UNDERSTANDING PURPOSE IN READING PASSAGES

Reading test passages include a variety of subjects and writing styles. No matter what the subject matter, a writer's purpose (why a passage is written) influences writing style (how a passage is written). Understanding why and how a passage is written can help readers decode the meaning of passages. Writing to persuade, explain, and entertain are three common purposes for writing, and most reading test passages fall into one of these categories. Take note of the point of view, organizational structure, tone, language and literary devices which characterize each of the three categories.

WRITING TO PERSUADE (PERSUASIVE)

Type: Argumentative writing

Main Idea: the argument itself, pro or con

Purpose: to convince the reader of a point of view

Point of View: the writer's subjective, biased point of view

Organizational Structure: comparison and contrast, cause and effect, facts and statistics, emotional appeal

Tone: authoritative, compassionate or judgmental, defensive, sarcastic, ironic, and even humorous

Language: subjective, argumentative, opinionated, factual, and emotional

Literary Devices: statistics, facts, opinions, descriptive language, appeals to emotion or intellect

WRITING TO EXPLAIN (EXPOSITORY)

Type: informational, descriptive, or researched writing

Main Idea: stated or unstated overall point of the passage (not argumentative or biased)

Purpose: to inform, to instruct, to educate

Point of View: objective, non-biased point of view of the author

Organizational Structure: general information, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, definition and example, chronologic order of events, or step by step instructions

Tone: informal/formal, unemotional, or academic

Language: unemotional, informational, factual, descriptive, formal

Literary Devices: factual information, statistics, chronologic order of events

WRITING TO ENTERTAIN (LITERARY)

Type: narrative, writing which appeals to the reader's imagination

Main Idea: usually inferred

Purpose: to entertain, enlighten, or elicit emotion

Point of View: that of the narrator (usually first or third person)

Organizational Structure: varies depending on the type of writing (it may tell a story, contain dialogue, describe a person or place, etc.)

Tone: depends on the type of writing (emotional, humorous, ironic, moral, sarcastic, etc.)

Language: descriptive, emotional, wide use of adjectives and adverbs

Literary Devices: irony, allusion, metaphor and simile, sarcasm, personification, alliteration, hyperbole