion. International expansion is depicted by the map, not the graph. Pay close attention to the question conditions. The question asks how the graph supports the ideas in paragraph 8. The graph is a bar chart depicting only growth in the number of messages sent, and that is the concept supported in paragraph 8, so option B is the right answer.

## Command of Evidence

Command of Evidence questions present a particular condition and require students to choose the best evidence from among answer options in quotes with paragraph or line citations. These questions appear on average almost once every 10 questions or roughly one question per reading passage. If you understand how to answer this question format, then you should get the correct answer most every time.



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Let's see an example to better recognize these questions.

Question: Which lines from the poem best contrast with the idea of winter's scarcity and bleakness?

- A. "The shrilling of the frogs was not so shrill as in the/first weeks after the broken winter;" (lines 4– 5)
- B. "The yellow spreads of the dandelions and buttercups / reached across the green pastures." (lines 8– 9)
- C. "Tee whee and tee whee came on the breezes, and the grackles / chuzzled their syllables." (lines 10– 11)
- D. "Or if instead of counting up last year as against / this year, they count up this year as against next" (lines 25– 26)

The key to correctly answering this question format is to **make sure you understand the question condition well because there is only one answer that meets the distinct condition.** In fact, command of evidence questions test your ability to truly understand the question being asked, something students too often take for granted. You must focus on correctly identifying the conditions and then, with laser focus, find the answer that meets those specific conditions and nothing else.

In almost 90% of the official examples you do not even need to consult the passage text to discern the context within surrounding text. In the above example, option B. "The yellow spreads of the dandelions and buttercups / reached across the green pastures" is the only choice that contrasts with the "bleak" "scarcity" of winter. Option B is indicative of summer and suggests color, growth, and abundance.

Note, the condition is usually stated clearly without further interpretation.

Question Condition Examples:

- Which sentence best demonstrates the professional relationship between the narrator and the professor? (the key condition is a "professional" or work relationship)
- Which sentence from the passage indicates that Bannister nearly made a mistake that would have cost him the world record? (the key is "*almost but not actually* a mistake")
- Which sentence from the passage supports the idea that congressional term limits would "benefit our government?" (the key condition to meet is "benefits from term limits")

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Only in a couple cases do the conditions present more abstractly. For example, "Which of the following supports what is implied in this line? Which detail from the poem describes the speaker's point of view?" In these cases, students have the added challenge to identify the speaker's point of view or what idea is implied. Many well-known workbooks present the command of evidence format in nearly half the questions (5 times the actual frequency they appear) and almost always in the latter, more difficult style. Fortunately, that is simply not how the exam presents based on approximately 30 official examples since the new ELA format was introduced. You can use this knowledge to your advantage.

## Best Summary

Questions that ask for the "best summary" must briefly provide both a complete overview and focus on the key ideas/events from the passage. Tricky wrong answers will typically include too much detail or provide only a partial overview. In many cases, **the correct answer will read like a list of events in order that can be found directly from the text by identifying the order of events in the passage.** In that regard, best summary questions are essentially fact/detail problems. You simply need to roll up your sleeve and check the evidence.

Let's see an example.

(Passage excerpts) By December 1837, Morse had enough confidence in his new system to apply for the federal government's appropriation, and during the next year he conducted demonstrations of his telegraph both in New York and Washington.

However, when the economic disaster known as the Panic of 1837 took hold of the nation and caused a long depression, Morse was forced to wait for better times. It was during this period that Morse visited Europe again and tried not only to secure patent protection overseas but to examine competing telegraph systems in England. . . .

By 1843, the country was beginning to recover economically, and Morse again asked Congress for the \$30,000 that would allow him to build a telegraph line from Washington to Baltimore, forty miles away. The House of Representatives eventually passed the bill containing the Morse appropriation, and the Senate approved it in the final hours of that Congress's last session. With President Tyler's signature, Morse received the cash he needed and began to carry out plans for an underground telegraph line.

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Question: Which sentence is the best summary of how Morse obtained the funding necessary to build his telegraph system?

Answer Options:

E. Morse applied for a federal grant that was delayed until 1843, so he spent time traveling in Europe, where he concentrated on obtaining a patent for his system.

F. Morse applied for a government grant that required both houses of Congress and the president to pass a bill awarding him \$30,000 for his telegraph project.

G. Morse applied for a government appropriation and conducted telegraph demonstrations to show that his system could work, and after a delay caused by a financial depression, Congress approved the \$30,000 appropriation in 1843.

H. Working with Gale and Vail allowed Morse to find flaws in Henry's work and to develop his own ideas before applying for the federal government appropriation.

Option G is the correct answer. It follows the order of key events in the passage that lead to Morse's funding. Although occasionally tedious, the process to answer this question format requires students return to the passage text to trace the literal details from the passage in order. Usually a list of the first three key events proves sufficient to differentiate the lists in the answer options. See the key concepts underlined in the excerpt above in order. Be careful not to summarize by including every specific detail; include only the high points. Return to the answer options and compare.

Watch out for answers that are correct but only partial summaries: they cannot be the best summary. Options E and F above are examples of this mistake because each only indicates an application for funding was made but never indicates the result. Note also option H. The question does not ask about the invention or development of the telegraph, which is incorrectly summarized in option H. The question is about *the funding process*. Make certain to identify the correct question conditions in all cases.

Let's see another example.

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- 6 To see what effects exercise might have on this process, the researchers first recruited 40 college-age Chinese men and women who were trying to learn English. The students had some facility with this second language but were far from proficient.
- 7 The researchers then divided the students into two groups. Those in one group would continue to learn English as they had before, primarily while seated in rote vocabulary-memorization sessions.
- 8 The others would supplement these sessions with exercise.
- 9 Specifically, the students would ride exercise bikes at a gentle pace (about 60 percent of their maximum aerobic capacity) beginning 20 minutes before the start of the lessons and continuing throughout the 15 minutes or so of instruction.
- 10 Both groups learned their new vocabulary by watching words projected onto large screens, together with comparable pictures, such as “apple” and a Red Delicious. They were shown 40 words per session, with the sequence repeated several times.
- 11 Afterward, the students all rested briefly and then completed a vocabulary quiz, using computer keys to note as quickly as possible whether a word was with its correct picture. They also responded to sentences using the new words, marking whether the sentences were accurate or, in the case of “The apple is a dentist,” nonsensical. Most linguists<sup>1</sup> feel that understanding sentences shows greater mastery of a new language than does simple vocabulary improvement.
- 12 The students completed eight vocabulary sessions over the course of two months.

Question: Which sentence is the best summary of the research procedure used in the study in the excerpt?

- A. Researchers had a group of non-English-speaking students learn new English vocabulary by matching words and images on a computer screen, and also by analyzing words in context; some students exercised and some students sat still while learning.
- B. Researchers first divided non-English-speaking students into two groups with one group exercising before and while studying English and the other group studying English without exercising; then, after instruction, student learning was assessed.
- C. Researchers first had non-English-speaking students sit on stationary bikes and pedal for 20 minutes before instruction and 15 minutes during instruction; then, after a rest period, students indicated whether English sentences made sense.
- D. Researchers asked non-English-speaking students to study English while sitting or biking; then the students’ vocabulary skills were assessed after a short break period and also after a break of a full month without their having studied any of the materials.

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Note the key events are highlighted in green, and they follow key transition word clues: first, then, and afterward. The additional details highlighted in red are examples of extra information that is not essential to capture in the summary. This non-critical information is preceded by the transition word “specifically”, which indicates the information that follows includes details, perhaps evidence of the summary points, not the key events themselves.

The correct answer to the question is option B because it follows the order of key events from start to end. It does not embellish the summary with too many unnecessary details as shown above in bold for options A, C and D. Be careful not to choose the most detailed answer because the inclusion of numerous, specific details is generally not the purpose of a “summary”. It is even possible some of those specific details are restated incorrectly like the last part of answer option D: students completed 8 sessions over two months according to the passage, not a full month break without study.

## Author's Point of View/Most likely to Agree

These questions ask what the author would “most likely agree with” or what the speaker’s, narrator’s, or author’s “point of view” is. **In reality, the author's point of view questions are basically asking the student to identify the main idea of the passage.** The author presented the main idea, so any answer option that rephrases the main idea must be correct by deduction. You cannot, on the other hand, get inside the author's head, so there is no other way to answer the question beyond the text evidence.

Question:

Which statement would the author most likely agree with?

- E. The publicity efforts La Cocina engages in will help its business design spread to other cities.
- F. The variety of exciting food available in San Francisco is due to the work of La Cocina
- G. La Cocina offers a method that will guarantee business ownership for qualified entrepreneurs.
- H. La Cocina does admirable work in supporting the efforts of ambitious cooks who may have few resources.

## Excerpt from “The Food Business Incubator”

by Mandalit Del Barco

1 “La Cocina” means “the kitchen” in Spanish. It’s also the name of a business incubator<sup>1</sup> based in San Francisco’s Mission District. Since it began in 2005, it’s been helping local food entrepreneurs, many of whom are low-income immigrant women, develop their small businesses.

Option H is the correct answer. It rephrases the main idea of the passage. Do not be seduced by seemingly plausible answers that are not a restatement of the main idea.

Answer choices that reflect strong opinions are likely to be too extreme to be correct. For example, if the author’s attitude is positive, then you will see correct answers use words like appreciative, agreement, approving, proud, sympathetic rather than excited, awed, amused. A negative attitude would be considered skeptical, ambivalent, tentative, uncertain or dubious rather than alarmed, mocking, hostile, sarcastic or angry. Neutral attitudes will be analytical, informative, objective rather than apathetic, indifferent, or resigned. Remember, author’s always care about the topic they write about, so apathetic or indifferent is a sure sign the answer is wrong unless it refers to a character in the passage, not the author.

**One approach to answering attitude or viewpoint questions is to play positive-negative.** Even if you cannot identify the exact viewpoint of the author, chances are you will gain a sense of the author’s attitude as positive, negative or neutral based on certain word clues from the passage. Compare this attitude to the language of the answer options. Are the words in the answer choices also similarly positive, negative, or neutral? If you understand the main idea of the passage or paragraph, then there is a good chance you will also know the author’s viewpoint unless the question narrows in on specific lines of text. In that case focus on the ideas only in those lines of text.

## Chronological/Sequencing

A few questions ask about various rhetorical effects such as those seen below. Chronological questions are one example, and they ask about the “chronological structure” or “sequencing” of events. **The correct answer will always reference a progression, change, or sequencing of ideas/events as follows.**

“It highlights the progression of Bannister’s training and details about his successful attempt to break the four minute-mile barrier”

“outlining the actions that the Wright brothers took to prepare for and successfully complete the first flight”

The correct answer will not focus only on the “lessons learned”, “primary factors”, or “analysis” details from the story without a significant focus on the change of those ideas over time. Although relevant to the story, many enticing answer choices do not explain anything about sequencing over time. If not, they are not answering the question. Make sure the idea presented in the correct answer results from something that “progresses” or “changes” over time according to the text and look for similar keywords to reflect the same temporal idea in the correct answer.

## Cause-Effect

Some questions ask about the “cause” and “effect” of certain actions in the text. Make sure to clearly identify the cause. **Wrong answers will often include effects that do not result from the “cause” in the question condition.** Even more difficult, some wrong answers will include correct effects from the identified cause but mix up facts or add details that are not true according to the text.



See the following example.

5 Julian Olden, a biologist at the University of Washington, Seattle, who co-organized the symposium, recently polled nearly 2,000 ecologists. Among his findings: a substantial number of them said they would immediately eradicate a hypothetical non-native forest plant, even if it were shown to have no effect on the forest. Olden calls this the “guilty even when proven innocent” approach.

6 That kind of approach is not very useful on a rapidly changing planet.

### **Exotics Are Everywhere**

7 Climate change is making it harder even to decide who the invaders are.

8 How, scientists at the symposium wondered, do you define “native” on a warming planet, when plants and animals are already moving toward the poles or up mountainsides in search of climate conditions they can tolerate? Should we consider them “invasive” in their new homes? Regardless of what we label them, conservationists will be reluctant to remove them from their new environs—to do so would stymie<sup>1</sup> their chances of adapting to the warmer future we’re creating.

Question:

Climate change has affected efforts to manage invasive species mainly by causing ecologists to

- E. call upon the public to be more tolerant of the presence of non-native species.
- F. admit that past attempts to eliminate non-native species have damaged the environment.
- G. find ways of ensuring that native species are not harmed by the arrival of new species.
- H. acknowledge that it is not realistic for some species to remain in their native habitats.

Answer option H is correct. The “cause” in this question is climate change and the effect needs to be upon “ecologists” according to the question conditions. Paragraphs 7–8 indicate that scientists (ecologists at the symposium) admit species are moving out of their native habitats due to climate change, implying it is not realistic for those species to remain in their original habitats.

## **Affect Tone**

Some questions ask what is the effect of some text from the passage on the “tone.” These questions correspond to more traditional tone-attitude questions where students must identify the correct “feeling” denoted by the words in question. Tone describes how the author writes. Does the author use strong language, uncertain phrases, formal language, irony or humor? Is the tone ambivalent or certain, defensive, nostalgic, formal or informal? There is a broad range of tones (feelings) that can be identified by the use of descriptive or feeling words in the text.



## Repetition

Some questions, frequently poem-related, ask about the meaning of repeated lines or phrases. You may already know repetition can be used for emphasis. Let's revisit an example we saw earlier.

Question:

In paragraph 8, the author repeats the word “played” most likely to?

- A. emphasize how much the adults enjoy observing the children.
- B. show how everyone finds a way to enjoy being at the gathering.
- C. indicate the variety of activities available at the gathering.
- D. characterize the manner in which the children master the work of adults.

The correct answer is option D. (Paragraph 8) “And the younger children played. They played at hunting. They played with the babies. They played with their horses and puppies. They learned how to live through their play.”

The word “played” is repeated throughout the same couple lines because it is emphasizing the actions of the children. **Merely identifying the existence of the emphasis is usually not enough to answer the question, however. Ask yourself what is being emphasized and why?** In this case the play does not include typical children's games. It represents the actions of adults: hunting, caring for babies, horses, etc. The key to the correct answer is to identify the correct idea being emphasized.

**Additionally, the purpose of repetition across stanzas or paragraphs is to connect two disparate ideas/events and draw a comparison that might not otherwise be obvious.**

Let's see an example from a poem.

And now when the branches were beginning to be heavy,  
It was the time when they once had said, "This is the  
beginning of summer."  
The shrilling of the frogs was not so shrill as in the  
5 first weeks after the broken winter;  
The birds took their hops and zigzags a little more  
anxious; a home is a home; worms are worms.  
The yellow spreads of the dandelions and buttercups  
reached across the green pastures.  
10 *Tee whee* and *tee whee* came on the breezes, and the grackles  
chuzzled their syllables.  
And it was the leaves with a strong soft wind over them  
that talked most of all and said more than any others  
though speaking the fewest words.  
15 It was the green leaves trickling out the gaunt nowhere  
of winter, out on the gray hungry branches—  
It was the leaves on the branches, beginning to be heavy,  
who said as they said one time before, "This is the be-  
ginning of summer."

Question: How does the repetition of “This is the beginning of summer” in lines 2–3 and lines 18–19 contribute to the meaning of the poem?

- E. It suggests that the shift to summer occurs in the same way each year.
- F. It emphasizes the idea that living things are prepared for the change of season.
- G. It highlights the idea that the first signs of summer are surprising each year.
- H. It builds expectations about what the natural world looks like during a change of season.

Option E is the correct answer. It is the only answer option that references a “connection”, in this case the “sameness” of season changes across time.

## Problem-Solution

Problem-solution questions do not appear very often, but it is worth knowing how to answer these questions correctly. In most cases, there is only one answer that presents a problem and its solution. First, identify the problem in the answer option. Most every answer option will at least present a problem. Ask yourself if the answer also provides a solution to that specific problem. **Most answer choices are not solutions at all. Trickier answers will be solutions to some problem, but you have to ask if the solution in the answer corrected the problem identified in the answer option.** Wrong answer choices will not.

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Question:

Which statement describes how the author’s use of problem-and-solution in paragraph 5 contributes to the development of ideas in the passage?

- A. Detailing the challenges that the cold channel waters presented highlights how effective Ederle’s training was.
- B. Describing Ederle’s physical difficulties during her swim provides evidence of the team effort required in order to ensure her safety.
- C. Explaining the difficulties that arose early in the effort helps predict the additional problems that occurred during Ederle’s attempt.
- D. Illustrating Ederle’s process of blocking out her discomfort shows that swimming the channel was both a mental and a physical challenge.

Option D is the correct answer because it is the only answer to present a problem and a solution to the same problem. Problem: Ederle felt discomfort. Solution to discomfort: Ederle used mental fortitude to block her feelings of discomfort. Answer options C and B amount to problem-prediction and problem-evidence, not problem-solution. Answer A may be enticing because it is presented in a problem-solution format, but Ederle’s training did not solve the problem of the cold water.

## Form of Poem

These questions typically apply to poetry and ask why the text is formatted (in most cases how the text is literally laid out on the page) the way it is. For example, note the poem *Cross Purposes*.

What I am is *built*: concrete and steel.  
I defy gravity. I am what every athlete  
wants: to remain at the apex of the leap,  
up in the air. And yet I am useful, too:  
8 cars, trucks, people, even trains  
make their way across my broad back.  
Swallows and ospreys<sup>1</sup> nest in my trusses.

*What I am is motion. I am water, and I am older  
than anything else you know. No human  
10 built me. I am gravity's best friend; I pool  
and flow wherever gravity takes me.  
I am the blood flowing in the runner's chest,  
and I catch everything: from the hills,  
the mountains. It all washes down through me.*

15 What you are is an *accident*,  
what happens to rain when rain gives in  
to Earth's gravitational pull.  
You are some tears dribbling from a mountain's  
eye, running down the pavements  
20 of small towns, into the cities, to the sea.  
You are the path of least resistance.

Question:

How does the form of the poem contribute to its meaning?

- E. The use of an equal number of lines in each stanza emphasizes that both speakers are equally important.
- F. The use of italics in some of the stanzas indicates the increasing tension between the structure and the water.
- G. The alternating positions of the stanzas highlight the opposing points of view of the speakers.
- H. The lack of a regular rhyme scheme or meter reflects the way the water changes the structure and the way the water itself changes.

The correct answer is option G. The stand-out feature of the text formatting is that it alternates from side to side, mirroring the back and forth conversation between the two speakers, which helps to develop the main idea.

## Personification

Personification is the rhetorical effect employed when the author uses human characteristics to describe non-human objects. For example, “They say chickens cannot wink, but I am certain ‘Miss Auntie’(a chicken) was glaring at me with the evil eye!” It is likely you will confront a problem about personification on any given exam. The question could ask about “personification” in the question wording or it could ask about the author’s technique like the following question from Cross Purposes.

Question:

How does the poet develop the points of view of the structure and the water?

- A. by relating a discussion between them about the future of human civilization
- B. by narrating a debate they have over their impact on the environment
- C. by illustrating the unique power they each possess over nature
- D. by using personification to allow them to debate who is more important

The correct answer is option D. The words “tears”, “blood flowing”, “across my back”, “regal”, “clumsy” all suggest human characteristics apply to inanimate objects that are talking back and forth in the poem.

## Risky

Questions that ask for evidence of “risk” **can be answered correctly by finding the option that presents danger of physical harm or death.** Potential for failure or loss or other types of problems do not constitute “risk” on the SHSAT. Ask yourself if the answer option means the subject of the question could/would die.

## If) Reading Strategies

Many guides or courses focus on the different strategies for reading a passage: deep reading (reading everything word for word), skim reading (reading only focused parts), segmented reading (read a section, answer related questions, repeat), or no preliminary read (dive immediately into the questions), etc. Instead of reviewing all the options, we believe **it is far more useful to focus on two important training goals that students should develop in every case: read the passage actively with a purpose and learn how to skim read.** Many of you will read just to get to the passage end to start answering questions. That approach is not helpful. Read with a purpose to make sure you walk away from every passage with certain details and targeted information you set out to find from the beginning. In other words, set a goal. Also, despite the different reading strategies, we know the overwhelming majority of you will end up deep reading every word and every line in part because you never really learned anything else. You never learned how to skim read, which is a critical skill that goes hand in hand with identifying core ideas and how they stitch together to form the passage idea(s). If you learn to read with a purpose and know how to identify the core ideas, then your reading comprehension will improve dramatically.

## Active reading techniques

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill for the SHSAT English Language Arts section. However, simply reading the passages is not enough to ace this section. You need to read actively, which means engaging with the text and actively trying to understand the arguments and the relationships between ideas.

The SHSAT English Language Arts section will test your ability to analyze arguments. This means that you need to be able to identify the main argument in a text, as well as the supporting evidence and any counterarguments. You also need to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the argument and identify any weaknesses or flaws.

To analyze arguments effectively, **you need to read critically**. This means that you should approach the text with a questioning mindset, **looking for evidence to support the argument** and evaluating its logic. You should also be aware of any biases or assumptions that the author may have, and consider how these might affect the argument.

1. Preview the passage: Before diving into the passage, take a moment to preview it. Look at the title, any headings or subheadings, and any images or graphs. This will give you an idea of what the passage is about and help you focus on the main ideas.
2. Highlight and annotate: As you read the passage, highlight important information and possibly make notes in the margins. This will help you remember key points and make it easier to refer back to the passage later.
3. Ask questions: While reading, ask yourself questions about the text. What is the main idea? What are the supporting details? What is the author's purpose? This will help you stay focused and actively engaged with the text.
4. Summarize: After reading each section or paragraph, take a moment to summarize what you just read in your own words. This will help you remember the information and make it easier to answer questions about the passage.

5. Visualize: Try to picture the information in your mind as you read. This will help you remember the information and make it easier to understand complex ideas.

By using these active reading techniques, you can improve your reading comprehension and score higher on the SHSAT English Language Arts section. Remember to practice these techniques regularly and take your time while reading the passages.

## Read with a Purpose

At the start of every passage, whether fiction or non-fiction, poetry or science, you should set a goal to identify the following:

1. Main Idea = Topic + Why we care
2. Author's Viewpoint & Tone
3. Progression of Ideas - stitch together paragraph/stanza ideas and their transitions

First, learn to identify the topic and the reason the author chose to write about the topic. i.e. why do we care. In non-fiction, the main idea is usually stated in a thesis claim in the introductory paragraph. It may not be in the very first sentences, which are often used to provide a hook or small story to grab the readers attention and provide scene setting. Often the main claim is the last sentence of the introduction, and almost always it is restated in the conclusion. With narratives, poetry, or other literary excerpts, the main idea generally follows the storyline from beginning to end. Make sure to crystallize the key points of the main idea in your mind. You will revisit the exact idea(s) throughout the questions and will need to refer to the specific thesis claim as a benchmark to judge numerous answer options.

Secondly, ask yourself who wrote the passage. What is the author's viewpoint on the topic and how does she present her thoughts and emotions? What words are used to convey feeling?

Lastly, and most importantly, try to reverse engineer the author's outline of the passage. This exercise will greatly improve your comprehension. It is almost always worth any extra time and effort. Every time you write your own essays, you hopefully outline your ideas to develop a logical progression of your arguments or ideas. Guess what? So did the author who wrote the passage, even in the case of poetry. If you identify the passage main idea and the separate ideas of each paragraph, you can begin to stitch together the progression of ideas the author is attempting to develop to present her story. Perhaps the best way to execute this last task is to get better at skim reading.

### **Skim Reading - Identifying the progression of ideas**

Identifying main ideas and supporting details is a critical skill that every student needs to master in order to excel in the English Language Arts section of the SHSAT. This subchapter will teach you how to identify the main ideas and supporting details in a passage, and use that understanding to answer questions more accurately.

When I was young, I did not understand what it meant to skim read a text. As an adult, it became clear that my experience was not unique. Like many of you, I thought "skim reading" a text basically meant reading everything more quickly. Speed reading. I learned to speed read from dicey course advertisements that promised I would soon read much more quickly. The advice never worked. I suspected it was my fault. A personal shortcoming. Then one day I read a quote by Woody Allen who said, "I read War and Peace in one sitting. The only thing I understood was...it was about Russia." A lightbulb went off. It dawned on me that I had it backward. Even the best English language artists cannot speed read and maintain the same level of comprehension. The secret to good reading comprehension lies elsewhere. I soon looked at the exercise differently and realized that skim reading was not about working at a frenetic pace. Skimming a passage means reading only certain parts of a passage—the most important ideas—and not reading other parts. That made sense to me.

How can you possibly know what the most important ideas are and which ideas you should skip, however? It is actually easier than you might think. We know how passages are organized from elementary school. The scene setting and thesis claim are in the introduction. The body paragraphs provide arguments in support of the main claim. Each outlines its own argument or idea in the topic sentence and both examples and supporting evidence follow. Each chart or table also tells its own mini-story. Together these ideas are stitched together by the author to form the main passage idea.



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This knowledge of passage organization suggests a simple approach to skim reading.

1. Read the introductory paragraph closely until you understand what is going on, including the main idea.
2. Highlight or underline the 1st (topic) sentence of each paragraph and possibly the last if the idea of the paragraph's last sentence is quite different.
3. Read the conclusion more closely word for word again.

The benefits of this simple skim reading approach are numerous. Surprisingly, saving time on the actual reading is the least of the benefits. Note, I personally do not jot notes on the sidelines of each paragraph. This takes extra time and my interpretation in the notes may differ from the exact text idea, creating a point of potential weakness. Instead, the highlights (I underline) can be read back quickly from beginning to end to form a separate "crib notes" for the story. When done right with some practice and experience, it is amazing how the progression of ideas fall right off the page. It is frequently like looking at the forest and not getting caught among the individual trees. The big picture is more clear. Moreover, most questions on the new ELA exam will require you to focus on individual paragraph ideas and their relations to other ideas. In short, most questions on the test will ask about the ideas and turning points in ideas that you identify from a good skim read. Although you may not directly pick up all the details, you will know where to find the relevant details given your outline from skim reading. The ability to zero in on the evidence for a Fact/Detail question, for instance, will save you time when answering questions. Additionally, most students have difficulty with "hard" passages because they miss the big picture. The natural response is to read the text again even more closely. Instead, the better approach is often to zoom out to try and see the overall organization of broad ideas from the skim read rather than get caught up in the nitty gritty language of a science passage or a poem. At least then you might be able to make some useful deductions about the questions and answers.

Let's revisit the skim reading example from the Main Idea chapter on page 35. **In this case, we will only present the underlined portions.**

**Paragraph 1:** But the power of the wind can also be put to constructive use. people have devised ways to harness wind energy for thousands of years.

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**Paragraph 2:** The first known attempt to use wind power was the sailboat. By the tenth century, windmills were used throughout central Asia; they were used in China as early as the thirteenth century.

**Paragraph 3:** In Europe, windmills came into widespread use during the twelfth century. Windmills eventually became sophisticated enough for use in a broad range of work, from sawmills and drainage pumping to processing goods such as dyes, tobacco, cocoa, and spices

**Paragraph 4:** In the 1700s, as steam engines gained in popularity, the use of wind machines for many types of work declined. In many remote areas even today, livestock production would be impossible without the use of windmills to provide water.

**Paragraph 5:** Beginning in the late nineteenth century, windmills were adapted to generate electricity. Efficient, clean, and fairly inexpensive to operate, wind farms may prove to be as important in the future as earlier windmills were in the past.

The underlined sentences from the skim read provide a quick synopsis of the entire story. It is easy to see the progression of ideas from the introduction of wind power to its development as an industrial power source to its relative demise and now the new growth prospects of green electricity production.

At first, learning to skim read might seem awkward. Practice. You will learn what to highlight and what not to read as you gain experience. You can modify the simple technique, also. For instance, I generally circle any transition words or strong punctuation (colons, exclamation marks, question marks, italics, etc.) within the paragraphs. This addition helps to capture changes in direction in ideas, which can be extremely useful, especially for longer paragraphs.

In conclusion, identifying main ideas and supporting details is a key skill that every student needs to master for success on the SHSAT English Language Arts section. By practicing this skill, you'll be able to understand passages more deeply and accurately, and answer questions with confidence. Make sure to read actively with a purpose in mind at the outset of every passage. Develop your skim reading skills. They will prove useful even if you utilize a different reading technique like deep reading. Keep practicing, and you'll be well on your way to success on the SHSAT!

## Lesson 2 - Revising/Editing Part B

The revising-editing part B ELA exam section is also fundamentally a reading exam with up to two shorter, non-fiction passages followed by 4-6 revising-editing questions for each. The questions test function and organization rather than focusing on what the story is about. You will be asked to order sentences, identify appropriate transitions, and determine which sentences best achieve a required goal. All questions are multiple choice.

The passages for the part B section will generally exhibit the features of a traditional essay e.g. five-paragraph model. The passage will begin with scene-setting background sentences or perhaps a hook to grab the reader's attention. The author will make a clear, succinct main claim and then list the arguments or details that will follow and support the main thesis—a roadmap. The traditional essay has three body paragraphs, which provide evidence and examples to support each feature or line of argument or possibly a rebuttal to contrasting arguments or information. The shorter passages on the exam may only explore one or two ideas in support of the author's claim or transition to one opposing line of thought, but the approach is similar—examples and evidence will be included. Finally, the author will conclude by reiterating her main claim and the supporting ideas and perhaps even put forth a call to action or lesson learned. By middle school, most students have likely seen and implemented this traditional approach in writing classes, but not many think about how they can apply this knowledge to the edit-revise passage related questions on the SHSAT exam. It is useful to draw upon this writing knowledge to help reverse engineer the author's writing outline, organize paragraphs and passages, and place sentences in proper order.

## ELA Part B Questions

Like other parts of the exam, there is a limited number of repetitive question formats for the ELA Part B exam section. Understanding each and the method to solve will help you succeed on this exam section.

## Best Accomplishes Goal

Best accomplishes goal questions appear frequently on this section of the exam. They ask you to determine which answer option best accomplishes the goal stated in the question prompt. Sometimes the goal relates to a paragraph or passage idea, but the objective can also be narrow in scope. For example, what sentence best supports the idea in the previous sentence? You will need to define the goal in the text and maintain a laser focus on the answer that matches that goal.

How to solve:

1. You must find the answer that achieves the goal, not just any answer that sounds good. Take this objective to heart.
2. Begin with the abstract goal in the question. e.g. “provides the most appropriate introduction to the paragraph,” or “best supports the previous sentence.”
3. Identify the main idea from that “paragraph” or “sentence” or whichever text the goal references and restate that specific idea from the text in your own words. For example, the main idea of the paragraph might be that dogs make great pets. Or the previous sentence might state that climate change is problematic for human civilization.
4. Find the answer option that best restates or demonstrates that specific goal. In the example of the dogs above, you might select the answer that paraphrases your main idea that dogs make great pets. In the climate change example, the correct answer option might be rising sea levels will create frequent flooding and damage coastal cities because this answer option is an example of one way climate change will present a problem for civilization.

Let’s see an example.

Passage excerpt: (1) Some new office buildings are designed to consider the health and happiness of employees inside, but most older buildings were designed with spaces that depend on artificial lighting. (2) While many employers may worry about the cost of reconfiguring such buildings to increase the amount of natural light, the investment has been shown to be well worth the cost. (3) For one, lack of exposure to light has a significant impact on employees’ health.

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Which sentence should be added prior to sentence 1 to provide the most appropriate introduction to the passage?

- A. Studies have shown employees are happier and more productive when they work in an environment that affords exposure to adequate amounts of light.
- B. Modern office buildings are always superior to older buildings.
- C. Studies have shown employees are happier and more productive when they work in an environment in which they feel comfortable.
- D. Modern office buildings typically provide new features like energy loss prevention measures unavailable in older structures.

The correct answer is A. Sentence 1 indicates buildings can be designed to consider employee health and happiness and it cites “artificial lighting” as an example in older buildings that does not consider health or happiness. Sentence 2 focuses on the topic of natural light and suggests the benefits outweigh the costs. Sentence 3 provides a negative relation between low exposure to natural light and health. All sentences refer to natural lighting and employee health, so an appropriate introduction must pull together the idea that natural light leads to health and happiness. Option A provides this information in the example of a study that leads to the ideas mentioned in sentences (1-3). Option B fails because modern versus old buildings are mentioned in the introduction to highlight the differences in lighting, but the contrast between the buildings is not the subject of the passage. “Superior” is also an extreme words that is not justified by the text. Note, vertical scans and elimination are also useful techniques on this reading exam section even though the questions are different. Feel free to utilize the same lessons you learned earlier in this book. Option D, which parallels option B, is wrong for the same reason. It focuses on energy efficiency, which is not considered in the passage text. Option C parallels the correct answer, A, however, it is too broad. “Comfortable” is not precisely happiness. Happiness could result from anything. The correct passage idea focuses on the positive impact of natural light.

There are several types of goals “Best Accomplishes Goal” questions can address, and each is different. Moreover, these goals tend to repeat throughout the Edit-Revise passage related exam section. The following table outlines the common goals and some useful information about how to approach each.

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| <b>Question format</b>  | <b>Method to Solve</b>  |
|---|---|
| <b>Which sentence...</b>  | <b>Process</b>  |
| <b>best supports the primary claim or topic in the passage?</b> | <b>Identify the main idea of the paragraph or passage. Find the answer that is consistent with the idea in all parts.</b>   |
| <b>develops the ideas in the paragraph?</b>                     | <b>Identify the function of the sentences before and after and find the answer consistent with the relationship between them. e.g. cause-effect, contrast, etc.</b>   |
| <b>clarifies the relationship between ideas?</b>                | <b>Identify the function of both sentences. The answer will be the correct transition that reflects the relationship between them. e.g. cause-effect, contrast, etc.</b>  |
| <b>most clearly introduces the topic of the passage?</b>        | <b>Identify the topic of the passage. Find the answer that first tells the reader what is the topic. Note the difference between “introduces” the main topic and the format above, “supports” the main topic.</b> |

## **Follow-On Sentences**

Follow On Sentence questions are essentially “best accomplishes goal” questions with a specific goal: to support the prior sentence. The question format appears frequently, so we have separated the question type, but the approach to the solution is similar to other goal related questions. You will have to understand the function of the previous sentence and identify which answer option best follows that idea in the context of the paragraph. In a sense, the correct answer also depends on your ability to use the skills in earlier lessons about transitions and sentence combinations.

## Sentence Combinations

Perhaps the most important edit-revise passage related question on the SHSAT will ask about the appropriate transition between sentences or the best way to combine two sentences. The skill required to answer either question is the same, and it is one of the most useful skills to develop for the entire ELA exam: the ability to recognize the relationship between ideas from the text. It is fundamental to the edit-revise section and the reading exam. In order to develop this skill, you will need to learn the typical methods of paragraph development, which will help you find clues and identify the correct relationships of ideas throughout the ELA exam.

How to solve:

1. Identify the main idea expressed by the sentence in question.
2. Identify the main idea in the previous sentence.
3. Assess what the relationship is between the sentences. Which typical method of development applies?
4. Select the appropriate transition word among the answer options that conforms to the relationship between the ideas.

Again, the list of 6-12 key transition ideas comes in to play for the ELA exam. It is important you get to know the list (comparison, contrasting, sequential, additive, examples, cause-effect, emphasis, etc.) and the related transition words for each idea. We look more closely at that list of methods of idea development.

Let's look at an example of a transition question.

(1) My nephew likes to watch superhero movies. (2) He doesn't like Superman.

Which transition word or phrase should be added to the beginning of sentence 2?

- A. Therefore, he doesn't like Superman.
- B. In other words, he doesn't like Superman.
- C. However, he doesn't like Superman.
- D. For instance, he doesn't like Superman.

The correct answer is option C. The second sentence contrasts with the first sentence by presenting information that is opposed to the first idea. "However" is an example of an appropriate transition to contrast two ideas. Option A, therefore, suggests a cause-effect relation between the two sentences, but the idea in the second sentence is not a conclusion drawn from the first idea. Option B, in other words, is an additive point that tries to explain the idea before, but not liking Superman doesn't explain or restate why the nephew likes superhero movies, so it is not the appropriate transition. Option D, for instance, suggests the second sentence is an example of the first idea. It is not. The first idea suggests my nephew would like Superman, a character in superhero movies.

## Order Sentences

Some edit-revise questions will ask you where an existing sentence should best be placed, and you will have to decide on the order of sentences that makes logical sense.

How to Solve Sentence Placement Questions:

1. Summarize in your own words what the topic of the new sentence is and what idea it is conveying.
2. Find the sentence among the answer options that is talking about the same thing.
3. The new sentence should be placed before or after that sentence.
4. Use additional clues to determine which position, before or after, is correct.

Additional Clues:

This type of question is analogous to the old scrambled paragraph problems where students had to order 5 sentences. One key to scrambled paragraphs was to look out for the following clues.

**R**epeat Words

**T**ransitions

**P**ronouns

**C**ontext



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Repeat words at the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next sentence, for example, may suggest the continuation of a thought and help you connect sentences. Secondly, identifying the function of sentences is a critical step to figuring out how the passage should be organized.

Transition words or phrases like "however, in addition, for example, or in conclusion" help students decide the correct organization of sentences. See the methods of paragraph development to learn more about transition clues. Pronouns can also be useful because each follows an antecedent noun to avoid repeating the antecedent noun over and over. e.g John went to town, and he bought milk.

The pronoun "he" avoids repeating the name John. This connecting relationship can be used to help order sentences. Let's review some examples.

Sentence 1: I have a cat named Sugar.

Sentence 2: She follows me everywhere.

In this case, the introduction of the cat, Sugar, must come before a description of how Sugar behaved, so the logical order is defined. Identifying the relationship between sentences and how they are organized also requires an ability to recognize transition clues.

Sentence 1: Cats are great.

Sentence 2: For instance, they are funny to watch.

Sentence 3: In addition, they tend to mind their own business.

Sentence 4: Dogs, on the other hand, are always jumping up on people.

Let's advance to placing a sentence in order in a paragraph.

New Sentence: **Active extracurricular calendars also help students develop their resume for college.**

Paragraph 2: (6) Most students strive to attend the Ivy League. (7) Good grades and strong SAT scores are essential for admission to top universities. (8) Athletic awards are not just an afterthought, and they should be included for athletes with high aspirations. (9) Even solid, well-rounded individuals will face tough competition for admission to top universities.

Where should the following sentence be added to best support the ideas of the second paragraph?

- A. Before sentence 6
- B. Before sentence 7
- C. Before sentence 8
- D. Before sentence 9

Up until this point, we have discussed the importance of using transition clues and identifying the function of sentences when attempting to answer edit-revise passage questions. Both come into play for this example. The function of the first sentence is to make a claim. Sentences 7 and 8 provide examples of what is needed to achieve the claim—admission to an Ivy League college. Sentence 9 summarizes with a word of advice—it is a competitive process.

First, you should assess what is the function of the new sentence? Is it a claim, supporting evidence, an additional point, a contrasting idea, a concluding statement or something else? The new sentence is another example of what is needed to prepare a resume for an Ivy League college. It is likely to fit in the middle with 7 and 8. Will it come first, between 7 and 8, or after? Transition phrase clues will help you more closely identify placement. The new sentence includes the word “also,” which is an additive point that follows one or more similar ideas. Thus, it will not come first. Sentence 8 mentions athletic awards in the context of a possible “afterthought,” which suggests it will still be the last among the examples. The only choice remaining is to place the new sentence in the middle before sentence 8.

## Relevant/Irrelevant

These questions will ask you to decide if a sentence belongs in the passage or whether it should be removed. Don't be fooled by similar words or topics. Irrelevant sentences will still often be loosely related to the main topic and use many of the same words from the text, but the idea in the irrelevant answer option will be different than the idea discussed in the text on that same topic.

How to solve:

1. Identify the main idea of the paragraph. The main idea is not just the topic. It is the topic plus the idea that gives us reason to care.
2. Read the first sentence of the paragraph to quickly identify the main idea of the paragraph.
3. Ask yourself if the sentence in question is relevant to that main idea.

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Let's see an example.

Excerpts:

(1) An age-old proverb says that necessity is the mother of invention. (2) Centuries of human ingenuity in the face of obstacles prove this to be true. **(3) For many years the Swiss Alps, a mountain range spanning southern Switzerland and northern Italy, were such an obstacle.** (4) Roads and railways had to navigate around the mountains or through winding tunnels inside the mountains. (5) Transportation of people and goods was difficult and time consuming. (6) In 2016 these burdens were eased with the completion of the Gotthard Base Tunnel.

(10) During the seventeen-year construction period, 28 million tons of rock were removed, enough to rebuild the Great Pyramid at Giza five times. **(11) This massive construction project is reported to have cost \$12 billion.**

**(13) By 2020 the high-speed railway will carry more than 250 freight trains and fifty-five passenger trains a day, with most traveling at speeds of around 100 to 125 miles an hour.** (14) It will be faster for people to travel between northern and southern Europe. (15) The travel time between the European cities of Zurich, Switzerland, and Milan, Italy, will be reduced by an hour. (16) Many European leaders compare the Gotthard Base Tunnel to the Channel Tunnel, a 33-mile underwater tunnel that connects the United Kingdom and France. **(17) While there is no roadway in the Channel Tunnel, people can drive their cars onto special trains that will carry vehicles through to the other side.**

Which sentence is irrelevant to the topic presented in the passage and should be removed?

- A. sentence 3
- B. sentence 11
- C. sentence 13
- D. sentence 17

Sentence 3 helps define the problem to which the tunnel is a solution. Sentence 11 highlights the cost in a paragraph about the enormous scale of the project. Sentence 13 provides details of the magnitude and benefits of the tunnel. All sentences are relevant. Only sentence 17 is irrelevant. The English Tunnel is mentioned as an analogy, a similar grand, underground project. The details of the design and mechanics of the English Tunnel, however, are not relevant to a passage that discusses the Goddard Tunnel. Sentence 17 should be removed.

## Lesson 3 - Revising/Editing Part A

### Grammar and Syntax

The revising-editing Part A section of the ELA exam presents 4-6 stand-alone questions designed to test your knowledge of various formal grammar topics. To improve your grammar and syntax skills, practice identifying and correcting common errors, such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, and sentence structure. Use study guides and Academy Pro to identify areas where you need more practice, and work on building your knowledge of grammar rules and conventions.

In this lesson, we will review the most common grammar, style, and punctuation rules that appear on the stand alone edit-revise part A exam section, especially the ones that tend to defy your natural instincts. We have saved the grammar section for last because it is the smallest exam section (~10% of the ELA exam), yet grammar is an enormous topic with numerous rules. As a result, you are likely to get the "least bang for your buck" by becoming a master of grammar for the SHSAT. You may have other motivations to learn grammar, but most students have spent years reading and writing in English, so they have a good instinct and will answer on average close to half the questions correctly on the part A exam without any additional training. The cut-off score for a specialized high school starts at about 70%, so the gains from substantial study hours are probably limited compared to other topics. For example, geometry angles questions are probably similar in number, but mastery of the few theorems can be achieved in significantly less study time. Many courses spend 25% of the curriculum to teach part A grammar, but that curriculum is inefficient. Unfortunately, this analysis doesn't help sell courses, which is probably why you won't see this advice anywhere else.

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We want to help you get ready for the SHSAT ELA exam as time and cost effectively as possible. As a result, we focus on a core set of grammar topics that are most likely to appear on the part A exam, especially the topics where the rules may defy your natural instincts to identify "what sounds good." These include run-ons and related punctuation, misplaced modifiers, basic verb tense rules and noun-pronoun agreement, and homophones. Some topics like precise language are included because they should prove to be so easy not much time is required to learn how to find the correct answer. Other topics may be excluded.

## Grammar Glossary

In order to understand and communicate effectively in English, it's important to know the different parts of speech and how they function in a sentence. The parts of speech include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and more. Let's make sure we understand the definitions of the different parts of speech.

**Nouns** - Words that name people, places, things, or ideas. They can be singular (one) or plural (more than one). Proper nouns are specific names of people, places, or things and are capitalized.

**Pronouns** - Words that take the place of nouns in a sentence. They can be personal (I, you, he, she, it, we, they), possessive (mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs), or reflexive (myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, themselves).

**Verbs** - Words that express an action or a state of being. They can be in different tenses (past, present, or future) and can be regular or irregular.

**Adjective** - Words that describe or modify nouns or pronouns. They can be used to indicate size, color, shape, or other characteristics.

**Adverbs** - Words that modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. They can be used to indicate time, manner, place, or degree.

**Conjunctions** - Words that connect words, phrases, or clauses in a sentence. They can be coordinating (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) or subordinating (because, although, if) or correlative (either...or).

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Coordinating Conjunction - For, and, not, but, or, yet, so (FANBOYS) – with a comma they connect independent clauses

Subordinating Conjunction - Although, after, as, because, before, once, rather than, since, though, unless, until, whereas, whether, while, etc. – form dependent clauses and connect to independent clauses

Correlative Conjunction - Either/or, neither/nor, not only/but also

Prepositions - Words that show the relationship between nouns or pronouns and other words in a sentence. They can indicate location, time, or direction.

Subject - Noun (person, place or thing) or pronoun the sentence is about

Predicate - Part of the sentence containing the verb (action word)

Phrase - A group of words that, unlike a clause or sentence, never completes a thought and never contains a verb. Prepositional phrase, e.g., at the ballpark.

Clause - A group of related words that contains both a subject and a verb divided into four types: independent, dependent, adjective, noun. Independent clauses can stand alone as sentences (subject, verb, complete thought), dependent clauses cannot.

Sentence - A group of words that contains a subject, a predicate, and completes a full thought.

Fragment - Group of words that lack a fully formed idea — dependent clause

Run-on - Two independent clauses not joined by proper punctuation

Compound Sentence - Independent Clause + Independent Clause combinations

Complex Sentence - Independent Clause + Dependent Clause combinations

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Conjunctive Adverb - Independent Clause + “;” + Conjunctive Adverb + “,” Independent Clause.  
e.g., however, moreover, similarly, nevertheless, also, hence, accordingly, anyway, consequently, therefore, thus, finally, otherwise, meanwhile, etc.

Coordinate Adjective - Adjectives equal in weight that require a comma. e.g., tall, handsome boy. Not little old lady.

## Revising-Editing Part A Questions

### Precise Language

Precise language questions require students to identify the correct word choice by a) choosing the appropriate word(s) in context or b) the accurate idiom (standard phrase used in English). For example, "Organic fertilizers annihilate the need for chemicals." Annihilate means to destroy, which is too extreme.

In most cases on the part A exam section, questions will ask test takers to identify the most precise version of a particular sentence. Precise language requires not only more detail and specificity, but also must include all the ideas or parts of the original vague sentence to be correct. Essentially, the correct answer must restate all parts of the text just like we learned from the reading section. Some answer choices will include parts of the original text, but leave out or add an extra idea that makes the answer option fundamentally different from the original text. **The correct answer will almost always be the most specific, detailed answer option.**

Let's see an example.

Sentence 9: They entered the office building in order to work.

Which revision of sentence 9 uses the most precise language?

- A. The commuters, dressed in professional suits, funneled into the Manhattan skyscraper of Bank Two in order to begin work.
- B. The commuters, dressed in suits and ties, entered the bank office building every Monday.
- C. They funneled into the Manhattan skyscraper of Bank Two in order to begin work.
- D. The commuters funneled into the Manhattan skyscraper of Bank Two in order to begin work.

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Option A is the correct answer. It provides the most specific or precise language, but it also reflects all the parts of the original text. The original text has three parts: somebody identified as “they” is the subject, “enter office building” is the verb and object of the action, and for the purpose of going to work. “They” becomes commuters dressed in suits. “Enter office building” becomes funneled into the Manhattan skyscraper of Bank Two. “In order to work” is included essentially unchanged. Not all choices reflect all these elements. For example, option B does not state if the people entered the building to work or not. Other answer choices remain vague like option C where the subject remains “they”.

## Commonly Confused Words/Homophones

On the part A exam section, students must differentiate between commonly confused words, typically homophones or words that sound alike but have different meanings. e.g., The recent races have a strong effect (noun) because they affect (verb) his ranking. *Affect* is a verb and *effect* is a noun.

### Confusing Pairs

Threw – to throw in past tense

Through – moving from one side to the other

Accept – to receive something

Except – to leave something out

Affect is a verb. e.g. The sad movie affected me.

Effect is a noun. e.g. cause and effect

Two is a whole number after 1

To means toward, in the direction of

Too means also or very. e.g. I got accepted too. You are too kind.

There means a place. e.g. He is going there.

Their shows ownership of an object. e.g. Their car stopped working.

They're is the contraction for 'they are. e.g They're going home.



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Your shows 'ownership. e.g. Your car stopped working.

You're is the contraction for 'you are. e.g You're going home.

Yore means a period of a long time ago.

## Commonly Confused Verbs

**Lie versus lay** The verbs "lie" and "lay" have different meanings. "Lie" means to recline or rest," and "lay" means to put down or place. Use "lay" to show an action that a person does to or for someone or something else. Use "lie" to show an action that a person does alone.

**Rise vs. raise** The verb pair "rise vs. raise" share similar definitions, but they are not interchangeable. "Rise," means a customary or steady movement upward, and it is an intransitive verb because it does not require an object to do the motion. On the other hand, "raise" is defined as to cause to rise, and it requires an object to cause the motion and is a transitive verb.

The word "rise" has several common uses that mean to move upwards (in this case by itself). The word "raise" has several common uses that mean to move upwards (in this case, something else is needed to raise something).

## Register/Tone

These questions test whether a student recognizes words and phrases that do not fit the formal or less formal context of the passage. In most cases, the wrong answer options are too casual or vague. e.g., "John has a bunch of stuff" can be replaced by "John has many different things." Occasionally, but less frequently, the wrong answers include vocabulary that is too formal.

Success on diction questions will not depend on memorizing every potential list of vocabulary words or phrases. That is not an efficient use of study time. Instead, review reference lists of typical idioms and commonly confused words to improve your recognition. It is better to learn to recognize context clues that define words according to the passage, not just the dictionary. Be prepared to handle words or phrases you may not recognize. In most cases, students confronted with an unknown word give up their training and guess wildly rather than search for clues to identify meaning or fail to make a reasoned risk-reward decision.

## Sentence Structure and Syntax

Sentence structure and syntax are the building blocks of effective communication and are critical to success on the SHSAT English Language Arts section. Understanding how to construct sentences and use proper syntax will help you convey your ideas clearly and concisely, which is essential for both reading comprehension and writing skills.

Sentence structure refers to the order and arrangement of words in a sentence, while syntax refers to the rules that govern how words are used to create phrases and sentences. Proper sentence structure and syntax are essential for effective communication and are especially important on the SHSAT.

In addition to proper sentence structure, it is also important to use correct syntax. This means paying attention to the way words are used to create phrases and sentences, including the use of punctuation marks such as commas, periods, and semicolons. The ru

## Run-Ons (Wrong Independent Clause Combinations)

Run-ons are not sentences that are necessarily too long. Some run-on sentences are short, and some grammatically correct sentences are ridiculously long. Run-ons are sentences that improperly combine independent clauses (clauses that stand apart and could be considered sentences). To learn this topic, you will need to understand a few of the grammar rules and definitions for the exam. On many stand alone edit-revise questions, students look for the answer option that “sounds good.” In many, cases that will not work. Let's see an example for run-ons.

Which of the following sentences represents correct grammar?

1. John runs, he is fast.
2. John runs and he is fast.

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Most students will choose one option or the other because it "sounds good," Both options sound good, but both options are run-on sentences. Neither presents the correct punctuation to combine the independent clauses. Option 1 is a common run-on sentence that has a special name, a comma splice. You cannot place only a comma between independent clauses. If the clauses are closely related, a semicolon is appropriate. Option 2 includes the coordinating conjunction "and" between the clauses. Coordinating conjunctions include a short list of words denoted by the acronym FANBOYS (For And Nor But Or Yet So). Say that list three times fast and you will memorize FANBOYS for life. And and but are the most popular examples. Coordinating conjunctions normally combine words without commas. For example, John and Bob run. He kicks and jumps. She is tall and slender. However, there is one special case: the combination of independent clauses. In this case, we must use a comma + a coordinating conjunction to combine clauses. The rules for combining stand alone independent clauses follows:

Acceptable punctuation between independent clauses

## I + I

1. Period
2. Semicolon (;)
3. Comma + Coordinating Conjunction (FANBOYS)

Let's see another example.

Sentence 1: Go to the store, buy some milk and bread while you are there.

Sentence 2: Go to the store and buy some milk and bread while you are there.

Sentence 3: Go to the store; your sister likes Frosted Flakes.

Sentence 4: Go to the store to buy a couple items: milk and bread.

Hopefully, you realize that both sentence 1 and 2 are incorrect. Both clauses, "go to the store" and "buy some milk and bread" are independent clauses: each can function as a stand-alone sentence expressing a complete thought with a noun and a verb. In this case, a comma is not sufficient to combine the sentences and neither is the coordinating conjunction "and" by itself. Independent clauses must be combined by either a period, a semicolon, or a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

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Sentence 3 uses a semicolon (;) to combine independent clauses. That is one of the acceptable ways to combine independent clauses. After all, the main purpose in life for a semicolon is to combine independent clauses. However, sentence 3 does not include closely related ideas, which must be the case to use a semicolon properly. Sentence 3 is not the best answer.

Sentence 4 is correct. How can that be? Sentence 4 includes a colon (:) between clauses, which is not one of the rules for combining independent clauses. True, but is the 2nd clause independent in sentence 4? It is not. It is a fragment or what we might call a dependent clause. Dependent clauses cannot stand alone as a sentence. They do not complete a thought and often lack either a subject noun or verb. The main purpose of a colon is to provide examples or an explanation of the main clause before the colon. In the case of a list like sentence 4, the 2nd clause is often a dependent clause. If the 2nd clause is an explanation, then the 2nd clause may be independent, which means colons can be a de facto way to combine independent clauses even though the purpose of a colon is slightly different.

The discussion of dependent clauses raises a new consideration, dependent clauses. You must know how to combine not just independent clauses into compound sentences but also dependent and independent clauses into complex sentences. Every sentence must have one main or independent clause.

## Fragments (Dependent Clauses)

There are several common types of dependent clauses including subordinate clauses (while she waited), participle clauses (thinking out loud), relative clauses (which she did not like), and prepositional clauses (before you sign) etc. You will want to learn the rules of combining dependent clauses to independent clauses.

Correct Sentences:

1. Always separate a dependent clause up front with a comma

**D + I = Dependent “comma” Independent**

*After Diane stopped by, Henri called me on the phone. (D, I structure)*

2a). If the dependent clause follows or is in the middle and no other rules apply,

## I + D or D in between = Independent “no comma” Dependent

I took a photograph of the quarterback *that won the game*. The children *who skateboard in the street are quite talented*. (I D structure)

2b). But if the Dependent clause is non-restrictive (a fancy way to say extra, non-essential information)

## I + D = Independent “comma” Dependent

She said goodbye to Justin, *who continued to play video games*.

## D in between I = “comma” Dependent “comma”

Jack’s decision, *which was a mistake*, came back to haunt him.

The case where the dependent clause is in the middle or at the end requires a little more analysis on your part. You must apply the comma rule for restrictive, non-restrictive clauses. In other words, if the dependent clause identifies the word it modifies (recall all dependent clauses modify other words as adjectives, adverbs, etc.), then no commas are needed. The clause is considered essential. If the noun or modified word is already identified, then the dependent clause is extra information, which needs to be separated by a comma or commas on both sides. This comma rule is perhaps the most important comma rule to know for the ELA exam.

\*Note, the essential clauses above not separated by commas identify the general, non-specific nouns *quarterback* and *children*; however, the non-essential relative clauses modify already specific nouns like *Justin* or *Jack*, so they are separated by commas. *The clauses are extra information, not essential to identify the noun.*

## Colons

The colon (:), a period on top of a period, is used chiefly to introduce a list, quotation/question, or explanation following an independent clause (complete sentence). Although not mentioned in the independent clause combination rules above, a colon can be used to combine independent clauses when the sentences are directly or closely related.

List examples:

- I am going to the store to get a few items: milk, eggs, and butter.
- Combine the ingredients as follows: first, cream the butter with the sugar; second, add the eggs and milk; third, add the flour and salt.

(note, a colon can follow the word “follows” and when there are commas already in a list of three or more items, then a semicolon is used to replace the commas for the list to avoid confusion between too many commas)

Quotation/Question examples:

- He ended with the immortal words of Neil Young: “Rock and Roll can never die.”
- The primary question is this: Should we give up or keep working diligently toward our goal?
- Karen started to worry: Would Teresa remember to pick up the cake? Would the guests arrive on time? And what would Karen do if Dawn wanted to go home after dinner?

Explanation examples:

- In that instant Brandon made a decision: he would fly to Toronto and propose to Sean.
- Silvia slumped in her chair and closed her eyes: she had never felt so dejected.

(note the above examples for quotations, questions, and explanations include two independent clauses)

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## Common Mistakes:

Do not use a colon after *for example*, *that is*, and *such as*. These phrases already suggest an example will follow, so the addition of a colon would be redundant. Use a comma instead:

(incorrect) There are many ways to flavor a cake—**for example:** with vanilla, with lemon or orange zest, or with cinnamon

(correct) There are many ways to flavor a cake—**for example,** with vanilla, with lemon or orange zest, or with cinnamon.

A colon should not separate a noun from its verb, a verb from its object or subject complement, a preposition from its object, or a subject from its predicate.

(incorrect) The three types of muscle in the body are: cardiac, smooth, and skeletal.

(correct) There are three types of muscle in the body: cardiac, smooth, and skeletal.

(incorrect) When I graduate, I want to go to: Rome, Israel, and Egypt.

(correct) When I graduate, I want to go to Rome, Israel, and Egypt.

## Comma Rule - Restrictive Clauses

There are numerous comma rules like separating a list of three or more elements by commas ( items 1, 2, and 3) or placing a comma between city and state (New York, NY) or using a comma only when dates include all three parts (September 1, 2023 or September 2023). However, the most important rule you will encounter on the exam relates to the treatment of extra, non-essential information (parentheticals). A parenthetical phrase or clause is like a side comment, a part of a sentence that adds information but is not essential for making the sentence complete. We confronted examples of non-essential, dependent clauses in the last lesson on fragments and learned non-essential clauses must be separated by commas.

My lawn mower, which is broken, is in the garage.

My mother, who is 86, lives in New York.

John went to the mall, even though he didn't buy anything.

\*note the nouns are already specific. John and "my" mother are specific people.

How to test if a phrase or clause is extra information that must be separated by commas:

- A quick way to test if the clause is parenthetical or extra information is to remove it from the sentence. Does the sentence read normally and retain the same essential idea? If yes, then the clause or phrase must be separated by commas. In the example above, "My mother lives in New York," reads normally without the clause "who is 86." As a result, "who is 86" is parenthetical and must be separated by commas.
- Another test from the previous lesson on dependent clauses is to test whether the information is defining or identifying the word it modifies or whether it is merely adding extra descriptive information. For example, the clause beginning with "that" identifies the swords in the following sentence, so it is essential and requires no commas. "The swords that hung on the wall were silver." In the next sentence, the clause beginning with "which" is merely adding details about the sword, so commas are necessary to separate the extra information. "The swords, which were silver, hung on the wall."



## Word Clues

If ever you are still confused or need to decide quickly whether to use a comma or not, you can take advantage of various word clues. There are a few words that indicate whether you need to separate the dependent clause by commas or not. The relative pronouns "which" and "that" above are a good example. "Which" almost always takes a comma and "that" does not require a comma. Other words like "such as" or "whereas" will almost always include a comma beforehand. "While" can mean whereas rather than represent a temporal notion. In that case, "while" also requires separation by a comma. Prepositions (in, on, by, at, for etc.) generally do not have commas beforehand. Participles like "including" will usually be preceded by commas as well as certain subordinating conjunctions like "though" and "although." Some subordinating conjunctions like "because" will rarely be preceded by commas, and recall that transitions like "however" will takes commas in most cases. With practice, you can build your list and use it to your advantage.

## Substitute Parenthetical Punctuation

There are other types of punctuation that can be use din place of commas to set off parenthetical clauses. **Parentheses ( )** and the **long dash —** also set apart non-essential information and can substitute for commas. Never mix different parenthetical punctuation, however. For example, if a long dash separates a non-essential clause at the beginning, do not close the parenthetical clause at the end with a comma or parenthesis. Let's see an example.

The "bike to work" program, **which makes use of our newly added bike lanes**, will reduce traffic.

The "bike to work" program (**a project of the transportation department**) will reduce traffic.

Our "bike to work" program will reduce traffic—**something everyone wants!**

## Verb Tense & Agreement

Verb tenses tell us how an action relates to the flow of time. Generally, that flow will stay consistent in the past, present, or future, but occasionally the author may shift the tense for good reason.

How to identify the correct tense and if a shift in tense is appropriate:

- Check the tense of other verbs in the same or surrounding sentences for agreement. Are they past, present, or future tense?
- Determine if there is a shift in the flow of time. For example, did the author shift from the past tense to the current timeframe? If so, a change in tense may be appropriate.
- Check the tense of the verbs following the verb in question. If they also reflect the new tense, then an appropriate change in tense occurred. If the verbs reflect the earlier tense of verbs before the sentence in question, then it is likely no change in tense is required.

## Verb Agreement

Verbs must agree with the subject noun or pronoun in number (singular or plural).

The dogs walk. The dog walks.

Note the simple present tense verb takes an "s" if the subject is singular but not if it is plural.

Most students feel confident about simple verb tense problems. Verb tense can be a little more complicated than simple past, present, and future tenses, however. There are also perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive tenses, each with a past, present, and future. In all, that is 12 tenses, which tend to overwhelm students. The other tenses actually are not that hard, and fortunately, you will likely not require any detailed knowledge of them for the exam.

Most students think it is easy to identify singular versus plural. In many cases it is, but the rules for verb agreement can get quite complex. See the examples below of the various verb agreement rules starting with compound ("and") and complex ("or") subjects. Singular subject nouns connected by the "and" condition become plural. If connected by the "or" condition, they remain singular. If one subject is plural in the "or" condition, then the verb will agree with the subject noun closest to the verb.

A dog **and** a cat *are* fun to have at home.

A dog **or** a cat *is* fun to have at home.

A dog **or cats** *are* fun to have at home.

Dogs **or a cat** *is* fun to have at home.

He **nor** I *am* at the party.

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Group or collective nouns

Group nouns include a plurality of elements but represent one single entity.

The **team** is going to play all night.

A **committee** is a singular group made up of many people.

Has the **jury** finally ruled on the case?

Dogs or a cat is fun to have at home.

Beware prepositional phrases that separate the subject noun from the verb.

A single planet in the solar system *is* orbiting the nearby star.

The bouquet of flowers *is* pretty.

A committee of your peers *has decided* on your guilt or innocence.

The underlined prepositions contain nouns closer to the verb, suggesting the verb might be conjugated to agree with that noun, but that is a mistake. The correct subject is not in the prepositional phrase. You must jump over the preposition to find the correct subject noun before the dependent clause. The verb will agree in number with that noun.

Some indefinite pronouns are always singular.

Why is this fact important? For example, saying "Everyone should do *their* homework" instead of "Everyone should do *his or her* homework" is incorrect. "Everyone" is a singular indefinite pronoun.

**Everybody** is deciding if they should leave the school.

**Something** is about to happen to you.

**Anyone** knows the secret to success. Each is available for your review after the class.

**Nothing** is like it used to be.

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Some indefinite pronouns are always plural.

**Many** are deciding if they should leave the school.

**Both** have taken precautions.

**Few** know what the secret will reveal.

**Several** are making the same mistake over and over.

Certain uncountable subject nouns are singular.

The **news** is on tonight at 6 PM.

My **hair** has grown extremely long.

Brown **rice** is supposed to be good for your health.

**Knowledge** is power, fear is unnecessary, and anger is a waste.

These are by no means the only rules pertaining to verb agreement but enough to cover most of the bases for the SHSAT grammar section.

## Misplaced Modifiers

A modifier provides description for another word. Frequently, modifiers act as adjectives, but they can also be adverbs and come in the form of participle phrases, prepositional phrases, adjective clauses, and more. The modifier should clearly support the modified word and be next to it in most cases. A misplaced modifier is a modifier that finds itself in the wrong part of the sentence modifying the wrong word.

Adjectives:

The kids left their powered up pile of mobile phones on the desk.

Powered up is the adjective modifier here, and it's misplaced because it's modifying the word pile, implying that the pile is powered. The intended meaning is for the phones to be powered. So, the correct fix would be: The kids left their pile of powered up mobile phones on the desk.

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Adverbs:

They swam from the giant shark they encountered quickly.

The modifier above is quickly, but it's in the wrong location. The encounter was not quick; the speed which they swam was quick. To fix this modifier, put the adverb back where it makes the most sense: They swam quickly from the giant shark they encountered.

Likewise, entire phrases can be misplaced, creating confusion.

Example: The outfielder dropped onto the field the ball from his glove. Did the outfielder drop to the field or the ball. To make it clear the ball dropped the correct phrase should be. The outfielder dropped the ball from his glove onto the field.

How to identify and correct misplaced modifiers:

1. In many cases, students sense that something sounds awkward in a sentence, but they cannot put their finger on it. Oftentimes, a misplaced modifier is the culprit. e.g. Mom served peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to us on paper plates.
2. Identify the modifying phrases in each sentence. e.g. on paper plates
3. Is it next to the word it modifies? If not, then place the modifying phrase near the word it should modify. The sandwiches, not Mom, are on the paper plates. Correction: Mom served us peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on paper plates.

Dangling Modifiers

A modifier must have the word it modifies present in the sentence. When this word is missing, a modifier is dangling.

Thinking about what comes next, the ideas were flowing.

Who is thinking here? It is not the ideas thinking hence the modifying phrase 'dangles.' Sometimes dangling modifiers seem obvious. The happy is sad. The happy what? There is clearly a missing subject. Sometimes the dangling modifier is difficult to spot in more complex sentences.

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Intending to ace the exam, the geometry book is given a thorough review the night before the test. Intending to ace the exam is the modifier, but who is it modifying? Who intends to ace the exam?

CORRECT: Intending to ace the exam, Maria gave the geometry book a thorough review the night before the test.

## Pronouns

| <b>Pronoun Type</b>  | <b>Members of the Subclass</b>  | <b>Example</b>                                     |
|----------------------|---|--|
| <b>Possessive</b>    | <i>mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs</i>   | The white car is <i>mine</i>                       |
| <b>Reflexive</b>     | <i>myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, oneself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves</i> | He injured <i>himself</i> playing football         |
| <b>Reciprocal</b>    | <i>each other, one another</i>  | They really hate <i>each other</i>                 |
| <b>Relative</b>      | <i>that, which, who, whose, whom, where, when</i>   | The book <i>that</i> you gave me was really boring |
| <b>Demonstrative</b> | <i>this, that, these, those</i>   | <i>This</i> is a new car                           |
| <b>Interrogative</b> | <i>who, what, why, where, when, whatever</i>  | <i>What</i> did he say to you?                     |
| <b>Indefinite</b>    | <i>anything, anybody, anyone, something, somebody, someone, nothing, nobody, none, no one</i> | There's <i>something</i> in my shoe                |

## Pronoun - Antecedent Agreement

Pronouns replace repeated nouns in a sentence to avoid the monotony of repeating a noun throughout a passage. For instance, "John came over. He was happy." This use of a pronoun is preferable to repeating the noun. "John came over. John was happy. John...John...John." As a result, each pronoun refers to a specific noun and must agree with the noun in gender and number. This pronoun-antecedent relationship requires students to identify the correct antecedent noun for each pronoun and then select the pronoun that agrees with the antecedent. Jane (feminine) came home when **her** day was complete. The team (singular collective noun) celebrated **its** win today.

## Vague Pronouns

The pronoun reference to its antecedent noun must be clear, not ambiguous.

### Multiple Antecedents –

- There should not be two or more possible antecedents. e.g, The car hit the tree and it was damaged. What was damaged—the tree or the car?
- This, That, Which – These pronouns are often used in writing without clear references. Each should be followed by a noun. e.g., "John knew that," is vague. "John knew that fact," is clearer and more likely to be correct.
- They, You – Make sure the pronoun "they" has a precise reference. e.g., "They say it will rain tomorrow." Who does "they" refer to? Only use the 2nd person to make a direct address. "I never start a race too quickly because it will make you tired before the end." Who is "you?" A little purple man from Mars? Or plural men from from the Moon?

## Possessive Pronouns

Unlike the general possession rules for nouns (add 's to a singular noun or add s' to make a noun plural possessive), **possessive pronouns do not use apostrophes**. The possessive pronouns include their, your, ours, mine, his, her, and its. Apostrophes with pronouns indicate contractions.

e.g., It's = It is. You're = You are. They're = They are. The correct possessive pronouns are respectively Its, Your, and Their.

How to analyze pronoun use, case, and ambiguity:

1. Find the correct antecedent noun for the pronoun and identify its number and gender.
2. Make sure both are in agreement. If the antecedent is unclear, then clarify the vague reference.
3. Check if pronoun possession is also an issue and avoid using apostrophes with possessive pronouns.

## Concise Language

Concise language entails using a minimal amount of effective words to make one's point. Writers often include words in their sentences that are unnecessary and could be omitted in order to make the sentence more concise.

**Shorter and simpler is better all else equal.**

This a rule of thumb applies throughout the ELA revising-editing exam section, especially for questions that focus on syntax or concise language. There are several techniques to make a sentence or paragraph more concise. **Correct answers will avoid:**

**Redundancy** – Does the answer option include redundant words or ideas like unnecessary synonyms? If so, it will be wrong because there is no need to say you will become both rich and wealthy once you ace the SHSAT and go on to get a great education.

**Passive Voice** – A strong active verb almost always results in a more concise sentence. Conjugations of the “to be” verb are red flags for potential passive voice errors. e.g., Songs were written by James (passive voice). John wrote songs (active voice).

**Excess Wordiness** – Have you ever read a paper where the student tries too hard to look serious and inserts extra wordy phrases? If that is you, avoid the practice. Correct answers on the exam will replace many words with fewer precise words. Let's see a few examples.



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Wordy→ The teacher demonstrated some of the various ways and methods for cutting words from my essay that I had written for class. (22 words)

Concise→ The teacher demonstrated methods for cutting words from my essay. (10 words)

Wordy→ The Barron's castles are an astounding marriage of beauty and madness. By his death, he had commissioned three castles. (18 words)

Concise→ The Barron's three castles are an astounding marriage of beauty and madness. (11 words)

Choose:

Because/Since/Why

Instead of:

The reason for/due to the fact that/this is why/considering the fact that/finally complete/absolutely filled/free gift/future plans/each individual/various differences etc. The initial modifying word is empty; it provides no new meaning.

## Parallel Structure

Make sure to use parallelism in the following cases.

- **When joining two or more items with *and* or *or*:**
  1. *The party featured a four-foot **cake** and a singing **gorilla**.*
  2. *I am doing well in my English class, in my math class, and in my history class.*
- **In comparisons:**

***Taking the train** is **as fast as driving**.*

Driving to Austin is **as fast as** flying
- **With certain paired words** (like *both/and, either/or, and neither/nor*):

*Marlize **both bakes bread** and **fixes cars**.*

My history course is both interesting and challenging

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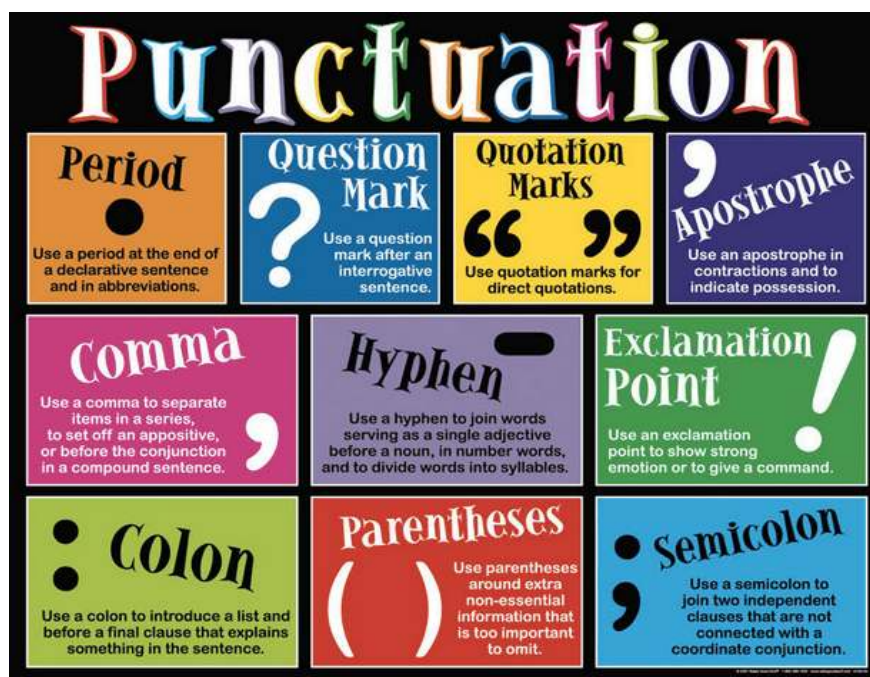
Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. Like the rule for concise language—all else equal, choose the most concise answer—students should choose the answer option that demonstrates a parallel structure, all else equal.

**FAULTY:** I like **swimming** better than to dive.

**CORRECT:** I like **swimming** better than diving.

**CORRECT:** I like to swim better than **to dive**.

## Additional In-Sentence Punctuation



It is important to note that using punctuation incorrectly can change the meaning of a sentence. For example, consider the following sentence: "Let's eat Grandma!" This sentence is grammatically correct, but without the comma, it can be interpreted as an invitation to cannibalism! The correct sentence should be: "Let's eat, Grandma!"

In addition to these basic rules, there are many other punctuation marks that you may come across in the SHSAT English Language Arts section, such as the hyphen (-), the dash (—), and the ellipsis (...). Make sure to familiarize yourself with these marks, and understand how they are used in different contexts.

To master punctuation rules, it is important to practice regularly. You can start by reviewing your writing assignments and checking for errors in punctuation. You can also try taking practice tests and quizzes to test your knowledge.

Remember that mastering punctuation is not just about getting the correct answer on a test. It is a crucial skill that will help you communicate effectively in your future academic and professional endeavors.

## Test-Taking Strategies for the SHSAT ELA

Develop a process to lead to more consistently correct results.

Read with a Purpose:

1. Identify the main idea, including the topic and why the author is writing about that topic.
2. Evaluate the author's point of view toward the topic. Who is telling the story?
3. Reverse engineer the author's outline by skim reading the passage. How do ideas progress?

Steps to Answer "Evidence-Based" Reading Questions:

1. Read the questions carefully and underline key conditions.
2. Find the relevant evidence in the text and try to summarize the key idea in your own words that answers the question.
3. Match the idea to the answer option that reflects the correct idea, including details.
4. Eliminate wrong answer choices based on firm criteria like typical wrong answer types.
5. If still caught between two answers, identify specific differences and test against the text evidence.
6. Manage your time by pacing yourself and not spending too much time on any one question.

Time Management and Pacing:

**Time is an asset you cannot get back, so the biggest possible mistake on the exam is to not manage your time from the very start and reinforce appropriate pacing with practice.**

1. Take practice tests with a timer to simulate the real exam. Academy Pro will time the tests for you.
2. Use your time wisely by not spending too much time on any one question.
3. Answer the easier questions first and then go back to the more difficult ones.
4. Keep track of your time and make sure you have enough time to review your answers.

By practicing these strategies, you will be well-prepared for the SHSAT English Language Arts section and confident in your abilities. Remember to use your time wisely, read the questions carefully, and think critically about the information presented. Good luck!

## Encouragement to continue practicing

As you continue to prepare for the SHSAT English Language Arts (ELA) section, we want to encourage you to keep pushing forward. While the exam can seem daunting, it is important to remember that with the right preparation and mindset, you can achieve success.

One of the most important things you can do to prepare for the SHSAT ELA section is to practice regularly. Set aside time each day to work on reading comprehension, writing, grammar, and syntax. The more you practice, the more comfortable and confident you will become with the material. Don't be discouraged if you don't see immediate results - progress takes time, and consistent effort is key.

It is also important to focus on specific areas of the exam that you may find challenging. For example, if you struggle with reading comprehension, try practicing with complex texts and using active reading strategies to improve your understanding. If writing is your weak spot, work on developing your organization and structure, and practice using different writing styles.

Additionally, it can be helpful to familiarize yourself with test-taking strategies for the SHSAT ELA section. This includes techniques for managing your time and pacing yourself during the exam, as well as methods for approaching multiple-choice questions and constructed responses.

Lastly, remember that critical thinking skills are crucial for success on the SHSAT ELA section. Practice analyzing and interpreting complex texts, drawing connections between different ideas, and evaluating arguments and evidence.

In conclusion, preparing for the SHSAT ELA section can be challenging, but with dedication and persistence, you can achieve your goals. Keep practicing, focus on areas of weakness, and utilize test-taking strategies to maximize your performance. Good luck!

## Practice exercises

Practice exercises are essential for preparing for the SHSAT English Language Arts section. By practicing reading comprehension strategies, writing skills, grammar and syntax, test-taking strategies, time management, pacing, and critical thinking skills, students can improve their performance and achieve success on the exam.

## SHSAT Academy Pro

If you are looking for a way to pull together all the concepts in this guide book in practice, then let us help. Academy Pro is the online study platform that complements this ELA study guide. On ELA reading we provide video solutions from instructors as they solve the same reading problems you will. It is the closest thing to having a tutor show you directly how to employ the techniques learned in this book without having to pay the high cost of tutoring. Academy Pro includes at least 8 full-length ELA exams and category practice exercises you can use as practice examples as well as a full suite of math practice exams and exercises.

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We hope you enjoyed our 2023-2024 ELA guide and find many of our insights useful. If you wish to follow up with additional tutoring support, we can help. In fact, our tutoring model is likely to save you significant money in addition to providing top quality instruction like the material in this guide book.

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Why spend thousands of dollars on quality tutoring to repeat many of the concepts you already know? Instead, pay for what you need and save. Our students gain admission at similar rates to the best firms in the industry. In fact, we challenge any firm to start with a similar quality student and consistently deliver higher admission rates to specialized high schools. At most firms, you will pay in excess of \$3,000 on average for SHSAT training leading up to the exam. Our admitted students average less than \$800 total training expenditures.

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# 2023-2024 SHSAT ELA



If you have any further questions about additional practice or tutoring options for the SHSAT, feel free to contact us at [testprepshsat.com](https://testprepshsat.com) or email [customer\\_service@testprepshsat.com](mailto:customer_service@testprepshsat.com)



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