

# READING COMPETENCY PACKET



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## **General CPT Information**

The Board of Higher Education requires every student attending a post secondary school in Massachusetts to take this test upon acceptance. The results are used to place you in English communication and Math courses. In addition, North Shore Community College uses the results to establish your communication and mathematics proficiency levels so that you will be successful in college level work.

The web-based CPT is untimed; therefore, take the time to understand each of the 20 questions. The passages are brief; usually only one or two paragraphs long and are followed by one multiple-choice question.

Each question must be answered before moving to the next question. Sometimes you will not be sure of your answer. Make the best decision you can and move on to the next question. The test adapts to your ability; that means that it will give you easier questions if you answer incorrectly, and harder questions if you answer correctly.

In this booklet reading comprehension techniques are explained to assist you in preparing for the Computerized Placement Test (CPT) Reading Comprehension selection.

To use this booklet, study the examples, and then complete the exercises. The answers are at the end of the booklet. When you find an unfamiliar word, check a dictionary for a definition. If you have difficulty understanding any of the concepts, come to the tutoring centers. Hours and locations are available at (978) 762-4000 x 5410, or by visiting the NSCC website: [www.nsc.mass.edu/academics/student\\_support/current/](http://www.nsc.mass.edu/academics/student_support/current/)

During the Fall and Winter/Spring semesters, tutoring is available at the Lynn Campus in LW219, at the Beverly Campus at SR221, and at the Hathorne Campus at Berry Hall 104. Evening hours are available in Lynn and in Beverly and vary according to semester.

Summer tutoring hours are limited.

## Selecting the Main Idea

The main idea is the author's most important concept. It is the best summary of what is read. The main idea may be stated, or it may be implied. It is not always in the first sentence; it may be in any position in the passage.

### Example:

Movie monsters seem large and frightening on the screen. Often they seem as large as buildings, and they appear to walk hundreds of feet with each step. Actually, they are just models no bigger than your arm. Skillful camera techniques make them seem very large.

The main idea of this passage is:

- A Movie monsters are scary.
- B Movie monsters are not what they seem.
- C Movie cameras are dangerous
- D Movie monsters are as big as your arm.

*A and C are not mentioned in the passage.*

*D is an example.*

*The main idea is B, because it summarizes the passage.*

### Example:

It's important to dress well for a job interview. Instead of wearing something trendy, wear clean, conventional clothes. You want your skills and experience to be the focus, not how you look. If you wear green lipstick, or rings in your nose, you probably won't get the job.

The main idea of this passage is:

- A Interviewers are easily distracted.
- B Green lipstick is in fashion.
- C How not to get a job.
- D How to dress for an interview.

*A and C are not mentioned in the passage.*

*B is an example.*

*The main idea is D, because it summarizes the passage.*

**Read each passage and choose the main idea.**

1. The black belt is the highest level in karate. The student must master hundreds of skills to reach this high standard. The beginner must practice constantly, aiming chops and jabs at an imaginary partner. Later the student hardens the side of the hand by chopping into piles of sand. Finally, the advanced student practices self-control. This last step is the hardest.

The main idea of this passage is:

- A. A karate student spends hours alone.
  - B. Black belt is the highest level in karate.
  - C. Chopping sand hardens a student's hand.
  - D. Practice is the way to become a black belt.
2. Television sets are found in almost every American home. Nine out of ten Americans watch at least one television show a day. Children watch a great deal of television; four year olds watch about 27 hours of television each week. But older people watch television more than any other age group. Men and women over the age of 55 watch more than 32 hours each week.

The main idea of this passage is:

- A. Watching television is a part of most American's lives.
  - B. Men watch sports on television.
  - C. People over the age of 55 watch the most television.
  - D. Four year olds watch too much television.
3. A hurricane is a storm that can cause terrible destruction and death. They bring tremendously strong winds that can knock down buildings. The wind travels as fast as a speeding automobile, and often it is accompanied by heavy rain. Meteorologists keep track of hurricanes by using cameras in satellites and they try to discover where the storms are heading. When people are informed that a hurricane is heading their way, they should move to a safer place. This science can save many lives.

The main idea of this passage is:

- A. Hurricanes are as fast as a speeding automobile.
- B. Hurricanes have big winds and cause large rainfall.
- C. Hurricanes are dangerous storms.
- D. Meteorology is a new science.

## Author's Point of View

By reading what an author has written, a reader can learn how the author feels about a topic or idea. The author gives hints about his/her opinion and the reader can use those hints to surmise what the author feels.

### Example:

Football is played in all weather, including rain and snow. It is played in the mud and on unbearably hot days. Players break bones and pull muscles just to catch a dirty piece of inflated leather.

The author believes that:

- A. Football is fun.
- B. Football players don't feel pain
- C. Football is an uncomfortable sport to play.
- D. Footballs are made of leather.

*A and B are not mentioned in the passage.*

*D is a fact.*

*C best expresses the author's belief, as shown by the inclusion of bad weather conditions and the player's physical discomfort.*

### Example:

Today American women have the right to vote. It seems impossible to believe that this right was ever denied to them. Yet it wasn't until 1920 that the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed that gave women that right. Perhaps sometime before the year 2020 we will have our first woman president. That will be a great triumph for women.

The author seems to believe that:

- A. Women should not vote.
- B. Some day soon there should be a woman president.
- C. A woman president would be a mistake.
- D. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment is unbelievable.

*A and C are the opposite to the author's position.*

*D is not what the author disbelieves.*

*B best expresses the author's position, since the author believes that would be a triumph for women.*

**Read the following passages and select the best answer.**

1. In the Old West many people were tricked into buying fake gold mines. A dishonest man would buy some land and then put some gold nuggets where they could be easily found. The landowner would then bring an unsuspecting customer out to inspect the property. The customer would find the gold and buy the land hoping to find large amounts of additional treasure. But the defrauded sucker would never find any more gold.

The author seems to believe that:

- A. Selling gold mines is illegal.
  - B. Fake gold mines usually lose money.
  - C. Life in the Old West was exciting.
  - D. All gold nuggets are fake.
2. Doctors take out improperly functioning parts of the human body and replace them with artificial parts. Teeth are replaced with silver, porcelain or white composite material; blood vessels are replaced with plastic tubing. Even damaged hearts can be replaced with mechanical pumps. These artificial parts work almost as well as the real ones. People live longer and more comfortable lives thanks to these medical advances.

The author seems to think that:

- A. Artificial parts do not help people.
  - B. People need to be careful selecting a doctor.
  - C. Artificial parts help people to live longer.
  - D. Silver teeth are attractive.
3. Some say that Leroy "Satchel" Paige was the best pitcher in baseball history. Since black players were not allowed in the major leagues, most of his career was spent pitching for black baseball teams, where he was a star. At an age when most players retired, he was invited to play in the majors where he continued to throw until the age of 59. Satchel retired as the oldest pitcher in baseball history. If he had joined the major leagues at the customary age of 18 or 19, he might have broken all the pitching records in major league history.

The author seems to believe that Satchel Paige:

- A. was the best ball player in history
- B. was an average baseball player.
- C. was too old to play baseball.
- D. was one of the best baseball pitchers in history.

## Finding Details

Questions may ask for factual information contained in the passage. Often the information is stated in the passage. Occasionally the information is not directly stated, and a comparison or conclusion is required. Be sure to confirm your selection with the information in the passage.

### Example:

When applying for a driver's license, there can be choices. You may wish to apply for a standard license allowing you to drive a personal car and some types of rental vehicles or perhaps you want a motorcycle license. You may be required to have a special license for your job, such as a taxi, truck, or limousine driver. The fees vary for each of these licenses. Standard licenses are the least expensive at \$12.00; motorcycle drivers pay slightly more at \$17.00. A chauffeur's license, allowing you to drive limousines, costs \$50.00, but taxi drivers pay the most: \$100.00.

What is the fee for a standard driver's license?

- A. \$12.00
- B. \$17.00
- C. \$ 50.00
- D. \$ 100.00

**B** and **D** are mentioned in the passage, but not as **standard license**.

**C** was not mentioned in the passage.

**A** is the correct answer. According to the passage, \$12.00 is a standard license fee.

### Example:

Either at zoos or in the wild, animals occasionally need to be relocated. Animal handlers find it easiest to move large animals when the animal is asleep. A special gun with tranquilizer ammunition is used to guarantee the animal won't awaken while being transported. The dosage varies according to the size of the animal.

Which animal would require the largest tranquilizer dose?

- A. Rabbit
- B. Skunk
- C. Elephant
- D. Lion

**A** and **B** are small animals.

**D** and **C** are large animals, but elephants are larger than lions.

**C** is the correct answer.

**Read the following passages and select the best answer.**

1. The smallest published book is called The Ant. In 1980 a Japanese publisher printed 200 copies of this story for children. Although the length of 20 pages is within the normal range, it is, nonetheless, the smallest book since it is about the size of an ant!

How many pages did The Ant have?

- A. 1, 980 pages.
  - B. 200 pages.
  - C. 20 pages.
  - D. 50 pages.
2. Currently the most popular method of keeping meat fresh is to store it in refrigerators. However, cooling and freezing are not the only methods available for preserving meat. Other methods include curing the meat by soaking it in a salt solution, or drying it. Another method involves smoking the meat in a special oven using different types of wood to enhance the flavor as well as preserve the meat.

When were smoking, drying, and salting the most popular method of preserving meat?

- A. Before the refrigerator was invented.
  - B. After the refrigerator was invented.
  - C. When there was more wood available.
  - D. When women were at home more.
3. Ever wonder why an actor doesn't get injured in a movie fight? For instance, when one actor breaks a chair over another's back, why isn't the actor's back broken? One trick is to have the property people make the chair of very light wood such as balsa wood. The actors have to treat the chair as if it is very sturdy and heavy so that the audience will believe that it is a good weapon. Will knowing this effect you the next time you see a movie fight? Not if there is good acting!

Why is balsa wood used to make some movie chairs?

- A. Balsa wood chairs are attractive
- B. Balsa wood chairs cost very little to make
- C. Balsa wood chairs break easily and don't hurt anyone.
- D. To make actors work hard at being believable.

## **Inference**

The information in a passage can lead you to a conclusion. Drawing the

correct conclusion involves making an inference. In other words, you must try to figure out which answer is correct from the clues in the passage.

**Example:**

First thing Fred did when he awoke this morning was cough. He hadn't slept very well and felt feverish. When he tried to get out of bed, his head was heavy and ached. Fred reached for the phone and called his boss. He would not be going to work today.

Why couldn't Fred go to work today?

- A. He wanted to go to the movies.
- B. His girlfriend was mad at him.
- C. He had a cold.
- D. He broke his leg.

*A, B, and D are not mentioned in the passage; no clues are given about what Fred will do today, if he has a girlfriend, or if he had a broken leg.*

*C is the correct answer. All the symptoms Fred has are those of a cold.*

**Example:**

The sand had gotten in her hair and bathing suit. The hot sun was burning her skin, but although she was tired, she did not wish to leave. The sound of the waves meeting the sand was making beautiful music and she wanted to enjoy it for a bit longer.

Where was she?

- A. At the beach
- B. In a factory
- C. At work
- D. On vacation

*B is not correct; there are no clues indicating a factory.*

*C and D could be true, but there is no direct indication that she works at the beach or that she is on vacation.*

*A is the correct answer. Sand, sun, and waves are all found at the beach.*

**Read the following passages and select the best answer.**

1. Although he was wearing a heavy shirt, he knew it would not be enough. Layers are best at this time of year. In preparation of going out he donned another shirt, a sweater, and a wind-breaker jacket. Then he found his gloves and a hat. Finally he was ready to go dig out the car.

What season was it?

- A. Fall.
  - B. Spring.
  - C. Winter.
  - D. Summer.
2. Smoke was everywhere. The air was so hot she could hardly breathe. Each breath was painful as she stumbled in the heavy air. The sound of desperate animals trapped in the fire could be heard all around her, made her want to cry. At last she found a small stream that she could follow to safety.

Where was she?

- A. In a large apartment building.
  - B. In a forest.
  - C. At home.
  - D. At work.
3. Giant trees once covered more than a million acres of California land. They live more than one thousand years and can grow up to 300 feet. People wanted to farm the rich California soil and the trees were in the way. Now they are nearly gone. The redwood trees are preserved in state and national forests and parks so that people may enjoy their splendor.

What happened to the redwood trees?

- A. They were killed by wild animals.
- B. They burned in forest fires.
- C. They had a disease and died.
- D. They were cut down by people.

# Comparisons

Questions may require that you compare the information using size, time, or variety. The reader may be asked to put the events in sequence or use a qualifier such as all, most or some to describe what is indicated in the passage.

**Example:**

In less than four minutes Jack Dempsey and Luis Firpo fought one of the most savage fights in history. Dempsey knocked Firpo down several times in the first round. Firpo came back in the next round to knock Dempsey out of the ring. Dempsey won the fight by knocking Firpo out.

What happened last?

- A. The fight lasted four minutes.
- B. Dempsey knocked Firpo down several times.
- C. Firpo knocked Dempsey out of the ring.
- D. Dempsey knocked out Firpo.

*A is true, but is not the final event that stopped the fight.*

*B and C are events in the fight, but not the last ones.*

*D was the last event that stopped the fight.*

**Example:**

Since Jamie arose early and skipped breakfast he was very hungry when he finally stopped working to eat lunch. The cook gave Jamie a plate with three pancakes on it. In no time, he was asking for more. When he was finally feeling full, he leaned back in his seat and rested, no longer hungry.

How many pancakes did Jamie eat?

- A. None
- B. Less than 3 pancakes
- C. 3 pancakes
- D. More than 3 pancakes

*A and B are not true. The passage suggested that Jamie ate the 3 pancakes on his plate and had more.*

*C only refers to the first plate full of pancakes.*

*D is the correct answer. The passage doesn't indicate how many pancakes Jamie ate, but indicated that he had more than the first three.*

**Read the following passages and select the best answer.**

1. Dogs generally do not live more than 20 years. But there have been a few exceptions. Good records exist for several dogs that are known to have lived between 20 and 25 years. The oldest reliable age for a dog is a little beyond 29 years. It is believed that very few dogs have lived much beyond this age.

Most dogs live:

- A. 20 years or less.
  - B. Between 20 and 25 years.
  - C. Between 25 and 29 years.
  - D. More than 30 years.
2. In the United States, there are four common hair colors: black, brown, blond and red. The least amount of people have red hair, and blond hair occurs more frequently than red. Black hair is seen more often than both of those colors. Brown is the most common color.

What color hair do most Americans have?

- A. Black
  - B. Brown
  - C. Red
  - D. Blond
3. Each year the Motion Picture Academy nominates movies and actors for Academy Awards in several categories. The first Award, in 1927, went to the silent film "Wings." Pictures with sound, or *talkies* as they were called, became increasingly successful within the next year. After 1928, most pictures that won the Award were not silent. One of the most popular films ever made was the Academy Award winner "The Godfather."

"The Godfather" was:

- A. Made before *talkies*.
- B. A silent film.
- C. Made After "Wings."
- D. Made in 1928.

## Selecting the Best Title

Some questions ask the reader to choose the best title for the passage. This is similar to selecting the main idea. The title should refer to the complete passage, not focus on one detail.

### Example:

Some trees are as large as a skyscraper and as wide as a truck. While others are thin and as small as a 1-year-old child. Trees can flower or not and they can seasonally drop their leaves or keep them all the time. Some look gray and some look black. Trees grow in many different forms.

The best title for this selection is:

- A. Trees without Flowers
- B. Different Sorts of Trees
- C. Black Trees
- D. Trees and Plants

*A and C are not good titles because they both focus on one detail of the passage.*

*D is not correct because no other plants are mentioned.*

*B is the correct answer. The passage describes several different types of trees.*

### Example:

The Atlantic Ocean is large and the waves are so dangerous that it is difficult to imagine that a small boat could cross it. Two men accomplished the feat in 1887. Frank R. Samuelson and George Harris each manned an oar and rowed for 55 days. They traveled from New York harbor to a small English harbor. When they set out on the seemingly impossible trek, many people believed that they were inviting a watery death.

The best title for this passage is:

- A. 55 Days of Work
- B. New York to England
- C. Small Rowboats
- D. Rowing the Atlantic

*A, B and C focus on a detail of the trip.*

*D is correct answer. Mainly the passage is about crossing the Atlantic.*

**Read the following passages and select the best answer.**

1. It seems impossible for a wrestler to defeat himself, but it happened. In a match between Count Zazoff and Stanley Pinto, the winner never touched the loser. On the way into the ring for the first round, The Count got tangled in the ropes that surround the ring. While struggling to get free, his shoulders were down on the mat long enough for the referee to count him out. Stanley Pinto won the match without touching his opponent.

The best title for this passage is:

- A. How to Wrestle
  - B. Wrestling is a Dangerous Sport
  - C. The Life of Stanley Pinto
  - D. How a Wrestler Defeated Himself
2. Fish are by no means silent. They do not produce sound the way humans do. Scientists have heard a wide range of whistles, beeps, and grunts while listening through specially constructed underwater microphones. Although to the average human swimming in the sea it may seem a quiet place, the undersea world is quite noisy.

The best title for this selection is:

- A. Swimmers and Fish
  - B. Noise Under the Sea
  - C. Silent Swimming
  - D. Science and Swimming
3. It is possible to be successful with very little formal education. For instance, Mark Twain, one of our most famous writers, and Charlie Chaplin, the great movie comedian, both dropped out of school before the 8th grade. In addition, the makers of our first airplanes, the Wright Brothers, never graduated from high school. With determination it is possible to be successful even if you leave school early.

What is the best title of this passage?

- A. Success without Much Education
- B. The Development of Our First Airplane
- C. Charlie Chaplin and Mark Twain
- D. The Importance of Success

## CPT Reading Sample Questions

Directions: Read each of the passages below and then choose the best answer to the question that follows. Answer the question on the basis of what is stated or implied in the passage.

1. Myths are stories, the product of fertile imaginations, sometimes simple, often containing profound truths. They are not meant to be taken too literally. Details may sometimes appear childish, but mostly myths express a culture's most serious beliefs about human beings, eternity and God.

The main idea of this passage is that myths:

- are created primarily to entertain young children.
- are purposefully written for the reader who lacks imagination.
- provide the reader with a means of escape from reality.
- illustrate the values that are considered important to a society.

-From The College Board

2. Embarking on the fight for independence, America faced formidable obstacles. The Continental Congress did not have the authority to pass binding legislation to impose taxes. The new nation had no army and no navy, and its population numbered only 2.5 million people, 20 percent of whom were slaves. Britain, by contrast, was a mighty power of 11 million people with the world's best navy and a well-disciplined army. Fifty thousand troops were in North America in 1776, and Britain hired thirty thousand German soldiers to supplement forces during the war. However, the American Revolutionaries were not deterred.

What is the main point of the passage?

- Britain was a great power whose population outnumbered that of America's.
- America's military forces were less experienced than Britain's military.
- America's Continental Congress had limited authority.
- As America was about to engage in its struggle for autonomy, it was faced with arduous barriers.

-From *An American History* by Rebecca Brooks Gruver

3. It is early summer. August's long-awaited vacation time still seems ages away, but by the same token, its torpor-producing heat and mildew-generating humidity have not yet arrived. Instead, these cool, end-of-June days practically insist on getting the picnic season under way immediately. But alas, there is difficulty: alfresco dining has a bad name among us. Tenth-rate hot dogs, carbonized chicken parts and beef a la charcoal lighter are principally what come to mind when we hear the words "outdoor food."

The passage suggests that the author believes that:

- picnicking is the best way to spend summer.
- August is better than June for a picnic.
- Picnicking has an unsavory reputation.
- Picnicking is better alfresco.

-From *A Spanish Picnic* by Robert Capon

4. Elements are basic substances that can not be broken down into anything simpler, and as atom is the smallest unit of an element. Compounds are combinations of two or more elements and can be broken down into simpler substances. Compounds are formed when atoms are held together by an attractive force called a chemical bond. A molecule is the smallest unit of a

compound, or a gaseous element, which can exist and still retain the characteristic properties of a substance.

According to the passage, compounds:

- a. require a chemical bond.
- b. develop when the smallest unit of an element is broken down.
- c. are formed when elements combine with atoms.
- d. are the basic units of molecules.

-From *Introduction to Physics and Chemistry* by Bill Tillery

5. My parent's divorce was final. The house had been sold and the day had come to move. Thirty years of the family's life was now crammed into the garage. The two-by-fours that ran the length of the walls were the only uniformity among the clutter of boxes, furniture, and memories. All was frozen in limbo between life just passed and the one to come. I suddenly became aware of the coldness of the garage, but I didn't want to go back inside the house, so I made my way through the boxes to the couch. I cleared a space to lie down and curled up, covering myself with my jacket. I hoped that my father would return soon with the truck so we could empty the garage and leave the cryptic silence of parting lives behind.

What is the author's mood?

- a. Melancholy
- b. Idealistic
- c. Vindictive
- d. Indignant

-From *Limbo* by Rhonda Lucas

6. While silk-stocking Manhattan is asleep, East Harlem is starting to bustle. The poor are early risers. They have jobs others don't want: the early-hour jobs, the late-hour jobs. The streets are filled with fast-moving people: men, women, and swarms of children of all sizes. Some will stand at the bus stops, but most will crowd into the downtown subways that speed them to jobs to serve the affluent. East Harlem is a busy place, night and day, filled with the joyous and troubled lives of residents – rather than the heavy commercial traffic of mid-Manhattan. There is so much togetherness.

The main idea of this passage is that the residents of East Harlem:

- a. are dissatisfied with their jobs.
- b. are poorer than Manhattan's residents.
- c. share common struggles and goals.
- d. disdain the rich of Manhattan.

-From *A Day in East Harlem* by Patricia Cayo Sexton

Directions there are two underlined sentences in each question below, which is followed by a question about them. Read each sentence and then choose the best answer to the question.

7. The American prison system functions primarily to exact retribution.

In Japan, the courts are less concerned with sending people to jail than they are with rehabilitating them.

What does the second sentence do?

- a. It supports an idea found in the first sentence.
- b. It contrasts an idea expressed in the first sentence.
- c. It analyzes an idea stated in the first sentence.
- d. It exemplifies an idea found in the first sentence.

-From *Sociology* by Scott and Sally McNall

8. Males and females are treated differently from grade school through college.

Therefore, this treatment of the sexes by school officials influences both the student's choice of career and level of performance.

How are the sentences related?

- a. The second sentence contradicts the first sentence.
- b. The second sentence shows a cause of the first sentence.
- c. The second sentence states an effect of the first sentence.
- d. The second sentence defines an idea found in the first sentence.

-From *Sociology* by Scott and Sally McNall

9. The Midwest is experiencing its worst drought in fifteen years.

Corn and soybean prices are expected to be very high this year.

What does the second sentence do?

- a. It restates the idea found in the first sentence.
- b. It states an effect of the first sentence.
- c. It gives an example of the first sentence.
- d. It analyzes the statement made in the first sentence.

10. The functions and meaning of the American family have changed over time.

There is now a stronger emphasis on romantic love between parents and an increase in the number of mothers in the workforce.

What does the second sentence do?

- a. It restates the idea found in the first sentence.
- b. It states an effect of the first sentence.
- c. It gives an example of the first sentence.
- d. It analyzes the statement made in the first sentence.

-From *Sociology* by Scott and Sally McNall

# Answers to Exercises

## Page 7

1. D
2. A
3. C

## Page 9

1. B
2. C
3. D

## Page 11

1. C
2. A
3. C

## Page 13

1. C
2. B
3. D

## Page 15

1. A
2. B
3. C

## Page 17

1. D
2. B
3. A

## Page 18-20

1. D
2. D
3. C
4. A

5. A
6. C
7. B
8. C

9. B
10. A