

Overview: Grasp-Prove-Eliminate

Our system for teaching critical reading and critical thinking breaks down the process into three active verbs: **Grasp**, **Prove**, and **Eliminate**.

Grasp

Grasp refers to your ability to comprehend the meaning of a passage. This is a skill that goes beyond simple identification of details and requires you to make sense of what you read. When you successfully grasp a passage's meaning, you will be able to pinpoint the passage's main idea and also communicate its larger point or meaning.

Identifying the **what?** and **so what?** of a passage will help you grasp its meaning.

- **What?** What is the passage about? What is the main subject or topic of the passage? = main subject
- **So what?** So what is the author's point? What is the primary takeaway or larger significance of the passage? = author's intent/argument or the passage's larger purpose.

The **so what?** builds on the **what?** by asking *why* it matters. The **what?** only identifies the basic content of the passage (i.e., what is the passage about?). It is the **so what?** that adds meaning, context, and larger importance to that information.

Utilizing efficient annotation strategies will help you grasp the meaning of a passage. In the pages that follow, we provide several annotation strategies, including: **Vital 10%**, **Chunking & Summarizing**, and **Character & Plot Relationships**.

Prove

The questions on the SAT Reading section are written with proof in mind. That is, correctness is not based on intuition or interpretation; it is based on evidence, or direct links to key terms in the passage. For an answer to be correct, it must be provable. Therefore, it is crucial to learn how to use proof within a text to guide you to the correct answer.

Reading with a **Four-Step Method** will help you identify the correct answer through proof:

- 1) identify key terms,
- 2) link key terms to relevant context areas,
- 3) read the context area, including sentences above and below, and
- 4) link key terms in the context area to key terms in the answer choices.

The answer choice with the most direct links to the context area will be the correct answer.

Eliminate

Just as correct answers on the SAT Reading section must be proved, incorrect answers must be wrong for standard reasons. This means if you are struggling to grasp or prove, you can still arrive at the correct answer through the elimination of incorrect answer choices.

There are three types of incorrect answer choices that appear on the SAT Reading test: **irrelevant**, **contradictory**, and **extreme (ICE)**.

- **Irrelevant** – Irrelevant answer choices can either be 1) irrelevant to the passage (not mentioned at all) or 2) irrelevant to the question (mentioned in the passage but not relevant to the question).
- **Contradictory** – Contradictory answer choices directly oppose evidence in the passage.
- **Extreme** – Extreme answers are too bold to be supported by evidence in the passage.

Now let's apply the concepts of Grasp, Prove, & Eliminate to an SAT-style passage and set of questions!

Grasp, Prove, & Eliminate

Grasp, Prove, & Eliminate Diagnostic: Read the passage below and answer the following questions.

Passage Word Count: 610 words

Words-per-Minute Reading Speed:

Telling Time in Natare

This passage discusses life in Natare, an African village.

There are few watches in Natare because its people distrust them. The schoolteachers wear watches, as does the agricultural advisor, though
 Line clock time only helps these people when they are
 5 talking to each other. The Natare believe that clock time isn't universal; it's a conspiracy amongst those who wear watches. It does the teachers little good to say that school will start at 9:00 when all the children are busy looking at the angle of the sun.

10 Nature and environment are what dictate time in Natare. Meetings in Natare are scheduled for one of two times: morning or afternoon. Morning means after everyone has gotten out of bed, eaten, swept the courtyard, taken care of the animals,
 15 and walked to the meeting place. Afternoon is after people have eaten lunch, as soon as the sun cools down enough to allow them to walk across the village comfortably. While waiting to go to an "afternoon" meeting once, I worried that I would
 20 be late. "It's not yet time," a friend told me. "It's still too hot."

When the people of Natare need to mark more specific points in time, they peg them to things they can see. If they need to be more specific
 25 than "morning" or "afternoon," they indicate the sun. "What time are you leaving for the market?" you ask. "When the sun is like this," they tell you, pointing to the place in the sky the sun will be at the given time. They use the sun to indicate all
 30 times of day when the sun is up. Anytime after that is simply "night."

While the people of Natare use the sun to track the passage of time through the day, they use the moon to track the passage of days. In many
 35 African languages, the word "moon" also means "month." If the sun is the local timepiece, the moon is the local calendar.

The people of Natare have no yearly calendar, and the months of their year have no names. They
 40 use the moon to track relative time. Near the end of the rainy season, if you ask the Chief when the heat will come, he may say, "When this moon dies," meaning at the next new moon. If you ask him when he'll organize a certain ceremony, he
 45 may say, "When the moon is fat," meaning at the next full moon. This can be anywhere from one to twenty-eight days depending on where you are in the lunar cycle. But one glance at the moon will let

you know how much time he means.

50 Most people in Natare are familiar with the twelve-month calendar, which they refer to as the "white man's moons." When speaking about the end of one of these months, they say, "when the white man's moon dies."

55 Many people use both systems—"white man's moons" when talking about absolute time, the Gourma moon when discussing relative time—but they distrust the "white man's moons" since they have no idea which moons they correspond to.

60 This confusion leads many Gourma to assume that the moon in the white man's country is different from the moon in theirs. They believe that surely the white man wouldn't create a whole system of "moons" that don't correspond to an
 65 actual moon. Surely he's not that foolish.

What?

So what?

Seconds-per-Question Answering Speed:
--

- The passage indicates that, in Natare, specific time indicators are determined by
 - daily routines.
 - the twelve-month calendar.
 - community leaders.
 - environmental observations.
- Based on the passage, the people of Natare would most likely consider the concept of time to be
 - absolute.
 - simple.
 - suspicious.
 - relative.
- Which choice best expresses the main idea of the second paragraph (lines 10-21) in regard to the people of Natare?
 - They have more free time in the morning than in the afternoon.
 - They pay more attention to natural cycles and events than to specific hours or minutes.
 - They always avoid walking during the hottest part of the day.
 - They tell time by referring to the sun's position in the sky.
- Based on the passage, which of the following leads the people of Natare to distrust the "white man's moons" (line 52)?
 - The moon waxes and wanes on a different cycle in Natare than it does elsewhere.
 - People in other countries pay less attention to time than do the people of Natare.
 - The names of the months in Natare are different from the names of the months elsewhere.
 - The "white man's moons" have no apparent relation to the Gourma moon.
- The author's use of the word "foolish" in line 65 suggests which of the following about the people of Natare?
 - The twelve-month calendar makes little sense according to their logic.
 - They refuse to adopt ideas they do not fully understand.
 - They think it is unhealthy to live according to a twelve-month calendar.
 - Their traditional ways of thinking are hard for outsiders to change.
- The author of this passage would most likely *disagree* with which of the following statements?
 - The lack of education in Natare gives its people no way to understand time.
 - It would be unreasonable for school teachers in Natare to expect children to arrive at school at exactly the same time every day.
 - The Natare use natural cycles of the sun and moon to determine time.
 - In order to function in a village like Natare, it is useful to understand how the local people comprehend time.
- The author's tone when discussing the practices and beliefs of people in Natare can best be described as
 - condescending.
 - nostalgic.
 - adoring.
 - impartial.

Prove & Eliminate Models

Prove Model

On a multiple-choice test of passage-based reading you must—above all else—**prove** correct answers.

When it comes to proving correct answers, the SAT Reading test is more science than art: in fact, the standard of proof is quite scientific.

Correctness is not based on intuition or interpretation; it is based on evidence, or direct links to key information in the passage.

Given the evidence-based nature of the SAT Reading test, we have a method for you that will direct your search for and use of evidence.

Four-Step Method

Our method below maps a logical process, helping you avoid interpretation or intuitive guessing and instead apply logic.

Step 1: Identify the **key terms** in the question. Ask yourself: “What context area should I direct my attention to in order to find these terms?”

Note: If the question deals with a specific point about the passage, then target those specific lines. If the question deals with a general point about the passage, then focus on the introduction and conclusion—the main areas in which the **what?** and **so what?** of the argument are developed.

Step 2: Link those **key terms** to the relevant context area in the passage.

Step 3: Read the **context area** surrounding these key terms.

Note: A general rule of thumb is to read four lines above and four lines below the context area. For more general questions, you may have to reread the introduction and/or conclusion.

Step 4: Link **key terms** from the relevant context area to key terms in the correct answer. Select the answer choice that is most directly supported by the evidence in the relevant context area of the passage.

Note: Key terms in the correct answer choice directly match key terms in the relevant context area. Put simply, the correct answer will be the one with the most direct links to the relevant context area.

Prove Model: The following is an illustration of how the Four-Step Prove Method works. This question and explanation relate to the passage “Telling Time in Natare” on page 16.

Question:

4. Based on the passage, which of the following leads the people of Natare to distrust the “white man’s moons” (line 52)?
- (A) The moon waxes and wanes on a different cycle in Natare than it does elsewhere.
 - (B) People in other countries pay less attention to time than do the people of Natare.
 - (C) The names of the months in Natare are different from the names of the months elsewhere.
 - (D) The “white man’s moons” have no apparent relation to the Gourma moon.

Passage context:

Many people use both systems—“white man’s moons” when talking about absolute time, the Gourma moon when discussing relative time—but they distrust the “white man’s moons” since they have no idea which moons they correspond to. This confusion leads many Gourma to assume that the moon in the white man’s country is different from the moon in theirs.

Analysis:

The underlined words and phrases above directly support the key terms in the correct answer, (D).

From the context, you can **identify** that the people of Natare “distrust the ‘white man’s moons’” because they have “no idea which moons they correspond to.”

This evidence directly supports the statement in (D) that the “white man’s moons” have “no” apparent “relation” to the “Gourma moon.”

Eliminate Model

Consider for a moment that your grasp of the passage is uncertain or you feel unable to prove the correct answer.

Is all lost? Have you reached your limit? Absolutely not.

Perhaps the most powerful insight you can make into this test is the following:

In order to standardize the SAT Reading test, incorrect answers must be wrong for standard reasons. In other words, incorrect answers are written to be incorrect according to **a repetitive set of logical flaws**. What this means is that critical reading is as much a test of logic as it is of reading.

Therefore, if your ability to **grasp** is diminished or your ability to **prove** is uncertain, your ability to **eliminate** can still yield the correct answer.

You'll find three types of incorrect answer choices on the test: **irrelevant**, **contradictory**, and **extreme (ICE)**.

Irrelevant

Irrelevant answers are by far the most common incorrect answers on the SAT. For example, if an author speaks positively about a scientist responsible for a new discovery, an irrelevant answer choice will state that the author knows of another scientist that came up with a similar idea fifty years ago.

There are two types of irrelevant answers:

- **Irrelevant to the passage:** The passage never mentions the answer choice at all; this first type of irrelevant answer is relatively easy to detect.
- **Irrelevant to the question:** The answer is relevant to the passage but *not* to the question. This second type of irrelevant answer is relatively challenging to detect because the answer is something mentioned in the passage, but it does not link back to the key words in the question.

Example: Here is an example of an answer choice that is **irrelevant**. This question and explanation relate to the passage “Telling Time in Natare” on page 16.

Question:

3. Which choice best expresses the main idea of the second paragraph (lines 10-21) in regard to the people of Natare?
- (A) They have more free time in the morning than in the afternoon.
 - (B) They pay more attention to natural cycles and events than to specific hours or minutes.
 - (C) They always avoid walking during the hottest part of the day.
 - (D) ~~They tell time by referring to the sun’s position in the sky.~~

Passage context:

Nature and environment are what dictate time in Natare. Meetings in Natare are scheduled for one of two times: morning or afternoon. Morning means after everyone has gotten out of bed, eaten, swept the courtyard, taken care of the animals, and walked to the meeting place. Afternoon is after people have eaten lunch, as soon as the sun cools down enough to allow them to walk across the village comfortably. While waiting to go to an “afternoon” meeting once, I worried that I would be late. “It’s not yet time,” a friend told me. “It’s still too hot.”

Analysis:

The underlined phrases above indicate that the people of Natare rely on natural cycles and events to tell time.

The idea that the Natare “tell time by referring to the sun’s position in the sky” is not mentioned in context.

Therefore, (D) can be eliminated because it is **irrelevant**.

Contradictory

Contradictory answers directly oppose evidence in the passage. Such answers often blatantly contradict the **so what?** (the author’s main point) of the passage.

For example, if an author speaks positively about a scientist responsible for a new discovery, a contradictory answer will state that the author criticizes or minimizes the scientist’s discovery.

Given that contradictory answers so directly challenge the **so what?** of a passage, you can see why reading aggressively for the **so what?** is essential: grasping the **so what?** prepares you for a successful process of elimination.

Example: Here is an example of an answer choice that is **contradictory**. This question and explanation relate to the passage “Telling Time in Natare” on page 16.

Question:

3. Which choice best expresses the **main idea** of the **second paragraph** (lines 10-21) in regard to the people of Natare?
- (A) ~~They have more free time in the morning than in the afternoon.~~
 - (B) They pay more attention to natural cycles and events than to specific hours or minutes.
 - (C) They always avoid walking during the hottest part of the day.
 - (D) ~~They tell time by referring to the sun’s position in the sky.~~

Passage context:

Nature and environment are what dictate time in Natare. Meetings in Natare are scheduled for one of two times: morning or afternoon. Morning means after everyone has gotten out of bed, eaten, swept the courtyard, taken care of the animals, and walked to the meeting place. Afternoon is after people have eaten lunch, as soon as the sun cools down enough to allow them to walk across the village comfortably. While waiting to go to an “afternoon” meeting once, I worried that I would be late. “It’s not yet time,” a friend told me. “It’s still too hot.”

Analysis:

The underlined phrases above indicate that the people of Natare rely on natural cycles and events to tell time.

The assertion in (A) that “they have more free time in the morning than in the afternoon” contradicts the passage’s statement that morning meetings are after the Natare have “swept the courtyard” and “taken care of the animals.” Clearly, the Natare people have a number of duties that keep them busy in the mornings.

Therefore, (A) can be eliminated because it is **contradictory**.

Extreme

Extreme answers go beyond the evidence in the passage. Such answers are compelling because they are somewhat related to the passage, but they go beyond the passage; that is, they are too bold to be supported by evidence.

For example, if an author speaks positively about a scientist responsible for a new discovery, an extreme answer choice might state that the discovery is the most surprising one in history.

Extreme answer choices can often be identified by extreme terms: strong words of praise or criticism or unqualified terms such as **all**, **every**, **always**, **never**, **only**, or **none**.

Note: Extreme answers can be correct if the evidence provided supports the extreme answer. Just bear in mind: an extreme answer requires extreme evidence.

Example: Here is an example of an answer choice that is **extreme**. This question and explanation relate to the passage “Telling Time in Natare” on page 16.

Question:

3. Which choice best expresses the **main idea** of the **second paragraph** (lines 10-21) in regard to the people of Natare?
- (A) ~~They have more free time in the morning than in the afternoon.~~
 - (B) They pay more attention to natural cycles and events than to specific hours or minutes.
 - (C) They **always** avoid walking during the hottest part of the day.
 - (D) ~~They tell time by referring to the sun's position in the sky.~~

Passage context:

Nature and environment are what dictate time in Natare. Meetings in Natare are scheduled for one of two times: morning or afternoon. Morning means after everyone has gotten out of bed, eaten, swept the courtyard, taken care of the animals, and walked to the meeting place. Afternoon is after people have eaten lunch, as soon as the sun cools down enough to allow them to walk across the village comfortably. While waiting to go to an “afternoon” meeting once, I worried that I would be late. “It’s not yet time,” a friend told me. “It’s still too hot.”

Analysis:

The underlined phrases above indicate that the people of Natare rely on natural cycles and events to tell time.

Although the passage states that the Natare people prefer to walk “as soon as the sun cools down enough to allow them to walk across the village comfortably,” it would be too extreme to conclude that the Natare people “*always* avoid walking” when the sun is hot.

Note that the word “always” in (C) indicates that this answer is likely **too extreme** to be correct.