NEXT IAS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & COMPREHENSION

Comprehensive Study Course

CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION 2024

English Language & Comprehension

Contents

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & COMPREHENSION

Chapter 5:

Solved Examples **19**

Chapter 6:

Previous Years Solved Papers **38**

THEORY OF READING COMPREHENSION (RC'S)

Reading Comprehension (RC)

(As nearly 30% of the questions coming in CSAT paper are based on Reading Comprehension (RC's), It is very important to prepare RC's very well to excel in CSAT paper.)

Reading comprehension is the ability to read text, process it, and understand its meaning.

Reading Comprehension (RC) questions put to test a host of related skills such as:

(a) Reading Ability

(b) Comprehension

(c) Retention / Verbal Memory

(d) Analytical Ability

(e) Ability to read and think simultaneously

(f) Common Sense

(g) General Awareness

Importance of Reading Comprehension Skills

Administrative duties demand comprehending, identifying, and analysing important aspects of a situation; drawing knowledgeable conclusions; forming ideas for implementing a plan of action mentally while scanning through reports and data, and more often than not, doing all these simultaneously.

Therefore, these skills are tested and Reading Comprehension provides the best way for testing these skills. Hence adopting a policy of 'practice makes perfect' and spending time improving one's RC solving ability is definitely a worthwhile exercise.

READING

A: Understanding Content

Understanding the content of the passage on which Reading Comprehension questions are based is essential to identify the correct answer. The subject of the passage can be diverse, ranging from philosophy to astronomy, from economics to art, or from history to science. The ease of understanding the RC passage depends upon the reading habit of student. However, there are certain generic aspects which lead to a proper understanding of any type of passage – where emphasis is placed on syntax rather than the subject matter of the passage. Getting well versed with these methods is important.

Key Sentence:

Certain sentences in the passage that convey the main idea or theme are called Key Sentences. They are essential in determining the flow of ideas and lay out the context of the passage. Hence, it is imperative to identify the Key Sentences while reading the passage.

Let's try to understand this concept with the help of an example.

Read the passage given below carefully:

The Roman Empire, as it existed in those days, must not be conceived of by the reader as united under one compact and consolidated government. It was, on the contrary, a vast congeries of nations, widely dissimilar in every respect from each other, speaking various languages, and having various customs and laws. They were all, however, more or less dependent upon, and connected with, the great central power. Some of these countries were provinces, and were governed by officers appointed and sent out by

the authorities at Rome. These Governors had to collect the taxes of their provinces, and also preside over and direct, in many important respects, the administration of justice. They had, accordingly, abundant opportunities to enrich themselves while thus in office, by collecting more money than they paid over to the government back home, and by taking bribes to favour the rich man's cause in court. Thus the more wealthy and prosperous provinces were objects of great competition among aspirants for office at Rome. Leading men would get these appointments, and, after remaining long enough in their provinces to acquire a fortune, would come back to Rome, and expend it on intrigues and manoeuvres to obtain even higher offices.

Once you have read the passage, try and summarize the key points of the passage. While summarizing or looking for key sentences, it would be helpful to ask questions like:

Questions:

What is the topic of the passage?

What is the view of the author?

What is the fundamental analysis/argument/hypothesis?

What are the points supporting fundamental analysis?

Are there any examples of the fundamental analysis?

Is there a conclusion to the passage? If yes, what is it?

The key ideas of the above passage are:

1. The Roman Empire as it existed in those days was not united under a central consolidated government.

2. It had disparate centres of power that functioned under a central rule.

3. The leaders of these autonomies became wealthy and grew in power.

4. This resulted in competition among such Governors for even higher offices.

The author's thoughts can be understood with key sentences like:

(a) It was, on the contrary, a vast congeries of nations, widely dissimilar in every respect from each other.

(b) They had, accordingly, abundant opportunities to enrich themselves while thus in office.

(c) Leading men would get these appointments, and, after remaining long enough in their provinces to acquire a fortune, would come back to Rome, and expend it on intrigues and manoeuvres to obtain even higher offices.

All these sentences point to the areas where the flow of passage changes or gets strengthened. Phrases like 'on the contrary', 'but', 'contrary to this' are the ones that bring about change in the flow whereas 'obvious to say', 'it follows from this', and 'therefore' are used for concluding or strengthening ideas.

The language, content and writing style are important in determining the ease of readability of passage. However, with enough practice, one can train one's mind to look out for the key ideas and sentences that affect the follow of thought in the passage.

B: Reading Speed

The biggest hurdle faced by students while solving RC is the slow speed of reading. Although understanding what one reads is much more important than the speed at which one reads it, speed still remains crucial because of its immediate bearings on the entire process of solving RC questions. A student who reads slowly might be tempted to leave the RC questions and might miss out on certain easy questions.

Defining Reading Speed

It is crucial for the student to understand that reading speed is not just the number of words per minute; instead, it is actually **the number of words read and understood per minute**.

How to increase your Reading Speed?

The simple answer is: Developing a Good Reading Habit.

A good reading habit helps in grasping the finer nuances of the English language and also helps in building good communication skills.

Reading materials recommended to develop a good diversified reading habit are:

1. **Newspapers:** Reading newspaper daily is the easiest and most useful method of reading practice. The subject matter in the paper covers a wide range of topics, much like the RC section.

   Recommended Newspapers: The Hindu, The Indian Express, The Economic Times

2. **Magazines** like Yojana and Kurukshetra etc.

3. **Fictional novels** like The Fountainhead, One Hundred Years of Solitude, Midnight's Children etc and Non – Fictional novels (priority over Fictional Novels) like The Argumentative Indian, I Do What I Do, The Discovery of India, The Story of My Experiments with Truth etc.

Other than reading material suggested above, conversing in English as often as possible would also help to complement Reading Comprehension. The more one reads, the more knowledge one gains (which will also help in Prelims General Studies Paper 1 and in UPSC personal interview) and the more chances one has of discussing and analysing this knowledge.

Comprehension

Comprehension is a complex process which necessitates learning specific reading skills; grasping the main idea of the passage; sequencing links from the factual data available, inferring and drawing conclusions based on the proper understanding of the RC passage. In a nut shell, comprehension can be described as the picture that comes to mind while reading passage.

A. Use of Comprehension Skills in RC solving

The flow of idea in a RC passage can be identified with the use of Comprehension skills. Understanding the detailed meaning of every sentence is not as important as understanding the content of a sentence in relation to the passage. The aim is to understand the usage of a particular sentence in a paragraph and not really data, details, date etc. Using certain techniques, sentences are placed in a paragraph and the paragraphs in a passage. Sometimes inferential questions are asked, they are only hinted at or implied in the passage and may not be explicitly mentioned. Such inferential questions necessitate a complete and thorough comprehension of the passage in order to be able to answer such questions correctly.

Here are some techniques that can be used to make comprehension easier:

(a) **Detect Key Ideas:**   There are certain key sentences that determine the flow of content in the passage. To make comprehension simpler, these sentences need to be detected during the first read of the passage.

(b) **Summarize the Paragraph:** While reading the passage, develop a habit of mentally summarizing each paragraph and keep linking them as you proceed. This helps in understanding the overall idea of the passage and answer the inferential questions easily. It might be useful to write a short summary on a sheet of paper while doing the exercise.

(c) **Determine the sentence links:** Sentences within a passage may be directly or subtly linked. Versatile reading helps to get into the habit of identifying sentence links. Inability to establish links between sentences could be a major cause for ideas being missed out.

(d) **Ask for Questions:** When in doubt, ask questions. For example: Why has the author mentioned this example? What is the purpose of the second paragraph? Is the last paragraph a conclusion of the analysis discussed throughout the passage? These questions help in gaining a deeper perspective of the passage and helps in the comprehension.

Retention

RC passages may consist of ideas that are either directly or indirectly linked to each other or they may contain illustrations riddled with facts and figures based on which conclusions are drawn. The test taker needs to remember and assimilate all information that has been read to correctly answer RC questions.

Therefore, Retention or the ability to read and understand is an essential part of solving RC questions.

A. Importance of Retention in RC Solving

Having a good memory or being able to retain what is read is a necessary skill for attempting RC questions.

Retention helps in:

1. Answering direct questions i.e. questions based on facts mentioned in the passage.

2. Analyzing the passage while reading it.

3. Assimilating information and facts to draw conclusions after reading the passage.

4. Cutting down on re-reading time while answering the questions.

5. Verifying answers to the questions after solving them.

B. Improving Retention

The best way to improve retention is by simultaneously reading and assimilating the text of the passage. Listed below are some ways by which the ability to assimilate information can be effectively increased, thus improving retention capacity.

All passages, factual as well as analytical, have a central theme – an idea which is subsequently analyzed or elaborated on. This central theme should be identified and pictured in your mind. Once you paint an image of central idea in your mind, everything that is mentioned in the passage can be easily added to this image, thus acting as an aid to the retention process.

For example, if the passage is about some civilization, you can picture a group of nomads and keep adding information to this image as and when you read about them in the passage like how they dressed, what they ate, how they communicated etc.

Analytical passages can also be dealt with in a similar fashion, by forming a picture of the main idea in your mind and adding the details to this picture as the reading of the passage proceeds.

For example, If the passage is about latest budget or economic survey, then you can picture a debate with pros and cons of the budget/survey being represented by two groups of the people in the debate. Assimilation of the information becomes easier when you have something 'concrete' to work on, like a picture of central theme.

1. Reading the questions first

This strategy has always been debatable and there is no correct answer to the question – should the questions be read first or the passage? The only way of finding out is to actually practice this strategy and then weigh the pros and cons. Reading the questions before the passage gives you a more focussed approach while reading the passage because you would know roughly what you're looking for. Direct questions can be solved in this fashion, whereas the answer to the indirect ones can be determined after doing a thorough analysis of that particular part of the passage where answer lies. Further, there would be less scope for missing any vital information as important aspects will be already known because of having read the questions first so special attention can be given to assimilate these important points while reading the passage.

2. Mapping the flow of thoughts

Retaining a large amount of data can be done by sequentially ordering sets of data; thus mapping the flow of thoughts as they appear. This is an efficient way of retaining information as it helps to map your visual understanding and underlines the significance of all the relevant data that has been mentioned in the passage. A diagram reconstructing the flow of thought can be drawn; new ideas can be added and connected with a link and factual information can be jotted down besides the idea it represents while the passage is being read.

C. Retention Tips:

Here are some tips and strategies to improve passage retention:

1. Make a mental note of all key figures, facts and sentences while reading the passage for the first time.

2. Make mental notes of factual information like dates, names, and quotes whenever they occur in the passage.

3. Avoid re- reading the passage for each and every question. Read the questions first if it helps to cut down on this habit.

4. Number the sentences whenever sequential information like reasons, solutions, inferences etc. is being conveyed in the passage.

5. For questions that contain sentences of the passage as options, it is easier if the questions and its options are read before the passage.

6. Try categorising the questions into direct and indirect before reading the passage. When this is done, read the passage and answer the direct questions simultaneously.

7. Read a lot of non fictional material as mentioned earlier in this chapter or material that deals with topics that are of no particular interest to you. Slowly you will realize that continual reading and practice improves retention in general.

Important Tip for solving RC questions

Option Elimination Technique:

A useful idea to effectively narrow down the choices is the elimination of incorrect options. Often the situation may arise where more than one option seems to be the correct answer. In such cases, these elimination techniques will help in identifying the options that appear to be right choice but are actually incorrect; by recognizing some defect in the option, or just by virtue of it being incomplete in some way or other. These elimination techniques will help you locate the key differentiating points between the options and will especially come in handy in cases where the options are very close or long or both.

The following is the list of inconsistencies that a test taker can be on the lookout for while analysing the options:

1. **Verbosity**

   Certain options are too verbose to be correct. These options will unnecessarily elaborate upon the actual idea and add a few redundant or repeated ideas to give the appearance of a more complete answer. Verbose options which can be recognised by their extra length are a direct indicator of this type of trap and are to be avoided or eliminated. The correct answer is the one that gives the complete picture in the most precise manner.

2. **Vagueness**

   Some options use short sentences and impressive words to give the appearance of being terse and apt at the same time. However, they end up being vague and incomplete. The best answer is not judged by its length or the quality of words used but by its clarity and completeness of idea. Never select an option if its implication is unclear or is not pertaining to the question.

3. **Contradiction**

   These options are the easiest to eliminate because they tend to contradict the passage, either explicitly or implicitly. Detecting an explicit contradiction is just a question of reading the passage thoroughly. Implicit contradictions, too, are easy to discover but they require a clear understanding of the passage and its implication.

4. **Irrelevance**

   Options that are not related to the question are usually used to fill up the void. These options might be based on an unrelated part of the same passage or might not be related to the entire passage at all. Like vague options, these options, too, are framed using impressive words and phrases that give an intellectual feel to them. These traps are identified easily if you have comprehended the question correctly.

   Let's try to solve the question based on passage given below with the help of option elimination techniques

   An air quality index (AQI) is a way to combine measurements of multiple air pollutants into a single number or rating. This index is ideally kept constantly updated and available in different places. The AQI is most useful when lots of pollution data are being gathered and when pollution levels are normally, but not always, low. In such cases, if pollution levels spike for a few days, the public can quickly take preventive action (like staying indoors) in response to an air quality warning. Unfortunately, that is not urban India. Pollution levels in many large Indian cities are so high that they remain well above any health or regulatory standard for large part of the year. If our index stays in the 'Red/Dangerous' region day after day, there is not much anyone can do, other than getting used to ignoring it.

   (UPSC 2017)

Which among the following is the **most logical and rational inference** that can be made from the above passage?

(a) Our governments are not responsible enough to keep our cities pollution free.

(b) There is absolutely no need for air quality indices in our country.

(c) **Air quality index is not helpful to the residents of many of our large cities.**

(d) In every city, public awareness about pollution problems should increase.

The passage highlights the importance of Air Quality Index in providing information regarding Air pollution; however this only serves when the pollution level is low for most of the time and there is temporary spike in pollution level for at max few days. Public can take preventive action like staying indoors.

However in many Indian cities the pollution level is generally higher than many regulatory standards for large part of year, so AQI doesn't help much as people have to go outside for their work.

Option A is **irrelevant** according to the passage as the given statement is not related to the main idea of passage and is nowhere mentioned in the passage.

Option B is **factually incorrect**; the passage talks about the importance of AQI (read lines 3 to 6).

Option C is **correct** as it is given in the passage that in many Indian cities the pollution level is generally higher than many regulatory standards for large part of year, so AQI doesn't help much as people have to go outside for their work.

Option D is **irrelevant** according to passage as the central theme of the passage is about AQI and its importance. The statement given in option is totally unrelated to the question hence can be easily eliminated.