

Advanced Principles for Multiple Choice

Reading the Multiple Choice Passages

Before anything else, know this:

- You are reading to answer questions--not for enjoyment or appreciation. Ask yourself, "do I know this well enough to answer multiple choice questions about meaning?"
- You can go back and look at the passage at any time. You should go back and look at the passage at any time.

0. Preview the questions--this is optional. Previewing the questions helps some students shape context of the passage, for others it is a waste of time. What are you? If you do, don't read answer choices. Don't try to memorize the questions. Just get a sense of what they are asking.

- 1. Skim the passage**--this should take no more than a minute. Don't confuse skimming with "fake reading" or just looking at the passage. Read the first sentences of the paragraphs or stanzas carefully, and then glance over the rest to see if it's about what you thought. Read the last sentence of the passage or line of the poem. You don't know enough to answer questions, but you probably do know who or what it's about.

Most people don't skim because it is uncomfortable, especially in a test situation where impulse says, "I've got to get this." Let the skimming be slightly uncomfortable; that means you're doing it right. Skimming, also called pre-reading, aids efficient comprehension enormously, which is exactly what you want on the AP Exam.

- 2. Read the Passage**--the second step, the step you've been waiting for, is reading--plain old fashioned reading. Just read, without fixating on details, without getting stuck or going blank. When you hit a sentence you don't understand in a book, you don't panic, do you? You don't assume: "Gosh, I might as well throw this book away...without that sentence it's just a useless collection of incomplete alphabets." When you read normally, you read for the main idea. You read to understand what is going on. When you hit a tricky sentence, you figure that you'll be able to make sense of it from what comes later, or that one missing piece of the puzzle isn't going to keep you from getting the outline of the overall picture. This is exactly how you want to read the prose sections.

Get the main Idea...try to make a ten word or less summary of the main idea after you've read.

The Questions--3 main types

In order to answer the questions efficiently, you need to be able to recognize three types of questions.

1. **General Knowledge Questions**--are those that ask about the overall passage. These are the questions that don't send you back to any specific place in the passage. This is why you read for the main idea--these questions build on the main idea.
2. **Detail Questions**--almost always send you back to a specific place in the passage. They tell you where to look and ask about what is going on at that specific place in the passage.
3. **Factual Knowledge Questions**--ask you about English language and its grammar and the basic terms of criticism (literary terms) and poetry. Factual knowledge questions sometimes (but very rarely) ask for a widely known cultural fact related to the passage.

Consistency of Answers

The main idea is your guiding rule for most questions on any passage. Choose answers that are in keeping with your main idea. When in doubt, pick the answer that squares with your main idea.

Pick answers that agree with each other. Generally this is a good strategy.

Do it your way

- If you know the main idea, do the questions in order.
- If you're uncomfortable with the main idea, answer detail and factual questions first.

The exam is difficult, but it is not impossible. A few of these tips can help you get a few more questions correct. The more comfortable with the tips you get, the more comfortable with the questions you'll get--and that is a good thing.