



Digital SAT® Reading Quick Guide

Use this packet as a quick reference for the most important Reading questions on the Digital SAT Reading and Writing section.

Format

The Digital SAT Reading and Writing section consists of two consecutive modules, each with 27 questions presented over 32 minutes.

Each question is paired with a unique text or pair of texts whose length will not exceed 150 words.

All questions are four-option multiple choice-format.

The section is scored from 200–800.

Words in Context

You'll be presented with a short text that is missing either a word or phrase; based on the context, you'll select the option that most logically completes the text.

The ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) is _____ for growth in low-light environments: over hundreds of millions of years, it has evolved to thrive in shaded areas created by the canopies of large trees, which filter much of the incoming sunlight.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A) designated
- B) planted
- C) formed
- D) adapted

Key Techniques

- Look for punctuation to signal definitions or explanations consistent with the word or phrase to be chosen. Commas, colons, and semicolons are the most common indicators of definitions and explanations.
- Use the context's tone: if it's clear from the context that the missing word or phrase must be positive or negative, eliminate all options that don't align with that tone.
- Notice any transition words, such as the contrast words *but* and *however*, which can help you determine the relationship between the sentence and the missing word or phrase.
- Try filling in your own word or phrase before looking at the options. This word or phrase doesn't need to be perfect: it should estimate the intended meaning. Then pick the choice most consistent with what you fill in.
- Before committing to a choice, test it by reading it in context.

Word Meaning

These are very similar to Words in Context questions, but the passages associated with them are usually fiction-based. You'll see a word underlined in the text and will be asked to select the option that properly distinguishes its meaning in context.

The following text is from Evelyn Waugh's 1946 novel *Brideshead Revisited*.

My three platoon commanders and myself had a carriage to ourselves. They ate sandwiches and chocolate, and slept. None of them had a book. For the first three or four hours they noted the names of the towns and leaned out of the windows when, as often happened, we stopped between stations. Later they lost interest.

As used in the text, what does the word "noted" most nearly mean?

- A) Remarked
- B) Observed
- C) Described
- D) Understood

Key Techniques

- Use the approaches described above for Words in Context questions to come up with your own word that models the meaning of the underlined word; do this before looking at the choices. If you can't come up with a single word, think of a phrase.
- Never assume that a word will take on its "typical" meaning – always use the context to analyze the word in question. This is especially true for older works, in which words may be used in ways you haven't seen.
- Before committing to an answer, try replacing the underlined word with your choice, testing it within the context.

Main Idea and Purpose

You'll be presented with a text and asked to distinguish one of several things: (1) the main idea of the entire text, (2) a central idea within the text, or (3) the main purpose of the text.

There is often a substantial delay between the discovery of life-saving drugs and their availability for mass medical treatment, a reality illustrated by the history of the antibiotic penicillin. In the late 1920s, scientists observed that the mold produced by the *Penicillium* fungus killed bacteria, and they were able to successfully treat infections using extracts from the mold. Producing purified extracts on a large scale, however, proved difficult, and the public would have to wait over a decade more until, in 1946, production of pure penicillin reached billions of units that would be distributed around the world.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

- A) To describe the discovery process that produces modern drugs
- B) To emphasize a fact about the development of important medicines
- C) To highlight the significance of a certain class of drugs
- D) To expose flaws in the system used to approve medicinal treatments

Key Techniques

- Identify the text's topic sentence and translate it into your own words as you read. Then, consider how the other sentences relate to it: do they provide support? add detail? present an argument or debate? This will help you distinguish the main idea.
- Consider not only what the text says literally, but *why* the text is written as such: what is the *function* of the author's choices?
- Try coming up with your own answer before looking at the choices. Base your answer on the main idea. Then, align your answer to the options, eliminating choices that are inaccurate and picking the one that best aligns.
- Remember that a single word can ruin an answer choice: if there isn't evidence for that precise word or concept, it's wrong.

Main Function

You'll be presented with a text and asked to distinguish the function of an underlined portion within the text.

Many birds immediately eat what they forage, but some save their food in small stores called caches. Black-capped chickadees have been observed hiding seeds and berries beneath woody ground cover, within tree knots, and under human-made structures such as gutters. Using highly developed spatial memory skills, the chickadees are able to recall the locations of up to hundreds of caches in order to supplement their energy intake during times of food scarcity, enabling them to survive in a wide range of habitats with significant variations in resource availability.

Which choice best describes the function of the underlined sentence in the text as a whole?

- A) It explains how black-capped chickadees have developed the spatial memory skills discussed later in the text.
- B) It clarifies how other birds discussed in the text compete with black-capped chickadees for resources.
- C) It provides a description of black-capped chickadee habitats discussed in the text.
- D) It describes a black-capped chickadee foraging behavior described in the text.

Key Techniques

- Make sure to get the main idea of the text by distinguishing the topic sentence.
- Read adequate context: the function of any given sentence is always dependent on the content that surrounds it. Note how the underlined portion relates to what precedes and follows it.
- Try thinking of your own answer to the question, then align it to the choices.
- Remember that the task is to evaluate what the underlined portion alone serves to do, not to analyze the function of other segments of the text.

Logically Completing the Text

You'll be presented with a text whose final sentence is incomplete. The goal will be to use the main idea and message of the text to choose the option that produces a coherent, sensible conclusion.

Some researchers believe that the primary cause of the Younger Dryas, a thousand-year period of climatic cooling that began around 13,000 BCE, was a large asteroid impact above North America. As evidence, they cite the sudden disappearance of the Clovis people, a group of hunter-gatherers known to have populated North America, whose arrowheads and other artifacts become absent from the archaeological record at approximately 13,000 BCE across several sites near the supposed impact. However, a strong majority of scientists reject the impact hypothesis, stating that Clovis populations were highly mobile. In fact, these scientists argue, _____

Which choice most logically completes the text?

- A) it is likelier that Clovis populations did not go extinct but simply migrated, as their artifacts have been discovered at other sites dating to approximately 13,000 BCE.
- B) given the rarity of asteroid impacts, such an event is not the likeliest explanation for the disappearance of an entire group such as the Clovis hunter-gatherers.
- C) many other plant and animal species stop appearing in the fossil record in approximately 13,000 BCE, when the Younger Dryas began.
- D) Clovis artifacts from 13,000 BCE may be difficult to distinguish from those of other populations unaffected by a potential asteroid impact.

Key Techniques

- Distinguish any strong claims and how they relate (e.g., do they align? contrast?). These often appear in topic sentences.
- Look out for transition words or phrases (e.g., continuing idea words like *therefore* and contrast words like *however*) that help convey the logic of the ideas.
- Based on the claims, try to predict what makes sense for the blank before you consider the answer choices.

Command of Textual Evidence

You'll read a text that presents a particular viewpoint or claim based on scientific findings or literary analysis; you'll then be asked to evaluate which additional piece of evidence provides support for the claim or weakens the claim.

In the early twenty-first century, American linguists began documenting changing geographic patterns in regional English accents across the United States, but often disagreed about the direction of the changes. Scholars such as Brian Lewinger claimed that the General American accent of the midwestern states was spreading to the east coast, moderating the most extreme elements of accents among speakers in the Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston metropolitan areas. In contrast, researchers like Mariella Sobotnik argued that elements of east coast accents had shifted west, altering traditionally General American pronunciations to be more like those found in eastern cities.

Which finding, if true, would most directly support Sobotnik's claim?

- A) Most of the accent data that the linguists collected confirmed data that had been collected in previous studies.
- B) Much of the accent data that the linguists collected showed large variations in accents between cities on the east coast of the United States.
- C) The accent data that the linguists collected from the midwest included several instances of non-rhotic pronunciations, a distinguishing element of accents in the Boston and New York regions.
- D) Some of the accent data that the linguists collected from east coast cities showed that many east coast speakers have the ability to mimic the cot-caught merger, a feature of the General American English accent, on demand.

Key Techniques

- Distinguish the claim(s) made in the text, establishing the facts behind them.
- If there are multiple claims, make sure you know which/whose claim you'll need to distinguish evidence for or against.
- Once you know which claim must be supported or weakened, use the core message of the claim to predict what supporting or weakening evidence would be needed.

Command of Quantitative Evidence

You'll be presented with a text accompanied by a related figure (a graph or a table). You'll be asked to integrate information from both sources to formulate a conclusion to a statement or to logically complete a paragraph.

Average Percentage Single Episode Completion Rates of Podcasts of Different Durations, by Genre

Genre	Duration		
	30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
fiction	87.5	84.3	81.4
technology	71.0	66.5	62.6
comedy	88.6	84.4	83.1
education	74.2	69.4	61.7

For any one podcast episode that is at least 30 minutes long, consumers tend to listen to (“complete”) most of the episode, but the percentage of the episode completed varies considerably by genre, with podcasts in story-based narrative or entertainment categories exhibiting the highest-percentage episode completion rates. For podcasts that challenge their listeners with complex ideas that require intellectual engagement, percent episode completion is significantly lower. This can be seen by comparing _____

Which choice most effectively uses data from the table to illustrate the claim?

- A) the average percentage single episode completion rate of 30-minute technology podcasts with the average percentage single episode completion rate of 60-minute technology podcasts.
- B) the average percentage single episode completion rate of 45-minute fiction podcasts with the average percentage single episode completion rate of 45-minute education podcasts.
- C) the average percentage single episode completion rate of 45-minute technology podcasts with the average percentage single episode completion rate of 45-minute education podcasts.
- D) the average percentage single episode completion rate of 60-minute comedy podcasts with the average percentage single episode completion rate of 60-minute fiction podcasts.

Command of Quantitative Evidence, continued

Key Techniques

- Ensure you're reading the graph or table properly:
 - Read the main title, axis titles, and row/column headings as necessary.
 - If there are multiple bars or curves, make sure to consider the key/legend.
 - If you're confused about what the figure shows, pick one data point, bar, or cell, and see if you can interpret it.
- Determine the central claim of the passage using the techniques reviewed in previous question types, noting strong statements and contrast words.
- Remember that multiple answers may be true, but only one will use the data to answer the question or to provide support adequate for completing the text.

Details in the Text

You'll be presented with a short nonfiction or fiction text and asked about a specific detail described within. Sometimes, the detail as described in the correct answer choice will be explained straightforwardly; others, it will appear as a statement that can be reached directly from a detail in the text that is phrased slightly differently.

The following text is adapted from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer. A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house—but that would be asking too much of fate! Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it. Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted? John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage. John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

According to the text, what is true about John?

- A) He sought to rent a haunted house for himself and his wife over the summer.
- B) He does not believe in any claims of the existence of the supernatural.
- C) He came to the summer house primarily because it could be rented cheaply.
- D) He is not friendly with the narrator.

Key Techniques

- Never select an answer choice simply because it contains words or ideas that appear in the text: make sure those words or ideas are being used to express something that is actually evidenced in the text.
- Know that a single wrong word can make an answer choice incorrect.
- Though these questions are centered on single ideas, finding the topic sentence, understanding the main idea, and recognizing other elements such as transitions will help you understand the details.

Text Structure

You will be presented with a nonfiction or fiction text and asked to select a statement that most accurately describes the overall structure of that text.

American voters tend to express concern over government debt; according to polls, a majority of voters are in favor of reducing the money the government owes. However, when presented with a list of specific programs whose budgets could be cut to reduce the debt, the same voters often reject reductions in funding. This particular situation exemplifies a broader fact about contradictory public sentiment: voters may claim to support a policy position on the whole while simultaneously expressing disapproval when asked to consider the individual actions necessary for implementing that position.

Which choice best describes the overall structure of the text?

- A) It describes a specific phenomenon, then relates the phenomenon to a more general observation.
- B) It introduces a potential solution to a problem, then asserts that the solution is illogical.
- C) It presents an argument, then outlines a position opposed to that argument.
- D) It provides a hypothesis, then cites evidence that supports that hypothesis.

Key Techniques

- Monitor topic sentences to establish the central idea.
- Pay especially close attention to transition words and phrases—contrasts like *but*, *however*, and *nevertheless* or continuations like *therefore*, *in addition*, and *similarly*—which signal shifts that will determine the answer.
- Be prepared for the answers to be phrased in the abstract: they might not cite the specific content of the passage, instead referring to the content with words that reference the content's *function*.
- Before committing to an answer, map what the choice says to the structure: which pieces of text correspond specifically to the pieces of the answer you're selecting?

Paired Texts

You'll be given two short texts that address the same topic. Then you'll be asked how the ideas presented in the second text relate to the ideas in the first.

Text 1

A number of scholars believe that understanding the works of playwright William Shakespeare requires understanding Shakespeare himself. Professor of English Donald McCarthy, for example, argues that details of Shakespeare's personality, pastimes, and relationships would provide additional important insights into the dramas and comedies that have made Shakespeare so iconic, allowing for a richer grasp of his output.

Text 2

When people discuss who Shakespeare was, they should ask themselves if the words in the play will change based on revelations about his personal life. If it turns out that Shakespeare mocked philosophy outside of his writing, does that mean Hamlet's soliloquy—"to be or not to be?"—loses significance? If not, then why should literary critics be invested in Shakespeare the man?

Based on the texts, how would the author of Text 2 most likely say in response to McCarthy's view presented in Text 1?

- A) It places too much emphasis on studying Shakespeare's dramas and comedies.
- B) It does not adequately address Shakespeare's genuine opinions about the topics that inspired his works.
- C) It ignores the influence of Shakespeare's peers on his understanding of human nature described in his writings.
- D) It overstates the relevance of Shakespeare's personal characteristics to comprehending and appreciating his works.

Key Techniques

- Make sure to distinguish topic sentence, main idea, and tone of each text.
- Determine the basic relationship between the texts' arguments: are their messages opposed? similar but from different perspectives?
- Read the question and anticipate the answer before looking at the choices.

Answer Key

Topic	Answer
Words in Context	D
Word Meaning	B
Main Idea and Purpose	B
Main Function	D
Logically Completing the Text	A
Command of Textual Evidence	C
Command of Quantitative Evidence	B
Details in the Text	B
Text Structure	A
Paired Texts	D