

Active Reading

Read the following passage and then we'll talk:

Once American men returned from the WWII battlefields, they quickly displaced the women who had temporarily filled jobs otherwise reserved for men. With most women reverting to their domestic roles, the dramatic increase in the number of infants born is perhaps not too surprising. Yet, such factors alone cannot explain the increase in the number of births from 1946-1951. Murray suggests that both women and men's perspectives changed, mostly because of America's success in the war. This optimism, in part, fueled the rapid growth in population. However, many argue that women, in returning to the home, were able to focus on raising a family, regardless of their levels of optimism.

Without looking at the passage above (you might want to put your hand over the passage, or scroll down a bit to hide it), tell me what you just read.

You're likely to pause for a minute and try to grab onto one of the words or phrases floating around in your head ("women," "jobs," "number of infants") and then formulate a statement like: "It was about women in America and how they had more kids." Your attention likely waned after the first couple of sentences and might have even derailed by the time you got to the name "Murray" (you might not even remember reading that name).

Passive Reading

Besides coming up with some vague generalities, you probably had difficulty formulating anything coherent and thorough when summarizing

the passage. A big reason for this is your brain was in passive mode: it was stringing words together. Once word was piled upon word, you got more confused--and ended up wasting precious minutes doing so.

But don't worry. You are not alone. 99% of your fellow SAT test-takers will probably have a very similar response.

You are not only alone if, instead of stopping and thinking about what you read, you kept plowing forward in the mistaken notion that if you got to the end, the passage would suddenly all make sense.

The thing is, the passages on the SAT are written in such a way that after the first couple of lines or paragraphs, your attention very well might wander off to daydream-land. The good news is we can use the predictability of SAT passages to our advantage. However, to do so, we need to understand how a passage is designed.

One Final Point

Once you've noticed the relationship between sentences in a paragraph and the meaning they convey, you'll be able to deal with the SAT questions pertaining to the passage far more confidently. Indeed, you'll be able to formulate an answer in your head. And if you do have to consult the passage (you still will), you'll know where to look.

All in all, becoming an adept active reader will help you hone in on the correct answer, instead of having to fumble frantically through the mass of words that make up the answer choices.