

READING COMPREHENSION

Oral Language Proficiency
The Critical Link to Reading Comprehension

Reading Fluency and Comprehension addresses the following critical issues:

- the rate of speech,
- Choice of words, and
- the strategic use of language.

Educators are coming to see the importance of oral language acquisition and its impact on academic success.

English is the medium of education at university level. So high degree of Reading Fluency and Comprehension is required.

Many students join universities in India with strong oral fluency in English due to their prior years of listening and speaking the English language. They are able to communicate basic ideas and feelings clearly. However, many other students come to universities with limited or no English language acquisition, notwithstanding their scores in English papers in their earlier qualifying examinations. Both categories of students coming to universities, particularly the latter, benefit the most from daily, by practicing Reading Comprehension exercises which provide explicit, and intentional oral language development.

Reading Comprehension Tests measure your ability to read and understand short passages similar in topic and style to those that students are likely to encounter in life.

The **Reading Comprehension** requires reading passages and answering questions about/based on the passages.

The questions are about information that is stated or implied in the passage and about some of the specific words in the passages.

Because many English words have more than one meaning, it is important to remember that these questions concern the meaning of a word or phrase within the context of the passage.

In the Reading Comprehension Tests you will be asked to read several passages. Each one is followed by a number of questions (MCQ type) about it. You are to choose the **one** best answer, A, B, C or D, to each question. Some times long answer type questions are asked which may have to be answered in paragraphs containing around 75 words.

A SAMPLE TEST

Read the following passage:

The railroad was not the first institution to impose regularity on society, or to draw attention to the importance of precise time keeping. For as long as merchants have set out their wares at daybreak and communal festivities have been celebrated, people (5) have been in rough agreement with their neighbors as to the time of day. The value of this tradition is today more apparent than ever. Were it not for public acceptance of a single yardstick of time, social life would be unbearably chaotic: the massive daily transfers of goods, services, and information would proceed in fits and starts; the very fabric of modern society would begin to unravel.

What is the main idea of the passage?

- A. In modern society we must make more time for our neighbors.
- B. The traditions of society are timeless.
- C. An accepted way of measuring time is essential for the smooth functioning of society.
- D. Society judges people by the times at which they conduct certain activities.

The main idea of the passage is that societies need to agree about how time is measured in order to function smoothly.

Therefore, you should choose answer C.

In line 6, the phrase "this tradition" refers to

- A. the practice of starting the business day at dawn
- B. friendly relations between neighbors
- C. the railroad's reliance on time schedules
- D. people's agreement on the measurement of time

The phrase "this tradition" refers to the preceding clause, "people have been in rough agreement with their neighbors as to the time of day." Therefore, you should choose answer D.

PRACTICE PASSAGE

The Alaska pipeline starts at the frozen edge of the Arctic Ocean. It stretches southward across the largest and northernmost state in the United States, ending at a remote ice-free seaport village nearly 800 miles from where it begins. It is massive in size and extremely (5) complicated to operate.

The steel pipe crosses windswept plains and endless miles of delicate tundra that tops the frozen ground. It weaves through crooked canyons, climbs sheer mountains, plunges over rocky crags, makes its way through thick forests, and passes over or (10) under hundreds of rivers and streams. The pipe is 4 feet in diameter, and up to 2 million barrels (or 84 million gallons) of crude oil can be pumped through it daily.

Resting on H-shaped steel racks called "bents," long sections of the pipeline follow a zigzag course high above the frozen earth. (15) Other long sections drop out of sight beneath spongy or rocky ground and return to the surface later on. The pattern of the pipeline's up-and-down route is determined by the often harsh demands of the arctic and subarctic climate, the tortuous lay of the land, and the varied compositions of soil, rock, or permafrost

(20) (permanently frozen ground). A little more than half of the pipeline is elevated above the ground. The remainder is buried anywhere from 3 to 12 feet, depending largely upon the type of terrain and the properties of the soil.

One of the largest in the world, the pipeline cost approximately (25) \$8 billion and is by far the biggest and most expensive construction project ever undertaken by private industry. In fact, no single business could raise that much money, so 8 major oil companies formed a consortium in order to share the costs. Each company controlled oil rights to particular shares of land in the oil fields and (30) paid into the pipeline-construction fund according to the size of its holdings. Today, despite enormous problems of climate, supply shortages, equipment breakdowns, labor disagreements, treacherous terrain, a certain amount of mismanagement, and even theft, the Alaska pipeline has been completed and is operating.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

The passage primarily discusses the pipeline's operating

- A. costs
- B. employees
- C. consumers
- D. construction

The word "it" in line 4 refers to

- A. pipeline
- B. ocean
- C. state
- D. village

According to the passage, 84 million gallons of oil can travel through the pipeline each

- A. day
- B. week
- C. month
- D. year

The phrase "Resting on" in line 13 is closest in meaning to

- A. Consisting of
- B. Supported by
- C. Passing under
- D. Protected with

The author mentions all of the following as important in determining the pipeline's route EXCEPT the

- A. climate
- B. lay of the land itself
- C. local vegetation
- D. kind of soil and rock

The word "undertaken" in line 26 is closest in meaning to

- A. removed
- B. selected
- C. transported
- D. attempted

How many companies shared the costs of constructing the pipeline?

- A. 3
- B. 4
- C. 8
- D. 12

The word "particular" in line 29 is closest in meaning to

- A. peculiar
- B. specific
- C. exceptional
- D. equal

Which of the following determined what percentage of the construction costs each member of the consortium would pay?

- A. How much oil field land each company owned
- B. How long each company had owned land in the oil fields
- C. How many people worked for each company
- D. How many oil wells were located on the company's land

Where in the passage does the author provide a term for an earth covering that always remains frozen?

- A. Line 3
- B. Line 13
- C. Line 19
- D. Line 32

Answer Key for Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension

D

A

A

B

C

D

C

B

A

C

SAMPLE TEST

Read the statement or passage and then choose the best answer to the question. Answer the question based on what is stated or implied in the statement or passage.

In the words of Thomas DeQuincey, “It is notorious that the memory strengthens as you lay burdens upon it.” If, like most people, you have trouble recalling the names of those you have just met, try this: the next time you are introduced, plan to remember the names. Say to yourself, “I’ll listen carefully; I’ll repeat each person’s name to be sure I’ve got it, and I will remember.” You’ll discover how effective this technique is and probably recall those names for the rest of your life.

The main idea of the paragraph maintains that the memory

- A. always operates at peak efficiency.
- B. breaks down under great strain.
- C. improves if it is used often.
- D. becomes unreliable if it tires.

The Correct Answer is: C

Read the statement or passage and then choose the best answer to the question. Answer the question based on what is stated or implied in the statement or passage.

Unemployment was the overriding fact of life when Franklin D. Roosevelt became President of the United States on March 4, 1933. An anomaly of the time was that the government did not systematically collect statistics of joblessness; actually it did not start doing so until 1940. The Bureau of Labor Statistics later estimated that 12,830,000 persons were out of work in 1933, about one-fourth of a civilian labor force of over fifty-one million.

Roosevelt signed the Federal Emergency Relief Act on May 12, 1933. The President selected Harry L. Hopkins, who headed the New York relief program, to run FERA. A gifted administrator, Hopkins quickly put the program into high gear. He gathered a small staff in Washington and brought the state relief organizations in to the FERA system. While the agency tried to provide all the necessities, food came first. City dwellers usually got an allowance for fuel, and rent for one month was provided in case of eviction.

This passage is primarily about

- A. unemployment in the 1930's.
- B. the effect of unemployment on United States families.
- C. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency.
- D. President Roosevelt's FERA program.

And the answer is... D

Read the statement or passage and then choose the best answer to the question. Answer the question based on what is stated or implied in the statement or passage.

In 1848, Charles Burton of New York City made the first baby carriage, but people strongly objected to the vehicles because they said the carriage operators hit too many pedestrians. Still convinced that he had a good idea, Burton opened a factory in England. He obtained orders for the baby carriages from Queen Isabella II of Spain, Queen Victoria of England, and the Pasha of Egypt. The United States had to wait another ten years before it got a carriage factory, and the first year only 75 carriages were sold.

Even after the success of baby carriages in England,

- A. Charles Burton was a poor man.
- B. Americans were still reluctant to buy baby carriages.
- C. Americans purchased thousands of baby carriages.
- D. the United States bought more carriages than any other country.

And the answer is...B

choose the best word to fill the spaces

Bristle-worms - a hobbyist's guide

Historically, Bristle-worms have had a bad reputation among saltwater aquarium aficionados. These marine worms usually enter the hobbyist's aquarium by [A. **attaching/tethering/hitching/lifting**] a ride on a piece of coral. Once established, they become part of the tank's ecosystem. Bristle-worms [B. **extend/range/reach/stretch**] greatly in size. The smallest ones are about an inch long, and the large ones can grow to over 20 inches, although, being segmented, their bodies are often [C. **retracted/withdrawn/shrunk/recoiled**] and so not usually seen at their greatest extent. Literature has frequently [D. **persuaded/analyzed/contended/posed**] that bristle-worms are harmful, asserting that they eat clams, anemones and even coral fish. However, most enthusiasts now conclude that small bristle-worms [E. **take/pose/bear/contain**] no threat, and are merely scavengers, clearing the tank from detritus and carcasses of animals that are already dead. However, larger worms, particularly those of the species known as fire-worms, are [**famished/unwarranted/ambitious/ voracious**] eaters and can do irreparable damage. These worms are better removed, although this is a challenge in itself, as the worms are nocturnal, sensitive to light and will go into hiding at the slightest disturbance.

For more practice exercises visit:

1. [d.edu/Emp/Departments/EA/Student Affairs/Assessment Practice Tests/ACCUPLACER/Reading Comprehension/Pages/Question_6.aspx](http://d.edu/Emp/Departments/EA/Student%20Affairs/Assessment%20Practice%20Tests/ACCUPLACER/Reading%20Comprehension/Pages/Question_6.aspx)

**How to Score Well on Reading
Comprehension Tests with Open Ended
Questions**

When you take a reading test, the goal is to prove that you've read each selection well and understand it thoroughly. Everything you write needs to focus on answering the questions as correctly, completely and clearly as possible. An open ended question is often the most challenging kind to answer, but taking the proper steps can help ensure you answer to the best of your ability and earn the highest grade you can.

Step 1

Go to the end of the text and read the questions thoroughly before you begin to read the selection. This will help you focus on what key ideas to be looking for when you read.

Step 2

Read the open ended questions a few times, and underline or highlight the key words -- if allowed -- in the questions that tell you what you need to do. For example, if a question says to give two examples from the text, make sure you watch, as you read, for two examples to include in your answer.

Step 3

Read the selection carefully, keeping the test questions in mind, and mark by underlining or some other method the sections of the reading that you think will help you in answering the questions.

Step 4

Compose your answers by using information from the reading selection. Do not rely on your previous knowledge. Instead, prove that you have read and understood the selection by using information from the reading.

Step 5

Restate the question in your answer, borrowing words from the questions. This will help you be sure that you have answered the question in a focused manner.

Step 6

Look back in the text when you are finished drafting your answer to make sure your writing is correct, clear and complete. Double check the questions, paying attention to the key words you underlined to see if you answered all parts of the questions. Give yourself at least five minutes to review your response and see if there are any other supports from the selection you can add, or any other revisions you need to make.

Pace yourself at the beginning of the test. Evaluate how long you have to read and respond to the answer, and check the clock to keep yourself on track. You don't want to spend an inordinate amount of time reading, and not leave yourself enough time to respond to the question.

Try to leave yourself five minutes at the end for a last minute review to see if you need to make any changes.

**How Does Critical Thinking Relate to the
Process of Reading Comprehension?**

You really can't fully understand something you have read until you take the time to think about it. That's the difference between reading comprehension and just reciting the words. All reading comprehension requires some degree of critical thinking, a term that refers to a systematic and deliberately thoughtful approach to analyzing a topic. Critical thinking in reading comprehension can range from understanding what the text says to evaluating the accuracy of its content.

Literal Comprehension

Literal comprehension is the most basic form of reading comprehension, and it uses the most simple forms of critical thinking. Readers identify explicitly stated facts and information from a text and recall that information later. A competent reader has to be able to find details that are directly stated in the text, like the name of a character or the setting of a story. The reader should even be able to restate abstract ideas that are defined in the text. For example, if a textbook chapter defines freedom, the reader should be able to repeat that definition and any explanation or examples that come with it.

Interpretation

The struggle readers often face with more sophisticated literature is deciphering the figurative language. Analyzing complex rhetoric requires readers to use higher level thinking skills than they would use to decode more conventional text. Understanding Shakespeare, for example, calls for negotiating passages constructed around allusions to Greek and Roman mythology and tracing the purpose of extended metaphors. To interpret similes and metaphors readers have to stretch their thinking to see how two otherwise dissimilar items can be alike. When they come across idioms, readers need to recognize that expression isn't meant to be taken literally. Readers need to make inferences by distinguishing the tone of the piece and applying background to figure out the idiom.

Inferences and Conclusions

Writers don't always directly state important ideas in ways that are obvious to the reader. Instead, they depend on the reader's ability to think critically and follow a trail of clues and evidence in the text to make inferences and draw conclusions. For example, a writer might reveal traits about a character through the description, actions and dialogue. The reader has to gather the clues the writer has scattered throughout text and make inferences to understand the characterization. To comprehend more challenging pieces, readers have to apply critical thinking skills to build meaning based on written evidence.

Evaluation

A reader is not expected to accept every detail a writer includes in a work as truth. Readers should approach some types of texts with a healthy degree of skepticism, especially nonfiction pieces on controversial issues. When reading an editorial, for example, readers should look for flaws in the writer's logic and errors in how the writer uses evidence. At this level of critical thinking, readers learn to examine the slants and biases that may exist even in informational texts like a feature story in a magazine or on a web page. As readers attempt to comprehend any text, they should also read critically, probing the strengths and weaknesses of the writer's claims and supporting arguments.

Critical Thinking Skills for the Analysis of Texts

Critical thinking and reading analytically go together. Getting better at one makes you better at the other, and both are essential to developing the mental habits of a disciplined, imaginative and reflective thinker. Many intelligent people are intimidated by the attention, imagination and deductive reasoning demanded by the critical analysis of written texts, but practice and a few basic techniques are all it takes to develop the skill of thinking critically about what you read.

Objectivity

The foundation of critical thinking about a text is objectivity, or the ability to get out of the way and truly listen to the author's message. Setting your own opinions, emotions and presuppositions aside to understand what another person is saying is a learned skill, and one that is increasingly important in the information age. Allow plenty of time to read the text thoughtfully and attentively, and don't try to evaluate, criticize or counter the author's perspectives or arguments until you have read the text all the way through once, focusing exclusively on comprehension. You will know you have completed this step when you can clearly and thoroughly summarize the text in your own words. This is the step at which you should answer the "what" questions. What type of literature is this, what is the author's purpose and what exactly is the author saying?

Structure

The next step is to recognize the structure of the text you are reading. Understanding how a text is put together is like reverse engineering. Recognizing the moves the author is making lets you see what he is trying to create, the relationships connecting his ideas and the type of reasoning he is using. Start by determining the role each paragraph plays in the structure of the piece, and recognizing how the paragraphs relate to one another. Is the author making a claim and backing it up with examples? Is he creating an analogy, then explaining its application? Next, do the same thing for each paragraph. What is the paragraph's overall goal, and how does each sentence contribute to that goal? In this step, you should be answering the "how" questions -- how is the author using word choice, logic and sentence structure to create a certain mood, achieve a certain effect and make certain points? How do the parts of the text combine to create the whole?

Implications and Inferences

Take your analysis to the next level by considering the implications of what the author is saying and the inferences that could be drawn from it. Think about what the author would probably feel or argue about an event or topic related to the one your text discusses -- and make sure you can explain why you make that inference. Ask what experiences, emotions or events might have led the author to form the ideas he is expressing. Consider the text's overall tone or mood, and identify the words or images the author uses to create that mood. Compare and contrast the text with others on a similar topic. In this step you should be answering "why" questions -- why does the author believe or feel what he does, and why does the text have the impact it does?

Questions and Counterclaims

By now, you have determined what the author is saying, how he is saying it and what inferences can be drawn from it. The final step is to consider the questions or counterclaims that might challenge the author's viewpoint. If you disagree with the author, take a moment to formulate your arguments against the text and pinpoint the specific assumptions or claims you dispute, or the logical fallacies you recognize. If you agree with or relate to what the author is saying, consider what additional, perhaps stronger, points might be made to support the argument or enhance the emotional effect. In this step, you enter into an imaginary dialog with the author, agreeing with and supporting some points, challenging or questioning others.

**What Are the Four Forms of Critical Thinking
and Writing?**

You use critical thinking skills to make decisions every day. From deciding what you want to wear in the morning to choosing how you're going to get to school or work, the ability to think critically allows you to make choices or solve problems in a way that best suits you and the situation you are facing. Critical thinking consists of four steps: collecting information, evaluating information, drawing conclusions and evaluating those conclusions.

Collecting Information

Collecting all of the information when making a decision is an important part of the critical thinking process. If you're planning your outfit for the day, you take everything from the weather forecast to your school or work dress code to comfort into consideration. Once you've gathered all the information you need, you can move to the next step of evaluating that information to make the best decision about what you should wear.

Evaluating the Data

If you've collected all the data you need to make a decision, evaluating it allows you to use your innovation skills. Innovating, or thinking of new approaches to old problems, provides the ability to come up with fresh ideas to create possibilities for solutions. If the weather forecast is warm but rainy and you are afraid that a rain jacket may make you too hot, innovative thought may lead you to dress to stay cool and carry an umbrella to avoid getting wet.

Drawing Conclusions

Being able to think intuitively allows you to use the evidence you've gathered from thinking critically so you can develop an opinion based on conclusions you've drawn. While you might not have all of the evidence you need based on the research you've conducted, you can use your intuition to make determinations quickly and readily. For example, if you see that an oven is on, intuitive thinking tells you that it is probably hot and dangerous to touch. This allows you to hypothesize conclusions and predict patterns even if you don't have concrete answers yet.

Evaluating the Conclusion

Evaluating the conclusion you've drawn from all the evidence is the final step of the critical thinking process. Once you've completed the other three steps, it's important to decide whether or not your conclusion is a fair one. For instance, if you dressed for warm and rainy weather, did you remember that your office has air-conditioning? If your conclusion takes all the evidence you have into consideration and allows you to make the best decision, then you have successfully completed the critical thinking process.

Critical Thinking Techniques: Issue Tree

The purpose of critical thinking is to encourage you to think about your own thinking processes, with the goal being to understand how preconceptions, misconceptions and biases effect your decisions so you can move beyond those impediments to objectivity. However, the actual process of critical thinking involves breaking down, or deconstructing, a problem into its constituent parts. Addressing a problem in this way makes it possible for you to see the clear path to a solution.

Definition

A critical thinking issue tree is a way of looking at a problem that allows you to concentrate on its various factors. It's a visual representation you would use to structure thinking, in much the same way you would use an outline to structure writing. By using an issue tree, you can visualize the relationship between the parts of a problem, as well as the comparative effectiveness of all possible solutions, as your group generates ideas.

Visualization

As you draw an issue tree, with the central problem denoted in the tree's trunk, you can delineate the various aspects of the problem -- or in a separate issue tree, the various possible solutions -- by writing those off to the side, as branches on the tree. By doing so, you can see clearly how certain issues or problems branch off from others, showing interrelationship. Additionally, you'll be able to see how solutions or outcomes might be the flowering of specific actions taken to address problems.

Hypothesis Driven

According to the Groove Network Marketing Facilitation Mentoring Program, there are two types of issue trees: hypothesis-driven and data-driven. A hypothesis-driven issue tree uses the same logic as the scientific method, in that it begins with a conjecture, or best guess, or with an objective or goal. If you're creating a solutions issue tree, you would list a hypothetical result on the diagram, representing it as leaves or flowers of a branch. Between the trunk (the problem) and the solution (the leaves or flowers) you can list on the branches the actions you can take to reach the desired outcome. A hypothesis-driven tree begins with a hypothetical solution and validates it by answering the question, "How?"

Data Driven

The Groove Network defines a data-driven tree as one that starts with the question, "Why?" As the name implies, this conceptualization uses the image of the tree and its branches to examine factual evidence. Your result when using this tree would be a comprehensive, thoughtful list of the individual issues (branches) that add up to create the larger problem (the trunk). After deconstructing the problem this way, you can connect similar issues with circles, or use numbers or arrows to indicate causal relationships.

Usefulness

When dealing with an existing problem or concern, an issue tree is a way to take the abstract and physically represent in a visual medium so as to logically establish both the issue and its component parts or causes. This is one method of mapping issues to determine what sub-issues exist, as well as how they overlay or overlap, allowing you to see when causes are mutually exclusive or interrelated. Issue trees are useful in business environments because they can be shared among a working group and because they make clear what the outcomes -- or, in business terms, deliverables -- will be for specific solutions.

How an English Course Can Help Critical Thinking

Educational psychologist Linda Elder encourages critical thinkers to raise vital questions and problems, gather and assess relevant information, review assumptions and implications, and communicate effectively in creating solutions for complex problems. Critical thinking is an organized system of thought and learning that has developed over time but became formally recognized in the 20th century. English courses teach students skills in questioning, evaluating and assessing, eliminating assumptions and bias and effective communication -- all essential critical-thinking skills.

Raising Questions

Questioning is a vital part of critical-thinking skills. An English course teaches students how to gain greater comprehension through asking questions before and during reading. Asking why Jonathan Swift's famous essay "A Modest Proposal" suggests that Irish parents should sell their babies for food leads to greater understanding of the tragic poverty in Ireland at the time the essay was written. Asking questions about "A Modest Proposal" also provides insight into the use of satire to shock and provoke.

Evaluating Information

All information is not equally valid or important. English courses teach students how to assess and evaluate written and visual information. Students gain skills in determining the purpose and audience of a text, as well as its context. The context of written or visual information includes the time, place and circumstances under which an author is writing. For example, articles about airport safety written before September 11, 2001, are written in a different context from those written after that date.

Eliminating Assumptions

No one can completely eliminate prior assumptions and bias about different concepts, people or situations. Assumptions are opinions or patterns of thought that students and writers have not examined in depth, including cultural, racial or gender bias, or underlying perspectives. English courses teach students how to uncover assumptions made by authors, which may be positive and beneficial or negative, hindering communication. An example of a beneficial set of assumptions made by an author is the African-American female perspective on the effects of slavery offered in the novel "Beloved" by Toni Morrison.

Communicating Effectively

Effective communication relies upon clearly stated concepts and opinions, good organization and structure, and reliance on reason and clarity. English courses teach students to recognize effective communication used by the authors they study. Students also learn how to adopt effective communication strategies in their own writing. For example, clear, straightforward thesis sentences in essays are strong communication tools. Students also learn to recognize logical fallacies that hinder effective communication, such as ad hominem statements or personal attacks.