

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

Let's start with a definition. A fact is:

- Something that we know for certain to have happened
- Something that we know for certain to be true
- Something that we know for certain to exist

Much of what you read in college will be designed to provide you with facts. Whether it's a reading assignment in history, computer science, or criminal justice, you'll have to know how to pick out and make sense of important information. Sometimes this won't be so easy, especially when the reading is especially dense or com-

plicated. To make it simpler, ask yourself these questions as you read: What facts am I expected to know? What am I to learn or be aware of? What happened? What is true? What exists?

PRACTICE PASSAGE 1

Jump right into the task of finding facts. The brief passage below is similar to something you might see in a newspaper. Read the passage carefully, and then answer the questions that follow. Remember, careful reading is active reading (see the Introduction), so mark up the text as you go. Underline key words and ideas; circle and define any unfamiliar words or phrases; record your reactions and questions in the margins.

On Tuesday, August 30, Mr. Blank, a prominent local citizen, arrived home from work to find that his apartment had been robbed. The thieves somehow managed to slip past building security at 131 West Elm Street with nearly all of Mr. Blank's belongings. In fact, the thieves left behind nothing but a stack of old *Home Decorator* magazines and a can of pork and beans. The robbery was reported by Mr. Blank's neighbor, who found Mr. Blank unconscious in his doorway. Apparently, Mr. Blank was so shocked by the robbery that he fainted. His neighbor immediately called an ambulance and then the police. Mr. Blank is now staying with relatives and is offering a reward of \$25,000 for any information leading to the arrest of the thieves.

1. What happened to Mr. Blank?
2. When did it happen?
3. Where did it happen?
4. How did Mr. Blank react?
5. Who called the police?
6. What was left in the apartment?

Remember, good reading is active reading. Did you mark up the passage? If so, it may have looked something like this:

On Tuesday, August 30, Mr. Blank, a prominent local citizen, arrived home from work to find that his apartment had been robbed. The thieves somehow managed to slip past building security at 131 West Elm Street with nearly all of Mr. Blank's belongings. In fact, the thieves left behind nothing but a stack of old Home Decorator magazines and a can of pork and beans. The robbery was reported by Mr. Blank's neighbor, who found Mr. Blank unconscious in his doorway. Apparently, Mr. Blank was so shocked by the robbery that he fainted. His neighbor immediately called an ambulance and then the police. Mr. Blank is now staying with relatives and is offering a reward of \$25,000 for any information leading to the arrest of the thieves.

Annotations:
 when, who
 standing out; widely & popularly known
 What happened - robbery
 where
 how did they manage this?
 interesting detail.
 who else was involved
 Wow!
 lots of \$!

You'll notice that the answers to the questions have all been underlined, because these are the key words and ideas in this passage. But here are the answers in a more conventional form:

1. What happened to Mr. Blank? His apartment was robbed.
2. When did it happen? Sometime while Mr. Blank was at work on Tuesday, August 30.
3. Where did it happen? 131 West Elm Street.
4. How did Mr. Blank react? He fainted.

5. Who called the police? Mr. Blank's neighbor.
6. What was left in the apartment? Some old Home Decorator magazines and a can of pork and beans.

Notice that these questions went beyond the basic who, what, when, and where to include some of the details, like what was left in the apartment. This is because details in reading comprehension, as well as in detective work, can be very important clues that may help answer the remaining questions: who did it, how, and why.

PRACTICE PASSAGE 2

Here's another passage, this time something a little more like what someone might see at work. Read the passage carefully and answer the questions that follow:

To: All New Employees
From: Human Resources

In order for your first paycheck to be processed, we must have a number of documents completed and in our files. Once these documents are in our hands, you will be entered into our payroll system. These documents include: a completed company application; a W-4 form; an I-9 form; a Confidentiality Agreement, if applicable; an emergency contact sheet; and a copy of your resume. You should be sure all of these documents are filled out within your first week of work. In addition, we will need the following documents from you for your file to be complete: two letters of recommendation from previous employers, a high school and college transcript, and an insurance coverage application. We request that you complete your file within your first month of employment.

7. What papers must new employees have on file?
List them below.
 8. In your list above, circle the items that employees must have on file in order to get paid.
 9. When should these circled items be completed?
 10. When must the rest of the file be completed?
 11. True or False: Everyone must sign a Confidentiality Agreement.
- Before you look at the answers, look at the next page to see how you might have marked up the passage to highlight the important information.

GETTING THE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

To: All New Employees

From: Human Resources

In order for your first paycheck to be processed, we must have a number of documents completed and in our files. Once these documents are in our hands, you will be entered into our payroll system. These documents include: [a completed company application; a W-4 form; an I-9 form; a Confidentiality Agreement, if applicable; an emergency contact sheet; and a copy of your resume.] You should be sure all of these documents are filled out within your first week of work. In addition, we will need the following documents from you for your file to be complete: [two letters of recommendation from previous employers, a high school and college transcript, and an insurance coverage application.] We request that you complete your file within your first month of employment.

Important deadline!

Official copy of a student's educational record

Documents I need in order to get paid

Documents I need to complete file

Deadline for completing file

With a marked-up text like this, it's very easy to find the answers.

7. What papers must new employees have on file?

Company application

W-4 form

I-9 form

Confidentiality Agreement (if applicable)

Emergency contact sheet

Resume

Two letters of recommendation

High school and college transcripts

Insurance coverage application

8. In the list above, the items that employees must have on file in order to get paid are circled.

9. When should these circled items be completed?
Within the employee's first week of work.

10. When must the rest of the file be completed?
Within the employee's first month of work.

11. True or False: Everyone must sign a Confidentiality Agreement. *False; only those for whom it is "applicable."*

PRACTICE PASSAGE 3

Now look at one more short passage. Again, read carefully and then answer the questions that follow.

Today's postal service is more efficient and reliable than ever before. Mail that used to take months to move by horse and by foot now moves around the country in days or hours by truck, train, and plane. First class mail usually moves from New York City to Los Angeles in three days or less. If your letter or package is urgent, the U.S. Postal Service offers Priority Mail and Express Mail services. Priority Mail is guaranteed to go anywhere in the U.S. in two days or less. Express Mail will get your package there overnight.

12. Who or what is this passage about?
13. How was mail transported in the past?
14. How is mail transported now?
15. How long does first class mail take?
16. How long does Priority Mail take?
17. How long does Express Mail take?

Once again, here's how you might have marked up this passage:

then → that used to take months to move by horse and by foot now moves around the
 now → country in days or hours by truck, train, and plane. First class mail usually moves
 Are there other services? → from New York City to Los Angeles in three days or less. If your letter or package is urgent, the U.S. Postal Service offers Priority Mail and Express Mail services. Priority Mail is guaranteed to go anywhere in the U.S. in two days or less. Express Mail will get your package there overnight.

What a long time!
 3 services listed-
 First class-3 days
 Priority-2 days
 Express-Overnight
 Fastest

You can see how marking up a text helps make it easier to understand the information a passage conveys.

12. Who or what is this passage about? *The U.S. Postal Service.*
13. How was mail transported in the past? *By horse and foot.*
14. How is mail transported now? *By truck, train, and plane.*

15. How long does first class mail take? *Three days or less.*
16. How long does Priority Mail take? *Two days or less.*
17. How long does Express Mail take? *Overnight.*

SUMMARY

Active reading is the first essential step to comprehension. Why? Because active reading forces you to really *see* what you're reading, to look closely at what's there. Like a detective who arrives at the scene of a crime, if you look carefully and ask the right questions (who, what, when, where, how, and why), you're on your way to really comprehending what you read.

Skill Building Until Next Time

Below are some suggestions for practicing the skills covered in this chapter throughout the day and even the rest of the week. Try them!

- **Mark up** everything you read throughout the day—the newspaper, an assignment, a letter from a friend. Underline the key terms and ideas; circle and look up any unfamiliar words; write your reactions and questions in the margins. If possible, share these reactions with the writer and see if you can get answers to your questions.
- Develop a “**detective’s eye**.” Begin to notice things around you. Look at the details on people’s faces; notice the architectural details of the buildings you enter. The more observant you are in daily life, the more enriched your life will be and the easier it will be to comprehend what you read.