Reading Comprehension: function of a sentence or...

A function question asks what a specified sentence or detail DOES for the passage...



Lesson grev.rc.R3

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The idea

A function question asks what a specified sentence or detail DOES for the passage, not what it says. Do not paraphrase the sentence; identify its job.

What JOB does this sentence or detail do for the passage — support, exemplify, concede, qualify, rebut, or explain — as opposed to what it merely says?

Read the neighboring sentences to fix the target's role, and name that role as a verb phrase before reading the options.

Watch every step

Some species influence an ecosystem far out of proportion to their numbers; ecologists call them keystones. Remove the sea otter from a kelp forest, and the sea urchins it once ate multiply and graze the kelp down to a barren floor, taking countless other species with it. The otter is scarce, yet its predation holds the whole community in balance. A keystone's importance, then, is measured not by abundance but by the size of the gap its absence would open.

The reference to the sea otter and the kelp forest functions primarily to

A. concede that abundant species matter more than scarce ones. ✗ *wrong-function*

B. prove that removing any predator will destroy an ecosystem. ✗ *too-extreme*

C. explain how kelp forests first become established. ✗ *out-of-scope*

D. restate the definition of a keystone species given at the outset. ✗ *literal-restatement*

✓ **E.** illustrate the keystone concept with a specific case.

Why E — "illustrate the keystone concept with a specific case.." Choose the option that names the function the sentence actually performs.

Now a harder one

A theory earns scientific standing, on one influential view, only if some possible observation could prove it false. A critic may object that scientists cling to good theories even when observations clash, patching them rather than discarding them. Yet this response misreads the standard, which demands not that a theory be abandoned at the first anomaly but that it forbid something, that it stake a claim the world could in principle violate. A theory compatible with every conceivable outcome forbids nothing, and so explains nothing.

The sentence beginning "Yet this response misreads the standard" functions primarily to

A. prove that every currently accepted theory is in fact unfalsifiable. ✗ *too-extreme*

B. recount the life of the thinker who first proposed the view. ✗ *out-of-scope*

✓ **C.** answer the critic's objection by clarifying what the criterion actually demands.

D. restate the view that a scientific theory must be falsifiable. ✗ *literal-restatement*

E. concede that scientists should discard a theory at its first anomaly. ✗ *wrong-function*

Why C — "answer the critic's objection by clarifying what the. . . ." Choose the option that names the function the sentence actually performs.

The method, in one line

Reading Comprehension: function of a sentence or detail

Read the neighboring sentences to fix the target's role, and name that role as a verb phrase before reading the options.

Have I named a function, not a paraphrase? Does the direction match (concede vs. assert, qualify vs. deny)? Is the strength matched to the text, and does it stay in scope?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

⚠ literal-restatement

Names what the sentence SAYS (a paraphrase of its content) rather than the JOB it does for the passage's argument.

⚠ wrong-function

Assigns a plausible rhetorical role the sentence does not perform — often reversing its direction, as by calling a concession a claim or a rebuttal a concession.

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

Try it, then watch the walk-through

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