

# SAT Reading Question Types

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

Unpack SAT Reading question stems by:

- Distinguishing among six SAT Reading question types
- Determining if the correct answer is best found by researching the passage text or by consulting your big picture summary

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### SmartPoints®:

Inference Questions, 90/300 (Very High Yield)

Command of Evidence Questions, 60/300 (High Yield)

Detail Questions, 45/300 (Medium Yield)

Vocabulary-in-Context Questions, 45/300 (Medium Yield)

Function Questions, 40/300 (Medium Yield)

Global Questions, 20/300 (Low Yield)

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## How Much Do You Know?

**Directions:** In this chapter, you'll learn to unpack SAT Reading question stems (Step 1 of the Method for SAT Reading Questions). Unpacking a question stem means identifying your task (as identified by the question type) and noting where the answer will be found (a specific reference within the passage text or in your big picture summary). You first saw the question types defined in chapter 17. For your reference as you complete this quiz, here they are again:

- **Global**—asks about the big picture
- **Detail**—asks for explicitly stated facts or details
- **Inference**—asks about points that are unstated but strongly suggested
- **Command of Evidence**—asks for evidence to support the answer to a previous question
- **Function**—asks why the author wrote specific parts of the text
- **Vocabulary-in-Context**—asks for the meaning of a word as it is used in the passage

For each of the following question stems, identify the question type, cite the language in the stem that helped you identify it, and indicate where you would begin to research this question: either your big picture summary or a specific part of the text.

## Example

The author of the passage would most likely agree with which one of the following statements concerning hydraulic mining?

**Question type:** *Inference*

**Identifying language:** “would most likely agree”

**Research where?** *passage, where author discusses hydraulic mining*

1. The passage indicates that non-rush hour commuters

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

2. As used in line 41, “labyrinthine” most nearly means

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

3. According to the passage, which of the following is true of the New York City subway system?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

4. The fifth paragraph (lines 66–90) serves mainly to

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

5. Which of the following best expresses the primary purpose of the passage?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

6. Based on the passage, which choice best describes a claim that critics of the current subway maintenance plan would likely make?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

7. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

8. With which one of the following statements would the author of the passage be most likely to agree?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

9. Based on the passage, advocates of the current New York City subway maintenance plan would most likely agree that

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

10. In the third paragraph, the discussion of two specific subway lines (lines 44–49) primarily serves to

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

## Check Your Work

1. The passage indicates that non-rush hour commuters

**Question type:** Detail

**Identifying language:** “indicates”

**Research where?** passage, where author discusses non-rush hour commuters

2. As used in line 41, “labyrinthine” most nearly means

**Question type:** Vocab-in-Context

**Identifying language:** “most nearly means”

**Research where?** passage, line 41

3. According to the passage, which of the following is true of the New York City subway system?

**Question type:** Detail

**Identifying language:** “According to the passage”

**Research where?** passage, where author discusses NYC subway system

4. The fifth paragraph (lines 66–90) serves mainly to

**Question type:** Function

**Identifying language:** “serves mainly to”

**Research where?** passage, fifth paragraph

5. Which of the following best expresses the primary purpose of the passage?

**Question type:** Global

**Identifying language:** “primary purpose of the passage”

**Research where?** big picture summary

6. Based on the passage, which choice best describes a claim that critics of the current subway maintenance plan would likely make?

**Question type:** Inference

**Identifying language:** “Based on the passage,” “would likely make”

**Research where?** passage, where author discusses critics’ views

7. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

**Question type:** Command of Evidence

**Identifying language:** “provides the best evidence”

**Research where?** passage, where you went to answer the previous question

8. With which one of the following statements would the author of the passage be most likely to agree?

**Question type:** Inference

**Identifying language:** “most likely to agree”

**Research where?** big picture summary (no specific clues)

9. Based on the passage, advocates of the current New York City subway maintenance plan would most likely agree that

**Question type:** Inference

**Identifying language:** “Based on the passage,” “would most likely agree”

**Research where?** passage, where author discusses advocates’ views

10. In the third paragraph, the discussion of two specific subway lines (lines 44–49) primarily serves to

**Question type:** Function

**Identifying language:** “primarily serves to”

**Research where?** passage, third paragraph

## How to Unpack SAT Reading Question Stems

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, you will be able to unpack SAT Reading question stems by:

- Distinguishing among six SAT Reading question types
- Determining if the correct answer is best found by researching the passage text or by consulting your big picture summary

### To unpack question stems like these:

1. One central idea of the passage is that
2. Which choice best describes the overall structure of the passage?
3. According to the passage, large corporations are
4. As used in line 38, “erased” most nearly means
5. The passage most strongly implies which of the following statements about the Great Recession?
6. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?
7. In the third paragraph (lines 63–91), the most likely purpose of the author’s discussion of the “gig economy” is to
8. In the context of the passage as a whole, the question in lines 89–91 primarily functions to help the author
9. The passage indicates that investing in the stock market
10. Which of the following statements is supported by the graph?
11. Which statement from the passage is most directly reflected by the data presented in the graph?

### You’ll need to know this:

The six kinds of question types, each of which defines a specific task:

1. **Global**—asks about the passage’s main idea, the author’s primary purpose, or the passage’s overall organization

#### Typical Global Question Stems

- The central claim of the passage is that
- Which choice best summarizes the passage?
- The main purpose of the passage is to
- Which choice best describes the developmental pattern of the passage?
- Which choice best reflects the overall sequence of events in the passage?

2. **Detail**—asks about something explicitly stated in the passage

Typical Detail Question Stems

- According to the passage, which of the following is true of developmental psychology?
- The author indicates that people value solitude because
- In the second paragraph (lines 14–27), what does the author claim are key questions the study must answer?
- The passage identifies which of the following as a factor that influences economic growth?

3. **Inference**—asks for something that follows from the passage without having been stated explicitly in it

Typical Inference Question Stems

- Based on the passage, the author’s statement “in response, the Federal Reserve will often lower interest rates” (lines 21–22) implies that
- Which concept is supported by the passage and by the information in the graph?
- Based on information in the passage, it can reasonably be inferred that
- The authors of both passages would most likely agree with which of the following statements?

4. **Command of Evidence**—asks you to cite the support offered in the passage for the correct answer to the previous question or for a given statement

Typical Command of Evidence Question Stems

- Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?
- Which choice best supports the claim that the new policy is unlikely to curtail water pollution?

5. **Function**—asks about the purpose of a piece of text—why the author included it or how the author has used it

Typical Function Question Stems

- The sentence in lines 35–37 serves mainly to
- The main purpose of the fourth paragraph (lines 42–50) is to
- How do the words “must,” “necessary,” and “imperative” in the third paragraph (lines 35–49) help establish the tone of the paragraph?
- The author uses the image of an explorer overlooking a valley (lines 23–28) most likely to
- The sentence in lines 74–78 (“After . . . rest”) primarily serves which function in paragraph 7?

**6. Vocabulary-in-Context**—asks you to define a word as the author used it in the passage

Typical Vocabulary-in-Context Question Stems

- As used in line 55, “platform” most nearly means
- As used in line 29, “substantial” most nearly means

The kinds of research clues found in SAT Reading question stems:

- **Line Numbers**—Mentions of “line 53” or “lines 37–40,” often in parentheses, tend to stand out and give you a clear place to start your research. (In Command of Evidence questions, line numbers are found in the answer choices.)
- **Paragraph Numbers**—A reference to “paragraph 5,” “the third paragraph,” or “the last two paragraphs” is not as precise as a line reference but will still give you an idea of where to look. Start with your margin notes for the paragraph.
- **Quoted Text** (often accompanied by line numbers)—Check the context of the quoted term or phrase to see what the author meant by it in the passage.
- **Proper Nouns**—Names like “Professor James,” “World War II,” and “Baltimore” will likely stand out in question stems due to the capitalization. If a particular proper noun is discussed in only part of the passage, it narrows the range of text you have to research.
- **Specific Content Clues**—Sometimes a question stem will repeat terminology used in part of the passage like “federalism” or “action potentials.” Use your passage map to direct your research to the right part of the passage.
- **Whole Passage Clues**—If a question lacks specific content clues but refers to the passage as a whole, or to the author in general, you are likely dealing with a Global question or an open-ended Inference question, which should lead you to your big picture summary rather than to rereading parts of the text.

**You need to do this:**

The Method for SAT Reading Questions	
Step 1.	Unpack the question stem
Step 2.	Research the answer
Step 3.	Predict the answer
Step 4.	Find the one correct answer

Unpack SAT Reading question stems by:

- Identifying the question type and anticipating how it will need to be answered
- Noting research clues that indicate how best to research the correct answer

## QUESTION TYPES

### Why distinguish question types in SAT Reading?

Unpacking the question stem puts you in control. You'll know exactly what the question is asking, where to find the correct answer, and what form the correct answer will take. Being able to distinguish between the following question types will help you find the correct answer:

- **Global:** The correct answer must take the entire passage into account. A choice that reflects only part of the passage is incorrect.
- **Detail:** The correct answer must be stated in the passage explicitly. A choice that is not directly stated in the passage is incorrect.
- **Inference:** The correct answer will be a conclusion that can be drawn from the passage. A choice that draws too strong a conclusion from the evidence available in the passage is incorrect.
- **Command of Evidence:** The correct answer must directly support the correct answer to the previous question. A choice about the same subject but providing no direct evidence is not good enough.
- **Function:** The correct answer will say *why* a certain detail is included. Look up the detail, then ask yourself what the author was trying to accomplish by putting it there.
- **Vocab-in-Context:** The correct answer will give the meaning of a word as it is used *in the context of the passage*. Choices that give common meanings of the word are often incorrect.

Correct answers to Reading questions are never random or vague. They are tailored to the precise language of the stem, so being able to distinguish the question types will save you time and eliminate confusion during the test.

### Answers and Explanations:

1. This is a Global question, as is clear from the phrase “central idea of the passage.” Your big picture summary will likely have the answer.
2. The mention of the “overall structure of the passage” indicates that this is also a Global question. In addition to your big picture summary, look for structural trends in your margin notes (particularly for places where the author changes direction or perspective) when answering a Global question about structure.
3. “According to the passage” is a clear sign of a Detail question. Though this question lacks specific line or paragraph clues, the mention of “large corporations” may help to narrow your research.



4. A question stem that begins with a line reference, quotes a term from the passage, and ends in “most nearly means” is always a Vocab-in-Context question. Be sure to go back to the passage to check the context before looking at the answer choices.
5. The word “implies” tells you that this is an Inference question. The proper noun “the Great Recession” gives you something to look for in the passage. The correct answer *must* be true based on the passage but may not be directly stated.
6. The vast majority of Command of Evidence questions have this exact wording: “Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?” All Command of Evidence answer choices feature direct quotes with line numbers, which you should use to guide your research. Start by looking at the lines of text you used to answer the previous question.
7. This is a Function question because it asks for the “most likely purpose” of a specific part of the text. To research it, you should look for mentions of the “gig economy” in the third paragraph. Function questions are *why* questions, so reread the indicated text and ask yourself, “Why did the author include this?”
8. The use of “primarily functions” gives this away as a Function question. The cited lines tell you where to start researching.
9. This is a Detail question, as can be garnered from “indicates.” The other clues in the stem suggest that you’ll need to search the passage for a discussion of stock market investment.
10. This is an Inference question because it asks for a statement that “is supported” by part of the passage—in this case, the graph. To research such a question, look for major takeaways from the data presented in the graph.
11. This is a less common variation of Command of Evidence, which would be more obvious after looking at the answer choices (quotes from the text with line references). To research, follow the line references until you come upon a quote that describes a major takeaway from the data in the graph.

### Try on Your Own

**Directions:** Analyze each of the following question stems by 1) identifying the word or phrase that describes your task, 2) naming the question type, and 3) noting how best to research the correct answer (research the text or consult the big picture summary). Answers are found at the end of the chapter.

1. According to the passage, which one of the following is true of Urmila Mahadev's graduate work?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

2. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

3. The author's attitude toward the potential success of quantum computing can best be described as

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

4. Which statement best describes the technique the author uses to advance the main point of the third paragraph (lines 39–62)?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

5. The primary purpose of the passage is to

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

6. Based on the passage, the author would most likely criticize classical computing because it

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

7. The passage indicates that which of the following factors slowed early developments in the theory of quantum computing?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

8. In the second paragraph, the discussion of locating a person's home on a globe (lines 26–36) primarily serves to

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

9. Which one of the following does the passage imply about the development of quantum computing in the 21st century?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

10. As used in line 123, "maintain" most nearly means

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

For any question types that you misidentified, return to the definitions and question stem examples before you try the final question set in this chapter.

## How Much Have You Learned?

**Directions:** Now, complete a similar assessment under timed conditions. Take a few minutes to analyze each of the following question stems by 1) identifying the word or phrase that describes your task, 2) naming the question type, and 3) noting how best to research the correct answer (research the text or consult the big picture summary).

11. The passage primarily serves to

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

12. Which of the following is most analogous to John Snow's discovery of the source of the cholera outbreak?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

13. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

14. The passage indicates that the main reason government officials rejected Snow's hypothesis was

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

15. The second paragraph serves mainly to

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

16. It can reasonably be inferred from the passage that scientists in 1855 would have found which of the following solutions to be most practical in dealing with future outbreaks of cholera?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

17. The author of this passage writes from the perspective of a

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

18. Which of the following is cited as the primary reason Snow suspected the Broad Street pump as the source of the epidemic?

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

19. As used in line 97, the word "flagged" most nearly means

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

20. The author uses the final sentence of the passage ("It wasn't . . . outbreaks") at least in part to

**Question type:**

**Identifying language:**

**Research where?**

## Reflect

**Directions:** Take a few minutes to recall what you've learned and what you've been practicing in this chapter. Consider the following questions, jot down your best answer for each one, and then compare your reflections to the expert responses on the following page. Use your level of confidence to determine what to do next.

Why is it important to always unpack the question stem before proceeding?

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Can you name the six SAT Reading question types and cite words or phrases that identify each one?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
o Identifying language: \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
o Identifying language: \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
o Identifying language: \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
o Identifying language: \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
o Identifying language: \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_  
o Identifying language: \_\_\_\_\_

How will you approach SAT Reading question stems differently as you continue to practice and improve your performance in the Reading section? What are the main differences you see between SAT Reading questions and those you're used to from tests in school?

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## Expert Responses

Why is it important to always unpack the question stem before proceeding?

*Knowing the SAT Reading question types makes you a more strategic and efficient reader because the test maker uses the same question types on every test. Fully analyzing each question stem helps you research the text more effectively, predict the correct answer in a way that fits the question stem, and avoid incorrect answers made from misreading the question.*

Can you name the six SAT Reading question types and cite words or phrases that identify each one?

1. *Global*
  - Identifying language: *main idea of the passage, author's primary purpose*
2. *Detail*
  - Identifying language: *according to the passage, identifies, claims*
3. *Inference*
  - Identifying language: *implies, can be inferred, based on the passage*
4. *Command of Evidence*
  - Identifying language: *provides the best evidence, best supports, the answer to the previous question*
5. *Function*
  - Identifying language: *is used to, serves mainly to, functions as*
6. *Vocabulary-in-Context*
  - Identifying language: *as used in line [number], most nearly means*

How will you approach SAT Reading question stems differently as you continue to practice and improve your performance in the Reading section? What are the main differences you see between SAT Reading questions and those you're used to from tests in school?

*There is no one-size-fits-all answer here. Reflect on your own strengths and weaknesses as you consider how to best improve your performance in the SAT Reading section. Depending on the kinds of classes and teachers you've had in high school, the skills rewarded on SAT Reading questions may be more or less familiar, but almost every test taker needs to be aware of her own instincts as a reader, and needs to break certain reading habits, to master this section of the test. The more you give yourself an honest self-assessment, the better prepared you'll be to handle all of the SAT Reading question types confidently.*

## Next Steps

If you answered most questions correctly in the “How Much Have You Learned?” section, and if your responses to the Reflect questions were similar to those of the SAT expert, then consider identifying Reading question types an area of strength and move on to the next chapter. Come back to this topic periodically to prevent yourself from getting rusty.

If you don't yet feel confident, review the material in How to Unpack SAT Reading Question Stems, then try the questions you missed again. As always, be sure to review the explanations closely. Finally, **go online** ([www.kaptest.com/moreonline](http://www.kaptest.com/moreonline)) for more practice with full Reading passages and question sets.

## Answers and Explanations

1. According to the passage, which one of the following is true of Urmila Mahadev's graduate work?
- Question type:** Detail  
**Identifying language:** "According to the passage"  
**Research where?** passage, where the author discusses Mahadev's work
2. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?
- Question type:** Command of Evidence  
**Identifying language:** "provides the best evidence"  
**Research where?** passage, where you answered the previous question
3. The author's attitude toward the potential success of quantum computing can best be described as
- Question type:** Inference  
**Identifying language:** "can best be described as"  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses quantum computing success
4. Which statement best describes the technique the author uses to advance the main point of the third paragraph (lines 39–62)?
- Question type:** Function  
**Identifying language:** "the technique the author uses"  
**Research where?** passage, third paragraph
5. The primary purpose of the passage is to
- Question type:** Global  
**Identifying language:** "primary purpose of the passage"  
**Research where?** big picture summary
6. Based on the passage, the author would most likely criticize classical computing because it
- Question type:** Inference  
**Identifying language:** "Based on the passage"  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses classical computing
7. The passage indicates that which of the following factors slowed early developments in the theory of quantum computing?
- Question type:** Detail  
**Identifying language:** "indicates"  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses early developments
8. In the second paragraph, the discussion of locating a person's home on a globe (lines 26–36) primarily serves to
- Question type:** Function  
**Identifying language:** "primarily serves to"  
**Research where?** passage, second paragraph
9. Which one of the following does the passage imply about the development of quantum computing in the 21st century?
- Question type:** Inference  
**Identifying language:** "imply"  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses 21st-century development
10. As used in line 123, "maintain" most nearly means
- Question type:** Vocab-in-Context  
**Identifying language:** "most nearly means"  
**Research where?** passage, line 123
11. The passage primarily serves to
- Question type:** Global  
**Identifying language:** "passage primarily serves to"  
**Research where?** big picture summary
12. Which of the following is most analogous to John Snow's discovery of the source of the cholera outbreak?
- Question type:** Inference  
**Identifying language:** "most analogous"  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses Snow's discovery

13. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?  
**Question type:** Command of Evidence  
**Identifying language:** “provides the best evidence”  
**Research where?** passage, where you went to answer the previous question
14. The passage indicates that the main reason government officials rejected Snow’s hypothesis was  
**Question type:** Detail  
**Identifying language:** “indicates”  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses officials’ rejection of Snow
15. The second paragraph serves mainly to  
**Question type:** Function  
**Identifying language:** “serves mainly to”  
**Research where?** passage, second paragraph
16. It can reasonably be inferred from the passage that scientists in 1855 would have found which of the following solutions to be most practical in dealing with future outbreaks of cholera?  
**Question type:** Inference  
**Identifying language:** “reasonably be inferred”  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses cholera outbreak solutions
17. The author of this passage writes from the perspective of a  
**Question type:** Global  
**Identifying language:** “author . . . writes from the perspective of a”  
**Research where?** big picture summary
18. Which of the following is cited as the primary reason Snow suspected the Broad Street pump as the source of the epidemic?  
**Question type:** Detail  
**Identifying language:** “is cited as”  
**Research where?** passage, where author discusses Broad Street pump
19. As used in line 97, the word “flagged” most nearly means  
**Question type:** Vocab-in-Context  
**Identifying language:** “most nearly means”  
**Research where?** passage, line 97
20. The author uses the final sentence of the passage (“It wasn’t . . . outbreaks”) at least in part to:  
**Question type:** Function  
**Identifying language:** “uses . . . at least in part to”  
**Research where?** passage, final sentence