

# Strategies and Practice for State and Standardized Tests

*The test items in this section are modeled after test formats that are used on many state and standardized tests. The strategies presented here will help you prepare for these tests. This section offers general test-taking strategies and tips for answering multiple-choice items, as well as short-response and extended-response questions in critical reading and writing. It also includes guidelines and samples for essay writing. For each test, read the tips in the margin. Then apply the tips to the practice items. You can also apply the tips to Assessment Practice Tests in this book.*

## 1 General Test-Taking Strategies

- Arrive on time and be prepared. Be sure to bring either sharpened pencils with erasers or pens—whichever you are told to bring.
- If you have any questions, ask them before the test begins. Make sure you understand the test procedures, the timing, and the rules.
- Read the test directions carefully. Look at the passages and questions to get an overview of what is expected.
- Tackle the questions one at a time rather than thinking about the whole test.
- Look for main ideas as you read passages. They are often stated at the beginning or the end of a paragraph. Sometimes the main idea is implied.
- Refer back to the reading selections as needed. For example, if a question asks about an author's attitude, you might have to reread a passage for clues.
- If you are not sure of your answer, make a logical guess. You can often arrive at the correct answer by reasoning and eliminating wrong answers.
- As you fill in answers on your answer sheet, make sure you match each test item to its numbered space on the answer sheet.
- Don't look for patterns in the positions of correct choices.
- Only change an answer if you are sure your original choice is incorrect. If you do change an answer, erase your original choice neatly and thoroughly.
- Check your answers and reread your essay.

## 2 Critical Reading

As you advance into high school, you will be exposed to different types of writing, both fiction and nonfiction. You will read novels, persuasive essays, poems, historical documents, and scientific or technical information. Tests will measure your ability to read and analyze these kinds of writings. Test selections can range in length from 100 words to 500 or 600 words.

**Directions:** Read the selection and then answer the questions on the following page.

### SELECTION

Walt has walked all the fourteen years of his life in suntanned, moose-hide moccasins, and he can go to the Indian camps and “talk big” with the men, and trade calico and beads with them for their precious furs. He can make bread without baking powder, yeast, or hops, shoot a moose at three hundred yards, and drive the wild wolf dogs fifty miles a day on the packed trail.

Last of all, he has a good heart, and is not afraid of the darkness and loneliness, of man or beast or thing. His father is a good man, strong and brave, and Walt is growing up like him.

Walt was born a thousand miles or so down the Yukon, in a trading post  
10 below the Ramparts. After his mother died, his father and he came up on the river, step by step, from camp to camp, till now they are settled down on the Mazy May Creek in the Klondike country. Last year they and several others had spent much toil and time on the Mazy May, and endured great hardships; the creek, in turn, was just beginning to show up its richness and to reward them for their heavy labor. But with the news of their discoveries, strange men began to come and go through the short days and long nights, and many unjust things they did to the men who had worked so long upon the creek.

Si Hartman had gone away on a moose hunt, to return and find new  
20 stakes driven and his claim jumped. George Lukens and his brother had lost their claims in a like manner, having delayed too long on the way to Dawson to record them. In short, it was the old story, and quite a number of the earnest, industrious prospectors had suffered similar losses.

But Walt Masters’s father had recorded his claim at the start, so Walt had nothing to fear now that his father had gone on a short trip up the White River prospecting for quartz. Walt was well able to stay by himself in the cabin, cook his three meals a day, and look after things. Not only did he look after his father’s claim, but he had agreed to keep an eye on the adjoining one of Loren Hall, who had started for Dawson to record it.

30 Loren Hall was an old man, and he had no dogs, so he had to travel very slowly. After he had been gone some time, word came up the river that he had broken through the ice at Rosebud Creek and frozen his feet so badly that he would not be able to travel for a couple of weeks. Then Walt Masters received the news that old Loren was nearly all right again, and about to move on afoot for Dawson as fast as a weakened man could.

### Tips: Reading Text

- 1 Before reading a passage, skim the questions that follow it to help you focus your reading.
- 2 Look for key ideas as you read. Competition and fairness are key ideas in this passage.
- 3 Make predictions. The passage tells you that Walt is brave, strong, and resourceful. You can predict that he will be all right while his father and Loren Hall are gone.
- 4 Pay attention to the connotation of words. For example, the word *stampede* in line 37 suggests something frenzied and out of control. The word is usually applied to a herd of wild animals. Here, its connotation helps describe the ruthless newcomers to the Klondike country.

Walt was worried, however; the claim was liable to be jumped at any moment because of the delay, and a fresh stampede had started in on Mazy May. He did not like the looks of the newcomers, and one day, when five of them came by with crack dog teams and the lightest of 40 camping outfits, he could see they were prepared to make speed, and resolved to keep an eye on them. So he locked up the cabin and followed them, being at the same time careful to remain hidden.

—from “The King of Mazy May”  
by Jack London

4

**Directions:** Answer these questions about the selection from “The King of Mazy May.”

1

stem

1. What can you infer about life in the Klondike from the description in lines 1–18?
  - A People need to use many skills to survive.
  - B The Klondike is a lonely place for most people.
  - C The competition for land makes people dishonest.
  - D Families purchase all of their supplies at trading posts.
  
2. The author characterizes Walt by presenting 2
  - A a description of his physical appearance
  - B the narrator’s direct comments about him
  - C Walt’s thoughts and actions
  - D other characters’ opinions of him.
  
3. The main conflict in this passage involves
  - A finding a place to trade rare furs
  - B traveling to town in dangerous weather
  - C protecting land from prospecting thieves
  - D hunting for moose along Mazy May Creek
  
4. Which is an effect of Loren Hall’s accident? 4
  - A Walt must stay alone in the cabin.
  - B Loren is delayed on his way to Dawson.
  - C Loren returns home instead of going to Dawson. 5
  - D The Masters’s claim is jumped.

3  
choices

**Tips: Multiple Choice**

A multiple-choice question consists of a stem and a set of choices. The stem is in the form of a question or an incomplete sentence. One of the choices correctly answers the question or completes the sentence. Many tests offer four answer choices, but no matter how many choices are given, you can use the same strategies to guide you to the best answer.

- 1 Read the stem carefully and try to answer the question before you look at the choices.
- 2 Pay attention to key words in the stem. They may direct you to the correct answer. In question 2, the word *characterizes* tells you to think about how the author develops Walt’s character.
- 3 Read all of the choices before deciding on an answer. In question 3, you might decide to stop at choice B, because Loren Hall falls through the ice on the way to town. The main conflict, however, is about protecting land, not about Hall’s difficult trip.
- 4 Some questions ask you to identify cause-and-effect relationships.
- 5 After reading all of the choices, eliminate any that you know are incorrect. In question 4, you can safely reject choice C, because the passage states that Loren was going to continue on to Dawson.

**Answers:** 1. C, 2. B, 3. C, 4. B

### 3 Vocabulary

Most standardized tests include items that ask about the meanings of words. Some questions might refer to a passage you just read, while others might provide a sentence or paragraph followed by the answer choices.

1. Which of the following words from the passage on pages R96–R97 has a negative connotation? **1**
  - A calico (line 3)
  - B toil (line 13)
  - C industrious (line 23)
  - D careful (line 42)
2. Which word from the passage might include the Latin root meaning “hard”?
  - A endured (line 13) **2**
  - B earnest (line 23)
  - C adjoining (line 29)
  - D liable (line 36)
3. In line 28 of the passage, the idiom *keep an eye on* means **3**
  - A report to
  - B think about
  - C watch over
  - D measure
4. Read this dictionary entry for the word *claim*. Which definition represents the meaning of *claim* as used in the passage?

**DEFINITION**

*v.* **1.** To demand or ask for. **2.** To state to be true; assert. *n.* **1.** A demand for something as due. **2.** Something claimed in a legal manner, especially a tract of public land. **3.** A statement of something as true.

- A *v.* meaning 1 **4**
- B *n.* meaning 1
- C *n.* meaning 2
- D *n.* meaning 3

### Tips: Word Meaning

- 1** Connotation is the suggestion or feeling a word carries beyond its literal meaning. *Work* is a neutral word. *Effort* is a more positive word for work, but the word *toil* has a negative connotation.
- 2** If you don't know the exact meaning of a word, look for clues in nearby sentences. For the word *endured* in line 13, read the description in the surrounding paragraph. Choice A is the best answer, because the passage is describing hard work and the difficult times the characters lived through.
- 3** An idiom is an expression that has a meaning different from the meanings of its individual words. Since Walt is not literally keeping one of his eyes at Loren's claim, you can use context clues to help you figure out the meaning of the idiom *keep an eye on*. Some idioms can be found in the dictionary.
- 4** Eliminate any answers that are not the same part of speech as the meaning of the word in the passage. *Claim* is used as a noun in the passage, so you can rule out answer choice A.

**Answers:** 1. B, 2. A, 3. C, 4. C

## 4 Writing and Grammar

You will be asked to write many essays and research papers in middle school and high school. When it comes to writing, good ideas aren't enough. You need to know how to express them. That requires knowledge of English grammar, sentence structure, and usage. To measure that skill, many standardized tests ask you to identify errors or to improve sentences and paragraphs.

**Directions:** Read this passage and then answer the questions.

### PASSAGE

(1) Jack London wrote many stories about life in the Yukon. (2) He's not the only person who loves rough terrain and cold weather. (3) Each year adventurous dog-sled racers gather in Anchorage, Alaska, for the Iditarod. (4) This race covers 1,150 miles through forests, mountains, and coastlines. (5) The racers, called mushers, steer they're teams of 12 to 16 dogs from start to finish, taking only a few breaks. (6) The dogs wear special boots for paw protection from cuts and frostbite. (7) The first musher to reach the Yukon River checkpoint is served a seven-course dinner. (8) I hope they feed the dogs, too!

1. The correct coordinating conjunction to join sentences 1 and 2 is

2.  A but  
 B for  
 C or  
 D so

2. What change, if any, should be made to sentence 5?

3.  A Change *steer* to *steers*.  
 B Change *they're* to *their*.  
 C Change *teams* to *team*.  
 D Make no change.

3. What is the best way to rewrite the underlined part of sentence 6?

4.  A for cuts and frostbite protection on paws  
 B to protect their paws from cuts and frostbite  
 C for the protection of paws from cuts and frostbite  
 D in order to protect from cuts and frostbite on paws

4. What change, if any, should be made to sentence 7?

5.  A Change *reach* to *reaches*.  
 B Change *is* to *are*.  
 C Change *served* to *servng*.  
 D Make no change.  6

### Tips: Grammar

- 1 Read the entire passage to grasp its overall meaning. Pay particular attention to any underlined parts.
- 2 If you are asked to combine sentences, think about how the ideas relate to each other. Use the coordinating conjunction *or* to introduce a choice. The words *for* or *so* indicate cause and effect. The word *but* expresses contrasting ideas. When you understand the connection between the two sentences, you will know which word best joins them.
- 3 Some items will test your knowledge of commonly confused words. Read sentences carefully to determine how each word is used before deciding which choice is best.
- 4 Before choosing a revision, read through all of the choices to decide which one is best. Your selection should produce a sentence that is grammatically correct.
- 5 Some items will test your knowledge of language conventions. Make sure that pronouns agree with antecedents and that verbs agree with subjects.
- 6 In test item 4, choice D says, "Make no change." Choose this answer only if the sentence is correct as it is originally written.

Answers: 1. A, 2. B, 3. B, 4. D

## 5 Responding to Writing Prompts

Not all tests are multiple choice. Sometimes you have to develop your ideas into a paragraph or a short essay. You might be asked to interpret, summarize, or react to a reading selection.

**Directions:** Reread the selection from “The King of Mazy May” on pages R96–R97 and follow the directions for the short and extended responses.

### SHORT RESPONSE

Write a well-organized paragraph comparing and contrasting the prospectors and the men of the “stampede.”

#### SAMPLE SHORT RESPONSE

The prospectors of Mazy May, such as Walt’s father and Loren Hall, **1** couldn’t be more different from the claim-jumping stampedeers. **2** The prospectors “spent much toil and time” looking for gold, willing to keep working for as long as it took. The stampedeers, on the other hand, seemed not to arrive until after the prospectors had worked for a year to set up their claims. **2** The stampedeers plan to steal the claims and profit from the prospectors’ hard work. Walt, who risks danger to protect his neighbor’s claim, is the exact opposite of the “unjust” stampedeers.

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Discuss in two or three paragraphs the effects of the setting in the selection from “The King of Mazy May.”

#### SAMPLE EXTENDED RESPONSE

The setting in “The King of Mazy May”—Klondike country—affects not only the story’s plot, but also its characters and conflict.

**3** Walt is a product of his setting. **3** His whole life, he has lived and worked in the cold weather and lonely conditions of the region. As a result, he’s learned to be a good hunter and dog driver. He’s become self-reliant because his father must leave on prospecting trips. **4** The skills Walt develops in the Klondike are what make him able to protect his neighbor’s claim.

**3** The setting also presents specific challenges that affect the story’s plot and conflict. **3** For example, the cold water of Rosebud Creek is what delays Loren Hall on his way to Dawson, and the “short days and long nights” seem to encourage the claim jumpers. Finally, the land along the creek is what brings both the prospectors and the thieves to the area in the first place.

### Tips: Responding to Writing Prompts

- 1** Short-response prompts are often fact-based rather than interpretive. Get right to the point in your answer, and stick to the facts.
- 2** Make sure that you write about the assigned topic. Support your answer with details from the passage, such as a quotation, a paraphrase, or an example.
- 3** When you are writing an extended response, build your paragraphs around clear topic sentences that will pull your ideas together.
- 4** If you are asked to interpret a passage, don’t just copy the author’s words. Try to express the ideas in your own words. Express your ideas clearly so that the reader understands your viewpoint.
- 5** Proofread your response for errors in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, or grammar.



## 6 Writing an Essay

Many tests will ask you to read a prompt and write an essay in response to it. You might be asked to write a narrative, persuasive, or expository essay. You might be asked to write a story, summarize an article, or respond to a piece of writing. It is important to read the prompt carefully and look for direction words that tell you what to write about. Because of the time constraints, an impromptu essay will not be polished. It will represent a first draft. Even so, it should be complete. Essays are scored on the following criteria:

- **Focus** Establish a point of view on your topic in the opening paragraph. Stay with that topic throughout the essay.
- **Organization** Maintain a logical progression of ideas.
- **Support for ideas** Use details and examples to develop an argument or line of thinking.
- **Style/word choice** Use words accurately and vary sentence structure.
- **Grammar** Use standard English and proofread for errors.

### Writing Prompt

In 1961, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission called television programming “a vast wasteland.” Many people still feel we would be better off without television. Write a persuasive essay of four or five paragraphs supporting or rejecting this idea.

#### SAMPLE PERSUASIVE ESSAY

1 [ I don't agree that television is “a vast wasteland.” A wasteland is an ugly place where nothing grows. So, if television were only a wasteland, that would mean that it never offered people anything beautiful or exciting. It would mean that there was no information or entertainment of value that people could get from watching television programs, and that just isn't the case.

It's true that there are many low-quality programs on TV. These programs don't teach us anything. Some shows, such as soap operas, don't show people or their lives the way they actually are. They exaggerate situations and rarely offer a positive or important message.

Other programs, however, offer interesting and important information about nature, science, history, the arts, sports, or current events. These educational and exciting programs can help us grow and improve ourselves. 2

People who don't agree with me might say that TV turns us into couch potatoes. 3 Many people do just sit in front of the television for hours, watching whatever is on, whether it's good or bad. My answer to that point of view is that we have to be responsible in choosing the programs we watch. If viewers stopped watching bad shows, those shows would eventually be canceled.

In conclusion, TV can be worthwhile if we make good decisions about its use. We just have to use our heads and take charge of the remote control. 4

### Tips: Writing an Essay

Before you begin writing, take a minute or two to gather your thoughts. You don't need to prepare a complete outline, but write the main points you want to make. In the essay here on television, program quality and personal responsibility are key issues.

- 1 When writing a persuasive essay, state your point of view in the introduction.
- 2 Facts and examples make your writing come to life. Use them in the body of your essay to clarify your points and to strengthen your arguments. The writer of this essay uses examples to illustrate some possible benefits of television.
- 3 Try to consider the opposing viewpoint and respond to it. In the sample essay, the student notes that some people think TV “turns us into couch potatoes.” Her response is that people should be responsible about what they watch.
- 4 Make sure your essay has a conclusion, even if it's just a single sentence. A conclusion pulls your ideas together and lets the reader know you have finished.
- 5 Allow time to reread what you have written. If you have to make a correction, do so neatly and legibly.