Text structure & purpose

A structure-and-purpose question asks what a text is mainly trying to DO (its...

Lesson `rw.craft.K2`

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The idea

A structure-and-purpose question asks what a text is mainly trying to DO (its overall purpose) or what a specific part accomplishes within it (its function). Read for the author's rhetorical goal: to describe, argue, explain, illustrate, qualify, contrast, and so on.

Is the question about the whole text's purpose or a specific part's function? What rhetorical action is being performed?

Name the action (argue, explain, illustrate, qualify, contrast...). For a part, ask what it does relative to the whole. Reject options that name the topic only, an unperformed action, or a part mistaken for the whole.

Watch every step

While early reviewers focused on the novel's complex plot, this essay argues that its real achievement lies elsewhere: in the quiet precision of its sentences, which reward slow, careful reading.

What is the main purpose of the text?

- **A.** To argue that the novel's prose style, not its plot, is its true achievement.
- **B.** To summarize the novel's complex plot. ✗ *part-as-whole*
- **C.** To discuss a novel. ✗ *topic-not-purpose*
- **D.** To describe what early reviewers said about the novel. ✗ *part-as-whole*

Why **A** — "To argue that the novel's prose style, not its plot, is. . . ." Select the option that accurately names the purpose or function.

Now a harder one

The report opens with a vivid anecdote about a single family's struggle to afford housing. It then shifts to statistics showing that millions face the same difficulty nationwide.

What is the function of the opening anecdote?

- **A.** To give a concrete, human illustration before the broader statistics.
- **B.** To present the report's statistical conclusions. ✗ *wrong-function*
- **C.** To argue that the problem affects only one family. ✗ *wrong-function*
- **D.** To list the main causes of unaffordable housing. ✗ *wrong-function*

Why A — "To give a concrete, human illustration before the broader…." Select the option that accurately names the purpose or function.

The method, in one line

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Name the action (argue, explain, illustrate, qualify, contrast...). For a part, ask what it does relative to the whole. Reject options that name the topic only, an unperformed action, or a part mistaken for the whole.

Does my choice name an ACTION the text actually performs? Is it the whole purpose, not a detail? Is it more than just the topic? For a part, is its job stated relative to the whole?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

purpose-not-performed

Names a rhetorical action the text does not actually perform.

part-as-whole

Treats the function of a detail or section as if it were the whole text's purpose, or vice versa.

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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Watch the walk-through