

2010

# UPSC CSAT – READING COMPREHENSION



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# READING COMPREHENSION

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## Introduction

**Reading comprehension** questions measure your ability to read with understanding. This type of question explores your ability to analyze a written passage from different perspectives as -

- A. your ability to recognize explicitly stated elements in the passage
- B. ability to understand the assumptions underlying statements or arguments in the passage
- C. And also the implications of those statements or arguments.

The passages are drawn from a variety of academic disciplines within the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. Based on a general analysis, most likely the topics will address one of the 3 areas described below. Each type of passage needs a slightly different optimum test-taking strategy. Regardless of what topic you encounter, you can rest assured that everything you need to know will be included in the passage. CSE will try to minimize the chances of giving someone with previous exposure to a particular topic an unfair advantage over others taking the same version of the test.

- A. Science Passages:** These passages deal with topics including biology, chemistry, and medicine. You should approach them by doing an initial quick reading/skim of the text. The main aim is to understand how the passage is structured and to analyze its outline.

Passages of this type are often slightly difficult to understand but are also very factual and straightforward. Hence, such passages will likely provide the easiest reading comprehension questions you will encounter. There will be factual questions and the answers can be seen in the passage in a very straight forward manner.

- B. Social science passages:** These passages deal with topics such as history, politics, and geography. It can be seen that these passages are quite interesting to read and that is the reason you can have questions based on inferences. Hence, you must read these passages slowly in order to deal with the inferences.

- C. Business passages:** Business passages involve very difficult structures, and present questions that require you to infer information and even to determine the authors' thoughts and opinions. They need to be read slowly and carefully. Frequently, business passages also include compound words and complex language which we do not use in our day to day conversation. Don't get distracted when you run into such terms. They are not very difficult to decipher if you break them down and examine each of their parts.

## Types of Questions

With this a very high level classification, let us now look at the different types of questions,

### Factual Questions

- These questions the easiest ones to answer, but also the most time consuming. You need to be careful because they often contain very close options.

### Inference Questions

- Inference questions do not test your knowledge of explicitly-cited facts, but rather your ability to draw conclusions. These questions may even ask you to make a judgment about the author's opinions, or to guess what further conclusions the author might draw

### Applying Information Questions

- Like inference questions, applying information questions deal with topics that are not explicitly mentioned in the passage. This type of question asks you to take the information given in the passage and logically apply it to a context outside of the passage

### Main Idea Questions

- Main idea questions ask the aspirant to identify the passage's overall theme. It is rather a difficult type of questions as all of the answer choices have been discussed in the passage. it does not mean that every one of them can be called the passage's central theme.

### Supporting Idea Questions

- Questions of this type focus on specific ideas or pieces of information presented in the passage. They require a more focused reading than do main idea questions.

### Logical Questions

- These questions examine your ability to analyze the structure of the passage and to determine what role specific components play in the whole

### Tone Questions

- The aspirant will ask to describe the tone of the passage. You need to apply the same rule of negativity to find the correct choice. Mostly the tone is positive or neutral rather than negative.

## Structure of different Questions

Let us look at the structure of the questions asked in the above mentioned types.

### A. Factual Question:

These questions are based on the straight facts provided in the passage and can be like

- What are the two methods mentioned by the author for analysis?
- Which institute provides the base for research of neurological diseases?

### B. Inference Questions:

Inference questions might look like –

- Based on the information given in the passage, it can be reasonably inferred that Government is thinking of finalizing which of the following proposal
- The author of the passage would be most likely to agree with which of the following statements?
- The author of the passage would most likely agree with which of the following statements?

The trick to solve inference questions is to stick closely to the wording of the passage and to keep your logic very clear. Inferences are the statements that must be true based on the facts. These are common questions seen in the examinations where Reading Comprehension is an important subject (like CSE)

### C. Applying Information:

These questions are slightly more complex than the previous types. They require you to figure out what the passage states about a particular topic, and then apply that information to answer choices that contain new information. These questions do not appear as frequently as the previous three. Some possible questions of this type include:

- Which of the following situations is most similar to the economic situation described in the second paragraph?
- The Policy referred in the paragraph is most likely to suit which sector from the following?

You need to take the same approach to this type of question as you take with inference questions. However it will require an ability of making a larger logical conclusion. These questions test your ability to recognize the structure of an argument or an idea, and then apply the same structure in a different context.

### **D. Main Idea Questions:**

These questions revolve around the basic theme of the passage. You need to understand the idea or concept which the passage speaks about. In most cases, the main idea will be expressed in one or two sentences in the first paragraph. Occasionally it may be expressed in the final paragraph or, rarely, in an interior paragraph. Sometimes the main idea is never explicitly stated. If you cannot locate a clear theme, it is usually helpful to go through the passage and determine how it gets derived from first paragraph to the final paragraph.

Typical main ideas questions look like the following:

- Which one of the following statements accurately captures the central idea of the passage?
- Which would be most appropriate title for the contents of the passage?
- Which one of the following most accurately summarizes the passage?
- The passage can best be described as which of the following?

Main Idea questions are the most common questions asked. Hence it is advisable that you summarize the idea of the passage in your words, on a scrap paper, while you complete the reading of the passage. This will avoid your temptation to with the incorrect but tempting answers. Such answers normally contain the central idea but with an additional information.

### **E. Supporting Idea Questions:**

These questions are based on specific concepts or examples provided in the passage and therefore need more detailed understanding of the passage. Typically the questions are as follows –

- According to the passage, the author believes in which of the following theories?
- According to the passage the current trends of economy can be characterized as
- Which government initiative is most fruitful since last five year's plan, according to the passage?

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Answers to such questions are always the statements in the paragraph. Identify the “**Key-words**” from the question and read the passage around these keywords. For example, the question asks for **Current Trends of Economy**, so look for these words in the passage. Usually you will be able to find the statement which says the same thing as that of the choices and the answer will come directly.

### **F. Logical Questions:**

Here you will determine the role of a specific component in the context of entire passage. Typically the question will be as below –

- Why author refers to the Supply Chain Theory mentioned in the second paragraph?

### **G. Tone Questions:**

These questions will ask you to draw a conclusion about author’s view or passage, based on the language used in the passage. For example –

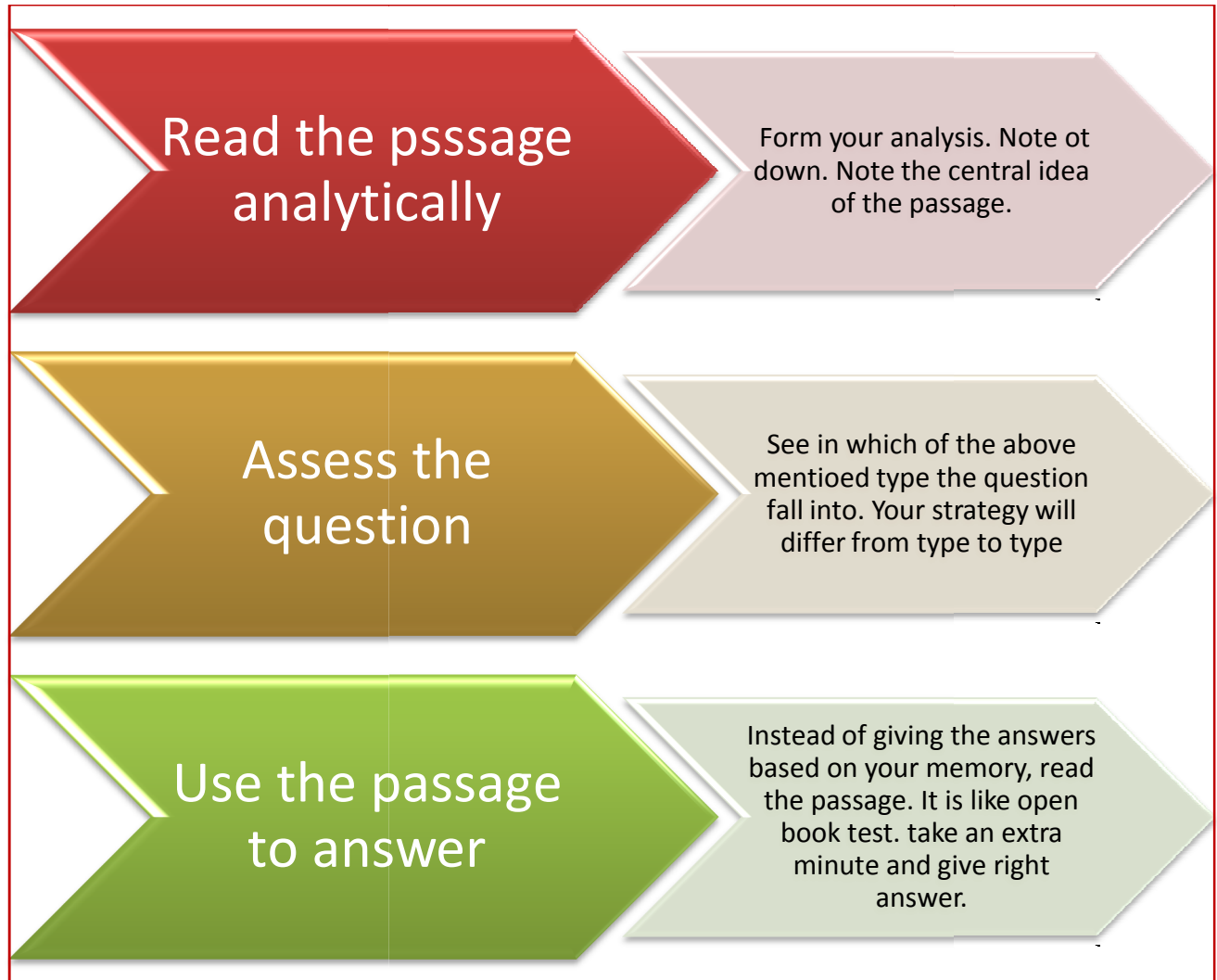
- What is the author’s view towards current economy?
- Which of the following best describes the passage?

Reading Comprehension questions are not at all like Quantitative questions, in which the correctness of the best response can be proved with the help of a mathematical formula. There are no specific rules that can be applicable to comprehension questions. For instance, consider a central-idea question. A typical second-best answer choice might incorporate the passage's central idea but go further to give a broader approach than the passage itself covers. Hence there is a fundamental difference between the best answer choice and the others.

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### Steps to Follow:





## Sample Passages

**Read the following passage and answer the questions below the passage.**

The classical realist theory of international relations has long dominated both academic institutions and the American government. Even at the birth of the nation, early political thinkers, such as Alexander Hamilton, promoted a realist view of international relations and sought to influence the actions of the government based on this perspective. While the classical realist school of international relations is not entirely homogeneous in nature, there are certain premises that all classical realists share.

The primary principle underlying classical realism is a concern with issues of war and peace. Specifically, classical realists ask, what are the causes of war and what are the conditions of peace? The members of the classical realist school mainly attribute war and conflict to what is termed the security dilemma. In the absence of any prevailing global authority, each nation is required to address its own security needs. However, each nation's quest for security—through military buildups, alliances, or territorial defenses—necessarily unsettles other nations. These nations react to feelings of insecurity by engaging in their own aggressive actions, which leads other nations to react similarly, perpetuating the cycle.

It is important to note that for realists, unlike idealists or liberal internationalists, international conflict is a necessary consequence of the structural anarchy that nations find themselves in. Whereas other schools may see international conflict as the result of evil dictators, historical chance, flawed sociopolitical systems, or ignorance of world affairs, classical realists see war as the logical result of a system that by its nature lacks a true central authority.

Hand in hand with this view of conflict as an inevitable condition of the global power structure is the realists' view of the nation as a unitary actor. Because classical realists see international relations as a continuing struggle for dominance, the nation can not be viewed as a collection of individuals with disparate wants, goals, and ideologies. The realist view requires the formulation of a national interest, which in its simplest terms refers to the nation's ability to survive, maintain its security, and achieve some level of power relative to its competitors.

Realism is not without its critics, many of whom challenge the premise that war is the natural condition of international relations or that there can be a truly national interest. However, the realist school of international relations continues to shape foreign policy because of the successes it has had in describing real world interactions between nations.

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**Q.1** The formation of a national interest serves what function in the classical realist theory of war and peace, based on the passage?

- A. It is a convenience used by theorists to describe national interests where none exist.
- B. It provides the necessary justification for the classical realist view of a continuous global power struggle.
- C. It is less important to the theory than is the idea of the nation as a unitary actor.
- D. It is the part of the theory that receives the most criticism from opponents.

**Answer: B.**

**Explanation:**

This is a supporting idea question. Refer to the part of the passage that discusses “**national interest.**” The answer to this question is in the fourth paragraph, where the author states “Because classical realists see international relations as a continuing struggle for dominance, the nation can not be viewed as a collection of individuals with disparate wants, goals, and ideologies. The realist view requires the formulation of a national interest...” Hence, for this theory to work there must be the idea of a national interest. Therefore the right choice is B.

Choice A is not supported. Choice C is not close enough, since there is no mention of any comparison or relative importance. For Choice D; the passage says it receives criticism, but it never says “most.”

**Q.2** From the passage, members of the classical realist school would be LEAST likely to support which of the following argument?

- A. an international policy based on building a strong military force to deter threats
- B. an international policy that seeks to reduce threats of war by providing humanitarian aid to potential aggressor countries
- C. a domestic policy that attempts to unify the nation’s citizens behind a common cause
- D. a domestic policy that allocates a majority of the country’s budget for defense spending
- E. an international policy based on joining a common defense contract with other nations

**Answer B**

**Explanation:**

This is an Inference Type Question. Now let us find out a support for each statement in the passage. The statements for which we can find the support should never be the answers.

Choices A and C are supported by the passage in the second paragraph which states that classical realists believe that every nation must take care of its own security needs and that war is a constant threat. Choice D is also supported because second paragraph speaks about “alliances”. That left us with Option B as the correct answer. Also the passage mentioned that “classical realists see war as the logical result of a system that by its nature lacks a true central authority” and not because of any flawed socio-political systems.

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**Q.3** Depending on the description provided in the passage, which of the following, if true, would best support the classical realist theory of international conflict?

- A. Some countries ruled by dictators maintain peaceful relations with their neighbors.
- B. Despite the presence of a world superpower, many countries continue to fight wars with their neighbors.
- C. War has existed from the beginning of recorded history.
- D. After the nations of the world form an authoritative world court, wars decrease dramatically.

**Answer D**

**Explanation:**

This is an apply information question. To answer it, you should first go to the passage to understand the theory of conflict. We can find this information in the second paragraph where the passage says, “In the absence of any prevailing global authority, each nation is required to address its own security needs.” Now, you need to find which choice best supports this view.

Choice A doesn't support because the classical realist school isn't concerned with the actions of dictators. Choice B again is not in line with the theory. It states that there is a prevailing global authority and yet conflict continues. Choice C states that war is a persistent problem, but it is not addressing the causes of it. Choice D supports the theory because it shows that the presence of a global authority reduces war.

**Q.4** The author most likely regards the classical realist theory of international relations with

- A. General lack of interest
- B. Unconvinced dismissal
- C. Indirect disapproval
- D. Experienced acceptance

**Answer D**

**Explanation:**

This is a tone type question. You need to understand the direction of passage. If you see the last paragraph of the passage, the author is more positive about realism and says – “However, the realist school of international relations continues to shape foreign policy because of the successes it has had in describing real world interactions between nations.”

Therefore the answer is D which is the only positive answer.

**Q.5** According to the passage, what is the underlying principle of classic realism?

- A. International Economic Conflicts
- B. Removal of dictatorship from world

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- C. Issues of War and Peace
- D. Humanitarian aid to economically depressed nations

**Answer C**

**Explanation:**

This is a factual type question and you can find the answer directly in the passage. The start of second paragraph says – “[The primary principle underlying classical realism is a concern with issues of war and peace](#)”. Hence the answer is C

### Important Tips

**Use your scrap paper.** Since these passages can be long and present difficult sentence and paragraph structures, you may want to use your scrap paper to take brief notes. You can note down the main ideas of each paragraph.

It is particularly useful for remembering where to find factual information. For example, paragraph 1 – types of bacterial diseases. Paragraph 2 – cause of harmonical disorder and likewise.

**Quickly read the questions before the passage.** This will give you a better idea of what you should be focusing on as you read, in order to answer the questions. Also this will help you in identifying the types of questions and passage.

**While answering a factual question, read the passage providing the data very carefully. Also read few lines before that passage.** This will save you from the misleading answers.

**Tackle the questions with multiple options very carefully.** For example, you will see the questions with following choices in the examination -

- a. I only
- b. III only
- c. I and II only
- d. I, II and III only

There might be a catch here. You will find I and II in the passage and which are very close to each other. But take out few minutes, read the passage carefully. You may find III as well mentioned in the deeper text. You should review and consider each fact on its own merits.

**Lastly and most importantly – Practice will make you perfect.** More the number of passages you will tackle, more the skill will get developed.