

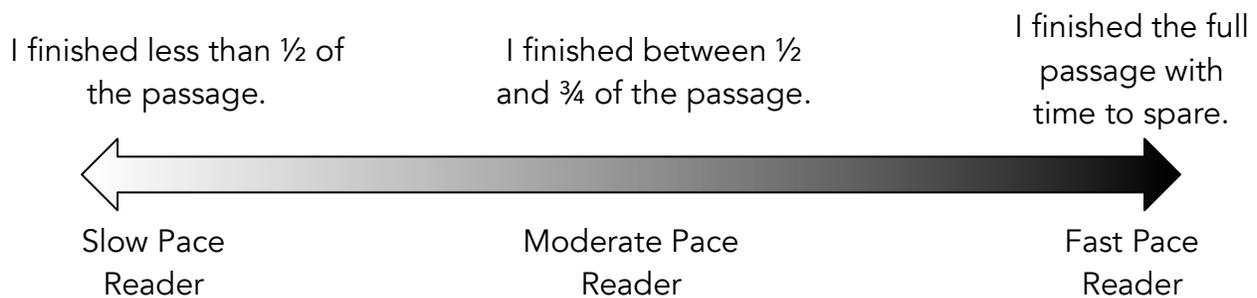
ACT READING QUICK-TIP PREP GUIDE

There is no single “correct” way to tackle the ACT Reading section; depending on your reading speed, comprehension level, and retention ability, you may need to make adjustments to what you read below.

Follow the steps to start on your way in determining the best ACT Reading strategy for you!

STEP ONE: DETERMINE YOUR READING SPEED

While running a timer, read a full ACT passage at your natural reading speed. Stop the timer between 2:30 and 3:00 minutes. Then, find your reading speed on the spectrum below. Note that, with practice over time, you can increase your natural reading speed. The only thing that makes reading easier is reading itself!



STEP TWO: PLAN HOW TO USE YOUR TIME

** (See page 4 for a word about paired passages) **

Slow Pace Readers

Consider completing only three of the four passages on the ACT reading section. Read each passage for about 4 minutes, and then spend about 12 minutes on each passage's questions. It's very important that you're as accurate as possible on each question: read the answer choices carefully!

Moderate Pace Readers

Aim to finish all four passages. Read each passage for between 2.5 and 3 minutes. Then, answer the Line-Reference questions (see next page) first. Lastly, do the others questions, aiming to spend around 6 minutes total on each of the passage's question sets. Remember that accuracy is more important than answering 100% of the questions!

Fast Pace Readers

Aim to finish all four passages. Read each passage in full, and then go after the questions in whatever order is best for you. Spend about 8.5 minutes total reading each passage and answering its questions. Slow down on the questions, because details are crucial to getting the correct answers!

QUESTION TYPES AND STRATEGIES

Read the following paragraph taken from an ACT Reading passage and then view the strategies for each type of ACT Reading question.

The direct election of United States Senators is a relatively recent political phenomenon. Prior to the 20th century, US Senators were elected “indirectly”, chosen not by each state’s citizens themselves, but by the elected members of each state legislature. This system led to several political quagmires. First, it was highly corrupt: senate candidates would sometimes bribe state legislators, who, in a time that lacked the constantly vigilant eyes of today’s internet watchdogs and tweeting journalists, could be bought without public detection. Second, it led to political gridlock that could leave US Senate seats vacant for weeks on end: if the politicians in a given state legislature could not agree to support the same candidate, no senator would be sent to the capitol, and the state would remain unrepresented on the federal level. The issues grew significant enough to necessitate change, which would come in the form of the Seventeenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Many political observers, however, believe that this change simply replaced old problems with new ones, and that to make the system even more equitable, we ought to change the very method of election itself.

Word Meaning Questions

As it is used in line 6, the word “quagmires” most nearly means:

- A. figures.
- B. elections.
- C. problems.
- D. fights.

When asked for the meaning of a word or phrase, remember: it’s never about the word or phrase itself: it’s about the context. Read around the word and ask yourself “what’s being discussed here?” The main discussion following “quagmires” concerns the difficulties caused by the indirect election of senators. Which goes along best?

Choice (C): problems.

Main Idea Questions

The main purpose of lines 7–11 is to:

- A. show that without using technology, it is impossible to ensure fair elections.
- B. mock the ways in which political observers who expose corruption.
- C. suggest that the majority of state senate candidates bribed their way into office.
- D. assert that it used to be more difficult to expose political wrongdoing.

When asked a main idea question, always go back to the lines or paragraph referenced and *determine the main idea in your own words before looking back at the answer choices*. After you re-read lines 7–11, you might come up with something like, “The main purpose of lines 7–11 is to show how it used to be hard to catch bribery, but now, with technology and specific groups constantly watching, it’s easier to discover.” Then, line your answer up to each answer choice, and see which one does the job. Choice (D) is definitely the closest.

EXCEPT Questions

The passages states that all of the following resulted from the system of indirect election of US Senators EXCEPT:

- A. guaranteed federal representation for each state.
- B. corrupt political practices like bribery.
- C. the alteration of the United States Constitution.
- D. disagreement in state legislatures over senate candidates.

EXCEPT questions are questions that require you find which thing was NOT mentioned in the passage. Typically, the three things that were mentioned will be clustered; that is, they will show up in the passage relatively close to one another. Use key words in the answer choices (examples here are “bribery” and “federal representation” to search for the relevant information, and then, reading carefully, use process of elimination to get rid of the three things that are present in the passage. Doing so here gives us choice (A), which directly contradicts the statement in lines 12–16.

The direct election of United States Senators is a relatively recent political phenomenon. Prior to the 20th century, US Senators were elected “indirectly”, chosen not by each state’s citizens themselves, but by the elected members of each state legislature. This system led to several political quagmires. First, it was highly corrupt: senate candidates would sometimes bribe state legislators, who, in a time that lacked the constantly vigilant eyes of today’s internet watchdogs and tweeting journalists, could be bought without public detection. Second, it led to political gridlock that could leave US Senate seats vacant for weeks on end: if the politicians in a given state legislature could not agree to support the same candidate, no senator would be sent to the capitol, and the state would remain unrepresented on the federal level. The issues grew significant enough to necessitate change, which would come in the form of the Seventeenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Many political observers, however, believe that this change simply replaced old problems with new ones, and that to make the system even more equitable, we ought to change the very method of election itself.

“Find the Detail” Questions

The passage suggests that several of today’s political observers believe that:

- A. the direct election of senators has provided a comprehensive solution to troubling political issues.
- B. the system of elections in general remains unfair and should be altered.
- C. if we do not change the way we run our elections, it is likely that the system of government in the US will fail.
- D. due to the rise of new electoral problems, the US should return to a system of indirect senatorial elections.

Sometimes, the ACT won’t give you line references, so if you don’t simply remember the answer to the question, you’ll have to find where the answer is being discussed. Use key words in the answer question that would be unique to the discussion (here, those would be “political observers”), and find them in the passage. Then, read around to determine the main point at this spot in the passage. Here, it is clear that the “political observers” think that our current system is imperfect, and that it needs to be changed, making choice (B) correct.

Inference Questions

According to the passage, it can reasonably be inferred that:

- A. indirect election of senators is a recent political phenomenon.
- B. prior to the Seventeenth Amendment, senators were typically elected directly by the people.
- C. today’s method of electing US Senators is different from the method originally specified by the US Constitution
- D. due to the direct election of senators, bribery has been eliminated from the US political system.

When asked an “inference” question, start by glancing over the answer choices to determine where you might find the relevant information. Look for key words in the answer choices to search for in the passage, specifically capitalized words, proper nouns, and unique descriptive words (examples here are “phenomenon” and “Seventeenth Amendment”). Once you’ve found the relevant information, skim over the paragraph again to get the main idea. *Keep in mind that many answer choices often feature phrases that appear word-for-word in the passage – this DOES NOT mean they’re correct!* For example, choice (A) above contains a phrase that appears lines 1–2, but mixes them with other words that make the answer as a whole incorrect; notice that the passage says direct election of senators is the recent phenomenon. Only choice (C) can be correctly inferred, since the passage mentions that elections were different “prior to the 20th century”, and that the method of election was changed by the Seventeenth Amendment.

Primary Function (Context) Questions

In the context of the first paragraph (lines 1–24), the primary function of lines 1–4 is to:

- A. add historical perspective to the discussion of senatorial elections.
- B. define several responsibilities of state legislatures in the early twentieth century.
- C. introduce a discussion of the voting rights of US citizens.
- D. respond to potential criticisms of the current method of senatorial election.

Primary function questions ask you to determine the role a particular segment of text plays in the passage as a whole. To answer this type of question, start by reading the referenced lines for the main idea. Then consider the passage’s *overall* main idea. Here, the overall main idea is that US Senators used to be elected indirectly, but that this caused problems that encouraged a switch to direct elections by the people. In the context of this discussion, lines 1–4 highlight the way senatorial elections were run prior to the 20th century, and to show us that the method has changed. In other words, the lines focus on what *used to be*, and what *now is*. This aligns directly with the “historical perspective” mentioned in choice (A).

GENERAL ACT READING STRATEGIES

1. **SPEED.** The ACT Reading section is FAST. Train yourself to read and answer questions more quickly by always practicing with a timer or watch. Remember that you can bring a wristwatch to the ACT, as long as it doesn't make noise or perform mathematical calculations.
2. **WHITTLE IT DOWN.** Use process of elimination to your advantage. Examine any extreme answer choices (answers that talk in absolute terms like "never", "always", etc.) very carefully before choosing them.
3. **BE LIKE A SPONGE AND GET YOUR BEARINGS – THE QUADRANT METHOD.** Many ACT Reading questions will not tell you where to go to find an answer (see "Find the Detail" Questions on the previous page); this means you need to remember where things are. Whatever your reading speed, make sure that you're as focused as possible on what you're reading so that you absorb and understand as much as you can. To help you remember where things are, consider using the "Quadrant Method", illustrated below. Using your pencil, divide the passage into four roughly equally sized regions. In each region, focus on the main ideas: what point is the author making? What are the major events and who are the major figures/characters discussed? What is the setting? When you get to the questions, ask yourself, "In which quadrant might I find this information?". Knowing where to go is half the battle.
4. **PAIRED PASSAGES.** Sometimes, the ACT Reading will feature two mini-passages for a series of ten questions. Fortunately, the questions will feature headers that indicate the passages to which they apply. It's up to you how you want to handle these, but we suggest doing the following. Try to spend about 2.5 minutes on each step
 - a. **READ PASSAGE "A" FIRST, AND ANSWER ITS QUESTIONS.** Spend about a minute reading the passage and a minute answer the questions that apply to passage A.
 - b. **READ PASSAGE "B" SECOND, AND ANSWER ITS QUESTIONS.** Spend about a minute reading the passage and a minute answer the questions that apply to passage B.
 - c. **ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT APPLY TO BOTH PASSAGES.** The passage will tell you which questions require information from both passages. Do these last.
5. **PRACTICE³.** Practice constantly. Practice consistently. Practice effectively. Use real ACT exams and Method Test Prep's web-based program to improve your skills gradually, and you'll be ready for the test when the real thing comes around.