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# LSAT READING COMPREHENSION BIBLE

*The Definitive Guide to the  
Reading Comprehension Section  
of the LSAT, Featuring Real  
LSAT Passages and Questions*

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**POWERSCORE®**

**The following is a short excerpt from our  
*LSAT Reading Comprehension Bible*, and is  
designed to illustrate PowerScore's methods and  
writing style.**

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## Understand the Type of Difficulty in the Reading Comprehension Section

There is a widespread misconception among test takers that because one's reading level is difficult to improve (having been developed over many years), one's performance on the Reading Comprehension section is also unlikely to change. This belief reflects a common misunderstanding about the specific type of difficulty associated with reading LSAT passages. Keeping in mind that the test makers only have about half of a page to get their points across, LSAT authors are limited as to the degree of depth that can be reached. This is not to say that these passages are simple, but that the challenge often comes from sources other than conceptual difficulty.

The LSAT is designed not only as a test of conceptual abilities—it is also a test of intimidation. So, how do the test makers ensure that the passages are challenging? Often by choosing subjects that seem daunting; many passages are based on esoteric topics, filled with sophisticated-sounding scientific or technical terms. It is vital that you avoid intimidation as a response to words or phrases which you have never seen. Since the makers of the LSAT do not expect or require outside knowledge with regard to Reading Comprehension passage topics, unfamiliar terms or phrases will almost always be surrounded by context clues. These issues will be covered further in our discussion of reading and notating strategy; for now it is important to understand that unfamiliar words or phrases do not necessarily make a passage any more conceptually difficult, as long as you do not react with discomfort at the prospect of seeing novel terms or phrases.

*In seeking to increase reading speed, some students ask us about speed reading courses. In our extensive experience, speed reading techniques do not work on LSAT passages because of the way they are written and constructed. LSAT passages are written in a detailed style filled with built-in traps and formations, and speed reading techniques are not designed to detect these elements.*

### Reading Speed and Returning to the Passage

Given that you have an average of 8 minutes and 45 seconds to read each passage and complete the questions, the amount of time that you spend reading the passage has a direct effect on your ability to comfortably complete all of the questions. At the same time, the makers of the LSAT have extraordinarily high expectations about the level of knowledge you should retain when you read a passage. Many questions will test your knowledge of small, seemingly nitpicky variations in phrasing, and reading carelessly is LSAT suicide. Thus, every test taker is placed at the nexus of two competing elements: the need for speed (caused by the timed element) and the need for patience (caused by the detailed reading requirement). How well you manage these two elements strongly determines how well you perform.

Although it may sound rather ordinary, the best approach is to read each passage at the high end of your normal reading speed. If possible, you should try to step it up a notch or two, but reading too quickly will cause you to miss much of the detailed information presented in the passage and will force you to reread most of the passage. On the other hand, reading too slowly will prevent you from having adequate time to answer all of the questions.

One thing to be aware of as you read is that you do not need to remember every single detail of the passage. Instead, you simply need to remember the basic structure of the passage so you will know where to return when answering the questions. We will discuss this in more detail when we discuss passage structure.

Everyone's reading speed is different, but the fastest readers tend to complete each passage in somewhere around two to two and a half minutes. Readers moving at a more deliberate pace should finish the passage in around three to three and a half minutes. Once your reading time per passage exceeds the three and a half minute mark, the likelihood of being able to complete all of the questions drops considerably. At the end of this book we will discuss section management and how to handle situations where time is running out, and over the next several chapters we will focus on improving your LSAT reading ability. Improving your reading ability will, in part, consist of teaching you what to look for when reading the passages. Once your ability improves, you will be able to move through the passages and questions more quickly.

Please note that the primary aim of this book is not to just make you a *faster* reader (your natural reading speed has been developed over many years and is hard to increase by itself in a short period of time). Instead, as you become more adept with effective approaches to the passages, you will likely be able to attack the passage sets far more proficiently. The goal here is to make you a *better* reader with a greater knowledge of what to look for, and this will result in your becoming a faster reader.

## Active Reading and Anticipation

The best readers read actively. That is, they engage the material and consider the implications of each statement as they read. They also use their involvement in the material to constantly anticipate what will occur next in the passage. This type of reading takes focus and a positive attitude, as discussed earlier, but it also takes practice.

The first part of this book is devoted to examining the theory of approaching the passages and questions, whereas the second part of the book is focused on applying those ideas and discussing passage elements.

Let us take a moment to examine several short sections of text, and use those sections to highlight the idea of how active reading leads to anticipating what comes next:

Governmental reforms, loosening of regulations, and the opening of markets each played a role in fueling China's economic growth over the last quarter-century.

After reading this section, one could deduce that there are a number of directions this passage could go. For example, a detailed analysis of each of the three listed factors in the economic growth could be presented, or further implications of the growth could be discussed. Let's add the next two sentences—which complete this paragraph—and see where the author goes:

Governmental reforms, loosening of regulations, and the opening of markets each played a role in fueling China's economic growth over the last quarter-century.

- (5) Within the economy, the two most important segments are industry and agriculture. However, industry has grown at a significantly faster pace than agriculture.

If you were reading this passage, when you reached this juncture, you should have a fairly good idea of the possible directions the author can take with the *next* paragraph. Consider for a moment the information that has been presented thus far:

- Three factors were named as playing a role in China's economic growth over the last quarter-century.
- The economy is stated to have two key segments.
- One of those two segments is said to have grown at a much faster rate than the other segment.

Clearly, the logical direction to take at this point would be to either explain why industry has grown at a faster rate or why agriculture has grown at a slower rate, or both. There does seem to be a slightly higher likelihood that the author will focus on industry because the exact phrase used was, "industry has

grown at a significantly faster pace than agriculture,” and this phrasing puts the emphasis on “industry.”

Let’s see which direction the author chose:

- Governmental reforms, loosening of regulations, and the opening of markets each played a role in fueling China’s economic growth over the last quarter-century. Within the economy, the two most important segments are industry and agriculture. However, industry has grown at a significantly faster pace than agriculture.
- (5) The growth in industry has occurred largely in the urban areas of China, and has been primarily spurred by a focus on technology and heavy manufacturing. This emphasis, however, has not come without costs.
- (10)

Not surprisingly, the author chose to address the industrial side of the economic growth, in this case by focusing on the segments within industry that have been the most important. Of course, as you continue to read, being correct in your anticipation should not cause you to stop reading actively. As the passage moves forward you should continue to “look ahead” mentally. For example, the last sentence in the text above suggests that the next topic of discussion will be the costs associated with the industrial economic growth.

As a reader, anticipating what will come next in the passage is a habit you should seek to cultivate. By constantly thinking about the possible directions the author can take, you will gain a richer perspective on the story being told by the author. Of course, at times, you might be incorrect in your prediction of what will come next. This is not a problem—you will still be able to absorb what is presented and there is no associated time loss. Simply put, there are tremendous benefits gained from actively reading.

## Active Reading Drill

The following drill is presented to reinforce the valuable habit of reacting to important verbal cues. Most students are likely to be familiar with the meanings of important transitional words such as “furthermore” and “however,” but again, the most effective readers react when they see these sorts of transitions, which can often allow the reader to predict the next turn of the passage. After each of the following examples, take a moment to consider what is likely to come next in the passage, and write down your predictions.

*Answers on the next page*

1. After developing her initial hypothesis, early studies yielded consistently positive results; in fact,...

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2. As a result of his childhood accomplishments, Rhee found many opportunities that would have been inaccessible to lesser known talents. Notwithstanding his early successes,...

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3. Martindale was generally scorned by his contemporaries, who characterized him as an artist who lacked the imagination to create anything truly original, as well as the self-awareness to perceive his own shortcomings. Modern critics, however...

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4. Many American constitutional scholars argue that in making legal determinations, the Supreme Court should comply whenever possible with the original intent of drafters of the Constitution. At the same time,...

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5. Most experts in the field who were first told of Dr. Jane’s hypothesis were initially skeptical, but...

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## Active Reading Drill Answer Key

1. In this case, the words “in fact” tell us that the next information provided will likely continue to support the positive results yielded by early studies.
2. “Notwithstanding,” which basically means “in spite of,” tells us that the passage is about to take a turn; although Rhee did apparently enjoy early success, we are soon likely to be told of some challenge(s) that appeared in spite of Rhee’s early achievements and opportunities.
3. The word “however” in this example is a clear indication that there is contrast between contemporaries’ characterizations and those of modern critics, so it is likely that modern critics are going to have nicer things to say about Martindale.
4. If taken out of context, “at the same time” might appear to continue a thought, but the phrase is often more akin to “on the other hand.” Here, the author begins by telling us that, according to many, Supreme Court decisions should be based on the Constitution’s original intent. “At the same time” is likely in this case to be followed by some limitation on the advisability of this notion (e.g., “At the same time, many facets of modern life were not envisioned by the founders.”)
5. “But” is a fairly obvious clue that the passage is about to take a new turn. If we are told of skepticism at first, followed by “but,” then it is likely that the author is about to discuss how the hypothesis was confirmed, or possibly how Dr. Jane was able to overcome the initial skepticism of the experts.



*Also from PowerScore's  
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## Passage Elements That Generate Questions

As you read, there are certain specific passage elements that should jump out at you, primarily because history has reflected the test makers' tendency to use these elements as the basis of questions.

For purposes of clarity, we will divide these elements into two groups: viewpoint-specific elements and text-based elements.

### Viewpoint-Specific Elements

Analysis of viewpoints is one of the major approaches we use in attacking the passages, and in Chapter Two we discussed this approach in depth. Because separating viewpoints allows you to divide the passage into logical, trackable units, the process helps you to more easily understand the passage and to disentangle the many disparate ideas in each passage. Viewpoints also play a large role in the main themes of the passage, so they also are the source of many of the questions asked by the test makers. For example, questions about the main point, authorities cited by the author, or the perspective of any of the players in the passage are all related to viewpoints, and thus tracking viewpoints not only makes understanding the passage itself easier, it automatically assists you in answering a *significant* portion of the questions. Thus, while reading you must always focus on identifying each viewpoint in the passage.

Competing perspectives offer differing opinions on the same subject.

When considering viewpoints, be aware that one of the favorite tricks of the test makers is to use competing perspectives, a trick that involves presenting two or more viewpoints on the same subject, with each viewpoint containing slightly different elements (but often sharing some similar elements). Here is an example:

Topic: Nuclear power

Viewpoint 1: Nuclear power plants are efficient generators of energy, but they present serious long-term environmental concerns because of the problems associated with storing radioactive waste in the form of spent fuel.

Viewpoint 2: Nuclear power is the most efficient way to produce energy, and the waste problems associated with them, while significant, are lesser than those associated with more traditional energy production methods, such as those involving coal.

In the form above, the difference and similarity in viewpoints is easy to identify, but subtleties exist (“efficient generators” vs “most efficient way,” and “serious long-term environmental concerns” vs “significant, are lesser,” to name two). But imagine for a moment that the two views are woven together

in a passage, and some extraneous information is also interspersed. When you finally attack the questions a few minutes later, it would be very easy to have forgotten the exact similarities and differences, especially if other viewpoints were present.

Thus, competing perspectives can be quite tricky because it is easy to confuse different views, and, of course, questions about these elements make certain to closely test whether you understand the exact differences between the different viewpoints.

Because viewpoint analysis was a main feature in Chapter Two, we will move on for the moment, but in all of the passages we analyze in later chapters we will prominently feature this element (and all the elements in VIEWSTAMP) in our analysis.

## **Text-based Questions**

In one sense, all questions are based on the text. In using the name “text-based,” we refer to elements that appear directly in the text as an identifiable part—definitions, lists, compare/contrast sections, or dates, for example—and not the broader and somewhat more abstract elements such as main points, author’s purposes, or passage structure. Under this definition, text-based questions will often be smaller pieces, sometimes just a single word, but sometimes short sections of the text. In this sense, these are the “nuts and bolts” elements that you should be aware of when reading.

These are the elements we will discuss (not in order of importance):

1. Initial Information/Closing Information
2. Dates and Numbers
3. Definitions
4. Examples
5. Difficult words or phrases
6. Enumerations/Lists
7. Text Questions

*Note these elements as you encounter them in the passages; you are likely to see them again in the questions.*

## 1. Initial Information/Closing Information

The information presented in the first five lines of a passage—especially the details—is often forgotten by students. This occurs because at the very beginning of a passage you are focused on figuring out the topic and the author’s general position, and thus seemingly minor details are hard to retain.

Similarly, the information presented in the last five lines is often forgotten because the average student is eager to jump to the questions and thus skims over the material at the very end of the passage. Thus, the test makers occasionally question you on your knowledge of information contained at the very beginning or end of the passage, so you must always make sure to check these areas if you are having difficulty answering a question, especially when you seem to have no idea where the answer might be (again, this would most likely occur with detail or fact-based questions).

## 2. Dates and Numbers

Dates often provide useful markers within a passage, allowing you “before” and “after” points to return to when searching for answers. While in some passages the use of dates is incidental, in other passages, a chronology is created, and then some of the questions will test your ability to understand the timeline. The general rule is that the more dates you see in a passage, the more important it is that you make note of them.

Numbers are usually less important than dates, but when numbers are used in a comparative sense, or as part of an explanation, the test makers will sometimes check your comprehension of their meaning.

## 3. Definitions

Identifying definitions serves two purposes: in those cases where you do not understand the term or concept it helps you to clarify the idea, and even when you do understand the concept the test makers will sometimes test you on your understanding of the definition.

The typical definition is presented in the immediate vicinity of the word or concept, like so:

In England the burden of history weighs heavily on common law, the unwritten code of time-honored laws derived largely from English judicial custom and precedent.

In the section above, the clause after the comma provides the definition for the term *common law*. Of course, some definitions are much shorter, such as this sentence which includes the one-word definition of *maize*:

When an LSAT author references more than one date or era, creating a simple timeline can be an effective way to maintain relative perspective, whether the comparisons span days or centuries.

Every culture that has adopted the cultivation of maize—also known as corn—has been radically changed by it.

Regardless of the length of a definition, you should make sure that you are comfortable with the term being defined. If you encounter an idea or term that you think should be defined but do not see a definition in the immediate vicinity, then the definition will probably be presented relatively soon (explicitly or through context clues), and the test makers are simply trying to trick you with a “trap of separation,” which we will discuss later in this chapter.

#### 4. Examples

LSAT authors often use examples to explain or underscore the points they are making. Logically, these examples serve as broad premises that support the conclusion of the author. Functionally, they help you to understand the typically more abstract point that the author is making, and so they can be quite helpful especially when you are having difficulty understanding the argument.

Examples can be short and specific to a single point, or they can be substantial and involved and appear throughout the passage. Always remember, though, that the example is not the main conclusion or point of the author; generally, examples are provided to support or explain the main conclusion.

The words “for example” are the most common way that examples are introduced, but the following terms all have been used:

For example  
For instance  
A case in point is  
As shown by  
As demonstrated by

Whenever you see these terms, immediately note what point is being shown. Here is an example:

In science, serendipity often plays a crucial role in discoveries. For instance, Teflon was discovered by a scientist attempting to find a new gas for use in refrigeration.

Above, the author introduces a concept (that good luck often plays a part in new discoveries), and immediately exemplifies the concept with the introductory phrase “for instance.”

*Whenever you see a brand new term or concept defined, be sure to take note; if the test makers have provided a clear definition or description, they generally expect you to be able to locate the reference.*

*Examples are not the main conclusion or point of the author; the point being proven or explained by the example is the main conclusion or point.*

## 5. Difficult words or phrases

The circumpolar vortex is the high-altitude westerly winds that circle the Northern hemisphere at the middle latitudes.

“Vituperate” means to berate or address harshly.

As mentioned earlier, challenging words or phrases are items that you should note while reading, but you should not become overly distressed if you do not immediately know what the terms mean. Terms outside the common public domain of knowledge (such as *circumpolar vortex*) are always explained, and unknown vocabulary words (such as *vituperate*) can often be defined by the context of usage. Acronyms are always explained.

The key thing to remember is that even if you do not understand a word, you will still understand virtually all other words in the passage, and so the possible downside of not knowing one word is very small. Simply bypass the word and then see if it is explained in some way later in the text or by context.

## 6. Lists and Enumerations

A number of passages feature sections where the author explains an idea by providing a list of points that support or explain the position. When these lists occur, you are almost always tested on your understanding of some or all of the items on the list.

The listed items do not appear as bullet points. Rather, they usually appear using constructions similar to one of the following:

“First...Second...Third...”

“First...Second...In addition...”

“First...Second...Third...Last...”

“(1)...(2)...”

“Initially...And...Further...”

“One possibility is...another possibility is...A final possibility...”

The lists usually contain one of two types of items: a list of reasons (premises) that explain why an action was taken or why a circumstance came into being, or a list of examples that relate to the point at hand.

A list of premises may appear as follows:

The move towards political systems less dependent on monarchical structures came about for several reasons. First, the monetary and military abuses of the royalty placed several governments in severe financial hardship and created a strong undercurrent of discontent and resentment among the populace. Second, the uncertainty over personal human and property rights caused select elements within the upper class to become convinced that a more concrete and accountable political system was necessary, one insulated from the vagaries of royalty. And finally, problems with succession created a political environment fraught with uncertainty and turmoil.

A list of examples might appear as follows:

Developing nations have used a number of ingenious methods to increase energy production—and therefore gross economic capacity—while at the same time maintaining a commitment to sustaining the environment. Microfinanced solar projects in India, Brazil, and Vietnam have all yielded power systems able to sustain towns and villages in remote areas, all without a material impact on local resources. A wind farm in Morocco is a successful collaboration between three commercial firms and the government, and now outputs 50 megawatts. In Tibet, where there are no significant or obtainable fossil fuel resources, the Nagqu geothermal energy field provides 300 kilowatts of power in a more cost-effective fashion than could any fossil fuel generators.

In the example above, the listed items are not numbered or introduced as list items, but a list of examples connected to specific countries is presented nonetheless. When reading, you must be prepared to encounter lists of items that are not clearly marked in the text. Any time an author presents a series of examples, you should recognize it and expect to capitalize on that list when you begin answering the questions.

## 7. Text Questions

When an author poses a question in the passage, in most instances the author goes on to immediately answer that question. Thus, tracking the presence of text questions is critical because it provides you with an outline for where the passage will go next. And, because these questions are often central to the theme of the passage, there is usually a question that revolves around the answer to the question.

Most often, text questions are posed in the traditional manner, with a question mark, as follows:

So, what was the ultimate impact of the court’s ruling on property rights for the Aleutian Islanders?

However, questions can be posed without the traditional question mark, as in this example:

And thus, researchers concluded that some other explanation was needed to account for the difference in temperatures.

*Text questions can be explicitly or implicitly presented in the passage.*

In the example, the sentence implies that there is a question regarding the temperature difference, and this implicit question is likely to then be answered in the text.