Turboprep® Module V for Reading Comprehension

ANATOMY OF READING COMPREHENSION AS TESTED ON GMAT, GRE, LSAT, AND SAT REASONING TEST

"**When I use a word**," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."
-- Lewis Carroll in '*Through the looking glass*'.

Logical Conclusion:
Humpty Dumpty will not fare well in the Reading Comprehension section.

Reading Comprehension is about your ability to understand information provided in a specific context, and to pick answer choices that will be consistent with the **LITERAL** interpretations of a context specific information provided in the passage and relevant to the question, without embellishing the stated information. You are required to answer all questions strictly on the basis of information stated in the passage, not on the basis of your real-world expectations or knowledge of the matter discussed in the passages.

Our rather blasphemous and libelous reference to Humpty Dumpty is meant to drive home the point that Reading Comprehension (or, for that matter, any aspect of Graduate School Admission Tests) is about your ability to make sure that the wording of answer options is appropriate and consistent with a necessarily valid interpretation of words and phrases. Any creative or liberal interpretation of words and phrases contained in the passage or in the answer options is a sure recipe for disaster. This section of the test is about '***wordsmithing***' and about your ability to determine whether an answer option using one set of words is more consistent with a literal interpretation of context-specific information than is another. For example, you will be required to determine whether the author is 'describing' a theory or 'discussing' a theory; or whether the author is providing 'a reason' for something or 'reasons' for something. The bottom line is that you must remain awake and engage in critical parsing of words and phrases in order to determine that the answer option that you are tempted to pick has the right set of words put together in it and does not have even ONE UNACCEPTABLE word or phrase in it. In some instances, you may have to ditch an answer because the form of noun used in the answer is singular whereas a more logical or required form is plural. You will learn in this file that you need to look at **selection of answer not as a process of choosing 1 of 5 answer choices but as one of determining which 4 of the 5 choices cannot be selected.**

You will also be required to apply all of the logical reasoning basics that we discussed in Module 4 file when you work on the Reading Comprehension Section. In fact, your ability to identify that which is necessarily implied in an explicitly stated item of information is what is tested in this section.

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HOW READING COMPREHENSION IS TESTED ON THE STANDARDIZED TESTS

READING COMPREHENSION section is part of all Graduate and undergraduate school admission tests.

GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) tests Reading Comprehension as part of its Verbal Assessment. Typically, GMAT includes 4 passages, one of which is typically not scored. The comparative Reading is not tested on the GMAT because the computer-adaptive format requires the test-takers to scroll up and down for each question, and scrolling becomes cumbersome for two passages. As to which of the 4 passages is experimental is difficult to tell in the Pearson created GMAT. Usually, the experimental passages are tested early on (usually the first or the second passage, or, occasionally, the third passage) so that 'fatigue' does not become a factor in the selection of answer options.

GRE (Graduate Record Examination) tests Reading Comprehension as part of its Verbal Assessment as well. GRE verbal assessment typically includes 3 passages and 10 questions (about 1/3 of the verbal section). The comparative Reading is not tested on the GRE because of the difficulties associated with scrolling on the computer.

LSAT (LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST) includes one scored section of Reading Comprehension that consists of 4 passages. Effective June 2007 administration, one of the four passages on the LSAT will be replaced by Comparative Reading (explained later in this file). LSAT allows 35 minutes for this section, and typically 24-26 questions are based on the 4 passages.

SAT (SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST) **REASONING TEST** will test Reading Comprehension in the Verbal Assessment area of the test and as part of Critical Reading. Typically, 4 passages are tested, at least one of which involves COMPARATIVE READING. It is not uncommon for the test-takers to get 2 normal passages and two comparative reading passages.

READING COMPREHENSION passages are typically about HISTORY, LANGUAGE, DEMOGRAPHICS, SCIENCE (astronomy, biology, biochemistry, medicine, physics, etc.), LAW, BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, RELIGION, and BOOK REVIEWS. Do not get intimidated by the subject of the passage. The following pages will walk you through the procedure for effectively handling ANY type of passage. Read with expectation as explained and be sure to process the elements of statements as illustrated. You will do just fine. Our introduction to this section and reference to Humpty-Dumpty are meant to underscore the importance of critically parsing words used in the passages and in the answer options. The Anchor-Phrase procedure explained in the following pages has helped thousands of trainees with this section, and made Reading Comprehension arguably the easiest section to deal with.

Now, fasten seat-belts and get ready for the adventure.

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Anatomy of Information

The probability of a statement being true is inversely correlated to its information content: the less the information contained in a statement, the higher the probability that the statement may not be disconfirmed.

Consider the following statement: "We will win". The probability of this statement is a near certainty or 1 because we will prevail someday, somewhere (in some activity or game), somehow, given enough time, patience, and resources. The statement begs the question: Win What?
Let us say that we want to qualify the statement and decrease its probability by adding the complement 'the war' and stating 'We will win the war'. Notice that the probability of the new statement is less than that of the first statement because the complement 'restricts' the scope of the winning activity.

Let us say that we want to ADD more information to the second statement and answer the question: "what kind of war?", we might be inclined to state: "We will win the war on Terrorism". Notice that this brand-new statement has significantly reduced probability than even the second statement because the new statement further restricts the scope of the war activity. It is not a war on poverty or on drugs but on terrorism.

Let us say that we want to add another qualifier or complement to the above statement and further decrease its probability by stating the following: "We will win the war on terrorism being waged in Iraq". We have further diminished the probability of information by adding the new qualifier 'in Iraq.

You get the hang of where we are headed with this line of reasoning, don't you? Technically, the more qualifiers that a statement contains, the more information it contains and the higher the probability that the statement can be verified or disproved. Qualifiers are meant to answer questions such as 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why', 'how' and to 'restrict the scope of statements' by narrowly describing them. If we want to add more information to the above set of statements, we could do so and end up with an information-laden statement such as the one below.
"We will win the war on terrorism being waged in Iraq by March 2007 by surging the troop levels currently deployed there and by installing a stable, functioning, secular, and western-friendly democracy there." Notice that the more qualifiers such as complements and adjectives there are in a statement, the more the statement becomes amenable to critical interpretation and questioning. Because qualifiers add information, and because information is overwhelming and distracting, you need to stay alert and learn to be able to tell where the author of the passage makes a serious statement.

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DESCRIPTION, COMMENTARY, CRITIQUE, RECOMMENDATION, ATTITUDE

A reading comprehension passage is a witches' brew of bland description, commentary, critique, attitude, suggestion or recommendation, and comparisons. Your task is to determine where the author is merely blandly describing a phenomenon or a theory, and where the author gets into a commentary.

Consider a simple passage:
"The democratic candidates are campaigning on the theme of repealing NAFTA, given that states such as Ohio have lost thousands of manufacturing jobs to countries overseas. **But this posture is fraught with unimaginable consequences for America in a world that is seamlessly integrated."**

Notice that the first sentence is a mere 'reporting' of the goings-on whereas the second statement is a strong commentary on that report. Also, note that the information 'described' in the first sentence provides the context for the commentary contained in the second sentence. Also, notice that the 'commentary' starts in a transitional conjunction 'but' that implies an objection or a contrast or an opposition.

Consider another simple passage:

"Marine biologists have long thought that variation in the shell color of aquatic snails evolved as a protective camouflage against birds and other predators. Brown shells seem to be more frequent when the underlying seafloor is dark-colored and white shells more frequent when the underlying seafloor is light-colored. A new theory has been advanced, **however,** that **claims** that shell color is related to physiological stress associated with heat absorption. According to this theory, brown shells will be more prevalent in areas where the wave action of the sea is great and thus heat absorption from the Sun is minimized, whereas white shells will be more numerous in calmer waters where the snails will absorb more heat from the Sun's rays.

The new theory is promising. Blah blah blah blah blah yada yada yada……."

This is how you dissect the passage: The first two sentences boringly 'describe' what the marine biologists have 'long thought'. The third statement contains a transitional conjunction, 'however', that lends this statement with a degree of seriousness and suggests a comparison / contrast between the theories. The fourth statement, again, boringly describes the new theory which is in contradistinction to the first theory that marine biologists had long believed in. The new paragraph starting in the statement "the new theory is promising" reflects commentary or favorable attitude of the author toward the second theory and must be noted. The main idea of the passage has to be about the somewhat positive inclination of the author toward the new theory.

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Let us take a look at another passage where the 'description' is followed by commentary or attitudinal stance of the author.

"The Food and Drug Administration has recently proposed severe restrictions on the use of antibiotics to promote the health and growth of meat animals. Medications added to feeds kill many microorganisms but also encourage the appearance of bacterial strains that are resistant to anti-infective drugs. Already, **for example**, penicillin and the tetracyclines are not as effective therapeutically as they once were. The drug resistance is **chiefly** conferred by tiny circlets of genes, called plasmids, that can be exchanged between different strains and even different species of bacteria. Plasmids are also one of the two kinds of vehicles (the other being viruses) that molecular biologists depend on when performing gene transplant experiments. Even present guidelines forbid the laboratory use of plasmids bearing genes for resistance to antibiotics. **Yet, while congressional debate rages over whether or not to toughen these restrictions on scientists in their laboratories, little congressional attention has been focused on an ill-advised agricultural practice that produces known deleterious effects."**

Notice that the first part of the passage is bland description of what the FDA has proposed to do and the effects of adding antibiotics to animal feed. The words and elements that you need to pay attention to are the transitional phrase 'for example' and the qualifier 'chiefly'. The commentary or the attitude or the tone of concern of the author does not emerge until the sentence beginning in the transitional conjunction 'yet'. Notice the serious commentary provided the use of qualifier 'ill-advised' and the tone of concern in the phrase "known deleterious effects". Also, notice the outrage that the author feels about what the congress is not doing to regulate agricultural practice.

The main idea of the passage has to be about commentary or the attitudinal stances that the author reveals in describing a theory or phenomenon.

If you want to process the structure of the passage, it would go as follows: "the author (boringly) describes the current agricultural practice and expresses outrage at the reality that the congressmen have not focused attention on an 'ill advised' practice (of adding antibiotics to animal feed) that produces KNOWN HARMFUL effects".

In all the above examples, the main idea of the author is not to provide a description of a theory or phenomenon, or to make a comparison or contrast but to make a commentary or to indicate an attitudinal stance. That is how you process the information in the passage. You should be able to read through the passage and determine where the author is merely 'describing' or 'reporting on' something and where the commentary or tone emerges. **The tone, commentary, explanation, or the attitude is expressed by the author by the use of qualifiers, transitional phrases, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, emphases provided by adverbs and superlatives, and explanatory elements such as colon, comma, parentheses, and dash.**

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ELEMENTS THAT COMMUNICATE AUTHOR'S TONE, COMMENTARY, ATTITUDE, RECOMMENDATION, SERIOUSNESS, CONCERN, ETC.

You can tell that the author of the passage is getting serious when he or she begins to use transitional phrases or strong expressions, or adjectives and adverbs, and words that express shock, outrage, curiosity, admiration, concern, or condemnation.

Statements beginning in words such as 'surprisingly', 'curiously', 'unfortunately', 'however', 'yet', 'but', etc. express strong attitudes that the author has toward the matter being discussed.

Any statement that makes a strong commentary such as 'it is a gross oversimplification' or 'his genius has not been appreciated by the critics', or 'Abramowicz's work is a VALUABLE EXAMPLE of the care that MUST BE TAKEN by researchers' indicates author's strong leaning toward a certain position or stance, and must be part of the main idea or primary purpose of the passage. Remember: words and phrases used in the passage are carefully picked and are never meant to be roses wasting their sweetness in the middle of a windless desert. All transitional phrases, strong nouns and verbs, strong characterization such as 'myopic view of capitalism', and words expressing concern or admiration or outrage must be considered part of the main idea or the primary purpose.

Learn to tell where the description stops and where the commentary begins. Usually, the description at the beginning of the passage is meant to provide the context for the commentary that normally follows the description. Consider the following passage that has the first paragraph is mostly concerned with describing the coral reef community:

Coral reefs are one of the most fragile, biologically complex, and diverse marine ecosystems on earth. This ecosystem is one of the **fascinating paradoxes** of the biosphere: how do clear, and thus nutrient-poor, waters support such prolific and productive communities? Part of the answer lies within the tissues of the corals themselves. Symbiotic cells of algae known as zooxanthellae carry out photosynthesis using the metabolic wastes of corals, thereby producing food for themselves, for their coral hosts, and even for other members of the reef community. This symbiotic process allows organisms in the reef community to use sparse nutrient resources efficiently.

Unfortunately for coral reefs, however, a variety of human activities are causing world-wide degradation of shallow marine habitats by adding nutrients to the water. Agriculture, slash-and-burn land cleaning, sewage disposal, and manufacturing that creates waste by-products all increase nutrient loads in these waters. Typical symptoms of reef decline are destabilized herbivore populations and an increasing abundance of algae and filter-feeding animals. Declines in reef communities are consistent with observations that nutrient input is increasing in direct proportion to growing human populations, thereby threatening reef communities sensitive to subtle changes in nutrient input to their waters.

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Notice that the first sentence has strong commentary in that it contains strong emphasis using superlative and adjectival/adverbial phrases. The author characterizes the coral reef communities as one of 'the most fragile, biologically complex, and diverse marine ecosystems' and then goes on to describe the communities as 'fascinating paradoxes'. The colon after the phrase 'fascinating paradox' is mean to start a sentence that explains why the coral reef communities are 'fascinating paradoxes'. The description that follows the colon is almost boring and does not contain any words of emphasis or commentary or tone. **The tone that emerges in the first two sentences is one of admiration or awe, and must be noted**. The second paragraph starts in 'unfortunately' and indicates a strong concern that the author has toward the 'most fragile, biologically complex, and diverse' coral reef communities. The reference to 'coral reef communities' must be processed in the context of the awe and admiration that the author expressed in the opening paragraph. The rest of the second paragraph describes specific human activities that pose a threat to the coral reefs. **Because the second paragraph starts off in a statement expressing strong concern, the main idea of the passage must necessarily be about this information expressing concern**. Anything that is part of description following the colon in the first paragraph or anything that describes what specific human activities pose a threat to coral reef communities cannot be the main idea of the passage. The description, however, serves to provide the context for why adding nutrients to the clear waters will jeopardize the sensitive and fragile communities.

When you process the passages, be sure to pay attention to the words and phrases, and to note where the commentary is made and where the description is provided.

Also, remember that any statement containing strong phrasing will be tested. If the passage asks you a question that does not include a clear anchor phrase, the answer is usually about the strong phrases contained in the passages. Questions such as 'the passage provides information that would support which of the following statements?' usually have answers suggested or indicated in the strong statements made in the passage. Read passages with expectations, and look for descriptions, commentaries, characterizations, endorsements, criticism, etc. (Remember that the passages will never be about criticizing people; they could criticize the ideas of people or the assumptions they made).

TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES USED IN PASSAGES

What are transitional words and phrases? Transitional elements are words and phrases that indicate transition from description to commentary or description to example or descriptions to contrast or descriptions to clarifications, etc. Phrases such as however, yet, but, in contrast, for example, therefore, equally, surprisingly, curiously, fortunately, unfortunately, etc. are transitional phrases indicating transition from statements of one kind to statements of another kind. Transitional words and phrases are important elements in passages and must be taken seriously. For example, (notice the transition from discussion to example here) the transitional word 'however' could imply a contrast between theories or an objection to an earlier quoted suggestion, or a counter-point of

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the author. The transitional word 'yet' could imply surprise or outrage or annoyance. ("Yet, while congressional debate rages over whether or not to stiffen restrictions on scientists in their laboratories, little attention has been paid to the ill-advised agricultural practice that produces known dangerous effects." ← In this sentence, the use of the word 'yet' connotes concern and shock felt by the author about inaction on the part of the Congress.)

The passages can have several different types of transitional words and phrases, indicating transition from a type of statement to another. Be sure to pay attention to the following elements when you read the passages.

- Words of emphasis – Adverbial ('radically different'), Adjectival ('ill-conceived notion'), Superlative ('the most time-consuming top-priority emergency cases')
- Explanatory elements such as Colon (:), Comma, Dash, and Parentheses. A colon will be followed by information that will explain the statement before the colon. A Comma will typically set off a 'modifier' describing a noun or providing a reason for the information that precedes the modifier or follows it. (Example: "Keenly aware of their artistic responsibilities, the women writers would not make concessions." ← You should read this statement as follows: Because they were keenly aware of their artistic responsibilities, the women writers would not make concessions. Consider another example: "Rubisco, arguably the most important enzyme in a plant, acts as catalyst promoting reactions building sugar." ← The modifier that follows the comma after Rubisco describes Rubsico as 'arguably the most important enzyme, etc."). The 'dash' will typically describe a word or a part of the information in the preceding sentence. ("our progress depends on compromise – unless we put aside the differences, we will not make progress." ← Notice that the word 'compromise' has been characterized as an act of putting aside the differences.) "Parentheses" are used to clarify and put in context the statement that precedes the parenthetical statements. (Example: "As long as a high-school diploma was not an occupational requirement, the enrollment of blacks in schools was an insignificant proportion of total enrollment. (Only 12% of black youth in the age group 16 to 20 was enrolled in high-schools.)← The parenthetical statement clarifies the preceding information and puts it in context.
- Transitional words of illustration: For example, a case in point, to illustrate
- Transitional words of contrast or objection or surprise: however, yet, but, nevertheless
- Transitional words indicating transition to additional information or to information of equal significance – equally, in addition, also
- Transition indicating time and order – initially, primarily, eventually, ultimately

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- Transition to statements indicating concession – although, despite, even though, in spite of
- Transition to statements indicating detail or specifics -- particularly, specifically
- Transition to statements indicating reason or result – because, consequently, in order to, so that
- Transition to statements indicating summary – In sum, Therefore, in short, accordingly
- Any FIGURES OF SPEECH or METAPHORS -- in a sense ('Quantas, in a sense, are wavelengths calibrated in inches.' ← 'in a sense' suggests that we can understand the size of Quantas in terms of our measures of calibration or calculation.), 'out of whole cloth' meaning 'from scratch' ('the English settlers created their systems out of whole cloth.' → 'the English settlers created their systems from scratch.')
- ANY PRONOUN such as IT, THIS, SUCH, SO, ONE ← Pronouns imply nouns or information and you will be tested to see whether you can identify the information for which the pronoun is used as a substitute.
- Any PASSIVE STATEMENT in the passage ← Passive statements imply the subject of the sentence and you will be tested to determine whether you have identified the implied subject of the sentence. ('Until recently, it was assumed (by the scientists) that microwaves heat body tissues the same way that the other forms of radiation do.' ← Notice that the subject 'scientists' is implied in the passive statement, and you will be required to identify the implication.)

So, when you read the passage, read with expectation and look for these elements, and be sure to note the significance of these elements. The test of comprehension is about your ability to look for, recognize, and process the significance of these elements used in sentences.

Any statement that contains or starts with these transitional elements or pronouns or passive information will provide the basis for a question on the test. In Critical or Logical Reasoning passages tested on the GMAT and LSAT, there is generally a single transition from evidence to conclusion but in longer passages tested in Reading Comprehension or Critical Reading sections of GMAT, GRE, LSAT, and SAT, there will be several different transitions, and you need to look for and process these transitions.

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TEASER STATEMENTS IN PASSAGES

The passages are generally organized in terms of descriptions and commentary on that which is described. Typically, adjectives (needed acceleration or untenable assumption), transitional conjunctions such as but, however, yet, and noun phrases (oversimplification or idealization) imply commentary. Additionally, the statements containing commentary can also act as 'teasers' that will be more fully explained in the passage by the author.

When you come across teaser statements, expect the author to explain to you the teasers more completely.

- If the author states the following in the passage: "unfortunately, human activities are posing a threat to the fragile marine ecosystem", expect the author to explain what specific human activities are posing a threat to the fragile ecosystem.
- If the author characterizes a theory as 'having important practical applications', expect the author to describe at least some of those applications or the most prominent of those applications. Similarly, if the author describes a theory as 'promising' expect the author to amplify that statement in the following statements. If the author calls a theory an 'oversimplification', be sure to look for reasons why the theory is an 'oversimplification'.

  In fact the primary purpose of the passage would be to explain the teasers and the characterizations that are part of the commentary. If the author states that the 'assumption that microwaves work in the same way as other radiations is untenable', expect the author to describe why that assumption is untenable and why microwave radiations do not act in the same way as other forms of radiations. The primary purpose of the author is to show that the assumption about microwave radiations is untenable, and why microwaves act differently from other forms of radiation.

  Learn to recognize a standard formulaic structure of passages so that you will not be bored or disinterested or distracted. If the author describes a theory, expect the author to describe another theory that is at some variance from the first theory. If the author describes one definition of ethnicity, expect the author to describe another description of ethnicity, and also expect the author to indicate which one, if at all, he or she considers more appropriate. If the author describes one account of Nightingale, expect the author to describe another account of the same person, and also expect the author to indicate which of the two accounts he or she prefers. Also, when you are presented with contrasting accounts or theories, process the similarities and the major difference between the theories.

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TONE OF THE PASSAGE REDUX

Words used in statements carry meanings and tones. When you 'read' passages, your objective is to look for and process the significance of the qualifiers, complements, connecting elements and phrases, and to identify the TONE implied in these words and phrases, **including Verbs and Nouns**. The tone could be positive, neutral, or negative (as in criticism). As you read through the passage, **actively look for the TONE** implied in the words used. Verbs and Nouns must be processed in terms of whether they connote information that is consequential or inconsequential or neutral. "He was an **artist**" is a statement in which the noun 'artist' is rather neutral and does not have any major 'consequence'. "He as a **genius**", however, is a statement in which the noun '**genius**' appears to have major consequence. "As Governor-General, he **represented** the King" is a sentence in which the verb 'represented' is used rather neutrally or inconsequentially. However, in the sentence, 'Many small businesses have been **devastated** by their reliance on one large company', the verb 'devastated' connotes information having serious consequence or TONE. "He **participated** in a political **campaign**" is a statement that is rather neutral in tone because the noun '**campaign**' or the verb '**participate**' do not connote a strong tone. However, if the statement were to read, 'he was **involved** in a **conspiracy**', then the tone is dramatically different. **Conspiracy** implies that more than one person was involved in the act, and connotes a secret agreement among two or more people to perpetrate a wrongful or unlawful act. The **TONE** here is **consequential** and must be processed. *When you process information, be sure to recognize verbs and nouns that imply information of consequence, and, therefore, a significant TONE.*

TONAL variations are also implied in the QUALIFIERS and COMPLEMENTS. Adjectives and Adverbs also communicate TONAL variations in terms of whether or not the information containing the elements has any consequence. For example, if the passage goes as follows, you should know that the tone is VERY POSITIVE: "The life and career of Miles Davis have been ASTONISHINGLY PRODUCTIVE and NOTEWORTHY. Yet, his GENIUS has not been recognized by some of his ardent critics who view his departure from the genre of traditional Jazz as heretical." Note that words such as 'productive' (preceded by an emphasizing adverb 'astonishingly'), 'noteworthy', and 'genius' communicate a POSITIVE TONE. Also, we should note that the author's tone toward the ardent critics of Miles Davis is somewhat critical or not positive.

Consider another example:
"Recent years have brought minority-owned businesses in the United States **unprecedented opportunities**—as well as **new and significant risks**." Notice that the tone here is one of concern as evidenced by the use of the qualifiers 'new and significant' before 'risks'.

Consider another example:
"Reform" in America has been **sterile** because it can imagine no change except through the extension of this **metaphor of a race**, wider inclusion of competitors, "a piece of the action," as it were, for the disenfranchised.
Notice that the tone here is critical as evidenced by the use of the word 'sterile' meaning 'unproductive'.

Take a look at a section of another passage:

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"**Most economists** in the United States seem **captivated by the spell** of the free market. Consequently, nothing seems good or normal that does not accord with the requirements of the free market. A price that is determined by the seller or, for that matter, established by anyone other than the aggregate of consumers seems pernicious. Accordingly, **it requires a major act of will** to think of price-fixing (the determination of prices by the seller) as both "normal" and having a valuable economic function." What kind of tone do we sense here? Critical, of course. How can we tell? Notice that the author is referring to economists as 'captivated by the SPELL of free market'. As professionals, the economists are not supposed to be under the MAGICAL POWER of the free market. Also, notice the reference that they are not READILY PRONE to looking at price-fixing as normal and having an economic function. The tone of the author toward the economists is certainly not positive and one of critical in nature.

Let us take a look at another segment:

"Archaeology as a profession faces two major problems. First, **it is the poorest of the poor.** Only **paltry sums** are available for excavating and even less is available for publishing the results and preserving the sites once excavated. **Yet archaeologists deal with priceless objects every day.** Second, there is the problem of illegal excavation, resulting in museum-quality pieces being sold to the highest bidder." **What kind of tone do we sense in the underlined sections here? A tone of sympathy and concern for the profession of Archaeology.**

Learn to look for and identify the tone as part of processing the information. A good understanding of the TONE of the passage can help you hone in on the correct answer easily. Consider the example of the segment from the passage about 'reform' above. The tone is undoubtedly critical and negative. Let us say that you are asked to deal with a question from the above passage. Take a look at the following:

The author sets offthe word "Reform" with quotation marks in order to

(A) emphasize its departure from the concept of settled possessiveness

(B) show his support for a systematic program of change

(C) underscore the flexibility and even amorphousness of United States society

(D) indicate that the term was one of Wilson's favorites

(E) assert that reform in the United States has not been fundamental

The "Reform" reference suggests that it is not the real reform and the characterization that it is sterile tells us that the author is not positively inclined toward the so-called reform. Notice that the only answer option that contains the critical tone implied in the statement is E. Notice that options such as B, C, and D are easily eliminated in that they carry a positive connotation. Choice A can be eliminated because there is no emphasis provided by the quotation marks. If anything, the quotation marks imply sarcasm and suggest that the reform is not really reform: it is the so-called reform.

As you begin to read the passages, learn to look for and identify the TONE implied in the words and phrases used in the statements put together to form the passage. Take a look at a passage in which the first paragraph goes as follows:

"Through the last half century, the techniques used by certain historians of African art for judging the precise tribal origins of African sculptures on the basis of style have been **greatly refined. However**, as one recent critic of the historians' classificatory assumptions has put it, the idea that the distribution of a particular style is **necessarily limited** to the area populated by one tribe may be 'a **dreadful oversimplification.. a decided falsification** of the very life of art in Africa."

What type of TONE can we identify here? We can identify a CRITICAL tone, chastising the

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assumptions of 'certain historians' who appear to be using 'greatly refined' techniques. The conjunction HOWEVER implies that the author is about to make a counter-point or a counter-argument or make a statement **in contrast** to the one made in the previous statement.

PAY ATTENTION to the TONE of information as you process the passage and comprehend the idea outlined. Read with a sense of purpose, and do read to be entertained. If you are actively INVOLVED in looking for these words and phrases of import and in processing the TONAL variations actively, you will not be bored or distracted.

THE BIG PICTURE OF THE PASSAGE

One of the principal goals when you begin to read a passage is to identify its BIG PICTURE information along with the IMPLIED TONE. The big picture could be anywhere in the passage:
The big picture or the main idea could be the first sentence of the passage;
The big picture or the main idea could be anywhere within the first paragraph;
The big picture or the main idea could be the last sentence of the first paragraph;
The big picture or the main idea could be the first sentence of the second paragraph;
The big picture or the main idea could be the first sentence of the last paragraph;
The big picture or the main idea could be the last sentence of the entire passage.
The passages could be **giant arguments** whose miniature cousins are encountered in Logical and Critical Reasoning Sections of the tests. Just as an argument can start off with its conclusion and go on to lay out the basis for the conclusion, so can the 'giant arguments' advanced by the passages start off with the Conclusion or the Main Idea and go on to explain the basis for that conclusion. Or, an argument could make its conclusion in the middle or in the end. So can the 'giant arguments' that Reading Comprehension passages are. **But Remember: the big picture is expressed in the commentary and in the sentences containing transitional phrases, elements of strong emphases, and strong characterizations.**

READ WITH EXPECTATION

We learnt in the previous discussion segments that your goal is to look for the commentary that the author makes by using QUALIFIERS (that characterize nouns or verbs -- "**unusual** behavior adaptations" or "**radically** alters our understanding of Mayan Civilization") and by resorting to use of transitional words and phrases that point to a contrast or counterpoint or disagreement. When the author characterizes something, using strong qualifiers or transitional phrases, expect the author to explain to you why the author characterized the nouns and the verbs the way he or she did.

For example, if the author characterizes the clown-fish community as exhibiting 'unusual behavior adaptations', expect the author to explain to you why he or she thinks that the behavior adaptations of clown-fish communities are UNUSUAL. Similarly, if the author states that the 'new theory about magmatic fluids turning into gold deposits has IMPORTANT PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS', expect the author to explain to you why the applications of this new theory are in IMPORTANT areas. If the author calls Miles Davis a 'genius' BUT the critics have not appreciated his innovations, expect the author to describe why the critics have not appreciated the many innovations that Miles Davis pioneered. If the author expresses strong concern by stating that 'the emphasis by historians on one influence on Martin Luther King was UNFORTUNATE', expect the author to explain to you why the emphasis on one influence is unfortunate. Likewise, if the author describes the assumptions that the art historians made in classifying African art as 'oversimplification and abject falsification of the very nature of African art', expect the author to explain to you why he or she used such strong characterization to describe the assumptions made by art historians.

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In other words, the authors use these and many other 'teasers' before giving you a 'guided tour' of their thinking. The teaser statements are, in many cases, part of the main idea of the passage, and should be sought out and processed. Read the passages with expectation, and you will find that you are not distracted and able to process the specifics of passages more efficiently.

HOW TO STAVE OFF DISTRACTION?

One of the major frustrations of processing information is DISTRACTION. If the subject of the passage is not 'entertaining' or 'likable', or is outright boring, you tend to wander off and stop processing the specifics of the giant argument. How do you remain focused? Do not indulge in self-fulfilling prophecies: do not say that you do not like scientific passages or technical passages. What else must you do? Read with anticipation as explained in the previous pages. Remember that you are basically looking for information contained in NOUNS, VERBS, QUALIFEIRS, COMPLEMENTS, CONJUCTIONS, and in the **TONE** implied in these elements making up a sentence. Also, be sure to apply the LITERAL meaning of the words and phrases; **do not be creative or illogical.** *(If the passage states that the 'algae in coral reef communities produce food by using photo-synthesis', do not interpret it to mean that 'if algae did not produce food, the reefs will die' or 'producing food is the main or the only function of algae'.)* Look for and process Adjectives, Adverbs, Strong Verbs ('ensure'), Strong Nouns ('genius'), Conjunctions that imply a counter argument or contrast ('however'), transitional phrases such as ('in contrast'), and the punctuation marks such as colon and parentheses. We will see in a later page how we must read the passage while paying attention to the specifics of information provided in the passage. If you come across technical terms, expect the author to explain them to you, if the author means for you to know what they mean. If the author merely states technical jargons and does not bother to explain what they mean, you may not be required to process the significance of that statement. Because test-takers are not experts in many technical or scientific areas, the test-authors will take the trouble to explain (typically using 'explanatory elements' such as colons or commas or dashes or parentheses) the technical phrases if they are deemed relevant or critical to comprehension. Any technical mumbo-jumbo that is not explained is a digression and need not be allowed to distract you.

LSAT test-takers will be able to use highlighters to mark off the adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, strong verbs, etc. so that they can process information more readily while answering context-specific questions.

We also strongly recommend that you do 'sub-vocal' or 'silent' (sub-auditory) reading so that you are able to process each word written into statements in the passage. If you merely read through eye-scanning, you may be distracted because your eyes may wander and not enable you to process the specifics such as qualifiers, strong verbs, etc.

The bottom line is, you must not be distracted. Do not dwell on difficult to comprehend sections. If strong or technical terms are described, they must be explained in the passage if you are going to be tested on them. Do not get intimidated by terminology. Of course, the test will require that you are conversant with words, idioms, and phrases that a reasonably well-read person should be comfortable with but you can do very well by paying attention to the wording of answer options and by eliminating the ones that be categorized into the classes to be discussed later on in this file.

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