

Skills

Basic Comprehension

The majority of the questions in the Reading section test your basic comprehension of a passage by asking you about main ideas and details, or about the writer's purpose.

Skill 1 Factual Information

Each passage has from three to six factual information questions. There are more factual information questions per passage than any other type of question. A factual information question asks you for a specific detail or fact that is explicitly mentioned in the passage.

Examples

According to paragraph 3, which event happened first?

According to the author, what was the main cause of the Civil War?

Which of the following does the author use to describe Hopi pottery?

You can scan a passage looking for the key words to help you answer a question. Once you find a key word, read several sentences before and after the word to make sure that that part of the passage specifically answers the question.

Tip

Skimming and scanning will save you time and help direct your reading. Review skimming and scanning on pages 16–24.

Practice

Skim each paragraph. Read the question. Then scan the paragraph and answer the question.

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1.

At a national level, the first effective campaign to improve worker safety began in the 1880s among railroad workers, who pushed for the development of better brakes and coupling mechanisms for freight cars. This led to improvements that not only increased safety, but productivity as well, and thus were readily accepted by the railroad industry. In 1893, Congress passed the first federal law primarily intended to improve work safety. This was the Safety Appliance Act, which mandated the use of the new equipment.

According to the paragraph, railroad workers demanded

- (A) better wages
- (B) safer equipment
- (C) increased productivity
- (D) a new federal law

2.

In 1908, Congress adopted the Federal Employers' Liability Act, which regulated the amount of damages an employee injured in any interstate railroad accident could recover and which also considerably limited employers' defenses. The cost to the employer for a worker fatality rose from roughly \$200 to \$2,000. Only two years later, New York became the first state to enact a Workmen's Compensation Law. Rather than requiring injured workers to sue their employers and prove the employer was at fault, the law automatically compensated all injuries at predetermined rates. Samuel Gompers, the head of the American Federation of Labor, had studied a similar compensation law in Germany. The law appealed to American businesses because it made costs predictable and reduced labor issues. It appealed to unions and other industry reformers because it promised more predictable benefits. Between 1911 and 1921, forty-four states passed similar laws.

According to the paragraph, New York's Workmen's Compensation Law

- (A) applied only to railroad workers
- (B) was not acceptable to most business owners
- (C) allowed injured workers to sue their employers
- (D) determined how much injured workers would be paid

3.

The first of the ways volcanoes form is where an oceanic plate collides with a continental plate. The oceanic plate is the heavier one, and it slides under the lighter continental plate. As the oceanic plate sinks, it heats up and melts. This molten rock, or "magma", is lighter than the solid rock above it. The magma begins to rise and eventually breaks through the surface. The area where an oceanic and a continental plate collide is called a "subduction zone", and it is along this kind of boundary that the volcanoes form in the Ring of Fire in the Pacific. These volcanoes spew dark, heavy lava, the name given to magma once it reaches the surface.

According to the author, where do volcanoes form?

- (A) At the boundary of two plates
- (B) In an area where rocks are lighter
- (C) Beneath the surface of a continental plate
- (D) At a place where rocks slide into the ocean

4.

The third main way volcanoes form is by hot spots. For reasons not yet known, magma rises very close to the surface in some locations. The magma builds up under these areas until the pressure causes the crust to rise, usually from the ocean floor. Eventually, a series of volcanoes form in roughly the same spot, some lasting longer than others, until a huge mountain of land is built up. This is the process Kilauea and Mauna Loa on the Island of Hawaii are currently undergoing. Many hot spots are extremely long-lasting, some, such as the one under Hawaii, enduring for millions of years. As the Pacific plate passes over this hot spot, the old island and volcano move northwest, and eventually, enough pressure builds up and a new volcano erupts over the same hot spot but under a new piece of land. All the Hawaiian Islands were formed this way. To the northwest of the Hawaiian Islands are older islands formed at this same hot spot, islands that have weathered away and are no longer visible from the surface.

According to the paragraph, which of the following is true about hot spots?

- (A) They erupt infrequently.
- (B) They are constantly moving.
- (C) They form islands in the ocean.
- (D) They are extremely short-lived.

Skill 2 Vocabulary

Each passage has from three to five vocabulary questions. After factual information questions, there are more vocabulary questions per passage than any other type of question. A vocabulary question asks you to give a synonym for a word or a paraphrase for a phrase.

Examples

The word **climatic** in paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to
By describing bears as **omnivores**, the author means

Use the context to help you understand the meaning of the word. Be especially careful with words that can have more than one meaning. You must choose the meaning of the word in the context of the passage. The answer choices will all be the same part of speech as the highlighted vocabulary word, and the tense or number will also be the same.

Tip

Substitute the word you think is the correct answer in the sentence to see if it makes sense.

Practice

Read the question. Scan the passage and read the sentence that contains the highlighted word or phrase. Then answer the question.

1.

When O'Neill started writing plays, the American stage was dominated by farce, a few European dramas, and melodrama. Melodrama is a genre characterized by emotional characters, exciting action-filled scenes, and a moralistic tone, and O'Neill's first plays were written in this style. However, they focused on unsavory situations and characters (destitute women, derelicts, lonely sailors) that had never been considered proper subjects for the stage. O'Neill did not really feel at home with the melodramatic style of writing, which he came to see as pandering to the audience. After having experimented with this genre, O'Neill **turned his back on** its conventions and embraced the naturalism of European playwrights, such as Henrik Ibsen and Émile Zola, who strove to depict "real" life situations, complex characterization, and psychological realism.

The phrase **turned his back on** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) returned to
- (B) relied on
- (C) left behind
- (D) added to

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2.

In the latter part of O'Neill's writing career, he rejected pure expressionism and the most highly theatrical tone of his previous devices, returning to naturalism while retaining a subtler form of symbolism. During this period, he produced his most **celebrated** and fully-developed work. In particular, he honed his skills at depicting realistic, psychological close-ups of his characters.

The word **celebrated** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) famous
- (B) rewarded
- (C) enjoyable
- (D) professional

3.

In both these traditional cultures, visual art is created on the ground for ritual use; both cultures consider the artwork to have life and power; both cultures **integrate** the visual art with dance and song and stories; and both cultures destroy the images at the end of the ceremonies. Contrasting with cultures rooted in Western Europe, religion in these cultures is not separate from daily life, visual art is not separate from other arts, such as music and dance, and art is not a commodity created for consumers.

The word **integrate** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) consider
- (B) separate
- (C) value
- (D) combine

4.

The Navajos (who also refer to themselves as Diné) use sand painting in extensive rituals called “sings”. Sings are ceremonies that involve many relatives and friends and are intended to bless, protect, or heal the individual for whom they are held. Sand painting plays a central role in the ceremony, but singing and dancing are also included. A design specific to the particular ritual is painted with sand, charcoal, pollen, and clay on the ground inside the Hogan. The images portray mountains and other features of the region, the gods who created them, and legends and stories from the past. The sand painting is considered a living being: when the “patient” lies on the image, the power of the gods is absorbed, and harmony is **restored** within his or her life. When the ritual is completed, the sand and other elements are returned to the earth.

The word **restored** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) contained
- (B) returned
- (C) protected
- (D) maintained

Skill 3 Negative

Each passage has from zero to two negative questions. A negative question asks you to determine which of the answer choices is NOT true.

Tip

The words *not* and *except* are in capital letters in these questions. When you see NOT or EXCEPT, read the question carefully to make sure you understand.

Examples

According to the passage, which of the following is NOT true?

The author discusses all of the following reasons EXCEPT:

A negative question may be based on information in one paragraph, or it may be based on information in the entire passage. The correct answer to a negative question is the choice that is NOT mentioned or is NOT true.

Practice

Skim each passage. Read the question. Then read the passage and answer the question.

1.

In 1908, Congress adopted the Federal Employers' Liability Act, which regulated the amount of damages an employee injured in any interstate railroad accident could recover, and which also considerably limited employers' defenses. The cost to the employer for a worker fatality rose from roughly \$200 to \$2,000. Only two years later, New York became the first state to enact a Workmen's Compensation Law. Rather than requiring injured workers to sue their employers and prove the employer was at fault, the law automatically compensated all injuries at predetermined rates. Samuel Gompers, the head of the American Federation of Labor, had studied a similar compensation law in Germany. The law appealed to American businesses because it made costs predictable and reduced labor issues. It appealed to unions and other industry reformers because it promised more predictable benefits. Between 1911 and 1921, forty-four states passed similar laws.

According to the paragraph, all of the following are true about New York's Workmen's Compensation Law EXCEPT that:

- (A) It satisfied both business and labor leaders.
- (B) It was similar to a law already in effect in Germany.
- (C) It compensated injured workers without the need to go to court.
- (D) It was the only such law in the United States for several decades.

2.

As accident costs rose between World Wars I and II, the safety record of American industry steadily improved. Separately, changes in technology and labor markets also contributed to an increased safety record. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, job turnover was relatively low. This meant there were fewer new employees, who were the ones more likely to get hurt. The spread of electrical lighting in factories also reduced injuries. The economic boom and the entry of many new workers during World War II led to another rise in industrial injuries. However, that declined again after 1945, particularly as labor unions increasingly focused on worker safety.

According to the paragraph, which of the following is NOT true?

- (A) People changed jobs frequently during the Great Depression.
- (B) There was an increase in worker injuries during World War II.
- (C) One factor contributing to a safer workplace was increased use of electric lights.
- (D) Technological advances improved workplace safety between World Wars I and II.

3.

Our planet is made up of several layers. The thin outer layer of the surface supports life. This section of the globe, the crust, is cool enough for molten rock to harden. Processes such as weathering and erosion transform the hardened rock into dirt, which through the interaction and eventual decay of living plants and animals forms soil. The crust is also cool enough for water, originally produced from volcanic explosions, to condense into rain, rivers, and oceans. Below this crust, we know, is another layer of hotter, flexible rock that stretches and deforms. The crust floats on this plastic layer. Below that layer is a thick layer of flowing and swirling molten rock, where temperatures reach thousands of degrees Celsius. Below that is the core. Because the crust is essentially frozen rock, it is brittle and breaks and shifts with the movements of the layer below. The crust is broken up into sections called plates, and as these plates move, they bump into each other along their boundaries. The collisions of plates can lead to the formation of volcanoes.

The passage mentions all of the following EXCEPT:

- (A) differences between the layers
- (B) where water comes from
- (C) how rock becomes soil
- (D) the temperature of the core

4.

If two plates run into each other, then somewhere else, plates must move away from each other. The second type of volcano occurs as a result of spreading along the middle of the ocean floors. As the crust thins when the plates separate, new, molten rock rises to the surface, and it often forms volcanoes. Much of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is a series of vents and volcanoes under the ocean. The ridge is entirely underwater, except for the volcanoes of Iceland. The north-south axis of Iceland is marked by cracks, called *vents* or *fissures*, where the nearly constant volcanic activity is visible on the surface.

According to the paragraph, all of the following are true about Iceland's volcanoes EXCEPT that:

- (A) They are still very active.
- (B) They are located where two plates collide.
- (C) They formed at a place where the Earth's crust thinned.
- (D) They are part of a mountain chain that is mostly under the ocean.

Skill 4 Inference

Each passage has from zero to two inference questions. An inference question asks you to make a judgment on something not directly stated in the passage.

Examples

The author of the passage implies that

Which of the following can be inferred about Benjamin Franklin?

The description of oil drilling in paragraph 2 implies that

Your answer choice is not a guess. It is a logical judgment based on information given in the passage. Rather than identifying facts, you will have to interpret their meaning.

Tip

When you see the verbs *imply* or *infer* in a question, you will need to make an inference. The answer will not be stated directly anywhere.

Practice

Skim each passage. Read the question. Then read the passage and answer the question.

1.

Only limited statistical data exist concerning the safety of American mills and factories prior to 1870. What is known is that employers tended to have only minimal interest in workplace safety. Because of that, American industry developed production methods that were both highly profitable and often extremely hazardous. Following the Civil War, with its great loss of life, many young and very inexperienced workers entered the job market. The factories where they found work were filled with dangerous machines driven by a jumble of overhead belts, pulleys, and gears. The air workers breathed was filled with toxic substances, and tragic fires were a frequent occurrence. Reports from various state labor bureaus in the 1870s described workplace tragedies, some quite grisly, which led early social reformers to call for state governments to enact factory safety and health laws. In 1877, Massachusetts became the first state to pass a factory inspection law which required guarding belts, shafts, and gears; protection on elevators; and adequate fire exits. Other states followed suit.

What can be inferred about the reasons for an inexperienced workforce following the Civil War?

- (A) Many of the experienced workers had died during the war.
- (B) Workers lacked experience because of military duty during the war.
- (C) Experienced workers did not want to work with dangerous machines.
- (D) Employers did not want to pay the higher wages demanded by experienced workers.

2.

The Navajos (who also refer to themselves as Diné) use sand painting in extensive rituals called “sings”. Sings are ceremonies that involve many relatives and friends and are intended to bless, protect, or heal the individual for whom they are held. Sand painting plays a central role in the ceremony, but singing and dancing are also included. A design specific to the particular ritual is painted with sand, charcoal, pollen, and clay on the ground inside the hogan. The images portray mountains and other features of the region, the gods who created them, and legends and stories from the past. The sand painting is considered a living being: when the “patient” lies on the image, the power of the gods is absorbed, and harmony is restored within his or her life. When the ritual is completed, the sand and other elements are returned to the earth.

What can be inferred about the Navajos’ sand painting designs?

- (A) Most are bright and colorful.
- (B) They always depict dancing and singing.
- (C) The same designs are used repeatedly.
- (D) The sand paintings are kept and reused.

3.

When O'Neill started writing plays, the American stage was dominated by farce, a few European dramas, and melodrama. Melodrama is a genre characterized by emotional characters, exciting action-filled scenes, and a moralistic tone, and O'Neill's first plays were written in this style. However, they focused on unsavory situations and characters (destitute women, derelicts, lonely sailors) that had never been considered proper subjects for the stage. O'Neill did not really feel at home with the melodramatic style of writing, which he came to see as pandering to the audience. After having experimented with this genre, O'Neill turned his back on its conventions and embraced the naturalism of European playwrights, such as Henrik Ibsen and Émile Zola, who strove to depict "real" life situations, complex characterization, and psychological realism.

O'Neill's early plays, which include the Pulitzer Prize-winner *Anna Christie*, are often called the "sea plays" because most are set near or on the sea. Eschewing melodramatic conventions, O'Neill asked audiences to identify with desperate people and other morally ambiguous characters. Often, good characters ended badly; not only had O'Neill created a new kind of American naturalism, he had created America's first tragedies.

Which of the following can be inferred about O'Neill's writing?

- (A) He followed the conventions of his times.
- (B) He preferred realism to melodrama.
- (C) His plays generally had happy endings.
- (D) His characters had high morals.

4.

Mining his unhappy childhood for themes and characters, he wrote his most autobiographical plays: *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *The Iceman Cometh*, and *Moon for the Misbegotten*. These plays are notable for their length and repetition of themes and ideas.

These plays show O'Neill bringing together his previous themes in powerful and haunting ways. *Long Day's Journey into Night*, generally regarded as his best play, brings together several lost souls in the same family. As in previous plays, these characters' pipe dreams are the only way they can sustain themselves in a hostile world. The mother is a drug addict, the father is a failed actor who has spent his life compromising his ideals in favor of gratifying the audience's tastes, the older son is a bitter alcoholic, and the younger son is a disillusioned invalid. Over the course of one day, the members of the family lose their pipe dreams and struggle to find some sense of purpose in their lives. It is in these later plays, and especially *Long Day's Journey into Night*, that O'Neill finally found the dramatic form that expressed his inner vision.

What does the author imply about O'Neill's family?

- (A) O'Neill's relatives shared many of his ideas.
- (B) Drug and alcohol problems plagued the O'Neill family.
- (C) Many of O'Neill's relatives were involved in the theater.
- (D) The family was extremely supportive of O'Neill's work.

Skill 5 Purpose

Each passage has from zero to two purpose questions. A purpose question asks you to determine *why* information was included in the passage.

Examples

The author of the passage details planting methods because

Why does the author mention the Great Lakes?

The author discusses new technology in paragraph 3 so that

Be careful about words that introduce reasons, such as *to provide*, *to argue*, *to criticize*, *to note*. These may be used in the answer choices to distract you. Read carefully and look throughout the passage for statements that provide a reason.

Tip

This type of question can be challenging because the reasons are not expressly stated in the passage. You may have to analyze information in multiple sentences in order to arrive at the purpose.

Practice

Skim each passage. Read the question. Then read the passage and answer the question.

1.

Only two years later, New York became the first state to enact a Workmen's Compensation Law. Rather than requiring injured workers to sue their employers and prove the employer was at fault, the law automatically compensated all injuries at predetermined rates. Samuel Gompers, the head of the American Federation of Labor, had studied a similar compensation law in Germany. The law appealed to American businesses because it made costs predictable and reduced labor issues. It appealed to unions and other industry reformers because it promised more predictable benefits. Between 1911 and 1921, forty-four states passed similar laws.

The author mentions that Samuel Gompers studied a German law in order to

- (A) illustrate how well-educated labor leaders were
- (B) contrast German labor laws with American labor laws
- (C) argue that Germany was ahead of the United States in safety standards
- (D) show that labor unions supported the new Workmen's Compensation Law

2.

By 1968, safety standards were again slipping. Each year more than 14,000 workers were killed and 2.2 million were injured on the job. President Lyndon Johnson cited inadequate standards, lagging research, and a patchwork of ineffective federal laws when he called on Congress to enact a comprehensive new job-safety and health program. The proposed legislation failed in committee, however, and never came to a vote.

Why does the author mention the numbers of workers killed and injured?

- (A) To support the statement that safety standards were getting worse
- (B) To compare safety standards in 1968 to previous years
- (C) To show how many workers were benefiting from federal laws
- (D) To explain why President Johnson's legislation failed in committee

3.

Aboriginal art is rooted in Dreamtime, the time when ancestor spirits dreamed the earth and its inhabitants into being. Dreamtime, unlike ordinary chronological time, exists simultaneously in the past, present, and future. Aboriginal clans in Australia employ ritual activities to access Dreamtime and the power found in specific places. Ground art, songs, and dance enact and bring into present-day experience the ancestral spirits who created the local animals, plants, and rock formations, as well as events in the clan's past, such as successful hunts and the discovery of water sources.

Why does the author discuss the aboriginal concept of Dreamtime?

- (A) To contrast it with everyday aboriginal life
- (B) To give an example of a traditional aboriginal belief
- (C) To explain the reasons behind certain aboriginal rituals
- (D) To describe an important time in the aboriginal calendar

4.

If two plates run into each other, then somewhere else, plates must move away from each other. The second type of volcano occurs as a result of spreading along the middle of the ocean floors. As the crust thins when the plates separate, new, molten rock rises to the surface, and it often forms volcanoes. Much of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is a series of vents and volcanoes under the ocean. The ridge is entirely underwater, except for the volcanoes of Iceland. The north-south axis of Iceland is marked by cracks, called vents or fissures, where the nearly constant volcanic activity is visible on the surface.

Why does the author mention the Mid-Atlantic Ridge?

- (A) To explain how Iceland was formed
- (B) To contrast its volcanoes with those of Iceland
- (C) To describe what is beneath the Atlantic Ocean
- (D) To give an example of what results when plates separate

Skill 6 Reference

Each passage has from zero to two reference questions. A reference question asks you to determine the noun or noun phrase that a pronoun refers to. The pronoun will be highlighted in the passage.

Examples

The word **them** in paragraph 3 refers to

Which in paragraph 2 refers to

Tip

Many of these questions ask about the referent for the pronouns *it* and *they*. Remember that *who* (for people) and *which* (for things) are also types of pronouns.

The noun that the pronoun refers to should match the referenced word in number. For example, if you are asked about *they*, scan for plural nouns in that sentence and the sentences just before and after. Substitute the noun you think is the correct answer to see if it makes sense.

Practice

Read the question. Scan the passage and read the sentence that contains the highlighted word. Then answer the question.

1.

Following the Civil War, with its great loss of life, many young and very inexperienced workers entered the job market. The factories where they found work were filled with dangerous machines driven by a jumble of overhead belts, pulleys, and gears. The air workers breathed was filled with toxic substances, and tragic fires were a frequent occurrence. Reports from various state labor bureaus in the 1870s described workplace tragedies, some quite grisly, which led early social reformers to call for state governments to enact factory safety and health laws. In 1877, Massachusetts became the first state to pass a factory inspection law which required guarding belts, shafts, and gears; protection on elevators; and adequate fire exits. Other states followed suit.

The word **which** in the passage refers to

- (A) state labor bureaus
- (B) pulleys and gears
- (C) workplace tragedies
- (D) dangerous machines

2.

When O'Neill started writing plays, the American stage was dominated by farce, a few European dramas, and melodrama. Melodrama is a genre characterized by emotional characters, exciting action-filled scenes, and a moralistic tone, and O'Neill's first plays were written in this style. However, **they** focused on unsavory situations and characters (destitute women, derelicts, lonely sailors) that had never been considered proper subjects for the stage.

The word **they** in the passage refers to

- (A) melodramas
- (B) European dramas
- (C) action-filled scenes
- (D) O'Neill's first plays

3.

While traditional Navajos have very different gods and belief structures from those held by Australian aboriginal clans, they too have no separation between religious and secular worlds. Navajos also have ancestral beings or gods (“the Holy People”) that were active in creating specific local natural features. In addition, Navajos also believe that the sacred beings are active and involved in the daily life of the people.

The word **they** in the passage refers to

- (A) traditional Navajos
- (B) aboriginal clans
- (C) different gods
- (D) belief structures

4.

Our planet is made up of several layers. The thin outer layer of the surface supports life. This section of the globe, the crust, is cool enough for molten rock to harden. Processes such as weathering and erosion transform the hardened rock into dirt, which, through the interaction and eventual decay of living plants and animals, forms soil.

The word **which** in the passage refers to

- (A) globe
- (B) crust
- (C) rock
- (D) dirt

Skill 7 Simplification

Each passage has either one simplification question or none. A simplification question asks you to recognize an exact paraphrase of a sentence.

Example

Which of the following best expresses the information in the highlighted sentence?

The paraphrase must not change the meaning of the original sentence, and it will not leave out important information. The correct answer is another way of saying the same thing as the passage sentence. Make sure you understand the meaning of the highlighted sentence. Then look for the answer choice that has the same meaning.

Tip

Try to eliminate one or two answer choices right away. The easiest ones to eliminate will be those that change the meaning in some way.