



Really Radical Reading Techniques for the SAT and ACT

Here are **THE BITS**: Read these – and only these – parts of the passage **FIRST**:

- the blurb, if provided (= the intro, often in italics, before the passage)
 - the first inch (= 5-7 lines)
 - the first sentence of each paragraph
 - the last inch (= 5-7 lines)
- Don't skim; really read.**

As you read:

- Underline whatever seem to be key points. Do not underline indiscriminately! Be very selective in what you underline; don't underline more than a few words or phrases per paragraph. This forces you to really THINK about what you want to emphasize to yourself.
- Circle triggers (= direction words such as however, and, nevertheless, because, and more). See **Triggers Worksheet** for practice), mentally noting the direction: same or change direction.

Do questions in this general order:

1. Vocab in Context. Always do these first!
2. Line Reference questions (= questions which mention a particular line or lines in the passage)
3. Lead Word questions (= questions with key words that will lead to where to start to read)
4. I, II, III or EXCEPT/NOT/LEAST (ACT only)
5. Line reference questions that are followed by Evidence questions (SAT only).
6. fuzzy, interpretive questions: inferences, author's point, tone, main purpose
7. Questions referencing a graph or chart at the end of the passage (SAT only)

How to approach most questions:

1. Cover the answers with your fat eraser (or use your hand if the proctor disallows anything on your desk other than your pencils).
2. Rephrase the question, starting with a question word:
Who, What, When, Where, Why, Which, or How
(Do the **Rephrasing the Question Worksheet** to get good at this!)
3. Find the line reference or lead word from the question that will lead you to the answer

area of the text. Then read 5 lines above and 5 lines below that point. Really read; don't skim.

4. Come up with your own answer or idea and jot your memo next to the answer choices.
5. Uncover the answers and eliminate any that are inconsistent with your memo.
Put a squiggle to the left of any answer choices that have words you don't know.
6. P.O.E. (= Process of Elimination)

Specific question type techniques:

1. **Vocab in Context:** "As used in the passage, the word ... most nearly means..."

- Find the word in the passage. Cross it out so you can't see it anymore.
- Read 5 lines above + 5 lines below.
- Underline key or powerful words/phrases, circle Triggers.
- Write your own word or memo. Two alternate words are even better.
- P.O.E. (Process of Elimination)

TIP:

If the word is a hard, sophisticated word that you happen to know, the first dictionary definition is probably correct. If it is an easy-seeming word, the first dictionary definition is probably NOT the answer. [Do not fall into the trap of plugging answer choices into the sentence from the start.](#) Save that for when you are down to two choices if you must do it.

2. **Line Reference questions:**

Do these in chronological order of the lines referenced, which may not be the same as question order (especially on ACT).

- Cover the answers.
- Read the question - rephrase it in your own words as a question, using a question word: Who What When Where Why How (Do **Rephrasing the Question Worksheet** to hone this skill)
- Find the line, then read 5 lines up + 5 lines down unless the lines in a new or previous paragraph clearly don't relate.
- Write your answer or a "duh" memo. (A "duh" memo is a simple, obvious connection. It's actually a good memo that will protect you from at least one wrong-but-appealing, answer choice.)
- P.O.E. (Process of Elimination)

3. **Evidence questions** (SAT only):

- The surest way to get an evidence question right without squandering a ton of time is to KNOW the answer before you choose it, just as you do for the other questions.
- Think carefully when solving the question before this so you already have found the evidence and just need to pick it out from the answers.
- If you are confused (very likely because your answer to the previous question was incorrect!), lean on P.O.E.

4. **Lead Word questions:**

A "lead word" is a word that leads you to the place in the passage where you will find the

answer.

- Read the question. Then rephrase in your own words as a question.
- Underline any lead words.
- Find those words in the passage, then read 5 lines up, 5 lines down.
- Jot your memo.
- P.O.E. (Process of Elimination)

5. EXCEPT/NOT/LEAST

- Cross out the word EXCEPT/NOT/LEAST. Now read the question.
- To the left of the answer choice letter, write **T** for true or **F** for false. If you can't tell immediately, leave that answer choice blank and do the other ones first.
- Whichever answer is different is the rest (that is, the lone T or the lone F) is the answer.

Passage 1 and Passage 2 (Passage A and B on the ACT):

- Read Passage 1 and do Passage 1 questions first, just as if it were a single passage, using techniques above.
- Then read Passage 2 and do Passage 2 questions.
- LASTLY, do the ones that refer to both passages.

6. Graphs and charts questions (SAT)

- Don't bother even looking at the graph or chart before dealing with the one or two questions that ask about it.
- If the question asks about the graph or chart ONLY, don't waste time referencing the text.
- Be sure to identify to yourself what is being measured in the x-axis, what is the dependent variable in the y-axis. For charts and bar graphs, compare and look for strong trends. Have some ideas of what the figure tells you before looking at the answer choices.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU REALLY DON'T UNDERSTAND THE PASSAGE AT ALL:

1. If, after reading "The Bits," you feel lost and befuddled, read through ALL the questions and ALL the answer choices at once. This will not take very long, especially since questions that ask for evidence or which give lines quoted in the answer choices are short reading. Doing this preview of all the questions and most of the answer choices will give you some clues to important points and themes. (Since you are reading all of them at once, you are less susceptible to having wrong answers planted in your brain than you would be if you looked at the answers for each question one by one.)
2. Then go back and do the questions as above.
3. If this is not enough help, either do that passage LAST or read more of it. **Reading more of the passage is the LAST resort**, however, because it is a time-sucker and it is not all that helpful. This applies especially to archaic political treatises and narratives.