

The RC Question Type Map

Different questions require different forms of passage analysis.

Hard Reading Comp questions become more manageable when you know exactly what the question requires. Without that precision, students often rely on a vague process: understand the passage, find something supported, and choose the answer that sounds best among several close options.

A better process starts with the question type. Identify the task, locate the evidence, apply the right support standard, and anticipate the likely traps. This guide organizes the major RC question types around that process.



Macro Questions

MAIN IDEA · PRIMARY PURPOSE · STRUCTURE / ORGANIZATION · TONE / AUTHOR ATTITUDE

Can you extract the passage's overall topic, purpose, and structure?

These questions concern the passage as a whole. They require you to analyze its major claims and sections without allowing one detail or a similar-sounding answer choice to derail you.



Role & Function Questions

STATEMENT FUNCTION · PARAGRAPH FUNCTION · PHRASE MEANING IN CONTEXT

Can you determine what a statement or paragraph is doing and interpret a phrase in context?

These questions focus on a particular part of the passage. The task is to explain that section's role, contribution, or contextual meaning.

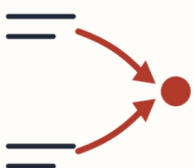


Inference Questions

STANDARD INFERENCE · AUTHOR VIEWPOINT · THIRD-PARTY VIEWPOINT

Can you determine what the passage supports, from directly stated details to multi-part inferential chains, while keeping each view attached to the correct speaker?

The reasoning may be nearly direct or may require combining several statements. The answer must remain within what the passage supports.



LR in RC / Apply the Passage

ANALOGY · APPLICATION · PASSAGE PRINCIPLE · WEAKEN / STRENGTHEN

Can you abstract a relationship, rule, or argument, apply it to a new situation, or determine how new information affects it?

These questions ask you to move beyond the passage's surface meaning while preserving its underlying reasoning, rule, or relationship.

Macro Questions

≈23% OF RC QUESTIONS

Can you extract the passage's overall topic, purpose, and structure?

Macro questions ask you to compress the full text into a single judgment: its central message, the author's reason for writing, the sequence of its sections, or the author's attitude. The characteristic wrong answer distorts a generally true statement, swapping between two similar fact descriptions or structural elements.

01 Main Idea

≈11% OF RC

THE TASK

Identify the one central message the author wants you to take away: the umbrella statement that best captures the passage's full arc without adding anything absent from it.

HOW IT'S ASKED

"main point," "main idea," "central idea," "best summarizes the passage."

THE METHOD

1. Summarize each paragraph in your own words, whether its point or its function, and chain the summaries into the passage's argument flow.
2. Compress that flow into one sentence before reading the choices, and look for the match.
3. If no match is clean, filter twice: accuracy first (eliminate anything contradicted, distorted, or outside the passage), then comprehensiveness (of the accurate survivors, take the one that covers the most of the passage).

THE TRAP

Distorted. A similar but distinct description: it tracks the passage's arc, but swaps one fact description or structural element for a similar-sounding one.

02 Primary Purpose

≈5% OF RC

THE TASK

Identify why the author wrote the passage, expressed as an abstract verb paired with an accurate topic.

HOW IT'S ASKED

"primary purpose," "primarily concerned with," what the passage "as a whole" does.

THE METHOD

1. Identify the thesis: what does the author want you to believe?
2. Analyze the method: are they defending, explaining, proposing, critiquing, reconciling, or correcting?
3. Hold the answer to both jobs at once: it must capture the author's motivation and describe something the passage actually does. Confirm the verb, then confirm the scope.

THE TRAP

The Wrong Verb. Right topic, wrong action. The answer says "to evaluate" when the author spent the whole passage defending.

IF STUCK BETWEEN TWO

check the tone. An argumentative passage takes *argue*, *critique*, or *defend*, not *present* or *describe*.

03 Structure / Organization

≈2% OF RC

THE TASK

Describe how the passage's major sections connect to form the whole, including every step in order.

HOW IT'S ASKED

the "organization of the passage," how the author "proceeds," the "structure" of the argument.

THE METHOD

1. Give each paragraph a job label, not a topic label: introduces a prevailing view, raises a problem, offers an alternative, qualifies an earlier claim.
2. Treat transition words such as *however*, *thus*, and *for example* as your direct evidence for each pivot.
3. Match the answer against your blueprint on two axes: the precision of its verbs and the order of its steps.

THE TRAP

The Mismatch. Describes the flow perfectly, *except for one step it mislabels or places out of order. Verify every link.*

04 Tone / Author Attitude

≈5% OF RC

THE TASK

Gauge the author's opinion of the specific subject named in the stem, including both its direction and its intensity, from their word choices.

HOW IT'S ASKED

"attitude toward," "stance," "view regarding," the author's "opinion" of a topic.

THE METHOD

1. Locate the exact topic. An author can admire a field, criticize one theory inside it, and stay neutral on a third. Judge only the subject the stem names.
2. Hunt charged language: adjectives ("promising," "flawed"), adverbs ("unfortunately"), verbs ("endorses," "dismisses").
3. Characterize the view on two scales: direction (positive, negative, neutral) and intensity (strong, moderate, qualified). Demand both from the answer.

THE TRAP

Too Extreme. *The author said "may be flawed"; that is not "complete rejection." Match the intensity, not just the direction.*

Role & Function Questions

≈15% OF RC QUESTIONS

Can you determine what a statement or paragraph is doing and interpret a phrase in context?

These questions isolate one piece of the passage, such as a detail, a paragraph, or a phrase, and ask what it is doing there. The question tells you where to look; the difficulty is in how to interpret what you find. What a sentence says is content; why the author placed it there is function, and these questions are won by the second.

05 Statement Function

≈7% OF RC

THE TASK

Explain why the author included a specific detail, example, or claim: its logical job, not its content.

HOW IT'S ASKED

"in order to," "serves to," "primarily to," the detail's "role" or "function."

THE METHOD

1. Isolate the local argument: read the detail plus the sentence before and after. What point is being made right here?
2. Name the role: evidence, example, concession, clarification, cause, or effect.
3. Test finalists with the frame "The author included X in order to ____," and confirm the role also serves the paragraph's larger purpose.

THE TRAP

The Content Dump. Accurately restates what the detail says, but never describes the job it performs.

06 Paragraph Function

≈3% OF RC

THE TASK

Explain what the author accomplishes with one particular paragraph: its role within the passage's architecture.

HOW IT'S ASKED

the "function of the second paragraph," the "purpose of the final paragraph."

THE METHOD

1. Summarize the paragraph's content in one line, so you know what it says *before* judging what it does.
2. Define its bridge role: how does it respond to the paragraph before it, and how does it set up the one after?
3. Prefer answers phrased in functional language, such as *introduces a counterargument* or *provides evidence for the main claim*, that capture the whole paragraph.

THE TRAP

Focus on Detail. Describes one example inside the paragraph instead of the paragraph's overall job.

07 Phrase Meaning in Context

≈4% OF RC

THE TASK

Define a word or phrase strictly by how it is used in that specific sentence, rather than by what it usually means.

HOW IT'S ASKED

what the author "means by" a term, what a phrase "refers to," what could be "substituted" for it.

THE METHOD

1. Read the sentence and its neighbors for the three highest-value clues: contrast language (what the phrase is *not*), restatement (a nearby paraphrase), and examples (the phrase in action).
2. Predict the job the phrase is doing in the surrounding logic before looking at the choices.
3. Test by substitution: swap each choice into the sentence, and keep the one that preserves the author's meaning, not the one that defines the word best.

THE TRAP

The Standard Definition. The dictionary meaning, offered exactly when the author is using the word in a narrower, technical, or metaphorical way.

Inference Questions

≈49% OF RC QUESTIONS

Can you determine what the passage supports while keeping each view attached to the correct speaker?

Nearly one of every two RC questions belongs to this family. The reasoning ranges from locating a direct paraphrase to combining statements across paragraphs, but the standard never moves: the answer must stay within what the passage supports, attached to the right voice. Before committing to an answer, run two checks: Is this the right speaker? Is this the right topic?

08 Standard Inference

≈31% OF RC

THE TASK

Identify the statement that is provable from the text, whether stated outright or supported by the smallest step beyond what is stated.

HOW IT'S ASKED

the passage "implies," "suggests," "indicates"; what can be "inferred"; "most strongly supported"; "according to the passage."

THE METHOD

1. Treat each choice as a claim requiring justification. The mental model: "Because this specific text is true, this answer is true."
2. For answers you are struggling to accept or reject, identify the key topics, then search the passage for the location where those topics were brought up. Do not reread at random.
3. Compare strength of support. Correct answers often keep cautious wording, such as *some*, *can*, *may*, or *likely*, because the evidence itself is cautious.

THE TRAP

Too Extreme / Out of Scope. Inflates a limited fact into a universal rule, or imports information the passage never gave you.

09 Author Viewpoint

≈11% OF RC

THE TASK

Identify the statement the author would agree with, on the exact issue the stem names.

HOW IT'S ASKED

the "author would be most likely to agree," what "the author believes."

THE METHOD

1. Synthesize the author's stance from the main point, the evidence they chose, and their tone, narrowed to the stem's exact issue rather than their general outlook.
2. Demand a verifying line: a sentence you can point to that makes the answer true.
3. Check ownership: the supporting line must express the author's own view, not a position they are merely reporting. Then match intensity: "suggests" is not "proves."

THE TRAP

The Misattribution. Reflects a critic's view quoted in the passage, but presents it as the author's.

10 Third-Party Viewpoint

≈6% OF RC

THE TASK

Isolate what a specific named party believes, such as "the critics," "the scientists," or the author of Passage B.

HOW IT'S ASKED

what a group or person "would likely agree with," their view "according to" the passage.

THE METHOD

1. Fix the exact voice and the exact issue. The same speaker can hold several claims in one passage; you need the right person on the right question.
2. Keep a mental speaker map: what the passage attributes to that party, versus what the author says about them. Attribution words (*argues*, *claims*, *maintains*) mark the view; evaluation words (*however*, *mistaken*, *persuasive*) mark commentary.
3. Match the answer to the speaker's claim at the speaker's strength. Do not inflate or distort the view.

THE TRAP

The Mix-Up. Hands the author's view to the third party, gives the third party's view to the author, or merges two voices into one tidy summary.

LR in RC / Apply the Passage

≈12% OF RC QUESTIONS

Can you abstract a relationship, rule, or argument, apply it to a new situation, or determine how new information affects it?

These questions ask you to move beyond the passage's surface meaning while preserving its underlying reasoning. These are Logical Reasoning skills transplanted into RC. They are the least frequent family, but they land disproportionately in the hardest difficulty band, and they punish one habit above all: matching answers by topic.

11 Analogy

≈3% OF RC

THE TASK

Find the scenario that duplicates the passage's logic in a completely new context.

HOW IT'S ASKED

a situation "most analogous to," "most similar to," or that "parallels" one in the passage.

THE METHOD

1. Isolate the relationship and state it as a topic-neutral rule: "X is designed for one purpose but becomes valued for an unintended one."
2. Test each choice against the rule: structure in, structure out. Eliminate extra components, missing pieces, or a different sequence.
3. If stuck, run the reverse test: abstract the answer choice into its own rule and check whether the passage's scenario fits it. The two should be interchangeable blueprints.

THE TRAP

Topic Matching. Same subject matter as the passage, *wrong logical structure*. The subject is bait; *the structure is the test*.

12 Application

≈3% OF RC

THE TASK

Apply the passage's rule, standard, or theory to a brand-new case.

HOW IT'S ASKED

a scenario "most consistent with" the passage, one that "exemplifies" a conception, what "would" follow "if" a condition held.

THE METHOD

1. Rebuild the passage's rule as a working checklist: what must be true, what disqualifies, what is merely optional background.
2. Preserve the qualifiers exactly, especially *only if*, *unless*, and *primarily*. The small limiter is often the whole question.
3. Audit each choice one condition at a time, in the same order. The right answer satisfies all of them, not most.

THE TRAP

The Missed Condition. The tempting answer satisfies two criteria and quietly fails the third.

13 Passage Principle

≈1% OF RC

THE TASK

Name the general rule that justifies a specific judgment or action in the text.

HOW IT'S ASKED

the "principle," "underlying generalization," or rule that "governs" the argument.

THE METHOD

1. Isolate the specific judgment: who concluded what, on what grounds?
2. Ask what general belief would make that judgment logical. Move from the concrete case to the rule behind it.
3. Run the justification test: if the principle were true, would it force the passage's conclusion? The right principle covers the case without outrunning the passage.

THE TRAP

Too Specific / Too Broad. Restates the passage's facts, or *floats to a generalization the passage never supports*.

14 Weaken / Strengthen

≈4% OF RC

THE TASK

Find the new information that most hurts or helps a specific argument made in the passage.

HOW IT'S ASKED

"weaken," "undermine," "call into question," "strengthen," "support" a claim or interpretation.

THE METHOD

1. Isolate the exact claim the stem names, whether a hypothesis, interpretation, or policy judgment, rather than the passage as a whole.
2. Map the argument: evidence → conclusion, and name the unstated assumption bridging them.
3. Predict the job of the right answer, whether it should supply a rival explanation, expose a missing cost, or confirm the disputed link. Then assume each choice is true and measure its direct impact on that exact connection.

THE TRAP

Irrelevant Impact. *The answer changes something, but it affects a side point while the central logic stands untouched.*

The Map at a Glance

One row per question type. For each: identify the task, locate the evidence, apply the standard of support, and know the trap. With open-ended stems, such as “Which of the following is true?”, locating the evidence may come after reading the choices.

THE FOUR FAMILIES

FAMILY	THE ANALYSIS	STANDARD OF SUPPORT	SHARE OF RC
1 • Macro	The author's overall work	The entire passage	≈23%
2 • Role & Function	Understanding passage relationships	One part of the passage in context	≈15%
3 • Inference	What the passage states	Direct textual evidence, correctly attributed	≈49%
4 • LR in RC	The logic of the passage, reapplied	The referenced text and the underlying concept	≈12%

ALL FOURTEEN TYPES

QUESTION TYPE	THE TASK	THE #1 TRAP
Main Idea	Capture the full passage in one statement	Distorted
Primary Purpose	Name the author's goal: precise verb + accurate topic	The Wrong Verb
Structure / Organization	Match the sequence of the passage's moves	The Mismatch (one step off)
Tone / Author Attitude	Direction and intensity of the author's stance	Too Extreme
Statement Function	The job a detail performs, not what it says	The Content Dump
Paragraph Function	The role one paragraph plays in the whole	Focus on Detail
Phrase Meaning in Context	What the phrase means in this sentence	The Standard Definition
Standard Inference	The claim the text can prove	Too Extreme / Out of Scope
Author Viewpoint	What the author would agree with	The Misattribution
Third-Party Viewpoint	What the named party believes	The Mix-Up
Analogy	Duplicate the passage's logic in a new context	Topic Matching
Application	Apply the passage's rule to a new case	The Missed Condition
Passage Principle	The general rule behind a specific judgment	Too Specific / Too Broad
Weaken / Strengthen	The new fact that moves the central logic	Irrelevant Impact