THE COMPLETE SAT PREP GUIDE

Reading & Writing + Math | Study Plans |
2026-2027 Edition



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Chapter 2: Reading and Writing: The Core System

The Reading and Writing section is 54 questions across two modules, and every one of them is a short, self-contained task: one passage (or a pair of passages, or a passage with a table or graph) and one question with four choices. That design rewards a consistent method more than raw reading speed. This chapter gives you the method. Chapters 3 through 6 apply it to each question type.

What the Section Tests

College Board groups the Reading and Writing questions into four content domains. Here is roughly how many scored questions each gets across the full section.

Domain	Share of section	Scored questions (approx.)	Question types
Information and Ideas	About 26%	12 to 14	Central Ideas and Details, Command of Evidence (textual and quantitative), Inferences
Craft and Structure	About 28%	13 to 15	Words in Context, Text Structure and Purpose, Cross-Text Connections
Expression of Ideas	About 20%	8 to 12	Rhetorical Synthesis, Transitions
Standard English Conventions	About 26%	11 to 15	Boundaries; Form, Structure, and Sense

Passages come from literature, history and social studies, the humanities, and science. You never need outside knowledge. Every answer is supported by the passage itself, by the notes, or, in the conventions questions, by the rules of Standard English.

That last point is the foundation of the whole section. **The right answer is the one the text supports.** Not the one that sounds smartest, not the one that is true in real life, not the one you would have written. The one the text supports.

The Evidence Method

Use these five steps on every reading-based question. With practice they take seconds, not minutes.

Step 1: Read the question first. The question tells you what job you are doing: finding a main idea, choosing a word, supporting a claim, completing a thought. Reading it first tells you what to look for in the passage. It is usually one line.

Step 2: Read the passage once, actively. Read the whole passage. They are short. As you read, notice three things: the main claim or point, any shift (words like *however*, *but*, *yet*, *although*), and the last sentence, which often carries the point the question is about.

Step 3: Predict before you look at the choices. Say to yourself, in a few plain words, what the answer should be. For a words-in-context blank, think of your own word. For a main-idea question, put the point into one short sentence. For an inference question, finish the sentence yourself. Your prediction does not need to be elegant. It needs to come from the passage.

Step 4: Eliminate. Go through the choices and strike out the ones that do not match your prediction or that the passage does not support. Use Bluebook's Answer Eliminator so you do not reread dead choices. Common reasons to eliminate:

- **Too broad or too narrow.** The choice covers more than the passage says, or only one detail.
- **Wrong direction.** The choice reverses the passage's relationship (says "caused" when the passage says "did not cause").
- **Out of scope.** The choice brings in something the passage never mentions.
- **Too strong.** The choice says *always*, *proves*, or *all* when the passage is more careful.
- **True but irrelevant.** The choice repeats a real detail from the passage but does not answer the question asked.

Step 5: Verify. Before you click, point to the words in the passage that support your answer. If you cannot point to them, reconsider.

> **Key rule:** If you cannot point to the support in the passage, the choice is not the answer, no matter how reasonable it sounds.

Worked example: the method in action

Here is a short passage. Try the five steps before reading the walkthrough.

When the town of Wexley replaced its gravel footpaths with permeable paving in 2019, officials expected the change to reduce flooding on nearby streets. Two years of rainfall records suggest they were partly right: minor storms no longer flooded the streets, but heavy storms still did, because the soil beneath the paving became saturated before the rain stopped.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A. Wexley's officials were wrong to expect permeable paving to affect flooding.

B. Permeable paving reduced flooding in Wexley during minor storms but not during heavy ones.

C. Heavy storms in Wexley became more frequent after 2019.

D. Gravel footpaths absorb more rainfall than permeable paving does.

Walkthrough. Step 1: the job is main idea. Step 2: the main claim is "partly right," and the shift is "but heavy storms still did." Step 3: prediction: "The paving helped with small storms, not big ones." Step 4: A is too strong (the passage says they were *partly* right). C is out of scope; the

Answer Explanations: Set A

1. **B (Words in Context).** The passage says Morrow rarely performed her songs and would leave a party rather than be asked to play. The blank needs a word meaning "reserved" or "unwilling to put herself forward," and *reticent* means exactly that. A, *boastful*, is the opposite of the behavior described (Opposite trap). C, *careless*, does not fit someone who wrote forty songs and avoided performing them; nothing suggests a lack of care (Unsupported meaning trap). D, *famous*, does not explain why she would leave a party, and "so famous about her work" is not a logical phrase (Topic-sounding trap).
2. **D (Words in Context).** "Instead" contrasts with "did not abandon," and the rest of the sentence describes keeping the arch while adding supports: a change, not a replacement. *Revised* fits. A, *discarded*, means abandoned, which the passage rules out (Opposite trap). B, *ignored*, contradicts the fact that Reyes made changes that "addressed the critics' main concern" (Contradiction trap). C, *celebrated*, does not describe making changes to the design (Tone trap: a positive word with no support).
3. **A (Text Structure and Purpose).** The first sentence gives the older view (pale color alone hides the moth). The second introduces Dalal's observation of an added behavior (aligning stripes with cracks). The third gives field-trial evidence that the behavior matters. A matches all three parts. B is wrong because the text does not reject any study's conclusion (Wrong verb trap). C is wrong because only one moth species appears (Out of scope trap). D is wrong because the text never argues that a problem cannot be solved (Invented claim trap).
4. **C (Text Structure and Purpose).** The third sentence states the shop owners' worry about losing customers. The final sentence, starting with "Instead," reports that most of them saw higher sales, which shows the worry did not come true. A is wrong because the third sentence says nothing about why the lot was chosen (Wrong sentence trap). B is wrong because the third sentence states a worry, not survey results; the results come in the fourth sentence (Order confusion trap). D is wrong because moving the market, described in the second sentence, is the solution to the traffic problem, not the shop owners' worry (Wrong sentence trap).
5. **D (Cross-Text Connections).** Kerr "agrees that the 1879 law expanded schooling" but adds that literacy had begun rising in the 1860s because of lending libraries, which made the later schools more effective. That adds an earlier contributing cause the historians leave out. A is wrong because Kerr explicitly agrees the law expanded schooling (Total disagreement trap). B is wrong because Kerr does not rank the libraries below the law; she says they made the schools more effective (Reversed emphasis trap). C is wrong because neither text says literacy failed to rise in the 1880s (Contradiction trap).
6. **A (Central Ideas and Details).** The final sentence carries the point: the neighbors see the habit as sad, but to Mrs. Halloran the cup is "a small promise that the door was still open." That is hope, not grief. B is wrong because the neighbors only think the habit sad; nothing says they