Reading Comprehension: inference

An inference question asks not what the passage says but what it commits you. . .



Lesson `grev.rc.R2`

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The idea

An inference question asks not what the passage says but what it commits you to — a claim the passage supports without stating outright. Read for what must be true if the passage is true, then choose the option that follows from the text by a short, safe step.

What does the passage commit me to that it does not state — what must be true if the passage is true?

Summarize the passage's claim, then take one short, safe step beyond it. Match each option to the evidence and to its strength.

Watch every step

The sonnet gives a poet only fourteen lines and a fixed scheme of rhyme, and a beginner is apt to feel the form as a cage. Practiced poets often report the opposite. The requirement to reach a rhyme by a certain point, or to turn the argument at the ninth line, pushes them toward words and connections they would never have stumbled on in open prose. The constraint, they say, does not silence invention but provokes it.

The passage most strongly implies which of the following?

A. The sonnet was the most popular verse form of its century. ✗ *out-of-scope*

B. Experienced poets find that the sonnet's rules stifle their invention. ✗ *contradicts*

C. A sonnet has fourteen lines. ✗ *true-but-not-implied*

D. Poems written in fixed forms are always better than poems written freely. ✗ *too-strong*

✓ **E.** A strict formal constraint can prompt a poet to invention rather than prevent it.

Why E — "A strict formal constraint can prompt a poet to invention. . . ." Choose the option the passage supports without overreaching.

Now a harder one

On a steep hillside, rain runs off fast, stripping soil and seed before either can do its work. The farmers who cut a slope into level terraces were not chiefly after tidy steps; each terrace catches the water that would have rushed downhill, holding it long enough to soak in and sparing the soil behind its wall. Where the technique took hold, land too steep to plow safely became land that could feed a village for centuries.

The passage most strongly implies which of the following?

A. Terraced fields yield more grain than any flat field ever could. ✗ *too-strong*

B. Building the terraces required the coordinated labor of many households. ✗ *out-of-scope*

C. The terraces were built mainly for their orderly appearance. ✗ *contradicts*

D. Water flows downhill under the force of gravity. ✗ *true-but-not-implied*

✓ **E.** Terracing made it possible to farm slopes that would otherwise have been too steep to cultivate.

Why E — "Terracing made it possible to farm slopes that would. . . ." Choose the option the passage supports without over-reaching.

The method, in one line

Reading Comprehension: inference

Summarize the passage's claim, then take one short, safe step beyond it. Match each option to the evidence and to its strength.

Is my choice supported by the text (not merely true in the world)? Is its strength matched to the passage? Does it stay in scope and agree with the passage?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

too-strong
Draws an inference stronger than the evidence — a universal or absolute (all, never, only, complete) where the passage supports only a limited claim.

out-of-scope
Names something the passage never addresses, so the text offers no grounds to infer it.

Name the trap before you pick — most wrong answers are one of these two.

Try it, then watch the walk-through

Explore this live

Watch the walk-through