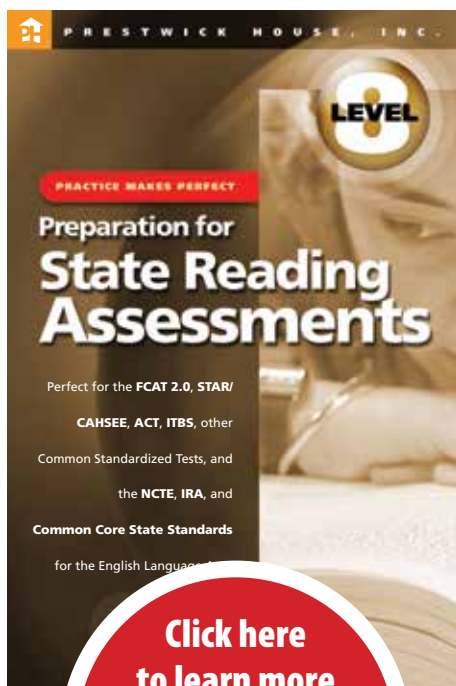




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Preparation for State Reading Assessments

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State Reading Assessments

Introduction to the Student

LEVEL

How to Take a Reading Comprehension Test

Taking a reading comprehension test does not have to be a stressful event. The following tips and methods can be used to make your test-taking efforts more effective and your results more accurate.

FOCUS:

When you read a comprehension passage, you should try to identify the following:

- main idea
- author's attitude or tone
- author's purpose

Many comprehension questions focus on your ability to determine what the author is trying to say and why he or she is saying it. Think about whether the author is biased: Does he or she support, criticize, or remain objective about the subject? What clues show the writer's attitude?

While you read, you should imagine yourself as the test writer.

- Which pieces of information do you think are important?
- Is the passage about a person or a group of people?
- What is that person's or group's message to the world?
- What questions would you write about the passage?

When you come across a point that stands out, make a mental note of it. Ask yourself why the author included it. Information that seems to have a special purpose often shows up in the questions.

TIPS:

In order to determine an author's attitude toward the subject, look for emotionally charged words, such as *tragically*, *sadly*, *unfortunately*, *surprisingly*, *amazingly*, *justly*, etc. These words indicate an author's bias—whether the author sides with or against the subject of the passage. Simple words tell you a lot about the author's feelings.

Frequently, you are asked to identify the main idea of a passage. These types of questions do not always use the words *main idea*. They may ask for the most appropriate title or the statement with which the author would most likely agree or disagree. Pick the answer that is true for the entire passage. If no choice relates to the entire selection, choose the answer that is supported by most of the passage.

You will also encounter questions that ask you to define a word or find the most appropriate synonym. These questions check your ability to use context clues, not your vocabulary knowledge. Sometimes, you will find more than one seemingly correct answer, but when you look at the word as it is used in the paragraph, you can choose the best synonym for the situation.

Some questions are open-ended and require you to write an answer. You must write two to four complete sentences to answer these types of questions. The person who scores your answer will look for you to explain yourself, so be sure to support your opinion with details from the passage.

Finally, when it comes to taking timed tests, many people feel pressured to race through the work so that they complete all of it. Remember, though, that careful reading cannot be rushed. So, what can you do? When you cannot decide the answer to a question, skip it and come back to it after you have answered the rest of the questions for that passage. You may even find the answer when you are working on other questions. If you still cannot answer it, make your best guess and move on, rather than spend too much time trying to figure out one question, leaving yourself insufficient time to answer the rest accurately.

Some people suggest reading the questions before you read the passage so that you know what information you need. If this works for you, that is terrific! For many people, however, this uses valuable time and results in too much information to remember. This breaks their concentration, and they cannot focus on what they read. If you cannot focus on both the questions and the reading at one time, read the passage first, concentrating on what you read. If you need to look back at the passage to answer the questions, go ahead and do so. The point to be made here is that you should work in a manner that is comfortable for you. When you find a technique that works for you, use it!

REMEMBER THESE THREE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT POINTS:

1. Read the directions and questions carefully!

Look for tricky words, such as *not*, *always*, *true*, *opposite*, etc. These words greatly affect the answer to the question.

2. If you cannot remember what you just read, read it again, and pay attention to it!

3. Always read all the answer choices!

You may choose the wrong answer and miss the correct one entirely if you stop reading once you think you have found the answer. There may be a better choice further down the list, and you will miss it if you do not read it.

Model Passage

The following model passage demonstrates effective use of the reading tips and strategies. You will see that there are underlined words and phrases in the passage and notes in the margins. The notes in the margins refer to the underlined portions of the passage and serve as examples of the way you should think about the passage. These notes include questions you should ask yourself or comments you should make to yourself as you read.

The Railroads Connect

¹This passage will be about the disorder of the “Wedding of the Rails” celebration.

On May 10, 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad was finally connected after years of hard work and confusion, but the celebration of the “Wedding of the Rails” was plagued by disorder and misunderstanding.¹

²What are the funny errors?

Of course, the real story is a comedy of errors.² First,³ the actual location of the event was Promontory Summit, Utah, but since this was not on the map, the press reported that it occurred at Promontory Point; therefore, postcards, souvenirs, and even textbooks to this day bear the name of the incorrect location. Second, on May 4, 1869,⁴ the president of the Central Pacific Railroad, Leland Stanford, revealed to his friend, David Hewes, that no commemorative item had been made for the event. Upset by this fact, Hewes attempted to have a solid gold spike made, but after failing to find someone to finance it, he had \$400 worth of his own gold

³The points are organized. The word *first* tells me to look for *second*, etc. Look for *next* and *finally*.

melted and cast⁵ as the “Golden Spike,” which was then engraved⁶ for the occasion. Three other spikes were also made for the event. The next problem arose when the event had to be postponed because disgruntled⁶ workers and poor weather conditions delayed the arrival of officials from the Union Pacific Railroad. Finally, on May 10, 1869, the officials from both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroads convened for the celebration. A special laurelwood railroad tie was laid in place at the junction, and the specially made spikes were dropped into pre-drilled holes. Not one of them was actually hammered into place.⁷ Then, the laurelwood tie and spikes were replaced with a standard tie and regular iron spikes. The last spike and the hammer were connected to the telegraph line so that the entire nation could hear⁸ the

⁴Wow, that is only six days before the ceremony.

⁵Wow, \$400 of his own gold! Why? What kind of question could the test ask about this?

⁶I should look at the context of these boldfaced words. What do they mean?

⁷Those spikes were just dropped in the holes!

⁸This was a huge event if the telegraph was going to relay the sound.

⁹The name of the event is mentioned again. This must be important.

¹⁰That is funny—after all of the problems, the important people who were supposed to hammer the spike could not do it.

¹¹That is funny, too. I cannot believe no one showed up. It seems as if no one cared.

“Wedding of the Rails.”⁹ The sound of the hammer hitting the spike would then travel across the country through the telegraph line. Leland Stanford was given the first swing, but he missed¹⁰ the spike and hit the wooden tie. Thomas Durant, vice president of the Union Pacific Railroad, swung at the spike, but missed entirely. In the end, a railroad employee hammered in the final tie,¹⁰ and the telegraph operator sent the message to the country: “D-O-N-E.”

Not so surprisingly, when the fiftieth anniversary celebration was scheduled, not one person showed up.¹¹ Maybe they all went to Promontory Point.

1. Which of the following best states the author’s purpose?

- A. to make fun of the Transcontinental Railroad
- B. to make an accurate portrayal of an important event in railroad history
- C. to explain the importance of the Golden Spike
- D. to describe how history books sometimes contain incorrect information

(B) *The author accurately describes the confusion and mishaps surrounding the “Wedding of the Rails” celebration. All other answer choices are merely supporting points in the passage.*

2. Which of the following would be the best title for this passage?

- A. The Golden Spike Disaster
- B. Where the Railroads Meet
- C. Leland Stanford’s Spike
- D. The Wedding of the Rails

(D) *The passage is about the entire “Wedding of the Rails” ceremony. After all, the ceremony’s title is mentioned twice in the passage, making it significant information and appropriate for the title. Although the event was riddled with errors, it would not be considered a disaster. Finally, the passage does not focus solely on Leland Stanford’s spike or where the event occurred.*

3. Which of the following did not contribute to the confusion on May 10, 1869?

- A. the telegraph operator
- B. poor weather conditions
- C. last-minute planning
- D. uncertainty about the location

(A) *The telegraph operator did not make any errors. The poor weather postponed officials, last-minute planning required a friend to donate his own gold for the commemorative spike, and uncertainty about the location led to incorrect information.*

4. As used in the passage, the word *engraved* most nearly means

- A. molded.
- B. decorated.
- C. transported.
- D. purchased.

(B) *If the spike was engraved for the occasion, it must have been decorated to show its commemorative purpose. Molded is not the answer because the passage already stated that the gold was melted and cast. Although the spike would have to be transported, the context is discussing the making of the spike, not the shipping of the spike. Finally, the gold was already purchased, since it belonged to Hewes.*

5. Based on the information provided in the passage, what can you infer is the reason for David Hewes's melting his own gold to make the spike?

- A. He was angry that no one would help him.
- B. He wanted to become famous for his contribution to the Transcontinental Railroad.
- C. He could find no one willing to pay for or donate the gold.
- D. He had more gold than he needed, so he was willing to give some away.

(C) *Hewes tried to find someone to finance a rail but was unsuccessful. Had he found someone willing to pay or donate at least something, then he would not have had to use his own resources. Since he looked for someone to finance a golden rail instead of financing it himself, we can infer that he did not have an overabundance of gold. There are no clues to imply he was searching for fame. Finally, the passage states that he was upset that there was no item made to commemorate the event, but no mention was made of his being angry at finding no one willing to help.*

6. Answer the following question using complete sentences:**Why does the author call the "Wedding of the Rails" a "comedy of errors"?**

The event is humorous because it was a major celebration of the uniting of the country's rails, which was a massive undertaking, and almost everything that could go wrong did. Railroad officials arrived late because their workers were unhappy, the commemorative spike was not even hammered in, and a railroad employee, not any of the officials who organized the celebration, completed the actual connection of the rails. As a final taunt, no one showed up for the fiftieth anniversary celebration.

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage and answer the questions that follow it.

The Origins of Uncle Sam

SOME PEOPLE CLAIM that the original Uncle Sam, the now-famous image appearing on posters proclaiming, “I want YOU for U.S. Army!” was Sam Wilson, a meat packer in Troy, New York. Wilson supplied the U.S. military with meat during the War of 1812. Since shipments were marked “U.S.,” the soldiers joked that the meat was from “Uncle Sam.” Soon, Wilson’s employees heard the joke and spread it through the company. In this way, the initials U.S. gave way to Uncle Sam as the personified version of the United States government. While many people accept this version as the origin of Uncle Sam, others refute the claim. After all, this story was not printed until many years after the event, and the passage of time allows for misinterpretations and flawed memories. The United States Congress, however, did give Sam Wilson the credit for Uncle Sam in 1961, when they issued this resolution: “Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives

concurring) that the Congress salutes ‘Uncle Sam’ Wilson of Troy, New York, as the **progenitor** of America’s National symbol of ‘Uncle Sam.’ ”

Thomas Nast, a political cartoonist,

created Uncle Sam’s image. Sam is often depicted as an elderly man who wears a top hat, which features stars and stripes, a coat (with the colors red, white, and blue), and striped pants. Early references to Uncle Sam appeared in newspapers that were opposed to the War of 1812. It is possible that



Uncle Sam’s image was used by people as a way to criticize the government. By creating a person, they would have someone to mock and receive their anger. The most famous version of Uncle Sam, the one on the Army recruiting posters from WWI, was created by James Montgomery Flagg. Today, Uncle Sam is seen as an honorable figure and is often treated with respect when portrayed in the U.S. He is also used in political and patriotic campaigns, such as those asking citizens to join the military. ●

Q U E S T I O N S

- 1. Which one of the following best states the author's purpose?**
 - A. to discuss the influence Uncle Sam had during the War of 1812
 - B. to explain why Uncle Sam is a well-known world symbol
 - C. to show how Uncle Sam became a popular figure
 - D. to describe the career of Sam Wilson

 - 2. How has the image of Uncle Sam changed over the years?**
 - A. Uncle Sam's image had been used honorably, but now, the image is used in political cartoons to criticize the government.
 - B. Uncle Sam's image had been used in political cartoons to criticize the government, but now, the image is used honorably.
 - C. Uncle Sam's image was originally the picture of Uncle Sam Wilson, the meat packer, but the picture has changed over the years.
 - D. Uncle Sam's image is used today the same way it was used two hundred years ago.

 - 3. Which of the following best describes the reason for the first paragraph?**
 - A. It describes New York's role during the War of 1812.
 - B. It describes the original portrayal of Uncle Sam.
 - C. It describes Sam Wilson's possible role as Uncle Sam.
 - D. It mentions how Congress identified Uncle Sam.

 - 4. As used in the passage, the word *progenitor* most nearly means**
 - A. originator.
 - B. caricature.
 - C. ancestor.
 - D. cartoonist.

 - 5. According to the passage, which statement is true?**
 - A. Sam Wilson was in the military during the War of 1812.
 - B. The Congress has yet to recognize the origin of Uncle Sam officially.
 - C. Uncle Sam is used only as a symbol to criticize the government.
 - D. Uncle Sam is often depicted with a top hat.

 - 6. Answer the following question using complete sentences:**

The author states that Uncle Sam is treated with respect when used by Americans today. How might enemy countries use the figure of Uncle Sam?
-