

# Sample Test Questions

ENGLISH  
MATH  
READING  
SCIENCE  
WRITING

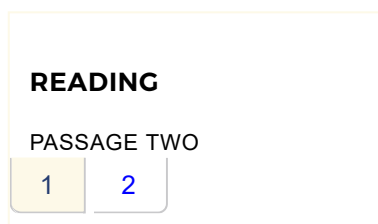
## Reading

### Test Tips

An actual ACT Reading Test contains 40 questions to be answered in 35 minutes.

- Read the passage(s) carefully.
- Read and consider all of the answer choices before you choose the one that best responds to the question.
- Refer to the passage(s) when answering the questions.

**Click on letter choices below to view the correct answer and explanations.**



**DIRECTIONS:** There are several passages in this test. Each passage is accompanied by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

2.

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** This passage is adapted from the chapter “Personality Disorders” in *Introduction to Psychology*, edited by Rita L. Atkinson and Richard C. Atkinson (©1981 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.).

### **Personality Disorders**

How should the law treat a mentally disturbed person who commits a criminal offense? Should individuals whose mental faculties are impaired be held responsible for their actions? These questions are of concern to social scientists, to members of the legal profession, and to individuals who work with criminal offenders.

Over the centuries, an important part of Western law has been the concept that a civilized society should not punish a person who is mentally incapable of controlling his or her conduct. In 1724, an English court maintained that a man was not responsible for an act if “he doth not know what he is doing, no more than . . . a wild beast.” Modern standards of legal responsibility, however, have been based on the McNaghten decision of 1843. McNaghten, a Scotsman, suffered the paranoid delusion that he was being persecuted by the English

prime minister, Sir Robert Peel. In an attempt to kill Peel, he mistakenly shot Peel's secretary. Everyone **20**involved in the trial was convinced by McNaghten's senseless ramblings that he was insane. He was judged not responsible by reason of insanity and sent to a mental hospital, where he remained until his death. But Queen Victoria was not pleased with the verdict— **25**apparently she felt that political assassinations should not be taken lightly—and called on the House of Lords to review the decision. The decision was upheld and rules for the legal definition of insanity were put into writing. The McNaghten Rule states that a defendant **30**may be found “not guilty by reason of insanity” only if he were so severely disturbed at the time of his act that he did not know what he was doing, or that if he did know what he was doing, he did not know it was wrong. **35** The McNaghten Rule was adopted in the United States, and the distinction of knowing right from wrong remained the basis of most decisions of legal insanity for over a century. Some states added to their statutes the doctrine of “irresistible impulse,” which recognizes **40**that some mentally ill individuals may respond correctly when asked if a particular act is morally right or wrong but still be unable to control their behavior.

During the 1970s, a number of state and federal courts adopted a broader legal definition of insanity **45**proposed by the American Law Institute, which states: “A person is not responsible for criminal conduct if at

the time of such conduct, as a result of mental disease or defect, he lacks substantial capacity either to appreciate the wrongfulness of his conduct or to conform his **50**conduct to the requirements of the law.” The word *substantial* suggests that “any” incapacity is not enough to avoid criminal responsibility but that “total” incapacity is not required either. The use of the word *appreciate* rather than *know* implies that intellectual awareness of **55**right or wrong is not enough; individuals must have some understanding of the moral or legal consequences of their behavior before they can be held criminally responsible.

The problem of legal responsibility in the case of **60**mentally disordered individuals is currently a topic of intense debate, and a number of legal and mental health professionals have recommended abolishing the insanity plea as a defense. The reasons for this recommendation are varied. Many experts believe that the **65**current courtroom procedures—in which psychiatrists and psychologists for the prosecution and the defense present contradictory evidence as to the defendant’s mental state—are confusing to the jury and do little to help the cause of justice. Some also argue that the **70**abuse of the insanity plea by clever lawyers has allowed too many criminals to escape conviction. Others claim that acquittal by reason of insanity often leads to a worse punishment (an *indeterminate* sentence

to an institution for the criminally insane that may con-  
**75**fine a person for life) than being convicted and sent to  
prison (with the possibility of parole in a few years).

Despite the current controversy, actual cases of  
acquittal by reason of insanity are quite rare. Jurors  
seem reluctant to believe that people are not morally  
**80**responsible for their acts, and lawyers, knowing that an  
insanity plea is apt to fail, tend to use it only as a last  
resort. In California in 1980, only 259 defendants (out  
of approximately 52,000) were successful in pleading  
not guilty by reason of insanity.

1.

**One of the author's main points about the legal concept of responsibility in the passage is that:**

- A. ☐ the phrase "not guilty by reason of insanity" has made our legal system more efficient.
- B. ☒ *responsibility* and *guilt* are legal concepts, and their meanings can be modified
- C. ☐ knowing right from wrong is a simple matter of admitting the truth to oneself.
- D. ☐ people can become severely disturbed without a word of warning to anyone.

**CORRECT RESPONSE** ^

**The best answer is B** because the passage focuses mainly on how standards of legal responsibility regarding a mentally incompetent person who commits a crime have been modified over time. These changes in responsibility also affect whether or not a person is guilty. To support the point that the legal concepts

of *responsibility* and *guilt* can be modified, the author first presents the information regarding the McNaghten Rule in the second paragraph and then goes on in the fourth and fifth paragraphs to show that in the 1970s, "a number of state and federal courts adopted a broader legal definition of insanity" (lines 43-44), which modified a mentally ill person's legal responsibility. The passage further states that "the problem of legal responsibility in the case of mentally disordered individuals is currently a topic of intense debate" (lines 59-61), which indicates that additional modifications to the meanings of *responsibility* and *guilt* are likely.

---

2.

**Based on the passage, the primary purpose for the 1970s redefinition of insanity proposed by the American Law Institute was to:**

- E. ☐ eliminate the insanity defense from American courtrooms.
- F. ☒ more precisely define the concepts of responsibility and intellectual capacity.
- G. ☐ redefine legal insanity so that it might include as many criminals as possible.
- H. ☐ apply the McNaghten Rule only to trials involving cases of mistaken identity.

**CORRECT RESPONSE** ^

**The best answer is F.** Support for this choice is found in the direct quote from the definition proposed by the American Law Institute (lines 46-50). This 1970s redefinition of insanity set out to define more precisely when "a person is not responsible for criminal conduct" and to explain that a person must have "substantial capacity either to appreciate the wrongfulness of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of the law."

---

3.

From information in the third and fourth paragraphs (lines 35–58) it can reasonably be inferred that the legal definition of insanity was changed in the 1970s after:

- A. ☐ federal courts won a dispute with state courts over a proposal made by the American Law Institute.
- B. ☐ the doctrine of “irresistible impulse” was found to contradict accepted notions of justice.
- C. ☐ proponents of the McNaghten Rule had been using the insanity defense in far too many murder trials.
- D. ☒ several courts found that justice was not always best served when the McNaghten Rule was applied.

**CORRECT RESPONSE** ^

**The best answer is D.** The inference in the third and fourth paragraphs is that the narrowness of the McNaghten Rule led to modifications. “Some states added to their statutes the doctrine of ‘irresistible impulse,’” (lines 38–39), and later “a number of state and federal courts adopted a broader legal definition of insanity” (lines 43–44). Both of these changes suggest that strictly applying the original McNaghten Rule could in some cases be unjust.

---

4.

According to the explanation provided in the fourth paragraph (lines 43–58), use of the word *appreciate* in the phrase “to appreciate the wrongfulness” (lines 48–49) instead of *know* implies which of the following?

- E. ☐ The difference between right and wrong is something people feel rather than know, which makes deciding legal responsibility difficult.
- F. ☐ To *know* implies certainty, and distinguishing right from wrong is often a subjective matter in determining legal responsibility.

- G. ☒ The word *appreciate* suggests that an action and that action's implications must be understood for there to be legal responsibility.
- H. ☐ An insane person would "know" something the way a sane person would "know" something, and be able to appreciate that knowledge, too.

**CORRECT RESPONSE** ^

**The best answer is G.** Support for this choice is found in lines 53-58. This section of the passage explains the use of the word *appreciate*, which implies that before persons can be held criminally responsible, they "must have some understanding of the moral or legal consequences of their behavior."

---

5.

**The passage indicates that the McNaghten case became the basis for future decisions about legal insanity because:**

- A. ☒ the House of Lords upheld the verdict of the court despite considerable political pressure.
- B. ☐ there had been an increase in cases of murder involving mistaken identity arising from delusions.
- C. ☐ McNaghten was unable to convince the jury at his trial that he was incoherent and insane.
- D. ☐ McNaghten used a gun to commit murder, thus aggravating the crime in the jury's mind.

**CORRECT RESPONSE** ^

**The best answer is A.** Support for this choice is clearly stated in lines 24-29, which explains how Queen Victoria, not pleased with the result of an insanity judgment in favor of a defendant named McNaghten, "called on the House of Lords to review



the decision. The decision was upheld and rules for the legal definition of insanity were put into writing," and this came to be known as the McNaghten Rule, the basis for future decisions regarding legal insanity.

---

[Previous Page](#)[Next Page](#)  
[Top](#)

3.3k  
Shares

