ELA Reading Comprehension (Multiple Choice) Exams

* To do well on a reading exam you must do two things: (1) read the print texts (the selections and items) and (2) understand the thinking behind the thinking (“read” how someone else has interpreted the texts).

**A Reading Exam consist of what?**

A Reading Exam typically consists of two documents:

* a **Readings Booklet** featuring up to five types of literary genre (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, and visual media),
* and a **Questions Booklet** consisting of 55 multiple-choice questions.

**What is the nature of such an exam?**

A Reading Exam is quite demanding: it is a triple reading test. You must be able to read:

* the literary selection
* the item stem (question) and its multiple-choice completions
* the interpretation already created by the item developer
* The reader/exam writer has created the text a certain way and has arrived at a particular understanding of the selection. Your task is not so much to arrive at your own understanding of the text, but rather your task is to comprehend how the test developer has interpreted the work. You are looking for the best or most probable answer that is presented in the options.

**What types of questions will there be?**

Typically there are six types of questions you can be asked. Such questions will require that you demonstrate the ability to:

1. Understand meanings (literal and figurative)
2. Understand and interpret the relationship between form and content
3. Understand and interpret human experience and values expressed through literature
4. Draw inferences
5. Apply knowledge
6. Evaluate the ideas, techniques, and values presented in the reading selections

Typically each selection has an accompanying series of question items that can be divided into three distinct sections:

**1st set:**  these questions help to establish the context; for some you will predict the appropriate (intended) meaning of specific words

**2nd set:** these questions examine such elements in the selection as meanings of words and phrases

* Figures of speech (metaphor, hyperbole, simile, personification)
* Effects of stylistic elements or literary techniques (foreshadowing, symbolism, irony)
* Characterization
* Character behavior (traits, tone, or motivation)
* Relationships between characters
* Writer’s tone

**3rd set:**  these questions ask students to consider the work as a whole, and will ask you to consider the work’s thesis or theme, the writer’s purpose or values, etc.

**What overall strategies might the student employ?**

* Read all instructions carefully before you begin.
* Survey the test and texts before you start answer questions. You do not need to complete the readings in the order provided. You might choose to start with a favorite genre and leave the difficult genres for last. Score your answer sheet carefully to ensure you have completed all questions and answers correspond with answer sheet.
* You must recognize that test developers know that a sloppy or weak reading of the piece will result in a misinterpretation of the text, and s/he has created three answers which will appear plausible and attract the eye of the poor reader. These incorrect answers are called distractors. Do not let the distractors distract you.
* The following techniques are possible strategies. Choose the one that works best for you:
1. You should COVER UP the four possible responses. Hopefully, after you have read and understood the question, you should be able to VISUALIZE THE ANSWER BEFORE REVEALING THE POSSIBLE RESPONSES. If you do not see the answer you predicted, make a note to return to the question and MOVE ON. Subsequent questions might illuminate an answer to an earlier question. Move on to the next text if you are unsuccessful.
* The thinking strategy behind this method is simple: you want to spend time with those questions that are the easiest for you to understand because that should translate into the most number of questions being answered correctly. You do not want to dwell on those questions that are your greatest challenge. Save these for last when you have completed the remaining questions and have time to spare.
1. Quickly preview the questions before reading the selected text to get a general understanding of the text. Then read the text carefully and make the appropriate choices.
* Previewing the questions will help you focus your reading. When you have found a potential answer to a question, make a note in the margin to indicate a possible response.
1. Quickly read the text, read all the questions, then reread the text carefully and, finally, choose the appropriate answer.
* Reading the text twice will give you a better understanding of the main ideas. You have also previewed the questions, so you will be able to make notes in the margin to indicate possible responses.

**How do I respond to a particular type of question?**

* Some questions will require that you do not read literally; rather, you need to understand **figurative language**. Such questions contain certain keywords: suggests, conveys, implies, compares, contrasts, and foreshadows. Questions containing the words “implies” or “suggests” usually asks you for information that is to be **inferred** rather than taken directly from the text. Use the text to make a predicted opinion based on evidence from the text.
* Some questions will concern **meanings** of particular words. It is important to read the word **in context**. The weak reader will not go back and check the context. S/he will might choose a distractor that is not in context.
* Some of the questions will ask you to understand and interpret the **motives and personalities** of characters as well as the **effect of setting** on the behavior (mood, tone and action) of such characters. Different characters will have different **values** as well – at times similar to your own and at other times very different. Remember to choose the response that a test developer would choose and not necessarily your personal opinion.
* Some questions will require **judgement** on your part. These “evaluation” questions are created using keywords: MAINLY, BEST, STRONGEST, LEAST, MOST, etc.
* The most difficult questions will require a global understanding. You should be prepared to look for a response that interprets your understanding of:
* the major issue or conflict in the piece
* the author’s motivation for writing
* the impression you have about the works focus
* the feelings you have in regard to the overall text
* the author’s treatment of the subject
* the text’s theme.

**How to prepare for the test:**

1. study the glossary of terms from the year (located on the webnode)
2. writing practice tests to strengthen your test-taking skills and help you review
3. review notes from the year and the application of literary terms to the works you studied (novel studies/literature circles)

Other Helpful Hints:

* Pay attention to bold faced words in the text and questions.
* If a question refers to a specific line or paragraph, reread the section for better understanding.
* If you have difficulty understanding a text, read the stem of the question (not the possible responses) for clues as to how to interpret the selected text.
* Your answers should be consistent. One answer should not contradict another answer because your interpretation must be consistent.
* If you do not see your interpretation in a question, look for another possible interpretation.
* Do not be tempted to choose a sophisticated looking word, especially if you do not know the meaning. Use context clues to decode meanings.
* Do not look for a pattern in the answer key!
* Trust your judgement! Frequently your first choice is the correct one. Try not to second guess your choices once you have made your decision.
* Change an answer only if you
1. Have a new insight
2. Know that you tend to make errors at the beginning or end of a test, or
3. Know you have difficulty with one type of passage (e.g. poetry)
* You may use the process of elimination in guessing as a last resort.
* Read each question carefully. Do not skim and leap to a conclusion when you see certain words that you think will lead you to a correct response. Slow down and concentrate on understanding the text, questions and possible responses.
* Manage your time carefully, and do not spend too much time on one genre or question.
* Allow sufficient time at the end to check that every question has been completed. Double check your entire test if you have time.
* Try to relax before beginning the exam. Clear your mind of any distractions and focus on the task at hand. Take several deep breaths before, during and after the exam.