

# Applying Strategies to the SAT\* and ACT

*The test items in this section are modeled after test formats that are used on the SAT and ACT. The strategies presented here will help you prepare for these tests and others. This section offers general test-taking strategies and tips for answering multiple-choice items in critical reading and writing, as well as samples for impromptu writing and essay writing. For each test, read the tips in the margin. Then apply the tips to the practice items. You can also apply the tips to Assessment Practice tests in this book.*

## 1 General Test-Taking Strategies

- Arrive on time and be prepared. Be sure to bring either sharpened pencils with erasers or pens—whichever you are told to bring.
- If you have any questions, ask them before the test begins. Make sure you understand the test procedures, the timing, and the rules.
- Read the test directions carefully. Look at the passages and questions to get an overview of what is expected.
- Tackle the questions one at a time rather than thinking about the whole test.
- Refer back to the reading selections as needed. For example, if a question asks about an author's attitude, you might have to reread a passage for clues.
- If you are not sure of your answer, make a logical guess. You can often arrive at the correct answer by reasoning and eliminating wrong answers.
- As you fill in answers on your answer sheet, make sure you match the number of each test item to the numbered space on the answer sheet.
- Don't look for patterns in the positions of correct choices.
- Only change an answer if you are sure your original choice is incorrect. If you do change an answer, erase your original choice neatly and thoroughly.
- Look for main ideas as you read passages. They are often stated at the beginning or the end of a paragraph. Sometimes the main idea is implied.
- Check your answers and reread your essay.

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## 2 Critical Reading

Most tests contain a critical reading section that measures your ability to read, understand, and interpret passages. The passages may be either fiction or nonfiction, and they can be 100 words or 500 to 850 words. They are drawn from literature, the humanities, social studies, and the natural sciences.

**Directions:** Read the following passage. Base your answers to questions 1 and 2 on what is stated or implied in the passage.

### PASSAGE

Mathematics is a living plant which has flourished and languished with the rise and fall of civilizations. Created in some prehistoric period, it struggled for existence through centuries of prehistory and further centuries of recorded history. It finally secured a firm grip on life in the highly congenial soil of Greece and waxed strong for a brief period. In this period it produced one perfect flower, Euclidean geometry. The buds of other flowers opened slightly and with close inspection the outlines of trigonometry and algebra could be discerned; but these flowers withered with the decline of Greek civilization, and the plant remained dormant for one thousand years.

Such was the state of mathematics when the plant was transported to Europe proper and once more imbedded in fertile soil. By A.D. 1600 it had regained the vigor it had possessed at the very height of the Greek period and was prepared to break forth with unprecedented brilliance. If we may describe the mathematics known before 1600 as elementary mathematics, then we may state that elementary mathematics is infinitesimal compared to what has been created since. In fact, a person possessed of the knowledge Newton had at the height of his powers would not be considered a mathematician today for, contrary to popular belief, mathematics must now be said to begin with the calculus and not to end there.

—Morris Kline, *Mathematics in Western Culture*

1 stem

1. Which statement expresses the main idea of the first paragraph in this passage? 2

- 3 choices
- (A) Botany and mathematics both date back to prehistoric times.
  - (B) Ancient Greeks saw a connection between numbers and plants.
  - (C) Euclidian geometry is an advanced form of mathematical thinking.
  - (D) New branches of mathematics developed over the centuries.
  - (E) Mathematics thrived in some early civilizations but stagnated in others.

2. The comparison between mathematics and plants conveys the idea that 4

- (A) both mathematics and plants need the right conditions to thrive
- (B) people who understand plants usually have strong mathematical skills
- (C) early civilizations believed that mathematics was a type of plant
- (D) mathematics and plants cannot be transported to new areas
- (E) mathematics and plants have both been useful to civilization 5

### Tips: Multiple Choice

A multiple-choice question consists of a stem and a set of choices. On some tests, there are four choices. On the SAT, there are five. The stem is usually in the form of a question or an incomplete sentence. One of the choices correctly answers the question or completes the sentence.

- 1 Read the stem carefully and try to answer the question without looking at the choices.
- 2 Pay attention to key words in the stem. They may direct you to the correct answer. Question 1 is looking for the *main* idea of a paragraph. There is no information in the paragraph to suggest choices (A) and (B). Choices (C) and (D) focus on minor points. Only choice (E) captures the main idea.
- 3 Read all the choices before deciding on the correct answer.
- 4 Some questions ask you to interpret a figure of speech. Question 2, for example, asks you to explain the meaning of a metaphor.
- 5 After reading all the choices, eliminate any that you know are incorrect. In question 2, all of the choices mention mathematics and plants, but only choice (A) expresses the correct relationship between the key words in the metaphor.

Answers: 1. (E), 2. (A)

**Directions:** Base your answers to questions 1 and 2 on the two passages below.

**PASSAGE 1**

I feel that writing is an act of **hope**, a sort of communion with our fellow men. The writer of good will carries a lamp to **illuminate** the dark corners. Only that, nothing more—a tiny beam of light to show some hidden aspect of reality, to help decipher and understand it and thus to initiate, if possible, a change in the conscience of some readers.

—Isabelle Allende, from “Writing as an Act of Hope”

**PASSAGE 2**

The most effective writer is not he who announces a particular discovery, who convinces men of a particular conclusion, who demonstrates that this measure is right and that measure wrong; but he who rouses in others the activities that must issue in discovery, who awakes men from their indifference to the right and the wrong, **who nerves their energies to seek for the truth and live up to it at whatever cost.** The influence of such a writer is dynamic. He does not teach men how to use sword and musket, but he inspires their souls with courage and sends a strong will into their muscles. He does not, perhaps, enrich your stock of data, but he clears away the film from your eyes that you may search for data to some purpose. He does not, perhaps, convince you, but **he strikes you, undeceives you, animates you.**

—George Eliot, from “Thomas Carlyle”

**Tips: Two Passages**

Questions are sometimes based on a pair of related passages, which may have completely different views or may simply describe different aspects of the same subject. The two passages here discuss the role of the writer.

- 1** Before reading the passages, skim all the questions to see what information you will need.
- 2** Find topic sentences and ask yourself whether the passages support or refute their topic sentences. In this case, both passages support their claims with examples and discussion.
- 3** You can determine an author’s attitude toward a subject by his or her choice of words. In passage 1, the words *hope* and *illuminate* convey the author’s positive perspective.
- 4** Analyze supporting details. The author of passage 2 uses examples to support the claim that an effective writer has a dynamic influence on readers.
- 5** When working with two passages, look for related or contrasting ideas. To answer question 2, you have to find a common thread in the discussions on the role of the writer. Eliminate any answers that pertain to only one passage or to neither of the passages.

**Answers:** 1. (C), 2. (D)

- 1** 1. In passage 2, the phrase “the activities that must issue in discovery” refers to the
  - (A) publication of scientific research
  - (B) interpretation of hidden clues
  - (C) pursuit of knowledge
  - (D) development of an individual writing style
  - (E) desire to discover the truth
2. To judge from these excerpts, the authors of these passages would most likely agree with which one of the following statements? **5**
  - (A) A writer is effective when he or she has a social conscience.
  - (B) Writers carry the burden of educating readers.
  - (C) Writers are undervalued in some societies.
  - (D) A writer can have a powerful effect on readers.
  - (E) Writers have a rare talent that must not be wasted.

**Directions:** Read the following passage, taken from an early 20th-century short story. Based on what is stated or implied in the passage, answer questions 1 through 5, which appear on the next page.

## PASSAGE

- 1 Mother called **me** to the house to bring cobs, and called me again to gather eggs in the middle of the afternoon. She called me a third time. Her face looked uncomfortable.
- 2 She said, "If the Slumps go by, do not ask them for any plums."
- 5 Mother knew I would not ask.  
"If they offer any, do not take them."  
"What shall I say?"  
"Say we do not care for them."  
"If they make me take them?"
- 10 "Refuse them."  
When the Slumps came in sight the horses were walking. The Niniscaw was fifteen miles away and the team was tired. I thought I could talk to the children as the wagon passed, but just before it reached me, Mr. Slump hit the horses twice with a willow branch. They trotted, and the wagon rattled by.
- 15 The children on the last seat were facing toward me. They laughed and waved their arms. Clubby leaned backward and caught up a handful of plums. The wagon bed must have been half filled. He flung them toward me; and then another handful. They fell, scattering, in the thick dust, which curled around them in little eddies, almost hiding them before I could catch
- 20 them up.  
The plums were small and red. They felt warm to my fingers. I wiped them on the front of my dress, and dropped them in my apron. I waited only for one secret rite, before I ran, heart pounding, to tell my mother what I had discovered.
- 25 She interrupted me, "Did they see you picking them up?"  
I thought of myself standing like Clubby Slump, mouth open, without moving. I laughed till two plums rolled out of my apron. "Oh, yes! I had them picked up almost before the dust stopped wriggling. I called, 'Thank you.'"
- 30 Still mother was not pleased. "Throw them away," she said. "Surely you would not care to eat something **flung** to you in the road."
- 4 It was hard to speak. I moved close to her and whispered, "Can't I keep them?"
- Mother left the room. It seemed long before she came back. She put
- 35 her arm around me and said, "Take them to the pump and wash them thoroughly. Eat them slowly, and do not swallow the skins. You will not want many of them, for you will find them bitter and not fit to eat."
- I went out quietly, knowing I would never tell her that they were strange on my tongue as wild honey, holding the warmth of sand that sun had
- 40 fingered, and the mystery of water under leaning boughs.  
For I had eaten one at the road.

—Grace Stone Coates, from "Wild Plums"

## Tips: Reading Text

- 1 Notice the characters who are presented in a passage. Be alert to details about their appearance, personality, or behavior.
- 2 Identify the point of view from which the story is being told. In a first-person narrative, the narrator is a character in the story and uses the pronouns *I* and *me*. In a third-person narrative, the narrator is outside the story and uses the pronouns *he*, *she*, and *they*.
- 3 Try to visualize the setting as you read, filling in details as they are presented. In this passage, we see a young girl living on a farm. It is dry country, miles from water and covered with "thick dust."
- 4 Remember that a word can have several different meanings or subtle shades of meaning. The word *flung*, for example, expresses an attitude that a more neutral word could not convey.
- 5 Some test questions will ask you to interpret a figure of speech or an image. Try to understand why the author chose a particular image and what effect it achieves. The images in lines 38–40 capture the warmth and sweetness of the fresh plums.

**Answers:** 1. (A), 2. (C), 3. (D), 4. (A), 5. (E)

1. The dialogue between the girl and her mother in lines 4–10 helps to
  - (A) reveal their personalities and suggest the conflict
  - (B) foreshadow the Slumps’ reaction to the girl
  - (C) create sympathy for the girl
  - (D) criticize the mother’s bossiness
  - (E) portray the Slumps in a negative light
2. The description in lines 11–14 suggests that Mr. Slump is
  - (A) overbearing to people and cruel to animals
  - (B) compassionate and well-disposed toward the girl
  - (C) determined to avoid contact with the girl
  - (D) picky and compulsively punctual
  - (E) intimidated by the girl’s mother
3. Later in the passage, readers learn that the “secret rite” referred to in lines 22–24 involves the girl’s
  - (A) thanking Clubby Slump for the plums
  - (B) vowing to keep a secret from her mother
  - (C) planting a plum seed beside the road
  - (D) eating a plum before she gets home
  - (E) getting revenge on Mr. Slump
4. The mother’s use of the word *flung* in line 31 conveys an attitude of
  - (A) disgust
  - (B) indifference
  - (C) joy
  - (D) determination
  - (E) graciousness
5. The simile “strange on my tongue as wild honey” suggests that the girl found the plums to be **5**
  - (A) overly sweet
  - (B) unpleasantly unfamiliar
  - (C) hard to swallow
  - (D) dangerously forbidden
  - (E) deliciously exotic

The critical reading section may feature sentence completion questions that test your knowledge of vocabulary. They may also measure your ability to figure out how different parts of a sentence logically fit together.

**Directions:** Choose the word or set of words that, when inserted, best fits the meaning of the complete sentence.

1. In human relationships, making \_\_\_\_\_ about people's motivations often \_\_\_\_\_ misunderstandings and conflicts. **1**
  - (A) pronouncements . . diffuses
  - (B) assumptions . . creates
  - (C) jokes . . symbolizes
  - (D) comments . . contemplates **2**
  - (E) judgments . . explains
2. James Joyce \_\_\_\_\_ the traditional narrative structure of the novel by focusing on the stream of consciousness in the characters' minds rather than on the action in the \_\_\_\_\_ world. **3**
  - (A) debunked . . imaginary
  - (B) perpetuated . . multidimensional
  - (C) internalized . . unconscious
  - (D) redefined . . external
  - (E) explicated . . literary
3. The physical fit and similarities among fossils and rocks in widely separated land masses provided support for Alfred Wegener's theory of \_\_\_\_\_ drift. **4**
  - (A) continental
  - (B) galactic
  - (C) atmospheric
  - (D) oceanic
  - (E) ecological
4. Because the comatose patient was \_\_\_\_\_ to stimuli, the trauma physician ordered a complete panel of \_\_\_\_\_ and brain imaging studies. **5**
  - (A) averse . . psychological
  - (B) overexposed . . personality
  - (C) unresponsive . . neurological **6**
  - (D) disinclined . . linguistic
  - (E) amenable . . computational

## Tips: Sentence Completion

- 1** When you are completing sentences with two words missing, think about which pair of suggested words fits both blanks.
- 2** If one word in the answer choice is wrong, eliminate that choice from consideration. In sentence 1, *comments* makes sense, but *contemplates* does not.
- 3** Look for key words or phrases that link the ideas in a sentence. The word *by* in sentence 2 introduces a phrase that explains how something was done—in this case, the way in which Joyce rejected traditional structure.
- 4** If you don't know a word's meaning, look for context clues in the sentence. In sentence 3, for example, ask yourself: What sort of theory would deal with land masses?
- 5** Identify relationships between ideas. In sentence 4, there is a cause-and-effect relationship, which is signaled by the word *because*.
- 6** A prefix can help unlock the meaning of a word. The Greek prefix *neuro-* means "nerve." In this sentence, the doctor is concerned with the patient's neurological, or nervous, system.

**Answers:** 1. (B), 2. (D), 3. (A), 4. (C)



### 3 Writing

The writing section of standardized tests measures your ability to express ideas clearly and correctly. You will be asked to identify errors in grammar and usage and to improve sentences and paragraphs.

**Directions:** The following sentence contains either a single error or no error. If it does contain an error, select the underlined part that must be changed to make the sentence correct. If the sentence is correct as written, select answer choice (E).

1. Conscientious people realize that some of the responsibility for carbon dioxide emissions rest with their personal consumption of energy. No error
- (A) 3 (B) 2 (C) (D) (E) 1

**Directions:** Determine if the underlined part of the following sentence needs improvement. If it does, select the best change presented. If the original phrasing is best, select answer (A).

2. Volunteering is a rewarding way of giving back to the community and to develop your own skills.
- (A) also develop 4  
(B) a way to develop  
(C) development of  
(D) of developing 5  
(E) developed

**Directions:** Following is an early draft of an essay. Read it and answer the question.

#### The Grand Canyon: A Historical Lens

- (1) The Grand Canyon offers a dramatic snapshot of natural history.  
(2) Caves in the cliffs hide many unique artifacts. (3) Archaeological evidence shows that hunter-gatherers inhabited the canyon for about 8,000 years.  
(4) The nomadic lifestyle of the region began to disappear around 1000 B.C.  
(5) At that time, villages appeared and introduced agriculture.

3. Which of the following sentences best combines sentences 4 and 5? 6
- (A) The nomadic lifestyle of the region began to disappear around 1000 B.C., villages appeared and introduced agriculture.  
(B) The nomadic lifestyle of the region began to disappear around 1000 B.C., as villages appeared and introduced agriculture.  
(C) The nomadic lifestyle of the region began to disappear around 1000 B.C., being a time when agriculture was introduced and villages appeared.  
(D) The nomadic lifestyle of the region began to disappear around 1000 B.C., causing villages to appear, which introduced agriculture.  
(E) The nomadic lifestyle of the region began to disappear around 1000 B.C., introducing villages and agriculture.

### Tips: Grammar and Style

- 1 Read the entire sentence or passage to grasp its overall meaning. Pay particular attention to any underlined portions.
- 2 Watch for subject-verb agreement when using an indefinite pronoun like *some*. If the word it refers to in the sentence is singular, the verb must also be singular; if the referent is plural, the verb must be plural.
- 3 Use suffixes to uncover word meanings. Knowing that the suffix *-ous* means “full of” helps unlock the meaning of *conscientious*—“full of conscience.”
- 4 Read through all of the choices before deciding which revision is best. In this case, answer (A) is *not* correct, because it would create a sentence that did not have parallel structure.
- 5 Be sure that words or phrases that serve similar grammatical functions in a sentence have parallel structures. In this case, gerund phrases should be used consistently.
- 6 When combining sentences, think about how the ideas are related. Subordinating conjunctions such as *when*, *while*, and *before* express a relationship of time. Conjunctions that show the manner in which something occurs include *as* and *as if*.

**Answers:** 1. (C), 2. (D), 3. (B)

## 4 Essay

To determine how well you can develop and express ideas, many tests ask you to write an essay in response to an assignment, or prompt. The essay will represent a first draft and be scored based on the following criteria:

- **Focus** Establish a point of view in the opening paragraph.
- **Organization** Maintain a logical progression of ideas.
- **Support for Ideas** Use details and examples to develop an argument.
- **Style/Word Choice** Use words accurately and vary your sentences.
- **Grammar** Use Standard English and proofread for errors.

Think carefully about the issue presented in this quotation and the assignment below.

One of a community's most important assets is its land. There has been ongoing tension in many communities between those who favor using land for residential and commercial development and those who support preservation of natural habitats.

**Assignment:** If your community had proposed building a hospital on a tract of open prairie, would you support the project? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your opinion on this issue. Support your opinion with specific examples and reasons drawn from your reading and experience.

### SAMPLE ESSAY

If my community proposed building a hospital on an expanse of prairie, I definitely would not support it. 1

I know that community hospitals are important and that saving human lives should be a priority in civilized societies. The fact is, though, that a hospital can be built anywhere. 2 There are also other ways of providing health care to community residents, including clinics and advanced transportation by ambulance and helicopter to fully equipped facilities.

A prairie, on the other hand, is a delicate ecosystem that evolved naturally and can never be replaced. 3 There would be no options available to the flora and fauna that have adapted to life in that specific habitat if we destroyed it. In demolishing a prairie, we would be dooming unique species of living things to extinction.

As human beings, we wield an enormous amount of power. The mere fact that we can propose drastically changing our environment is an indication of that influence. But with power comes responsibility. It is essential that we transcend our individual points of view and consider the global impact of our actions.

We have an obligation to look out for the well-being not only of other human beings, but also of all the living things in our world. Building a hospital on our vanishing prairie is not the way to meet that obligation. 4

## Tips: Writing an Essay

The SAT allows only 25 minutes for you to write an essay. Before you begin writing, take a few minutes to jot down the main points you want to make. Allow time to reread and proofread your essay before you hand it in.

- 1 When you're writing a persuasive essay, state your point of view in the introduction. Be sure to keep your purpose in mind as you write.
- 2 Take the opposing point of view into consideration and respond to it.
- 3 Include concrete examples in the body of your essay to clarify your points and strengthen your arguments.
- 4 Make sure your essay has a conclusion, even if it is just a single sentence. A conclusion pulls your ideas together and lets the reader know that you have finished.
- 5 There will not be time to recopy your essay, so if you have to make a correction, do so neatly and legibly.
- 6 You don't have to write a long essay. Length is less important than clarity of thought and correctness of expression. Your essay could range from 200 to 400 words.