

## TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES FOR READING

For students who have enrolled in this class shortly before taking the reading proficiency exam, here are some helpful test-taking strategies you can use:

1. Always **read the questions first**. This will help you to focus your attention and direct you to the parts of the reading passage that are most important for you to understand.
2. **Make sure you understand exactly what each question is asking**. STOP and take a moment to think about what you will need to look for in the reading passage. Sometimes it helps to put the question in your own words or circle key words in the passage, such as **not, least, cause, effect, first, last, etc.**

Believe it or not, this is one of the most important strategies for a test taker to learn. If you just read the questions without really thinking about them or taking a moment to circle the most important words in the questions, you will probably forget what the questions are asking before you even finish reading the passage. (This happens to so many of us.)

3. Do **not** leave any answers blank! On the Nevada State Proficiency Test, a blank answer is a wrong answer.

4. Guess on any of the ones that you do not know. Choose what you think is the best answer **by eliminating the choices that do not seem correct**.

(You can put a tiny pencil mark next to the numbers that you guessed at on your answer sheet and go back to them after you have finished. At the end of the test, you can erase any of these stray pencil marks on your answer sheet before you turn in your paper.)

5. Remember that the proficiency test asks you to choose the **best answer** for each question, so it is important to read all your answer choices and then eliminate the ones that do not seem correct or to best answer the question.

(If you are pretty sure that neither letter A nor B is the best answer, then at least you have narrowed down your choices to the 2 remaining two letters: C and D. Now, you have a fifty percent chance of choosing the most correct answer. Since the Nevada Reading Proficiency Exam usually contains 4 choices for each question, this strategy should help you to get a better score. Even if you can only eliminate one choice, it will still be easier for you to select the best answer from the remaining 3 choices.)

6. Never choose an answer that is not supported by something **in the selection or your own background knowledge**.

Using your background or prior knowledge is crucial to your deciding which answer choices make the most sense. You use your prior knowledge every day of your life. It's so automatic that most of us do not even think about it. Here's an example: You are walking down the hallway at school and say *hello* to a student you generally greet each day. Naturally, the student returns your greeting. However, one morning the student does not say hello to you. Your background knowledge about life tells you a few possibilities. First, he or she may not have seen you. No, the person looked right at you. Second, maybe this person is angry or upset with you about something. Third, it's possible that the student was preoccupied about something else and not all focused on greeting friends or classmates. Chances are, you will not feel comfortable until you either find out why you were ignored or the student greets you with a friendly hello the next morning. As you take the proficiency test, you must **read and think - read and think**.

- 7. If the answer you choose is in the reading passage, make sure that it answers what the question asks. This could be a trick – a choice that has information from the passage but does not answer what is being asked.**

So many times, students think that they are choosing the correct answer just because they read this same sentence in the reading passage. Just because it's in the passage does not mean that it is the correct answer to question *you* are trying to answer. Many reading tests do this to prevent students from just *skimming* the passages for the answer and not really reading carefully.

- 8. Skimming means to glance quickly at a reading passage to get a sense of the topics and important ideas. It should never be used a substitute for careful reading of the passage.**

However, it can be an important strategy, which you can use throughout the test.

Here's an example: A test question asks about the setting of a story. Once you have read the passage all the way through, go back and skip through the paragraphs that discuss other ideas or events. Skim the paragraphs until you find the ones that discuss the time and the place, which together would make up the setting. Now, read this part of the passage carefully.

- 9. Don't expect to always know the answers to most questions after only one reading.**

Most test takers expect to read the passage once and then be able to answer the questions.

However, very few of us know all of the answers after reading the passage only one time. Good test takers learn how to go back into the passage again and again to find specific information.

This is one of the most important strategies for a reading test –

**knowing what information you need and rereading until you find it.**

(Don't forget to use your skimming skills here.)

- 10. If the question says *According to the passage...* or *Presented in the passage...*, make sure that the answer you choose is based on information you read in the passage.**

This can also be a trick for students who think they can get by without doing the necessary reading.

- 9. Never choose an answer that contains any wrong information. If any part of an answer choice is wrong, do not choose this answer.**

- 10. Understand that part of an incorrect answer is often correct, but may not be complete enough to be the best answer.**

You want to make sure that you always choose the most complete and correct answer, especially when you are working on main idea questions.

- 11. Be aware that the answer to a question is often stated in words that are a little bit different from the exact words used in the reading passage.** (This is to test your comprehension, not just word recognition skills. If this were all that's expected of you as a student, you could pass this test in elementary or middle school. )

Here's an example: A passage about the Civil War discusses the *casualties* of war, but the answer choice uses the word *fatalities*. By choosing the answer choice that contains the word *fatalities*, a good test taker is also demonstrating understanding or reading comprehension.

- 12. About every 10 answers or so, check your answer sheet with your test booklet to make sure that you have been bubbling on the correct lines. If you wait until the end of the test to check over your answer sheet, you could have a problem.**

So many students do wait until they get to the end of the test to do this. If you have accidentally skipped a line or bubbled in two answers on the same line, you will have quite a mess to clean up. Something like this can affect all the answer choices after your mistake, and you might not erase the wrong answers completely enough. The best thing to do is just make sure this does not happen to you by simply taking a few seconds during the test to check your answer sheet.

- 13. If you have time after you finish the test, go back and recheck all of your answers in this part of the test. Be sure to check the ones you guessed at first. Then, as suggested earlier, be sure to erase any pencil marks you made on your answer sheet.**

Believe it or not, this strategy is extremely important for a good test taker. Chances are that if you are like most people, you were a little bit nervous when you went through the test the first time. The pressure is on for you to pass this test in order to get your high school diploma. When we are nervous, we do not always remember things. But once you know that you have already worked hard to read, understand, and bubble in all of the answers, you start to relax – just enough to remember certain clue words that were in the passages and what they mean. You also start to remember other strategies you have learned about reading and can put your prior knowledge to work for you.

(In recent years, the state has allowed students plenty of time to do this. Please, take advantage of the time you are given. You won't be sorry.)

- 14. For main idea questions, always reread the first and last sentences. Also, *skim* through the reading passage to see how many times each of the answer choices is discussed.**

Here's an example: You are trying to decide whether the main idea is about soccer or football, so you *skim* through the passage and learn that soccer is mentioned four times. (Be sure to include the pronouns in your count.) However, the writer only mentions football two times. You can be pretty confident that the main idea is about soccer.

(If you are given permission to write in your test booklet, go ahead and underline the words *football* and *soccer* as you skim. This way, you know you have made the correct choice.)

- 15. Don't confuse a supporting detail with the main idea. Remember that a supporting detail just explains or gives more information about the topic.**

Think about the paragraphs you have written in your English classes when your teachers have told you to be sure to write about 8 or 10 sentences that explain about your topic sentence or main idea.

- 16. When you finish a reading passage, try to sum up everything in one sentence. This should be very close to the main idea.**

You can do this the same way you would tell a friend about a new movie or song.

- 17. For time and sequence questions, don't always expect to find all of the events given to you in correct order in the passage. These directions are not in order: "Pass up your homework after you sit down." The correct order is – first, sit down, and second, pass up your homework. Something like this can fool you on a test.**

Also, remember to use your clue words for time and sequence like *first*, *then*, *before*, *finally*, *last*, etc.

18. For **vocabulary questions**, when you have to choose the correct meaning of a word, it is helpful to read the following:

The sentence that the word is in

The sentence right before

The sentence right after

This area of the passage surrounding the word is called the **context**. **Context clues** are the words, phrases, and sentences that surround the word you do not know.

Many sentences and paragraphs contain enough information for you to use the clues that the writer has left to figure out the meanings of many words you do not know.

19. Para los alumnos latinos – Cuando se encuentre una palabra desconocida en inglés, necesita preguntar a usted mismo si esta palabra es semejante a una palabra en español. Hay que usar su propio idioma porque existen muchas palabras en los dos idiomas que son casi iguales.

20. For **fact and opinion** questions:

Statements that contain words like good, bad, or great, which show personal values, are **opinions**:

“We played a great game against Rancho High School.”

Statements reporting other people’s opinions are **facts**:

“The dean said our students are very polite and respectful.”

The opinion itself is not a fact, but the statement reporting what someone says or believes is a fact.

Statements by the writer that something is necessary, or wanted, or liked are **opinions**:

“Everyone can enjoy our new menu in the cafeteria.”

Predictions are **opinions**:

“Students would welcome a change in the attendance policy.”

**Facts can always be checked or verified to be either true or false.** With a fact, there can be **no** other reasonable point of view.

21. Multiple choice answers that are often wrong:

- ✓ Answers that seem humorous or ridiculous
- ✓ Answers that contain extreme or absolute statements (all, always, never, no one everyone, impossible, must, absolutely, etc.)
- ✓ Answer choices that are almost exactly alike or say the same thing in different words

22. When you are answering questions that contain the word **NOT** or **EXCEPT**, always read though your answer choices carefully. You can answer three of the answers choices with a *yes* based on what you read in the passage. The one answer choice that you can answer with a *no* will be the correct answer.

23. Be aware of the **three types of questions** you will have to answer:

“Right there questions” where the answer can be found right there on the page.

“Think and search questions” where you must **look in two or more places** for the answer and then make an intelligent guess.

“On your own questions” where you must combine your own background knowledge with the information given in the reading passage.

**REMEMBER TO USE YOUR BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE. TRY TO CONNECT  
WHAT YOU ARE READING TO WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW. READ AND THINK.**

(Created by Jill Leone)