THEA Reading Tips

The word meaning questions on the THEA Test are not used to test vocabulary. They are testing your ability to find the correct meaning of a word from the surrounding context. Sometimes you can find the meaning of the word in question just from the sentence in which it is used. More often, you will have to read sentences preceding and following that sentence. You may even have to use surrounding paragraphs to find the correct meaning.

The author’s purpose is tied to the main idea of the passage. For example, he or she is trying to persuade you to be for or against the main idea, or to entertain you with the main idea, or to inform you about the main idea. When answering questions about the author’s purpose, remind yourself of the main idea.

In study skills questions, when the test is asking you to find the best outline of the passage and the choices are all Roman numerals, remember that Roman numerals indicate main points of the passage and not supporting or minor details.

Another thing to remember about study skills questions is that when the question asks you to find the best summary of the passage, the summary you choose must cover the main points of the passage from the beginning to end.

Preview the passages before reading them - - this improves comprehension. Read the title of the passage (it suggests the topic), the first and last sentences of the first paragraph (the first sentence often introduces the main idea and the last often is the thesis statement), and the last sentence of the last paragraph (it often restates the thesis statement). After reading the title and the three sentences, read the whole passage and try to find the main idea of the whole passage.

If possible, when answering a question, read the stem of the question, cover the choices and try to answer the question on your own. Then find the choice that matches your answer.

Answer all the questions from one reading passage before going on to the next. Only correct answers are counted, so do not leave any question blank.

If you are taking all three sections of the THEA test, you should allow about 90 minutes for the reading section. Manage that 90 minutes so that you will be able to finish all passages. To determine the amount of time to spend on each passage, divide 90 by the number of passages in the test. For example, if there are six passages, you can spend 15 minutes per passage. Time yourself on the first passage and see how close you are to the 15 minutes. If it takes you more than 15 minutes, speed up, and if it takes you less than 15 minutes, you are doing just fine.
The following terms appear in THEA questions:

**assertion** a positive statement or declaration, often without support or reason

**contention** a point debated or affirmed in controversy; an assertion put forward in argument

**argument** a fact or statement offered as proof of evidence; a course of reasoning aimed at demonstrating the truth or falsehood of something

**anecdote** a short narrative concerning an interesting or amusing incident or event; a short story that serves to support the main idea

**fact** can be objectively verified (capacity to be verified); can be proved true or false

**opinion** a statement giving judgments or beliefs; cannot be objectively verified

**inference** common-sense reasoning drawn from a passage but not directly stated in the passage

**assumption** a statement accepted or supposed true without proof or demonstration

**Reading Skill Description**

**Determine the meaning of words and phrases.**
This skill includes using the context of a passage to determine the meaning of words with multiple meanings, unfamiliar and uncommon words and phrases, and figurative expressions.

**Understand the main idea and supporting details in written material.**
This skill includes identifying explicit and implicit main ideas and recognizing ideas that support, illustrate, or elaborate the main idea of a passage.

**Identify a writer’s purpose, point of view, and intended meaning.**
This skill includes recognizing a writer’s expressed or implied purpose for writing; evaluating the appropriateness of written material for various purposes or audiences; recognizing the likely effect on an audience of a writer’s choice of words; and using the content, word choice, and phrasing of a passage to determine a writer’s opinion or point of view.
Analyze the relationship among ideas in written material.
This skill includes identifying the sequence of events or steps, identifying cause-effect relationships, analyzing relationships between ideas in opposition, identifying solutions to problems, and drawing conclusions inductively and deductively from information stated or implied in a passage.

Use critical reasoning skills to evaluate written material.
This skill includes evaluating the stated or implied assumptions on which the validity of a writer’s argument depends; judging the relevance or importance of facts, examples, or graphic data to a writer’s argument; evaluating the logic of a writer’s argument; evaluating the validity of analogies; distinguishing between fact and opinion; and assessing the credibility or objectivity of the writer or source of written material.

Strategies for reading the passages:

1. Knowing what you are looking for makes finding the answer easier, so one strategy is to read the questions first. Then, read the passage carefully with the questions in mind.
2. Another strategy is to read the passage slowly and carefully; then read the questions.
3. A third approach is to get a general idea about the passage by quickly scanning it; then read the questions and refer to the passage to check your answers.

Use the strategy which works best for you.

Types of context clues to deduce the word meanings

1. Surrounding words and phrases
   Use words before and after an unknown word to understand its meaning. “The vast panorama of sea any sky overwhelmed Balboa when he first saw the Pacific Ocean in 1513.” You know “vast” means “very big” and that it describes the unfamiliar word “panorama.” The word after “panorama” indicates that the panorama consist “of sea and sky.” Next, you read that Balboa was overwhelmed when he saw the Pacific Ocean. Therefore, you can deduce that “panorama” means “view” or “vista.”

2. Definition
   Writer’s often use certain words and phrases (e.g. is, means, refers to) to signal that a definition is coming in the sentence. 
   Anaphylactic shock refers to a severe allergic reaction. 
   In addition, certain punctuation marks often signal a definition. American cars depreciate, decrease in value, quicker than foreign cars.
3. Restatement
   Key words such as that is, or, and in other words indicate that a restatement is coming in the sentence.
   Scratching will exacerbate, worsen, a wound.

4. Example
   A writer often provides an example to clarify word meaning.
   I like a variety of condiments, such as mustard, onions, and relish on hot dog.

5. Explanation
   Sometimes a writer explains the meaning of an unknown word in the same sentence or in the next sentence.
   Darlene’s freckles were ubiquitous. They developed wherever sun had touched her skin.

6. Contrast
   Sometimes the context of an unfamiliar word contains an antonym or a word that has an opposite meaning.
   Although one tennis player seemed energetic, the other player appeared enervated.

Sources:
Becoming a Confident Reader, Carol Kamar, Mifflin Company, Boston, New York.

Study Hints

The following study hints will help you understand main ideas and identify supporting details in your reading.

1. Ask questions about what you read; whom or what is the paragraph or selection about? What is the writer saying about that subject?

2. When you are about to start reading a book, begin by giving yourself a general sense of what is to come by reading its table of contents and introduction, as well as the beginning of a couple of chapters. This preview of the book will help you recognize main ideas and read in a more directed and efficient manner.

3. Look first for the main idea in the first sentence of a paragraph or in the first paragraph of a longer selection. It may not be there, of course, but you will find it there more often than not.

4. Look for a restatement of the main idea of a paragraph in the final sentence, or look for a restatement of the main idea of a longer selection—an essay, textbook chapter, or journal article in the final paragraph of summary.
5. Remember that writers may imply rather than state the main idea. Use the two questions in study area #1 to find the implied main idea.

6. Test what you believe to be the main idea by asking if all the details, facts, reasons, and examples given by the writer support the idea in some way.

7. Preview a long reading assignment by reading just the first and last paragraphs and the first sentence of each remaining paragraph. Using this method, you can identify many main points and see how the writer arranges these points to build an argument or to explain a process or body knowledge.

8. Read your assignments in their entirety, noting how the details support the main points.

The following study hints will help you understand the relationships among the ideas included in the materials you read.

1. For each work you read, determine the type or types of organization the writer has used: sequential, cause and effect, argumentative, comparison and contrast, or problem and solution.

2. Look for signals words and phrases to help you determine how a selection is organized and how specific points included in the selection relate to one another. Because writers sometimes include one structure within another, be sure you have correctly identified the overall structure of the selection.

3. Ask yourself the following questions as you read: What is the writer’s goal in this selection? How are the facts and the ideas broadly organized to achieve the writer’s intended goal? How does each idea presented relate to the writer’s broad goal and to the other specific ideas included in the selection (e.g., as a cause, an effect, a solution, a pro argument, a con argument)?

4. If, after reading a selection, you remain unsure about how some of the facts and ideas discussed relate to one another, try developing a rough diagram to help you visualize those relationships as you reread the parts you found confusing. Keep rereading the selection until you are sure you understand all the important ideas and relationships mentioned.

The best way to learn to recognize and analyze a writer’s intent is to ask yourself the following questions each time you read:

1. Who is the writer’s intended audience? Is it an instructor? a college class? the academic community? a technical audience? the business community? the general public?
2. What is the intended goal of the writer? Is it to express his or her own thoughts and feelings? to create a work of art? to entertain an audience? to inform readers? to persuade them?

3. How does the writer achieve this goal?

   A. What kind of language does the writer use? Is it formal or is it informal? Is it descriptive or is it technical?

   B. What kind of structure does the writer use? Is information presented in a particular sequential order? as a cause-effect analysis? as a comparison-contrast? as an argument? Are the paragraphs long or are they short? Is the thesis presented first? Is it presented last? Or is it only implied and never stated explicitly?


4. What is the writer’s point of view? Is the writer neutral? Or does the writer show either a positive or negative attitude toward the subject of the work?

The best way to become a critical reader is to practice critical reasoning skills whenever you read expository writing. This means following the steps listed below:

1. Identify the writer’s main point or argument.

2. Identify the assumptions underlying the writer’s main point or argument.

3. Identify the types of support the writer uses to present the point or the argument.

4. Evaluate the completeness, relevance, validity, and objectivity of the support used.

5. Assess the writer’s overall logic and credibility.


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http://www.thea.nesinc.com/practice/htm