

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.

READING

PASSAGE TWO

1

2

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-
75fine 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
80responsible 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.

6.

The passage states that McNaghten wanted to kill the English prime minister because the Scotsman thought that he:

- E. ☐ would establish a confusing legal precedent.
- F. ☐ had been rejected by Peel's secretary.
- G. ☐ would be better off in a mental hospital.
- H. ☒ had been wronged by the minister.

CORRECT RESPONSE ^

The best answer is H because lines 17-18 directly state that McNaghten thought "he was being persecuted by the English prime minister."

7.

According to the passage, one of the reasons some mental health and legal groups want to abolish the insanity defense is that:

- A. ☐ even clever lawyers are confused about when to use and when not to use it.
- B. ☒ juries that must sort out conflicting testimony become confused, and justice suffers.
- C. ☐ when it is invoked, even if the case is won, the punishment often ends up being too lenient.
- D. ☐ innocent defendants are too often being punished unfairly by unsympathetic juries.

CORRECT RESPONSE ^

The best answer is B. Support for this choice is stated in the fifth paragraph: "a number of legal and mental health professionals have recommended abolishing the insanity plea as a defense" (lines 61-63) because "current courtroom procedures . . . are confusing to the jury" (lines 65-68).

8.

The passage suggests that individuals who use the insanity defense:

- E. ☐ are not permitted to do so unless it can be proved beforehand that they are really insane.
- F. ☐ should be tried, convicted, and punished whether or not they are really insane.
- G. ☐ are legally responsible for their actions even if a jury decides they are not guilty.
- H. ☒ might risk a lifelong confinement even if acquitted by a jury, if the acquittal is based on insanity.

CORRECT RESPONSE ^

The best answer is H because the passage clearly states that "acquittal by reason of insanity often leads to a worse punishment (an *indeterminate* sentence to an institution for the criminally insane)" (lines 72-74).

9.

According to the passage, a lawyer contemplating using insanity as a defense for a client should do which of the following?

- A. ☒ Carefully evaluate using the defense, since in actual practice it rarely works
- B. ☐ Assemble for trial a team of expert witnesses with a wide range of viewpoints on mental illness
- C. ☐ Make sure that the doctrine of "irresistible impulse" is not used by the prosecution in his or her client's trial
- D. ☐ Recommend that the client be acquitted because he or she has been judged criminally insane by a doctor

CORRECT RESPONSE ^

The best answer is A. Support for this choice is clearly stated in lines 80-82: "lawyers, knowing that an insanity plea is apt to fail, tend to use it only as a last resort."

10.

One of the main points made in the last paragraph is that insanity pleas were:

- E. ☒ unconvincing to most juries in California in 1980.
- F. ☐ used in most cases in California in 1980.

- G. ☐ often successful in California in 1980.
- H. ☐ popular with lawyers in California in 1980.

CORRECT RESPONSE ^

The best answer is E. The last paragraph confirms that "actual cases of acquittal by reason of insanity are quite rare" and that in California in 1980, only a small percentage of defendants in these cases were successful.

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