



Test Prep

Reading 101



# 1. Reading Passages

## Starting a Passage

At the moment when you begin an ACT Reading passage, the thing you need most is the overall main idea.

At that moment, specific details are not important, because a passage has hundreds of specific details, and we don't know which of them we'll be quizzed on.

To get that initial main idea, start by reading faster than your comfortable reading speed, getting through the passage in around 60 seconds. You can only do this by cutting corners in order to read fast (i.e. skipping long names, dates, modifiers, and other details that you don't need at this exact moment).

## The Way Your Brain Reads

As you read, there are two parts of your brain that are making sense of the passage: your auditory brain and your visual brain.

Your auditory brain hears the passage in your head, as if it's being read out loud. This takes long!

Your visual brain sees the words, like seeing trees in a forest. This happens quickly. In fact, if you really want to, you can see the entire forest at once.

To use this method, use your visual brain and auditory brains simultaneously.

- Glance (visually) through the sentence, judging which words are more important and which are less important.
- Pronounce, in your inner monologue (auditory), only the words that you've quickly judged to be the most important ones.



This method only works if you trust in your visual brain's amazing ability to quickly judge which words are more important.

## How Does 'Skipping Words' Work?

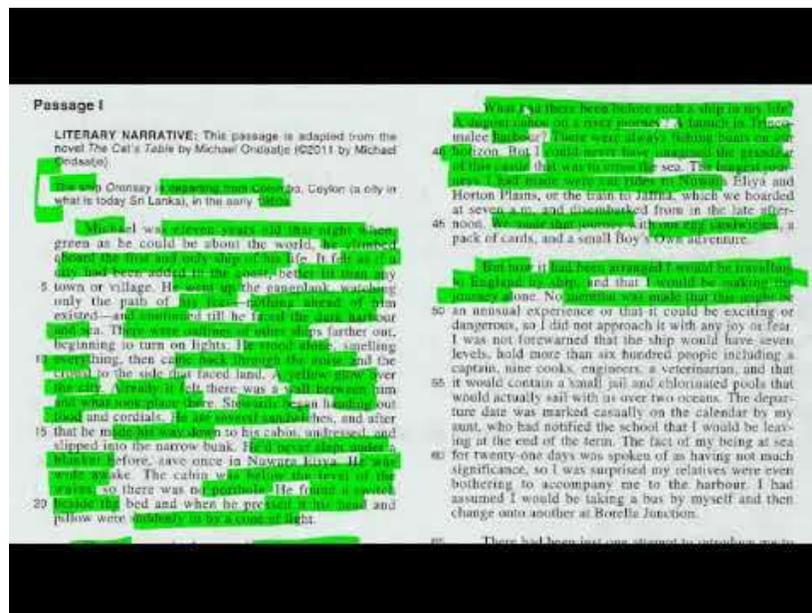
Let's say we're reading this sentence from an SAT Reading passage (Practice Test 2, Passage 1 "The Professor"):

"No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of profession, and every man, worthy of the name, will row long against wind and tide before he allows himself to cry out, "I am baffled!" and submits to be floated passively back to land."

Letting our mind pick the more important words, we might only pronounce these words in blue:

No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of profession, and every man, worthy of the name, will row long against wind and tide before he allows himself to cry out, "I am baffled!" and submits to be floated passively back to land.

Here's what the 'Skipping Words' Method looks like on a real ACT Reading passage:



## Don't Doubt!

If you're hearing about this method and are doubtful that you will have the ability to quickly judge the more important words, fear not!

It's more of an art than a science. Practice this method and make it your own. There's at least a possibility that you'll be someone with an above average ability to use this method.

If not, we have a backup plan! For the toughest reading passages and the most difficult questions, we can try the 'Focusing on Verbs' method, which takes longer, and which we'll get into next.

## The 'Focusing On Verbs' Method

Verbs are like the neon signs in a reading passage and focusing on them takes you to the most important things in a sentence. When using this method, we need to make sure that we are surgical with verbs.

To review:

- Regular verbs are words like *run*, *punch*, and *jump*.
- Important verbs are *is*, *was*, *are*, *am*, *were*, *be*, *have*, *has*, *had*.
- The following are not verbs: '-ing' words like *running*, *punching*, *jumping* and 'to do' words like *to run*, *to punch*, *to jump*. They are not verbs because we can say:

"I like *muffins*."

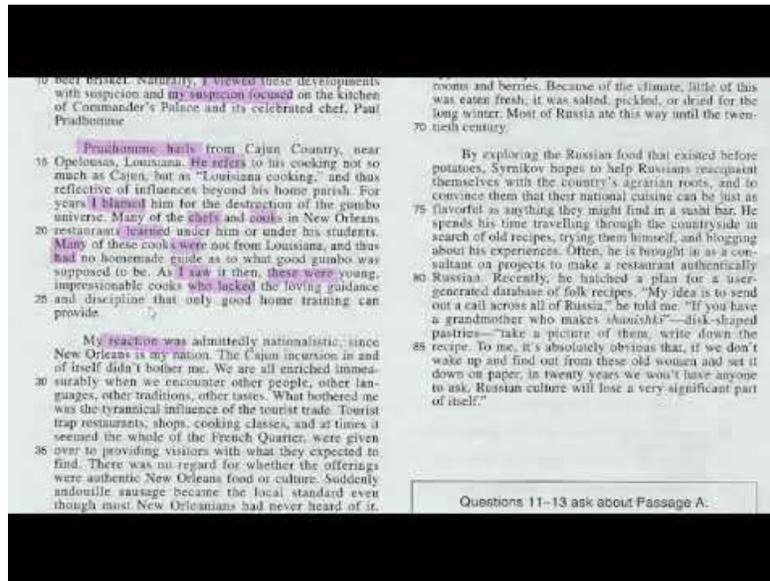
"I like *running*."

"I like *to run*."

In order to use the 'Focusing on Verbs' method correctly, you must identify and read each and every verb in a given paragraph, as well as the surrounding words for context.



Here's what the 'Focusing on Verbs' method looks like on a real ACT Reading passage:



## It's Not Black or White

It's important to note that we are not forcing students to use a specific reading method for every situation. The biggest ability that we seek to build in our students is judgment: knowing when to go fast or slow, when to use one method or another.

Rules are meant to be broken, but in general, we do recommend using the 'Skipping Words' Method to start most passages and the 'Focusing on Verbs' Method for more difficult passages and portions of text that you have difficulty understanding.



## 2. Answering Questions

### **I've Sped Through the Passage...Now What?**

Since you moved so quickly, you should have, at this moment, only a superficial understanding of the passage. That's okay, because moving swiftly is more important than retaining information at this point.

All you need to be able to answer right now is:

This passage is arguing or saying \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Order of Answering Questions**

You can answer the questions in the order that they are given to you on the test, except for the Main Idea or Broad questions. These questions should be answered last. The reason you want to answer these Main Idea or Broad questions last is because you will be much more of an expert on the passage by that time, therefore they will become much easier for you.

### **Every Answer is Quote-Based**

Every answer on ACT Reading is quote-based, which means you need to be able to point out the specific line where the answer came from. Quite often, you'll notice that the correct answer is nearly a word for word quote of the actual text.

Because the answers are so quote-based, you must resist the temptation to ever answer a question based on 'what you think you read,' and always, no matter what, find actual textual support.



## **Answer in Your Own Words First**

Once you have found the area in the passage that discussed the given information, answer the question in your own words first, and then (only then) look at the answer choices.

The reason you want to answer in your own words first is because the ACT is very good at giving you answer choices that seem correct but, in reality, are not.

## **Skip When You're Stuck**

Be willing to skip any question that is taking too much time or seems overly involved and come back to it after answering the rest of the questions for that passage.

