

Do's and Don'ts for Taking a Standardized Test

Note how the material is organized -

- Skim the stems of the multiple-choice questions to discover what kind of information is wanted.
- Most selections have a central subject or main idea, which could be used as a title. Often you will find this in the first sentence of a paragraph. Underline the main topic especially ideas you note in answer to the questions you skimmed.
- Key words and facts will help solidify the main idea. These are the details. Always look for the key words.
- Details are usually of two types.. The main details will develop the central theme. These may be broken down further into subordinate details
- Read with questions in mind. Ask *who, what when and where* to find key ideas. Ask how and *why* to find reasons.

Some further ideas -

- Avoid word-by-word reading or backtracking (rereading). Try reading at approximately the same speed as you are thinking.
- Staying actively involved will help you concentrate. Read critically.
- Look for a general impression, main thought and implications so that you may draw some inferences. In other words read for ideas!! Then look for supporting information.
- Realize that while main ideas will usually be found in the first sentence or the summary sentence they can also be found in other places in the paragraph.
- Read through a whole selection or at least a paragraph before you do any rereading. If you need to clarify a point or two, *then* go back and spend the time sorting out the ideas.

- As you read a selection composed of several paragraphs, determine whether succeeding paragraphs *expand the ideas or points raised* in preceding paragraphs or whether they *provide an example* or illustration of them
- Don't get too involved with the reading selection. Answer the questions on the basis of *only* what is presented. Don't read more into it than is there. Don't jump to a conclusion before you have read the whole passage.

Adapted from MCAT: How to Prepare for the Medical College Admission Test, Seventh Edition by Hugo R. Seibel et al. New York: Barrons Educational Series, Inc., 1991.

Kathleen D Thayer
Director Academic Success Center
Purdue University

PURDUE
UNIVERSITY