

# **Reading: Essential Skills Student Review Guide**

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# Basics of Reading Comprehension

## Section 1.4

### Lesson, Moral, and Theme of Fiction



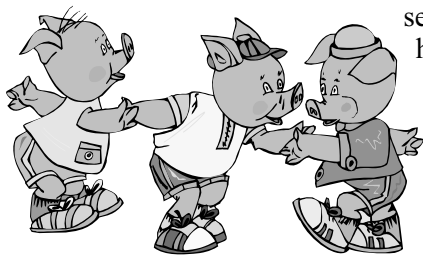
#### Lesson or Moral

Instead of having a true topic, a work of fiction may teach a **lesson** or a **moral**, which usually relates to the principals of right and wrong. Authors sometimes intend to impart some lesson or value to the reader as is seen with some of Aesop's fables, which often use the famous "moral of the story" phrase.

Identifying the lesson or moral in a story or poem may take a little more effort than simply identifying a topic. To find the lesson or moral, first ask what the story or poem is about. Then ask yourself what point the author may be trying to make. The characters in the story or poem may be the one learning the lesson, so also ask what the characters learned or should have learned from their experiences.

#### Example 1:

Most of you are probably familiar with the children's story of "The Three Little Pigs." If you remember the story, it begins with three pigs who are brothers. The first little pig builds his house out of straw because it is quicker and cheaper, but it doesn't stand up to the wolf's huffing and puffing. The second little pig builds his house of sticks because of the time and money, but his house, like that of his brother's, didn't withstand the wolf's huffing and puffing. The third little pig took the time to think about his home and decided that he needed a strong building material to keep him safe even though it would cost him a little more and take longer to build. His decision paid off when the wolf came and tried to eat him and his foolish brothers. The wolf could not blow down the house, and he got quite a reception when he tried to come down the chimney to get the little pigs!



**First, what is the story of "The Three Little Pigs" about?** In general, it is about three pigs who build houses out of different materials and a wolf who sees those three pigs as his breakfast, lunch, and dinner. But, it is easy to see that the author of this story wrote it to do more than simply entertain children.

**What did the characters learn in this story?** The first two brothers learned that being safe is better than being sorry. They built their houses quickly and inexpensively without considering the consequences. The wolf learned that just because something worked twice, it's not a sure thing that it will work three times in a row.

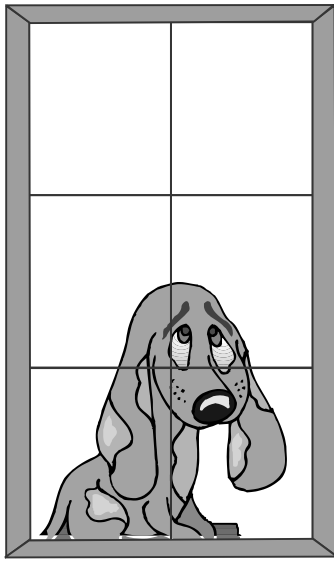
**What is the moral of this story? What lesson might the author be trying to teach?** The moral of the story might be that quicker and cheaper is not always better and that one should consider long term consequences before taking the "easy way out."

#### Theme

The **theme** of a story or a poem is the insight into life or message that the author is conveying to the reader. Think of it as what the author believes is true about people or life. The theme may not be as direct as a moral or a lesson.

To determine the theme, first ask yourself what the story or poem is about. Then ask what the author's opinion about that subject is. Once you can identify the author's opinion or opinions, you should have the theme. Similar to lesson or moral, identifying the theme may take a little more effort. Let's look at some examples.

**Section 1.4, continued**  
**Lesson, Moral, and Theme of Fiction**



**Example 2:**

**Fool's Money Bags by Amy Lowell**

Outside the long window,  
With his head on the stone sill,  
The dog is lying,  
Gazing at his Beloved.  
His eyes are wet and urgent,  
And his body is taut and shaking.  
It is cold on the terrace;  
A pale wind licks along the stone slabs,  
But the dog gazes through the glass  
And is content.

The Beloved is writing a letter.  
Occasionally she speaks to the dog,  
But she is thinking of her writing.  
Does she, too, give her devotion to one  
Not worthy?

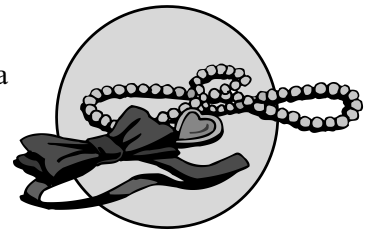
What is the theme of this poem?

- A. The Beloved is writing a letter and ignoring her dog.
- B. The dog is lying outside, cold and lonely, but is watching his Beloved and is content.
- C. Dogs shouldn't be mistreated by starving them and leaving them out in the cold.
- D. The Beloved is giving her devotion to someone unworthy just as her dog is giving her unworthy devotion.

First ask what this poem is about. Can you see that answers A and B summarize what this poem is about? These are not themes, but they can help you determine the theme. Next, ask yourself what the author thinks about the subject. Does the author approve of the writer ignoring her dog? No, she doesn't approve. Does she think that dogs are special? Yes, she does. Answer C looks like it could be a theme, but the poem doesn't really suggest that the dog is starving or that the dog is being overly mistreated. Would you agree that the last two lines of the poem really summarize the author's opinion? The author questions if the writer is giving her devotion to someone not worthy just as the dog seems to be giving its devotion to someone who doesn't appreciate it. Answer D is the best theme for this poem.

**Example 3:**

In "The Diamond Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant, Madame Loisel borrows a diamond necklace from a friend to go to a special event. When she gets home, she discovers it is missing. Her husband goes back and searches everywhere but cannot find it. Instead of admitting to the friend that they lost the necklace, they borrow money from everyone, including loan sharks, and replace the necklace without the friend knowing. It takes them ten years to repay all the loans. When Madame Loisel sees her friend again after ten years, she sadly tells her what they did. Her friend is shocked and tells her the necklace is only a clever fake.



The above example gives a summary of "The Diamond Necklace." To determine the theme, ask yourself what the author's opinion of the situation is. In this story, the implied theme could be "*Being forthright and honest with friends could save much trouble.*" Another way to put it is "*Pride can cause much heartache.*" The author builds the story around this theme which is finally revealed through the ending.

## Section 1.4, continued

### Lesson, Moral, and Theme of Fiction

#### Universal Theme

**Universal themes** are themes that would be true for people in any country or in any time period.

#### Examples of Universal Themes

- Power can corrupt.
- With power comes great responsibility.
- Honesty is always best.
- Greed can be dangerous.
- Love conquers all.
- Outside appearances are unimportant; what's inside counts. (You can't judge a book by its cover.)
- The love of money is the root of evil.

These universal themes could be used in literature about cave men or people of today.

A theme that would not be universal would be the following:

*Huge corporations encourage dishonesty and greed.*

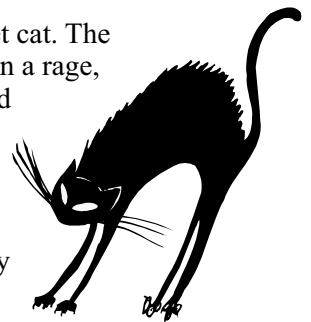
This theme is too specific. It only applies to modern day corporations. It couldn't happen in earlier times or in primitive societies.

There are different ways theme may be expressed. In other words, there is no one right answer, but that doesn't mean anything could be a theme. Pieces of literature, such as a novel, a play, a longer poem, or even a short story may have more than one theme. Literature for entertainment may have no theme.

#### Practice

**Read each summary below and answer the questions about lesson, moral, or theme. Remember that a lesson, moral, or theme is more than just a summary of what happened.**

In "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe, the narrator is happily married with a favorite pet cat. The narrator's temperament changes drastically for the worse because of his drinking. One night in a rage, he cuts out one of the cat's eyes. Later he hangs it. Then another cat with one eye appears, and his wife loves it. His dislike of it turns to loathing. When his wife tries to save the cat from a blow of his ax, he kills his wife instead. He puts her body behind a wall in the basement. Days later when the police come to investigate her disappearance, they are satisfied after looking around. When he shows off by knocking on the wall, a noise begins and sounds like the crying of a baby and then screaming. The police tear down the wall to find his wife's body and the second cat, who has been trapped behind the wall.



- (A) (B) (C) (D) 1. Which of the following is the best moral of this story?
- A. Cats have nine lives and are not easily killed.
  - B. When a person commits a crime, he should be careful to hide the evidence.
  - C. Cruel acts can backfire and lead to justice.
  - D. The narrator killed his wife and walled her body in the basement.

# Author's Purpose and Viewpoint

## Section 2.4 Strength of Argument

Many times, our opinions are based not only on our beliefs but also on how we interpret facts. As we discussed in the last sub-section, authors use facts and their own opinions to convey their own viewpoint. Sometimes, an author's main purpose in writing is to persuade the reader to agree with that viewpoint. In this sub-section, let's look at how an author can strengthen his or her viewpoint.



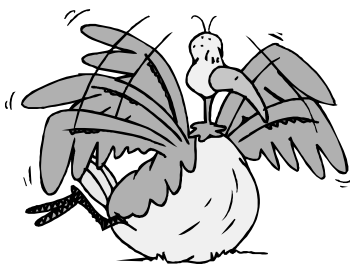
An **argument** is a reason given to persuade or support a viewpoint. The idea of an argument is one that many people might associate with a heated debate or loud discussion. When thought of in the negative sense, argument is not very pleasant. However, argument is not always a negative term, and it is often a necessary part of daily life.

We use argument to determine what is best for us in certain situations. For example, as students, we use argument in debates, research papers, speech assignments, and other assignments given by our teachers to help us learn. As adults we use argument to make valid points in meetings, discussions, and other activities connected to our jobs as well as in other areas of our lives. Argument is vital part of life for most people, so it is important for us to understand what comprises a good argument and how to argue successfully. It is equally important for us to recognize the strength of other people's arguments so that we can determine if we agree or disagree.

### Reasoning

Remember, a viewpoint is an opinion about a subject. We form those opinions by reasoning; we use our beliefs and interpret evidence and facts to draw logical conclusions. A viewpoint should be supported by valid reasons that can lead others to a convincing conclusion. Forming conclusions requires the use of either deductive or inductive reasoning.

**Deductive reasoning** applies a general truth to draw a conclusion about something specific. This type of reasoning is always logically valid because it relies on established truths and laws.



**Example 1:** In biology, it is an accepted truth that birds are the only animals that have feathers (all feathered animals are considered birds). A researcher in the Amazon jungle discovers a new species. That species has feathers. The researcher concludes that the new species is a type of bird.

This is deductive reasoning. The researcher uses the general truth that all feathered animals are birds to conclude that this new species that has feathers must be a bird. As long as the general truth holds true, the conclusion will be valid.

**Inductive reasoning** uses specific observations to draw a more general conclusion. This type of reasoning may be true but is not always valid because it always relies on one or more assumptions. We use inductive reasoning to piece together what we know to draw a conclusion about something else. The strength of an argument based on inductive reasoning depends on how strong the evidence is.

**Example 2:** While at college, Carl becomes friends with four people who are from Italy. Each of those friends loves spaghetti. Carl draws the conclusion that all people from Italy love spaghetti.

This is inductive reasoning. Carl uses specific observations to make a general conclusion. In this case, you can easily see that this is not necessarily a valid conclusion. There are over 57 million Italians. Just because four of them love spaghetti is not very strong evidence that ALL Italians love spaghetti. After all, people of many different cultures enjoy spaghetti.



## Section 2.4, continued

### Strength of Argument

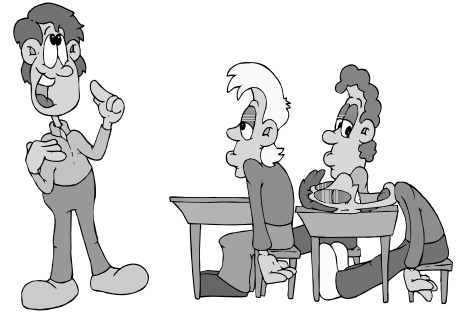
**Example 3:** Jessica saw her best friend Ashley at the mall. Ashley was walking beside a boy that Jessica had never seen. Jessica knows that Ashley’s cousin from Detroit is supposed to be visiting her this week. Jessica concludes that the boy walking beside Jessica is her cousin from Detroit.

Jessica is making an assumption based on what she knows. Her conclusion may be correct, but it is also possible that she is wrong. However, the evidence is strong that her conclusion is correct.

### Flexible Language in a Viewpoint

Did you notice in Example 2 that the conclusion Carl drew was that “*all* Italians like spaghetti.” Using his four friends as evidence to draw a conclusion about an *entire* population was pretty flimsy.

As stated earlier, a viewpoint should be supported by valid reasons that can lead others to draw the same conclusion. Taking a rigid viewpoint that includes terms like *always*, *all*, *everyone* or *never*, *none*, *no one* is hard to defend. When you voice a viewpoint, consider using flexible terms that allow for exceptions. Likewise, beware of viewpoints from people who use rigid terms.



**Example 4:** Students always ignore teachers’ directions.

This is a rigid viewpoint that allows for no exceptions. Someone making this claim would have a difficult time successfully proving the point. Critical thinkers will quickly recognize that there would be some exceptions to this statement. This statement is not logical because if only one exception can be proven, the statement is false.

**Example 5:** Some students frequently ignore teachers’ directions.

The wording of this viewpoint is much more flexible than the first, and it is much easier to defend. Using the word *some* allows for the exception of those students who do listen to the teachers’ directions. Using the flexible term *some* keeps this statement from being illogical.

### Support for a Viewpoint

To argue a viewpoint, it must be supported by valid reasons, evidence, or facts. As an intelligent person, you most likely will not and probably should not believe what you hear or read based on a simple statement. Just because someone else says it certainly doesn’t make it true.

**Example 6:** In health class, the teacher asks students for reasons that people should not smoke. A fellow student raises her hand and says, “Smoking causes lung cancer.”

Do you believe what this student says? Why or why not? You may believe this statement because you know of evidence on your own that would support the statement. But, what if this is the first time you have ever heard this claim? Then, you might have reason to doubt. You might need reasons to support this claim. Consider the same claim followed by the logical reasons to back it up.

Smoking causes lung cancer. The surgeon general requires warning messages about lung cancer on packages of cigarettes. Since the surgeon general knows the latest research on lung cancer, I believe smoking causes lung cancer.

Now the claim is backed up with two true facts. It is true that the surgeon general requires a warning message about lung cancer on cigarettes. It is also true that the surgeon general should know the latest research on lung cancer since that is part of his or her job. Therefore, the viewpoint that smoking causes lung cancer is based on facts and logical reasoning.

## Section 2.4, continued

### Strength of Argument

The more types of evidence used, the stronger the argument becomes, and the stronger the evidence is, the stronger the argument is. Kinds of support that may be helpful in argument are personal testimony, statistics, observation, expert testimony, demonstration, and the citing of both positive and negative aspects of an issue.

#### Methods and Examples of Strengthening A Viewpoint

**Viewpoint:** *Toyotas are economical and dependable cars.*

**Personal testimony:** Since I've owned a car made by Toyota, I know they are very dependable cars.

**Statistics:** Ninety-nine percent of all Toyota products will last longer and perform better if they receive regular service maintenance.

**Observation:** As a certified mechanic, I have observed first hand that Toyota cars require less maintenance than many other cars.

**Expert testimony:** Service Manager Greg Foster says, "Toyotas that receive regularly scheduled maintenance sometimes last for more 300,000 miles."

**Demonstration:** Toyota offers classes to dealership personnel to demonstrate the quality workmanship of the cars.

**Positive and Negative Aspects:** Toyotas are both economical and dependable, and their only drawback is that the genuine Toyota oil filters recommended by the dealers are only sold at the dealerships.

### Practice

Read each excerpt below and then answer the question about the strength of the author's argument.

#### from Boost Your Vitamin C

Recent studies show new support to the idea that Vitamin C is truly a super nutrient that can reduce asthma symptoms, decrease blood pressure, lower high cholesterol, and increase immunity. It has been shown to decrease the incidence of heart disease and decrease the risk of many cancers. There is also new evidence that shows the RDA amount is much too low for most people and that the body can indeed absorb more than 200 mg per day. Although government agencies and medical experts lag behind, there is indeed evidence for taking more than the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin C. For active individuals and those combating high levels of daily stress, taking several grams of Vitamin C per day may be the cheapest form of health insurance.



- (A) (B) (C) (D) 1. How does the author try to convince the reader of her viewpoint?
- A. citing new studies and by contradicting the critics
  - B. by attempting to frighten the reader
  - C. by quoting government agencies and medical experts
  - D. by citing percentages
- (A) (B) (C) (D) 2. What is the most convincing reason the author gives for increasing the daily intake of Vitamin C?
- A. It is a cheap form of health insurance for active and inactive individuals.
  - B. Government agencies lag behind.
  - C. The suggested RDA amount is too high.
  - D. It has the ability to combat major diseases and serious health problems.



# Literary Elements

## Section 5.1 Direct and Indirect Characterization

### Direct Characterization

**Characterization** is the way the author reveals a character's personality or nature. In **direct characterization**, the author describes the character or makes statements about him.



**Example 1:** Jordan at five is a sweet but mischievous girl who loves to dress up and play pretend games.

In this example of direct characterization, the author both describes the girl's nature and tells about what she loves to do. The author is not showing us through her actions yet.

### Indirect Characterization

In **indirect characterization**, the author shows the reader something about the characters through the characters' words, their thoughts, their actions, or other characters' words or thoughts about them. Indirect characterization is more effective because the author is showing, rather than just telling.

#### Indirect Characterization Through The Character's Words

**Example 2:** The husband was angry with his wife. "That bag of lettuce is half empty. Why didn't you try to get one that had more in it? I can't believe you didn't look at the bag more carefully at the grocery store."

How is the husband indirectly characterized in this passage? Through his words, the husband is characterized as picky and critical. The author doesn't have to tell us these characteristics directly.



#### Indirect Characterization Through The Character's Thoughts

**Example 3:** As he sat brooding in his room, Caleb thought, "She spoils everything. Things were so different before the baby came. I can't go to Disney World for my birthday just because of her. I wish — I know! Buck can come by and feed her when he comes to feed the dogs. He loves to play with her anyway, and he could do that. We can leave her at home!" He got up to run tell his mother.



Here we see the thoughts of a little boy about his frustrations with his new baby sister and the solution he thought of to solve the problem. We are shown his thoughts, and the reader sees an intelligent little problem-solver.

## Section 5.1, continued

### Direct and Indirect Characterization

#### Indirect Characterization Through The Character's Actions

Actions can tell the reader the most about an individual. People's actions usually show more than words because people may say one thing but do another.

**Example 4:** Julie began preparing supper while the children played. First she washed the romaine lettuce with grapefruit seed extract. Then she got out the mill to grind the corn. After it was ready, she used honey to replace the sugar in the recipe and put the cornbread in the oven. The dried beans were simmering in the crock pot. She washed and cut up the fresh strawberries they had picked that morning for dessert.



How is Julie, the mother, characterized? Through her actions, we see a conscientious mother concerned about the nutrition of her family. She cares enough to work harder in preparing meals the way she thinks is best.

#### Indirect Characterization Through The Other Characters' Words

**Example 5:** After visiting my sister Jean, Frances said, "She really knows how to get a lot of storage into every space, doesn't she?"  
"Yes," I answered. "Organizing is a challenge that she enjoys. She never stops but keeps reorganizing in better ways."

How is Jean indirectly characterized? From the conversation between Frances and Jean's sister, the reader gets a picture of Jean's organizational skills.

### Practice

Read each example and then answer the questions about characterization.

Yvon came into the hospital room where her grandmother was sleeping. "How did she do last night?" she asked Lori, her cousin, who had stayed there all night.

"She didn't sleep much, and neither did I," Lori answered whispering. "I wish she would eat more to get stronger."

"Yeah, me, too," Yvon replied. "I'll stay until somebody else gets here and then stay tonight with her. I know she's afraid to be alone."

"I don't have to work tomorrow, so I'll relieve you early in the morning. I know you have to be at work by eight," said Lori.

"Yeah," replied Yvon. "I'm beat."

- (A) (B) (C) (D) 1. Yvon and Lori are characterized how?
- A. cautious and scared
  - B. stubborn and critical
  - C. humorous
  - D. caring and determined

# Literary Elements

## Section 5.4 Plot



The **plot** is the sequence of events or “what happens” in a narrative, such as a short story, a novel, a play, or a narrative poem. In each there is a structure, or blueprint, with a beginning, middle, and end. Plot is made up of several elements. First, the plot has an order in which it is told, which is usually chronological but can also use flashback or time lapse. Second, the plot centers around a conflict. Third, the plot usually follows a basic sequence of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Last, well-written plots may include other elements such as suspense to keep the reader interested in the story and foreshadowing, which hints at what will happen later in the story.

### Order of Narration

- **Chronological:** Events are told in the order in which they happen.
- **Flashback:** Events that occurred earlier than the current time of the story are narrated by the author. The author may use dreams, memories, or stories told by a character, or the author himself may interrupt the story to give past information.
- **Time lapse:** A long period of time elapses between events.

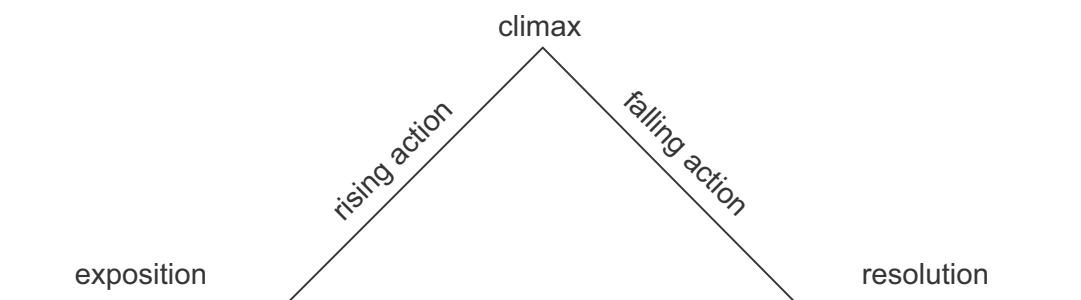
### Types of Conflict

**Conflict** is the struggle, or problem, that a character faces. It is a very important element; without conflict there would be no interest in what happens. In a short story, there is one main conflict, and the story revolves around it. In a novel or a play, there may be more than one conflict.

The conflict can be **internal** between two opposing desires within the character, or it can be **external** between the character and an outside force. Examples of external conflict would include conflicts between the character and another person or persons, nature, an animal, society, machines, or even the supernatural.

### Sequence Elements of Plot

Most plots also contain the following elements of sequence.



- **Exposition** is background information, which prepares for the next step in the story.
- **Rising action** introduces and develops the major conflict in the story.
- **Climax** can be the turning point of a story, or it can be the point of most intense feeling or excitement. In many cases, the turning point and the point of most intense feeling will be the same moment in the story. In a short story, the climax usually occurs near the end.
- **Falling action** contains events or actions that occur after the climax.
- **Resolution** is the point at which conflict is resolved. It is the final outcome of the conflict.

## Section 5.4, continued

### Plot

#### Other Elements of Plot

Authors may use other techniques in a story to keep the reader interested. Some of these techniques make the story itself better, and others do nothing for the story but may still interest the reader.

- **Suspense** gives the reader the feeling of uncertainty or tension and makes the reader want to know more. Suspense is an important element in the plot that keeps the reader interested in the story. All plots need to have some suspense.
- **Foreshadowing** gives the reader a clue or hint about what will happen later in the story. Foreshadowing is usually subtle (not obvious), and it is used to strengthen the plot.
- **Violence** is an element of plot that is not always necessary to the story but is added for the benefit of the reader.
- **“Tear-Jerker” Endings** or other dramatizations can be used in plots, but these also do not always strengthen the plot. These elements may be used to interest the reader or to invoke certain emotions in the reader without adding to the story itself.

**Example:** Read the following short story. Pay close attention to the elements of plot.

#### An Arrest by Ambrose Bierce (adapted)

Having murdered his brother-in-law, Orrin Brower of Kentucky was a fugitive from justice. From the county jail where he had been confined to await his trial, he had escaped by knocking down his jailer with an iron bar, robbing him of his keys and, opening the outer door, walking out into the night. The jailer being unarmed, Brower got no weapon with which to defend his recovered liberty. As soon as he was out of the town, he had the folly to enter a forest; this was many years ago, when that region was wilder than it is now.



The night was pretty dark, with neither moon nor stars visible, and as Brower had never lived thereabout and knew nothing of the lay of the land, he was, naturally, not long in losing himself. He could not have said if he were getting farther away from the town or going back to it — a most important matter to Orrin Brower. He knew that in either case a posse of citizens with a pack of bloodhounds would soon be on his track and his chance of escape was very slender, but he did not wish to assist in his own pursuit. Even an added hour of freedom was worth having.

Suddenly he emerged from the forest into an old road and there before him saw, indistinctly, the figure of a man, motionless in the gloom. It was too late to retreat: the fugitive felt that at the first movement back toward the wood he would be, as he afterward explained, “filled with buckshot.” So the two stood there like trees, Brower nearly suffocated by the activity of his own heart.

A moment later — it may have been an hour — the moon sailed into a patch of unclouded sky and the hunted man saw that visible embodiment of Law lift an arm and point significantly toward and beyond him. He understood. Turning his back to his captor, he walked submissively away in the direction indicated, looking to neither the right nor the left; hardly daring to breathe, his head and back actually aching with a prophecy of buckshot.

Brower was as courageous a criminal as ever lived to be hanged; that was shown by the conditions of awful personal peril in which he had coolly killed his brother-in-law. It is needless to relate them here; they came out at his trial, and the revelation of his calmness in confronting them came near to saving his neck. But what would you have? — when a brave man is beaten, he submits.

## Section 5.4, continued

### Plot

So they pursued their journey toward the jail along the old road through the woods. Only once did Brower venture a turn of the head: just once, when he was in deep shadow and he knew that the other was in moonlight, he looked backward. His captor was Burton Duff, the jailer, as white as death and bearing upon his brow the livid mark of the iron bar. Orrin Brower had no further curiosity.

Eventually they entered the town, which was all alight, but deserted; only the women and children remained, and they were off the streets. Straight toward the jail the criminal held his way. Straight up to the main entrance he walked, laid his hand upon the knob of the heavy iron door, pushed it open without command, entered and found himself in the presence of a half-dozen armed men. Then he turned. Nobody else entered.

On a table in the corridor lay the dead body of Burton Duff.

This story is told in **chronological order** beginning with Orrin's escape until his returning to the jail. Most stories are written in the order they happen, or chronological order.

There are several **conflicts** in this short story. One conflict is between Orrin Brower and society, represented by the court system and law enforcement. Orrin also has an internal conflict when trying to decide which way to go once he escapes. Yet another conflict arises when he sees the man as he comes out of the woods. At the end of the story, the reader realizes the conflict was really between Orrin and the supernatural since Burton Duff, the man he thinks brought him in, is really dead.

The **exposition**, or the background information of this story, begins with the escape of a murderer, Orrin Brower, who had gotten away while waiting for trial by hitting his jailer and fleeing.

The **rising action** includes the dark setting, his getting lost in the woods, and his fear of a posse chasing him any minute.

The **climax** revolves around his seeing the man too late to hide and being signaled to return.

**Falling action** includes his looking back and seeing that the man was his jailer Burton Duff.

The **resolution** is his going into the jail with no one following him to see armed men with the dead body of Burton Duff on the table.

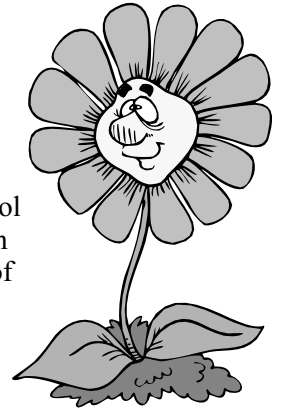
There are many examples of **suspense**. The setting of the darkness of night with no moon in unfamiliar woods adds to the suspense of whether he will escape or not. Seeing a man pointing at him to turn around and feeling that he could be shot any time continues the suspense. When he finally turns around to see the man more clearly and sees that it was Burton Duff, he was frightened more and didn't think of getting away. When he saw the dead body of the jailer inside the jail, the suspense has reached a peak of the supernatural.

# Literary Elements

## Section 5.7 Imagery

**Imagery** is a collection of word pictures that appeal to the reader. Imagery is an important tool used by an author and can include literary devices such as simile and metaphor. Imagery is an author's words used to build a picture in the reader's mind. Imagery appeals to one or more of the senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, feel) and is sometimes referred to as sensory imagery.

**Example:** Read "Spring" by Edna St. Vincent Millay. You may recognize this poem from Section 5.2.



### Spring by Edna St. Vincent Millay

- 1 To what purpose, April, do you return again?
- 2 Beauty is not enough.
- 3 You can no longer quiet me with the redness
- 4 Of little leaves opening stickily.
- 5 I know what I know.
- 6 The sun is hot on my neck as I observe
- 7 The spikes of the crocus.
- 8 The smell of the earth is good.
- 9 It is apparent that there is no death.
- 10 But what does that signify?
- 11 Not only under the ground are the brains of men
- 12 Eaten by maggots,
- 13 Life in itself
- 14 Is nothing,
- 15 An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.
- 16 It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
- 17 April
- 18 Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers

This poem is full of sensory imagery.

Which of the following excerpts from the poem shows sensory imagery that appeals to the readers sense of feeling?

- A. The sun is hot on my neck . . .
- B. The smell of the earth is good.
- C. Eaten by maggots,
- D. . . . like an idiot, babbling . . .

Answer A, "hot on my neck" appeals to the reader's sense of feeling, so it is the correct answer. Answer B, "smell of the earth is good" appeals to the reader's sense of smell, not feeling. Answer C, "Eaten by maggots" gives a vivid, visual image which appeals to the reader's sense of sight. Answer D, "like an idiot, babbling" gives the reader a sense of sound.

Why does the author use the sensory imagery in this poem? The poet wants to paint a picture for the reader so that the reader feels and understands the author's feelings and attitude. In this way, the author uses the sensory imagery to create a mood in the poem and also to express a tone. The poet uses words and phrases like *what purpose, beauty not enough, brains of men eaten by maggots, life . . . is nothing, empty cup, uncarpeted stairs, idiot, babbling, and strewing* to paint a picture and to stir emotion.

## Section 5.7, continued

### Imagery

Read lines 13–15 from the poem.

- 13 Life in itself  
14 Is nothing,  
15 An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.  
16 It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,  
17 April  
18 Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers

How does the imagery in these lines reveal the author’s purpose?

- A. It compares April to the author and shows that they are both idiots who babble and strew flowers.
- B. It describes and emphasizes the author’s opinion that life is meaningless.
- C. It contrasts the emptiness of death to the fullness and hope of life.
- D. It shows that April is a stupid season and should not be celebrated.

In these lines, the author is comparing life to an empty cup and a flight of uncarpeted stairs. She then compares April to a babbling idiot strewing flowers. These lines of imagery describe and emphasize the author’s opinion that life is meaningless, Answer B. The imagery does not show fullness and hope of life, so Answer C is wrong. These lines convey the author’s opinion of life; they are not meant to show that the season of April, specifically, is a stupid season that should not be celebrated as stated in Answer D.

### Practice

Read the passage below and then answer the questions that follow.

#### from “By the Bayou St. John” by Alice Dunbar

The Bayou St. John slowly makes its dark-hued way through reeds and rushes, high banks and flat slopes, until it casts itself into the turbulent bosom of Lake Pontchartrain. It is dark, like the passionate women of Egypt; placid, like their broad brows; deep, silent, like their souls. Within its bosom are hidden romances and stories, such as were sung by minstrels of old. From the source to the mouth is not far distant, visibly speaking, but in the life of the bayou a hundred heart-miles could scarce measure it. Just where it winds about the northwest of the city are some of its most beautiful bits, orange groves on one side, and quaint old Spanish gardens on the other. Who cares that the bridges are modern, and that here and there pert boat-houses rear their prim heads? It is the bayou, even though it be invaded with the ruthless vandalism of the improving idea, and can a boat-house kill the beauty of a moss-grown centurion of an oak with a history as old as the city? Can an iron bridge with tarantula piers detract from the song of a mocking-bird in a fragrant orange grove? We know that farther out, past the Confederate Soldiers’ Home, — that rose-embowered, rambling place of gray-coated, white-haired old men with broken hearts for a lost cause, — it flows, unimpeded by the faintest conception of man, and we love it all the more that, like the Priestess of Isis, it is calm-browed, even in indignity.

- (A) (B) (C) (D) 1. What is the author’s purpose for using the following description?

It is dark, like the passionate women of Egypt; placid, like their broad brows; deep, silent, like their souls.

- A. to describe the St. John river bayou
- B. to describe the women of Egypt
- C. to describe the people who live along the St. John river bayou
- D. to describe a romantic encounter between two characters

# Practice Test 1

## Overview

### Introduction

The practice test that follows is provided to help you determine how well you have mastered essential reading comprehension skills.

### Directions

Read each question carefully and darken the circle corresponding to your answer choice. Once you have completed this practice test, circle the questions you answered incorrectly on the practice test evaluation chart on page PT1-34. For each question that you missed on the practice test, review the corresponding sections in the book as given in the evaluation chart. Read the instructional material, do the practice exercises, and take the section review tests at the end of each section.



Reading Comprehension Practice Test 1

Read the following poem and answer questions 31 through 38 that follow. You may look back at the poem as often as you like.

Mr. Flood’s Party

By Edwin Arlington Robinson

1

Old Eben Flood, climbing alone one night

2

Over the hill between the town below

3

And the forsaken upland hermitage

4

That held as much as he should ever know

5

On earth again of home, paused warily.

6

The road was his with not a native near;

7

And Eben, having leisure, said aloud,

8

For no man else in Tilbury Town to hear:

9

“Well, Mr. Flood, we have the harvest moon

10

Again, and we may not have many more;

11

The bird is on the wing, the poet says,

12

And you and I have said it before.

13

Drink to the bird.” He raised up to the light

14

The jug that he had gone so far to fill,

15

And answered huskily: “Well, Mr. Flood,

16

Since you propose it, I believe I will.”

17

Alone, as if enduring to the end

18

A valiant armor of scarred hopes outworn,

19

He stood there in the middle of the road

20

Like Roland’s ghost winding a silent horn.

21

Below him, in the town among the trees,

22

Where friends of other days had honored him,

23

A phantom salutation of the dead

24

Rang thinly till old Eben’s eyes were dim.

25

Then, as a mother lays her sleeping child

26

Down tenderly, fearing it may awake,

27

He set the jug down slowly at his feet

28

With trembling care, knowing that most things

29

break;

29

And only when assured that on firm earth

30

It stood, as the uncertain lives of men

31

Assuredly did not, he paced away,

32

And with his hand extended paused again:

33

“Well, Mr. Flood, we have not met like this

34

In a long time; and many a change has come

35

To both of us, I fear, since last it was

36

We had a drop together. Welcome Home!”

37

Convivially returning with himself,

38

Again he raised the jug up to the light;

39

And with an acquiescent quaver said:

40

“Well, Mr. flood, if you insist, I might.”

41

“Only a very little, Mr. Flood

42

For auld lang syne. No more, sir; that will do.”

43

So, for the time, apparently it did,

44

And Eben evidently thought so too;

45

For soon amid the silver loneliness

46

Of night he lifted up his voice and sang,

47

Secure, with only two moons listening.

48

Until the harmonious landscape rang

49

“For auld lang syne.” The weary throat gave out,

50

The last word wavered; and the song being done,

51

He raised the jug regretfully

52

And shook his head, and was again alone,

53

There was not much that was ahead of him,

54

And there was nothing in the town below

55

Where strangers would have shut so many doors

56

That many friends had opened long ago.

31. What is the theme of the poem?
- A

Friends are more important later in life.
- B

One may only drink for the sake of old times with friends.
- C

Loneliness can be the result of outliving one’s friends.
- D

Family keeps one from becoming too lonely.
- A

B

C

D

32. What is the tone of the poem?
- A

happy
- B

somber
- C

disinterested
- D

friendly
- A

B

C

D

## Reading Comprehension Practice Test 1

Read the following article and answer questions 65 through 69 that follow. You may look back at the article as often as you like.

### **Tallulah Bankhead** **Successful International Actress from Alabama**

Born into one of the most famous political families in Alabama in 1903, Tallulah was the daughter of William Brockman and Adelaide Eugenia Bankhead. Her paternal grandfather served as a United States Senator as did her uncle John, and her father served as United States Representative and Speaker of the House. Her aunt, Marie Bankhead Owen, was named Director of the Alabama State Archives, so she was the first woman in Alabama to head a department in state government.

Tallulah seemed happiest when she was the center of attention, so her decision to become an actress at the age of sixteen could not have surprised her family. After winning a photo contest, Tallulah convinced her family to let her move to New York and take her aunt with her as her chaperone. During her stay in New York, she formed friendships with people who could help her career and give her good advice, but she also found those whose influence introduced her to illegal drugs and promiscuity. The party crowd tried to influence her to drink as well, but she refused alcohol at that time because she had promised her father she wouldn't when he told her he didn't want her drinking.

After being in New York for two years without very much real success, Tallulah decided to try her luck in England. In London her fans supported her efforts by attending her stage performances religiously, and she rewarded their faithfulness with autographs, personal conversations, and invitations to her dressing room and home. Tallulah thrived in the eight years she spent in London, but she also continued many of the wild habits she had cultivated in New York. She lived with friends during her first years in London but later bought her own home and filled it with people whose most important job was to listen to her.

During her stay in London, Tallulah enjoyed the run of many stage productions, and because of her hard work, she was selected as one of the most talented women in England. Her success on the stage was a bright part of her life while her finances proved to be a problem. She often owed large sums of money because of her free-spending habits, and after her first years in England, she was forced to leave her English friends to accept an offer in Hollywood.

Because of her lengthy stay abroad, Tallulah was a fresh face that Paramount wanted to promote. She did not enjoy as much success with films in Hollywood and finally gave them up for the stage, which would remain her favorite medium. She returned to New York and then to England for several years before deciding to give Hollywood a second chance that proved to be much more successful, especially her performance in Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*.

As she matured, Tallulah's dedication to her art became more evident, and she inspired those around her toward higher levels of achievement. Her presence in a film or stage production was enough to ensure success because her performance made up for any unsatisfactory dramatic compositions. She received several awards for her performances: Variety Award for Best Actress of the Season for *The Little Foxes*, The Critic's Award for *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and The New York Screen Critics Award for Best Actress in *Lifeboat*. Her success paved the way for a stint in radio as the hostess of *The Big Show*, which earned her the title of radio's Woman of the Year. Her most successful television appearance with Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz is still viewed.

Achieving a degree of success in each entertainment medium, Tallulah Bankhead achieved international stardom and was the first native Alabama woman to do so. Many would argue that the nation has produced few who might be labeled as her professional equal.

## Reading Comprehension Practice Test 1

65. When Tallulah did not realize much success in New York, where did she go next?

- A California
- B Alabama
- C England
- D Texas

(A) (B) (C) (D)

68. Which word BEST describes Tallulah's character?

- A determined
- B critical
- C pessimistic
- D humorous

(A) (B) (C) (D)

66. The main idea of this article is that Tallulah Bankhead

- A is best known for her film *Lifeboat*.
- B often wished that she had chosen another career instead of acting.
- C was not famous at the end of her life.
- D is famous for achieving success in many mediums in her field.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

69. Which idea from the article is not supported by evidence?

- A After winning a photo contest, Tallulah convinced her family to let her move to New York with her aunt as her chaperone.
- B She also continued many of the wild habits she had cultivated in New York.
- C Tallulah was happiest when she was the center of attention.
- D Tallulah decided to try her luck in England.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

67. Which of the following ideas from the article is an OPINION?

- A . . . Tallulah was the daughter of William Brockman and Adelaide Eugenia Bankhead.
- B Her paternal grandfather served as a United States senator as did her uncle John.
- C Her aunt, Marie Bankhead Owen, was named Director of the Alabama State Archives.
- D Many would agree that the nation has produced few who might be labeled as her professional equal.

(A) (B) (C) (D)

# Practice Test 1

## Test 1 Evaluation Chart

If you missed question #:	Go to section(s):	If you missed question #:	Go to section(s):	If you missed question #:	Go to section(s):
1	3.1	31	1.4	61	4.1
2	1.3	32	5.2	62	1.1
3	1.1	33	3.2	63	3.3
4	3.5	34	3.4	64	3.1
5	2.4	35	5.6	65	3.2
6	2.2	36	3.4	66	1.2
7	4.1	37	5.6	67	2.2
8	3.2	38	5.7	68	5.1
9	3.4	39	3.3	69	2.4
10	1.1	40	3.5	70	1.4
11	2.1	41	2.1, 2.4	71	3.1
12	4.1	42	4.1	72	3.5
13	3.3	43	2.4	73	5.2
14	2.2	44	3.4	74	1.4
15	4.2	45	1.2	75	4.1
16	3.5	46	3.2	76	5.6
17	7.2	47	3.1	77	5.2
18	3.2	48	3.3	78	3.4
19	3.3	49	4.2	79	3.2
20	3.2	50	3.2	80	5.6
21	2.4	51	3.5	81	5.3
22	7.2	52	2.4	82	1.1
23	4.2	53	2.1	83	5.2, 5.7
24	3.3	54	3.1	84	1.4
25	4.1	55	3.4		
26	2.4	56	2.2		
27	6.1	57	3.5		
28	3.1	58	6.5		
29	6.1	59	2.3		
30	3.2	60	6.5		