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## Chapter 4

# How to Approach Multiple-Choice Questions

The multiple-choice section of the AP English Language and Composition exam is a test of your critical reading skills; the breadth and depth of the knowledge you bring to the test—vocabulary, grammar, rhetorical strategies—are measured only in your ability to apply them in your reading. The good news is that all of the answers to critical reading questions are in the excerpt; the difficulty lies in finding those answers, extracting meaning from complex, often dense, and sometimes archaic passages, and doing so under the pressure of time and without the aid of dictionaries or the Internet. Most good readers, which you probably already are, apply critical reading strategies intuitively—they deconstruct text without thinking much about what they are actually doing. It is also no accident that strong readers read a lot, almost always because they enjoy it, but the beneficial byproduct of that practice—besides the pleasure and knowledge they derive from it—is that they become very good at it. Consider a study on the role of practice in the creation of musicians. The research found that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert at playing a musical instrument, and that innate talent was only a secondary element, far less important than those hours of focused, purposeful practice. The implications of this research have been expanded to other skills: athletics, computer programming, math, dance, etc. What video game whiz kid isn't the product of thousands of hours of bleary-eyed, glued-to-the-screen practice? Just think of what he could do if those hours had been applied to practicing the piano, hitting tennis balls—or reading. Increase your reading practice and you will become a better reader, and probably a better writer as well.

This book will help you to do well on the AP English Language and Composition exam by helping you to become a better reader, that is, by heightening your ability to apply critical reading strategies and by focused reading practice. This may require you to fill in some of the holes in your knowledge base, increase your vocabulary, as well as work on your ability to focus and concentrate in a timed assessment. Yes, there are some test-taking strategies, even tricks, that will help you; familiarity with the types of questions on the exam will give you an advantage and a feeling of preparedness. But even these “tricks” are still really about becoming a better reader, someone who has developed the mental discipline to know what to do when faced with challenging text.

## The Format of the Multiple-Choice Section

The AP English Language & Composition examination is divided into two parts: Section I, Multiple Choice or critical reading questions (45 per cent of your score) and Section II, the Free Response or essay questions (55 per cent of your score). The multiple-choice section has approximately 54 to 60 questions divided among four to six reading passages (the exact number varies from year to year), and there will be from nine to fifteen questions per reading passage. You are allowed 60 minutes for the objective portion. Although the test is geared so that most good students can finish within the time limits, the time constraints are also challenging. It is essential you do some timed practice. Note two recent changes to the multiple-choice section of the exam:

- **Change in Content:** From 2007 onward, some items in the multiple-choice section refer to documentation and citation of sources. While examinees need not memorize any particular style (e.g., MLA, Chicago, APA, etc.), they will need to use information from citations that may indeed follow a given style. Some passages—“at least one,” says the College Board—will be from a published work (book, journal, periodical, etc.) that incorporates footnotes or a bibliography; the documentation questions will be based on such passages.
- **Change in Scoring:** The method of scoring the multiple-choice section has changed. Beginning in 2011, the score on the multiple-choice section will be based only on the number of questions the student answers correctly. Points will no longer be deducted for incorrect answers, and, as always, no points will be awarded for unanswered questions. Though this change certainly has implications for test-taking strategies, the formula for calculating the scores has also changed, and The College Board is expecting the distribution of scores (on the 1 to 5 final scale) to remain the same.

## The Passages

The AP English Language and Composition exam is decidedly not “literary” in the sense that its sister test, the AP English Literature and Composition exam, is; thus you will NOT be asked to analyze fiction, poetry, or drama on Section I of the exam. The multiple-choice section of the test measures your ability to read nonfiction. It may include essays, speeches, letters, journal entries, journalistic writings, biographies, or memoirs. Other important passages on the exam include types of criticism (literary, historical, cultural, political—including satire) as well as academic writing on various subjects (history, science and nature, the social sciences, etc.). Of course you won’t be reading grocery lists, the phone book, or other informational types of writing. Most of what you will read on the exam will be on some level persuasive—meant to make you think or feel a certain way, or at least make you understand how the author thinks or feels about a particular subject. Also expect the range of expository modes: description, narration, definition, cause and effect, argument, process analysis, and compare/con-

trast. One passage will be research-based with notes, and you may be asked a question or two about those notes.

This test is also, what a musician would call, a sight-reading test. The College Board looks for materials obscure enough not to be typically read or studied by high school students in order not to give anyone an unfair advantage on the test. While you may see a familiar writer on the test, it is highly unlikely that you will recognize an excerpt on the multiple-choice section, so you need to gain the experience necessary to approach a wide variety of reading in your preparation. In addition, it is important to understand that most of what you will see in the objective section of the exam is excerpted material, meaning that there is text that comes before and text that comes after what you are reading. This structure poses obvious difficulties for the reader, but again, always remember that the answers are in the passage. Everything you need to know about context for the purpose of this exam is provided for you; you just need to find it in the content and language of the passage. The other contextual difficulty is that the passages are almost all anonymous and obscure, so you usually don't know the writer or the time period of the piece. Anything of vital importance to the reader that can't be gleaned from the passage will be footnoted for you or presented in a brief introduction.

Finally, expect to be challenged and expect to be bored. At least one of the excerpts will be pre-twentieth century text and is extremely archaic even to avid readers. Expect difficult and archaic vocabulary. Being a twenty-first century student, you may wonder why you should be expected to know a word that was used in the seventeenth century and no longer used today. Certainly, strong readers have good vocabularies, but they also have an advanced ability to derive the meaning of a word from the context in which it is used, and the exam tests how well you do this. In addition, the length of the test, as well as the archaic and esoteric nature of some of the pieces, may challenge your ability to focus and concentrate. The exam is designed to measure your ability to read critically at the college level. Most people can read about subjects they are interested in, even if the reading level is advanced. College-level reading and research will require you to read beyond your comfort zone and apply strategies to make sense of difficult material. Reading outside one's comfort zone is a mental discipline that most of us need practice and patience to attain.

## Practice

**DIRECTIONS:** Consider the following letter written in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Native American leader Canassatego, in response to an offer of free education at the College of William and Mary presented to his people by the Virginia colony. Think about how all the elements discussed in this section come together to inform your understanding of purpose, audience, style, and tone.

We know you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in these colleges, and the maintenance of our young men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us good

5 by your proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you who are so wise must know that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will not therefore take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of education happens not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it. Several of our young people were formerly brought up in the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but, when they came  
10 back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear either cold or hunger, know neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, nor counselors, they were totally good for nothing. We are however not the less obliged for your kind offer,  
15 tho' we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia shall send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them.

1. What can we infer about the intended audience? We know by the introductory material that the leaders of the Virginia colony, who had made this offer, are the intended audience. What assumptions does Canassatego make about his audience?

*Canassatego assumes by their offer that they value their culture and education over his, and even more arrogantly, they assume he does as well. His knowledge and assumptions about his audience along with his purpose inform his approach to this piece.*

2. His explicit purpose is to reject the offer; however, what is the implied purpose of this letter?

*Canassatego asserts his cultural pride here, challenging the ethnocentric paradigm of the European colonists who assume the Native Americans will quickly accept the opportunity to become more like them. He wants the colonists to see their arrogant offer for what it is.*

3. How does Canassatego craft his tone to achieve his purpose?

*Canassatego's letter is satiric; in other words, he uses humor to make his point. He begins his letter in the form of a thank-you note. Using the most cordial and polite language and noting the generosity of the offer by acknowledging how highly the colonists "esteem the kind of learning taught in these colleges" and how "very expensive" their education is, he thanks them "heartily." He maintains this cordiality and respect, referring to his audience as "you who are so wise," even as he begins to point out the differences in the two cultures. When he lists the specific examples of the proud skills the young men were deficient in, the true purpose of the letter becomes apparent, his mocking assertion that "they were totally good for nothing." He concludes his letter—still maintaining the polite, but now clearly mocking tone—by offering to educate the sons of the colonists and "make men of them" and implying that their education is a less than masculine attainment. Canassatego achieves his purpose through his use of tone; his criticism of the Colonists' education is clear, yet relatively gentle, when placed in this humorous context. He certainly chooses*

his language and tone carefully, possibly thinking that expressing anger or outrage might offend or provoke the colonists.

### 4. How does Canassatego's style help him to achieve his purpose?

As mentioned above, Canassatego outwardly maintains the formal, yet gracious style, of the official thank-you letter from the leader of one great nation to another. He presents himself as an equal by referring to the differences between people of “different nations” and using the first-person plural “we.” Using the word “we” establishes to his audience that he is a leader, a representative of his people. Canassatego's command of sophisticated syntax and other stylistic elements demonstrates to his audience that, though he does not see the value of his people acquiring a European education, they are in no way incapable of acquiring it. In addition, he uses syntax to emphasize two very important points. The first, “they were totally good for nothing,” occurs as the culminating point after he catalogues a long list of the deficiencies of a college education for his young men. While it might not be essential to know that this construction is a periodic sentence, it is important to understand how this structure works to create meaning here. The other example is, of course, in the last line, another periodic sentence, where the final parallel construction concludes the final insult, “and make men of them.”

## Grammar on the Multiple-Choice Section

The AP English Language and Composition exam does ask you to apply some grammar skills, but it has de-emphasized much of the terminology you learned in school. What the test measures is your ability to apply your understanding of English grammar and syntax in context and deciphering complex language. Good readers intuitively understand sentence structure, but anyone can be challenged by a hundred-word sentence written over three-hundred years ago, or even a Faulkner line written in the twentieth century. An understanding of some grammatical elements and applying them as a reading strategy will help you when faced with what feels like impossibly complex syntax.

- Find the subject and the verb of the main (or independent) clause. The subject and the verb, often just two words, is the grammatical essence of all sentences. If you can isolate them, work from there to decide what the other words, phrases, and clauses are telling you about the subject and verb. Since the independent clause is grammatically the most important part of the sentence, it is often rhetorically the most important part of the sentence as well. If you have a compound sentence, you will have more than one main clause of grammatically equal value. If you have a complex sentence—one with at least one subordinate (dependent) clause in addition to an independent clause—the subordinate (dependent) clause is subordinated structurally in the sentence, so it usually plays a subordinate or dependent role in meaning as well. Let's take that complicated (technically complex if you know the grammar jargon) sentence from The Declaration of Independence. I'll write it out completely for you this time:

5 “We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to  
10 them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

This sentence contains 112 words! So, where do you begin? Well, what is the main clause? “We hold these truths to be self-evident. . . .” The rest of the sentence following the colon is a series of subordinate or dependent clauses that lists the “truths” Jefferson says are “self-evident.” Jefferson organizes the clauses for you, using parallel structure as we discussed earlier; but, he clearly separates the clauses from each other with semi-colons as well. Now, some of the subordinate clauses contain other complicating phrases, but you can look at these subordinate clauses as separate units now, separate units that all exist in service to illustrating the self-evident truths. Will they ask you to identify the phrases and clauses in the technical way I just described? No, but what they might ask you is a question such as this one: How do the clauses beginning with “that” function in the sentence? And now you know; they illustrate the “truths.” You also might see a question such as this one:

The series of dependent clauses beginning with “that” do all of the following EXCEPT

- (A) They create a parallelism that adds coherence to the sentence.
- (B) They present a list of items exemplifying the “truths.”
- (C) They assert the concepts Jefferson says that declaration will assume.
- (D) They incorporate abstract nouns and adjectives to help illustrate the truths.
- (E) They employ a series of metaphors to illustrate the “truths.”

And (E) is the bad choice, or in this case good choice, because you are looking for the one that doesn’t belong. Notice that the grammar you employed to deconstruct the sentence in order to understand it was exactly the grammar you needed to answer the questions.

- Pronoun reference: It is essential when you read that you know what nouns the pronouns are referring to in the selection. These nouns are technically called the antecedents. Though it is not important you know this term for this test, you do need the skill it represents. If you are finding, as you work through complicated syntax, that the pronouns are confusing, slow down and puzzle them out. Let’s

again look at the line from The Declaration of Independence. The antecedent of the first two pronouns, “they” in line 2 and “their” in line 2, can easily be identified; they both refer back to “men.” It is the pronoun “their” in the fifth line, “governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” that presents a problem. The pronoun refers to “governments” (not “men”) who are “deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed”; if you do not identify this concept, it will be difficult to understand the passage. The pronouns, “it” and “its” in line 8, may also be problematic. The “it” refers back to the “form of government,” the one that becomes “destructive of these ends,” while the “its” refers to the “new government.” Take the time when you are reading to sort these out to support your comprehension, and be aware that there may be questions about pronoun reference on the multiple-choice section of the test.

- **Phrases:** Phrases are groups of words that go together but do not have subjects and verbs like clauses do. We could talk all day about phrases, but it is important to know that often phrases have modifiers. And when placed correctly, phrases are usually near the word they are modifying. For example, “laying its foundation” modifies “government” and “on such principles” modifies “foundation.” Appositive phrases occur right after a noun and rename or describe that noun. It is recommended that you draw an arrow back to the noun modified. This annotation will help you stay focused on the passage and makes it easier to identify if you want to refer to it later when you are answering the questions.
- **Punctuation:** Use punctuation to help you understand what you read. For example, colons introduce clarifying material or a list illustrating the text before the colon. The colon after the main clause in the line from the Declaration introduces clarifying material in the form of a list of subordinate clauses. You can usually replace a colon with the phrase “in other words:” “We hold these truths to be self-evident” in other words “that all men are created equal,” etc. The semi-colons are useful here because they create a strong separation between each subordinate clause. Semi-colons connect independent clauses that are closely related in meaning. When faced with very dense text, use all the punctuation to help you hear what you are reading in your mind. Practice reading difficult text out loud with the expression the punctuation implies, and you will improve your reading comprehension.

## Types of Questions

### Overall Meaning, Purpose, or Style

Often, one of the first few questions following the passage test your understanding of the passage as a whole: why did the author write the work? what is he or she attempting to accomplish? Questions about the overall style of writing often come at the end of the piece. These questions usually appear in the following format:

- As a whole, the passage can best be described as \_\_\_\_.
- The passage in its entirety can best be described as \_\_\_\_.
- The author's primary concern in this passage is to \_\_\_\_.
- The passage describes \_\_\_\_.
- The primary function of the passage is to \_\_\_\_.
- The primary goal of the passage is to \_\_\_\_.
- What is the point of the statement in line \_\_\_\_ as it applies to the passage as a whole?
- All of the following can be said about the author's purpose EXCEPT \_\_\_\_.
- Which of the following are true according to the passage? (The question will state three possibilities and you will be asked which combination of these choices is true.)
- The style of the passage can best be characterized as \_\_\_\_ (often the answers will include two words, i.e., formal and pedantic, lyrical and ceremonial, erudite and allusive, etc.).
- All of the following can be said about the author's style EXCEPT \_\_\_\_.
- Which of the following sentences (from the passage) best represents the author's main point in the passage?
- Which of the following is true about the author's style? (The question will state three possibilities and you will be asked which combination of these choices is true.)
- All of the following is true about the passage EXCEPT \_\_\_\_.
- The passage characterizes \_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_.
- The passage implies all of the following about \_\_\_\_ EXCEPT \_\_\_\_.
- The overall effect of the passage is to \_\_\_\_.
- The passage is meant to \_\_\_\_ (define, explain, examine, refute, persuade, describe).

### Questions About the Author or Audience

For questions about the author or audience, you are asked to make observations about the speaker or author and his or her audience. You are asked to judge how the author views himself or herself, what effect the subject has on the author, what is important to the author, and how he or she obtains/has obtained information about the world. Questions about the audience ask you to draw inferences about the text to decide who specifically is being targeted, what assumptions the author is making about



the audience, and what strategies the author uses to appeal to this audience. These questions usually appear in the following format:

- In lines \_\_\_\_\_ the author depicts himself/herself as \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author believes that \_\_\_\_\_.
- In lines \_\_\_\_\_ the author depicts himself/herself as all of the following EXCEPT \_\_\_\_\_.
- For the author, \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) has the effect of \_\_\_\_\_.
- For the author, \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) is \_\_\_\_\_ (evaluation of meaning or importance).
- Which of the following is probably the main source of the author's knowledge of \_\_\_\_\_?
- In " \_\_\_\_\_ " (quotation containing action or description) the author is \_\_\_\_\_ (conclusion about that action or description).
- The author would probably consider himself to be which of the following? (The choices might include these following adjectives: a cynic, skeptic, romantic, realist, idealist, pragmatist, etc.)
- The author probably assumes the audience is \_\_\_\_\_.
- This piece would most likely appeal to (or is meant to appeal to) \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author uses \_\_\_\_\_ to appeal to the audience's \_\_\_\_\_ (emotions, sense of justice, patriotism, etc.)
- Which of the following does the author probably assume about the audience? (The question will state three possibilities and you will be asked which combination of these choices is true.)
- The author probably assumes all of the following about the audience EXCEPT \_\_\_\_\_.

### Questions About Tone or Attitude

For questions about tone or attitude, you are asked to determine or make judgments about the attitude of the speaker or author toward the subject being described or discussed. You may be asked to do the following:

- identify a shift
- analyze the effect of the author's attitude
- decide what the author believes
- determine the atmosphere/mood
- determine the tone/atmosphere

These questions usually appear in the following format:

- The tone of the passage can best be described as \_\_\_\_ (often the answers include two words, i.e., supercilious and scornful, reverent and respectful, scholarly and didactic, apathetic and cynical, etc.).
- The shift in point of view has the effect of \_\_\_\_.
- The author's attitude toward \_\_\_\_ can be described as \_\_\_\_.
- The speaker assumes that the audience's attitude will \_\_\_\_.
- The author believes/apparently believes \_\_\_\_.
- The point of view indicated in \_\_\_\_ is that of \_\_\_\_.
- The atmosphere is one of \_\_\_\_.
- In "\_\_\_\_" which of the following most suggests a humorous attitude on the part of the author?
- The passage is an appeal for \_\_\_\_.

### Questions About Word Choice and Selection of Details

For questions about word choice and details, you are asked to analyze the fine points of language and specific word choice. You are asked to determine the meaning of a word/phrase/sentence, identify elements of fiction, analyze important details or quotations, determine meaning of a word or phrase from the context, identify parts of a sentence, such as subject of a verb or antecedent of a pronoun, or analyze the style of a passage.

Sometimes, you will be asked to identify the meaning of a word in the context of the paragraph. You may not have seen the word before, but from your understanding of the writer's intent, you should be able to infer the author's implied meaning.

For example, read the following paragraph:

Paris is a beautiful city, perhaps the most beautiful on Earth. Long, broad avenues are lined with seventeenth and eighteenth century apartments, office buildings, and cafés. Flowers give the city a rich and varied look. The bridges and the river lend an air of lightness and grace to the whole urban landscape.

In this paragraph, "rich" most nearly means

- (A) wealthy
- (B) polluted
- (C) prismatic
- (D) dull
- (E) abundant

If you chose (C), “prismatic,” you would be right. Although the word rich literally means “wealthy” (“wealthy” is its denotation, its literal meaning), here the writer means more than the word’s literal meaning and seems to be highlighting the variety and color that the flowers add to the avenues—that is, richness in a figurative sense.

The writer is using a non-literal meaning, or connotation, that we associate with the word rich to show what s/he means. When we think of something “rich,” we also think of abundance and variety and color. If the word you are being asked to define is a common word, suspect the meaning is either a non-literal or a secondary meaning of a word. Don’t make assumptions; always refer back to the passage for vocabulary in context questions. These questions usually appear in the following format:

- Which of the following best describes what \_\_\_\_ symbolizes?
- The \_\_\_\_ sentence/paragraph/section is unified by metaphors of \_\_\_\_.
- “\_\_\_\_” signals a shift from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_.
- The \_\_\_\_ paragraph employs which of the following?
- The statement “\_\_\_\_” is best described as \_\_\_\_.
- The use of “\_\_\_\_” instead of “\_\_\_\_” accomplishes which of the following?
- In line \_\_\_\_ the author emphasizes “\_\_\_\_” because \_\_\_\_.
- The use of “\_\_\_\_” suggests most strongly \_\_\_\_.
- The major purpose of the word/phrase/statement “\_\_\_\_” is to make clear that \_\_\_\_.
- By “\_\_\_\_,” the speaker means/most probably means \_\_\_\_.
- The mention of \_\_\_\_ is appropriate to the development of the argument because \_\_\_\_.
- In the sentence/paragraph/section, the speaker seeks to draw attention to \_\_\_\_ by stressing \_\_\_\_.
- In the context of the passage as a whole, the \_\_\_\_ (paragraph/word/phrase/sentence) “\_\_\_\_” is best interpreted to mean \_\_\_\_.
- In relation to \_\_\_\_, which of the following best describes the function of the \_\_\_\_ (word/phrase/sentence/paragraph)?
- Which of the following best describes the \_\_\_\_ (word/phrase/sentence)?
- Which of the following is an example of “\_\_\_\_” mentioned in line \_\_\_\_?
- All of the following qualities are present in the passage EXCEPT \_\_\_\_.
- The primary purpose of \_\_\_\_ (selection of details) is to \_\_\_\_.
- The author uses the word \_\_\_\_ in order to \_\_\_\_.
- In line \_\_\_\_, “\_\_\_\_” modifies “\_\_\_\_.” (Might be an adjective or adverb, or might be an adjective or adverb phrase or clause.)

## Questions About Grammar and Sentence Construction

For questions about grammar and construction, you are asked to identify how words work together in groups. You are asked to analyze syntax, identify sentence construction, or analyze relationships of sentences or phrases. These questions usually appear in the following format:

- The syntax of sentence/sentences beginning with \_\_\_\_ in lines \_\_ serves to \_\_\_\_.
- The phrase/clause \_\_\_\_ in line \_\_\_\_ are describing \_\_\_\_.
- “ \_\_\_\_ ” (pronoun) in line \_\_ refers to \_\_\_\_ (the antecedent).
- What is the function of the two (or three) \_\_\_\_ (words/phrases/clauses)?
- Despite its length, the \_\_\_\_ sentence remains coherent chiefly because of its use of \_\_\_\_.
- The subject of the verb “ \_\_\_\_ ” is which of the following?
- The sentence beginning \_\_\_\_ in lines \_\_ is characterized by all of the following EXCEPT \_\_\_\_\_. (The question might reference parallelism, complex structure, active verbs, etc. These terms might be mixed with choices that speak to meaning rather than structure.)
- Which best describes the syntax of lines \_\_\_\_.
- Which of the following is grammatically parallel to \_\_\_\_?
- Which of the following best describes the function of the \_\_\_\_ (phrase, clause, parenthetical comment, series of phrases, parallel construction) in lines \_\_?

## Questions About Progression of Thought and Organization

- In relation to the first sentence, the second sentence serves to \_\_\_\_.
- The (particular sentence) moves from \_\_\_\_.
- In relation to the rest of the passage, the \_\_\_\_ paragraph provides/serves to \_\_\_\_.
- The passage develops from \_\_\_\_ (a specific example to a universal truth, a universal truth to its specific examples, a universal truth to a discussion of its exception, an idea or event and its causes, an idea or event and its effects).
- Which of the following best describes the relationship between the first paragraph and the second paragraph?
- Paragraphs \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ are unified by \_\_\_\_.

## Questions About Development

- The rhetorical purpose of lines \_\_\_\_ is to \_\_\_\_ (assert, suggest, contrast, encourage, prompt, qualify, provide, etc.)
- The primary imagery of the passage is that of \_\_\_\_.
- The passage is developed through \_\_\_\_ (a series of anecdotes, an extended metaphor, a description, an analogy, etc)
- The development of the passage can best be described as the \_\_\_\_ (process of..., examination of..., presentation of..., illustration of...).
- The \_\_\_\_ paragraph is significant in that the author \_\_\_\_ (cites, outlines, traces, describes, utilizes, qualifies, etc.)
- The examples in the passage are meant to illustrate \_\_\_\_.
- The allusion in lines \_\_\_\_ serves to \_\_\_\_.
- The purpose of the questions beginning in lines \_\_\_\_ is to \_\_\_\_.
- All of the following antitheses may be found EXCEPT \_\_\_\_.
- The relationship between \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ is explained primarily by the use of \_\_\_\_.
- The author uses \_\_\_\_ as an example of \_\_\_\_.
- The author's discussion of \_\_\_\_ depends on which of the following?
- The type of argument employed in \_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_.
- The pattern of exposition exemplified in the passage is best described as \_\_\_\_.
- In describing \_\_\_\_, the author emphasizes \_\_\_\_.
- The principal contrast (or comparison) in the passage is between \_\_\_\_.
- The author mentions \_\_\_\_ as examples of \_\_\_\_.
- Which of the following does the author use to illustrate \_\_\_\_?
- Which of the following best explains/supports the author's claim that \_\_\_\_?

## Questions About Inferences

For questions about inferences, you are asked to draw conclusions based on context clues. You are asked to determine relationships or identify references. These questions usually appear in the following format:

- It can be inferred that \_\_\_\_ is/are \_\_\_\_.
- It can be inferred from the description of \_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_.

- It can be inferred that \_\_\_\_\_ refers to \_\_\_\_\_.
- It can be inferred from the passage that \_\_\_\_\_ occurs for which of the following reasons.

## Questions About General Conclusions

For questions about general conclusions, you are asked to predict outcomes and make inferences. You are asked to determine what the author would think about a certain subject, what the author wants us to do, or what the author would/would not advise us. These questions usually appear in the following format:

- The author believes that we should \_\_\_\_\_.
- According to the author, \_\_\_\_\_ should \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- Which of the following would the author be LEAST/MOST likely to encourage?
- If one were to take the author's advice, one should \_\_\_\_\_.
- The effectiveness of the final paragraph (sentence) is primarily the result of \_\_\_\_\_.

## Tricky Question Formats

There are two formats specific to this test that sometimes causes the student to misread the question: the "EXCEPT" questions and the questions that provide you with three possibilities for your evaluation. The "EXCEPT" questions are only tricky if you miss the word EXCEPT. Though the screaming uppercase presentation might suggest otherwise, students often miss the "EXCEPT" and choose an answer that is true of the passage, rather than one that is not. Here is an example using the famous Jefferson quotation:

In lines \_\_ of The Declaration of Independence, Jefferson incorporates all of the following EXCEPT

- (A) parallel syntax
- (B) a complex sentence
- (C) a cumulative sentence
- (D) abstract diction
- (E) figurative language

The answer is (E); there is no figurative language in the line. If you missed the word EXCEPT, you might have chosen (A) because the line includes parallel syntax. Be aware that this format is a frequent question style because it is used to assess your understanding of various aspects of the passage. If you find yourself missing these questions in your practice, discipline yourself to mark them as they

occur. This annotation will help you pay closer attention so you will not misread the questions or help you identify the question quickly if you choose to return to the questions later.

The “three possibilities” questions are just like any other question, except they offer you three possibilities about an aspect of the passage to consider in isolation or in combination. These questions are problematic because several of the answers may be correct, not just the best answer. Here is an example, again, from Jefferson.

Jefferson uses which of the following in lines \_\_\_\_ of The Declaration of Independence?

- I. parallel syntax
  - II. abstract diction
  - III. figurative language
- 
- (A) I only
  - (B) II only
  - (C) III only
  - (D) I and II only
  - (E) I, II, and III

The correct answer is (D), I and II only; however, the question is tricky because (A) and (B) are not completely wrong, but they are not the best answer. Any answer that included III cannot be correct because it is not completely correct. These questions consume the most time. Most students find it helpful to initially skip these questions and return to them later. It is not worth missing several questions that you can easily answer for the possibility of answering one, difficult, time-consuming question correctly.

## Multiple-Choice Test-Taking Preparation and Strategies

Anticipate and Annotate: Annotating the test helps you focus and actively engage with the reading. Now that you have read the preparation material, you should begin developing a sense of the types of questions you will be asked on the multiple-choice section of the test. While you read the passages, mark items that will support your comprehension and may be useful later. You'll be surprised as you work on the practice tests, how interrelated these objectives are, especially if you are a visual or a kinesthetic learner. But, just underlining items is not useful—develop your own shorthand to mark the important concepts and comment on what you are highlighting in the margins. The following are items you should mark in the text:

- Important points: Briefly paraphrase or mark explicit statements of purpose, assertions, or conclusions.

- **Transition words and phrases:** Transition words and phrases are essential to your understanding of the writer's progression of thought. It is important to isolate words and/or phrases with a special mark (a circle or box perhaps). When asked how one paragraph or idea relates to another, the answer will be obvious and quick to find if you use this technique.
- **Expository modes:** Be looking for these expository modes—description, definition, narration, cause and effect, process analysis. They may be the dominant mode or they may be a secondary mode used in combination with others.
- **Figurative Language:** Mark all examples of simile, metaphor, analogy, and obvious hyperbole and label them in the margins near the place they occur. If you are not sure the type of figurative language, just write your shorthand abbreviation for figurative language.
- **Tone:** Did the writer move from humorous to serious? Understanding to critical? Mark the place where a shift in tone occurs.
- **Imagery:** Mark imagery and comment on the character of the imagery in the margins.
- **Allusions:** Similarly, mark all allusions.
- **Anecdotes:** Mark them
- **Examples:** Number them if your author offers you several examples to support the point.
- **Alliteration, repetition of words, onomatopoeia:** Mark them.
- **Parallel Syntax:** Mark the beginning of each parallel item and write a parallel symbol in the margin.
- **Incongruity:** Mark examples of diction, sentence lengths or structures, images, etc., which are strikingly different from the rest of the passage, and comment in the margin.
- **Grammar:** Mark grammar that will help you. Find the subject and verb in long, dense sentences if you are having difficulty understanding the key ideas in the passage. Find the antecedents to any confusing pronouns.
- **Specialized sentence forms:** Periodic, cumulative, balanced, inverted sentences—mark them if you recognize them. More importantly, be aware that the writer made a conscientious decision to use stylized sentence forms; ask yourself why.

Keep in mind that not all of these items will be important in every passage. The more you practice annotation, the better you will get at it, and the more useful your marking will become. Marking can be especially helpful in the “EXCEPT” questions because they may require you to reread a big portion of the passage. If you have already marked items in the text, you will be able to quickly eliminate choices without



rereading. Before they read the passage, some students have found it helpful to look at the questions that refer to specific line numbers and mark those lines, so they know to give them special attention as they read. You may want to experiment with this approach as you complete the practice tests to see if it works for you.

**Process of Elimination:** Every guide that prepares you for a multiple-choice test will tell you to eliminate those answers that you are sure are wrong. Every answer you eliminate raises your odds of answering correctly by twenty percent.

**Distracters:** Every good multiple-choice test has distracters meant to test your critical reading skills. Here are some typical distracters on this test.

- **Opposites:** There is often an answer choice that is the exact opposite of what you are looking for. Students will choose these answers because they misread the question, they misread the answers, or they misread the passage. There is probably not much you can do about a passage misreading at this point, but be careful to read the question as carefully as you read the passage. The test is difficult enough without making these kinds of errors. Again, practice will train you to avoid making this mistake. Try marking key words in the questions to keep you focused.
- **Almost right:** Most likely your answer choices will include items that are true about the passage, but are not the answer to the specific question being asked. Again, familiarity with and careful reading of the questions is essential.
- **Vocabulary in context:** Don't assume you know the meaning—always check back in the passage. If the word you are being asked about is easy, suspect they are looking for the secondary or archaic meaning of the word.

**Know thyself:** One of the benefits of preparation is that it allows you to learn about yourself as a reader and as a test taker. Are you a person who falls for the distracters? Taking practice tests will help you understand your strengths and weaknesses. If you consistently choose the distracter, be aware of this habit and analyze the problem. Are you missing questions because you don't know the rhetorical terms? If so, you need to learn them. Also, if you find yourself changing your mind from the right to a wrong answer, trust your first instinct.

**Review the practice tests:** Remember, quality over quantity. Don't just take the tests and consider yourself to have practiced. After you finish taking and correcting a practice test, read the answer explanations carefully to understand your mistakes and delve back into the passage to deepen your understanding of the questions and the passage. In fact, read the explanations for the questions you answered correctly, making certain you fully understand why they are correct. It will be helpful to be able to intellectualize the reason for an answer that you merely intuit correctly on the practice test. Use this opportunity to improve your test-taking vocabulary. Know your terms as well as the general vocabulary that occurs in the questions and answer choices (don't worry so much about the vocabulary in the passage). Look up words you don't know

after you have corrected the test—even on the questions you answered correctly—and learn those words. Finally, you shouldn't try to complete an entire test at once early in your preparation. Complete one multiple-choice passage in a sitting and spend quality time with it, learning it deeply. You should be increasing your knowledge and skill with every passage you read. Keep a vocabulary notebook and spend time learning the words you don't know.

**Timing:** When you begin the test, quickly look to see how many passages and how many questions there are, so you can pace yourself appropriately. Some passages are longer and more difficult than others, but in general you should divide your time evenly between the number of passages on the test. Do not spend too much time on one question. All the questions, the easy and the difficult, count the same, so it is a waste of valuable time to labor too long over one question. Do your best and move on. Practice will greatly improve your ability to do this; but remember, if you can't understand the passages and answer the questions without the pressure of time, you will never be able to with a time pressure. So, when you first start practicing, do so untimed. Focus on understanding the text, annotating, and familiarizing yourself with the questions. Then, as the test date gets closer, practice with the time constraint.

**If you are running out of time:** If you only have a few minutes left, but you have read the passage, skim the questions to find the ones you can answer most easily without having to go back into the passage. Make your best guess on the others. If you haven't read the passage and you don't have time to, look for the questions that ask you about specific line numbers, vocabulary in context, grammar, etc., and try to answer some of those. Guess on the rest, but don't leave any blank.

**If you have almost completely run out of time:** For the first time on the 2011 exam, there will be no deduction for wrong answers, so do not leave any questions blank. This change should alter your strategy in only one situation, when you are running out of time. If you have a minute left and you have questions you cannot possibly get to, randomly fill in the blanks so that all the questions are answered.

**Get in a reading state of mind:** You should spend a year reading to prepare for this test, but in the last few months before the big test day make sure your brain is engaged at full capacity. Turn off the TV, the iPod, your cell phone, and video games and set aside time every day to read, beyond your normal school requirements. Sit in a quiet place, without interruptions, for at least a half hour (an hour would be better) and read. Be focused—no electronics! This practice will improve your speed, comprehension, and ability to concentrate.

**Be well-rested and well-fed:** This is a long, grueling test that demands stamina. Get some rest the entire week before. Even if your normal routine is to wake up only a few minutes before you leave for school, get up early on test day. Take a brisk walk and eat a good breakfast. You want to be wide awake, ready for the adrenaline to kick in when you start the test. Most schools will break after the multiple-choice section, so bring a light snack and drink for that short break.