

# Breaking Down the Test



BASIC PRINCIPLES OF  
THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

# Basic Principles of Cracking the System



- **When you are getting ready to take the test isn't the time to worry about what you know.**
- **Your score will depend on you getting what you know onto the answer sheet.**

**The difference between your success and another's is, by the end of this presentation, you will know how to take a standardized test.**

# Two critical concerns:



1. You must manage a limited amount of time well.
2. You must guess wisely and aggressively

# Have a Plan



- If you manage your time poorly, you will not get a chance to use your knowledge.
- Guessing wisely and aggressively calls for the ability (and courage) to use partial knowledge.
- When you fail to guess, you let whatever partial knowledge you have go to waste.
- A plan lets you stop worrying about whether you are going to do things the right way and lets you concentrate on what's important:

**Earning Points!**



**T  
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N**

**Here's an  
outline of what  
you should do  
on the multiple-  
choice section  
of the test.**



# #1

**Note the time and the number of pages.**

- **Take/use a watch**
- **Make a note of the time when the test begins.**

**You have 60 minutes to complete the multiple-choice section.**

**That gives you an average of 12 to 15 minutes per passage.**

**Keep track of your pace.**

**If you take more than 15 min to read a passage and answer the questions, you may need to increase your pace.**



# #2

**Pick a passage to do first!**

**Some are easier than others.**

**There is no order of difficulty.**

**You know what you're good at –  
find it and do it first!**

**Why?**

- Instant confidence booster**
- Might get you ahead in pacing**
- Gives you more time with the  
challenging passages**



# #3

**Pick a passage to do last (or skip)!**

**This part of the plan is a key safety device for your time and your score.**

**Assures yourself that if you are running out of time on the last passage, it's the one that would have given you the most trouble anyway.**

**Put a big X at the top of the page to remind yourself which passage is going to be the last one.**



# # 4

**Work the passage!**

**Note the verb choice *work* not *read*!**

**Use the skills you will get in the next lesson – how to test on multiple choice passages!**



# #5

**Answer the questions in the order that you choose, using the techniques you learned.**

**Not all passages are equal and the questions differ in level of difficulty.**

**No order of difficulty exists.**

**Complete the questions in the order that works for you!**

**Do the ones you know, then come back!**

# Time Management



**YOU WILL ANSWER ROUGHLY 50 QUESTIONS  
IN 60 MINUTES AND THIS INCLUDES  
READING THE PASSAGES.**

**THERE IS NO TIME TO WASTE!**

**BUT – DON'T WORK TOO FAST!**

**YOUR GOAL SHOULD BE TO GET AS MANY  
RIGHT AS YOU CAN.**

**ANALYZE YOURSELF WITH THE FOLLOWING  
SUGGESTIONS.**

# Do it your way!



If you can get to all the passages and answer all the questions with five minutes left over, great, but don't count on it!

Plan ahead! Nobody says you have to do them order – so don't!

As soon as the test begins:

Quickly look over the passages

Decide which to do first and which to do last

Object is:

Find the hardest passage and put off doing it until the end

Reasons for this –

1. If you are going to run out of time, why not run out on the passage that you would have missed a lot of the questions.
2. The hardest passage is one that will take the most of your time.

# Which passage is the hardest?



There is really no way of knowing which one is really the hardest or has the hardest questions, so don't try to figure that out.

Look for the passage that is written in the most confusing form for you.

For most students, this means the older poetry or excessively wordy prose.

If you are better at poetry, go for it first!

In general:

1. If there are 6 or more words you don't understand in the beginning (1<sup>st</sup> paragraph or stanza), pass over it and leave it until last.
2. Look at the first few lines. Do they make sense? Do you feel comfortable?
3. Shorter passages are easier than longer ones.
4. More recent passages are easier than older ones.
5. If you read a passage and it makes you go "Huh?", put an X on it and leave it to the last.

# Skip a passage



You have 12-15 minutes per passage – this includes reading!

If there were 3 passages – you would have a solid 20 minutes each.

Some will end of skipping anyway – you just run out of time.

Goal – to get as many correct as possible.

PSAT & SAT – How did you do? Did you run out of time?

If YES, consider skipping a passage to give yourself more time.

The trade off – accuracy!

Think realistically – 20 min. left and 2 passages to go – should you rush and just answer or take your time to get some right and maybe leave some blank?

# You can still get a good score!



It is completely possible to get a 5 without completing all of the multiple-choice section questions.

It isn't easy – you need excellent essays and accurate answers on the passages you do attempt.

- If you are satisfied with a 4 (and you should be – it is an excellent score)
- You know reading comprehension questions are difficult for you –  
Consider skipping a passage!

Of course,

**Don't leave them blank**

Choose a letter and bubble them in at the end quickly!

**There is no guessing penalty!**

Guessing Aggressively with:



**POE**

# Process of Elimination



It is not just crossing out the answers that you know are wrong .

READ the question carefully – make sure you understand it.

There are two ways to answer a multiple-choice question:

1. Have the answer in mind from the moment you read the question.  
\*You'll often see the right answer among the choices!
2. Stop looking for the right answer  
\*Look for the wrong answers and eliminate them.

ETS is really good at

- writing wrong answers that are quite appealing and
- at finding spots in the text that students have trouble with.

Let's look at an example from *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole, followed by a typical question:

# Example AP Question



It asks for an evaluation of a passage for comprehension.

The majority of questions take this form.

Essentially you are being asked:

**“What’s going on in lines 5-8?”**

If you don’t spot the answer right away, use POE.

Go to each choice and say, “Why is this wrong?”

# Half Bad = All Bad



The key is to take each answer a word at a time. Don't fixate on what is right.  
If any part is wrong, **eliminate it!**

## Half Bad = All Bad

Let's look at the answer choices:

A) **ELIMINATE!**

B) ***HOLD!***

C) **ELIMINATE!**

D) **ELIMINATE!**

E) ***HOLD!***

That leave answers **B** and **E** – So now what?

# Eliminate the Obvious & Come Back!



B) A comically ironic treatment of a social misfit.

*Or*

E) A farcical treatment of an overly sensitive man.

Ask yourself:

- Is he “overly sensitive”?
- Is he a “social misfit”?

What do you do?

Choose B

## FEARLESS!

- 1) Nothing wrong with B. Tough vocab – sure. So What?
- 2) Don't be afraid to choose answer you aren't sure are right. Sometimes that's necessary.
- 3) Just make sure you don't pick answers that you think are probably wrong. Just because it is unfamiliar, doesn't mean it is right!

# What was the answer?



**B was the correct answer!**

If you were solid on the definition of the word “ironic” then you probably picked out the answer right away. The passage is ironic. Ignatius’s choice in dress is the basis of the irony. He comments on the outward appearance of others as if it indicates that they have no taste in clothing, and therefore, no decency. However, his ruffled and gaudy appearance seems anything but tasteful.

It is this contrast between the author’s description of Ignatius appearance and Ignatius’s attitude towards the shoppers that produces the irony.

# A Preview of Coming Attractions



## **ONE MORE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE**

# Art of the 7 Minute Passage (Lite)



The full technique will be given after the prose and poetry section presentation.

- Most students have time to complete 3 1/2 passages.

When you get to your last passage, check the time on the watch you brought. If you are running out of time (7 minutes or less), you must take emergency measures.

1. Don't read the passage. (You don't get points for reading.)
2. Go directly to the questions.
3. Answer the questions that take no reading.
4. Then, answer the questions that take a little reading.
5. Then, answer the rest until you run out of time.

Still lost? Let's look at an example.

# Example



Let's look at three questions:

1. What is the main point of the passage?

2. The phrase *cold fire* is an example of

3. In the context of the passage, the phrase *wang-a-dang-doodle* (line 123) probably means

If you had 7 minutes to answer these questions, which one would you choose first?

After #2, look for other questions like it and answer those right away.

Then start looking for questions like #3.

Finally, look at questions like #1 (big picture questions) and make good guesses.

**Remember – Your goal is as many accurate guesses as possible!**

One Final Tool:



**CONCENTRATION**

# Concentration



Stating the obvious here, but once you start working – concentrate.

Easy, right? Not really – Reading too fast is easy and doesn't allow you to understand what you just read, and you NEED to understand it to answer the questions correctly.

Remember, this test is tough. Force yourself to stay focused on what you are reading.

**Don't blank out! (Everyone does it so don't think you won't!)**

When you come across a line or text that doesn't make sense to you, don't let it trip you up. You aren't reading hieroglyphics and it won't magically come to you.

When a sentence starts to get away from you Stop. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Open your eyes. Begin again. IF it still doesn't make sense, move on and come back to it later. Keep reading.

# Summary



Basic Principles of  
Cracking the System

## Have a Plan:

1. Note the time and the number of passages.
2. Pick a passage to do first.
3. Pick a passage to do last.
4. Work the passage.
5. Answer *all* the questions on the passage, using the techniques you learned.

## Time Management:

- Guess aggressively.
- Pick a passage to do last based on what you consider your greatest weakness.
- Skip a passage, guess on all the questions for the passage, and still get a good score.
- Learn the Art of the 7 Minute Passage (Lite or Full) and use it.

## POE

- Guess aggressively
- Use POE (Process of Elimination)
- Look closely at the wording of each answer choice for what is wrong, and eliminate.
- Bubble an answer for *all* questions, even if it is just your Letter of the Day.

# Works Cited



McMullen, Douglas Jr. "Basic Principles of the Multiple-Choice Section." *Cracking the AP English Literature & Composition Exam*. New York: 2011.