

PARAGRAPH COMPREHENSION REVIEW

Reading comprehension, the ability to read and understand written or printed material, is an important verbal skill. The reading material may be in the form of several paragraphs, a single paragraph, or a single sentence. This section includes reading selections that are samples of the type of material that you would be required to read, whether at school, in training, or on the job.

Before you try the following samples, note the eight general suggestions for answering reading comprehension questions. Keep these in mind as you take the sample test batteries in this book as well as on your ASVAB test day.

1. Scan the passage to get the general intent of the reading selection.
2. Reread the passage carefully to understand the main idea and any related ideas.
3. Read each question carefully. Be careful to base your answer on what is stated, implied, or inferred in the reading passage. Do not be influenced by your opinions, personal feelings, or any other information not expressed or implied in the passage.
4. Options that are partly true and partly false are incorrect.
5. Look for such words as *least*, *greatest*, *first*, *not*, etc., appearing in the comprehension question.
6. Be suspicious of options containing words such as *all*, *always*, *every*, *forever*, *never*, *none*, *wholly*, etc.
7. Be sure to consider all options given for the question before selecting your answer.
8. Speed is an important consideration in answering reading comprehension questions. Try to proceed as rapidly as you can without sacrificing careful thinking or reasoning.

When answering Paragraph Comprehension questions, refer back to the paragraph *as often as necessary*. Questions may focus on a particular sentence or phrase within the paragraph. You should refer back to make sure you answer the question correctly instead of trying to answer from memory. Keep in mind that wrong answer choices could be *subtly* wrong. With careful review of the paragraph and the details in the answer choices, it becomes clear which answers are correct and which ones aren't.

Here are samples of the four main types of paragraph comprehension questions you may find on the ASVAB Paragraph Comprehension section of your test. Each type of question is explained, a sample is given, and an explanation of the correct answer is given in detail. After these samples are practice questions to try on your own.

The four main types of questions are:

Type 1. Finding specific information or directly stated details contained in the reading passage:

This is a common type of item found in paragraph comprehension tests. It requires the ability to pick out specific facts provided in a passage or, sometimes, the ability to pick out the fact that is not mentioned in a particular passage.

Sample:

There are many signs by which people predict the weather. Some of these have a true basis but many do not. There is, for example, no evidence that it is more likely to storm during one phase of the moon than during another. If it happens to rain on Easter, there is no reason to think that it will rain for the next seven Sundays. The groundhog may or may not see his shadow on Groundhog Day, but it probably won't affect the weather anyway.

1. Which of the following is *NOT* mentioned as a sign of weather phenomenon?
 - 1-A Rain on Easter
 - 1-B The phases of the moon
 - 1-C Pain in a person's joints
 - 1-D The groundhog's shadow

The correct answer is choice C. The other choices were mentioned in the passage.

Below are some typical "detail" questions:

- The first toll road in the United States was completed in _____.
- Helping to prevent accidents is the responsibility of _____.
- The principal reason for issuing traffic summonses is to _____.
- The side margins of a typewritten letter are most pleasing when _____.
- The reason for maintaining ongoing safety education is that _____.
- It would be desirable when planning a departmental reorganization to _____.

Type 2. Recognizing the main idea or concept expressed in the passage:

Although questions of this type may be phrased differently, they generally require the ability to summarize the principal purpose or idea expressed in the reading passage. These questions require the ability to analyze and interpret as well as to read and understand the material presented.

Sample:

Specific types of lighting are required at first-class airports by the Department of Commerce. To identify an airport, there must be a beacon of light of not less than 100,000 candlepower, with a beam that properly distributes light up in the air so that it can be seen all around the horizon from an altitude of from 500 to 2,000 feet. All flashing beacons must have a definite Morse code characteristic to aid in identification. Colored lights are required to indicate where the safe area for landing ends, red lights being used where landing is particularly dangerous.

2. The best title for this selection is
- 2-A “Landing Areas.”
 - 2-B “Colored Lights at Airports.”
 - 2-C “Identification of Airports.”
 - 2-D “Airport Lighting Requirements.”

The correct answer is choice D because every sentence in the paragraph describes a lighting requirement for airports. The other choices are each mentioned in only one of the four sentences.

Below are other typical “main idea” questions:

- This paragraph is mainly about _____.
- The passage best supports the statement that _____.
- The passage means most nearly that _____.
- One may conclude from the above statement that _____.

Type 3. Determining the meaning of certain words as used in context:

The particular meaning of a word as actually used in the passage requires an understanding of the central or main theme of the reading passage, as well as the thought being conveyed by the sentence containing the word in question.

Sample:

The maritime and fishing industries find perhaps 250 applications for rope and cordage. There are hundreds of different sizes, constructions, tensile strengths, and weights in rope and twine. Rope is sold by the pound but ordered by length and is measured by circumference rather than by diameter.

3. In this context, the word “application” means
- 3-A use.
 - 3-B description.
 - 3-C size.
 - 3-D types.

The correct answer is choice A, “use.” Try it in the sentence in place of the word “application”; “use” makes sense in that context and keeps the meaning of the sentence intact.

Type 4. Finding implications or drawing inferences from a stated idea:

This type of item requires the ability to understand the stated idea and then to reason by logical thinking to the implied or inferred idea. *Implied* means not exactly stated but merely suggested; *inferred* means derived by reasoning. Although these terms are somewhat similar in meaning, *inferred* implies being further removed from the stated idea. Much greater reasoning ability is required to arrive at the proper inference. Because the answer to an inference question will not be found in the passage, it is the most difficult type of comprehension question to answer.

Sample:

The facts, as we see them, on drug use and the dangerous behaviors caused by drugs are that some people do get into trouble while using drugs, and some of those drug users are dangerous to others. Sometimes a drug is a necessary element in order for a person to commit a crime, although it may not be the cause of his or her criminality. On the other hand, the use of a drug sometimes seems to be the only convenient excuse by means of which the observer can account for the undesirable behavior.

4. The author apparently feels that
- 4-A the use of drugs always results in crime.
 - 4-B drugs and crime are only sometimes related.
 - 4-C drug use does not always cause crime.
 - 4-D drugs are usually an element in accidents and suicides.

The author states that drugs are sometimes a necessary element in a crime but at other times are just an excuse for criminal behavior. Therefore, choice B is the correct answer.

Other typical “implication” or “inference” questions include any of the following:

- Which of the following is implied by the above passage? _____.
- Of the following, the most valid implication of the above paragraph is _____.
- The author probably believes that _____.
- It can be inferred from the above passage that _____.
- The best of the following inferences that can be made is that _____.

Now try the sample Paragraph Comprehension questions that follow. Detailed explanations of the answers are given immediately after each question to help you understand the logic of the answers. Once you feel comfortable with these, continue on to try the next set of sample questions on your own.

1. Investigations show that activation analysis of wipings taken from a suspect’s hands will reveal not only whether he or she has fired a gun recently but also the type of ammunition used, the number of bullets fired, and the hand in which the gun was held.

Activation analysis of wipings taken from the hands of a person suspected of firing a gun CANNOT be used to reveal the

- 1-A exact time the gun was fired.
- 1-B hand in which the gun was fired.
- 1-C number of bullets fired.
- 1-D type of ammunition used.

The paragraph states that activation analysis can be used to reveal choices B, C, and D. Although activation analysis can reveal whether the suspect fired a gun recently, it *cannot* ascertain the exact time the gun was fired; therefore, choice A is correct.

The ability of activation analysis to detect and identify very tiny amounts of certain elements has come to the aid of law-enforcement officers in a variety of ways. Hair even hundreds of years old can be analyzed successfully for arsenic and other residues.

2. English scientists recently found an unusual amount of arsenic in a relic of hair from Napoleon's head. The suspicion now is that he was slowly poisoned to death.

The case of King Eric XIV of Sweden is similar. When the king's body was exhumed recently, activation analysis showed that his body contained traces of poisonous arsenic.

Both King Eric XIV of Sweden and Napoleon could have been

- 2-A killed by gunshot.
- 2-B killed in military combat.
- 2-C poisoned by arsenic.
- 2-D poisoned by lead.

For this question, the possibility of poisoning by arsenic is indicated in paragraphs 2 and 3 for both Napoleon and King Eric XIV. There is nothing in the reading passage suggesting that their deaths were due to gunshot or occurred in military combat; nor is there any reference to poisoning by lead. Choice C is the only correct answer.

3. In spite of the fact that the latitude of Scandinavia corresponds to that of Alaska and Siberia, the climate is surprisingly mild. Even in winter, the temperatures in Scandinavia are often higher than those of Central Europe and sometimes even Southern Europe. The average temperature is higher in Scandinavia than for other places on the same latitude, thanks to the Gulf Stream that washes the Scandinavian Atlantic coastline.

According to the quotation above, it may be concluded that the latitude of Scandinavia is

- 3-A higher than that of Alaska.
- 3-B lower than that of Siberia.
- 3-C higher than that of Southern Europe.
- 3-D lower than that of Central Europe.

Nothing in the passage suggests that the latitude is either higher or lower than that of Alaska or Siberia; nor is there any indication that it is lower than that of Central Europe. The implication is that it is higher than that of Southern Europe. Choice C is the correct answer.

Answer the next two questions on the basis of the following passage.

4. It is important for every office to have proper lighting. Inadequate lighting is a common cause of fatigue and tends to create a dreary atmosphere in the office. Appropriate light intensity is essential for proper lighting. It is generally recommended that for "casual seeing" tasks, such as in reception rooms or inactive file rooms, the amount of lighting be 30-foot candles. For "ordinary seeing" tasks, such as reading or for work in active file rooms and mail rooms, the recommended lighting is 100-foot candles. For "very difficult seeing" tasks, such as transcribing, accounting, and business machine use, the recommended lighting is 150-foot candles.

For copying figures onto a payroll, the recommended lighting is

- 4-A less than 30-foot candles.
- 4-B 30-foot candles.
- 4-C 100-foot candles.
- 4-D 150-foot candles.

For this question, it is necessary to determine the proper lighting task for copying figures onto a payroll. This activity requires much more light than either “casual seeing” or “ordinary seeing.” As it is a “very difficult seeing” task, choice D is the correct answer.

5. It can be inferred from the passage above that a well-coordinated lighting scheme is likely to result in
- 5-A greater employee productivity.
 - 5-B lower lighting costs.
 - 5-C more use of natural light.
 - 5-D windowless offices.

In this question, there is no mention of lighting costs or the need for windowless offices in the reading passage. Nor is there any suggestion for greater use of natural light. Choices B, C, and D are therefore eliminated. If inadequate lighting is a common cause of fatigue, one can *infer* that proper lighting would eliminate this fatigue element and should result in greater employee productivity. Choice A is the correct answer.

Sample Questions

1. In the relations of man to nature, the procuring of food and shelter is fundamental. With the migration of man to various climates, ever-new adjustments to the food supply and to the climate became necessary.

According to the passage, the means by which man supplies his material needs are

- 1-A accidental.
 - 1-B inadequate.
 - 1-C limited.
 - 1-D varied.
2. From a building designer’s standpoint, three things that make a home livable are the needs of the client, the building site, and the amount of money the client has to spend.

According to the passage, to make a home livable,

- 2-A it can be built on any piece of land.
 - 2-B the design must fit the designer’s income.
 - 2-C the design must fit the owner’s income and site.
 - 2-D the prospective piece of land makes little difference.
3. Twenty-five percent of all household burglaries can be attributed to unlocked windows or doors. Crime is the result of opportunity plus desire. To prevent crime, it is each individual’s responsibility to
- 3-A provide the desire.
 - 3-B provide the opportunity.
 - 3-C prevent the desire.
 - 3-D prevent the opportunity.

4. In certain areas, water is so scarce that every attempt is made to conserve it. For instance, on one oasis in the Sahara Desert, the amount of water necessary for each date palm has been carefully determined.

How much water is each tree given?

- 4-A No water at all
- 4-B Water on alternate days
- 4-C Exactly the amount required
- 4-D Water only if it is healthy

Answers and Explanations

- 1-D** The author talks about “adjustments” to the food supply and climate. Of the available choices, the only word related to adjustment is “varied.”
- 2-C** The author mentions three necessary items; the needs of the clients, the building site, and amount of money available. Choice C is the only answer that contains any of these items.
- 3-D** Choices A and B can be immediately eliminated, and since individuals cannot control the desires of burglars, choice D is the only logical answer.
- 4-C** The only conclusion that can be drawn from information given is contained in choice C. The author talks about “...the amount of water necessary...” This is the key to the correct answer.