

CONCLUSIONS AND INFERENCES

Interpreting is an important part of becoming a careful reader. A reading selection offers information about a topic; good readers can use that information to know what to expect next. One way to improve on the skill of interpreting is to draw conclusions from what a writer tells you.

All writing contains information that is clearly stated and material that is not specifically stated but is there in *implied form*. Implied information is **not directly stated** but is only **suggested by the author's choice of words**. Writers may choose not to directly state some information for a number of reasons. They frequently leave unstated information they believe that most readers are likely to know. Although not directly stated, this implied or unstated background information is necessary to gain a clear understanding of the passage. Thus, in order to come up with a logical conclusion about a passage, readers must often add their own knowledge and understanding to the facts and ideas presented in the passage. Try the following example:

Which answer would you select to complete the following sentence?

If you keep reading books with small print in such dim light,

- a. you'll never pass your exam.
- b. you may not learn the meaning of important words.
- c. you may strain your eyes.
- d. you should play some music on the radio.

The most reasonable and logical ending for the sentence is *C*. The word *if* sets up conditions that will affect the outcome. From our own experience, we know that small print and dim lighting can indeed lead to eyestrain. Although the other choices may contain some truth in them, they don't **logically develop from the previous part of the sentence**.

Facts and details need to be logically connected in order to draw correct conclusions. Even though you may not know for sure, **you must use evidence from the reading to forecast what will happen**.

Since many types of communication suggest more information than they directly state, the ability to make inferences is very important. This is why many tests, such as the COMPASS, include a high percentage of this type of question. The words in bold print below are often used in the stems of inference questions.

- The reader can **conclude** that
- The reader can **deduce** that
- The passage **implies** that
- The author **suggests** that
- The author **would probably agree** that
- The author **most likely believes** that
- With which of the following statements would the author **most likely agree**
- The author's ideas are **similar or related to**

BUILDING INFERENCE SKILLS

- Read beyond the words. Fill in details and information based on the writer's suggestions.
- Question yourself as you read. "Why is this person doing what he or she is doing?" "What can I infer from this scene?" Answer these questions based on hints the writer provides and your own experiences.

- If a writer describes a person, understand the person from how he or she moves, what he or she says, and what the person looks like. Try to build a picture of the person in your mind based on the writer's description of action and appearance.
- If you cannot easily answer a question about what you have read, use your inference skills. Go back to the part of the reading where you would expect to find the answer and look for clues that logically suggest the answer.

PRACTICE EXERCISE

Mrs. Harris, an elderly patient in a nursing home, sat all day in a chair and did nothing else. She required complete physical care, even feeding. No one seemed to realize that she was partially deaf and blind. One day, a young doctor observed cataracts in both her eyes. He discovered that if he spoke in her ear, she seemed to respond. One eye was operated on, and when it was first uncovered, the old woman cried with joy. Her recovery was quick, and she soon became quite independent. She started feeding herself and took to smiling and talking to others. The change in her attitude was amazing. Not only did she require less nursing care, but she was also able to help other patients. She was again able to see and with this, she seemed to experience some hearing recovery.

- ___ 1. Evidence suggests that the young doctor was
- a) careless.
 - b) alert.
 - c) independent.
 - d) casual.
- ___ 2. We can reasonably infer from the passage that
- a) a person's state of health affects his or her outlook on life.
 - b) nursing homes are staffed with unqualified attendants.
 - c) elderly people should be cared for by their families.
 - d) state governments should supervise nursing homes closely.
- ___ 3. It is fair to infer that the regular attendants of the nursing home were
- a) overworked to the point of exhaustion.
 - b) indifferent to the needs of the patients.
 - c) unaware of Mrs. Harris's real problem.
 - d) highly trained medical experts.
4. Underline the sentence in the paragraph from which you can infer that Mrs. Harris was discouraged and depressed.