

Many people believe LSAT Reading Comprehension can't be taught. Luckily, they're mistaken.

Consider this post your blueprint for Reading Comp. It even includes tips to help you deal with those newfangled Comparative Reading passages.

1. Look for the key words that indicate degree of certainty.

Watch out for words like some, most, all, never, and always, and the difference between singular and plural.

2. Keep an eye out for the passage's main idea.

Bracket or underline whenever the author summarizes a point of view: "Although some scholars propose..."

Look for bits of evidence used to support each point of view.

Figure out whether or not the author agrees with each point of view.

3. Look at the relationship between the evidence and conclusion in each paragraph.

Questions to ask yourself:

What evidence is given in each paragraph?

Does the conclusion follow from this evidence?

Does the author promote any guiding principles?

Does the passage contain sub-conclusions?

Does the author mention any counter-arguments? What evidence strengthens or weakens them?

Does the author agree or disagree with any counter-arguments?

What is the author's tone? How does it change over the course of the passage?

Look at each example and determine its role in the argument.

Connect the paragraphs and consider:

What is the passage's argument / goal?

4. Question types in Reading Comprehension

In increasing order of difficulty:

-Main point / main idea

You'll usually see one of these as the first questions. Consider doing them first since they're the easiest. Solving it will also help you articulate the passage's overall argument for yourself.

-Specific / "according to"

The most straightforward question-type you'll see. These tend to follow the passage's structure and ask about part of the author's argument.

-Inferences

Ask you to make a prediction based upon the argument: "The author would agree with which one of the following statements?"

Examine the structure of the passage and note the various points of view within. Go back to areas where you summarized the tone and argument.

Whenever the question refers to a certain piece of evidence or particular line, analyze its role in the argument. Look a couple of lines above and below it.

As you'll see, RC is predictable just like Logical Reasoning and Logic Games.

5. How to deal with Comparative Reading passages

LSAC started including these in the Reading Comprehension section in June 2007, so instead of having 4 long passages, you'll only have 3. The 4th is replaced by 2 shorter ones on a related topic.

Now that you know this, you already have an advantage over everyone studying the older exams who doesn't know this.

In Comparative Reading, a couple of questions will be like the ones I described in #4 (above). However, most of them will compare the short passages. Although the passages won't explicitly refer to each other, they'll be on similar topics. The authors will probably agree on some issues and disagree on

others. Sometimes, one passage will go into detail on a particular topic and the other will discuss it in more general terms.

How to approach:

Start with the questions that focus on only one of the two passages - it's easier to locate the relevant information.

When you start doing questions that focus on the 2nd passage, analyze it with an eye towards how this passage is different from the first. Look for variations in the topics, areas where the authors agree / disagree, and contrast their tones and styles.

6. Question types in Comparative Reading

In increasing order of difficulty:

*Common issue / central idea (similar to "main point" / "main idea" in longer passages): "Which one of the following issues is central to both passages?"

*Agree / disagree (similar to "according to" / "specific" in longer passages): "It can be inferred from the passage that both authors agree / disagree on which one of the following ideas?"

*Method of reasoning / style (similar to "inference" in longer passages): "Which one of the following best describes the style of (or relationship between) the passages?"

*Analogy (similar to Parallel Reasoning in Logical Reasoning): "The relationship between the passages is most similar to that of which one of the following?"

7. How to avoid those tempting incorrect answer choices

Just as in Logical Reasoning, incorrect answers in Reading Comp are wrong for the same couple of reasons. Wrong answers usually contain one of the following.

-extreme statements not supported by evidence (correct answers tend to use more reasonable and moderate terms)

-irrelevant info outside the scope of discussion

-the exact opposite of the passage's argument

-minor changes to info supported by the passage

-illogical or random combinations of the passage's arguments

-false attributions of individuals' points of view

8. How to take notes in Reading Comp

Although taking notes can keep you focused, the fewer notes you take, the better. Why? Because it costs time, just like making overly-complicated diagrams on Logic Games does.

Consider pausing while you read to write a short 3-4 word summary every now and again. However, you're better off making symbols in the margins whenever appropriate. You might jot down an "!" wherever the author expresses his/her opinion.

Instead of focusing on content, try to comprehend the passage's flow / structure as well as the author's intent. The details aren't as important as the main idea. It's more important to know where in the passage to find the details and unfamiliar terms than it is to know what they actually are.

Try not to spend too much time circling and underlining key words - this will likely slow you down and interrupt your concentration. However, it's useful for you to mark for people or groups mentioned in the passage because there are often questions about them.

You'll develop your note-taking technique as you complete more passages and learn to recognize the most important details of each passage.

Refine your approach to underlining and note-taking over time. As you practice, you will be able to decrease your dependence upon this method as you learn which pieces of info are most important.

Another tip:

When you come across a passage with only a few big paragraphs, break them apart by using brackets. The longest paragraph usually contains several ideas or subtopics.

By breaking it into smaller chunks, you will see where the passage's topic changes. There are often questions about the information at these transition points.

9. Words to look out for

Here are some words to box or underline:

advocates, critics, opponents, others, proponents, supporters

artists, engineers, politicians, scholars, scientists, writers

all, always, every, most, never, some

first, second, third

according to, but, despite, for example, for this reason, furthermore, however, in addition, in contrast, namely, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand

argue, claim, criticize, oppose, support, reject

10. If you just know you won't be able to do every passage...

Begin with the passage associated with the greatest number of questions and save the passage with the fewest questions for last.