

Reading Comprehension

Many questions on the GRE will ask you to read a passage and to answer questions based on your reading. **Don't** waste time carefully reading the whole passage the first time you see it! You're reading to earn points, not to paraphrase the writer's argument.

Reading Comprehension questions may be 1 to 6 paragraphs long and may be followed by 1 to 6 questions. Reading Comprehension questions can have good answers and better answers. Don't select one answer until you've considered all of them.

The Questions

- ❖ Reading Comprehension questions come in three formats:
 - Multiple Choice: one right answer
 - Multiple Choice: more than one right answer
 - Text Selection: highlight the part of the text that answers the question
- ❖ Reading Comprehension questions come in three types:
 - Recognition (the answer is explicitly in the reading)
 - Reasoning (the answer is not explicitly in the reading and must be inferred)
 - Vocabulary

Your Approach

- ❖ Use your scratch paper: write down ABCDE and cross the corresponding answers off as you eliminate them. This strategy is especially important for negative questions ("Which of these is not...").
- ❖ Skim the passage first to find the main idea.
 - read the first and last sentences of each paragraph
 - read the last sentence of each paragraph
 - jot down a few words that express
 - the **main idea**
 - the **kind of writing** it is: explaining? arguing? problem-posing?
 - the author's **tone** and **point of view**
- ❖ Analyze the question and reword it so it tells you what you're looking for—you might start with "what" or "why." Reword negative questions as positive questions and cross answers that fit them off on your scratch paper.

Example: "The passage states that Jordan did all of the following EXCEPT..."

Rewording: Which of these **did** Jordan do?

- If it asks about a specific word or idea in the passage,
 - Skim the text until you see a keyword from the question and then start reading carefully about four lines before that word. Read until about four lines after.
 - Predict an answer to the question before you look at the choices.
 - If it asks a broader question,
 - Reread the passage carefully to find the answer.
 - If you can predict an answer to the question before you look at the choices, great; more often, you'll move straight to the answer choices.
- ❖ Read the answers and eliminate any that you can.
- ❖ Choose the remaining answer closest to your prediction and go on.

Be careful!

- ❖ In reading **questions**, pay careful attention to the number of concepts you're being asked about. If the question mentions two concepts, eliminate any answer that applies to only one--and vice-versa.
- ❖ Pay close attention to words like *must, every, all, each, totally, always, least, except, and not*, and avoid all over-general answer choices.
- ❖ Readings require no outside knowledge, so don't worry about readings which include technical terms you don't know. Most other readers don't know them either, and the questions won't be about them.
- ❖ Watch out for (and eliminate) answer choices that include elements not specifically mentioned in the passage.

Practice Test: Reading Comprehension

First Passage

Among the more interesting elements of etymology is the attempt to derive the meaning of seemingly nonsensical expressions. Take, for instance, the increasingly archaic rural phrase “to buy a pig in a poke.” For centuries, the expression has been used to signify the purchase of an item without full knowledge of its condition, and it relates to the common Renaissance practice of securing suckling pigs for transport to market in a poke, or drawstring bag. Unscrupulous sellers would sometimes attempt to dupe purchasers by replacing the suckling pig with a cat, considered worthless at market. An unsuspecting or naïve buyer might fail to confirm the bag’s contents; a more urbane buyer, though, would be sure to check and—should the seller be dishonest—“let the cat out of the bag.”

For the following question, consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

1. Which of the following phrases from the passage would help the reader infer the meaning of the word urbane as used in context?
 - A. “increasingly archaic rural phrase”
 - B. “without full knowledge”
 - C. “unsuspecting or naïve buyer”
2. Select a sentence in which the author makes deliberate use of a seemingly nonsensical expression.

Second Passage

Toqueville, apparently, was wrong. Jacksonian America was not a fluid, egalitarian society where individual wealth and poverty were ephemeral conditions. At least so argues E. Pessen in his iconoclastic study of the very rich in the United States between 1825 and 1850.

Pessen does present a quantity of examples, together with some refreshingly intelligible statistics, to establish the existence of an inordinately wealthy class. Though active in commerce or the professions, most of the wealthy were not self-made but had inherited family fortunes. In no sense mercurial, these great fortunes survived the financial panics that destroyed lesser ones. Indeed, in several cities the wealthiest one percent constantly increased its share until by 1850 it owned half the community’s wealth. Although these observations are true, Pessen overestimates their importance by concluding from them that the undoubted progress toward inequality in the late eighteenth century continued in the Jacksonian period and that the United States was a class-riddled, plutocratic society even before industrialization.

For each of questions 3-4, select one answer choice.

3. According to the passage, Pessen indicates that all of the following were true of the very wealthy in the United States between 1825 and 1850 EXCEPT:
- A. They formed a distinct upper class
 - B. Many of them were able to increase their holdings.
 - C. Some of them worked as professionals or in business.
 - D. Most of them accumulated their own fortunes
 - E. Many of them retained their wealth in spite of financial upheavals.
4. Which of the following best states the author's main point?
- A. Pessen's study has overturned the previously established view of the social and economic structure of early-nineteenth-century America.
 - B. Toqueville's analysis of the United States in the Jacksonian era remains the definitive account of this period.
 - C. Pessen's study is valuable primarily because it shows the continuity of the social system in the United States throughout the nineteenth century.
 - D. The social patterns and political power of the extremely wealthy in the United States between 1825 and 1850 are well documented.
 - E. Pessen challenges a view of the social and economic systems in the United States from 1825 to 1850, but he draws conclusions that are incorrect.

Third Passage

The first smallpox prevention methods were inoculations, intentional infections with active diseased matter that typically caused a mild illness, and would later result in immunity. Modern epidemiologists believe that inoculated patients were less likely to contract a fatal case of tuberculosis because they contracted the disease through skin contact, not inhalation. However, due to extreme disparities in the type and amount of virus used, health practitioners could offer no real prediction of how severe a case a given patient might contract after being inoculated. Inoculation differs from vaccination, which uses a standard dose of dead or weakened virus culture and therefore poses a much lower risk of fatal infection. After a smallpox vaccine was developed in the 1790s, inoculation gradually fell from favor and was eventually banned in numerous jurisdictions.

For the following question, consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

5. Which of the following statements is supported by the passage?
- A. Vaccination replaced inoculation because it was a safer method of protecting against disease.
 - B. Two random doses of a vaccine were likely to be more similar than two random doses of an inoculum
 - C. Prior to the 1790s, live virus cultures were often used in tuberculosis inoculations.

6. In the context in which it appears, “disparities” most nearly means which of the following?
- A. incapacities
 - B. vulnerabilities
 - C. inconsistencies
 - D. resemblances
 - E. ineffectiveness

Fourth Passage

When marine organisms called phytoplankton photosynthesize, they absorb carbon dioxide dissolved in seawater, potentially causing a reduction in the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide, a gas that contributes to global warming. However, phytoplankton flourish only in surface waters where iron levels are sufficiently high. Martin therefore hypothesized that adding iron to iron-poor regions of the ocean could help alleviate global warming. While experiments subsequently confirmed that such a procedure increases phytoplankton growth, field tests have shown that such growth does not significantly lower atmospheric carbon dioxide. When phytoplankton utilize carbon dioxide for photosynthesis, the carbon becomes a building block for organic matter; but the carbon leaks back into the atmosphere when predators consume the phytoplankton and respire carbon dioxide.

For the following question, consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

7. It can be inferred from the passage that Martin’s hypothesis includes which of the following elements?
- A. A correct understanding of how phytoplankton photosynthesis utilizes carbon dioxide
 - B. A correct prediction about how the addition of iron to iron-poor waters would affect phytoplankton growth
 - C. An incorrect prediction about how phytoplankton growth would affect the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide.
8. It can be inferred that the author of the passage mentions predators (line 10) primarily in order to
- A. help explain why Martin’s hypothesis is incorrect
 - B. identify one effect of adding iron to iron-poor waters
 - C. indicate how some carbon dioxide is converted to solid organic matter
 - D. help account for differences in the density of phytoplankton between different regions of the ocean
 - E. point out a factor that was not anticipated by the scientists who conducted the field tests mentioned in the passage.

Fifth Passage

Scholars of early Buddhist art agree that Buddha images in human form emerged around the first century AD in the regions of Mathura, located in central India, and Gandhara, now part of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Uncertainty exists, however, about whether Mathura or Gandhara has the stronger claim to primacy. Those who believe that anthropomorphic sculptures of the Buddha first appeared in Gandhara point out that earlier Buddhist art was usually aniconic and that *bas relief* was far more common than sculpture. They argue that Greek influence in Gandhara promoted the development of the new style and form of representation of the divine. Other scholars make the case for indigenous development of such representations in Mathura, citing a centuries-long record of iconic art in pre-Buddhist traditions. They don't reject all foreign influence, but they argue that local traditions provided a strong foundation for the development of Buddhist sculpture.

Art historians bolster their arguments by highlighting distinctive features of the sculptures from each region. For example, the artists of Gandhara sculpted their Buddhas in heavy, pleated drapery, similar to that of Greek statues. Wavy lines indicating hair also reflect Greek influence. Mathura Buddhas, on the other hand, are portrayed wearing lighter robes draped in a monastic style, often with part of the shoulder and chest left bare. Elongated earlobes and strong facial features characterize Mathura images of the Buddha, whereas Gandhara images possess more angular features. Sorting out dates and directions of influence has proven difficult, but the totality of evidence suggests that the Buddha image evolved simultaneously in both regions and was shaped by the predominant cultural influences in each region.

9. Which of the following, if true, would those who believe that anthropomorphic images of Buddha originated in Gandhara be likely to cite as evidence for their viewpoint?
- A. Pre-Buddhist subcultures in the Gandhara region created representations of their deities in human form.
 - B. Mathuran Buddhas' lightweight robes appear to have been modelled on the real robes of people who lived in a warm climate.
 - C. Gandharan artists were isolated from the larger society and not exposed to influences from outside the region.
 - D. Rulers from the Mathura region had political ties to Greek rulers and frequently exchanged gifts with them.
 - E. The hairstyles worn by Gandharan Buddhas are similar to those depicted on Greek pottery from the same period.
10. According to the passage, Buddhist art
- A. first appeared in regions that are now part of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan
 - B. experienced a period during which human representations of the Buddha were not common.
 - C. characteristically portrayed figures with elongated earlobes and strong facial features.
 - D. began to appear in the medium of bas relief as a result of Greek influence.
 - E. was more influenced by foreign artworks than by indigenous artistic traditions.

GRE Review
ISU Student Success Center
Verbal Section

Answer Key: Reading Comprehension (Set Two)

First Passage: 1. C 2. Final sentence

Second Passage: 3. D 4. E

Third Passage: 5. A and B 6. C

Fourth Passage: 7. A and B and C 8. A

Fifth Passage: 9. E 10. B