

TIPS FOR GRE READING COMPREHENSION SECTIONS

- You will have two to four reading comprehension passages, with a total of six to ten questions. Reading comprehension questions generally don't appear until about questions eight to twelve.
- GRE reading comprehension is unlike any other reading you do. Therefore, you should not approach it in the way you approach other reading.
- ETS passages are poorly written, but not on purpose. Don't look for hidden meanings in the grammatical and stylistic errors.
- Forget about "comprehension." On the GRE, you read for one reason only: to earn points. If you can accept this fact, you'll be far, far ahead. Don't even try to read the whole passage, just get an idea what each paragraph is about and what the main idea of the whole passage is. Don't get bogged down in useless details that may not even be considered in the questions.
- Outline the passage:
 - Read the first sentence and last sentence of each paragraph.
 - On your scrap paper, jot down a few notes for each paragraph, then write down the main idea. This is what we call outlining. Be sure to number the paragraphs in your notes. For example:
 - "1st paragraph: greenhouse gases and greenhouse effect introduced"*
 - "2nd paragraph: greenhouse gases affected by humans, and CFC/ozone example"*
 - "3rd paragraph: 2 possible results of greenhouse effect"*
- When you skim and summarize a passage, you should look for the big themes and main ideas and skim over the details. You shouldn't "speed read." That is, you should slow down for the important stuff and speed up for the details.
- There are two types of GRE reading passages: science and nonscience.
- Science passages may deal with either the "hard facts" of some particular science or with a "soft" topic, such as the history of science.
- Nonscience passages will deal with either a topic related to the humanities or a topic related to the social sciences.
- Use common sense. You won't find a passage arguing that literature is stupid, or that history doesn't matter, or that the moon is made of green cheese. As a result, you will often be able to eliminate answer choices simply because the facts or opinions they represent couldn't possibly be found in ETS reading passages. However, all the information that will lead to the correct answer will always be found in the passage. This is a treasure hunt; look to the passage for the answers.

- Correct answers will always be politically correct. Authors of passages will never say negative things about other people, groups of people or ideas. If the answer choice says that the purpose of a passage is "to demonstrate the intellectual dishonesty of our founding fathers," you can safely eliminate it without even reading the passage.
- Correct answers will never be too negative, too extreme, irresponsible or irrational. Eliminate any answers that fit this category.
- Eliminate disputable statements. ETS's answer will be indisputable. The easiest way to find this answer is to focus your attention on disputable choices and use process-of-elimination aggressively to eliminate as many of them as possible:
 - Certain words make choices highly specific and therefore easy to dispute--must, each, every, all, will totally, always, no.
 - Certain words make choices very general and therefore difficult to dispute--may, can, some, most, sometimes.
 - Vague, general choices won't always be ETS's answer, but ETS's answer will always be indisputable. If a statement says that something is *sometimes* true, you only need to find one example to prove it correct.
- Avoid direct repetitions. ETS's answer will almost always be a paraphrase, not a direct repetition.
- The more closely a choice resembles a substantial part of the passage, the less likely the choice is to be ETS's answer.
- Theme questions, tone questions, and organizational questions are all general questions. You should be able to answer them without looking back at the passage.
- Explicit questions, inferential questions, and literary-technique questions are all specific questions. You'll need to refer back to the passage to answer them.
- Many, many students make careless mistakes on LEAST/EXCEPT/NOT questions. Be careful! Remember, you are looking for the one *dumb* answer among the choices.
- Triple true/false questions are time-consuming and difficult. POE will improve your guessing odds dramatically.

From Princeton Review's Cracking the System: The GRE (New York: Villard Books, 1990) and

Princeton Review's Cracking the GRE CAT 1999 ed. (New York: Random House, 1998).