General Information

The Reading section of the ACT test compels you to rely on the text given and use your own powers of **deduction** and **reasoning** to determine the answers to questions. Though questions may differ, the most common type of question provides you with a text or paragraph that must be analyzed through a series of questions, checking for **reading comprehension**, **information retention**, and basic **knowledge of terms related to literature and reading**. One part contains two shorter passages to which the questions refer.

The entire Reading test consists of **36 multiple-choice questions** to be answered in **40 minutes**. Each item is related in some way to the process of reading or reading comprehension. When taking the test, it is best to first read the questions assigned to the passage, followed by the passage. This way, you can determine key points in the passage and save time searching for answers.

Your score on the ACT Reading test will include a **total score**, plus a **subscore in each of these three areas**. The percentage shown indicates the approximate portion of the Reading questions that will be used to arrive at each subscore. Note that the numbers do *not* add up to 100% because some questions are used to arrive at more than one subscore.

- **Key Ideas and Details** (44 to 52%): You will need to be able to summarize **themes**, analyze **relationships**, and make **inferences** as a result of your reading.

- **Craft and Structure** (26 to 33%): This score is derived from your success in understanding things like the **author's purpose**, **point of view**, and the reason for the author's use of **structure and choice of words**.

- **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** (19 to 26%): Differentiating between **fact and opinion**, **analyzing evidence** given, and **combining evidence** from various sources are some of the skills needed to achieve a good score on this sub-area of Reading.

Note: The 2025 ACT enhancements resulted in the length reduction of some passages in the Reading section.

Types of Reading Material to Practice

Be sure to practice reading and understanding material in all of them.

Social Studies: The social studies portion will take information from *anthropology*, *archaeology*, *biography*, *business*, *economics*, *education*, *geography*, *history*, *political science*, *psychology*, and *sociology*. Although you do not need to be proficient in each of these areas, you should have an idea of what each area covers and involves, to be better able to answer questions in these fields.

Natural Sciences: Natural sciences include *anatomy*, *astronomy*, *biology*, *botany*, *chemistry*, *ecology*, *geology*, *medicine*, *meteorology*, *microbiology*, *natural history*, *physiology*, *physics*, *technology*, and *zoology*. These questions may require you to read and synthesize unfamiliar information. A basic understanding of what each category might involve can help in answering related questions.

Literary Narrative or Prose Fiction: Questions in this category involve passages taken from *short stories*, *novels*, *memoirs*, and *personal essays*.

Humanities: Humanities questions come from a wide variety of sources, including *architecture*, *art*, *dance*, *ethics*, *film*, *language*, *literary criticism*, *music*, *philosophy*, *radio*, *television*, and *theater*. These areas require a basic understanding of the humanities.

Key Ideas and Details

The goal when you read is to understand what you read. Being able to identify the key ideas and details in a text **helps a reader better understand the text** and boosts overall comprehension. Key ideas and details address questions like who, what, where, when, why, and how. While details may be given to the reader explicitly, it is often necessary for the reader to make logical inferences about these explicit details and draw their own conclusions based on the details or evidence provided.

Reading Carefully

Identifying **key ideas** may be able to happen with a cursory skim of a text, but close, careful reading will help the reader identify the details that **support or explain** the key ideas. It is important to read carefully so as not to overlook any important details provided by the author. It is also important to read carefully so that you can make those **logical inferences** and draw those **conclusions** accurately. Without close, careful reading, assumptions may be made that are inaccurate with regard to the text and its message.

Finding Facts and Details

Writers include facts and details to support their argument or provide evidence for their claim. Strong readers look for these facts and details as they read and interpret them as they evaluate their purpose and their importance to the **overall message** of the text. To find facts and details, **use the text features** present to help. This means looking for headings, font size,

and styles, including bolding, italicizing, or even underlining. Also, keep in mind the general **structure of writing**: the topic sentence will introduce the subject of the paragraph, and the subsequent sentences will give examples and evidence (like facts and details!) to support the main idea.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means restating words or ideas into different words. Unlike summarizing, which condenses ideas down to the most important elements, paraphrasing is **translating writing into one's own words**, restating it in more familiar terms and vocabulary. By paraphrasing the ideas you come across in a text, you are making meaning for yourself to better understand the message. It can help increase comprehension of what you are reading. In testing situations, the questions and/or answers often use paraphrased portions of the text, so being able to consider the content in different terms can help you understand what the question is asking or what the answer options really are.

Determining the Sequence of Events

Understanding the order, or sequence, that events happen in is critical to understanding a text. **Narrative texts** are usually organized with a beginning, middle, and end. **Expository texts** also sequence information in logical ways to move the reader from the beginning of the text to the end.

One thing to consider when determining the sequence of events is to look for **transitional words and phrases**. These help show the relationship between events or ideas in a text. For example, *before* indicates an action or event that precedes another; *then* indicates progression; *earlier* can be used to reference an idea already presented; *therefore* indicates a consequence or effect of an action. Transitional words and phrases, including those that show causation, importance, example, purpose, similarity, or difference, can help the reader determine the sequence of events or ideas in a text and understand how they are related to one another.

Identifying Relationships

Close reading includes being able to identify both **stated** and **implied** relationships within a text. Looking for **textual clues** that indicate cause-and-effect relationships, importance, or examples can help a reader understand the connections between ideas or events in a text. Sometimes the writer will state the relationship explicitly (*This is an example of…*), but sometimes the relationship is implied, and the reader must draw conclusions based on the evidence presented in the text about how ideas or events are related.

Cause and Effect

One type of relationship between ideas is cause and effect. In this type of relationship, a cause or event is presented, and then the effect or outcome is explained. For example, a student has an exam at 8 a.m. They elect to see the midnight showing of their favorite movie in the theater the night before and don't get to sleep until 2 a.m., then oversleep and miss the exam. The

cause, or the "why," is staying up too late, and the effect is oversleeping and missing the exam.

Comparative

In a comparative relationship, **similarities and differences** between two or more ideas or events are presented. Oftentimes, the comparison of characteristics is implicit, and the reader must draw conclusions about the relationship between the events or ideas. A compare-and-contrast organization of text makes the comparison more explicit for the reader once they determine that is the organizational structure being used.

Drawing Conclusions

Writers don't always give the reader explicit information. Often, the reader must draw conclusions from the information or evidence presented in the text and their own **personal experience**. Using **hints and clues** in the text, readers must infer a conclusion based on what is implied in the text.

Identifying the Elements of a Text

Understanding or comprehending a text is easier when you know where to look for certain types of information. Being able to identify the elements of a text can help the reader make meaning. Different types of texts may include slightly different types of elements, but some elements are pretty universal to all types of writing. **Theme**, **details**, and **main idea** are elements that are present in almost all types of texts.

Main Idea of a Paragraph

In a well-written text, each paragraph will have a main idea or focus around which the paragraph is "built." It sets the direction for the rest of the paragraph. The main idea is usually presented at the beginning of the paragraph in a **topic sentence**. The topic sentence is then supported by examples and evidence that are more fully explained and applied for the reader. Then the paragraph transitions to the next main idea and the next paragraph. The main idea may be explicitly **stated** by the author, or it may be **implied** and left for the reader to infer.

Theme or Central Idea of a Passage

The theme is the main idea of a text. It is the anchor that holds the text together and everything in the text should link back to it; **all body paragraphs should support or explain it**. Do not confuse *theme* with *topic*. The **topic** of a text is the subject it covers; the **theme** is the writer's insight or idea about the topic. For example, a text may be about healthcare (topic) but the theme might be the need for easier access to affordable healthcare for people in underserved communities (theme). Like the main idea, it may be presented **explicitly** or **implicitly**.

Key Ideas vs. Secondary Ideas

Not all ideas are created equal. When supporting or explaining the ideas of a text, writers use **key ideas**, or main ideas, as the **big points** they wish to make. These key ideas are critical to

understanding the author's overall message. **Secondary ideas**, or supporting ideas, help to give more **details** about the key ideas and are used to augment or fill in the gaps between the key ideas, to explain, to provide examples, to define, to compare, etc.

Summarizing

Summarizing, or identifying the main points of a text, aids in comprehension as the reader considers what the big ideas in the text really are. Being able to **outline** the main points and **condense** the text into its most crucial ideas is helpful in understanding what it's really about and what it's really trying to say. Sometimes readers summarize the **whole text** after reading it all the way through. Sometimes, summarizing is done **paragraph by paragraph**, especially if the text is densely packed with information or topic-specific vocabulary. Summarizing what has been read and putting it in your own words is a valuable reading comprehension strategy to make meaning.