SAT READING & WRITING MASTERY

Evidence, Vocabulary & Grammar



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Chapter 2: Information and Ideas

Information and Ideas questions ask what a text says, what it supports, and what follows from it. They make up about a quarter of the section, and they include the question family often considered the hardest: Command of Evidence and Inferences. The good news is that these questions are also the most predictable in structure. Once you know the job each one is asking you to do, the method is the same every time.

This chapter covers four skills:

- **Central Ideas and Details:** What is the text mainly saying, and what does it say about a specific point?
- **Command of Evidence: Textual:** Which piece of evidence supports, weakens, or illustrates a claim?
- **Command of Evidence: Quantitative:** Which data from a table or graph supports or completes a claim?
- **Inferences:** Which choice most logically completes the text?

Central Ideas and Details

The rule. A central idea answer must cover the whole passage, not one sentence of it, and must say what the passage says about its topic at the same strength the passage says it. A detail answer must match a specific statement in the text.

Typical question wording:

- “Which choice best states the main idea of the text?”
- “According to the text, what is true about [something]?”
- “Based on the text, what is [a character] most likely doing?” (this one sits close to inference territory)

The method. After reading, finish this sentence in your own words: “This text is about **,** ***and it says*** .” For a literature passage, swap in: “This text shows a character who ___.” That sentence is your prediction. Then eliminate choices that are too narrow (one detail only), too broad (bigger than the passage), too strong (more certain or extreme than the passage), or contradicted.

Worked example 2.1

Many gardeners assume that earthworms always improve soil. A team led by soil scientist Imani Okafor found a more complicated picture in northern hardwood forests where earthworms are not native. There, the worms rapidly consumed the thick layer of fallen leaves that normally covers the forest floor. Without that layer, seedlings of several native wildflowers dried out and failed to establish. Okafor's team concluded that a species can enrich soil in one setting while damaging an ecosystem in another.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A. Earthworms improve soil quality in nearly every environment where they live.

B. The effects of earthworms depend on the setting, and in some forests the worms cause ecological harm.

C. Native wildflowers in northern hardwood forests need dry conditions in order to establish.

D. Gardeners should remove earthworms from their gardens to protect native wildflowers.

Solution. Prediction: "This text is about earthworms, and it says they help in some places but harm forests where they are not native." The last sentence states this directly.

- **B is correct.** It covers both halves of the passage: the setting-dependent effect and the harm in certain forests.
- A repeats the gardeners' assumption that the passage sets up in order to complicate. That is a reversal.
- C flips a detail. The seedlings failed because they dried out, so they need moisture, not dry conditions.
- D is advice the passage never gives, about gardens the passage does not study. It is out of scope.

> **Trap:** Many passages open with a common belief ("Many gardeners assume…") and then challenge it. A choice that restates the opening belief is usually the opposite of the main idea. Watch for pivot words like "but," "however," and "a more complicated picture."

Details questions are lookups. Find the sentence the question points to, reread it, and pick the choice that restates it. The most common wrong answer on a detail question uses words from the passage but attaches them to the wrong thing, such as the right number with the wrong group.

Quick check. In Worked example 2.1, according to the text, what happened to the layer of fallen leaves?

Answer Explanations: Set A

Trap names in parentheses refer to the patterns in Chapter 7. For conventions questions, wrong answers are named by the rule they break (for example, comma splice, run-on, or dangling modifier), plus a Chapter 7 pattern name where one applies.

1. **B.** The clue is "slow" and "lingering on small daily routines," and the colon tells you the blank describes that same pace. "Unhurried" restates "slow" with a neutral-to-positive charge that fits "deliberate." A, "frantic," is the opposite of slow (Reversal). C, "unpredictable," and D, "inconsistent," describe irregular pacing, but nothing in the text suggests the pace changes; it is steadily slow (Out of Scope).
2. **D.** Moss "insist[ed] that their skill had shaped the finished works," so she was publicly recognizing the workers' contribution. To credit someone in this sense is to acknowledge them. A and C are financial meanings of "credit" (Common Meaning). B, "believe," is another real meaning ("I can't credit that story"), but Moss is not deciding whether the workers are telling the truth; she is giving them recognition (Common Meaning).
3. **A.** The colon explains the blank: the population "more than tripled" in three years. That is a dramatic increase, and "Although… grew slowly" sets up the contrast. B, "gradual," and D, "modest," describe the earlier slow growth that the sentence contrasts with (Reversal). C, "temporary," has no support; nothing says the population later fell (Out of Scope).
4. **C.** Label the sentences: sentence 1 states Ibarra's advice; sentence 2 gives the sauce example, showing how flavors change; sentence 3 states the consequence of tasting only at the end; sentence 4 offers the driving comparison. The second sentence is an example supporting the advice. A is wrong because the sauce sentence supports Ibarra; it doesn't oppose her (Wrong Job). B is wrong because the text doesn't call any technique outdated (Out of Scope). D describes the fourth sentence, not the second (Wrong Job).
5. **D.** The passage moves from discomfort (loud streets, buildings "sharing secrets she was not meant to hear") to small warmth (the free roll, the bright geraniums she notices "for the first time"). Its purpose is to show her first impressions softening. A is never addressed; the text gives no reason for the move (Out of Scope). B is wrong because the text describes the present street, not its history (Out of Scope). C is wrong because the aunt appears only as the person who recommended the bakery; there is no contrast (Recycled Language).