

Preparing for the COMPASS Reading Test

[GPC Testing Website](#)

The COMPASS reading test is designed to measure your reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. Your scores on the COMPASS will determine if you are ready to tackle college-level courses. To help you prepare for the reading test, follow the tips and instructions in this guide.

The COMPASS reading test measures your proficiency in three basic areas:

1. Vocabulary
2. Comprehension (both literal and inferential)
3. Analysis – overall ability to understand the author’s style and purpose

Let’s take a look at these three categories in greater detail.

VOCABULARY – You must identify the meanings of words as they are used in passages. Context clues, structural analysis and/or a general understanding of the meaning of the passage may be used to determine the meanings of words. Context clues are found in the form of: formal definition and definition by example, description, comparison, contrast, synonym, or antonym. Words in apposition, words in a series, transitional expressions, such as conjunctive adverbs or other modifiers, and the general logic of the passage may provide definition clues to those specific words being tested. Structural analysis clues include common affixes and roots. *Note: Some words have more than one dictionary meaning. Questions about such words require you to use clues within the passage to identify the meaning that fits the context.*

LITERAL COMPREHENSION – You must recognize information and ideas presented directly in passages.

1. **Details or Facts** – identification of a single fact, concept or event, or recognition of several facts, concepts, or events.
2. **A Sequence of Events** – Signals may be words such as then, next, before, finally, in the first place, in the meantime, subsequently, thereafter, latter, former, respectively.
3. **Comparative Relationships** – identification of likenesses or differences among periods, events, characters, philosophies, actions, or ideas. Signals may be provided by words or phrases such as: in the same way, just as, likewise, similarly, and furthermore.
4. **Cause and Effect Relationships** – identification of the reason(s) for events, actions, or decisions, or the outcome of an event, action, or decision. Signals may be words or phrases such as: hence, therefore, consequently, for this purpose, accordingly, as a result, or because.
5. **Referential Relationships** – identification of the referent for which a word or group of words has been substituted in a passage. Referring words or phrases may include pronouns, nouns, or noun phrases.

All details tested are important to understanding the passage. You are tested on your ability to identify details that are supportive of major ideas presented in the passage even though the questions do not necessarily use the exact wordings provided in the passage.

INFERENCEAL COMPREHENSION – You must synthesize and interpret material that is presented in a passage. Inferenceal comprehension items involve the following skills:

1. **Identification of the Main Idea** of a passage or paragraph. (This idea or focus is not likely to be stated directly.)
2. **Utilization of Inductive Reasoning** – You may be required to draw conclusions, make generalizations, summarize ideas presented in the passage, identify relationships and interpret an author's beliefs about his or her subject.
3. **Utilization of Deductive Reasoning** – You may be asked to apply one or more of the ideas presented in a passage to a new situation not referred to in the passage.
4. **Interpretation of Figurative Language** – You must draw inferences that indicate comprehension of the author's implied meaning.

ANALYSIS – You must identify the author's purpose and organization of ideas. Drawing inferences about the author's style, purpose, or pattern of presentation may be required. Although these inferences are based on the content and structure of the passage, analysis differs from inferenceal comprehension in that analysis does not specifically test comprehension of the passage's content. Instead, analysis requires the student to identify the following:

1. Author's Style

- a. *Tone* – identification of the author's perspective or attitude toward the topic of the passage, attitude toward the reader, the author's attitude toward him/herself, and shifts in tone that occur within a passage.
- b. *Point of View* – identification of the author's position, the place of the author in the passage, i.e., as an observer, as a participant.
- c. *Type of Language* – identification of language, i.e. humorous, argumentative, entertaining, serious, formal, informal, academic, etc.
- d. *Literary Devices* – identification of specific literary tools commonly utilized by writers such as analogy, fact and opinion statements, irony, factual narration, sensory appeal, and figurative expression.

2. Author's Purpose

- a. *Identification of the author's purpose* in writing a paragraph or a passage – Such purposes might be: to explain an idea, to argue a point of view, to describe an item or event, to instruct, to contrast or compare, or to discuss causes and/or effects.
- b. *Recognition of functional relationships* – You may be required to identify the author's manner of functionally relating words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs... Example: You may be asked to select the word, phrase, or sentence

which would be a logical transition between portions of the passage. To choose the correct answer, the student would have to understand the functional relationships between the items being connected. Possible transitional words or phrases may include: in addition, for example, likewise, as a result, in fact, furthermore, indeed, but, on the contrary, certainly, however, yet, now, here, then, in other words, nevertheless.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

A figure of speech expresses an idea, thought, or image with words that carry meanings beyond their literal ones. Figures of speech give extra dimension to language by stimulating the imagination and evoking visual imagery that awakens the senses. Thus, figures of speech paint mental pictures in words. Some types of figurative language include the following:

Allusion: A reference to some well-known historical or literary event or person that has striking resemblance to the subject under discussion. Allusion is used often in prose.

“He is a Romeo to every girl he meets.”

“That celebrity is being crucified by the media.”

Cliché: Any over-used, trite or banal expression.

“Today’s business world is dog-eat-dog!”

“Rather than complain, you should just grin and bear it and keep a stiff upper lip.”

Hyperbole: The use of exaggeration or overstatement to make a point; used for emphasis, humor or poetic intensity.

“She is the most annoying person in the entire world.”

“Here once the embattled farmers stood, / And fired the shot heard around the world.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Imagery: The use of vivid, detailed descriptions that evoke sensory images. Imagery is evoked to give the reader the impression that he or she can see, hear, feel, smell or otherwise experience what is being described.

“She turned the moon into salve, the stars into a swaddling cloth and healed the wounds of every creature walking up on two or down on four.” (Gloria Naylor in Mama Day)

“Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” (Mark Twain)

Irony: An expression in which the author’s meaning is quite different (often opposite) from what is literally said. Irony, as a matter of tone, occurs most frequently in prose as a technique for humor, satire or contrast.

“When I reflect upon the number of disagreeable people who I know have gone to a better world, I am moved to live a different life.” (Mark Twain)

Metaphor: An implied comparison in which one thing is spoken of in terms of something else; the figurative term substitutes for or is identified with the literal term. Metaphors are extremely valuable in making an abstract idea clearer by associating the idea with something concrete that relates to one or more of the senses.

Life is but an empty dream.

It’s raining cats and dogs.

She is a jewel.

“And merry larks are ploughman’s clocks. / Time is a river.” (Shakespeare)

Personification: Another type of comparison that treats objects or things as if they were capable of the actions and feelings of people. As in a metaphor, there is an implied comparison which gives the attributes of a human being to an animal, object or idea.

The sun smiled down on us.

“...Sea that bears her bosom to the moon” (Wordsworth)

“The dirty nurse, Experience.” (Tennyson)

Simile: A direct comparison of two things, usually employing the words *like* or *as*.

Her eyes shine like fresh cut diamonds.

Life is like a box of cherries.

“My heart is like an apple tree whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit.” (Christina Rosseti)

TRANSITIONS

Coherence in a paragraph requires transitions which can be a word or a phrase. Transitions show the relationship between sentences or ideas within sentences. They are placed at or near the beginning of a sentence to indicate their relation to the preceding sentence. The coordinating conjunctions for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so are often used this way. The following is a list of additional common transitional words and phrases.

TRANSITIONS INDICATING:	USES:
<p><u>Time or Sequence:</u> first, second, third, then, next, after that, also, last, at the same time, meanwhile, providing, subsequently, previously, after a short time, afterward(s), as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, before, earlier, of late, in the meantime, lately, later, presently, shortly, soon, thereafter, until, frequently, occasionally.</p>	<p>You are indicating a time relationship</p>
<p><u>Addition:</u> again, also, then, besides, equally important, in fact, similarly, first, second, third, furthermore, in addition (to), additionally, last, likewise, moreover, next, too, indeed.</p>	<p>You are adding something. "And" can be a good sentence opener when used with care.</p>
<p><u>Cause & Effect:</u> accordingly, as a result, consequently, hence, otherwise, then, therefore, thus, since, because, in other words, so.</p>	<p>You are showing the relationship between two ideas or conditions</p>
<p><u>Comparison:</u> also, like, too, as well as, in a like manner, both _ and _, neither _nor_, likewise, similarly.</p>	<p>You are showing similarities.</p>
<p><u>Contrast:</u> although, though, and, yet, at the same time, but, for all that, however, in contrast (to), in spite of, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the other hand, still, yet, even though, in opposition to, conversely, whereas, nor, or, but, yet.</p>	<p>You are reversing or deflecting the line of thought, usually back to your own side.</p>
<p><u>Supporting a Point:</u> because, since, for</p>	<p>You are connecting a reason to an assertion.</p>
<p><u>Conceding a Point:</u> of course, no doubt, doubtless, to be sure, granted (that), certainly.</p>	<p>You are conceding a point to the opposition or recognizing a point just off your main line.</p>
<p><u>Special Features or Examples:</u> for example, for instance, incidentally, indeed, in fact, in other words, in particular, specifically, that is, to illustrate, frequently, occasionally, especially, in general, usually, as an illustration.</p>	<p>Again you are adding, illustrating, or expanding your point.</p>
<p><u>Summary:</u> so, and so, finally, last, hence, thus, on the whole, all in all, therefore, in summary, in brief, in conclusion, in short, on the whole, to conclude, to sum up, to summarize, in other words, consequently.</p>	<p>You are adding up consequences, summarizing minor points to emphasize a major point.</p>

BEING TESTWISE

When taking a reading test like the COMPASS or the TEAS, it is important to utilize techniques that will maximize your test scores. Being testwise includes physical and psychological factors that will improve your chances of doing well on the test.

READING COMPREHENSION EFFICIENCY

Some passages may be more difficult than others. The difficulty levels of the passages are directly related to the background knowledge and vocabulary of the reader. Using the systematic approach will enhance concentration and, thus, improve comprehension.

1. Read the passages this way:
 - Do a quick overview to get an idea of what the passage is about. Skim for key words in the passage. *Hint – Key words are usually nouns.*
 - Read the selection carefully (try to "see" what is happening). *Hint: Draw pictures or diagrams in your mind as you read.*
 - Read to understand the passage. As you read through the complete passage, try to identify the most important idea presented. Approaching the questions with a clear understanding of the passage is your most valuable test strategy.
2. Work through the questions this way:
 - Read all the options. The first one that looks correct may not be the correct answer.
 - Eliminate obviously wrong answers first. You greatly enhance your chances of selecting the best answer when you narrow your choices; one in two is much better odds than one in four.
 - Choose the best answer.
 - Review your answers by locating supporting information in the passage. Remember, this is not a memory test; it is a comprehension test.

PHYSICAL FACTORS

To a great extent, the physical preparations you make before the test will determine how prepared you are to cope with the stresses of test taking. A good idea is to establish these habits long before the test date:

1. Diet – Eat a well-balanced diet. Make diet choices from the following food groups: fruits, vegetables, lean meats, lean dairy products, and whole grains. Adequate nutrition gives your body the flow of energy you need to prevent fatigue during the test. Also, a few days before the test, curtail or eliminate foods that have dramatic effects on your blood sugar and blood-oxygen levels, i.e., sugary foods, caffeine, and alcoholic beverages.
2. Rest – Don't wait until the night before the test to start getting enough sleep. Fatigue caused by lack of sleep can be extremely detrimental to your ability to concentrate.
3. Exercise – Exercise is an excellent way to reduce body tension, which can, in turn, affect your academic performance. In addition, exercise can increase stamina.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

It is important to realize that it is normal to be nervous when you are about to take a test. Actually, some anxiety may help you to focus your concentration on the test and motivate you to do your best. Too much anxiety, however, will interfere with your concentration. Practice some of the following simple techniques during the days before the test to learn how to relax when you are tense. The more you practice relaxation techniques, the more effective they will be when you need them. Learn *how* to relax.

1. Breathe deeply. Taking deep breaths can help you relax, and it can also increase your brain power. The brain, like the rest of the body, requires oxygen to function efficiently. The healthy habit of deep breathing will be beneficial to you even before you realize you are tense. Breathe deeply through your nose, expanding your diaphragm fully. Hold your breath for 3 to 5 seconds. Exhale slowly through the mouth. Repeat several times. Remember to breathe deeply during the test.
2. Practice Body Awareness Scans. This is a concentration technique which focuses your attention away from anxiety. It is a good technique to use during your waiting time just prior to the test. Begin by becoming aware of your feet; be sensitive to any tension there. Release and relax the muscles in your feet. Using this process, gradually move up your body all the way to your eyebrows.
3. Tighten and Release Muscles. Use this technique as needed during the test. Be alert to the tension that builds in the neck and shoulder area. Raise your shoulders as high as you can, tightening the muscles in your shoulders and neck. Hold briefly. Release.
4. Affirm Success. Your brain has a powerful control over your body. It believes what you tell it. Be sure you speak to it with positive affirmations. Affirm your success on the test.

DETERMINING FACT FROM OPINION

Much of what you read is designed to influence your thinking. Critical readers must be able to judge which statements to accept and which to question further. To do so, you must be able to distinguish facts from opinions and determine the author's viewpoint and reliability.

FACTS: Statements that can be proven to be true or false through objective evidence. Facts can be proved or disproved in several ways: through direct observation; experimentation; and outside sources such as a dictionary, encyclopedia, maps and newspapers. Statements that appear to be facts, but are proven to be false are called fallacies.

Ex:

- Columbus discovered America in 1492. (fact)
- Georgia Perimeter College is located in Atlanta, GA. (fact)
- Christmas is celebrated in January. (fallacy)

OPINIONS: Statements that cannot be proven to be true or false. Opinions express beliefs, feelings, attitudes or judgments a person has about a subject. Opinions may take the following forms: Statements that contain value words such as good, best, beautiful, bad, lovely and terrible. Value words often express judgments; they are generally subjective, not objective.

Ex:

- The Big Mac is the best hamburger around for the money.
- I am going to Europe next year. (*Statements which involve the future.*)
- Pit Bulls should be a restricted breed. (*Statements that give the speaker's personal judgment or belief about what is, can be, should be, and has been.*)
- Statements that are prefaced with the following phrases: I believe, I feel, I hold firmly that, I suggest, I think, In my opinion...
- Statements that sound like they are facts because they have been prefaced by the following phrases: As a matter of fact, In fact, The truth is, It is a fact that...

Please read the following statements and determine which statements are facts and which are opinions.

1. The economy should continue to improve according to government economists.
2. Interest rates and inflation have gone down over the past year.
3. The employment rate is unacceptably high.
4. Gold was discovered in California in 1848.
5. Since 1985, the U.S. economy has experienced little increase in inflation.
6. I think candidate Gore's plan is most likely to be effective.
7. Students who are not prepared for college should not go to college.
8. Science fiction movies are wonderful forms of entertainment.
9. In recent years, several science fiction movies have been released.
10. The Model "T" was the most significant invention of the first half of the 20th century.
11. Roses have been found in dry bouquets in Egyptian tombs.
12. Jay Leno became the official host of "The Tonight Show" in 1992.
13. Leno is the greatest talk show host of them all.
14. The most important fact about any job is whether you like the people with whom you work.

Key:

1	Opinion	6	Opinion	11	Fact
2	Fact	7	Opinion	12	Fact
3	Opinion	8	Opinion	13	Opinion
4	Fact	9	Fact	14	Opinion
5	Opinion	10	Opinion		

CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS

1. Visit the [Testing website](#) and learn all you can about the COMPASS Test and its requirements.
2. Before your test, visit the testing site. Become acquainted with the location and Testing environment.
3. Get adequate rest the night before the test.
4. Eat a light snack before the test. Do not arrive to the test hungry or overfed.
5. Wear comfortable clothing that can be layered to adjust to the temperature of the testing room.
6. Arrive early on the day of the test. While you wait for the test to begin, do some brief relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing and/or body awareness scans. Perform efficiently during the test:
 - Read each passage carefully before you read the questions.
 - Read for the main idea as you read.
 - Read all options.
 - Eliminate obviously wrong answers first.
 - Check all answer choices by locating support in passages.
 - Choose best answer.
 - Think success! Maintain a positive attitude. You have worked very hard to prepare for the test.
 - Affirm your success.

For additional help in improving your reading skills, check out these handouts on the Learning & Tutoring Center's website:

[Reading Test Savvy](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[All Reading & Writing Handout](#)