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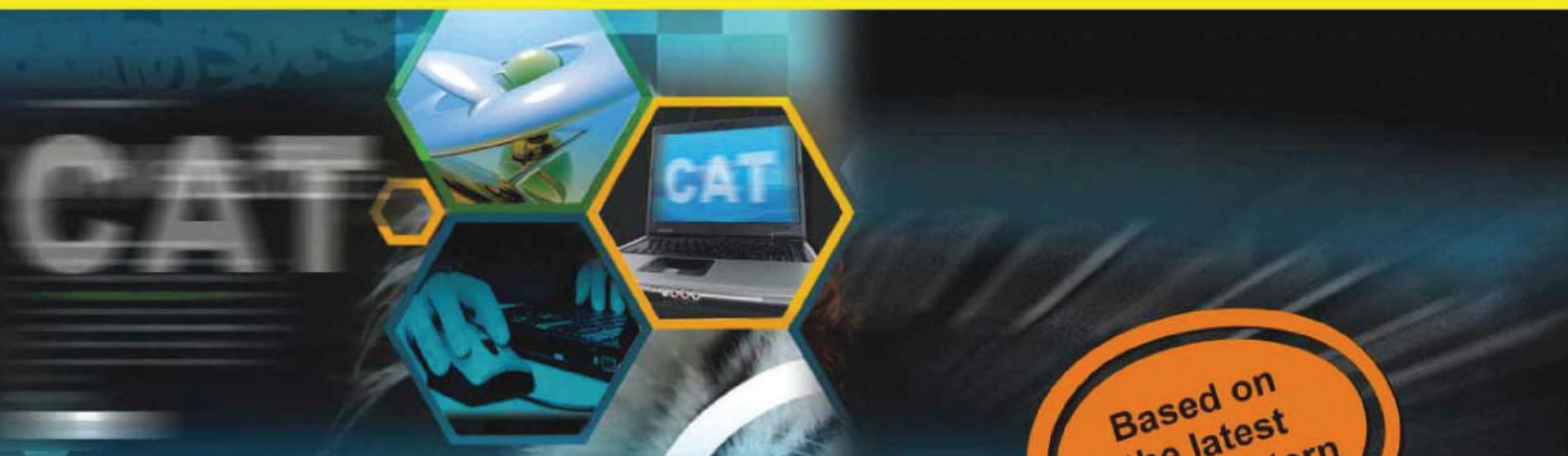
How to Prepare *for*

Verbal Ability *and* Reading Comprehension

for the

CAT

COMMON
ADMISSION
TEST



Based on
the latest
online pattern

- Arun Sharma
- Meenakshi Upadhyay

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CAT

Fourth Edition

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Meenakshi Upadhyay has been deeply involved in training students for the CAT and other Management entrance examinations over the last decade. A British Council certified trainer for communications and business English, she is also a corporate trainer in the fields of personality, language, etiquette and communication training.

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Educational Consultants



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*To
our son
Shaurya*

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

The CAT has gone online and in its aftermath we have embarked on a new journey of preparation. The online CAT was not much of a surprise regarding pattern of questions but a definite structure did evolve which was followed throughout the entire period of the examination.

Keeping in mind the dynamic nature of the exam and also the latest trends in the online version, we are pleased to present you with a revised edition of this popular book that aims to fully address the need of aspirants.

In this edition

1. Three mock tests on the latest online CAT pattern with solutions.
2. A mix of questions with four and five options (keeping in mind the unpredictable nature of the way questions are asked).
3. New section on phrasal verbs.
4. An informative write up on how to take a holistic approach to the online CAT from the perspective of the aspirant.

The book is totally in sync with the exam and to provide a one-stop solution for CAT and MBA exam aspirants.

As a student preparing for these highly competitive examinations, we would like to remind you that thorough preparation of the English section is imperative for success in CAT.

Through this book, we are providing the reader with an invaluable resource for improving your language section score drastically. Contained in this book is the very best advisory for each and every question type as also for developing your skills in comprehending and understanding the English language. Your job is to ensure that you follow the process diligently.

KEY ISSUES IN PREPARATION

1. Sentence Comprehension is the Core Skill in English

For many CAT aspirants, especially those who do not have a convent education background, this section represents the biggest hurdle in the CAT and indeed so, in most other management entrance exams.

At the same time, even for students who have the best education and are seemingly good at English, the experience of the past few years' CAT papers shows us that being good at speaking and conversing in English might not guarantee you a top percentile score.

The Role of Reading in Developing Your Language Solving Skills

The most commonly heard advice for career aspirants when it comes to preparing for this all important section is "Read more and more". So it is your right to ask, "If I read more and more, would I get a solution to my problem in the language section in a time frame of say, four months?"

The answer to this question is largely in the negative. The reason for the same is that for you to develop your scores in Verbal Ability (VA) and Reading Comprehension (RC) by just reading more and more—you require maybe a 2–3 year cycle of preparation. Four months would be more like scratching the surface for the same.

We are not saying for a moment that reading is not important for preparing yourself for this section. Reading more and more remains one of the primary activities that you would still need to do, but rather than doing it blindly it would definitely be better for you if you did it with a clear purpose.

First of all let us try to set the objectives of reading more and more.

One of the key problems aspirants face when they take the CAT is that the language is too complex and the options for the answer to the question asked are too close for comfort.

Your comfort with the language you read in the examination is going to depend on three broad factors. These give rise to the possibilities of the kind of language you are going to face:

1. Short Sentences (10–15 words long) *versus* Long Sentences (25+ words long)
2. Easy Vocabulary *versus* Tough Vocabulary
3. Familiar Topic *versus* Unfamiliar Topic

So obviously, short sentences, easy vocabulary and familiar topics would be the easiest to handle while you would have to grapple with long sentences, tough vocabulary and unfamiliar topics.

Needless to say, when aspirants face such language they lose control over the solving of questions based on such paragraphs and passages.

So obviously, one of your primary objectives has to be to improve your skill in handling the most complex language scenarios that the above three dimensions can throw up.

What we are referring to would be clear from the example below:

Consider this paragraph from a reading comprehension section of the CAT 2008 question paper:

“Finally, while we still have some other past societies to consider before we switch our attention to the modern world, we must already be struck by some parallels between the Maya and the past societies. As on Mangareva, the Maya environmental and population problems led to increasing warfare and civil strife. Similarly, on Easter Island and at Chaco Canyon, the Maya peak population numbers were followed swiftly by political and social collapse. Paralleling the eventual extension of agriculture from Easter Island’s coastal lowlands to its uplands, and from the Mimbres floodplain to the hills, Copan’s inhabitants also expanded from the floodplain to the more fragile hill slopes, leaving them with a larger population to feed when the agricultural boom in the hills went bust. Like Easter Island chiefs erecting ever larger statues, eventually crowned by Pukao, and like Anasazi elite treating themselves to necklaces of 2000 turquoise beads, Maya kings sought to outdo each other with more and more impressive temples, covered with thicker and thicker plaster – reminiscent in turn of the extravagant conspicuous consumption by modern American CEOs. The passivity of Eater chiefs and Maya Kings in the face of the real big threats to their societies completes our list of disquieting parallels.”

The above paragraph contains 202 words and has 6 sentences, giving an average sentence length of 33.66 words! And this is more of a rule than exception. An aspirant whose comfort level consists of 10-word sentences would be badly out of his depth in such a paragraph.

So the first point we would like to make here is:

You should focus on improving your ability to comprehend longer sentences with complex vocabulary on unfamiliar topics.

Do all your reading activity with this goal in mind and you would suddenly realise that a 3-year cycle of development would crash into 4 months.

Remember, improved comprehension of sentences could well be the game-changer you are looking for in your language preparations!!!

2. CAT Questions are More about Logic Than about Language

Consider a Sample Question and its Options

The question was based on a passage in Reading Comprehension (which obviously cannot be reproduced here due to space constraints) but we want you to just focus on reading the options well. Very often one sees that aspirants make an error in an answer simply because they have not understood *what the question is asking* and *what the options are saying*.

So read the options carefully and try to slot them into clear-cut compartments.

The question was:

What is the thematic highlight of the passage?

1. In the absence of strong biological linkages, reciprocal roles provide the mechanism for coordinating human behaviour.
2. In the absence of reciprocal roles, biological linkages provide the mechanism for coordinating human behaviour.
3. Human behaviour is independent of biological linkages and reciprocal roles.
4. Human behaviour depends on biological linkages and reciprocal roles.
5. Reciprocal roles determine normative human behaviour in society.

If you were to observe the options carefully you would realise that all the options are talking about the interrelationship between three concepts viz:

- A. Biological Linkages**
- B. Reciprocal Roles**
- C. Human Behaviour**

With this understanding if you were to look at the options they can be rewritten as:

1. In the absence of strong A, B provides the mechanism to coordinate C.
2. In the absence of B, A provides the mechanism to coordinate C.
3. C is independent of A and B.
4. C depends on A and B
5. B determines C.

Once you have this kind of clarity in your mind about what each of these options is saying all you need to do is to understand the purpose of what the author is saying in the passage. Now if you were to read the following random extracts from the passage, what do you conclude is the author saying?

Statements from the First Paragraph

Human Biology does nothing to structure human society.

Giving birth is certainly not sufficient to be a mother but, as adoption and fostering show, it is not even necessary!

Statements from the Second Paragraph

The fine detail of what is expected of a mother or a father or a dutiful son differs from culture to culture, but everywhere behaviour is coordinated by the reciprocal nature of roles. Husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, waiters and customers, teachers and pupils, warlords and followers—each makes sense only in its relation to the other.

Statements from the Fourth Paragraph

The American sociologist Erving Goffman built an influential body of social analysis on elaborations of the metaphor of social life as drama. Perhaps his most telling point was that it is only through acting out a part that we express character.

Correct Option

It is clear that the author is indeed talking about a relationship between B (reciprocal roles) and C (human behaviour). So, clearly 2 and 3 are rejected. Option 4 can be rejected on the basis of the fact that the author is saying the opposite of the dependence of C on A. In fact he is saying that C does not depend on A. So we are in between options 1 and 5.

In order to choose the correct option from these, you need to read the options clearly and take a call.

Option 1 is talking about the “**absence of strong biological linkages**” in a society. Hence, all you need to do to eliminate this option is to ask yourself the question—“Can biological linkages ever be absent in a society?” Your mind would tell you clearly that this cannot happen. Hence, we are only left with option 1 which indeed is the key argument that the author is taking.

Key Arguments

Obviously the point of discussing this question with you is to make a certain argument about your preparation process for the language section. And the key arguments one is trying to make are:

1. Solving a language question is an exact science i.e. just as solving a Quantitative Aptitude or Data Interpretation question. This section too always has one clear answer. The only issue is whether you have developed your mind enough to see it!
2. Even if you have good command over English you should not take this section lightly and do your preparations to actually develop your reliability to score well always. Remember they test more of your logical thinking ability rather than your level of English. So knowing English is no guarantee to scoring well in this section. Focus on clearing the cobwebs from your mind, induce clarity in your thought and you should be well on your way!

3. Concluding Note

It has always been our effort to help and guide you with the best possible study material and practise questions so that you get a simulated experience of the whole process before you take the actual exam. As the saying goes, *“The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win. Everyone wants to win, but not everyone wants to prepare to win. Preparing to win is where the determination that you will win, is made. Once the game or test or project is underway, it is too late to prepare to win. The actual game, test or project is just the end of a long process of getting ready, in which the outcome was really determined. So if you want to win, you must want to prepare to win. Once you prepare to win, winning is almost anti climatic.”*

ALL THE BEST!!

**ARUN SHARMA
MEENAKSHI UPADHYAY**

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The English section, comprising Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension, is one of the most crucial components of the Common Admission Test (CAT). Questions worth 50 marks have been appearing from this section regularly for the past five years. As teachers in this field for the past 11 years, we have found it extremely difficult to recommend one single book that would comprehensively cover the entire English portion of the CAT. This constant dilemma, coupled with the overwhelming response that we received for *How to Prepare for Quantitative Aptitude for the CAT* and *How to Prepare for Data Interpretation for the CAT*, prompted us to think of preparing a book on *How to Prepare for Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension for the CAT*. Besides CAT, this book would effectively meet the requirements of exams like XAT, IIFT, IRMA, CET, MAT, UPMCAT, and Bank PO examinations, where the English section is essentially a very vital component.

However, conceptualising and compiling a book which would provide a one-stop solution for English was not an easy task. And the inputs that we got from our sources regarding the expectations from such a book were no less demanding. They talked about a book which should help students:-

- (a) *improve* their reading,
- (b) give substantial inputs on how to read and *retain* it,
- (c) teach accurate ways of *interpreting* the written material (*Refer Part I on Reading Skill Development*),
- (d) have exhaustive *practice of Reading Passages*,
- (e) have exhaustive *practice for Reading Comprehension questions*,
- (f) have *CAT questions*,
- (g) provide the *correct approach to solve CAT questions* in the limited timeframe (*See section on Illustrated CAT Passages*),
- (h) have *solved examples* of previous year CAT Reading Comprehension questions,
- (i) have *difficulty-based exercises* (one of the unique features of our previous books—*See the Level of Difficulty (LOD) exercises given at various sections*),
- (j) provide students with a *rich vocabulary*—graded, if possible and suggest ways of enriching it,
- (k) have sections on root words, origin of words, foreign words, prefixes, and suffixes,
- (l) cover all *vocabulary-based question types* (like Antonyms, Synonyms, Odd-mans outs, and Analogies),
- (m) cover question types and solving techniques for Fill in the Blanks/Cloze Tests; single and double blanks,
- (n) provide a comprehensive solution to the all important question types of Paragraph Jumbles and Critical Reasoning (areas which we have covered in an extensive manner),
- (o) have a section on Sentence Correction since it puzzles everyone and
- (p) cover the all important Verbal Reasoning portion (where the inputs are too enormous to write in a single line).

Efforts have been made to accommodate the all these points. Basically, the book has been prepared in such a fashion that it would help students having varying requirements.

Structure

The book has been divided into four parts.

1. Reading Comprehension
2. Verbal Ability
3. Verbal Reasoning
4. Mock Test Papers

Let us now briefly look at the suggested approach for each part of the book.

Part I: Reading Comprehension

While going through the first part on Reading Comprehension your focus should be on:

- (a) Improving your reading skills (ability to read, grasp and retain information)
- (b) Improving your ability to predict questions that might be framed on a passage even as you read the passage (In fact, there is an entire chapter devoted to CAT passages which illustrate what you should perceive at each stage within the reading of a passage)
- (c) Understanding the various types of questions that are framed under Reading Comprehension and how to solve these question types
- (d) Gaining extensive practice through the Level of Difficulty (LOD) 1, LOD 2 and CAT Exercises provided

PART II: Verbal Ability

The second part of the book concentrates on three levels of the language viz., word level, sentence level and paragraph level.

The word level, apart from giving you a glimpse and practice of the various vocabulary-based question types asked in competitive exams, also contains an exclusive section to help you develop your vocabulary. This section has Word Lists based on three levels of difficulty—the words segregated on the basis of the frequency of appearance of the word in the CAT examination. To make full use of this feature in this book, you are required to work under a proper routine and go through the Word Lists in increasing order of difficulty.

Besides we have also given a comprehensive and rare collection of roots, prefixes and suffixes as well as foreign origin words, which is rather a unique feature of this book.

You will also get adequate question exposure and practice questions under the following question types: Fill in the blanks, Grammatical error-based questions, Paragraph Jumbles, etc.

PART III: Verbal Reasoning

This section exposes you to the various questions types in verbal reasoning viz., Critical Reasoning, Syllogisms, Binary Logic and Logical Deductions. Adequate practice sets for each of these question types have been provided for improving your skills.

Part IV: Mock Test Papers

This part has eight Mock Test Papers designed in the pattern of CAT questions.

Efforts have been made to make the book as student-friendly as possible. Any suggestion for improvement will be highly acknowledged and appreciated.

ARUN SHARMA
MEENAKSHI UPADHYAY

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I would like to begin by being grateful for the guidance and inspiration given by my late grandparents Dr. S.N. Upadhyay and Smt. Indira R. Upadhyay. The values and beliefs that they instilled in me have been a source of constant inspiration in my life.

I am thankful to my late father Mr. G.S. Upadhyay whose stories and knowledge inculcation have had a very special significance for me, and my mother Sandhya who with her unflinching support through thick and thin has helped me reach where I am today. I also owe thanks to my sister Jaysashree who introduced me to the wonderful world of books and unfolded the voracious reader in me and my brother Sanchindra who has always been there whenever I needed him. Special mention and thanks are also due to my brother-in-law and sister-in-law—Aparna and Dr. Rajarshi.

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My husband Arun has been a pillar of strength in whatever I have done. This book would have been impossible without him.

MEENAKSHI UPADHYAY

We would like to thank our students and readers across India who remain our primary motivation to discover better and more efficient ways of thinking. Our team members at MindWorkzz are a constant source of support and encouragement and we would like to especially mention Mr. S. Mazumadar, Bilplab Ghosh, Shyam Kumar, Tarannum, Ashish Singh, Anadi Upadhyay, Umesh Kumar, Abhijeet, Mr. Vinod Choudhary, Prabhat Rajan, Vijay Kumar, Kshitij Gupta and Prakash Purti for standing with us through thick and thin.

The wonderful people at Tata McGraw-Hill with their amazing insights and professional guidance are responsible in bringing out the book. They are a constant source of learning for us. We extend our special thanks to this team—Mr. Biju Kumar, Mr. Kannath Prakash, Mr. Niju Sreedharan and Ms. Medha Arora.

ARUN SHARMA

THE ONLINE CAT: FROM A VA/RC PERSPECTIVE

Welcome to the world of online CAT!

The advent of the online version of the Common Admission Test (CAT) in 2009 brought with it a whole lot of opinions and views about

- what has changed in the examination and
- what should be the ideal preparation pattern.

Therefore, one objective in this revised edition of this widely read book is to look at the issues that an aspirant needs to consider while preparing for the online CAT. We would like to discuss this issue in the following parts:

1. What has changed ?

A comprehensive analysis of what are the critical dimensions of the changes that have taken place in the CAT in its online avatar. Here, a picture has been presented regarding what these changes mean for the aspirant, both in respect of positive and negative factors, taking into account the following:

- (a) Changes in the test-taking experience
- (b) Changes in the exam pattern.

2. What does all this mean for the Preparation Process? How has it changed and how has it remained constant?

While doing so I have taken the help of a varied experiential sample of test-takers across India and also my own personal experience of taking (and may I add dominating) the CAT. Given below are some of the implications of the online version of the CAT in the context of the Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension section (which this book is all about)

I. WHAT HAS CHANGED

The 'Experience' of Taking the Test

1. Cleaner and More Efficient

Compared to the paper-and-pen based CAT, the online version is much cleaner as regards the clarity of questions, their visibility, and the overall feel of the question-solving experience. Consequently, the efficiency (of the thought processes) is much higher, leading to a much superior test-solving experience.

2. Space Management on the Table

In the paper-and-pen version, the aspirants had to typically manage the test paper, admit card, watch, pencils (at least 2), eraser, sharpener along with the answer sheet on the table. To add to their woes, the paper-and-pen versions of the exam were mostly conducted in schools. Very often the aspirants had to contend with the additional challenge of managing all this paraphernalia on a school boy's small table. In addition, if luck did not run your way and you were made to sit in a classroom meant for juniors (between classes 3 to 6), you really had a challenge.

Most of these problems have disappeared in the new version. The fact that computer terminals in most colleges and universities are of standard shape and size eliminates the imbalance created due to non-uniformity of examination equipment. Besides, while writing the online version of the CAT, all you need to manage on the table are the mouse, the key board, a pencil and a sheet of paper for rough work; no watches, erasers, sharpeners test paper and answer sheet are there to bother you. No turning of pages in the Reading Comprehension section for the passages and the questions. What a relief!!!!

3. Moving Questions in the Test

Unlike the paper-and-pen version where test-takers could scan the whole question paper in one look, in the online CAT, aspirants have to move one question at a time. This has both its advantages and disadvantages in terms of the overall test experience. The obvious disadvantage that most aspirants face is the fact that since you could not really see the whole paper in one look, you could not make a judgment about the balance, the difficulty level or the topic-wise question distribution in the paper. Although we are referring to the Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension (VA/RC) section here, this is also true for all the sections in the exam.

Ironically, the biggest advantage for the examinee in terms of the online CAT is exactly the same i.e. since you could not see the entire paper at one go, the only option while taking the test is to look at the questions one by one. The option of clicking and going to the next question and thus seeing all of them is there but it would mean an unnecessary waste of time. This is a huge advantage because of three main reasons mentioned below:

- **Higher Focus while Solving an Individual Question:** As the aspirant does not know the exact number of questions from various areas and cannot estimate the difficulty level of the paper, he/she is left with no choice but to focus on one question (visible on the screen) at a time. The result is that the aspirant easily achieves the all-important ‘tunnel vision’ while solving a question. Consequently, the aspirant is able to zero in on the problem at hand with clarity and concentration in the online test than conventional paper-and-pen based exam.

When the aspirant solves a question on computer screen, the experience of the previous question tends to get erased from his mind. This helps him to put his entire attention to solving the present question. This is not the case in the paper-and-pencil based test where the aspirant tends to carry the negative experience of a badly-solved question to the next question.

Thus, the specific advantage of the online version of test is that “forgetting” a bad experience is relatively easy. The moment an aspirant navigates from one question to the other, he forgets the previous question so much so that remembering a question that was just two questions back is close to impossible. Hence, negative emotions from a previous bad experience do not linger on.

- **The Need for Faster Navigation (Less Time Wasted on Unsolvable Questions):** Since the examinees do not see the full question paper right at the beginning, they move to the next question quickly. This results in students seeing a higher percentage of questions in the online test than in the paper-and-pencil based exam.

Author’s Note—One of the problems we have noticed in the paper-and-pencil based exam is that most examinees are not able to “see” the entire paper. i.e. the fraction of the English section that they were able to process was a fraction of the entire test paper. As a result they used to miss out on a large number of questions which they should have attempted as they wasted their time in question types/ Reading Comprehension (RC) passages that they should not have attempted!

Part of this time mismanagement also occurred due to the fact that they did not have the clock ticking on the screen in front of them. Therefore, there was a tendency of losing track of how much time they had spent in attempting to solve a question. A good percentage of the time the aspirants used to spend in the English section (and especially the reading comprehension) was spent in trying to solve a question/passage where they eventually had a low accuracy rate.

All this has changed for better in the online version of the examination. There is a greater imperative to move to the next question due to the twin facts that you do not see the entire paper as you move from one question to the other, and that the ticking clock is present on the screen in front of your eyes all the time. As a result you are aware of the exact amount of time you spend on a particular question/passage. The net result is that test-takers move faster from one question to the next and the faster navigation directly converts into a higher percentage of the total attemptable questions being attempted than in the paper-and-pen version of the examination. Thus time management improves drastically for the examinee.

(Contd...)

We believe this is one of the main reasons why a lot of students who were trying to compare the two versions of the CAT said that the online version was easier. Since the amount of time spent in questions which they were eventually not able to solve, reduced drastically, they got a feeling that they were solving questions all the time as opposed to the paper-and-pencil version where aspirants used to have an overall negative experience of the test (as they would end up spending a lot of time in attempting “unsolvable” questions).

- **Advantage for Reading Comprehension:** In the online examination, the passages are relatively smaller than passages of previous years and only three questions are given per passage. Online test gives much superior solving experience to the aspirants because questions are visible together with the passage. In the pen-and-paper based examination, the Reading Comprehension involved a lot of turning of pages to see the questions. Also the number of questions per passage has been reduced to three, which is a significant change. But it also demands accuracy on part of the student as the number of questions has also been reduced.

4. Mark/Unmark Button and the Review Button

A very important feature in the online version is the introduction of the review button. In the paper-and-pencil version, it was extremely difficult to track the number of your attempts and especially so in the context of questions that you were unsure about and/or questions which you wanted to come back to. There was simply no way in which you could keep a track of those and as a result there was effectively “no second chance” at a question.

This too changed in the online CAT. For every question, apart from the facility to answer it, you also had a MARK button, which would give you easy access to the question at the end of the paper. When you have completed the paper (reached the last question in the paper), you also got access to a review screen that in one visual showed you all the questions you have solved as well as all the questions you have marked with the MARK button. So going back to a specific question in the paper was just the click of the mouse away.

5. Highlighting

One apprehension aspirants have with respect to solving Reading Comprehension on the computer is due to the habit of underlining various parts/sentence of the passage while reading. The online software used in CAT has a highlighting option which allows this to happen. Not only is that, highlighting is a much better way of relocating information in the passage than underlining.

To sum up, the net effect of the online CAT was a superior test-taking experience—something that gives you a chance to be more in control of your test—and thus aim for a higher score assuming that the same set of questions would have been asked in the paper-and-pencil version.

II. WHAT HAS CHANGED IN TERMS OF THE EXAM PATTERN?

Having seen the specific changes that have occurred in terms of the test-taking experience, let us now examine another crucial aspect.

Changes in Exam Pattern: Obviously for the purpose of this book, the analysis will pertain to the Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension portion only. In order to read a similar analysis with respect to the other sections namely, **Quantitative Aptitude and Data Interpretation**, you can refer to my books on those subjects (also published by Tata McGraw Hill). The major changes in the pattern of the Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension paper can be summarised through the following points:

1. **More balanced portion coverage**
2. **Reduction in number of questions**
3. **Uniform pattern in all papers**
4. **Higher percentage cutoffs**
5. **Higher penalty for mistakes**

1. More Balanced Portion Coverage

As per the scheme followed in this book, the English portion can be divided into 6 major parts.

The underlying constant that used to exist in the paper-and-pencil version (through the entire decade prior to the first online CAT) was the prominence of Reading Comprehension and presence of, may be, 2–3 VA question types like para jumbles, sentence correction, last sentence of paragraph, critical reasoning, correct usage, etc.

In each of the years from 1999 to 2008, the English section required you to get a net score of approximately 30–40% of the total marks in order to score a high 90 percentile in this section.

The table below shows the break-up in terms of % weightage given to the question types in 2009 CAT:

<i>Block</i>	<i>Weightage (as a % of total marks)</i>
Reading Comprehension	45%
Para Jumbles	15–25%
Last Sentence of Paragraph	15–25%
Fill in the Blanks	15%
Sentence Correction	5%
Correct Usage [Phrasal Verbs]	10–15%

The following table shows a number of question-wise break-up in the different areas:

<i>Block</i>	<i>Number of Questions</i>
Reading Comprehension	9
Para Jumbles	2–5
Last Sentence of Paragraph	2–5
Fill in the Blanks	3
Sentence Correction	1
Correct Usage [Phrasal Verbs]	2–3

2. Reduction in Number of Questions

The second major change in the English section is the reduction of questions to 20—from 55 questions in the late nineties to 50 between 2000 and 2003, to 30 and then 25 in the last years of the paper-and-pencil version. The number of questions has further gone down to 20 in the online version. Naturally, this reduced the amount of choice the aspirant had for leaving out a question.

For instance in CAT 2003 out of 50 questions, you needed to solve 15 to get to the cut off. This meant that at 100% accuracy, you could afford to leave 35 questions. This scenario has now changed drastically as is evident from the table below.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of questions in QA</i>	<i>Number of Marks</i>	<i>Cut off at (approx Number of Marks)</i>	<i>Number of Questions You Could Leave @ 100% Accuracy</i>	<i>Number of Questions You Could Leave @ 90% Accuracy</i>
CAT 1999	55	55	16–18	37+	32+
CAT 2000–04	50	50	12–14	36+	32+
CAT 2005	30	50	12–14	20+	16+
CAT 2006–08	25	100	28–32	17–18	14+
Online CAT	20	80	40–48	8+	5+

- As you can see, there is very little elbowroom available now in the online version to leave out questions and expect a good percentile score.
- The expectation in the future is that students taking the CAT would have to really use their English skills and attempt as many questions as possible in order to get a top percentile in the test.

3. Uniformity

The third major factor in terms of paper pattern was the uniformity of the test paper. The English section on all days was more or less of the same level, although there are reports of questions being more difficult in the later days of the examination but that is more a question of perception of the level and is open to debate.

An issue that is being discussed widely on the internet is *fairness*. A lot of voices rose against the CAT committee and the online version of the exam questioning the fairness of the testing process.

The Key Criticism

In the context of multiple papers with varying difficulty levels, how would the IIMs judge fairly between students who solved a high percentage of the questions in an easy test versus students who were able to solve a lower number of questions in a more difficult paper? The answer to this is really simple. Since the population size of each paper was significantly large, the IIMs could easily define individual percentiles in each test and ensure fairness to all.

The key point to be noted here is that there are infinite statistical ways through which processes like this can be made fair to everyone. As a future CAT aspirant, however, what you need to worry about is preparing diligently and facing the exam with a positive attitude. Control what you can and do not worry about things that are outside your control.

4. Higher Percentage Cutoffs

In the online version, aspirants wasted less time in questions which they thought were unsolvable and moved on to those they could solve. The result — most students were able to raise their scores in this section significantly.

Consequently sectional cut offs which used to be in the range of 30% of the net marks rose to around 40 – 45% of the marks.

5. Higher Penalty for Mistakes

In the online version, the number of errors have been penalised heavily with higher penalty for more errors progressively.

III. WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR THE PREPARATION PROCESS? HOW HAS IT CHANGED AND HOW HAS IT REMAINED CONSTANT?

Let us look at this aspect in two broad parts:

1. What are the changes that need to happen in the preparation processes for the online CAT vis-a-vis the preparation process for the traditional paper-and-pencil version?
2. What are the things and issues that remain constant in the preparation process?

Changes in Preparation Process

For the first question, the specific things come to my mind.

1. More Balanced Portion Coverage Needed

As explained above, in the paper-and-pencil version, the best approach for English preparation was to do 2–3 question types well knowing that the rest would take care of itself. In fact, the elbowroom was so much that you could crack the entire language section without touching RC.

However, in the new online version, since the weightage of distribution of questions is much more even, this approach is no longer going to work. Also, since the elbowroom has reduced drastically, you need to be much more thorough with your preparations of each question type.

Hence, the need to cover all aspects of the portion well and not ignore any particular portion is perhaps the first and the biggest change that needs to be done in the preparation process.

2. Need to cover the basics well, namely, speedily solving LOD 1 questions and the ability to think through LOD 2 and LOD 3 questions

In the early years (1980s and upto the late 1990s), the CAT used to be essentially a speed test (including the English section). There were times when the paper used to consist of upto 225+ questions to be solved in 120 minutes. Questions used to be one-liners and could be solved easily. The key differentiation used to be the speed at which the aspirants could solve questions. However, from late 1990s onwards, the English section of the CAT had become a real test of English language intelligence. Questions ceased to be easy unless you had a very high degree of understanding and intelligence.

The online CAT in its first year tended to be a mix of both these extremes. Papers consisted of between 4–6 LOD 1 topped up by LOD 2 and LOD 3 questions. So while most aspirants found 4–6 very easy questions in each paper, they also had to really use their English ability to cross 10–12 correct attempts. In the future, as the IIMs improve the quality of the database of questions, one can expect the quality of the questions to improve drastically and hence the LOD 2 and LOD 3 questions contained in this book would be an extremely important resource to solve for maximizing your score in this section in the exam.

For the future CAT aspirant and the readers of our books the advice is short and simple. Cover both the flanks—solve the easier LOD 1 questions *and* improve your English language intelligence to cover the higher end questions of LOD 2 and LOD 3 level.

3. The Need to take Computer Based Tests in Order to be Able to Think on the Computer

Thinking and solving questions from the computer screen is a slightly different experience than solving from a physical book. Thus students and aspirants are advised to experience this change by going for online solving experience. It is in this context that we have tied up with www.mindworkzz.in to give our readers a feel of the online problem solving experience. However, in spite of these seemingly big external changes, my personal opinion is that the changes are mostly external in nature.

Issues that Remain Constant

The essence of preparation of the English section remains the same in a lot many fundamental ways. Some of these that come readily to mind are:

1. The Need to Develop Mental Structures for the CAT

English preparation has always been associated with the development of the language and analytical thinking processes and thought structures for specific situations. The smart CAT aspirant is able to create the analytical thoughts in his mind to situations that he would encounter in the exam.

The whole battle for English preparation in the CAT essentially has been the battle to develop the ability to process information at varying levels of the language—and analyse it. Remember, this exam (and all other good aptitude exams) test you for your ability to apply logic in real life situations. Thus, the imperative remains to be able to recognize and comprehend various writing patterns, structures and styles.

Besides, the need to create exposure to diverse reading so as to be able to analyse a passage/paragraph/sentence in a superior manner than an average test-taker remains as strong as ever. Hence, the **imperative to form “thought algorithms” for standard and diverse forms of writing in the English language and also a thought process for the techniques associated with each question type remains as strong as ever.**

2. The Need for Thoroughness in your Preparation

This is again something that does not change.

To sum up, the CAT still remains a test of your intelligence and analytical skills and an aspirant should focus on this aspect. This book provides plenty of practice and exposure to various chapters and aspects of the examination pattern that will eventually hone your skills in this aspect.

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Highlights...

Numerous examples have been provided throughout the chapters for a better understanding of the concepts discussed in the book. The icon ☹️ stands for the relevant example while 💡 provides the explanatory answer for that.

huge, but somehow plausible, later gains. Nigerians, especially, are renowned for elaborate and persuasive tales: "my uncle the president, died leaving me a million to smuggle to your country; let me use your bank account to hide the cash and you will get a slice; oh, and pay me a few thousand dollars in advance for handling fees".

💡 The topic and the main idea are visible in the second sentence of the second paragraph. The topic is 'advance fee frauds in Africa' and the main idea is—what is done in these frauds.

☹️ "Our everyday life is much stranger than we imagine, and rests on fragile foundation." This is the intriguing first sentence of a very unusual new book about Economics, and much else besides: "The Company of Strangers", by Paul Seabright, a professor of Economics at the University of Toulouse. Why is everyday life so strange? Because, explains Mr Seabright, it is so much at odds with what would have seemed, as recently as 10000 years ago, our evolutionary destiny. It was only then that "one of the most aggressive and elusive bandit species in the entire animal kingdom" decided to settle down. In no more than the blink of an eye, in evolutionary time, these suspicious and untrusting creatures, these "shy, murderous apes", developed co-operative networks of staggering scope and complexity—networks that rely on trust among strangers. When you come to think about it, it was an extraordinarily improbable outcome.

💡 The topic is the 'unlikely evolution of the human species' and the idea conveyed is that the human species has moved from being an aggressive and elusive bandit species to a species which has developed cooperative networks of staggering scope and complexity, something that seemed highly unlikely in the context of what was our evolutionary destiny.

☹️ "In the first weekend of every August, the town of Twinsburg, Ohio, holds a parade. Decorated floats, cars and terraces roll slowly past neat, white houses and clipped lawns, while thousands of onlookers clap and wave flags in sunshine. The scene is a perfect little slice of America. There is though, something rather strange about the participants: they all seem to come in pairs. Identical twins of all colours, shapes, ages, and sizes are assembling for the world's largest annual gathering of their kind. The Twinsburg meeting is of interest to more people than just the twins themselves. Every year, the festival attracts dozens of scientists who came to prod, swab,

sample and question the participants. For identical twins are natural clones: the odd mutation aside, they share 100% of their genes. That means studying them can cast light on the relative importance of genetics and environments in shaping particular human characteristics."

💡 The topic is 'identical twins' and the main idea as expressed in the second last and last sentences of the second paragraph is that 'studying identical twins can help us understand better, the relative importance of genetics and environment in shaping particular human characteristics.'

☹️ "The twin rule of pathology states that any heritable disease will be more concordant (that is, more likely to be jointly present or absent) in identical twins than non-identical twins—and in turn, will be more concordant in non-identical twins than in non-siblings. Early work, for example, showed that the statistical correlation of skin mole counts between identical twins was 0.4, while non-identical twins had a correlation of only 0.2 (A score of 1.0 implies perfect correlation, while a score of zero implies no correlation). This result suggests that moles are heritable, but it also implies that there is an environment component to the development of moles; otherwise, the correlation in identical twins would be close to 1.0.

💡 The topic is 'the twin rule of pathology' and the main idea about it is 'the relative concordance of heritable diseases between identical twins, non identical twins and non siblings. The idea sentence here is the first sentence of the selection. (In this case, the topic is also in the same sentence.)

The Crease of the Piece

1. The idea sentence is usually supported by all the information in the remaining part of the paragraph. Hence, a useful way to check if you have got the idea sentence and hence, the main idea correctly is by asking yourself the question—"Is the sentence you have identified as the idea sentence supported by all the other material in the paragraph?"
2. Be careful not to select a topic that is too broad or too narrow.
3. The idea sentence can occur at either the start or the middle or the end of the paragraph. Paragraphs could be written in any of the following structures.
 - A. Idea Sentence at the start of the paragraph (within the first two sentences). This is the most commonly used structure in writing. In

1.22 How to Prepare for Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension for the CAT

uninspiring leaders but we would do well to consider past American presidents.

4. **Topic :** Gordon Brown Pre-Election Budget
Main Idea : Gordon Brown's second pre-election budget, like his first, avoided traditional tax bribes to the electorate as a whole.
5. **Topic :** Mr. Wolfowitz's Selection as World Bank chief
Main Idea : Its leader needs to know about development, be able to articulate a workable vision and be a good manager.
6. **Topic :** Nigeria's changing face
Main Idea : A new economic team, led by the finance minister, a former World Bank Director called Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has made strenuous efforts to impose discipline.
7. **Topic :** A surprise cut in oil supplies.
Main Idea : Price collapse as the northern-hemisphere winter (when demand peaks) gives way to warmer spring (when oil use declines).
8. **Topic :** Deer Oh! Dear
Main Idea : Farmers increasingly sow grain and rape seed in autumn rather than spring, because crops grow more vigorously in spring and so produce better yields. That provides fodder for deer in winter.
9. **Topic :** A new use for the poison pill
Main Idea : It exists to stop shareholders enjoying their full ownership right by threatening, if triggered, to dilute the value of those shares in certain circumstances, by a firm's board.
10. **Topic :** Computer security
Main Idea : This virus, called My Doom, seems to be of a different nature—conspiratorial and political. That is because its main feature, besides humiliating Microsoft, is to turn infected machines into weapons against a controversial company called SCO.

Now we will graduate from Understanding Paragraphs to Understanding Passages

Dimension Two (C): Identifying Central Points

A passage is a series of paragraphs connected to each other through a logical idea flow. Each paragraph has its own main idea. However, when the ideas of each of the paragraphs are connected to each other, one idea stands out as it is surrounded and supported by all the ideas of the passage. Besides, it will also be supported by the details

throughout the passage. Such an idea, then, is called the central idea or the central point of the passage.

—The Crease of the Piece—
Some useful questions that need to be answered in order to determine the central point of the passage are:
"What is the idea that the author is consistently referring to throughout the passage?"
"With what point are all the ideas in the passage connected to?"
"What central idea is supported by all the supporting details in the entire passage?"

The answer to one or more of these questions will help you to identify the central point of the passage. Being able to identify the central point is a critical skill in the development of RC skills. The student should concentrate on honing this skill through his/her reading exercises. We have demonstrated this skill as applied to actual CAT passages in the detailed solved CAT passages at the end of this chapter.

Dimension Three: Ability to Predict and Identify Supporting Details

Supporting details are generally in the form of illustrations, reasons, factual evidences, examples, etc. that explain a main idea. Since supporting details are always supportive of the main idea, developing the skill to predict, an oncoming supporting detail, or to identify the supporting detail when you see one is closely related to the ability to identify main ideas—something we saw in detail in the previous Dimension. Let us look closely at some of the ways of putting in supporting details.

1. **Supporting Details as Examples** Read the following extract, where the supporting details appear as examples.

☹️ Some decisions will be fairly obvious—"no-brainers." Your bank account is low, but you have a two week vacation coming up and you want to get away to some place warm to relax with your family. Will you accept your in-laws' offer to free use of their Florida beachfront condo? Sure. You like your employer and feel ready to move forward in your career. Will you step in for your boss for three weeks while she attends a professional development course? Of course!

These are important pieces of advice/information regarding the topics discussed.

These are Section-end difficulty-based exercises graded as Level of Difficulty (LOD)-I, (LOD)-II, (LOD)-III—a unique feature on language-based books for competitive examinations.

5

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY—I

TEST I

Passage 1

One of the most successful commercial products ever launched is said to have come about as the result of a mistake. In 1896, Jacob's Pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia, was selling a nerve tonic known as 'French Wine Cola—Ideal Nerve Tonic'. By accidentally adding fizzy water instead of still water to the recipe, a pharmacist called John S. Pemberton invented what has today become the most popular soft drink in the world: Coca-Cola. Along with its closest rival—Pepsi—which appeared on the market three years later, Coke has enjoyed phenomenal success worldwide, particularly in the past fifty years. Indeed, old Coke bottles and 'limited edition' cans can often fetch considerable sums from collectors, and there are even stores which deal exclusively in Coke products and memorabilia.

What could possibly account for the amazing success of Coca-Cola? How has this combination of carbonated water, sugar, acid and flavourings come to symbolise the American way of life for most of the world? After all, even the manufacturers could hardly describe Coke as a healthy product since it contains relatively high amounts of sugar (admittedly not the case with Diet Coke which contains artificial sweeteners instead of sugar) and phosphoric acid, both of which are known to damage teeth.

One explanation may be found in the name. The original recipe included a flavouring from the coca plant and probably included small amounts of cocaine (an addictive substance), but since the early part of this century, all traces of cocaine have been removed. However, Coke (like all cola drinks) also includes a flavouring from the cola tree; cola extract contains caffeine, which is a stimulant, and the Coca-Cola company adds extra caffeine for good measure. While caffeine is not thought to be an addictive substance in itself, there is considerable evidence that over a period of time, the consumption of caffeine has to be increased in order for its

stimulating effect to be maintained, and so sales of Coke perhaps benefit as a result.

A more likely reason for the enduring popularity of Coke may, however, be found in the company's enviable marketing strategies. Over the years, it has come up with some of the most memorable commercials, tunes, slogans and sponsorship in the world of advertising, variously emphasizing international harmony, youthfulness and a carefree lifestyle. Few other companies (arguably including Pepsi) have been able to match such marketing ploys so consistently or effectively. As suggested earlier, the influences of American culture are evident just about everywhere, and Coca-Cola has somehow come to represent a vision of the United States that much of the rest of the world dreams about and aspires to. Perhaps drinking Coke brings people that little bit closer to the dream.

1. According to the paragraph, 'cans can often fetch considerable sums' means the same as:
 - (a) Coke is quite expensive in some parts of the world.
 - (b) collectors consider carefully how much they are paying for a can of Coke.
 - (c) old coke cans have a lot of value.
 - (d) some collectors will only drink Coke in exclusive stores.
 - (e) certain Coke cans are worth a lot of money as collectable items.
2. According to the paragraph, the author uses 'for good measure' to emphasize the fact that:
 - (a) there is a lot of caffeine in Coke.
 - (b) the amount of caffeine in Coke is carefully measured.
 - (c) the extra caffeine improves the taste of Coke.
 - (d) the extra caffeine balances the amount found naturally in the cola extract.
 - (e) the extra caffeine is healthy for the drinkers of Coke.

2

THE SEVEN DIMENSION APPROACH TO BETTER READING SKILLS

INTRODUCTION

The reading skills that you need to develop to improve your reading ability can be categorised into seven dimensions, which are divided into Basic and Advanced reading skills:

Basic Dimensions	Dimension 1: Understanding Vocabulary in Context
	Dimension 2: Identifying and Understanding Main Ideas
	Dimension 2(A): Identifying Implied Main Ideas
	Dimension 2(B): Identifying Supporting Details
Advanced Dimensions	Dimension 3: Identifying Relationships between Ideas
	Dimension 4 (A): Understanding the Use of Transitions
	Dimension 4 (B): Idea Organization patterns.
	Dimension 5: Identifying Facts, Opinions and Inferences
	Dimension 5 (A): Facts and Opinions
	Dimension 5 (B): Inferences
	Dimension 6: Identifying Purpose and Tone
Dimension 7: Recognising Arguments and their Common Structures.	

Fig. 2.1 Seven Dimensions of Reading Skills

BASIC DIMENSIONS OF READING SKILLS

Dimension One: Developing the Ability of Understanding Vocabulary in Context

As mentioned above, any piece of writing is a sequence of words, sentences and paragraphs. The *word* is the most basic building block of any piece of writing.

During the process of reading, we often come across situations where we are unaware of the meaning of

particular words. The presence of unfamiliar words in a piece of writing might lead to one of two types of situations:

- (a) The meaning of the word totally breaks the comprehension of the sentence, leading to uncertainty in the interpretation of the passage.
Consider the following example:

☞ (i) And the courtier said "May I *genuefact*?"

☞ (ii) Since, Ecuador's presidents are limited to one term, Mr. Gutierrez might also back his former boss. If so, things really could get *foco*.

💡 In each of the above sentences, the italicised words make the reader lose comprehension with what the author is trying to get across. Unless you happen to know the exact meaning of the word, you will be at a loss to understand the author's message. The best you can do is to create alternatives in your mind with respect to what the particular word could mean.

- (b) The meaning of the word can be understood (or pieced together) based on the context in which it is used.

If you were asked to define the words *testimony*, *charismatic* or *clannish*, you might face some discomfort. However, if you saw these words in sentences, the chances are that you would come up with fairly accurate meanings of the same words.


Consider the following examples. See whether you can define the words in italics in the following three sentences:

☞ Judge John Hass imposed a publication ban on the *testimony* of Philip Sartre, former head of Amans and Mathers, an advertising agency, as he is to stand trial on fraud charges.

Theory on reading skill development—how to comprehend passages and ways of interpreting the same.

Highlights...

Vocabulary Drill, graded according to their appearance in CAT.



WORD LIST I—HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS

1

In this chapter, we will discuss words that are frequently asked in CAT examinations. The treatment has been done in such a manner that the meaning is given first, followed by the synonym (noted by the letter S,) and antonym (noted by the letter A).

No.	Word	Definition
A		
1.	abandon	to give up S: Desert, Forsake, Leave A: Retain unrestrained activity, Exuberance
2.	abase	to humiliate S: Scorn, Belittle, Degrade A: Exalt, Cherish
3.	abate	to lessen; to subside
4.	abbreviate	to shorten S: Abridge, Condense A: Expand, Prolong
5.	abdicate	to give up formally S: Resign, Renounce A: Retain, Uphold
6.	abdication	giving up control, authority
7.	aberration	straying away from what is normal
8.	abet	to assist (normally a crime) S: Conspire, Conive A: Dissuade, Deter
9.	abhor	to hate; to detest
10.	abide	to endure
11.	abjure	promise or swear to give up
12.	ablation	washing
13.	abridgement	a short summary S: Outline, Abbreviation, Summary, Abstract A: Enlargement, Expansion
14.	abscond	to go away suddenly (to avoid arrest)
15.	abstruse	difficult to comprehend; obscure
16.	abysmal	extremely bad
17.	abyss	a bottomless pit, anything too deep to measure S: Chasm A: Summit, Elevation
18.	accede	agree to S: Assent, Concur A: Refuse, Dissent
19.	acclaimed	welcomed with shouts and approval
20.	accolade	praise; approval
21.	accost	to approach and speak to S: Greet A: Shun, Avoid
22.	accredit	to approve, certify
23.	accomplice	a partner in crime
24.	acquaint	to inform, to make familiar
25.	acquit	to clear (a person) of a charge
26.	acrid	sharp (as in speech)
27.	acrimony	bitterness or harshness of speech or manner
28.	acronym	word formed from the initial letters of a group of words
29.	acumen	Keeness of mind, Insight
30.	adage	An old saying, Proverb
31.	adamant	inflexible
32.	addle	to become rotten; to become confused
33.	adduce	to offer as example, reason or proof
34.	adjudicate	to settle judicially
35.	adjure	to beg, appeal
36.	admonish	to warn, reprove mildly

ILLUSTRATED CAT PASSAGES (SOLVED)

4

The following eleven passages are a reproduction of the Reading Comprehension (RC) section of the CAT paper. The first three passages are from CAT 2006 paper & the later eight passages are from CAT 2003 paper. The choice of papers from these two years is due to the following reasons:

- Upto 2005, CAT paper had 4-option questions. CAT 2003 paper would give you a feel of these questions.
- CAT 2006 passages have 5-option questions which is the current trend. CAT 2006 paper would give you the practice needed to solve CAT RC questions according to the latest pattern.

CAT 2006 has been given preference over the later CAT papers because of the fact that Reading Comprehension in CAT 2006 is supposed to be the toughest in the history of CAT. Detailed solutions have been provided for each of the eleven passages (including the ideal process of reading the passages, as also the reason for the elimination of each of the incorrect options.) First try to solve these and then look at the detailed thought processes involved for each passage.

However, since such a detailed analysis (the best way to read a passage) is rarely available anywhere, we would like the reader to first solve each passage on his own, by reading it in his normal reading style. Once you have read and solved the passage completely, reread the passage—which is reproduced for your benefit, with detailed comments by the authors—understanding each of the points completely. Then try adopting this approach in your own reading style—by practicing it in everything you read (be it a newspaper article, a journal, a magazine, a fictional or non-fictional book). As an additional exercise, you might also want to see what errors of comprehension occurred in case you had wrong answers.

CAT 2006

Passage I

Directions for Questions 1 to 5: The passage given below is followed by a set of five questions. Choose the most appropriate answer to each question.

Fifteen years after communism was officially pronounced dead, its spectre seems once again to be haunting Europe. Last month, the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly voted to condemn the "crimes of totalitarian communist regimes," linking them with Nazism and complaining that communist parties are still "legal and active in some countries." Now Göran Lindblad, the conservative Swedish MP behind the resolution, wants to go further. Demands that European Ministers launch a continent-wide anti-communist campaign—including school textbook revisions, official memorial days, and museums—only narrowly missed the necessary two-thirds majority. Mr. Lindblad pledged to bring the wider plans back to the Council of Europe in the coming months.

He has chosen a good year for his ideological offensive: this is the 50th anniversary of Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Josef Stalin and the subsequent Hungarian uprising, which will doubtless be the cue for further excoriation of the communist record. Paradoxically, given that there is no communist government left in Europe outside Moldova, the attacks have if anything, become more extreme as time has gone on. A clue as to why that might be can be found in the rambling report by Mr. Lindblad that led to the Council of Europe declaration. Blaming class struggle and public ownership, he explained "different elements of communist ideology such as equality or social justice still seduce many" and "a sort of nostalgia for communism is still alive." Perhaps the real problem for Mr. Lindblad and his right-wing allies in Eastern Europe is that communism is not dead enough—and they will only be content when they have driven a stake through its heart.

Ways of understanding and interpreting CAT Passages illustrated with author comments.

Mock Test Papers (LOD-I and LOD-II) designed on the pattern of CAT examination have been provided in Section IV.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY—I 1

TEST I

No. of Questions—25
Time—20 minutes

Passage 1

Nine years ago when several eastern European countries were making the transition from communism to free market policies, inevitable difficulties arose in government, social, medical and educational sectors. At that time I was elected to the SATE committee, and my feeling was that we teachers of English could make a contribution towards helping colleagues in one of these countries to alleviate their very poor conditions.

The echo from members of our Association was positive, and although help abroad was not a function of SATE, a modest sum was approved to fund assistance in a limited way. Knowing that most teachers have a number of superfluous English books on their shelves at home and at school, I set out to collect these and send them to teachers of English in Albania. It was a known fact, how classes functioned there—badly equipped schools; usually the teacher had a textbook (perhaps twenty years old) and pupils—for reasons of economy—would write grammar notes and word lists in very small writing in their notebooks. When we were able to send a class set to a fortunate teacher she was delighted. At the same time I addressed pupils and asked them to write me a letter, explaining 'Why we are learning English in our class'. It was surprising to read the replies I received, well written, many in a refreshing, original style. The classes that submitted such a piece of work got an extra book as a prize, usually an English dictionary. My contacts were usually members of the National Albanian English Teachers' Association (NAETA), and I coordinated the sorting and delivery of material with the vice-president, Mrs Kuanthipi Dodi.

When I received hundreds of books from our members, those of the ETAS and from other sources, I enlisted the help of some volunteers to help sort and pack the books, tapes, etc. ready for despatch. We invited teachers to come to Switzerland from Albania for a study period of two weeks, sponsored by the International Teachers' Exchange Organization and SATE. These colleagues usually stayed with me, and I set up a programme of visits to several types of schools, teacher training or university courses for a short period. Sometimes they could attend ETAS convention, a WBZ course or a professional workshop. The SATE and ETAS members were always ready to welcome our guests, to discuss educational matters and to provide help, often showing hospitality at their schools or their homes.

It was a memorable moment for me when I was invited to Albania as a guest of the NEATA, to meet personally some of the teachers with whom I had been in correspondence. I was known at schools all over the country as Mrs Jean and enjoyed hospitality at colleagues' homes. At schools and at Tirana University I gave some talks and workshops, and was able to see at first hand their difficulties. But I was also able to witness how some of the books that we had sent were now the core of a new library, and to hear how teachers and educational authorities were encouraged by the rather modest help we had provided.

In spring 1997, it became practically impossible to send books to Albania, on account of the political crisis. I could not stockpile any more material, so reluctantly I sent the last load to schools in Hungary, where the books and tapes were also welcome. The hospitality programme continued until last year, but now funds for this purpose are no longer available, and I have had to bring this to a close. Happily, conditions in Albania have been improving; bookshops have a wide range of publications available, and so I see it to be fitting now to end our assistance to English teachers there.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS FROM THE CAT 2

CAT 2003

Directions for Questions 1 and 2: Four alternative summaries are given below each text. Choose the option that best captures the essence of the text.

1. You seemed at first to take no notice of your school-fellows, or rather to set yourself against them because they were strangers to you. They knew as little of you as you did of them; this would have been the reason for their keeping aloof from you as well, which you would have felt as a hardship. Learn never to conceive a prejudice against others because you know nothing of them. It is bad reasoning, and makes enemies of half the world. Do not think ill of them till they behave ill to you; and then strive to avoid the faults which you see in them. This will disarm their hostility sooner than pique or resentment or complaint.
 - (a) The discomfort you felt with your school fellows was because both sides knew little of each other. You should not complain unless you find others prejudiced against you and have attempted to carefully analyse the faults you have observed in them.
 - (b) The discomfort you felt with your school fellows was because both sides knew little of each other. Avoid prejudice and negative thoughts till you encounter bad behaviour from others, and then win them over by shunning the faults you have observed.
 - (c) You encountered hardship amongst your school fellows because you did not know them well. You should learn to not make enemies because of your prejudices irrespective of their behaviour towards you.
 - (d) You encountered hardship amongst your school fellows because you did not know them well.

You should learn to not make enemies because of your prejudices unless they behave badly with you.

2. The human race is spread all over the world, from the polar regions to the tropics. The people of whom it is made up eat different kinds of food, partly according to the climate in which they live, and partly according to the kind of food which their country produces. In hot climates, meat and fat are not much needed; but in the Arctic regions they seem to be very necessary for keeping up the heat of the body. Thus, in India, people live chiefly on different kinds of grains, eggs, milk, or sometimes fish and meat. In Europe, people eat more meat and less grain. In the Arctic regions, where no grains and fruits are produced, the Eskimo and other races live almost entirely on meat and fish.
 - (a) Food eaten by people in different regions of the world depends on the climate and produce of the region, and varies from meat and fish in the Arctic to predominantly grains in the tropics.
 - (b) Hot climates require people to eat grains while cold regions require people to eat meat and fish.
 - (c) In hot countries, people eat mainly grains while in the Arctic, they eat meat and fish because they cannot grow grains.
 - (d) While people in Arctic regions like meat and fish and those in hot regions like India prefer mainly grains, they have to change what they eat depending on the local climate and the local produce.

CAT 2004

Directions for Questions 3 to 5: Four alternative summaries are given below each text. Choose the option that best captures the essence of the text.

Previous year CAT questions have been discussed throughout the book, with detailed explanation, wherever required.

FREQUENCY ANALYSIS TABLE

	<i>CAT 2008</i>	<i>CAT 2007</i>	<i>CAT 2006</i>	<i>CAT 2005</i>	<i>CAT 2004</i>
Comprehension	20 qns, 80 marks	12 qns, 48 marks	15 qns, 60 marks	12 qns, 20 marks	21 qns, 21 marks
Tables	0	4 qns, 16 marks	0	3 qns, 3 marks	5 qns, 7 marks
Completion	4 qns, 16 marks	0	0	0	13 qns, 8 marks
Section	4 qns, 16 marks	3 qns, 12 marks	0	4 qns, 8 marks	3 qns, 3 marks
Paragraph	4 qns, 16 marks	3 qns, 12 marks	5 qns, 20 marks	4 qns, 8 marks	5 qns, 8 marks
Reasoning and Judgement	0	0	5 qns, 20 marks	0	0
Logical Questions	8 qns, 32 marks	3 qns, 12 marks	0	7 qns, 11 marks	3 qns, 3 marks
Total Questions	40	25	25	30	50



PART 1

All the chapters in this part will help you to hone your Reading Comprehension (RC) skills in the following ways:

- Helping you to create your daily reading scheme underlining the importance of RC in CAT papers.
- Making you (i) understand vocabulary in context, main ideas and implied main ideas, and transition and idea organisation patterns; (ii) identify supporting details, facts, inferences, and judgements; (iii) recognise author's purpose and tone; and (iv) evaluate strength of argument.
- Helping you understand (i) what is RC (ii) how to read RC passages, and (iii) how to think and react while reading a CAT reading comprehension passage.
- Helping you practice RC exercises at different difficulty levels.

Key Components of this Part:

- Seven-Dimension approach to better reading skills
- An introduction to the various types of RC questions
- Thorough explanation and analysis of RC
- Bit-by-bit explanation of CAT passage from CAT papers of 2003 and 2006
- LOD Exercises

SECTION 1: READING COMPREHENSION

SECTION 2: LOD EXERCISES



Go through the introduction and the Seven Dimension Approach to better reading skills

Comprehend the theory of RC

Go closely through the illustrated CAT passages noting the key gaps between *what you understand out of and how you react to a CAT passage* versus *what should be the ideal reaction and comprehension while solving a cat passage*

Solve the three Levels of Difficulty and the CAT passages and while doing so make sure that you closely analyse each question and also focus on recognising the mental thought errors you are making while solving each level of difficulty. Solve Level of Difficulty 1 with detailed analysis (Chapter 5)

- Solve Level of Difficulty 2 with detailed analysis (Chapter 6)
- Solve Level of Difficulty 3 with detailed analysis (Chapter 7)
- Solve CAT passages with detailed analysis (Chapter 8)

READING COMPREHENSION

- CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
- CHAPTER 2: THE SEVEN DIMENSION APPROACH TO BETTER READING SKILLS
- CHAPTER 3: THEORY OF READING COMPREHENSION
- CHAPTER 4: ILLUSTRATED CAT PASSAGES (SOLVED)



SECTION 1

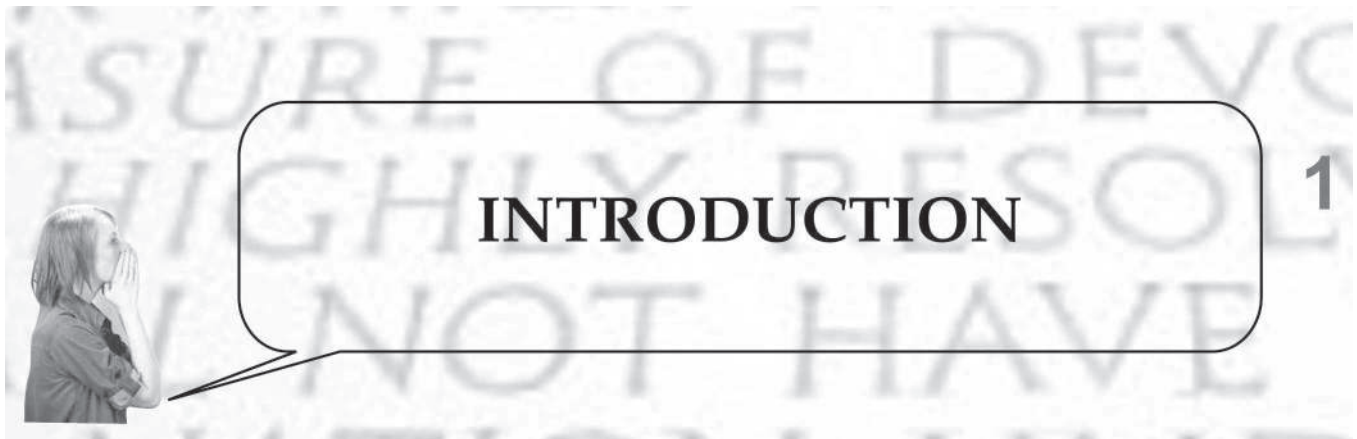
In this section, we will be concentrating on helping you build your Reading Comprehension (RC) skills. We start this chapter with a basic introduction of Reading Comprehension and by giving you a basic framework for developing your reading skills.

Chapter 2 increases the focus on the development of reading skills by dividing reading skill into seven clear cut dimensions. The reader is expected to first understand each of these skill dimensions and then to focus his self development efforts on each of these reading skill dimensions.

Chapter 3 focusses on the theory and question types of Reading comprehension giving the reader a clear glimpse into the various question types to expect in RC.

Chapter 4 gives the reader a rare insight into the mind and the mental processes of CAT cracker by taking the reader through the actual thinking that goes towards the solving of real CAT passages.





Reading Comprehension (RC) forms one of the most critical parts of the CAT question paper.

TO BELL THE CAT

Every year, over the past 20 years of the CAT, RC has constituted anything between 15–30% of the total number of questions in the exam.

Thus, for instance, while CAT 2003 (re-exam) had 25 marks out of 150 from the RC section, CAT 2004 had 25 marks out of 150 (16.66%) and CAT 2005 had 20 marks out of 150 (13.33%). Hence, developing the appropriate level of skills for tackling the reading comprehension section is something that a student preparing for CAT simply cannot afford to ignore during the preparation phase for the CAT exam. Needless to say, the correlation between good Reading Ability and good Reading Comprehension Ability is very high. Hence, in order to develop your ability to solve reading comprehension questions, your first focus should be to take your reading ability up from its current level (whatever that might be.)

READ MORE AND MORE

This advice is what you will come across from every trainer across the country. However, what is not so readily available for students is what skills should one focus on developing while reading, as well as under what framework of self development should one take up the task of reading more and more. Consequently, in our decade long experience of training students, we have seen that students normally end up trying to blindly read more and more without a framework, a direction or a focus. As a result, the returns from reading that students achieve are not proportional to the effort that they put into their reading.

Picking Contextual Clues

We have always believed that blindly reading, without working in a framework, will result in sub optimal results. Hence, a major thrust of our initial emphasis in this section will be to give you a framework for developing your reading habits. Before we go into that aspect, let us look at another issue which we believe is of utmost importance for you to understand.

THE PROCESS OF WRITING AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PROCESS OF READING

Language can be defined as a set of sounds which has been developed in order to convey ideas from one mind to another. Prior to the invention of the first languages, humans used to convey ideas either through sign language or through pictorial representations (as borne out in the paintings in caves through which messages were conveyed). The invention of language represented a paradigm shift in man's ability to communicate his thoughts and ideas to other fellow humans. Initially, all communication used to be oral and passed on orally from generation to generation. Speaking and listening were the two opposite ends of this chain of communication.

As the complexity of human life increased, the introduction of the written word was necessitated. In this chain of communication, reading is basically the reverse process of writing. A piece of writing is incomplete unless it is read by a reader. In this context, understanding the act of writing can take you a long way towards becoming a good reader.

The Cream of the Piece

Since any and every reading that you do involves comprehending and connecting to the author of the passage, in order to become a good reader you need to understand the process through which a good writer goes

1.6 How to Prepare for Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension for the CAT

while writing any piece—(be it as short as a paragraph long to a passage of 1000 words to a full length book).

Let us suppose that you are asked to write a 500 word essay on 'The relevance of Management Education in India'. Would you straightaway put your pen to paper and start putting down whatever comes to your mind or would you first formulate the outline of the idea structure that you might want to convey through the piece? If you are not an amateur writer, chances are that you would do the latter.

As a matter of fact, all good writers will follow this approach, i.e., they would formulate a kind of a skeleton (map or outline) of the idea they want to convey through their essay, before they put their pen to paper for the first time. This skeleton/map often includes the main idea, the supporting ideas, supporting evidences as well as the conclusion.

Most writers see the skeleton in the form of a picture of the idea structure. (A picture that consists of flowcharts, symbols, etc.) It is only after this that the pen is put to paper and the idea structure conveyed through a sequence of words, sentences and paragraphs.

As a reader, your task essentially, is to decode this sequence of words, sentences and paragraphs and come up with your own picture or interpretation of the idea conveyed by the author. The closer this picture is to the original one in the mind of the author, the better is the comprehension of the passage. In other words, you can even define the objective of reading as 'to photocopy the idea structure of the author into your mind'. Remember a crucial point:

The Cream of the Piece

The closer your skeleton/map is to what the author must have formulated, the more comprehensive will be your understanding of the passage you are reading.

It is in the light of the above that you should embark on what follows below. The following approach, if applied consistently to your daily dose of reading, will help you develop your level of reading from your current levels.

HOW READING SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR ASPECTS OTHER THAN THE READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS OF THE CAT ENGLISH SECTION

The relevance of preparing well for the RC section does not simply end there. In fact, a closer look at the questions and question types asked under the head of Verbal Ability in the

CAT, XLRI and other Management entrance papers of the past few years, clearly points at the overwhelming requirement of good reading habits for this section. Let us take a closer look at the question types in Verbal Ability asked in the CAT over the past few years to illustrate the importance of good reading habits for solving the same.



Verbal Ability Question Type I: Paragraph Jumbles (Frequency of use: Consistently used every year over the last decade)

This has been one of the most favorite question types of examiners over the past decade. In this question type, a set of sentences which constitute a paragraph, are jumbled. The student is supposed to find out the correct order of sentences so as to form a coherent paragraph. For instance, try solving this question, which appeared as a two mark question in CAT 2005.



The sentences given in the question, when properly sequenced, form a coherent paragraph. Each sentence is labeled with a letter. Choose the most logical order of sentences from among the given choices to construct a coherent paragraph.

- Similarly, turning to caste, even though being lower caste is undoubtedly a separate cause of disparity, its impact is all the more greater when the lower-caste families also happen to be poor.
- Belonging to a privileged class can help a woman to overcome many barriers that obstruct women from less thriving classes.
- It is an interactive presence of these two kinds of deprivation—being low class and being female—that massively impoverishes women from the less privileged classes.
- A congruence of class deprivation and gender discrimination can blight the lives of poor women very severely.
- Gender is certainly a contributor to societal inequality, but it does not act independently of class.

1. EABDC
2. EBDCA
3. DAEB C
4. BECDA.

The correct answer here is EBDCA. The skills required to solve a question of this type (which is discussed in detail in Part Two of this book) include:

- (a) Identification of opening sentence,
- (b) Identification of the topic sentence,
- (c) Getting and understanding the main idea in the question,
- (d) Identifying transitions of ideas,
- (e) Ordering of ideas,
- (f) Slotting in the details in their right places,
- (g) Understanding Vocabulary in context.

All the above are reading skills which we will learn about in the later part of this chapter.

Verbal Ability Question Type 2: Inappropriate Usage of Word

Here, we would look into the usage of a single word in four different contexts. These type of questions were first introduced in CAT 2003.

In each question, the word at the top is used in four different ways. Choose the option in which the usage of the word is incorrect or inappropriate.

Hand

1. I have my hand full, I cannot do it today.
2. The minister visited the jail to see the breach at first hand.
3. The situation is getting out of hand.
4. When the roof of my house was blown away, he was willing to lend me hand.

Reason

1. Your stand is beyond all reason.
2. Has she given you any reason for her resignation?
3. There is little reason in your pompous advice.
4. How do you deal with a friend who doesn't listen to a reason?

Other words that have been asked are: Help, Paper, Business, Service, For, Near, etc.

There is no way you can study grammatical rules to help you improve your ability to solve these kinds of questions—nor does it have anything to do with vocabulary since the words given are extremely easy in nature.

The Cream of the Piece

As you must have understood, your ability to solve these questions depends directly on the extensiveness of your reading habits and how often and in what form of usage you have seen the word earlier.



Verbal Ability Question Type 3: Paragraph Completion

In this question type, introduced for the first time in CAT 2005, the question contains a paragraph where the last statement has been removed. The student is expected to decide the appropriate option which best completes the paragraph.

Consider the following question that was a two mark question in the CAT 2005 paper:



The following question has a paragraph from which the last sentence has been deleted. From the given options, choose the one that completes the paragraph in the most appropriate way.

Federer's fifth grand slam win prompted a reporter to ask whether he was the best ever. Federer is certainly not lacking in confidence, but he wasn't about to proclaim himself the best ever. "The best player of this generation, yes", he said, "but nowhere close to ever. Just look at the records that some guys have. I'm a minnow."

1. His win against Agassi, a genius from the previous generation, contradicts that.
2. Sampras, the king of an earlier generation, was as humble.
3. He is more than a minnow to his contemporaries.
4. The difference between 'the best of this generation' and 'best ever' is a matter of perception.

The correct answer here is 3.

CAT aspirants in 2005 faced a lot of difficulty in solving this question type. Needless to say, solving this question needs an ability to catch:

- (a) the author's topic,
- (b) the main idea he/she is trying to convey and
- (c) understand the transitions he/she is using in the paragraph.


Needless to say, it is not possible to eliminate the doubts that crop up in one's mind while solving such questions... only a good reader with a lot of reading exposure would be able to clearly see an answer to such a question. If you want to be able to see the answer to such questions, minus any ambiguities, development of good reading skills is the only way out.

(And considering that there were a clear 8 marks in 4 questions, it gave a clear advantage to the 'good reader'.)

1.8 How to Prepare for Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension for the CAT

Verbal Ability Question Type 4: Identifying Grammatically Correct/ Incorrect Sentence(s):

Consider the following question asked in CAT 2005.

 This question consists of four sentences on a topic. Some sentences are grammatically incorrect or inappropriate. Select the option that indicates the grammatically correct and appropriate sentence(s).

- A. People have good reason to care about the welfare of animals.
- B. Ever since Enlightenment, their treatment has been as a measure of mankind's humanity.
- C. It is not a coincidence that William Wilberforce and Sir Thomas Foxwell Buxton, two leaders of the movement to abolish the slave trade, helped found the Royal Society for the Prevention of cruelty to animals in 1820s.
- D. An increasing number of people go further: mankind has a duty not to cause pain to animals that have the capacity to suffer.


- 1. A & D
- 2. B
- 3. A & C
- 4. C & D

The correct answer here is 1.

As you must have realized, solving these questions is not about cramming up complex grammatical rules. Even if you are given a comprehensive book on grammar to consult while solving these questions, you are unlikely to come out with the relevant rule which applies to the particular sentence under consideration. Then, on what skills would you depend to solve these kinds of questions? To draw a parallel, let us ask you a question in turn. How would you solve a similar question if it were asked in your mother tongue? Would you rush to the nearest available grammar book? Unlikely! In fact, your ability to solve such a question would depend solely on the frequency of the number of times that you have seen the particular nuance of the language being used. If you have not been exposed to the same, it is unlikely that you will be able to apply any sort of logic to solving this question type.

Verbal Ability Question Type 5: Summarising a Paragraph.

Consider the following question which appeared in CAT 2003.

 Four alternative summaries are given below. Choose the option that best captures the essence of the text.

Some decisions will be fairly obvious—"no-brainers." Your bank account is low, but you have a two week vacation coming up and you want to get away to some place warm to relax with your family. Will you accept your in-laws' offer to free use of their Florida beachfront condo? Sure. You like your employer and feel ready to move forward in your career. Will you step in for your boss for three weeks while she attends a professional development course? Of course.

- A. Some decisions are obvious under certain circumstances. You may, for example, readily accept a relative's offer to free holiday accommodation or step in for your boss when she is away.
 - B. Some decisions are no-brainers, You need not think when making them. Examples are condo offers from in-laws and job offers from bosses when your bank account is low or boss is away.
 - C. Easy decisions are called "no-brainers" because they do not require any cerebral activity. Examples such as accepting free holiday accommodation abound in our lives.
 - D. Accepting an offer from in-laws when you are short on funds and want a holiday is a no-brainer. Another no-brainer is taking the boss's job when she is away.
- 1. A
 - 2. B
 - 3. C
 - 4. D

The correct answer here is 1.

As for the previous questions, solving this question depends on your ability to understand the author's topic sentence, get a grip of the main idea, identify where the details are and what is the message conveyed through them—all skills of reading rather than anything else.

The Cream of the Piece

A closer look at other question types on Verbal Ability will further bear out this fact that—**strong reading exposure, habits and skills are a must in order to solve questions of Verbal Ability.**

It is due to this fact that Part I of this book on English is devoted to helping the student develop the skills set required to be a good reader. You are required to clearly understand the framework required for developing good

reading habits, which is explained in the following part of the chapter. After that, you need to follow through consistently by applying the same framework in your daily reading scheme.

YOUR DAILY READING SCHEME

How Much Time Should I Spend on Reading Daily?

If you want to have any hope of developing your reading skills, the authors recommend a minimum of two hours per day of reading, over a year's time. (Needless to say, if you are trying to achieve this in a shorter time span, the minimum recommended reading will go up proportionately.)

What Kinds of Stuff Should I Read?

Well, a true and frank answer to that question would be more like everything and anything under the sun. But where and at what level you start off your reading (under the framework we will be mentioning below) would depend on how much of a reader you have been during your school and college life. Remember, whatever your current reading skills are, there is always a level of writing which will challenge you. The basic concept that you need to adhere to for your reading exercises is that you should read things that constantly challenge and invigorate your mind. However, be careful to ensure that the challenge that the reading material puts forth to you should be small and not too big. If the material you choose to read is too challenging, the end result might be that you lose comprehension and subsequently, your interest in reading—an end result we are definitely not targeting!

So, when deciding the sources from which you are going to do your daily dose of reading, first of all define what level of writing represents a challenge for you. Then, you should identify the source/s (newspapers, magazines and books) that will give you that level of writing.

Thus, for instance, for some students, the editorials in a national daily represent a challenge, while for some others, the same level of challenge might be experienced in advanced philosophical (read: heavy) text.


In our experience, based on their reading exposure levels, students might be classified under four categories:

1. The Poor Reader

This category of students has had no exposure to reading in English. Most students whom we have encountered under

this category come from vernacular medium schooling backgrounds (although that is not an absolute rule since even convent school educated students might belong to this category if their reading exposure has been poor.)

Consider the following excerpt, which will prove challenging for students belonging to this category:

 "I was deeply embarrassed last week before a distinguished audience of sophisticated investors abroad—they virtually called me a liar. A year ago, I had reassured them that our stellar reformers—Manmohan Singh, Chidambaram and Montek—would not only ensure that our economic reforms would continue but they might even accelerate. A year later, the reforms are stuck and they were angry. I could not pretend that the reformers had become victims of coalition politics, for insiders tell me that the problem is with the Congress Party itself, which has lost the will of reform.

Luckily, I was bailed out by the Indian economy, which continues to grow robustly, and has been doing so for two decades, contemptuously ignoring our governments. The only way to explain this contradiction is that politics and economics are increasingly getting divorced in India, and we may have become like Italy, where they used to say, the economy grows at night when the government is asleep. Stephen Roach, the chief economist of Morgan Stanley, who exercises considerable influence on investor minds explains: 'India is on the cusp of something big. After my third trip there in 18 months, I am as enthusiastic about India as I was about China in the late 1990s. What excites me is the potential for an increasingly powerful internal consumption dynamic—the missing link in most development models.'

The Cream of the Piece

If you think you belong to *the poor reader* category, your initial reading should start off with editorials of good quality national level newspapers (like *The Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Deccan Herald*, *The Times of India*, *The Pioneer*, *The Indian Express*, etc.), analysis based articles in these newspapers and analytical articles in national level current issues magazines (like *India Today*, *Frontline*, *Week*, etc.). You can also graduate to books written in simple English (both fictional and non fictional).

2. The Average Reader

In this category, students do not have a basic problem in reading and understanding English (since most of them are educated in English Medium schools). However, what we have seen is that in spite of the advantage of having studied

1.10 How to Prepare for Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension for the CAT

in English medium schools, this category of students have not developed their reading skills, simply because they have not worked towards developing their reading habits. This group of students faces problems the moment they are confronted with a slightly complex or an unfamiliar topic. Thus, they might have no problem reading about the latest exploits of the Indian cricket team, but give them a topic about the latest advances in medical technology or for that matter, Freud's interpretation of a dream and they lose contact with the subject matter of the passage.

Consider the following extract which might prove challenging to a reader of this category:

☯ “What reader could resist so delicious a topic: a book that sets out to explain how cuisine came to be deeply ingrained in France's cultural and intellectual make-up? Unfortunately, little of this hard-to-digest work concerns the actual history of French cuisine and how it came to 'triumph'. Much of it seemed at embedding the subject in a sociological framework to prove that food is worthy of academic study. Accordingly, it piles on jargon, including sentences such as: 'The cluster of activities that surround cooking and eating stakes out culinary as a privileged entry into the social order.'”

This is a pity, because beneath the layers of intellectual stodge, the author, a professor of sociology at Columbia University, offers some tantalizing morsels. Almost in passing, she mentions such iconic moments as the suicide of 17th century chef Vatel, when the fish arrived late for a banquet he was preparing for Louis XIV. She also cites the banquets of the Sun king at Versailles as a defining moment in French cuisine, but sadly does not describe them. Nor does she consider the influence of his minister Cardinal Rachelieu. Yet it was in this nation-building era of the Sun King that the first specifically French cookbooks were written.”

The Cream of the Piece

If you think you belong to *the average reader* category, your reading scheme should start off with reading editorials from newspapers mentioned above, as also from Economic newspapers and should also include higher level magazines which use good quality English in their writing (like *Time*, *Fortune* and *Economist*).

3. The Good Reader

This category of reader has developed himself through consistently being in touch with reading. His/her reading exposure includes reading novels (fictional mainly), coffee

table books on self development and newspapers on a daily basis. He/she will not face problems in reading and connecting to the author's message in either of the above two extracts.

However, for this level of reader, something which goes beyond his/her comfort level of reading poses a problem. Consider this extract which might pose problems for this category of reader:

☯ Philosophers have discussed the mode of existence which belongs to works of art, debating whether they are material things or mental constructs or whether perhaps they are more correctly to be described as 'types' of which the mental objects which come to awareness of this or that observer in moments of appreciation are the 'tokens'. To sturdy common sense it seems at first sight obvious that some works of art are material things: pictures and sculptures are transported from place to place in lorries; they are hung on walls or set up on pedestals; they are weighed and measured, their physical properties can be tested and verified. Yet when we consider such arts as poetry, music, and dance the case is different. Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Verdi's *Requiem* are unique entities which we agree to be works of art: but there is no one material thing anywhere, and no one happening, which can be identified with either of them. Moreover, as has already been seen, even in the case of painting and sculpture we ascribe to the art work properties which are incompatible with its being merely a material thing. There are important senses in which the picture which we talk about and enjoy as a work of art is not identical with the material piece of pigmented canvas which is crated and carried about in a lorry.

The Cream of the Piece

If you belong to *the good reader* category, your objective should be to raise fair level through consistently reading material that challenges your comprehension. Magazines like *Time* & *Economist* & articles/books on Philosophy, advanced Scientific texts etc. should form your daily reading scheme.

4. The Excellent Reader

This category of reader has gone beyond the levels required to connect to any of the above three extracts. He/she has typically read a lot on diverse topics and at varying levels of language usage. If you think you belong to this category, you can skim through the reading lessons and frameworks in the next part of this chapter (since we believe you might already be aware of all the points we are making). All you

need to do is to continue your good work and further expand your level of exposure and increase the coverage of topics with which you are familiar.

Consider this extract, that might prove challenging to you if you belong to this level:



Man is seen as a component of this order of things, and his psychic-mental life as reproduction of the life of the cosmos, in both its material and its mode of organization. This view was advanced in the sixth century B.C. by the thinkers of the Miletian school (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes) and by Heraclitus of Ephesus. They were all products of the commercial-industrial and cultural centres of Asia Minor—the Greek colonial city-states*, in which new social and economic relationships were being formed, with maximum destructive effect upon the old order of tribal society.

These thinkers of classical times did not all take the same form of matter to be the primary material of the world: Thales held that this was water; Anaximander, that it was vague, boundless essence (apeiron**); Anaximenes, that it was air; and Heraclitus, that it was fire. The “nature philosophers” of classical times, explaining the natural world as proceeding from a single, all-penetrating primary principle, supposed that the particular form of life and behaviour which language (still reflecting the level of mythological thinking) designated as “the soul”, must likewise be a manifestation of this principle.

The Cream of the Piece

Whichever level you belong to, a common objective for you as an MBA/CAT aspirant will be to increase and develop the scope of subjects with which you can claim familiarity.

TO BELL THE CAT

A closer analysis of the CAT question papers of the past decade reveals very clearly, that familiarity with certain topics is a must for all aspirants. Not just the passages but even the shorter Verbal Ability questions are normally extracted from one of the following topics/subjects:

- (1) Economics
- (2) Management
- (3) History
- (4) National and International Polity
- (5) Sociology

- (6) Humanities
- (7) Philosophy
- (8) Psychology
- (9) Art, Music and culture
- (10) Science and Technology (incl. Medicine and Information Technology.)
- (11) Miscellaneous

A WORD OF CAUTION: THINGS THAT DO NOT WORK

Why Speed Reading Does Not Work, and in Fact is not Needed

There are a lot of books and trainers around who talk about speed reading, promising inexperienced readers a never before and almost magical jump in their reading abilities. However, in our experience of training thousands of students, we have seen the futility of speed reading techniques. The fact that the ‘magic’ wears off the moment you try to read anything outside the provided exercises has been a constant in our years of experience of having trained students. In fact, the moment a ‘speed reading trained student’ is confronted with something remotely heavy, the speed reading techniques stop working.

The basic reason why these reading techniques do not work under the examination reading conditions is that these techniques are designed for sparse and easy reading materials. (Speed reading is typically defined for ordinary, non technical matter). On the contrary, the passages and extracts used in the CAT, XLRI and other top management entrance exams are dense in terms of their content. They contain too much information and any attempt at skimming and scanning (which are recommended speed reading techniques) result in a loss of comprehension. Sometimes, missing on a crucial sentence might just end up making you lose your connection with the author totally.

Furthermore, at what speed (in words per minute) do you think you need to read in order to do well in the RC section? Take a guess... 400, 500, 700, or even more??? Incidentally, these are the kinds of reading speeds that speed reading books promise you that they will help you achieve.

Now consider this fact. A typical CAT passage is anywhere between 800 to 1200 words. The questions further form approximately 300 to 500 words. This means that in order to read a passage and solve the questions, all

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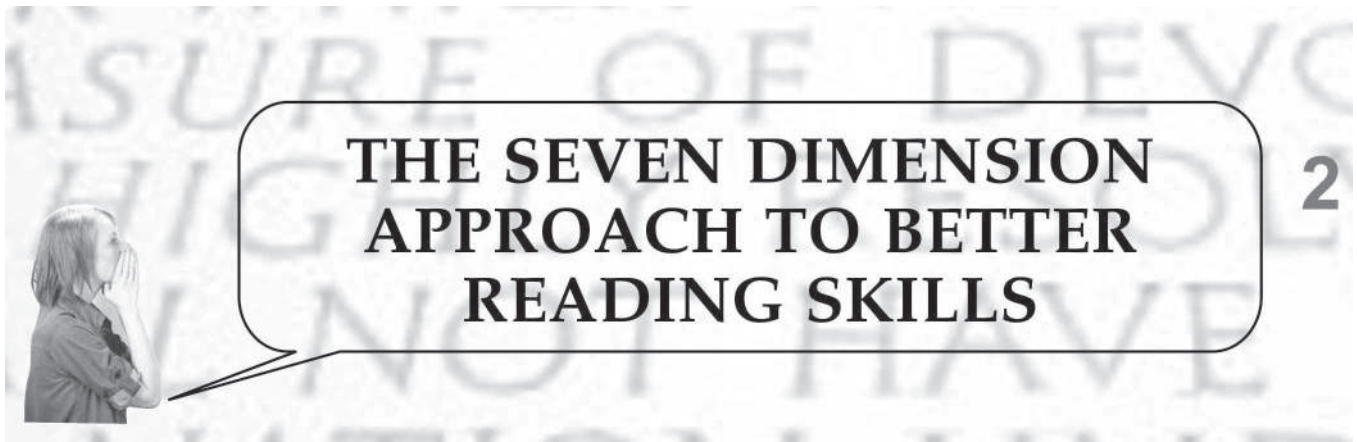
you need to do is read and completely understand anywhere between 1100 to 1700 words. CAT 2005 had 3 passages constituting 20 marks in all, and students had approximately 20 to 22 minutes to solve the same. A total of 3073 words — translates to a ridiculous reading speed requirement of 139.68 words per minute if you want to solve all the three passages. If you add the fact that most successful CAT aspirants solved only two out of the three passages, the statistic becomes even more ridiculous—especially in the light of the tall claims of 600 to 800 words per minute that these speed reading trainers and books claim that they can help a student achieve. Looking at it from another angle—if someone was able to achieve these reading speeds he/she should have been able to complete the 20 marks in the RC

section in CAT 2005 in about five minutes flat!! Doesn't happen, does it?

TO BELL THE CAT

A look at CAT 2003 gives a similar picture: 5702 words in five passages (including their questions) were required to be read for 25 questions (reading speed of 228.08 wpm if you were, to solve all five passages). CAT qualifiers attempted at most, 3 passages out of the five, in about 25 minutes. This required a reading speed of approximately 134 wpm.

Where does the need for speed reading arise? It simply does not.



THE SEVEN DIMENSION APPROACH TO BETTER READING SKILLS

2

INTRODUCTION

The reading skills that you need to develop to improve your reading ability can be categorised into seven dimensions, which are divided into Basic and Advanced reading skills:

Basic Dimensions	Dimension 1: Understanding Vocabulary in Context Dimension 2: Identifying and Understanding Ideas Dimension 2(A): Identifying and Understanding Main Ideas Dimension 2(B): Identifying Implied Main Ideas Dimension 3: Identifying Supporting Details Dimension 4: Identifying Relationships between Ideas Dimension 4(A): Understanding the Use of Transitions Dimension 4(B): Idea Organization patterns.
Advanced Dimensions	Dimension 5: Identifying Facts, Opinions and Inferences. Dimension 5(A): Facts and Opinions Dimension 5(B): Inferences Dimension 6: Identifying Purpose and Tone Dimension 7: Recognising Arguments and their Common Structures.

Fig. 2.1 Seven Dimensions of Reading Skills

BASIC DIMENSIONS OF READING SKILLS

Dimension One: Developing the Ability of Understanding Vocabulary in Context

As mentioned above, any piece of writing is a sequence of words, sentences and paragraphs. The *word* is the most basic building block of any piece of writing.

During the process of reading, we often come across situations where we are unaware of the meaning of

particular words. The presence of unfamiliar words in a piece of writing might lead to one of two types of situations:

- (a) The meaning of the word totally breaks the comprehension of the sentence, leading to uncertainty in the interpretation of the passage.

Consider the following example:



- (i) And the courtier said “ May I *genuflect*?”
- (ii) Since, Ecuador’s presidents are limited to one term, Mr.Gutierrez might also back his former boss. If so, things really could get *loco*.



In each of the above sentences, the italicised words make the reader lose comprehension with what the author is trying to get across. Unless you happen to know the exact meaning of the word, you will be at a loss to understand the author’s message. The best you can do is to create alternatives in your mind with respect to what the particular word could mean.

- (b) The meaning of the word can be understood (or pieced together) based on the context in which it is used.

If you were asked to define the words *testimony*, *charismatic* or *clannism*, you might face some discomfort. However, if you saw these words in sentences, the chances are that you would come up with fairly accurate meanings of the same words.

Consider the following examples. See whether you can define the words in italics in the following three sentences:



Judge John Hass imposed a publication ban on the *testimony* of Philip Sartre, former head of Amans and Mather, an advertising agency, as he is to stand trial on fraud charges.

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Here, the word *testimony* means statement.



The *charismatic* leader's home coming will further complicate Ecuador's already turbulent political scene.



Here, *charismatic* means magnetic.



The revival of village *clannism* is among the party's main worries about its grip on rural stability. In Beihe, more than half of the villagers share the surname Zhang. Among the rest, Yan is the biggest clan.



Here, *clannism* means the tendency to stick to one's tribe or family.

In each of the above sentences, the context (the previous and the following words and ideas) provides us with clues for defining the unfamiliar word.

In most situations, the meaning of the word can be derived from the context of the passage. However, this is an ability that gets better with use.

Picking Contextual Clues Generally, contextual clues are seen in the form of:

- Illustrations & Examples
- Cause & Effect relationships
- Synonyms (Parallelisms or similarities)
- Antonyms (Opposites or contrasts)
- General sense of the paragraph or passage.

Let us now look at examples of each type one by one:

(A) Illustrations or Examples One of the ways of making a point which is commonly used by authors is through the use of illustrations or examples to reiterate the point. In such cases, if the unfamiliar word has an illustration or an example to support what it means, it provides us with a contextual clue for solving the question.

Let us look at the following examples:



- The *impoverished* state of the castle told a sorry tale of holding on to past glories—the walls were barren, the paint had peeled off and the glory of the past had clearly worn off.

In the above sentence, *impoverished* means:

- poor
- rich
- inadequate

- His *obsequious* nature made him a favorite of all—he only had complimentary words to say about everybody.

In the above sentence, *obsequious* means:

- Deceiving
- Critical
- flattering



In the first sentence above, the examples provided to illustrate, *impoverished*, clearly point to 'poor' as its meaning. In the second, the illustration provides only one meaning, i.e., flattering, to the word in the context of the sentence.

(B) Cause & Effect Cause and effect relationships are again very commonly used in most writing structures. If we come across an unfamiliar word in either the cause or the effect of a cause-effect structure, the context is likely to tell us what the intended meaning of the word is. This principle is amply illustrated in the example below:



Asked to explain the *rosier* outlook, manufacturers cite one factor above all—the sharp decline in interest rates in the past five years, which besides beautifying company balance sheets is encouraging consumers to borrow, to buy cars, for example and build houses.

In the above sentence, *rosier* means:

- Optimistic
- pessimistic
- Indifferent



In the sentence, *rosier* obviously means optimistic, considering the illustrations in the later part of the sentence. The **cause-effect** relationship is extremely clear here. Dropping of interest rates has led to improved company balance sheets, as well as to greater demand in the form of consumers buying cars and building houses. The effect of all this has been to create an optimistic outlook on the part of the manufacturers.

(C) Synonyms (Parallelisms or Similarities) Often, context clues occur in the form of synonyms— wherein one or more words mean the same as the unfamiliar word. The presence of the synonym gives a context clue that is useful to understand the meaning of the unfamiliar word.

Consider the following examples where the italicised word has its synonym in the form of the emboldened word/s.



1. The **exhilaration** experienced by the parents when their child starts to walk is common to all cultures. The child's first steps give a feeling of **intense happiness** to the parents.
2. Coming face to face with his first love, left Sameer in a **poignant** mood. He was **touched** by the irony of the situation.
3. The **felony** committed by the robber was sure to make him pay. After all, serious **crime** seldom goes unpunished.
4. Although he had sworn not to **divulge** her secret, he **revealed** it to his best friend, Rajeev.
5. The **emancipatory** or **liberatory** significance of situating ordinary life and the world of duality and dualism in terms of a philosophy of non duality, lies in the fact that ultimately most of the categorical errors, those deep fundamental errors constitutive of our misunderstanding of being, which are at the same time constitutive of the superficial, oppressive and mystifying levels of social beings which dominate and screen our life world, is the fact that they turn on misidentifications.
6. Let us look at how a block operates, how potentially free, unbound energy becomes **fixated** or **stuck** or alternatively—in the case of a weakness of attention/one-pointedness/mindfulness—becomes **dissipated** or **dispersed**.

(D) Antonyms (Opposites or Contrasts) Just like same meaning words, there are situations where opposite meaning words give the contextual clues. Antonyms normally are signaled by a contrast statement/phrase, like however, on the other hand, but, yet, as against, although, etc.

Consider the following examples. In these examples, the italicised words are antonyms (have opposite meanings):



1. Although my grand father was always **profuse** in his criticism, his praise was always **scarce**.
2. A **sedentary** lifestyle is the root cause of all diseases, hence, regular exercise to stay **active** is a must to prevent disease.
3. The **homogeneity** of the mixture was broken by the presence of a **variety** of stuff in it.

(E) General Sense of the Paragraph or Passage In many cases, the contextual clues can be seen on the basis of the general sense of the paragraph (or sometimes, even the entire passage.)

Consider the following paragraph as an example.



Oddly, things are looking up for American International Group (AIG). Yes, the **embattled** global insurer has admitted overstating past earning and has postponed filing its financial statement with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), provoking questions about how much the company is really worth; yes, there was an embarrassing **kerfuffle** between lawyers over the possible removal of critical documents in Bermuda; yes, regulators are looking through an ever-expanding list of suspect deals; and yes, Maurice "Hank" Greenberg, the brilliant executive who built AIG, has been forced to sever his formal ties with the firm. But a company as aggressive as this has faced litigation before. Even as the headlines seem ever more dire, AIG and Mr. Greenberg already looked poised for a modest comeback.

In the context of the above paragraph:

embattled means:

- (a) Healthy (b) Profitable
(c) Stressed or beleaguered



The answer is obviously, stressed, and this can be deduced from the overall meaning of the passage.

Kerfuffle means:

- (a) dialogue (b) talks (c) commotion



The answer is obviously, c.

In your normal everyday reading exercises, try to identify sentences and paragraphs where contextual clues fitting in one of the patterns above, help you to understand the meaning of a word with which you were unfamiliar.

Dimension Two (A): Ability to Identify and Understand Main Ideas

The ability to identify main ideas is perhaps the most important factor for good reading skills.

The main idea is the answer to the question: What is the main point that the author is trying to make in the paragraph?

For instance, read the following paragraph:



Most people do not worry much about physics or politics when for example, they look at the colours of a rainbow. Nor do they pause much when they use a remote control for their T.V. set, talk on the mobile phone, listen to the radio, cook food in their microwave oven, open

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their car door from a distance, or surf the internet without wires. Yet, these are all phenomena of electromagnetic radiation. How humans harness electromagnetic waves—and specifically those in the radio frequency part of the spectrum—has become so important that old and new ways of thinking are now lining up for a tense confrontation that will affect numerous businesses and billions of consumers.

The old mindset, supported by over a century of technological experience and 70 years of regulatory habit, views spectrum—the range of frequencies, or wave lengths, at which electromagnetic waves vibrate—as a scarce resource that must be allocated by government or bought and sold like property. The new school, pointing to cutting edge technologies, says that spectrum is by nature, abundant and that allocating, buying or selling parts of it will one day seem as illogical as, say, apportioning or selling sound waves to people who would like to have a conversation.



What is the main point that the author is trying to make in this paragraph? In order to discover the main idea, you should first determine the topic being discussed. In the above paragraph, for example, the topic is 'harnessing of electromagnetic radiation'. The main idea is that 'old and new ways of thinking are confronting each other with respect to the way we are harnessing electromagnetic waves.'

The main idea is something like an umbrella idea—the author's primary point about the topic. All the other material in the paragraph falls under the main idea (and is called the supporting detail, which consists of examples, illustrations, causes and reasons, evidence in the form of factual information, etc.).

(A) The Concept of the Idea Sentence In a paragraph, authors often present the main idea to the readers, in the form of a single sentence, called the '**Idea Sentence**'. For example, in the given extract both the topic and the point about the topic are expressed in the last sentence of the first paragraph. Thus, the outline of the above paragraph can be shown as:

Topic: Harnessing of Electromagnetic radiation.

Main idea (as expressed in the idea sentence): There is a conflict of opinion about the harnessing of electromagnetic radiation between the old and the new way of thinking.

Supporting details:

1. The old way of thinking is that the spectrum of radiation is a scarce resource and its scarcity must be

respected by making people buy and sell it like property.

2. The new way of thinking is that the spectrum is abundant by nature and buying and selling it will seem illogical one day.

The Cream of the Piece

You should always remember that the topic is the subject of a selection. It is normally expressed in a few words. Since Reading Comprehension passages do not have the topic mentioned, your first objective while reading a passage should be to identify the topic of the passage. In such a case, the question—'Who or what is the passage about?', is a useful question to ask oneself, as the answer to this question is the topic of the selection.

Once you have found the topic of the selection, the next step is to find the main idea which the author is trying to convey. For this purpose, you should ask yourself the question: 'What is the main point of the author about the topic?'

Note that it is not necessary that authors present the entire main idea of the paragraph in one sentence.

Sometimes, the main idea might be distributed across two to three sentences in the paragraph.

Consider the following selections. The topic and the idea sentence/s in each of these passages have been described below it.



They have a dismal track record when it comes to predicting economic growth, exchange rates or the direction of the stock market. So, you might have expected economists to despair at the thought of forecasting sports result. Not at all. Efforts to work out the numbers of medals which countries are likely to get in the Athens Olympics, which start on August 13th, are well under way.



The topic is forecasting sports results and the last sentence is the idea sentence.



"You want rubies! We can do business!" the anonymous caller promised a lucrative deal over the phone: stump up dollars in advance and he would produce a glittering hoard in Johannesburg. But your correspondence refused; so the caller instead produced some colorful abuse, sneered at British sexual prowess, and hung up.

It is rare for any attempted African scam to be executed so inelegantly. Advance-fee frauds often lure victims to part with tens of thousands of dollars on the promise of

huge, but somehow plausible, later gains. Nigerians, especially, are renowned for elaborate and persuasive tales: “my uncle the president, died leaving me a million to smuggle to your country; let me use your bank account to hide the cash and you will get a slice; oh, and pay me a few thousand dollars in advance for handling fees”.



The topic and the main idea are visible in the second sentence of the second paragraph. The topic is ‘advance fee frauds in Africa’ and the main idea is—what is done in these frauds.

☯ “Our everyday life is much stranger than we imagine, and rests on fragile foundation.” This is the intriguing first sentence of a very unusual new book about Economics, and much else besides: “The company of Strangers”, by Paul Seabright, a professor of Economics at the University of Toulouse. Why is everyday life so strange? Because, explains Mr Seabright, it is so much at odds with what would have seemed, as recently as 10000 years ago, our evolutionary destiny. It was only then that “one of the most aggressive and elusive bandit species in the entire animal kingdom” decided to settle down. In no more than the blink of an eye, in evolutionary time, these suspicious and untrusting creatures, these “shy, murderous apes”, developed co-operative networks of staggering scope and complexity—networks that rely on trust among strangers. When you come to think about it, it was an extraordinarily improbable outcome.



The topic is the ‘unlikely evolution of the human species’ and the idea conveyed is that the human species has moved ‘from being an aggressive and elusive bandit species to a species which has developed cooperative networks of staggering scope and complexity, something that seemed highly unlikely in the context of what was our evolutionary destiny’.

☯ “In the first weekend of every August, the town of Twinsburg, Ohio, holds a parade. Decorated floats, cars and lorries roll slowly past neat, white houses and clipped lawns, while thousands of onlookers clap and wave flags in sunshine. The scene is a perfect little slice of America. There is though, something rather strange about the participants: they all seem to come in pairs. Identical twins of all colours, shapes, ages, and sizes are assembling for the world’s largest annual gathering of their kind.

The Twinsburg meeting is of interest to more people than just the twins themselves. Every year, the festival attracts dozens of scientists who came to prod, swab,

sample and question the participants. For identical twins are natural clones: the odd mutation aside, they share 100% of their genes. That means studying them can cast light on the relative importance of genetics and environments in shaping particular human characteristics.”



The topic is ‘identical twins’ and the main idea as expressed in the second last and last sentences of the second paragraph is that ‘studying identical twins can help us understand better, the relative importance of genetics and environment in shaping particular human characteristics.’



☯ “The twin rule of pathology states that any heritable disease will be more concordant (that is, more likely to be jointly present or absent) in identical twins than non-identical twins—and in turn, will be more concordant in non-identical twins than in non-siblings. Early work, for example, showed that the statistical correlation of skin mole counts between identical twins was 0.4, while non-identical twins had a correlation of only 0.2 (A score of 1.0 implies perfect correlation, while a score of zero implies no correlation). This result suggests that moles are heritable, but it also implies that there is an environment component to the development of moles, otherwise, the correlation in identical twins would be close to 1.0.



The topic is ‘the twin rule of pathology’ and the main idea about it is ‘the relative concordance of heritable diseases between identical twins, non identical twins and non siblings. The idea sentence here is the first sentence of the selection. (In this case, the topic is also in the same sentence.)

The Cream of the Piece

1. The idea sentence is usually supported by all the information in the remaining part of the paragraph. Hence, a useful way to check if you have got the idea sentence and hence, the main idea correctly is by asking yourself the question—“Is the sentence you have identified as the idea sentence supported by all the other material in the paragraph?”
2. Be careful not to select a topic that is too broad or too narrow.
3. The idea sentence can occur at either the start or the middle or the end of the paragraph. Paragraphs could be written in any of the following structures.
 - A. Idea Sentence at the start of the paragraph (within the first two sentences). This is the most commonly used structure in writing. In

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such cases, the paragraph can follow any of the following structures:

- (i) **Idea Sentence**—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment
 - (ii) Introductory detail/comment/question—**Idea Sentence**—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment.
- B. Idea Sentence in the middle of a paragraph (Beyond the first two sentences). In such cases, the paragraph would typically follow the following structure:
- (i) Introductory detail/comment—Introductory detail/comment/question—**Idea Sentence**—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment
- C. Idea Sentence at the end of the paragraph will follow the following structure:
- (i) Introductory detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—**Idea Sentence**
- D. Idea Sentence at the beginning and the end of the paragraph

Some authors like to make a point at the beginning of the paragraph and reiterate it at the end of the paragraph. In such cases, the following structure will be used:

Idea Sentence—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment—Supporting Detail/comment/question—**Idea Sentence**

Whatever, we have been discussing above has been in the context of single paragraphs. How does it apply to a reading comprehension passage? This is a very obvious query that comes to mind. Well, the answer is that in a long passage consisting of 4–5 paragraphs, each paragraph will have its own main idea (or its own theme). This is due to the fact that the main idea of the entire passage is broken down into its component parts. What you need to realize is that just as the alphabet is the building block of a word and the word is the building block of the sentence, so also the paragraph is the building block of the passage. Just as we need to read all the alphabets used in the formation of a word in order to make sense of the word, and just as we need to read all the words in a sentence in order to make sense of a sentence, similarly, we need to read and grasp

each paragraph of a passage to get the true meaning of the entire passage.

Comprehending individual paragraphs without linking them, often leaves us with an incomplete idea structure. Seen from the author's point of view, the writing process as described earlier, is: he/she formulates the main idea in his mind and then breaks it down into its component parts. Each component part is then normally put into separate paragraphs and the supporting details filled in to complete the passage.

Dimension Two (B): Identifying Implied Main Ideas

Many a times, the main idea may not be expressed inside one sentence. In such cases, authors typically imply or suggest a main idea without actually stating it clearly in one sentence. In such cases, the reader needs to be able to figure out the main idea by stringing together multiple statements giving the idea. Even in such cases, the main idea will be got by the answer to the question:

What is the main point that the author is trying to make in the paragraph? The only difference will be that the answer to the question will not be found in one or more idea sentences.

In fact, it will not be stated anywhere in the paragraph. In such cases, the main idea gets identified by the fact that most of the supporting details will be pointing towards the implied main idea. The student is encouraged to locate and experience such situations in his/her normal reading exercises.

BETTER UNDERSTANDING

FOR YOUR

In the following paragraphs, identify the topic and the idea.

1. Even by the standards of ASEAN, it was a dismal performance. The leaders of the other nine members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations used their summit in Bali this week to ladle praise on Myanmar for its “positive” and “pragmatic” recent policies. These, it appeared, meant the transfer of Myanmar’s most famous citizen, the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, from prison to house arrest, and the publication of a “road map” for democracy. Since a return to democracy

has been promised by Myanmar’s current junta ever since it took power in 1988, and since Miss Suu Kyi won an election in 1990 that has never been recognised, the Myanmar map looks as forlorn as the Middle Eastern one.

The disgraceful treatment meted out to Miss Suu Kyi is only the most obvious outrage committed by South-East Asia’s most repressive and incompetent government. The generals do not just imprison thousands of political prisoners: they have turned their country into a place where life expectancy has collapsed to around 55, and growth has vanished. The World Health Organisation ranks the efficacy of Myanmar’s health system at 190 out of 191 nations.

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

2. In Pakistan—they are katchi abadis, in Cuba—focos isalubres, in India—bustees and in Brazil—favelas. Whatever the local name of slums, there are a lot of them and they are growing fast. A new report, “The Habitat,” by the United Nations agency responsible for “human settlements”, says that in 2001, just under a billion people were living in slums—about a third of the world’s city dwellers. In the last decade, urban populations in less developed regions increased by a third. On present trends, says the UN report, 2 billion people could be living in slums by 2030.

In Africa, many parts of the middle East, Latin America and Asia, migrants are leaving farm land which is unable to support them, and arriving in cities which are unprepared to deal with them. This has been a long term trend, and is unlikely to abate no matter how awful the slums become. In 1800, only 2% of the world’s population was urbanized; by 2008, more than half of the world will be. Because such migration is so predictable, and long established, it might seem surprising that many governments are ill-equipped for it. But there is little new in that either: the now—rich countries fared just as badly when their cities first began to grow rapidly.

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

3. The main factor in the California recall election is the economically underestimated effect of charisma, or rather Governor Grey Devis’s utter lack of it. No one can calculate the cost of having uninspiring leaders but we would do well to consider past American presidents.

America struggled in the Depression, but eventually rebounded under brilliant Franklin Roosevelt, in spite of the war. We boomed under the spell of dashing young John Kennedy and declined under smart-but-creepy Richard Nixon and dull Gerald Ford. We muddled along under earnest Jimmy Carter and boomed, after a rough start, under ebullient Ronald Reagan. We fell into recession under the often-unintelligible George Bush senior and then boomed under charming Bill Clinton, before declining once again under plain-spoken George Bush junior. Mr. Davis’s problem is that he is perceived not only as ineffectual but insipid; a bad combination for any leader.

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

4. Pre-Election budgets are not what they used to be. Once upon a time, governments could be relied on to ply the electorate with extravagant giveaways in the run-up to polling day. But today’s voters are an edgeable-lot, so a more subtle approach is required. Gordon Brown’s second pre-election budget, like his first, avoided traditional tax bribes to the electorate as a whole. Instead, Britain’s chancellor opted for a selection of sweeteners, carefully directed at vital electoral target groups such as pensioners, poorer families and aspiring home-buyers.

But the similarity between the two budgets ends there. In 2001, the public finances were exceeding healthy. Including measures announced in his pre-budget report, Mr. Brown was able to give away £8

billion (\$12billion) in the fiscal year ahead while still forecasting a comfortable surplus. In this budget, Mr. Brown was in a much weaker position. Even the wee sweeties he handed out were far too much, bearing in mind how bad the figures now look.

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

5. The World Bank is the world's biggest development agency—a sprawling bureaucracy that is extremely difficult to run well. Its leader needs to know about development, be able to articulate a workable vision and be a good manager. Mr. Wolfowitz scores passably on two counts. He is not an economist or a banker, but has first-hand experience of developing countries. He has public-sector management experience—not least as number two at the Pentagon, although the bungling in Iraq raises questions about just how good his management skills are.

The biggest concern is that Mr. Wolfowitz is an idealist some would say a Utopian, whose career has been guided by zeal to bring democracy to the world—regardless of what the world might make of that ambition. Thus far,—Mr. Wolfowitz has focused on the relationship between democracy and security, but his belief in the power of democracy will surely colour his views of economic development as well.

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

6. If one considers how Nigeria has handled its oil revenues over the past 30 years, its quest for debt relief seems laughable. Its oil wells have yielded hundreds of billions of dollars, which its politicians have largely stolen or squandered. Nigeria is scarcely less poor than before its oil boom began. And, since successive governments borrowed against future oil receipts and wasted that money too, the country is saddled with some \$34 billion in foreign debt. Such a record suggests that extra cash freed up by debt relief would be frittered away.

But look at the past year and a half, and a different picture emerges. A new economic team, led by the finance minister, a former World Bank Director called Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has made strenuous efforts to impose discipline. Recent high oil prices have generated an unexpected revenue surplus, which previous Nigerian governments would have spent. This one has saved it, on the wise assumption that prices will eventually fall. The federal government has also cajoled Nigeria's 36 states to save their share of the windfall. This is unprecedented. State governments are powerful, jealous of their prerogatives and often the kind of folk who, ahem, are glad that a governorship confers immunity from prosecution.

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

7. Will China and Russia be the new Axis of Oil? Supply and demand trends, plus this week's surprise from the OPEC cartel, suggest that these emerging giants may yet up-end energy market.

With oil prices above \$30 a barrel, OPEC was not expected to cut output quotas at its meeting in Algeria this week, merely to clamp down on quota busting, which adds some 1.5m barrels per day (bpd) to official quotas of 24.5m bpd. But, on February 10th, it agreed to cut quotas by 1m bpd from April.

Why? "The second quarter is a bad quarter," explained one oil minister. He was talking of the risk of price collapse as the northern-hemisphere winter (when demand peaks) gives way to warmer spring (when oil use declines). Yet, OPEC may be playing with fire. Edward Morse of HETCO, an energy trader, points out that inventories are currently unusually low. Even if OPEC cuts output by half of what it threatens, he says, there may still be sharp price spikes: "There's no cushion left."

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

8. There are now, according to Ben Bradshaw, a farming minister, about 1.5m deer roaming Britain—more than at any time since the last Ice Age. One reason is milder weather. Another is that farmers increasingly sow grain and rape seed in autumn rather than spring, because crops grow more vigorously in spring and so produce better yields. That provides fodder for deer in winter. At last, it seems, an agricultural technique which improves farmers’ profits and boosts wildlife.

Not quite. Autumn planting may help see deer through hard times. But it is also blamed for a decline in numbers of certain bird species.

Graham Appleton, of the British Trust for Ornithology, says that autumn and winter planting means less grain lying around fields in winter. Naturalists think that may explain why corn bunting numbers are down by 41% since 1994, grey partridge by 18% and yellowhammer by 13%. Autumn-seeded crops also grow all too quickly for field nesters such as skylarks (down 14%).

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____

9. The poison pill is one of the most egregious creatures of American corporate law. It exists to stop shareholders enjoying their full ownership right by threatening, if triggered, to dilute the value of those shares in certain circumstances by a firm’s board. They first caught on in the 1980s, when boards used them to deter hostile takeover bids—hostile at least, to the board, though not necessarily to shareholders.

How strange, then, to find a poison pill being used (seemingly) in a good cause, against somebody who has (apparently) given many shareholders a lousy deal. This is the latest twist in the remarkable affair involving Hollinger International, a newspaper group, and its long time controlling owner, Conrad Black. This week, Hollinger International board launched a campaign, including the creation of a poison pill, to stop Lord Black selling control of the firm to wealthy Barclay brothers.

Topic : _____

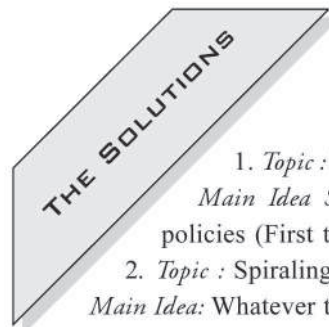
Main Idea : _____

10. A new computer virus, the fastest spreading ever, was this week making the rounds among unprotected computers running on Microsoft Windows. Such incidents of online vandalism by what are often presumed to be geeky teenage hackers are, sadly, routine. But this virus, called MyDoom by some and Novarg by others, seems to be of a different nature—conspiratorial and political. That is because its main feature, besides humiliating Microsoft, is to turn infected machines into weapons against a controversial company called SCO.

SCO, a tiny software firm in Utah, and Microsoft, the world’s largest software firm, have only one thing in common. Both are passionately hated by “open-source” software programmers, who typically believe that computer code should be freely shared instead of sold as property. Microsoft is hated chiefly because it represents the opposite model, proprietary software, and because its operating system, Windows, is the main rival to Linux, the best-known open-source software today.

Topic : _____

Main Idea : _____



1. *Topic :* Myanmar’s failure in ASEAN
Main Idea Sentence : Even by.... recent policies (First two sentences)
2. *Topic :* Spiraling Slums
Main Idea: Whatever the local name of slums, there are a lot of them and they are growing fast.
3. *Topic :* Economic effects of Inappropriate Leadership
Main Idea : No one can calculate the cost of having

uninspiring leaders but we would do well to consider past American presidents.

4. *Topic* : Gordon Brown Pre-Election Budget

Main Idea : Gordon Brown's second pre-election budget, like his first, avoided traditional tax bribes to the electorate as a whole.

5. *Topic* : Mr. Wolfowitz's Selection as World Bank chief

Main Idea : Its leader needs to know about development, be able to articulate a workable vision and be a good manager.

6. *Topic* : Nigeria's changing face

Main Idea : A new economic team, led by the finance minister, a former World Bank Director called Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has made strenuous efforts to impose discipline.

7. *Topic* : A surprise cut in oil supplies.

Main Idea : Price collapse as the northern-hemisphere winter (when demand peaks) gives way to warmer spring (when oil use declines).

8. *Topic* : Deer Oh! Dear

Main Idea : Farmers increasingly sow grain and rape seed in autumn rather than spring, because crops grow more vigorously in spring and so produce better yields. That provides fodder for deer in winter.

9. *Topic* : A new use for the poison pill

Main Idea : It exists to stop shareholders enjoying their full ownership right by threatening, if triggered, to dilute the value of those shares in certain circumstances, by a firm's board.

10. *Topic* : Computer security

Main Idea : This virus, called My Doom, seems to be of a different nature—conspiratorial and political. That is because its main feature, besides humiliating Microsoft, is to turn infected machines into weapons against a controversial company called SCO.

Now we will graduate from **Understanding Paragraphs** to **Understanding Passages**

Dimension Two (C): Identifying Central Points

A passage is a series of paragraphs connected to each other through a logical idea flow. Each paragraph has its own main idea. However, when the ideas of each of the paragraphs are connected to each other, one idea stands out as it is surrounded and supported by all the ideas of the passage. Besides, it will also be supported by the details

throughout the passage. Such an idea, then, is called the central idea or the central point of the passage.

The Cream of the Piece

Some useful questions that need to be answered in order to determine the central point of the passage are:

"What is the idea that the author is consistently referring to throughout the passage?"

"With what point are all the ideas in the passage connected to?"

"What central idea is supported by all the supporting details in the entire passage?"

The answer to one or more of these questions will help you to identify the central point of the passage.

Being able to identify the central point is a critical skill in the development of RC skills. The student should concentrate on honing this skill through his/her reading exercises. We have demonstrated this skill as applied to actual CAT passages in the detailed solved CAT passages at the end of this chapter.

Dimension Three: Ability to Predict and Identify Supporting Details

Supporting details are generally in the form of illustrations, reasons, factual evidences, examples, etc. that explain a main idea.

Since supporting details are always supportive of the main idea, developing the skill to predict, an oncoming supporting detail, or to identify the supporting detail when you see one is closely related to the ability to identify main ideas—something we saw in detail in the previous Dimension.

Let us look closely at some of the ways of putting in supporting details.

1. Supporting Details as Examples Read the following extract, where the supporting details appear as examples.



Some decisions will be fairly obvious—"no-brainers." Your bank account is low, but you have a two week vacation coming up and you want to get away to some place warm to relax with your family. Will you accept your in-laws' offer to free use of their Florida beachfront condo? Sure. You like your employer and feel ready to move forward in your career. Will you step in for your boss for three weeks while she attends a professional development course? Of course!