

ACCUPLACER READING TEST PREPARATION

North Central State College

Prepared by Scott Smith; Liberal Arts Instructor

How to Use this Resource: Before you take the Accuplacer Reading Test, it is highly recommended that you review and study all of the lessons in this packet and apply them to sample Accuplacer Reading questions, or to anything you read. The lessons are constructed to be brief, and to provide you with examples and models of key reading concepts. There is no set order in which you should review the lessons.

How to Think of this Resource: Picture a garage or a shed. Usually the tools kept there are organized in some way: hammers, saws, crowbars, etc. might be hanging on one wall, shovels on another. Wrenches, ratchets, drills, etc., might be in a cabinet or large kit. And inside the kit, all of the smaller accessories (bits, bolts, screws, nails, etc.) might occupy their own drawers or small containers. Each tool and accessory serves a specific purpose. And it stands to reason, that the more and various tools you have, the more and varied projects you can take on.

Reading follows the same principle: The more tools you know how to use, the more subjects you can read about and comprehend (even when they are complex, or if they don't interest you). Think of the lessons in this resource as Tools in Your Reading Shed. Each one will help you build an understanding of what you read, which will aid your comprehension, prepare you answer questions based on reading passages, and ultimately help you test higher on the Reading Accuplacer.

Be Resourceful Yourself: Being a college student, whether online or in person, *demands resourcefulness*. The earlier you start looking up information in order to familiarize yourself with key concepts of the subjects you take, the more prepared you will be for study, assignment, and examination. Similarly, being willing to read more about the concepts in this packet will help better prepare you for taking the Reading Accuplacer. So, if you need more examples, or different definitions, go to your teachers, go to Google, go to NC's Tutoring Center. Find information on your own. It is essential for your success.

Lessons:

Considering Genre & Content Area

Reading Closely & Critically

Determining Central Ideas & Themes

Recognizing Textual Relationships

Understanding Author's Purpose & Point of View

References

Considering Genre & Content Area

The Accuplacer Reading Test will contain two types of passages, literary and informational. Literary passages will focus on the genres of fiction or literary nonfiction. Informational passages are spread across content areas: History, Social Studies, Science, etc. The informational passages will not focus on any specific content knowledge, but readers should be able to recognize, analyze, and evaluate key characteristics of genre and content area.

A Literary Passage	Characteristics
<p>[4] She stood at the desk a long time before the librarian deigned to attend her.</p> <p>“Yes?” inquired the lady pettishly.</p> <p>“This book. I want it.” Francie pushed the book forward opened at the back with the little card pushed out of the envelope. The librarians had trained the children to present books that way. It saved them the trouble of opening several hundred books a day and pulling several hundred cards from as many envelopes.</p> <p>“Yes?” The librarian did not bother to look up.</p> <p>“Could you recommend a good book for a girl?”</p> <p>“How old?”</p> <p>“She is eleven.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dialogue• Narrative• Description• Character Traits• Literary Devices <p>Questions on the Accuplacer may ask a reader to make inferences and draw conclusions based on these characteristics (see below).</p>

Dialogue: A reader should recognize how dialogue functions in a work of fiction or literary nonfiction, mainly to show spoken words between characters that reveal events of the narrative and character traits.

Narrative: A reader should recognize the narrative line of the passage—the story taking place: What is happening in the beginning, middle, and end of the passage, and what is revealed about the characters.

Description: A reader should recognize the details authors choose to add to settings, characters, reasoning (as in the paragraph above), action, emotion, etc. For example, in the novel *The Great Gatsby*, author F. Scott Fitzgerald devotes an entire paragraph of text to describing Gatsby’s smile. This description gives great insight into Gatsby’s character.

Character Traits: Description, word choice, and dialogue reveal these traits. In the passage above, the words ‘deigned’ and ‘pettishly’ reveal possible traits about the librarian (condescending, childish). The dialogue “This book. I want it.” reveals possible traits about Francie (direct, impatient).

Literary Devices: A reader should recognize devices the author uses to develop character, description, and narrative: mood, metaphor, imagery, irony, etc. For example, in the passage above, the author uses irony by describing a piece of the librarian’s dialogue (he uses the word ‘pettishly’—or childishly). This is ironic because the librarian is supposed to be a figure of authority, yet is acting childishly toward Francie. Googling “literary devices” will show you many resources for brush up.

Two Informational Passages

[6] Physical anthropologists and forensic anthropologists use two different methods to determine the sex of a skull. One method, which is qualitative, depends on a visual inspection of the skull. That is, the skull is inspected and its traits noted. Subsequently, the observed traits are compared to those of skulls of known sex.

There is also a quantitative method to sex skulls. This method involves measuring skulls of known sex from anatomical collections and discriminant function scores that best characterize the samples.

[3] After the Agricultural Revolution, growth and change took place, but at a slower pace. One way to describe this growth is by the energy available for work. At the beginning of the Agricultural Revolution, human energy was used, along with fire. As people learned how to make hotter fires, pyrotechnology led to fired clay, to smelted metals, and to cooking and preserving food. The domestication of large animals like horses and oxen allowed more work to be done like plowing larger fields and transporting more goods. Early sailboats harnessed the wind.

As the Dark and Middle Ages proceeded, larger, more powerful animals were bred. (This development, as today, was often tied to war. Large horses were used to carry armored knights, the military “tanks” of their day.)

Key Characteristics of this Passage

Just from the language used, a critical reader is able to recognize that this is a science passage. So, when reading science passages, a reader should be able to:

- Decipher the text structures(s) used to present the information in the passage.

The first sentence shows a reader that the main mode of this passage is Comparison / Contrast:

Physical anthropologists and forensic anthropologists use two different methods to determine the sex of a skull.

The phrase “two different methods” indicates that two things will be compared and contrasted in the passage.

Also, the word “methods” indicates that the author will be using the Process writing mode.

- Use context clues to determine the meaning of vocabulary.

The words “qualitative” and “quantitative” are essential to understanding the passage. There is information in the description of each method that clues a reader in to the meanings of these words.

qualitative: visual inspection observed traits
 quantitative: measuring function scores

Key Characteristics of this Passage

Multiple text structures are being used in this passage.

- Even though this passage is informational, a critical reader should recognize that it is in a narrative form. It seems to be telling a chronological story, listing key technological developments in early history.
- A scientific topic is mentioned (pyrotechnology) and historical references are made (The Agricultural Revolution, The Dark and Middle Ages). So, the reader can see a mixture of content: science and history.
- Also, there is clearly a textual relationship of cause and effect, since the concepts listed after “pyrotechnology” and “domestication of large animals” are showing different things each of these advancements led to:
 - Pyrotechnology led to fired clay, smelted metals, and cooking food.
 - Domestication of large animals led to plowing fields and transporting goods.

Taking the Reading Accuplacer often involves knowing how to recognize textual relationships especially when different ones are utilized by authors throughout the passages.

Reading Closely & Critically

Critical reading involves being able to recognize stated concepts, to make inferences about those concepts, and to draw conclusions based on what you've read.

Stated Concepts: Ideas the author has written

If we read too quickly, we often interpret what we've read before we understand it. It is important to note the key ideas an author has written in a passage before interpreting them. Read the passage below and note the idea in bold:

[5] In general, most stars have a constant brightness. **However, certain very young stars and some aging stars become unstable and vary in brightness and are known as variable stars.**

The bold idea is a stated concept. A critical reader should be able to recognize it as such, even if it is worded differently: **Variable stars are stars that are unstable and vary in brightness.**

A critical reader should also be able to recognize when a statement is inaccurate based on the stated concepts of the author: All aging stars are known as variable stars. This statement is inaccurate based on what the author has written. The author only states that some aging stars are known as variable stars.

In the left box, you'll see more of the passage from above. On the right is a list of some stated concepts (worded differently, but accurately) from the passage.

[5] In general, most stars have a constant brightness. However, certain very young stars and some aging stars become unstable and vary in brightness and are known as variable stars. The oldest observations of variable stars come from China. The star Omicron Ceti was discovered in 1596 as the first variable star. It was named Mira, The Wonderful, and has been studied by astronomers ever since.	<table border="1"><thead><tr><th data-bbox="1120 976 1364 1008">Stated Concepts</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td data-bbox="966 1018 1518 1224"><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Variable stars are stars that are unstable and vary in brightness.• The first variable star, Omicron Ceti, was discovered in 1596.• Omicron Ceti was named "Mira, The Wonderful."</td></tr></tbody></table>	Stated Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Variable stars are stars that are unstable and vary in brightness.• The first variable star, Omicron Ceti, was discovered in 1596.• Omicron Ceti was named "Mira, The Wonderful."
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On the Accuplacer, you will see questions related to the author's stated concepts, like this one:

[1] According to the author, variable stars <ol style="list-style-type: none">Originated in China in 1596Are very young stars or aging starsHave a constant brightnessAre called Omicron Ceti	Notice that all of the possible answers, except one, are inaccurate representations of stated ideas from the passage. Only one, (b.) accurately represents one of the author's stated concepts. So, letter b. is the best answer.
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Note the phrasing of the question: "According to the author..." followed by a basic concept from the passage: "variable stars." When you see this, or similar phrasing: "According to the passage, variable stars...", it's a good bet you'll need to recognize the author's stated concepts.

Inferences: Reasonable ideas that a critical reader has based on stated concepts.

Sometimes people refer to inference as "reading between the lines." Which is a good way to think about it. If authors tried to state every single idea related to the concepts they've already stated in a given passage, it would be impossible. It is up to a critical reader to infer new ideas, reasonably,

based on what the author has already stated. Look at the same passage on the left. In the right column, you'll see reasonable inferences a critical reader can make based on the stated concept.

<p>[5] <u>In general, most stars have a constant brightness. However, certain very young stars and some aging stars become unstable and vary in brightness and are known as variable stars.</u> The oldest observations of variable stars come from China. The star Omicron Ceti was discovered in 1596 as the first variable star. It was named Mira, The Wonderful, and has been studied by astronomers ever since.</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="807 201 1526 233">Reasonable Inferences</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="807 233 1526 487"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a star is neither very young nor very old, it probably has a constant brightness. • There are likely very young stars and aging stars that have a constant brightness. <p>A reader can infer both these ideas because the author uses the words 'certain' and 'some.'</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Reasonable Inferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a star is neither very young nor very old, it probably has a constant brightness. • There are likely very young stars and aging stars that have a constant brightness. <p>A reader can infer both these ideas because the author uses the words 'certain' and 'some.'</p>
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To be clear, *inferences are not facts*, and they are not stated by the author of a given passage. They are ideas that critical readers may reasonably come to...based on their own individual readings—so, you may infer from this idea that different readers may infer different things from the same passage. Regardless of individual readings, inferences must be made based on the stated concepts. Below is a list of *unreasonable inferences* that could be made regarding the passage, and reasons why each unreasonable inference misrepresents the author's ideas.

Unreasonable Inferences	Why Each is Unreasonable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable stars are close to exploding. • Omicron Ceti means Mira, The Wonderful. • The Chinese had telescopes in 1596. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although stars will explode or implode when they are old, there is nothing in the passage to indicate that variable stars are about to do either. • The author has not made clear where the name Omicron Ceti comes from; so, readers cannot assume that it means Mira, the Wonderful. • The first telescope was made by Galileo in 1608.

Drawing Conclusions:

Drawing conclusions follows the same principles of making inferences, with one difference. A reader makes inferences about specific stated concepts within a passage; a reader *draws conclusions* based on the passage *as a whole*. Just as with an inference, a conclusion must be reasonable, and based on evidence *in the passage*.

<p>[5] In general, most stars have a constant brightness. However, certain very young stars and some aging stars become unstable and vary in brightness and are known as variable stars. The oldest observations of variable stars come from China. The star Omicron Ceti was discovered in 1596 as the first variable star. It was named Mira, The Wonderful, and has been studied by astronomers ever since.</p>	Reasonable Conclusions	Unreasonable Conclusions
	<p><u>Conclusion:</u> Stars change slowly over centuries.</p> <p><u>Evidence:</u> People have studied the same variable star since 1596 (last sentence).</p> <p><u>Conclusion:</u> There must be a written record of Omicron Ceti's discovery.</p> <p><u>Evidence:</u> The author mentions a specific year of discovery and a name given by the discoverer.</p>	<p>1. Omicron Ceti was discovered because it was unstable.</p> <p>The author gives no evidence that the discoverer of Omicron Ceti knew the star was unstable.</p> <p>2. The Chinese had better techniques of observing stars than the Greeks.</p> <p>The author makes no mention of Greek astronomy.</p>

Determining Central Ideas and Themes

A critical reader knows that an author may place the main idea of a paragraph anywhere in it. The main idea may not always be stated in the first sentence; it could be the last sentence, a sentence in the middle of the paragraph, or an idea that is not stated at all. So, to determine the author's main idea, it is essential to read *the entire passage* and find the ideas that best state or infer it. Think of the main idea as a *specifically worded blanket idea that covers all of the other supporting ideas and details*.

Here is an informational passage which we'll use to analyze **Main Idea** and **Supporting Details**:

[1] Rocks of all types—igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary—have stories to tell about Earth's history. Sedimentary rocks, however, are the most important to Historical Geology. Sedimentary rocks have grossly similar origins; most are born at earth's surface by weathering of pre-existing rock, the transport of solid or dissolved weathering products by various agents (e.g., water, wind, ice), and eventual deposition or precipitation in one of a multitude of settings ranging from glaciated mountain peaks to the deepest ocean basins. Despite their genetic similarities, sediments and sedimentary rocks differ broadly in composition, texture, and other features. These differences reflect variations in physical and chemical conditions at the Earth's surface and help us recognize temporal and spatial changes in the magnitude of weathering, mechanisms of transport, and environments in which sediments accumulated. This type of information, in turn, allows us to reconstruct aspects of the geological past, including ancient climates, geographies, and tectonic events. Moreover, sedimentary rocks contain the great majority of fossils, and hence, provide the basis for our understanding of the history of life on earth.

This passage seems daunting, but if we look for repeated ideas, and similarly stated ideas, we can list those ideas, find the main idea, and the supporting details. Re-read the passage, and notice how many times the phrase sedimentary rocks is used. Now, we'll list all the ideas that contain that phrase or are *clearly related to the phrase:

1. Sedimentary rocks are the most important to Historical Geology.
2. Sedimentary rocks have similar origins.
3. Sedimentary rocks differ in composition.
4. Sedimentary rocks contain the great majority of fossils.*
5. Sedimentary rocks provide the basis for our understanding of the history of life on earth.*
6. Sedimentary rocks allow us to reconstruct aspects of the geological past.*

These are all key ideas, but only one is the main idea. Remember, the main idea is the general point the author wants to make about the topic, it needs to be specifically worded, and it needs to be a general (blanket) idea that covers all of the other—more specific ideas—in the passage.

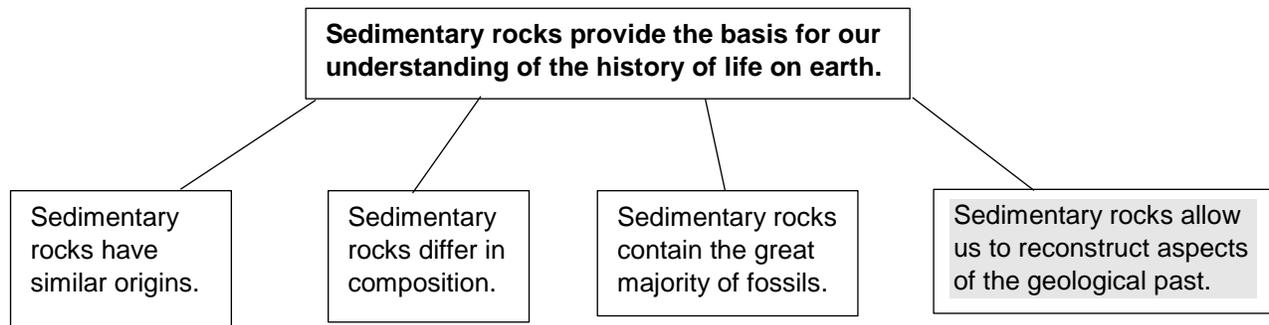
Sentences 2, 3, and 4, are much too specific. The entire passage is not about any one of these things (origins, composition, containing fossils).

Sentence 6 might be, but it isn't, for the same reason. The entire passage is not about reconstructing the geological past, or we would see that phrase and those words more frequently.

Sentence 1 would seem to be the one we're looking for; however, it is too general to be the main idea when you compare it with Sentence 5.

Sentence 5 is specifically worded enough to read as the most important point the author is trying to make, and, it is general enough to cover all the other ideas in the passage. Therefore, it is the main idea.

Here is a graphic that visualizes the main idea and supporting details of the above passage:



All of the more specific ideas in the passage would be listed in one of the 4 supporting detail categories. Now that we see the structure of the main and supporting ideas, we can easily see where those more specific ideas fit. We can also see that the fourth supporting detail is related to the first three as a reason. We can state that because sedimentary rocks 1) have similar origins, 2) differ in composition, and 3) contain fossils, we can use them to reconstruct aspects of the geological past. Therefore: **sedimentary rocks provide the basis for our understanding of the history of life on earth.**

Here is a literary passage which we'll use to illustrate Theme:

[4] She stood at the desk a long time before the librarian deigned to attend her.

“Yes?” inquired the lady pettishly.

“This book. I want it.” Francie pushed the book forward opened at the back with the little card pushed out of the envelope. The librarians had trained the children to present books that way. It saved them the trouble of opening several hundred books a day and pulling several hundred cards from as many envelopes.

She took the card, stamped it, pushed it down a slot in the desk. She stamped Francie’s card and pushed it at her. Francie picked it up, but she did not go away.

“Yes?” The librarian did not bother to look up.

“Could you recommend a good book for a girl?”

“How old?”

“She is eleven.”

Each week Francie made the same request and each week the librarian asked the same question. A name on a card meant nothing to her and since she looked up into the child’s face, she never did get to know the little girl who took a book out every day and two on Saturday. A smile would have meant a lot to Francie and a friendly comment would have made her so happy. She loved the library and was anxious to worship the lady in charge. But the librarian had other things on her mind. She hated children anyhow.

Theme is often confused with a “moral,” or, a lesson meant to teach a person how they should and should not behave. Theme is more about the familiar aspects of a story and the lessons—in general—that a certain type of story tends to teach.

This story clearly centers around a child, so its theme must have something to do with being a child and/or growing up. These stories are commonly referred to as “Coming of Age” or “Rites of Passage” stories—stories where children have to overcome some kind of challenge or crisis that informs who they will become as adults.

Below are listed some common literary themes and works associated with them. Familiarize yourself with the types of characters, the plots, and the lessons you might see in each type of theme:

Love: *Romeo & Juliet*

Death: *The Book Thief*

Good vs. Evil: *Chronicles of Narnia*

Prejudice: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

War: *Slaughterhouse 5*

Courage & Heroism: *The Hobbit*

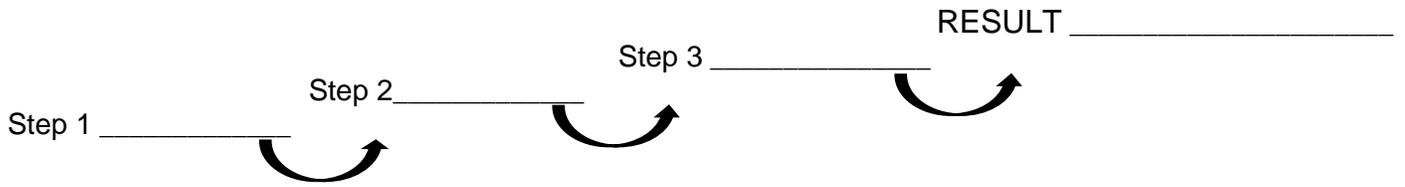
Individual vs. Society: *Fahrenheit 451*

Survival: *Lord of the Flies*

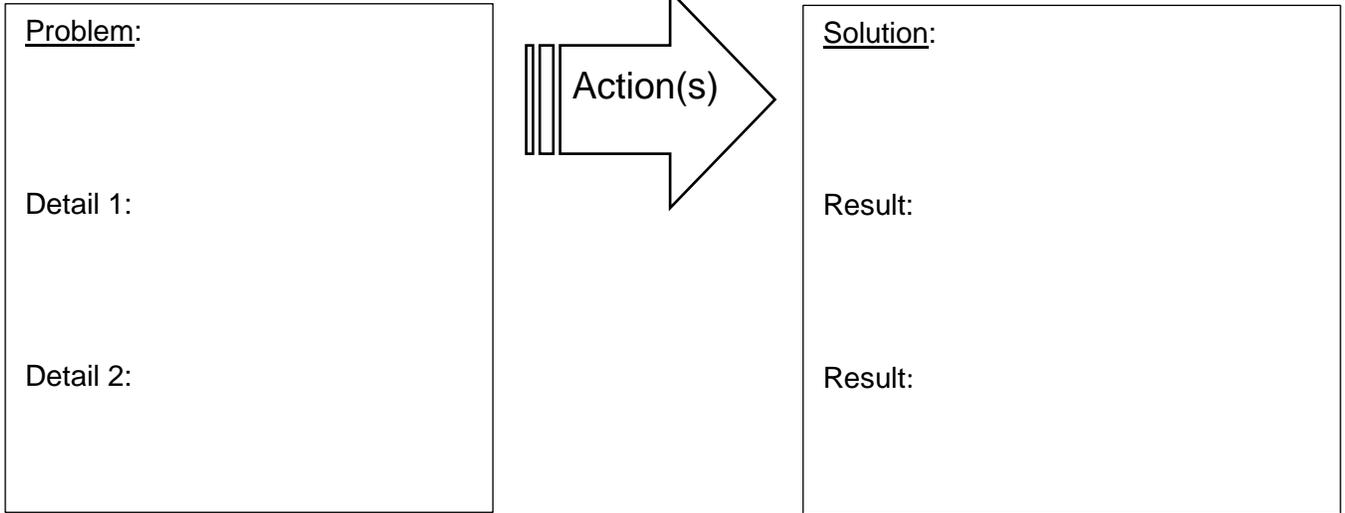
Power & Corruption: *The Hunger Games*

Recognizing Text Structures: Apply these models to any prep materials you are reading.

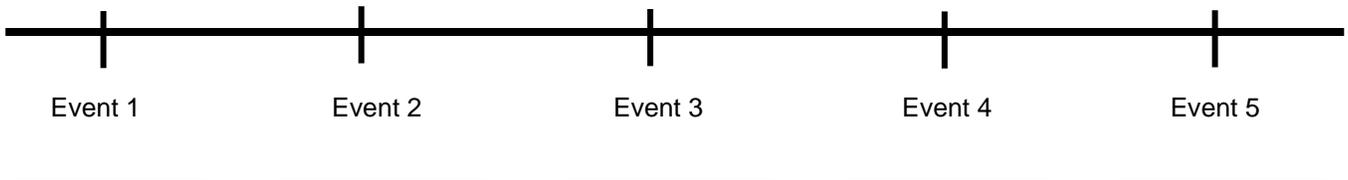
Process (Sequence): You will often see this structure in science based passages.



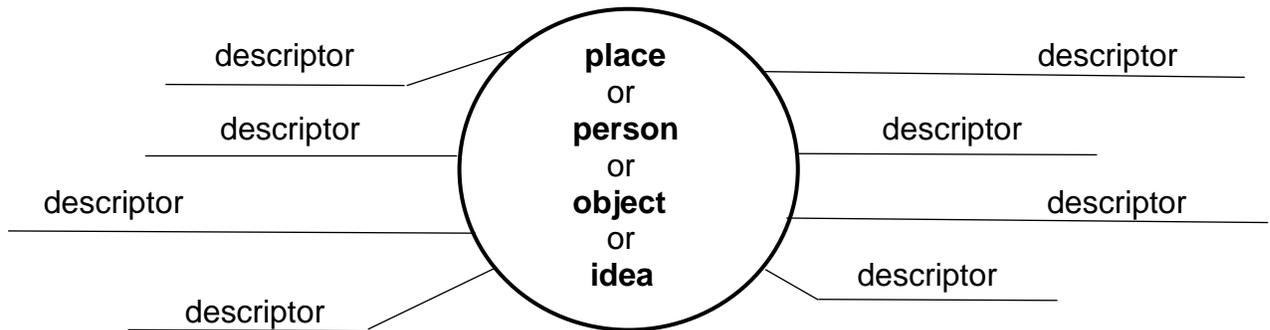
Problem → Solution: This structure is common in argument / persuasion passages.



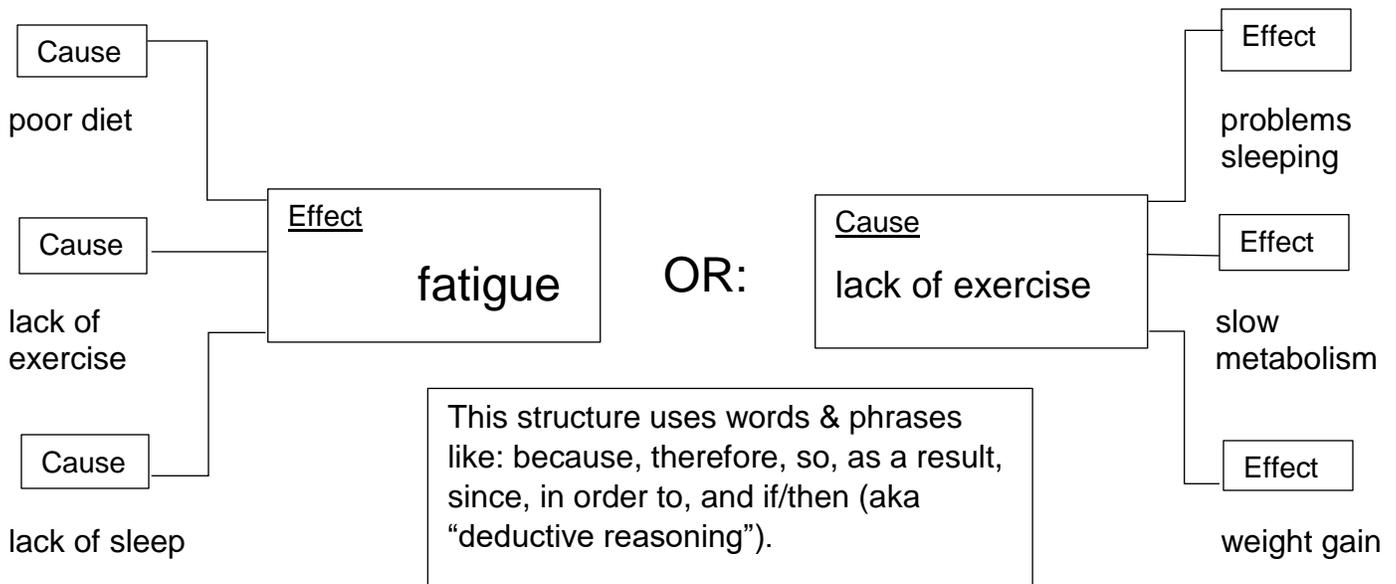
Chronological (Sequence): Look for chronology in narratives that contain history or background.



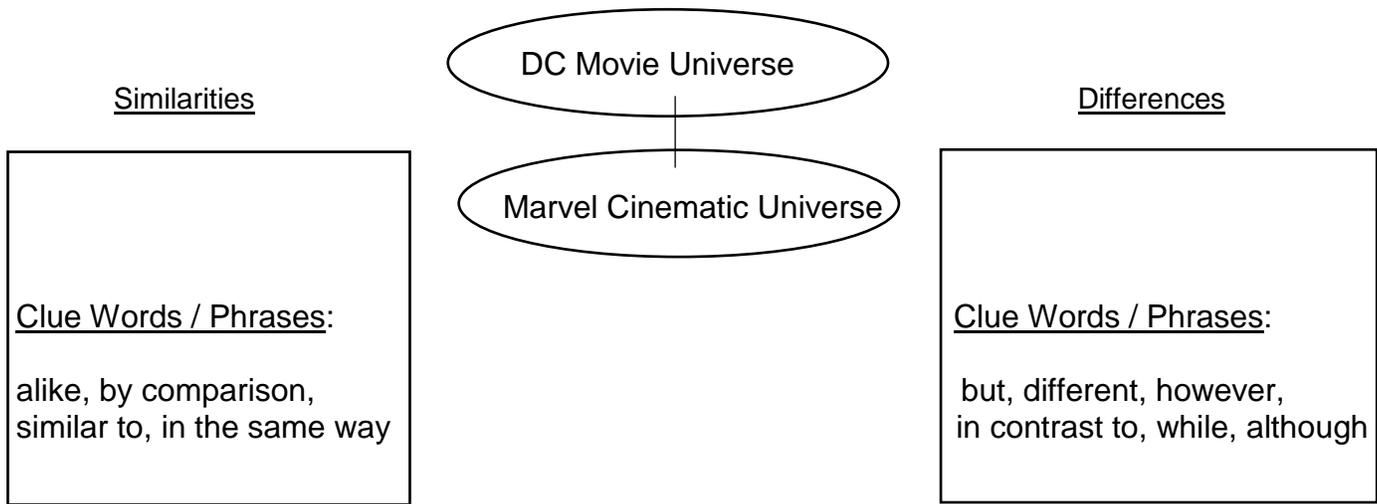
Spatial (Description): Narrative—especially literary—passages may contain description.



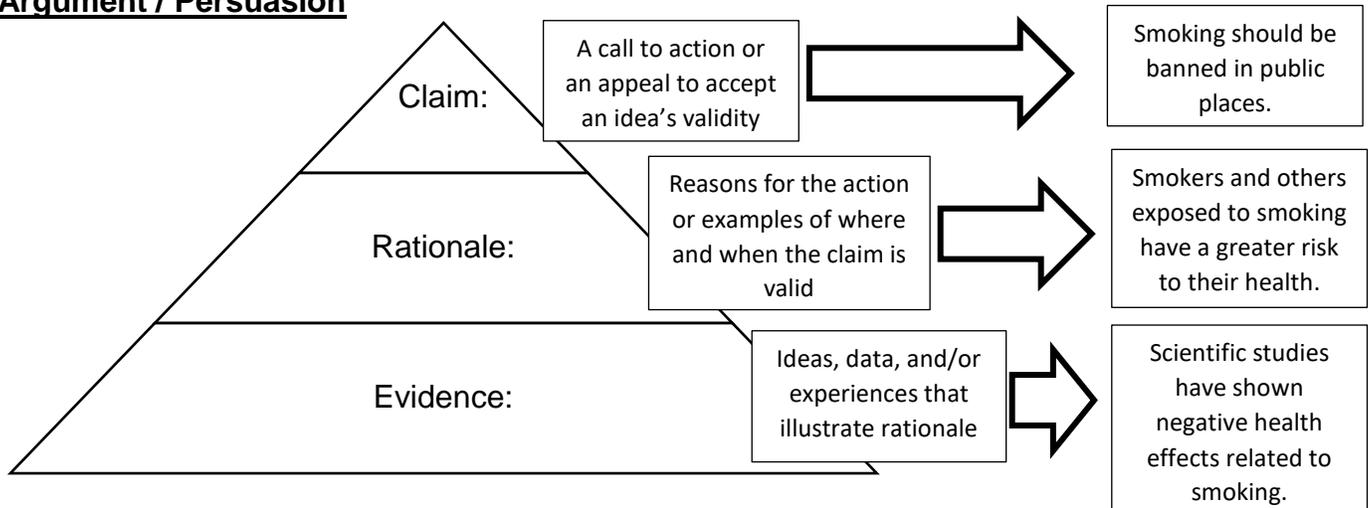
Cause & Effect: This structure is used across content areas.



Comparison / Contrast: Used with two or more things that have *something in common*:



Argument / Persuasion



Understanding Author's Purpose & Point of View

An important key to comprehending a passage is knowing where an author is coming from: what the author's purpose in communicating ideas is and what point of view author is taking.

Purpose: Why the author is communicating. There are 3 general purposes: 1) to inform (or explain), 2) to entertain, 3) to persuade.

Expository Prose: Giving information, explaining concepts, describing processes or methods, etc. Anything science-based most likely was written with **the purpose of informing or explaining**. But it could also be used in a narrative form, to give information about a character's backstory, or to tell you about General William Tecumseh Sherman's march to Atlanta, for example.

Narrative Prose: Telling a story, setting a scene, chronicling an event, exchanging words between characters (dialogue), describing a character's thoughts and feelings. When you see any of these things, most likely, **the author's purpose is to entertain**. Narrative prose is not exclusive to the literary genre. An author of a science text may use narrative to relate an event from history that led to the development of the microscope.

Argumentative Prose: Making a claim, calling readers to action, providing rationale for taking action, giving the reader factual evidence that supports a claim. All of these things are used for **the purpose of persuading** a reader. Argumentative prose is usually found in sociological and political passages.

Read the passage below. You'll recognize a main purpose (to inform) and a secondary purpose (to entertain):

[5] In general, most stars have a constant brightness. However, certain very young stars and some aging stars become unstable and vary in brightness and are known as variable stars. The oldest observations of variable stars come from China. The star Omicron Ceti was discovered in 1596 as the first variable star. It was named Mira, The Wonderful, and has been studied by astronomers ever since.

A critical reader can see that the main purpose of the passage is to inform readers about a certain type of star (variable stars). But the author also gives readers a short narrative about the first variable star. A reader can infer that the author chose "Mira, the Wonderful" not just for information, but for narrative effect.

Authors will often have a main purpose, and use different types of prose and text structures to fulfill that purpose. The Accuplacer may even ask you to pick the best statement of the author's purpose. Just as with main idea, the author's purpose must be discerned from the whole passage, not part of it.

Point of View:

In Expository Prose: the attitude or tone an author has toward the subject matter.

In Narrative Prose: the specific characters through which a reader views a story.

In Argumentative Prose: the side an author is taking, with biases considered.

EXPOSITORY PROSE	NARRATIVE PROSE	ARGUMENTATIVE PROSE
<p>[5] In general, most stars have a constant brightness. However, certain very young stars and some aging stars become unstable and vary in brightness and are known as variable stars. The oldest observations of variable stars come from China. The star Omicron Ceti was discovered in 1596 as the first variable star. It was named Mira, The Wonderful, and has been studied by astronomers ever since.</p> <hr/> <p>Even though the author does not state it directly, a critical reader can identify, by the use of narrative structure and word choice, that the author has an <u>implicitly positive</u> point of view toward the subject matter.</p> <p>If the author had <i>stated</i> a point of view like, “I find variable stars to be extremely interesting,” we could say the author’s point of view is <u>explicitly positive</u>.</p> <hr/> <p>NOTE: The Reading Accuplacer may ask you to choose a <i>very specifically worded point of view</i>, like, “The author believes that parochialism is inhibiting the preparation of business students.”</p> <p>Remember, as with identifying main ideas and conclusions, you must use the whole passage to determine specific point of view, <i>unless the test question asks about a specific idea in the passage</i>.</p>	<p>[4] She stood at the desk a long time before the librarian deigned to attend her.</p> <p>“Yes?” inquired the lady pettishly.</p> <p>“This book. I want it.” Francie pushed the book forward opened at the back with the little card pushed out of the envelope. The librarians had trained the children to present books that way. It saved them the trouble of opening several hundred books a day and pulling several hundred cards from as many envelopes.</p> <p>She took the card, stamped it, pushed it down a slot in the desk. She stamped Francie’s card and pushed it at her. Francie picked it up, but she did not go away.</p> <hr/> <p>In this passage, we are experiencing the story through Francie’s point of view, even though the author has chosen to write the story in 3rd person. Also, notice that the librarian is not a named character. That, and other key word choices, show us that Francie’s point of view is how we are to experience the story.</p> <p>Read the passage again. What do you think Francine’s point of view toward the librarian is?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implicitly positive? • Explicitly positive? • Implicitly negative? • Explicitly negative? • Neutral? 	<p>[2] As far as business is concerned, our national parochialism is growing worse. A study commissioned by the National Council on Foreign Language and International studies questioned 1,690 young men and women in 564 business schools working toward their doctoral degrees in business in the spring of 1984. The study found only 17 percent of these students were taking one more courses in international affairs and foreign languages.</p> <hr/> <p>From the claim (first sentence) alone, a critical reader can tell that the author is taking an <u>explicitly negative</u> point of view toward the concept of “national parochialism” in regard to business.</p> <p>All of the evidence following the claim shows that many business students do not have knowledge of a foreign language. We can conclude from this evidence that the author has an <u>implicitly positive</u> point of view toward business students studying a foreign language.</p> <p>Also, if a reader does not know the meaning of “parochialism,” he or she can use the information in the rest of the passage as <u>context clues</u> to discern it. We know the author has a negative view of it, and we can imply that the author thinks more business students should take a foreign language. This would better prepare them for international business. So, we can conclude that “national parochialism” has to do with a <i>narrower experience</i> than studying foreign language would give. Therefore, parochialism probably means a narrow mindset or experience.</p>

References

- [1] Gastaldo, R. A., Savrda, C. E., & Lewis R. D. (1996). *Deciphering Earth history* [Excerpt]. Reprinted in Commander, N., Cotter, W., & Callahan, C. (Eds.). *Chart Your Success on the COMPASS*. 3rd ed. Raleigh, NC: Contemporary Publishing.
- [2] Lauder, L. (1985). *The language of foreign trade* [Excerpt]. Reprinted in Commander, N., Cotter, W., & Callahan, C. (Eds.). *Chart Your Success on the COMPASS*. 3rd ed. Raleigh, NC: Contemporary Publishing.
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