SAT Reading and Writing: Craft and Structure, study guide and worked solutions

What the SAT asks

Craft and Structure questions test how a writer uses words and builds a text: choosing the most precise word for a blank, naming the purpose of a text or the job of one sentence, and comparing two short texts on the same topic. The domain carries about 15% of the whole test, which is about 15 of the 54 Reading and Writing questions (roughly 28% of that section), spread across both modules.

Words in context

Choose the most logical and precise word or phrase for a text

The idea. You see a short text with a blank, or with one word picked out, and four choices. The SAT is not testing rare vocabulary. It is testing whether you can read the logic of a sentence. Every blank is fixed by a **clue** in the text: a definition, an example, an explanation after a colon, or a contrast. Find the clue, say what the blank must mean in your own simple word, and only then look at the choices.

The rules.

- Cover the choices and predict your own word first.
- The clue is always in the text. Never answer from outside knowledge.
- **Contrast signals** (but, yet, however, although, despite, instead): the blank goes the opposite way from the nearby idea.
- **Agreement signals** (a colon, because, since, so, indeed, in fact): the blank agrees with the nearby idea; words after a colon usually explain the blank.
- Match the **tone** (positive, negative, neutral) and the **strength**: "slightly reduced" and "destroyed" are both negative, but only one fits a small change.
- For a word picked out in the text, a common word often has a less common meaning: to "qualify" a claim is to limit it; to "check" growth is to slow it.
- Put your choice back into the sentence and read the whole text again.

Worked example 1: a blank with a contrast clue

Text: "Visitors to the old library often expect its reading room to be gloomy, since the building's outside walls are dark stone with only a few narrow windows. Inside, however, the room is surprisingly _____: a glass ceiling lets in daylight that falls evenly on every desk."

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word?

A) cramped
B) bright
C) silent
D) modern

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Step 1: find the clue. "However" contrasts with what visitors expect, "gloomy." The colon then explains the blank: daylight "falls evenly on every desk."

Step 2: predict. The opposite of gloomy, explained by daylight: "full of light."

Step 3: match. "Bright" means full of light. Choice B.

Step 4: check the others. "Cramped" is about space, which the text never mentions. "Silent" fits a real library, but the text says nothing about sound: the topic trap. "Modern" picks up the glass ceiling, but the clue is about light, and "modern" does not contrast with "gloomy."

Check: "Inside, however, the room is surprisingly bright: a glass ceiling lets in daylight..." Both the contrast and the explanation work.

Fastest route: read the words just after the colon. They nearly always tell you what the blank means.

SAT trap: the topic word and the impressive word

The most common wrong answer **fits the topic** but not the logic, such as "silent" for a library. The next is the **hardest-looking word**, chosen because it sounds clever; the SAT often makes a plain word the answer. If you cannot point to words in the text that support your choice, it is wrong. And when you see "but" or "although," make sure your word goes the opposite way.

Text structure and purpose

Identify the main purpose of a text or the function of a sentence in it

The idea. These questions ask what the writer is **doing**, not what the text **says**. A **main purpose** question asks for the job of the whole text: to explain, describe, correct a belief, report a finding, or show a character's feeling. A **structure** question asks for the order of the writer's moves. A **function** question asks what one sentence does for the sentences around it: introduce, claim, give an example or evidence, contrast, or give a result. Before you read the choices, sum up the text in one line that **starts with a verb**, such as "reports a problem, then a solution." For a function question, read the sentence before and the sentence after the one asked about.

The rules.

- Purpose is the job of the whole text; function is the job of one sentence.
- Choices begin with a verb (explain, describe, challenge, illustrate, argue). Check the verb first: a text that only reports cannot "argue."
- Common structures: a common belief, then a correction (signals: in fact, however, yet); a claim, then evidence; a problem, then a solution; an expectation, then a surprise, then a new explanation.
- In poems and stories, the purpose is often to show a character's feelings or a scene's mood. Small actions carry the feeling.
- Reject a choice if **any part** of it is not in the text. One wrong word makes the whole choice wrong.
- Watch strength: "suggests a possible cause" is not "proves the cause."

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Worked example 2: main purpose

Text: "When the town of Darsh began collecting rainwater from rooftops, officials expected the program to help mainly during droughts. Five years later, a city report found a second benefit no one had planned for: because less rain ran off the roofs into the streets, flooding during heavy storms fell sharply in the neighborhoods that took part."

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To explain how rooftop rain collectors are built
B) To argue that every town should collect rainwater
C) To describe an unexpected benefit of a program that was designed for a different purpose
D) To compare droughts and floods in the town of Darsh

Step 1: sum up each sentence. Sentence 1: a program starts, meant to help in droughts. Sentence 2: a report finds a second, unplanned benefit, less flooding.

Step 2: your own line. "Reports a surprising extra benefit of a water program."

Step 3: match. Choice C: "unexpected benefit" matches "no one had planned for," and "a different purpose" matches the droughts.

Step 4: check the others. A: building methods are never described. B: wrong verb ("argue") and far too wide ("every town"). D: droughts and floods are both mentioned but never compared; the choice borrows words without describing what the writer does.

Fastest route: find the turn ("a second benefit no one had planned for"). The purpose is almost always tied to the turn.

SAT trap: the true detail that is not the purpose

The trap repeats something that really is in the text, so it feels safe, but it describes a detail, not the whole text. Other traps use the **wrong verb** ("criticize" for a text that only describes) or are **half right**: the first half fits and the second half adds something the text never says. Read every choice to the last word.

Cross-text connections

Compare how two texts on the same topic relate to each other

The idea. You get Text 1 and Text 2 on the same topic. Usually the question asks how the author of Text 2 (or a person named in it) would most likely respond to a claim in Text 1; sometimes it asks how the texts relate. Sum up each text in a few words first, then name the relationship. Text 2 seldom says Text 1 is completely wrong. More often it **agrees in part** and adds a limit, a condition, new evidence or a different explanation.

Relationship	What Text 2 does	Typical signals in Text 2
Agreement	Adds support for Text 1's claim	also, similarly
Partial agreement with a limit	Accepts the claim for some cases only	but, only, however

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Different explanation	Accepts the facts, explains them another way	another factor, instead
Weakening evidence	Reports a finding that does not fit the claim	yet, did not, contrary to

The rules.

- Sum up each text in one short line before you read the options.
- Find the exact claim in Text 1 that the question names.
- Find what Text 2 **admits** (often its first words) and where it parts from Text 1 ("but," "however," "only if," "yet").
- The answer must be true of both texts.
- Distrust extreme options: "completely wrong," "never," "always," "proves," "has no effect."
- Answer for the person the question names, not for yourself.

Worked example 3: "most likely respond"

Text 1: "Many city gardeners plant only flowers that are native to their region, believing that native plants are the only ones local bees can use for food."

Text 2: "In a two-year survey of city gardens, ecologist Sana Mirza counted bee visits to more than 300 kinds of plants. Native flowers drew the most visits overall. However, several non-native herbs, such as mint and thyme, were visited almost as often, especially late in summer when many native plants had stopped flowering."

Based on the texts, how would Mirza most likely respond to the gardeners' belief in Text 1?

A) She would agree that bees visit only native flowers.
B) She would argue that native flowers are of little use to bees.
C) She would agree that native flowers are valuable to bees but point out that some non-native plants are also used, especially late in summer.
D) She would say that city gardens should not have any flowers.

Step 1: Text 1 in a line. Native plants are the **only** food bees can use.

Step 2: Text 2 in a line. Native flowers got the most visits, "however" some non-native herbs got almost as many.

Step 3: relationship. Partial agreement with a correction: yes to "native plants matter," no to "only."

Step 4: match. Choice C has both halves.

Step 5: check the others. A contradicts the mint and thyme data. B goes too far the other way: native flowers drew the most visits. D is in neither text.

Fastest route: find the "However" in Text 2. The answer usually includes what comes before it (what Text 2 accepts) and what comes after it (what Text 2 adds).

SAT trap: too strong or too weak

The favorite trap says Text 2 **completely rejects** Text 1 when it accepts part of it. The opposite trap says Text 2 **fully agrees**, ignoring its limit. A third describes one text correctly and the other

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wrongly. Answer only from what the named person says.

Practice set

Fourteen questions. Give yourself about 70 seconds for each. Each question has one correct answer.

Question 1

Marine biologist Rana Qadir expected her survey of a coral reef to take one week, but the work proved far more _____ than planned: strong currents, cloudy water and broken equipment stretched it to almost a month.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) predictable
B) enjoyable
C) time-consuming
D) affordable

Question 2

Although the novelist's early stories were praised for their long, winding sentences and rich descriptions, her later work is strikingly _____: most of its sentences are under ten words, and each scene is sketched with a single detail.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) spare
B) ornate
C) obscure
D) lengthy

Question 3

Economists had long assumed that the small weaving towns of the region traded only with nearby villages. Newly translated account books, however, _____ that view: they record regular sales of cloth to merchants in at least six distant cities.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) confirm
B) summarize
C) predate
D) undermine

Question 4

The committee's report did not reject the proposed dam outright. Instead, it _____ its support, approving the project only on the condition that fish populations in the river be monitored for ten years after construction.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) withdrew
B) qualified
C) exaggerated

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D) concealed

Question 5

In her study of migrating cranes, ecologist Mina Farouk notes that the birds do not simply follow a single fixed path each year. Instead, they appear to **entertain** several possible routes at once, shifting from one to another as winds and weather change during the journey.

As used in the text, what does the word "entertain" most nearly mean?

A) amuse
B) host
C) consider
D) perform

Question 6

For decades, planners in many cities tried to reduce traffic by widening roads. Yet studies of several such cities found that within a few years of widening, traffic was as heavy as before, because the extra space encouraged more people to drive. Some planners now argue that improving buses and trains does more to shorten travel times than adding lanes.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To describe the history of road building in a single city
B) To present a common approach to a problem, report evidence that it did not work, and mention an alternative
C) To argue that people should stop driving cars entirely
D) To explain how bus and train systems are paid for

Question 7

The potter Ilyas Karim shapes each bowl by hand on a slow wheel that his grandfather built. The wheel turns so unevenly that no two bowls come out exactly alike. Buyers sometimes ask whether the small wobbles in the rims are mistakes. Karim tells them that the wobbles are the very reason he has never replaced the old wheel.

Which choice best describes the function of the second sentence in the text as a whole?

A) It introduces a problem that Karim later solves by buying a new wheel.
B) It contrasts Karim's method with the methods used in modern factories.
C) It gives Karim's grandfather credit for the design of the bowls.
D) It explains a feature of the bowls that the rest of the text goes on to discuss.

Question 8

Researchers studying a species of desert lizard expected that its rough, ridged scales served mainly as armor against predators. When they placed the lizards on damp sand, however, they saw water creep along the narrow grooves between the scales toward the animals' mouths. The ridges, the researchers now suggest, may help the lizard drink in a place where standing water is rare.

Which choice best describes the overall structure of the text?

A) It states an expectation, describes an observation that did not fit it, and offers a new explanation.
B) It describes a problem and then lists several possible solutions to it.
C) It compares two species of lizard and explains why one survives better.

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D) It presents a theory and then reports an experiment that confirms it.

Question 9

The following text is from an original short story.

Grandmother kept the old radio on the kitchen shelf long after it had stopped working. Every evening at exactly seven, she wiped its dusty face with the corner of her dupatta and turned the dial a little, as if searching for a station only she could still hear. None of us asked her why. We all knew that, years ago, seven o'clock was when the news from her village used to come on.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To explain how old radios can be repaired at home
B) To criticize the family for ignoring the grandmother's wishes
C) To show, through a daily habit, the grandmother's lasting attachment to her former home
D) To describe how radio news broadcasts have changed over time

Question 10

Accounts of the printing press usually stress how quickly it could copy books. Historian Amara Okafor argues that a quieter effect mattered more. Because every printed copy of a page was identical, scholars in different cities could refer to "page 42" of a book and know they were reading the same words. This shared reference, Okafor suggests, made it far easier for readers to debate and correct one another's work.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To describe how the first printing presses were built and operated
B) To present a historian's view that an often overlooked effect of the printing press was more important than the one usually emphasized
C) To argue that the printing press did not in fact make the copying of books faster
D) To explain why scholars in different cities often disagreed about page numbers

Question 11

Text 1

Some nutrition writers claim that eating breakfast is essential for students' learning. They point out that students who skip breakfast tend to score lower on tests taken in the morning, and they conclude that breakfast itself improves performance.

Text 2

A team of school researchers followed 600 students for a year. Students who ate breakfast did score slightly higher on morning tests, but the gap disappeared once the researchers took sleep into account. Students who slept more were both more likely to eat breakfast and more likely to score well.

Based on the texts, how would the researchers in Text 2 most likely respond to the conclusion of the nutrition writers in Text 1?

A) By agreeing that breakfast is the main cause of higher morning test scores
B) By arguing that students would score higher if they skipped breakfast
C) By claiming that the amount of sleep students get has no effect on their test scores
D) By suggesting that the link the writers describe may be explained by another factor, the amount students sleep

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Question 12

Text 1

Architect Farah Baig argues that office buildings with walls made mostly of glass save energy. Because daylight fills the rooms, she explains, workers need far fewer electric lamps during the day.

Text 2

It is true that glass walls reduce the need for electric lighting. In hot climates, however, engineer Omar Siddiqi has found that large glass walls also let in so much heat that the extra cost of air-conditioning is greater than the money saved on lighting, unless the glass is shaded from direct sun.

Based on the texts, how would Siddiqi most likely respond to Baig's argument?

A) By agreeing that glass walls reduce lighting needs but warning that in hot climates they may increase total energy use unless shading is added
B) By rejecting the idea that daylight can reduce the use of electric lamps
C) By agreeing completely, since glass walls save energy in every climate
D) By arguing that offices in hot climates should be built without windows

Question 13

Text 1

Literary scholar Hamid Rauf argues that the nature poems of Zubaida Rahim, a nineteenth-century poet, are purely descriptive. In his view, Rahim's careful pictures of forests and rivers show a love of landscape but carry no political meaning.

Text 2

Scholar Nadia Ilyas points to letters in which Rahim complained bitterly that the forests near her home were being cut down to build a railway. Read beside these letters, Ilyas argues, the poems' repeated images of fallen trees and empty hillsides look like a quiet protest against the loss of those forests.

Based on the texts, how would Ilyas most likely respond to Rauf's claim?

A) By agreeing that the poems describe landscapes closely and adding that this shows Rahim had no interest in public events
B) By arguing that evidence from outside the poems suggests they carry a meaning that Rauf overlooks
C) By claiming that Rahim's letters, rather than her poems, should be the main subject of study
D) By suggesting that the poems were written after the railway was finished and so cannot be a protest

Question 14

Text 1

A team of biologists proposed that the silver-wing warbler, a small songbird, times its spring migration by day length. In laboratory tests, birds kept under gradually lengthening hours of light became restless and tried to fly north at the same point in the season as wild birds.

Text 2

A ten-year field study tracked wild silver-wing warblers. In years when spring weather arrived early, the birds left as much as two weeks earlier than in cold years, even though day length on any given date is the same every year. The study's authors suggest that temperature also plays a part in timing the

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journey.

Which choice best describes how Text 2 relates to Text 1?

A) It confirms the finding in Text 1 by repeating the same laboratory method.
B) It argues that the laboratory tests described in Text 1 were badly designed.
C) It shows that day length has no effect on when the warblers migrate.
D) It presents field evidence suggesting that day length alone cannot fully explain the timing that Text 1 describes.

Solutions

Question 1. Answer: C

The colon says the rest of the sentence explains the blank: currents, cloudy water and broken equipment "stretched" a one-week job "to almost a month." So the work took much longer than planned, and "time-consuming" fits. Check: "far more time-consuming than planned: ... stretched it to almost a month." A is wrong: "but" shows her expectation failed, so the work was less predictable, not more. B is wrong: pleasure is never mentioned, and the problems point the other way. D is wrong: cost is a topic word with no clue in the text.

Skill: Words in context

Question 2. Answer: A

"Although" contrasts the early stories (long sentences, rich descriptions) with the later work, and the colon explains the blank: sentences under ten words, one detail per scene. The blank means "plain, using few words," which is "spare." A is right. B is wrong: "ornate" (highly decorated) describes the early stories and ignores "although." C is wrong: "obscure" means hard to understand, and difficulty is never mentioned. D is wrong: "lengthy" contradicts "under ten words."

Skill: Words in context

Question 3. Answer: D

The view is that the towns traded "only with nearby villages." "However" shows the account books go against it, and the colon gives the evidence: sales "to merchants in at least six distant cities." So the books weaken the view: "undermine." A is wrong: "confirm" ignores "however." B is wrong: the books do not restate the view; they contradict it. C is wrong: "predate" means come earlier in time, and the text gives no dates to support that.

Skill: Words in context

Question 4. Answer: B

The report "did not reject the proposed dam outright" and approved it "only on the condition that" fish be monitored. That is support with a limit. To "qualify" support means to limit it with a condition. A is wrong: "withdrew" means took back completely, but the report still approved the dam. C is wrong: a condition makes support weaker, not overstated. D is wrong: the support is stated openly, not hidden. B uses the less common meaning of a common word, which is why students skip it.

Skill: Words in context

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Question 5. Answer: C

Replace the word with a blank: the birds "appear to _____ several possible routes at once, shifting from one to another" as the weather changes. They keep several routes in mind as options, so the word means "consider." Check: "they appear to consider several possible routes" keeps the meaning. A is wrong: "amuse" is the familiar meaning of "entertain," the trap. B is wrong: "host" (entertaining guests) makes no sense with routes. D is wrong: "perform" (entertaining an audience) does not fit choosing paths.

Skill: Words in context

Question 6. Answer: B

The text makes three moves: planners widened roads to cut traffic (a common approach to a problem); "Yet" studies found traffic returned (evidence it did not work); some planners now favor buses and trains (an alternative). B names all three. A is wrong: the text covers "many cities," not one, and is not a history. C is wrong: too strong; no one says people should stop driving entirely. D is wrong: funding is never mentioned.

Skill: Text structure and purpose

Question 7. Answer: D

Sentence 2 says the wheel turns unevenly, so "no two bowls come out exactly alike." This explains the bowls' irregular shape, and sentences 3 and 4 then discuss that very feature, "the small wobbles in the rims." A is wrong: Karim "has never replaced the old wheel." B is wrong: factories are never mentioned. C is wrong: the grandfather built the wheel, not the bowl design, and that fact is in sentence 1.

Skill: Text structure and purpose

Question 8. Answer: A

"Expected that its ... scales served mainly as armor" is an expectation. "However, they saw water creep along the narrow grooves" is an observation that does not fit it. "May help the lizard drink" is a new explanation. A matches each step. B is wrong: there is one explanation, not a problem with a list of solutions. C is wrong: only one species appears. D is the trap: the observation does not confirm the first idea (armor); it points to a different one.

Skill: Text structure and purpose

Question 9. Answer: C

The text centers on one habit: at seven each evening the grandmother cleans a broken radio and turns the dial "as if searching for a station only she could still hear." The last sentence explains why: seven was when "the news from her village used to come on." The habit shows she still holds on to her former home. A is wrong: the radio is never repaired. B is wrong: "None of us asked her why" is not criticism; the next sentence shows the family understood her, and the tone is gentle. D is wrong: the text is about one woman's feeling, not the history of broadcasting.

Skill: Text structure and purpose

Question 10. Answer: B

Sentence 1 gives the usual emphasis (speed of copying). Sentence 2 introduces Okafor's view that "a quieter effect mattered more." Sentences 3 and 4 explain that effect (identical pages gave

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a shared reference) and why it mattered (easier debate and correction). That is B. A is wrong: how presses were built is never described. C is the hard trap: Okafor says speed mattered less, not that presses were not faster; "did not in fact make copying faster" is far stronger than the text. D is wrong: identical pages helped scholars agree; no disagreement about page numbers is described.

Skill: Text structure and purpose

Question 11. Answer: D

Text 1: students who skip breakfast score lower, so breakfast itself improves scores. Text 2: breakfast-eaters did score slightly higher, "but the gap disappeared" once sleep was taken into account, because students who slept more were more likely both to eat breakfast and to score well. The researchers accept the pattern but explain it by another factor, sleep. A is wrong: once sleep was counted, breakfast made no difference. B is wrong: nothing says skipping breakfast helps. C is wrong: Text 2 says students who slept more scored better.

Skill: Cross-text connections

Question 12. Answer: A

Text 1: glass walls save energy because daylight cuts lighting needs. Text 2 admits "It is true that glass walls reduce the need for electric lighting," then "however" adds that in hot climates air-conditioning costs more than the lighting saved, "unless the glass is shaded." That is partial agreement with a limit and a condition: A. B is wrong: Siddiqi accepts that glass reduces lighting needs. C is wrong: he says savings can be wiped out in hot climates. D is wrong: his fix is shading, not removing windows.

Skill: Cross-text connections

Question 13. Answer: B

Text 1: Rauf says the poems are purely descriptive, with no political meaning. Text 2: Ilyas uses Rahim's letters (evidence from outside the poems) about forests cut for a railway, and argues that, read with them, the images of fallen trees are a quiet protest. So she would say the poems carry a meaning Rauf overlooks: B. A is wrong: its second half reverses Ilyas's view. C is wrong: Ilyas uses the letters to read the poems, not to replace them. D is wrong: Text 2 gives no date for the railway, and Ilyas argues the poems are a protest.

Skill: Cross-text connections

Question 14. Answer: D

Text 1: lab tests suggest the warblers time migration by day length. Text 2: wild birds left up to two weeks earlier in warm springs, although day length on a given date is the same every year. If day length is fixed but departure dates change, day length cannot be the whole explanation; "also" shows Text 2 keeps day length and adds temperature. That is D. A is wrong: Text 2 is a field study, not a repeat of the lab method. B is wrong: the lab design is never discussed. C is the too-strong trap: "also plays a part" means day length still matters.

Skill: Cross-text connections

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