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https://www.kaptest.com/study/sat/whats-tested-on-the-sat-reading-and-writing-section/**

**SAT / ACT Prep Online Guides and Tips**

[**Breakdown of Every Question Type in SAT Reading by %**](https://blog.prepscholar.com/breakdown-of-every-question-type-in-sat-reading-by-percentage)



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[SAT READING](https://blog.prepscholar.com/topic/sat-reading)



Passage-based questions on the [SAT Critical Reading section](https://blog.prepscholar.com/whats-actually-tested-on-act-reading-skills-you-need) can be a real challenge, so it’s helpful to know exactly what you’re getting into before the test. **I’ve gone through every publicly available SAT and analyzed how frequently every type of Reading question shows up on the exam.**

In this article, which has been fully updated for the new SAT, I’ll go over the different categories of questions, show you how frequently they each appear, and tell you what this information means for your testing strategy.

**What Are the SAT Reading Question Types?**

On the SAT, the Reading section lasts 65 minutes and contains 52 questions. There will be five passages in the section, and all Reading questions are based on the passages.

Before we get to the distribution of questions, **I’ll briefly outline each of the nine question types** you'll see on the SAT Reading section so you have a better context for the numbers.

**Big Picture Questions**

[Big picture questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/big-picture-questions-in-sat-reading-strategies-tips) are about **the author’s point of view, the primary purpose of the passage, and the rhetorical strategy of the author.**

**Example of a big picture question:**

The primary purpose of the passage is to

**A.** discuss the assumptions and reasoning behind a theory  
**B.** describe the aim, method, and results of an experiment  
**C.** present and analyze conflicting data about a phenomenon  
**D.** show the innovative nature of a procedure used in a study

**Little Picture/Detail Questions**

[Little picture/detail questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/little-picture-questions-in-sat-reading) will be about a **specific small detail in a passage.** They might ask you what a phrase in a passage specifically refers to or give you a line number and ask you to find a detail in that part of the passage.

**Example of a little picture question:**

The fourth paragraph (lines 50-56) indicates that Plato’s principal objection to “poetry” (line 50) was its

**A.** confusing language  
**B.** widespread popularity  
**C.** depiction of turbulent events  
**D.** influence on people’s morals

**Inference Questions**

[Inference questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/inference-questions-on-sat-reading-6-strategies) will ask you to **make a logical assumption based on details in the passage.** You may have to infer the meaning of a paragraph or line in the passage, determine the implications of a statement in the passage, or make a logical conclusion about opinions stated by passage authors.

**Example of an inference question:**

Which of the following, if available, would best refute the author’s assertion about the “young upstart” (line 57)?

**A.** Evidence that certain kinds of particles in nature exceed the speed of light  
**B.** Confirmation of conditions that existed in the earliest stages of the Big Bang  
**C.** Speculation that the deep interior of a black hole is not as dense as scientists have believed  
**D.** Mathematical formulas that link general relativity and quantum mechanics in the same realm

**Function Questions**

[Function questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/function-questions-on-sat-reading-5-strategies-with-practice) will ask you to **figure out what the purpose or effect of a line or paragraph is in the context of a passage** or why the author used a certain phrasing in the passage.

**Example of a function question:**

The author of the passage uses the quotation in lines 5-6 primarily as a:

**A.** vivid expression of how she views words  
**B.** powerful example of what she sought in Shakespeare  
**C.** scholarly citation linking her to poetic words  
**D.** comical introduction to a problem encountered by every dramatic performer

**Vocabulary in Context Questions**

[Words in context questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/words-in-context-sat-strategies) will ask you the **definition of a word as it is used in the context of a passage.** Answering these questions correctly requires an understanding of nuance in the meanings of common words rather than a wide-ranging vocabulary.

**Example of a vocabulary in context question:**

In line 34, the word “follow” most nearly means

**A.** pursue  
**B.** result  
**C.** join in  
**D.** listen carefully

**Analogy Questions**

[Analogy questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/analogy-questions-in-sat-reading-strategies-and-tips) will ask you to make a comparison between a condition or relationship described in the passage and a condition or relationship that is **not** mentioned in the passage. Basically, you have to **detect the underlying similarity between something in the passage and a separate hypothetical situation.**Analogy questions are a subset of inference questions.

**Example of an analogy question:**

The “experts” (line 53) would most likely argue that which of the following is guilty of the “sin” mentioned in line 58?

**A.** A veterinarian who is unwilling to treat a sick animal  
**B.** A cat owner who believes his cat misses its siblings  
**C.** A dog owner who is unwilling to punish her dog for misbehaving  
**D.** A zoologist who places the interests of people before those of animals

**Author Technique Questions**

[Author technique questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/author-technique-questions-in-sat-reading) will ask you about **the author’s tone in the passage or the mood the passage conveys to the reader.**

**Example of an author technique question:**

The first paragraph of the passage establishes a mood of

**A.** jaded dismissal  
**B.** nervous apprehension  
**C.** dramatic anticipation  
**D.** initial concern

**Evidence Support Questions**

These are a new type of SAT Reading question. You'll answer a question about the passage, for example an inference or little detail question, and the next question (the [evidence support question](https://blog.prepscholar.com/command-of-evidence-sat-reading)) will ask you to **cite evidence**that supports your answer to the previous question.

**Example of an evidence support question:**

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

**A.**Lines 45-50 ("So every...beetles")  
**B.** Lines 51-53 ("Finally...beetles")  
**C.** Lines 59-61 ("We would...open")  
**D.** Lines 76-79 ("Gourds...flowers")

**Data Reasoning Questions**

For the first time, SAT Reading now includes figures (such as graphs and charts) that show data. **For**[**data reasoning questions**](https://blog.prepscholar.com/data-graphics-sat-reading-and-writing)**, you'll need to interpret the data in the figure and place it in the context of the overall passage** - for example, how does this figure support the author's argument? Especially tricky will be data reasoning questions that require you to make inferences- for example, "the author is most likely to support which interpretation of the data in this figure?"

**Example of a data reasoning question:**

According to figure 1, in 2017, the cost of which of the following fuels is projected to be closest to the 2009 US average electricity cost shown in figure 2?

**A.** Natural gas  
**B.** Wind (onshore)  
**C.** Conventional coal  
**D.** Advanced nuclear

*Now for our all-access behind-the-scenes tour of SAT reading. This is where the magic happens, folks. Currently in production: "SAT Reading: This Time, It's Critical"*

**Distribution of Question Types**

Here's a table that outlines the distribution of each question type that we found on the SAT Reading section. This data was collected by going through every Reading question on the first [eight official practice SATs](https://blog.prepscholar.com/complete-official-sat-practice-tests-free-links), sorting them into categories, and averaging the data we got.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question Type** | **Average Number of Questions per Section** | **Percentage of Total Reading Questions** |
| Big Picture | 11 | 21% |
| Little Detail | 7 | 13% |
| Inference | 5 | 10% |
| Function | 5 | 10% |
| Vocabulary in Context | 8 | 15% |
| Analogy | 1 | 2% |
| Author Technique | 1 | 2% |
| Evidence Support | 10 | 20% |
| Data Reasoning | 5 | 10% |
| **All Critical Reading Questions** | **52** | **103%**(due to rounding) |

**Big Picture Questions**

Out of the 52 questions on the SAT Reading section, I found that an average of about **11 questions per test** were Big Picture questions. This makes them the most common type of Reading question, and it means that about **21% of the questions** you’ll encounter on SAT Critical Reading will be based on an understanding of the main points of passages. The SAT has more Big Picture questions than the ACT, so this can make the SAT Reading section a bit more challenging because you really need to be aware of what the passage is discussing and what the author is trying to convey.

**Little Detail Questions**

Little detail questions are also pretty common on the SAT, with an average of **7 questions per test.** This means that about **13% of the questions** in the Critical Reading section will be comprised of little detail questions.These questions tend to be the most direct and the least challenging of the bunch, so it’s encouraging to know that they are so common.

**Inference Questions**

At an average of **5 questions per test**, inference questions are somewhat common and make up about **10% of questions** on the Critical Reading section. This means that inference skills are pretty important on the SAT. This is especially true since they come into play on other question types, like analogies and sometimes big picture questions, as well.

**Function Questions**

There are also about **5 function questions per test,**and they make up about **10% of Reading questions.** This means it's going to be important to understand the structure of the passages and the reasons behind the author's phrasing.

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**Vocabulary in Context Questions**

Vocabulary in context questions became much more common when the SAT was revised in 2016. Now, there are about **8 of these questions per test**, and they make up around **15% of Reading questions.**As we mentioned above,  you don't need a huge vocabulary to get these questions right, but you do need to be familiar with different definitions of more common words and how to determine which definition is being used based on the word's context in the passage.

**Analogy Questions**

Analogy questions are very rare - you can expect **1 or maybe 2 of them per test.** If your skills with inference questions are strong, you should be able to figure out analogy questions as well. It's still good to be prepared for analogy questions because they are kind of weird if you haven't seen them before. See my [article on analogy questions](https://blog.prepscholar.com/analogy-questions-in-sat-reading-strategies-and-tips) for more information about how to solve them.

**Author Technique Questions**

Author technique questions are even rarer than analogy questions. They only come up about **once per test, if at all.** It is sometimes useful to understand tone and mood for the Critical Reading section even if you don’t come across a specific question about them, but these are clearly not core concepts on the test.

**Evidence Support Questions**

[Evidence support](https://blog.prepscholar.com/command-of-evidence-sat-reading) (also known as command of evidence) questions are one of the new SAT Reading questions, and they're also one of the most common question types. You can expect to see about **10 evidence support questions**on each Reading Section, which means they make up about **20% of SAT Reading questions.**To answer these questions correctly, you'll need to be able to use higher-level reasoning skills to correctly select the part of the passage that supports your previous answer.

**Data Reasoning Questions**

Another new question type, there will be about **5 data reasoning questions** on the SAT, usually spread between two passages. This means they make up about **10% of the Reading section.** To answer these questions correctly, you'll need to be able to accurately read graphs and charts and be able to understand how they relate to the passage. For more in-depth information, [check out our guide to data reasoning questions.](https://blog.prepscholar.com/data-graphics-sat-reading-and-writing)

*I got a blank space baby, and I'll write your name - a philosophy that probably didn't get TSwift very far on the SAT.*

**How Does This Information Affect Your Approach to SAT Reading?**

Now that you know the frequency of question types, you may be wondering how you can adapt your Critical Reading strategy to the composition of the test.

**Here are some tips you should consider based on the data:**

**Read Strategically**

It’s important to come up with a [passage reading strategy](https://blog.prepscholar.com/the-best-way-to-read-the-passage-in-sat-reading) that will allow you to absorb details while also understanding the main points the author of the passage is making. Since a significant portion of questions in Critical Reading are big picture, **it is especially critical to understand passages holistically.**

On the SAT, passages are relatively short, so it can be beneficial to **skim them before reading the questions.** Even though Reading questions often give you line numbers, it's a lot easier to figure out questions that deal with inferences, the function of a certain part of the passage, and the main purpose of the passage if you read the passage quickly beforehand. **A good skimming strategy is to read the first and last paragraphs and the first and last sentences of each body paragraph.** This way you’ll know the main ideas and the gist of the author’s argument.

**Inference, function, and big picture questions together make up nearly half of the Reading questions on the test.** This means that fully understanding the main points made in the passage before you read the questions will help you to answer them much more efficiently.

**Pay Attention to Details**

Little picture questions make up a significant part of Reading questions, so you should also **be prepared to get very specific with your answers.** Sometimes the questions students miss are the ones that seem easy. They’ll breeze right by them and make a silly mistake. Don’t let that happen to you!

This is also important because **inference skills are critical on the test.**With most inference questions, it comes down to finding the right keywords in the passage and matching up details to draw conclusions. This requires an eye for small details as well as awareness of the overall structure of the passage.

**Don’t Worry About Rarer Question Types (Unless You’re Shooting for a Perfect Score)**

If analogies scare you (and they are some of the more difficult questions), don’t worry too much about them. The same goes for author technique questions. **You don’t need to spend your time practicing question types that will likely only show up once or twice on the test if at all.**

Practice answering big picture, little detail, evidence support, and vocabulary in context questions first and foremost. Then, if you master those, you can work through the rarer question types.

****

*Some questions are rare birds. But mainly I just think the expression on this bird's face is HILARIOUS.*

**Summary**

There are a few different types of questions that you can expect to see on the passage-based reading section of SAT Critical Reading. **These include:**

Big picture  
Little picture  
Inference  
Function  
Vocabulary in context  
Analogies

Author technique

Evidence support

Data reasoning

**Big picture** and **evidence support**questions are the most common, followed by **vocabulary in context**and **little detail**questions. **Analogy** and **author technique** questions are relatively rare.

**Based on the frequency of question types, you should:**

* Practice skimming passages strategically
* Pay attention to passage details
* Save the rare question types for last in terms of studying

**Now that you know exactly what kinds of questions to expect, you’ll be extra prepared for everything the Critical Reading section throws at you!**

# SAT Reading Test - Question Types

The 2016 SAT Reading Test, which is part of the "Evidence-Based Reading and Writing" section of the exam, consists entirely of multiple-choice questions that require students to demonstrate comprehension of individual reading passages and paired passages. The College Board has divided the requisite skills into the categories listed below.

## Command of Evidence

All of the 2016 SAT's assessments of verbal ability include questions based on the concept of Command of Evidence, including the Reading Test, Writing and Language Test, and Essay. Command of Evidence is also one of the SAT's subscores, and a total of ten Reading Test questions count toward this subscore (two for each of the test's five reading passages). Command of Evidence questions on the SAT Reading Test evaluate the following skills: determining the best evidence, interpreting data presented in graphics, drawing connections between text and graphics, and understanding author use of evidence. Test-takers must be able to find the best evidence in a reading passage in order to answer a question, infer answers from informational graphics, connect written text to information presented graphically, and assess an author's use of supporting evidence (or lack thereof) for arguments advanced in reading passages.

## Words in Context

Words in Context is one of the most significant areas of improvement for the 2016 SAT. Instead of obscure vocabulary words, the new SAT focuses on what the College Board calls "high-utility academic words and phrases," which appear in college-level readings in a broad range of disciplines. More importantly, multi-paragraph reading passages allow students to infer word meaning from context rather simply regurgitating dictionary definitions. Contextual inference is a much more useful academic skill than vocabulary memorization. As with Command of Evidence, Words in Context is an area evaluated across all verbal sections of the new SAT, and there are 10 Words in Context questions on the Reading Test (two per reading passage) that represent a portion of the Words in Context subscore. Words in Context questions on the Reading Test are of two types: interpreting words in context, and analyzing word choice rhetorically. The former asks students to assess the meaning of a word from various clues in a multi-paragraph text, while the latter requires test-takers to determine how word choice affects author meaning, style, or tone.

## Information and Ideas

This category and the two below are specific to the 2016 SAT Reading Test. Information and Ideas questions are described by the College Board as falling into six "types": reading closely, citing textual evidence, determining central ideas and themes, summarizing, understanding relationships, and interpreting words and phrases in context. The skills evaluated include finding directly stated or implied information, choosing passages that best support a conclusion, understanding main themes, recognition of summarization, determining relationships between ideas, and discerning the meaning of specific words in the context of reading passages.

## Rhetoric

This question category focuses on analysis of reading passages with respect to word choice, text structure, point of view, purpose, and argument. The term "rhetoric" can be defined as the art of persuasion in the use of language, and the SAT Reading Test requires students to understand various techniques. Word choice questions are concerned primarily with effect rather than definition, and text structure questions require comprehension of organizational strategies such as problem-solution or cause and effect. Point of view questions ask about the perspective of the author, while purpose questions necessitate inference of the author's agenda. To successfully answer questions about author argument, students must be able to understand author assertions and rank them by importance.

## Synthesis

Questions in this category are oriented around the analysis of multiple texts and quantitative information. The "synthesis" category of the Reading Test is therefore only relevant to paired reading passages and reading passages with informational graphics. Paired passages generally include two texts on a similar topic in history/social studies or science. Test-takers answer questions about consistency or discrepancy between passages. Passages with informational graphics require students to find information, draw conclusions from charts and tables, and understand how graphics support textual assertions.

SAT Reading Test questions are not labeled by category, but it is often a simple matter to discern which skill is being tested by noting the specific wording of the questions. For example, students should look for keywords and phrases such as "main focus," "stance," or "asserts," all of which suggest analysis of argument. In addition to the Command of Evidence and Words in Context subscores, some Reading Test questions are also components of the Analysis in History/Social Studies and Analysis in Science cross-test scores. These are usually identifiable by the nature of the questions and subject matter of the passages.