

Sample Questions and Explanations

for the Reading and Writing Section of the Digital SAT

Question 1 – Main Idea

As the tide falls, the sand is rapidly dried and carried by the wind above the high-water mark. The minute particles are blown still farther from the water until they strike against some piece of driftwood, bush, or tuft of grass. Thus, a hill begins to form, growing larger and larger as more sand falls upon it, until there is a dune many feet in height. The material is never at rest, but constantly shifts with the wind, and a hillock ten- or fifteen-feet high today may noiselessly be taken down tomorrow and rebuilt a hundred yards away. In time, as the beach grows seaward and a few seeds are blown on to the dunes, tufts of grass begin to grow. As years elapse, the dunes become so thickly covered with vegetation that they are protected from the eroding winds and retain their form with comparatively little change. (*Adapted from Barrier Beaches of the Atlantic Coast by Frederick Merrill*)

Which choice best states the main idea of the text?

- A) It is not possible for a dune to be moved by the wind in the space of one night.
- B) It takes years for a dune to become covered with vegetation.
- C) Wind is a major force in the creation of dunes.
- D) Dunes are only created when during low tide when the sand has time to dry.

Question 2 – Strengthening a Hypothesis

In *A New Theory of the Milky Way*, Mr. Easton advances the striking view that the Milky Way is itself a spiral nebula, which appears as an irregular band through the Earth's night sky. We on Earth view the Milky Way from a position within the circuit of the nebula. The curious convolutions of the Milky Way and the varying star densities of its different parts, would, as shown by Mr. Easton, be completely accounted for if the Milky Way were a mighty spiral. Furthermore, the center of the Milky Way is not our Sun but is a point close to the Cygnus constellation. (*Adapted from The Earth's Beginning by Robert Ball*)

Which astrological discovery, if true, would most strongly support Mr. Easton's hypothesis?

- A) A spiral nebula that has similar variations in star density as the Milky Way
- B) A disc nebula that looks like an irregular band when viewed from Earth
- C) A spiral nebula that is centered around a single star rather than a constellation
- D) A distant nebula that includes planets similar to those in the Milky Way

Question 3 – Paraphrasing a Poem

In her poem, "In a Library" Emily Dickinson describes the how the enjoyment she feels in reading a book shifts to a sense of loss when the book is complete: _____

Which quotation from "In a Library" most effectively illustrates the claim?

- A) A precious, moldering pleasure 'tis / To meet an antique book, / In just the dress his century wore; / A privilege, I think
- B) His venerable hand to take, / And warming in our own, / A passage back, or two, to make / To times when he was young.
- C) He traverses familiar, / As one should come to town / And tell you all your dreams were true; / He lived where dreams were sown.
- D) His presence is enchantment, / You beg him not to go; / Old volumes shake their vellum heads / And tantalize, just so.

Question 4 – Using Data from a Table

Participant's Evaluation of the Likelihood that Restaurants Will Be Successful in Different Types of Environments

Environment	Somewhat or very unlikely (%)	Neutral (%)	Somewhat or very likely (%)
College Campus	65	20	15
Office Building	62	24	14
Shopping Mall	10	3	87
Highway Rest Area	38	20	42
Hospital Lobby	39	32	29

Researchers at a consulting firm were interested in people's perceptions of the potential for restaurants to become profitable in different types of environments. They recruited participants and asked them how likely they thought a restaurant could be profitable in various locations. The responses varied widely depending on which type of environment was being considered; for example, _____

Which choice most effectively uses data from the table to complete the example?

- A) 14% of respondents believe that it is somewhat or very likely that a restaurant could be profitable in an office building, but 62% thought that it would be somewhat or very unlikely.
- B) 87% of respondents believe that it is somewhat of very likely for that a restaurant could be profitable in a shopping mall, but only 15% thought one could be profitable on a college campus.
- C) 42% of respondents thought a restaurant could be profitably operated in a highway rest area.
- D) 20% of respondents were neutral when asked if a restaurant could be profitably operated in a hospital lobby, which is the same percentage as the number of respondents who were neutral about the profitability of a restaurant on a college campus.

Question 5 – Logical Conclusion

At the age of 3 to 4, a child's limbs are still very short as compared with his torso; that is, the length of his limbs barely corresponds to 38% of the stature. Over the next few years, the child not only makes a noticeable growth in height, but experiences significant changes in the relative proportions between the torso and the limbs. The adult torso is only half of the full stature. This pattern of growth implies that _____.

(Adapted from *The Montessori Method* by Maria Montessori)

What choice most logically completes the text?

- A) It would be incorrect to assume that children are shaped like little adults.
- B) It is more important to understand how children grow than what causes them to grow.
- C) There are many traits in children that are quite different from the corresponding traits in adults.
- D) The torso and limbs perform functions that are difficult to understand from a developmental standpoint.

Question 6 – Vocab in Context

Fantastic as the story of *Beowulf* is, it is depicted against a background of what appears to be fact. Through *Beowulf*, we receive much information about the Geatas, Swedes and Danes that has an appearance of historic _____, and in some cases can be proved with external evidence.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A) story telling
- B) greatness
- C) falsification
- D) accuracy

Question 7 – Vocab in Context

The following text is from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*.

I was curious to know how time was passing. I struck a match, and by its flame looked at my watch; it was within a few minutes of midnight. This gave me a sort of shock, for I suppose the general superstition about midnight was increased by my recent experiences. I waited with a sick feeling of suspense.

As used in the text, what does the word "shock" most nearly mean?

- A) Energy
- B) Dread
- C) Fatigue
- D) Delusion

Question 8 – Vocab in Context

To the Harvard professors who have made my work known in America and to *McClure's Magazine*, a mere acknowledgment of what I owe them is a(n) _____ response, but it is my hope that the method itself, in its effect upon the children of America, may prove an adequate expression of my gratitude. (Quote by Maria Montessori)

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

- A) ingenuine
- B) hearty
- C) insufficient
- D) necessary

Question 9 – Main Purpose

Horizontal gene transfer (HGT), the acquisition of genetic material from sources other than biological parents, is known to be an important force in bacterial evolution. For instance, a study by Friedman, Cordero, and others demonstrated that HGT could be responsible for the antibiotic resistance that makes some cases of meningitis difficult to treat. Insight on the evolution of the bacterial genetic material and the causes of that evolution could go a long way toward finding new treatments.

Which choice best states the main purpose of the text?

- A) It presents the study by Friedman and Cordero to caution against an overemphasis on HGT in future research programs.
- B) It explains a significant problem in the development of meningitis treatments and shows how the research of Friedman and Cordero has found a solution.
- C) It discusses a study by Friedman and Cordero to illustrate a potential benefit of further research on the topic of HGT.
- D) It argues that research findings on the topic of HGT are often misunderstood, as was the case with Friedman and Cordero's study.

Question 10

Master William Horner came to our village to school when he was about eighteen years old: tall, lank, straight-sided, and straight-haired, with a mouth of the most puckered and solemn kind. Never did that prim mouth give way before a laugh. A faint and misty smile was the widest departure from its propriety, and this unaccustomed

disturbance made wrinkles in the flat, skinny cheeks like those in the surface of a lake after the intrusion of a stone. Master Horner knew well what belonged to the pedagogical character, and that facial solemnity stood high on the list of indispensable qualifications. He had made up his mind before he left his father's house how he would look during the term. (from Caroline Kirkland's 1845 short story "The schoolmaster's progress")

Which choice best states the function of the underlined sentence with respect to the text as a whole?

- A) It expands on the description of a facial expression in the first part of the sentence.
- B) It introduces a setting by a lake that is described in the sentences that follow.
- C) It establishes a contrast with the description of a solemn character given in the first two sentences.
- D) It explains why a character will leave his home in the final sentence.

Question 11 – Paired Paragraphs

Text 1

For a personality test to be a useful component of a hiring process, the company must identify which traits have a significance to the job. For instance, teachers should not be afraid of public speaking, accountants should have great attention to detail, police officers should remain calm in stressful situations, pilots should be emotionally stable, and workers in nuclear plants should be free of psychopathic disorders.

Text 2

As demonstrated by a 1990 study by McCrae and Costa, personality tests can have a value, albeit a limited one, in the selection of personnel. McCrae

and Costa indicated that the knowledge of a person's traits could predict his or her behavior a maximum of 10% of the time. Lay people who misunderstand this concept can become overzealous in their claims about the usefulness of personality tests for hiring employees.

Based on the texts, how would McCrae and Costa (Text 2) most likely describe the view of the statements presented in Text 1?

- A) They would give their unequivocal agreement and would provide additional supporting data.
- B) They would disagree with the statements and provide several reasons.
- C) They would admit the statements seem plausible but are not supported by research.
- D) They would not contradict the statements but would recommend caution in their implementation.

Question 12 – Student Notes/Similarity

While researching a topic, a student has taken the following notes:

- Fernando Amorsolo was named the National Artist of the Philippines in 1972.
- He is known for colorful depictions of local people and landscapes that seem to glow on the canvas.
- His work, *The Fruit Gatherer* (1950), shows a young Filipino woman in bright garb holding a basket of multicolored fruits.
- His work, *Antipolo* (1939), shows a group of travelers on their way to a cathedral, which is illuminated by sunlight in the verdant landscape.

The student wants to emphasize a similarity between the two works. Which option most effectively uses relevant information from the notes to accomplish this?

- A) *The Fruit Gatherer* shows a single figure; *Antipolo*, however, includes multiple figures and a building.
- B) Like many of Amorsolo's works, both *The Fruit Gatherer* and *Antipolo* makes use of color and light.
- C) Amorsolo's work, which earned him the title of "National Artist", is best known for its detailed landscapes.
- D) Amorsolo completed *The Fruit Gatherer* in 1950 and *Antipolo* in 1939.

Question 13 – Transition Word

Celia White, a well-known poet from New York, was the recipient of the "Best of Buffalo Awards for Best Spoken Word Artist." _____ White doesn't define herself as a spoken word artist, saying that her voice just adds to the poetry.

Which choice best completes the text with the most logical transition?

- A) Moreover,
- B) However,
- C) Therefore,
- D) For example,

Question 14 – Punctuation

Researchers at the University of Massachusetts recently engineered a biofilm that harvests the energy in evaporation and converts it to electricity. This biofilm has the potential to revolutionize the world of wearable _____ powering everything from personal medical sensors to mp3 players.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A) electronics;
- B) electronics:
- C) electronics,
- D) electronics

Question 15 – Sentence Structure

Corals have been shown to pass somatic mutations, or changes to DNA in non-reproductive cells, to their offspring. By using a high-resolution molecular tool called a microarray, _____ and showed they were derived from a single colony through asexual reproduction.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- A) six different coral colonies were genetically mapped by an international team of scientists
- B) genetic mapping of six different coral colonies by an international team of scientists was completed,
- C) six different coral colonies, whose genetic makeup was mapped by an international team of scientists,
- D) an international team of scientists mapped the genetic makeup of six different coral colonies

Answers and Explanations

Question 1

Answer: C

Domain: Information and Ideas

Skill: Central Ideas and Details

Explanation: Choice C is the best answer because wind is mentioned in multiple locations in this paragraph. Wind carries the sand particles to create small hills, grows the hills into dunes, and brings seeds to the dunes so that they might eventually be covered by vegetation. Choice A is incorrect because it IS possible for a dune to be moved overnight. (OPP) Choices B and D are incorrect because they are mentioned in the paragraph, but only one time each. (WL)

Question 2

Answer: A

Domain: Information and Ideas

Skill: Command of Evidence (Textual)

Explanation: Choice A is the correct answer because the Easton's hypothesis that the Milky Way is a spiral nebula based on variations in star density. Therefore, the discovery of a second nebula that is in the shape of a spiral and has similar variations in star density would support this hypothesis. Choice B is incorrect because it would support the hypothesis that the Milky Way is a disc nebula rather than a spiral (OPP). Choice C is incorrect because it contradicts Easton's second hypothesis about a constellation at the center of the Milky Way (OPP). Choice D is incorrect because planets are not a part of Easton's hypothesis (OOS).

Question 3

Answer: D

Domain: Information and Ideas

Skill: Command of Evidence (Textual)

Explanation: Choice D is correct because the phrase "his presence is enchantment" demonstrates Dickenson's feeling of enjoyment and the phrase "beg him not to go"

demonstrates her feeling of loss at the end of the book. Choices A, B, and C are incorrect because none of them involve the idea of loss. (WL)

Question 4

Answer: B

Domain: Information and Ideas

Skill: Command of Evidence (Quantitative)

Explanation: Choice B is correct because it supports the claim by contrasting two locations that respondents gave answers that “varied widely.” Choices A and C only discussed one location (WL). Choice D is incorrect because it provides two percentages that are the same (WL).

Question 5

Answer: A

Domain: Information and Ideas

Skill: Inferences

Explanation: Choice A is correct because the passage focuses on how the limb to torso proportion is different in young children and adults. Therefore, adults and children are not only different sizes, but they are also different shapes. Choice B is incorrect because there is no discussion about the causes of growth (OOS). Choice C is incorrect because there the passage offers no evidence of traits other than growth patterns (OOS). Choice D is incorrect because the author never discusses any functions of the torso or limbs (OOS).

Question 6

Answer: D

Domain: Craft and Structure

Skill: Words in Context

Explanation: Choice D is the correct answer because the word “accuracy” signals the later use in the passage of something that “can be proved with external evidence.” Choice A is incorrect as “story telling” does not fit in the logical discussion of facts supported by evidence (ALT). Choice B is incorrect because “greatness,” while it does

seem to connect with the word “fantastic,” does not logically lead to the phrase “proved with external evidence” (MS). Choice C is incorrect because “falsification” would refer to information that is NOT “proved with external evidence” (OPP).

Question 7

Answer: B

Domain: Craft and Structure

Skill: Words in Context

Explanation: Choice B is the correct answer because the word “shock” relates to a feeling of dread. This is specifically referred to in the passage as a “sick feeling of suspense.” Choice A is incorrect because, while in some cases “shock” can mean electricity or energy, that definition does not fit the context of this passage (MS). Choice C is incorrect because although it is almost midnight, the author gives no indication he is feeling tired (OOS). Choice D is incorrect because, while the author references superstition and suspense, there is no evidence that he is deluded (OOS).

Question 8

Answer: C

Domain: Craft and Structure

Skill: Words in Context

Explanation: Choice C is correct because it logically follows from the word “mere” and contrasts with the word “adequate.” We know that a contrast is needed between this word and the second half of the quote because of the conjunction “but.” Choice A is incorrect because this sentence is a genuine expression of gratitude (OOS). Choices B and D are incorrect because the words “hearty” and “necessary” while potentially correct descriptions of Montessori’s sentiment, do not have a logical link to the words “mere” and “adequate” (ALT).

Question 9

Answer: C

Domain: Craft and Structure

Skill: Text structure and purpose

Explanation: Choice C is correct because the research by Friedman and Cordero shows that HGT could explain the problem of antibiotic resistance. Thus, further research could have a potential benefit – that is, it “could go a long way toward finding new treatments.” Choice A is incorrect because the text points out benefits of research on HGT (OPP). Choice B is incorrect because the text never indicates that Friedman and Cordero found a solution, only a potential explanation (OOS). Choice D is incorrect because a misunderstanding is never discussed in the text (OOS).

Question 10

Answer: A

Domain: Craft and Structure

Skill: Text Structure and Purpose

Explanation: Choice A is correct because the underlined portion provides a simile that furthers the description of Master Horner’s faint smile by comparing the way it wrinkles his face to the ripples in a lake. Choice B is incorrect because the sentences that follow are not set by a lake (ALT). Choice C is incorrect because the description of Master Horner’s faint and unaccustomed smile does not contrast with how he is described in the first two sentences (OPP). Choice D is incorrect because the underlined portion describes what Master Horner looks like, not what he will do. Furthermore, the final sentence states that Master Horner had left his father’s house in the past, not that he will leave it (ALT).

Question 11

Answer: D

Domain: Craft and Structure

Skill: Cross-Text Connections

Explanation: Choice D is correct because the second text states that “personality tests can have a value... in the selection of personnel” but proceeds to warn against misunderstandings leading to their “overzealous” use. Choice A is incorrect because McCrae and Costa would not “unequivocally” agree (EXT). Choice B is incorrect because they didn’t say anything that could be construed as a disagreement with the statements in text 1 (OOS). Choice C is incorrect because their research does, at least in a limited way, support the statements (OPP).

Question 12

Answer: B

Domain: Expression of Ideas

Skill: Rhetorical Synthesis

Explanation: Answer B is correct because it uses the word “both” to emphasize the similarity between *The Fruit Gatherer* and *Antipolo*. Answer A is incorrect because it emphasizes a difference between the two paintings (OPP). Answer C is incorrect because while one of the paintings is a landscape, the other might not be one (OOS). Answer D is incorrect because it seems to emphasize that the works were completed in different years (OPP).

Question 13

Answer: B

Domain: Expression of Ideas

Skill: Transitions

Explanation: Choice B is correct because the ideas of receiving an award as the Best Spoken Word Artist and the fact that White doesn’t consider herself a spoken word artist contrast with each other. Choice A is incorrect because the second sentence isn’t similar to but emphasized over the first. Choice C is incorrect because these sentences don’t have a cause and effect relationship. Choice D is incorrect because the second sentence isn’t an example of the first statement.

Question 14

Answer: C

Domain: Standard English Conventions

Skill: Boundaries

Explanations: Choice C is the correct answer because it correctly separates the main sentence from a modifying phrase at the end. (This is also known as the “ING Thing”). Choice A is incorrect because the phrase after the semicolon isn’t an independent clause. Choice B is incorrect because the phrase after the colon isn’t an example, explanation, or list. Choice D is incorrect because a comma is required between the main sentence and a modifier that begins with a participle.

Question 15

Answer: D

Domain: Standard English Conventions

Skill: Form, Structure, and Sense

Explanation: Choice D is correct because the introductory modifying phrase “by using a high-resolution tool called a microarray” describes the team of scientists, therefore “team” must be the first noun after the introduction. Choice A is incorrect because the noun “coral colonies” is placed between the introductory modifying phrase and what it describes. Choice B is incorrect “genetic mapping” is placed between the introductory modifying phrase and what it describes. Furthermore, the antecedent of the word “they” could be incorrectly thought of as the scientists. Choice C is incorrect because the noun “coral colonies” is placed between the introductory modifying phrase and what it describes. Furthermore, the word “and” that is found in the sentence just after the blank would not be needed with this structure.

Wrong Answer Types:

OPP – This answer is the opposite of the correct answer.

OOS – This answer is out of scope. It has an element that was never mentioned in the original passage.

WL – This answer is in the wrong location. It is a detail that was mentioned in the passage but does not answer the question on hand.

EXT – This answer uses language that is more extreme in tone than that of the original passage.

ALT – This answer includes an alteration of the correct answer.

MS – This answer is a misused synonym. It matches a definition of the word in the question but does not fit in the context of the passage.

Citations:

Barrier Beaches of the Atlantic Coast

By Frederick J. H. Merrill, Ph. D.

Popular Science Monthly for October 1890

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Penn State. "Corals pass mutations acquired during their lifetimes to offspring."
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