

PREPARING FOR THE ACT SOCIAL SCIENCE READING PASSAGES

The ACT Reading section contains four types of passages: 1. Prose Fiction/Literary Narrative, 2. Social Science, 3. Humanities, and 4. Natural Science. A heading preceding each passage identifies what type of passage it is. This study guide is designed to help highlight strategies and practices for preparing for the Social Science related passages and text-dependent questions.



About the Social Science Passages

These passages may be drawn from any of the social science disciplines, including anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. For example, a passage may cover a recent presidential election, the development of industrialization in the late 19th century, the psychology of personality disorders, or the effects of poverty. While it is helpful to have some familiarity with these disciplines, it is not necessary to memorize any specific content information. Everything needed to answer the questions will be included in the passage itself.

[Click here for a video lesson on ACT social science passages: https://youtu.be/ulmuYij9qgo](https://youtu.be/ulmuYij9qgo)

About the Social Science Passage Questions

ACT reading test measures reading comprehension. The questions require the use of referring and reasoning skills to:

- determine main ideas;
- locate and interpret significant details;
- understand sequences of events;
- make comparisons;
- comprehend cause-effect relationships;
- determine the meaning of context-dependent words, phrases, and statements;
- draw generalizations; and
- analyze voice and method.

Sample Question Stems

- The primary purpose of the passage is to:
- The author’s attitude toward main subject of the passage can best be described as:
- Based on information in paragraph ____, it can reasonably be inferred that:
- The author’s comparison of ____ and ____ focuses primarily on:
- As used in line ____, the word ____ most nearly means:
- The use of the word ____ in line ____ implies that:
- The passage suggests that:
- One of the main points made in the paragraph ____ is:

Source: Reading Test Description for the ACT

<http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/description-of-reading-test.html>

Preparing for the Social Science Passage Questions

1. Master the Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards for Grades 9-12. These standards can be accessed here: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/>. Aligned resources that can help students with mastery of these standards include:
 - *Mini-Qs in World History, American History, and Civics*. Print and electronic binders provided to CCS schools.
 - Reading Like a Historian lessons and Beyond the Bubble assessments. Available with a free account at <http://sheg.stanford.edu>
2. Practice reading nonfiction passages with text-dependent questions.
 - CommonLit - Available with a free account at <http://www.commonlit.org>
 - Newsela - Available with a free account at <http://www.newsela.com>
 - ReadWorks - Available with a free account at <http://www.readworks.org>
 - Achieve 3000 - Available through CCS Clever: <http://clever.com/in/columbuscity>
3. Practice with sample ACT social science passages and questions.
 - [“Personality Disorders”](#)
 - [“Great Waters: An Atlantic Passage”](#)
 - [“An Essay on Malcolm X”](#)

More About Text-Dependent Questions

Typical text-dependent questions ask students to perform one or more of the following tasks:

- Analyze paragraphs on a sentence-by-sentence basis and sentences on a word-by-word basis to determine the role played by individual paragraphs, sentences, phrases, or words;
- Investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words and why an author may have chosen one word over another;
- Probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, each key detail in literary text, and observe how these build to a whole;
- Examine how shifts in the direction of an argument or explanation are achieved and the impact of those shifts;
- Question why authors choose to begin and end when they do;
- Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve; and
- Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated.

Creating Text-Dependent Questions for Close Analytic Reading

An effective set of text-dependent questions delves systematically into a text to guide students toward extracting the key meanings or ideas found there.

The following process is a good guide that can serve to generate a core series of questions for close reading of any given text:

1. Identify the Core Understandings and Key Ideas of the Text
2. Start Small to Build Confidence
3. Target Vocabulary and Text Structure
4. Tackle Tough Sections Head-on
5. Create Coherent Sequences of Text-dependent Questions
6. Identify the Standards That Are Being Addressed
7. Create the Culminating Assessment

Source: Achieve the Core. For complete detailed guidelines, see: <https://achievethecore.org/file/358>