Main Idea and Main Purpose Questions

Question Stems: "Which choice best states the main idea of the text?" and "Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?"

These questions hand you a short text, a paragraph about a discovery, a person, a book, or a scene from a story or a poem, and ask you to step back and sum it up. They come in two versions. A **main idea** question asks what the text **says**: its point, the one statement that everything else in the text serves. A **main purpose** question asks what the text **does**: its job, what the author is using the text to accomplish, such as describing, explaining, arguing, or showing. The wording of the stem barely changes:

- Which choice best states the **main idea** of the text?
- Which choice best describes the **main idea** of the text?
- Which choice best states the **main purpose** of the text?
- Which choice best describes the **main purpose** of the text?

The 3-Step Strategy for Main Idea and Main Purpose Questions

Three steps work for every question of either kind. After them come five worked examples, one for each **blueprint** (organizational plan) that a passage can follow, then three comprehensive drills, one at the level of Module 1 and two at the level of the harder Module 2. The chapter closes with the Logic Skeleton Bank, a reference table of every form the official questions take.

Step 1. Find the blueprint, then the point.

Read the whole text once, start to finish, before you look at the choices. These passages are short, about 60 to 150 words and most of them 80 to 110, and almost every one follows one of five blueprints. The blueprint tells you where the point is:

- **The turn** — a common view, an old assumption, or a first impression, then a turn (*however*, *but*, *yet*, *in fact*) and the writer's real view. The point comes after the turn.
- **The finding** — researchers study something and report a result. The point is the result **and what it shows**, often in the last sentence.
- **The claim and its support** — a claim, then the reasons or examples that back it up (sometimes the examples come first and the claim last). The point is the claim, never one of the examples.
- **The problem and its answer** — a puzzle, a question, or a difficulty, then the explanation or the solution. The point joins the two: what the problem was, and how it was answered.
- **The portrait** — a scene from a story or a poem, or a description of a person, a place, or a work, with no stated claim at all. The point is what the details add up to: a feeling, a quality, a relationship.

In official main idea questions, portraits are the most common blueprint (13 of 45, counting stories, poems, and descriptions), followed closely by turns (10) and findings (10), then claims with support (7) and problems with answers (5). In main purpose questions the portrait leads by far, because so many of those passages come from stories and poems.

Then **locate the point**. In just over half of official main idea questions (24 of 45), the point sits in a single sentence: the one after the turn (9), the last sentence (8), the first (4), or one in the middle (3). In the rest, and in almost every main purpose question (41 of 43), no single sentence holds it, and you build it from the whole text. Four signals tell you where to look:

After a turn word — *however, but, yet, in fact, actually, although, while*. What comes before the turn is usually the view the text corrects; what comes after is its point. More than a third of official main idea questions (17 of 45) depend on a turn like this, including some whose blueprint is a finding or a claim.

After a summing-up word — *thus, therefore, in other words, so, this suggests, this shows*. A sentence that sums up is usually the point, or the heart of it.

In what a study found or a scholar argues — *found, concluded, suggests, argues, proposes*. The point is the finding, plus what it means.

In what the details share — a story, a poem, or a description seldom states its point, so ask what every detail has in common. If a farmer's fences sag, his tools rust, and his fields go unplowed, the point isn't the fences; it's the neglect.

Step 2. Say the point in one sentence; for main purpose, name the job.

Before you read the choices, say the whole text in one sentence of your own: **topic + point**. *This text is about [topic], and its point is that [point].* Two rules keep the sentence honest. Make it **whole**: it must cover the whole text, not just its most interesting detail. Keep it **inside**: nothing the text doesn't say, and nothing stronger than the text says it. For a turn passage, your sentence should carry the turn itself: *People assume X, but in fact Y*. For a portrait, it names what the details add up to: *The scene shows that the narrator envies her sister.*

For a main purpose question, add the job: **The text [verb]s [content].** The **blueprint** usually suggests the verb:

The turn — to challenge a common view, to correct an assumption, to argue that …

The finding — to present or describe a study and what its results suggest

The claim and its support — to argue that …, to explain why …

The problem and its answer — to explain how or why …, to describe a solution to …

The portrait — to show, convey, portray, or describe a character's feeling, a quality, or a relationship

Don't lean too hard on the verb, though. The four choices of a main purpose question usually begin with four different verbs, but most of them are near neighbors (*describe*, *present*, *discuss*, *explain*), and in the official questions the verb alone sinks only about one wrong answer in twenty. What comes after the verb decides almost everything. So read each purpose choice **content first, verb second**, and use the verb to break ties. The one verb warning that matters: a strong verb such as *argue*, *criticize*, *praise*, or *refute* attached to a text that only reports.

Step 3. Test every choice: whole, true, inside.

Now read the choices and hold each one up against your sentence. The right answer passes three tests, in this order:

Whole? — Does it cover the whole text, or only one part of it: a detail, an example, or the setup before the turn?

True? — Does it say what the text says, or does it bend the text's own words: the right people in the wrong

relationship, two ideas swapped, the very view the text rejects?

Inside? — Does it stay inside the text, or does it add a topic, a comparison, a lesson, or a degree of certainty that the text never offers?

Wrong answers fail these tests in a few familiar ways. Learn their names, and you'll spot them on sight:

Outside it — an idea, a topic, or a comparison the text never takes up. It is the most common wrong answer, about two in five wrong choices in official main idea and main purpose questions, and it often sounds like a perfectly sensible thing to say about the subject.

Misreads — the text's own words, bent out of shape: the right people in the wrong relationship, a cause turned into an effect, one person's view handed to another. It is about one wrong choice in four, and the most tempting by far: by our count, the hardest wrong answer to resist is a misreading in nearly half of the official questions (40 of 88).

Half of it — a true detail, one example, or the setup alone, offered as if it were the whole point. This is the main idea trap to watch: 13 percent of its wrong answers, three times its share in main purpose questions.

Reverses it — the opposite of the point. In a turn passage it is usually the very view the text corrects; in a portrait, the opposite of what a character feels. About one wrong choice in seven.

Too far — the text's idea pushed past what the text says: *all* for *some*, *proves* for *suggests*, a sweeping lesson drawn from one case. It is rare, about one wrong choice in fifteen.

Wrong job — main purpose only: a job the text never does, such as criticizing, praising, or recommending, usually attached to content that sounds close to the point. It is rare, about one wrong choice in twenty, but it settles ties.

Two habits that work elsewhere don't help here, and the official questions show it. **Matching words prove nothing.** The right answer and the wrong ones borrow the passage's words at the same rate, a little more than a third of their key words each, so a choice that echoes the text is no more likely to be right. The right answer is free to say the point in different words, and a misreading may simply rearrange the text's own words. **Length proves nothing either.** In main idea questions, the right answer is the longest choice about as often as it is the shortest (11 and 10 of 43). When two choices both look good, go back to your sentence and ask one blunt question: **which one is the whole text, said truly, and nothing more?**

- **Expect a main purpose answer to sound general.** Main purpose questions, if anything, lean the other way: the right answer is often the plainest choice on the screen. In the Question Bank's main purpose questions, it is the shortest choice in 13 of 35 and the choice that borrows the smallest share of its words from the passage in 14 of 35, both well above the one in four you'd expect by chance. That is because a purpose answer names what the text *does* (it presents a study that answers an open question, it shows a character's reaction to a new place) instead of repeating what the text says. The wrong answers, meanwhile, are often crowded with the passage's own details, bent out of shape. So never pass over a choice because it sounds too general to be the answer. Test it like any other: if it fits the whole text, its plainness is a strength.

Recap: The 3-Step Strategy

Here are the three steps in one place. The worked examples label each step with its short name.

Step 1 · Blueprint — Find the blueprint, then the point.

Step 2 · Predict — Say the point in one sentence; for main purpose, name the job.

Step 3 · Test — Test every choice: whole, true, inside.

The five examples that follow take the five blueprints in turn. The first two are main idea questions and the last three are main purpose questions, so you can watch the same reading produce both kinds of answer.

SAT Example 1 · The Turn

In novels and films set in the 1800s, the Victorian "language of flowers" often appears as a secret code: a suitor sends a bouquet, and the recipient, consulting the same guidebook, reads a private message in every bloom. Many such guidebooks were indeed published in Britain and the United States during the period, and they sold well. Yet as literary historian Beverly Seaton has shown, the books did not agree with one another: a flower that stood for one feeling in one guide could stand for a quite different feeling in another. The language of flowers, in other words, was less a single code shared by everyone than a set of meanings that changed from book to book.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Guidebooks to the language of flowers sold better in Britain than they did in the United States during the 1800s.

B) Victorian suitors relied on flower guidebooks to send private messages that only the people receiving the bouquets could read.

C) The language of flowers was less fixed than it is often portrayed, since its guidebooks gave the same flowers different meanings.

D) Modern novels and films invented the idea that particular flowers carried particular meanings for people in the 1800s.

Step 1 · Blueprint **The turn.** The first sentence gives the popular picture: a secret code that sender and receiver read from the same book. The second sentence grants part of it (the guidebooks were real). Then *Yet* turns the text: the books disagreed. The last sentence, flagged by *in other words*, sums up the writer's view. The point lies after the turn.

Step 2 · Predict *Flower language is pictured as one shared code, but its guidebooks disagreed, so the meanings weren't fixed.* Notice that the sentence carries the turn itself.

Step 3 · Test **→ C is correct.** Whole: it has both halves, the popular picture ("often portrayed") and the correction. True: "less fixed" is the last sentence in different words, and "gave the same flowers different meanings" is the disagreement. Inside: nothing added, nothing stronger than the text.

A — outside it: the text says the guidebooks sold in both countries but never compares their popularity. A comparison the text doesn't make is an idea it doesn't contain.

B — reverses it, and the most tempting choice: this is the popular picture from the first sentence, the very view the text sets out to correct. In a turn passage, the view before the turn is the trap.

D — misreads: the guidebooks themselves, published in the 1800s, gave flowers meanings, so the films didn't invent the idea. What the text questions is only that the meanings were shared and fixed.

In a turn passage, the trap to fear is the view before the turn. In a finding passage, the trap to fear is stopping too soon: a true result that leaves out what the study really shows.

SAT Example 2 · The Finding

In 2006, biologist John Marzluff and his colleagues at the University of Washington began an unusual experiment on their campus in Seattle. Wearing a rubber caveman mask, they trapped seven American crows, put identifying bands on their legs, and let them go. Over the next five years, team members walked across the campus wearing either the caveman mask or a neutral one. Crows scolded and mobbed the caveman but not the neutral face, and the number of scolding birds grew rather than shrank. Many of the scolders, it turned out, had never been trapped at all; they had apparently learned from other crows which face to fear.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Crows that once saw a threatening face remember it for years and react to it when it reappears.

B) Crows remember a threatening face for a long time, and other crows can learn to fear that face from them.

C) Crows gradually stopped reacting to the caveman mask as the years passed, just as they ignored the neutral face.

D) Researchers who study crows should avoid trapping them, since trapping makes the birds hostile to all people.

Step 1 · Blueprint **The finding.** Three sentences of method (the mask, the trapping, the walks), then the results: crows scolded the caveman and not the neutral face, the scolding grew, and many scolders had never been trapped. The last sentence carries the point: those birds learned from others.

Step 2 · Predict *Crows remembered the face that threatened them, and crows that were never threatened learned to fear it too.* Two parts: memory, and its spread.

Step 3 · Test **→ B is correct.** Whole: it has both parts, the long memory and the learning from other crows. True and inside: "can learn" is no stronger than the text's "apparently learned." The words are new; the idea is the last two sentences.

A — half of it, and the most tempting choice: it is true, and it is the result most people would expect. But it stops at memory, before the text's real news: crows that were never trapped learned the face from the others.

C — reverses it: the scolding grew rather than shrank over the years. Only the second half, about the neutral face, is true.

D — outside it: the text draws no lesson for researchers. And the crows ignored the neutral face, so they were not hostile to all people, only to the caveman.

Now the same reading, with a job attached. In the next three examples the question asks for the main purpose, so Step 2 adds a verb, and Step 3 reads each choice content first, verb second.

SAT Example 3 · The Claim and Its Support

Old cookbooks can be surprisingly rich historical sources. Consider *American Cookery*, published in 1796 by Amelia Simmons and generally regarded as the first cookbook written by an American and published in the United States. Alongside dishes inherited from English cooking, it offers recipes built on New World foods, such as cornmeal johnnycakes and a pumpkin pie. It also calls for pearlash, an early chemical leavening that American bakers had begun to use. Its pages thus record a young nation's cooks adapting English traditions to American ingredients and methods.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To argue that cookbooks can be valuable historical evidence, using an early American cookbook as an example

B) To explain how the introduction of pearlash changed the way bakers in the United States made bread and cakes

C) To show how American cooks of the 1700s replaced English dishes with recipes built on New World foods

D) To criticize historians who have overlooked what old cookbooks can reveal about daily life in the early United States

Step 1 · Blueprint **The claim and its support.** The first sentence is the claim: old cookbooks can be rich historical sources. Everything after it is one example, *American Cookery*, with two details (New World foods and pearlash), and the last sentence ties the example back to the claim with *thus*.

Step 2 · Predict *The text claims that old cookbooks are useful historical sources and backs the claim with an early American cookbook.* The job: to argue, or to show, that cookbooks are valuable evidence.

Step 3 · Test **→ A is correct.** Content first: cookbooks as historical evidence, plus the early American example. That is the whole text. Verb second: *argue* fits a claim that the text states and then supports.

B — half of it: pearlash is one detail of the example, not the point of the text. And the text never says how pearlash changed bread making, so this choice also adds what isn't there.

C — misreads, and the most tempting choice: the cookbook offers New World recipes *alongside* English dishes, and its cooks were *adapting* English traditions, not replacing them. The choice also turns one example into the point.

D — wrong job: no historian is criticized, and the text never says anyone overlooked cookbooks. The topic is close to the point, but the choice gives the text a job it never does.

SAT Example 4 · The Problem and Its Answer

Why some birds fly in a V has puzzled scientists for decades. Many suspected that the shape saves energy, but no one had shown exactly how the birds might benefit. In a 2014 paper, Steven Portugal and his colleagues reported data from northern bald ibises that had been reared and trained to fly behind a small aircraft. Lightweight data loggers on the birds showed that each ibis tended to fly where it could catch air rising off the wingtip of the bird ahead, and that the birds timed their wingbeats to make the most of that rising air. The V, the results suggest, lets each bird ride on air stirred up by its neighbor.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To argue that saving energy is the only reason any bird flies in a V

B) To explain how the small aircraft helped the ibises save energy in flight

C) To recommend that young birds be trained to follow aircraft

D) To describe research that offers a likely answer to a long-standing question about why some birds fly in a V

Step 1 · Blueprint **The problem and its answer.** The question (why a V?) and its long history come first, then a study, then the answer its results suggest, flagged by *the results suggest*.

Step 2 · Predict *The text describes a study that suggests an answer to the old question of why some birds fly in a V.* The job: to describe research, or to explain a likely answer.

Step 3 · Test **→ D is correct.** Content first: it joins the problem ("a long-standing question") and the answer ("research that offers a likely answer"). Inside: "likely" matches the text's caution, *suggest*. Verb second: *describe* fits a text that reports a study.

A — too far: the text suggests how the V helps these ibises save energy. It never says energy is the only reason for the V, let alone for every bird.

B — misreads, and the most tempting choice, because it reuses the passage's own nouns. But the aircraft was only part of the birds' training; the rising air that helped them came from the wings of the birds ahead.

C — wrong job: training the birds was part of how the study was done, not advice. Recommending is a job the text never takes on.

The last blueprint is the one main purpose questions use most: a portrait with no stated claim, often from a novel written long ago. Here Step 1 changes its question. Instead of "Where is the point?" ask **"What do all the details have in common?"**

SAT Example 5 · The Portrait

The following text is adapted from Thomas Hardy's 1874 novel *Far from the Madding Crowd.*

His Christian name was Gabriel, and on working days he was a young man of sound judgment, easy motions, proper dress, and general good character. On Sundays he was a man of misty views, rather given to postponing, and hampered by his best clothes and umbrella: upon the whole, one who felt himself to occupy morally that vast middle space of Laodicean [lukewarm] neutrality which lay between the Communion people [devout churchgoers] of the parish and the drunken section. . . . Or, to state his character as it stood in the scale of public opinion, when his friends and critics were in tantrums, he was considered rather a bad man; when they were pleased, he was rather a good man; when they were neither, he was a man whose moral colour was a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To suggest that Gabriel's neighbors judge him unfairly because they see him mainly on Sundays

B) To criticize Gabriel for neglecting his religious duties in favor of his own comfort

C) To portray Gabriel as a man whose character is neither especially good nor especially bad

D) To show that Gabriel behaves differently on working days than he does on Sundays

Step 1 · Blueprint **The portrait.** No sentence states a claim outright; the text describes Gabriel three ways: on working days, on Sundays, and in his neighbors' opinion. So ask what the details share. Together they place him in the middle: sensible at work but vague on Sundays; even on Sundays, in a "vast middle space" between the devout churchgoers and the drunkards; "rather" bad or "rather" good depending on his neighbors' moods, and otherwise a "pepper-and-salt mixture" of the two, like black and white grains shaken together.

Step 2 · Predict *The text portrays Gabriel as an ordinary man of mixed character, neither strikingly good nor strikingly bad.* The job: to portray, or to characterize.

Step 3 · Test → C is correct. Whole: it covers all three views of Gabriel, because together they lead to the same place, the middle. True: his weekday good sense is offset by his lukewarm Sundays, and "neither especially good nor especially bad" is "pepper-and-salt" in plain words. Inside: it adds no judgment the narrator doesn't make. Verb second: *portray* fits a description of a character.

A — misreads: the neighbors' opinion swings with their own moods ("when they were pleased …"), not with the day of the week, and nothing suggests they see him mainly on Sundays.

B — wrong job: the narrator smiles at Gabriel's lukewarm Sundays (his "misty views," his habit of "postponing," his best clothes and umbrella) rather than condemning them. A text that gently describes a habit is not criticizing it.

D — half of it, and the most tempting choice: the contrast between working days and Sundays is real, but it is only the first half of the portrait. The text goes on to public opinion, and both halves serve one purpose, showing a man of middling character.

Comprehensive Drill: Module 1

Question 1

Architect Diébédo Francis Kéré designs buildings around the materials and skills he finds where he builds. For the primary school in Gando, the village in Burkina Faso where he was born, he used bricks made on site from the area's clay, strengthened with cement. Completed in 2001, the school was the first building he designed. Kéré also relied on Gando's residents: villagers he had trained made the bricks, children gathered stones for the foundation, and women carried water for the work.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Kéré's first building was a primary school in his home village of Gando.
B) Kéré had difficulty persuading the residents of Gando to help build the school.
C) Kéré makes use of local materials and people in his approach to building.
D) The Gando school is widely admired as the most original of Kéré's designs.

Question 2

On La Gomera, one of Spain's Canary Islands, farmers and shepherds have long talked across the island's deep ravines in Silbo Gomero, a whistled form of Spanish whose sharp notes can carry for several kilometers. For generations, the whistles carried all kinds of everyday messages. Roads and telephones may have taken over much of that work, but islanders still treasure Silbo Gomero, and since 1999 it has been a required subject in the island's schools.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Even though technology has replaced many of its practical uses, Silbo Gomero is still valued on La Gomera.
B) Although Silbo Gomero can express any sentence in Spanish, most whistlers today use it only to greet one another.
C) Silbo Gomero has been performed for visitors to La Gomera for several centuries.
D) Telephones can now carry many of the messages that whistlers once sent across the ravines.

Question 3

Today Beatrix Potter is known almost entirely for her children's books, such as *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Readers who stop there, however, miss much of her talent. In the 1880s and 1890s, Potter painted hundreds of watercolors of mushrooms and other fungi, studies so exact that mycologists still consult them, and she wrote a paper on how fungal spores sprout that was read before London's Linnean Society in 1897. This patient scientific work deserves as much notice as her famous tales.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To describe the similarities and differences between writing for children and writing about science
B) To encourage readers to seek out the scientific work of many different artists
C) To explain how Potter taught herself to paint mushrooms and other fungi
D) To argue that Potter's less familiar work deserves more attention

Question 4

When threatened, the dusky arion, a slug common in Europe and parts of the United States, releases a defensive mucus that clings strongly even to wet surfaces. Because most medical glues bond poorly to wet tissue, bioengineers Jianyu Li, David Mooney, and their colleagues modeled a new adhesive on the slug's mucus. Rather than collecting mucus from slugs, they built a gel in the lab that imitates the mucus, and in tests it stuck firmly even to a pig's heart covered in blood.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) The dusky arion's sticky mucus makes up for the slug's lack of a protective shell.
B) Most medical glues lose much of their strength when they come into contact with wet tissue.
C) The defensive mucus of a slug has helped researchers create a new kind of medical adhesive.
D) A slug's defensive mucus has led researchers to develop an adhesive designed for dry surfaces.

Question 5

The following text is adapted from Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's 1887 short story "A New England Nun."

It was late in the afternoon, and the light was waning. Somewhere in the distance cows were lowing and a little bell was tinkling; some blue-shirted laborers with shovels over their shoulders plodded past. There seemed to be a gentle stir arising over everything for the mere sake of subsidence [quieting down]—a very premonition of rest and hush and night.

This soft diurnal [daily] commotion was over Louisa Ellis also. She had been peacefully sewing at her sitting-room window all the afternoon. Now she quilted her needle carefully into her work, which she folded precisely, and laid in a basket with her thimble and thread and scissors.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To convey a character's uneasiness as night approaches
B) To depict the setting as a character puts away her work at day's end
C) To contrast the bustle inside a house with the calm outdoors

D) To describe how a character's daily routine has changed over the years

Question 6

The following text is adapted from Mary Mapes Dodge's 1865 novel *Hans Brinker; or, The Silver Skates*. Hans, a poor boy in the Netherlands, has stopped a famous doctor who is skating past him.

"Get out of the way," muttered the doctor, preparing to skate past the intruder. "I've no money—never give to beggars."

"I am no beggar, mynheer [sir]," retorted Hans proudly, at the same time producing his mite [small amount] of silver with a grand air. "I wish to consult you about my father. He is a living man but sits like one dead."

Hans told the whole story, dashing off a tear once or twice as he talked, and finally ending with an earnest "Oh, do see him, mynheer. I know that this money is not enough, but take it. I will earn more, I know I will. Oh! I will toil for you all my life, if you will but cure my father!"

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To explain why Hans would rather earn money than attend school

B) To illustrate Hans's pride in being able to pay for whatever he wants

C) To describe the treatment the doctor gives Hans's father

D) To portray Hans's determination to get help for his father

Question 7

Between the 1880s and about 1919, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie paid for nearly 1,700 public library buildings in towns and cities across the United States. Some states gained well over a hundred Carnegie libraries; California, for instance, gained 142. No state, however, gained more than Indiana, with over 160. Indiana had a state library commission, founded in 1899, whose organizers traveled the state's dense railroad network to help towns apply for Carnegie's grants. With such help, it is not surprising that Indiana led the nation.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To show that Carnegie libraries spread nationwide and to explain why Indiana gained the most

B) To compare the Carnegie libraries still in use today with those that have since closed

C) To argue that Indiana's Carnegie libraries influenced the design of those in California

D) To explain why California, a large state, gained fewer Carnegie libraries than Indiana did

Question 8

To learn how ancient Egyptians moved massive statues across the desert, physicists led by Daniel Bonn of the University of Amsterdam pulled a weighted model sledge through trays of sand that held different amounts of water. They found that the right amount of water cut the pulling force roughly in half, since damp sand is stiffer than dry sand and doesn't heap up in front of the sledge. The result may explain a painting in the tomb of Djehutihotep, a provincial governor, that shows a worker pouring water onto the sand ahead of a sledge carrying a colossal statue.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Bonn's study showed that the Egyptians could not have moved large statues without pouring water on the sand.

B) Bonn and his team tested a model sledge on sand and gained insight into how the Egyptians may have moved heavy statues.

C) Bonn and his team were reluctant to draw conclusions because their model sledge was far smaller than a real one.

D) Bonn's team found that Egyptian workers poured water on sand more often than they used any other method to move statues.

Question 9

The following text is adapted from Alfred Ollivant's 1898 novel *Bob, Son of Battle*. Adam M'Adam, a sheep farmer in a valley in northern England, lives with his son, David, and his dog, Red Wull.

The little man seemed devoid of all natural affection for his son. He lavished the whole fondness of which his small nature appeared capable on the Tailless Tyke, for so the Dalesmen called Red Wull.

The little man and his dog were as alike morally as physically they were contrasted. Each owed a grudge against the world and was determined to pay it.

You saw them thus, standing apart, leper-like, in the turmoil of life; and it came quite as a revelation to happen upon them in some quiet spot of nights, playing together, each wrapped in the game, innocent, tender, forgetful of the hostile world.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Though hostile toward the world, M'Adam and his dog share a tender bond.

B) M'Adam feels nothing but hostility toward every creature around him.

C) The Dalesmen are fond of Red Wull, as the nickname they gave him shows.

D) M'Adam has grown less affectionate toward his son since he acquired Red Wull.

Question 10

The following text is from Oscar Wilde's 1895 play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Algernon has turned up

uninvited at the country house of his friend Jack, pretending to be Jack's brother, Ernest.

ALGERNON. I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time.

JACK. Merriman, order the dog-cart [a small horse-drawn carriage] at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

MERRIMAN. Yes, sir. [*Goes back into the house.*]

ALGERNON. What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all.

JACK. Yes, you have.

ALGERNON. I haven't heard any one call me.

JACK. Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGERNON. My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.

JACK. I can quite understand that.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To reveal how Algernon spends his time when he is in town
B) To give an account of the country house where Jack lives
C) To explain why Algernon must suddenly return to town on urgent business
D) To show that Jack wants Algernon to leave

Question 11

A study by researchers Marily Oppezzo and Daniel Schwartz concluded that walking can boost a person's ability to come up with original ideas. In one experiment, 48 students were asked to list unusual uses for everyday objects, such as a button or a tire. Each student did the task twice: first while sitting at a desk facing a blank wall, and then while walking on a treadmill facing a blank wall. Most of the students produced more original uses while walking; on average, their output of such ideas rose by about 60 percent.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To describe a common belief about creativity and show how a study's results support it
B) To explain a study's conclusion and how the researchers arrived at it
C) To suggest how the researchers could have improved the design of their experiment
D) To argue that the researchers were surprised by the results of their own study

Question 12

Believing that drivers slow down and pay closer attention when they feel unsure of themselves, Dutch traffic engineer Hans Monderman made streets less orderly rather than more. At a busy intersection in the town of Drachten, he removed the traffic lights; in other towns, he took out signs, painted lines, and curbs, leaving drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians to work out who should go first by making eye contact. The effect can be unnerving but appears to be safer: an evaluation of the Drachten intersection found that crashes fell, even though many road users said they felt less safe.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Although Monderman's designs can make streets safer, they work only in small towns.
B) Removing traffic lights and signs is the most effective way to make any intersection safe.
C) Drivers in Drachten had long asked town officials to remove the traffic lights at the intersection.
D) Although it may unsettle road users, Monderman's approach to street design may make streets safer.

Question 13

Since the New Horizons spacecraft flew past Pluto in 2015, scientists have puzzled over a region of the dwarf planet covered in rows of sharp ridges, some about 500 meters tall. Planetary scientist John Moores and his colleagues propose that these blades formed the same way as penitentes, the spikes of ice that crowd snowfields high in the Andes and can stand taller than a person. In the Andes, strong sunlight in cold, dry air turns snow directly into vapor, unevenly, carving the surface into spikes. Although Pluto's blades are made of frozen methane rather than frozen water, the same process could have shaped them.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Pluto's blades appear to have formed long before the ice spikes in the Andes formed.
B) The main difference between Pluto's blades and the spikes in the Andes is that the Andes spikes are much taller.
C) Researchers think Pluto's blades and the Andes' ice spikes may share a cause despite being made of different ices.
D) Researchers still cannot explain how Pluto's blades formed, since Pluto has no snowfields like those in the Andes.

Question 14

For much of the twentieth century, the widespread view of body fat as little more than a storehouse for surplus energy discouraged scientists from looking for other roles it might play. Research since the 1990s has shown that fat tissue releases hormones that act on organs throughout the body. In 1994, for example, geneticist Jeffrey Friedman and his colleagues identified leptin, a hormone produced by fat cells that signals the brain about how much energy the body has stored.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) The discovery of leptin confirmed that body fat serves mainly as a store of energy.
B) Body fat was long seen mainly as a store of energy,

but research has revealed its other functions.

C) Recent research has challenged widely accepted claims about how leptin signals the brain.

D) Scientists long lacked the tools to study fat tissue, but new technology has revealed how it works.

Question 15

Along highways that cut through wilderness, fences often keep large animals off the road, while overpasses and underpasses give them a safe way across. But it has been unclear whether such crossings do more than prevent collisions, that is, whether they keep the animal populations on either side of a road connected. To find out, biologist Michael Sawaya and his colleagues collected bear hair snagged by wire at crossings on the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff National Park and analyzed its DNA. The results showed that genes were flowing across the highway, enough to keep the bear populations from becoming genetically isolated.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) It presents a study addressing an open question about structures that help animals cross roads.

B) It discusses research intended to settle a debate about how to reduce traffic in national parks.

C) It explains how the crossings in Banff National Park differ from those built in other parks.

D) It describes findings that challenge a previously held view about how bears choose their mates.

Question 16

The following text is from Charles Dickens's 1861 novel *Great Expectations*. The narrator, Pip, has traveled to London for the first time.

The journey from our town to the metropolis was a journey of about five hours. It was a little past midday when the four-horse stage-coach by which I was a passenger, got into the ravel of traffic frayed out about the Cross Keys, Wood Street, Cheapside, London.

We Britons had at that time particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything: otherwise, while I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) It explains why a character has decided to move to a large city.

B) It compares a character's impressions of a city at two different times of day.

C) It illustrates a character's reaction to an unfamiliar city.

D) It presents a character's delight at finding a city grander than he expected.

Question 17

A team led by biologist Kristin Winchell found that the crested anole, a lizard common in Puerto Rico, is built differently depending on where it lives. In three of the island's cities, the lizards had slightly longer limbs, and more of the tiny scales on their toe pads that help them grip, than lizards in nearby forests did. These traits suit city lizards, which often perch on walls, metal poles, and other broad, smooth surfaces. Forest lizards, by contrast, mostly perch on tree trunks, which are narrower and rougher.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To describe the methods researchers use to measure the limbs and toe pads of lizards

B) To discuss how a lizard's physical traits determine which habitat it chooses to live in

C) To explain why toe-pad scales matter more than limb length for lizards that live in cities

D) To present findings about how a lizard's surroundings are related to its physical traits

Question 18

Many histories of the overland migration to the American West in the mid-1800s leaned heavily on accounts written by men, a tendency that can make the journey look chiefly like an adventure of hunting, danger, and exploration. Historian Lillian Schlissel showed that building a study entirely from the diaries, letters, and reminiscences of women who made the trip leads to a fuller understanding of the migration and of what it demanded of women, from cooking and washing on the trail to giving birth and caring for the sick and dying.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Schlissel's research has deepened the understanding of the westward migration and of women's part in it.

B) Before Schlissel's research, historians had paid little attention to the westward migration of the mid-1800s.

C) Other historians objected to Schlissel's use of letters and reminiscences as historical sources.

D) The men whose accounts earlier historians relied on would have agreed with Schlissel's conclusions.

Question 19

In 1905, biologist Nettie Stevens reported that in mealworms, sex is determined by a difference between the chromosomes of males and females: males carry a small chromosome, now called the Y, that females lack. Her finding was a landmark in genetics, yet her name has long been far less familiar than her discovery. One reason is the prominence of two contemporaries. Edmund B. Wilson, an established biologist who reached similar conclusions that same year, and Thomas Hunt Morgan, her former adviser, were so well known that textbooks long gave them much of the credit.

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

A) Stevens is remembered today mainly as the teacher who trained the biologists Edmund B. Wilson and Thomas Hunt Morgan.

B) Stevens is less famous than she deserves, partly because better-known scientists got much of the credit.

C) Stevens studied the same insects that Wilson and Morgan studied but used different methods.

D) Few people know of Stevens's discovery because she described it in only one short paper.

Question 20

The following text is from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1840 poem "The Village Blacksmith."

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,
How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

A) To argue that sorrow is a more lasting feeling than joy

B) To question whether tasks begun in the morning are more rewarding than tasks finished in the evening

C) To portray a life of steady routine that holds both joy and grief

D) To show how the blacksmith's experiences shape the life of his village