



Exemplar Grade 8 Reading Test Questions



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Introduction

This booklet explains ACT Aspire® Grade 8 Reading test questions by presenting, with their answer keys, sample questions aligned to each reporting category on the test. A key includes the question's depth-of-knowledge (DOK) level,¹ an explanation of the task posed by each question, a thorough explanation of correct responses, ideas for improvement, and more. The exemplar test questions included here are representative of the range of content and types of questions found on the ACT Aspire Grade 8 Reading test. Educators can use this resource in several ways:

- Become familiar with ACT Aspire question types.
- See what typical questions in each ACT Aspire reporting category look like.
- Help reinforce or adjust teaching and learning objectives.
- Learn how ACT Aspire improvement idea statements can help students identify key skills they have not yet mastered.

Each ACT Aspire Reading assessment contains several passages, including literary narratives (prose fiction, memoirs, personal essays) and informational texts (social science, natural science). Within and across grade levels, the passages span a range of complexity levels in order to provide students, teachers, and parents with information about how well students understand texts of increasing difficulty. Students answer a series of selected-response (multiple-choice), technology-enhanced, and constructed-response questions that assess their abilities to recognize meaning in, reason logically about, and make connections between and among texts. ACT Aspire Reading questions operate at various DOK levels, or cognitive complexities, and reflect a range of difficulty appropriate for the grade level.

All levels of ACT Aspire Reading assessments include constructed-response tasks that measure the higher-order cognitive processes necessary for reading and understanding increasingly complex texts. Constructed-response tasks are scored according to rubrics that allow students to receive varying amounts of credit for responses that are correct or partially correct, enabling differentiation between multiple skill levels.

The types of constructed-response tasks in ACT Aspire Reading assessments include the following examples:

- Formulate a conclusion by making connections within a passage, and provide support using specific details from the text.

¹ Norman L. Webb, "Depth-of-Knowledge Levels for Four Content Areas," last modified March 28, 2002, <http://facstaff.wcer.wisc.edu/normw/All%20content%20areas%20%20DOK%20levels%2032802.doc>.

- Formulate a conclusion by making connections between a pair of passages, and provide support using specific details from both texts.
- Identify cause-and-effect relationships within a passage, and provide support using specific details from the text.
- Identify similarities and differences between the key ideas of paired passages, and provide support using specific details from both texts.

Reporting Categories

ACT Aspire Reading tests assess skills in the following reporting categories, which are the same as the categories listed in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Reading strand and those found in the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards in Reading.

Key Ideas and Details

These questions require students to read texts closely; to determine central ideas and themes and summarize information and ideas accurately; and to understand sequential, comparative, and cause-effect relationships.

Craft and Structure

These questions require students to determine word and phrase meanings and analyze an author's word choice rhetorically as well as influences on the English language; to analyze text structure; and to understand purpose and point of view.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

These questions require students to understand how arguments are constructed and to make connections to prior knowledge and between and among texts.

Improvement Ideas

ACT Aspire includes simple improvement ideas at the reporting category (skill) level on student and parent reports. These improvement ideas are provided for the lowest performing skill for each subject tested. The skills are always ordered from highest performing to lowest performing based on the percentage of points correct. If the percentages for two or more skills are tied, the skill with the lower number of total points is displayed first.

Keep in mind that the order of skills listed on reports may not always be exemplary of where to focus learning. For example, the skills in which a student performed within the ACT Readiness Range may not always be listed first, and the skills in which a student did not perform within the ACT Readiness Range may not always be listed last. Also, keep in mind the total number of points possible in each skill when interpreting the percentage correct.

There are two levels of improvement idea statements (low and high) for ACT Aspire summative reporting. Low statements are given on the report if the student's lowest skill score is below the ACT Readiness Range for that particular skill. High statements are given on the report if the student's lowest skill score is at or above the ACT Readiness Range for that particular skill.

Answer Key

This section presents a reading passage and the sequence number, grade, question type, DOK level, alignment to the ACT Aspire reporting categories, and correct response for each question. Each question is accompanied by an explanation of the question and the correct response as well as improvement idea statements for ACT Aspire Reading.

Passage: “A Capital Capitol”

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article “A Capital Capitol” by Gina DeAngelis (©2006 Carus Publishing Company).

The U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., one of the most recognizable buildings in the world, has been the working site of the U.S. Congress for more than 200 years.

- 5 In January 1791, French engineer Pierre L’Enfant was asked to design America’s grand capital city. L’Enfant submitted his idea to commissioners in August. It included a grand vista about a mile long, at one end of which would be the city’s “Congress House.” The U.S. government decided to hold a contest to find the best design for the new country’s Capitol. The winner was a physician named William Thornton.

- 15 Construction began in 1793, when President George Washington used a silver trowel to lay the cornerstone on Jenkins Hill (known today as Capitol Hill). It was hoped that Congress, which had been meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, could move in by the turn of the century.

- 20 By 1796, though, construction already was behind schedule. Worried lawmakers decided to focus on completing the north wing of the Capitol, but parts of that still were unfinished in 1800. Both branches of Congress, the Supreme Court, the District of Columbia courts, and the Library of Congress moved in anyway.

- 30 Congress authorized more money for the Capitol in 1803 and appointed architect Benjamin Latrobe to oversee construction. He had the south wing finished by 1811, but by then, the north wing was in need of repair. The War of 1812 (which lasted until 1815) intervened, and Congress refused to worry about the building project. A frustrated Latrobe resigned in 1813.

- 35 In August 1814, an invading British force set fire to the Capitol, the White House, and other government buildings. A timely rainstorm saved the city from complete destruction, but Congress was forced to meet for a time in a cramped hotel.
- 40 From 1815 to 1819, the Senate and the House gathered in a brick structure where the Supreme Court building stands today.

- Congress begged the efficient Latrobe to return, which he did, until he resigned again in 1817. His replacement, Charles Bulfinch, designed a beautiful copper-covered dome for the central section of the Capitol. The building finally was completed in 1826, more than 30 years after construction began. Of course by then the United States had grown, so Congress again needed more space.

- 55 Another competition to expand the Capitol in 1850 resulted in a five-way tie. President Millard Fillmore chose Thomas U. Walter to supervise construction. Bulfinch’s dome was dwarfed by the enormous new wings, so Walter came up with a design for a huge dome and displayed a drawing of it in his office. Congressmen who visited there were so impressed that in 1855, they voted to replace the original dome with Walter’s grand design.

- 65 Though the outbreak of the Civil War (1861–1865) briefly interrupted construction, President Abraham Lincoln, inaugurated in 1861 beneath the half-completed dome, refused to stop the project. In December 1863, the final section of the 19-foot-tall Statue of Freedom was hoisted into place. Three years later, the building, with its great domed Rotunda that is so recognizable today, was completed.

Question 1

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By 1796, though, construction already was behind schedule. Worried lawmakers decided to focus on completing the north wing of the Capitol, but parts of that still were unfinished in 1800. Both branches of Congress, the Supreme Court, the District of Columbia courts, and the Library of Congress moved in anyway.

Which of the following statements best describes the main purpose of the passage?

- A. To provide an overview of the stages through which the Capitol was designed and built
- B. To describe the places Congress met during times when the Capitol couldn't be used
- C. To analyze the interactions between the people who designed the Capitol and those who built it
- D. To argue for the continued restoration and maintenance of the Capitol

Sequence	Grade	Question type	DOK level	Reporting category	Correct response
1	8	Selected Response	3	Craft and Structure	A

This selected-response question requires students to understand the main rhetorical purpose of the text (aligns with the Common Core State Standards College and Career Readiness anchor standard [CCRA] R.6). Students must read the entire text carefully in order to infer the text's main purpose. They then must identify an accurate statement of main purpose among answer options that include subordinate purposes or purposes for which no textual support exists.

Correct Response

Only answer option A accurately describes the main purpose of the text. The other purposes presented are either subordinate issues or are not supported by the text.

Improvement Idea Statements

Reporting category	Grade	Low statement (scored below ACT Readiness Range)	High statement (scored at or above ACT Readiness Range)
Craft and Structure	8	As you read, consider the purpose of texts and parts of texts. Also analyze how texts are organized, how authors use point of view, and how authors use words and phrases.	Read increasingly complex texts from a variety of genres. Analyze how parts of texts relate to the whole, how authors use point of view, and how word choices impact meaning and tone.

Question 2

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article "A Capital Capitol" by Gina DeAngelis (©2006 Carus Publishing Company).

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The passage most strongly suggests that Latrobe resigned in 1813 from his duties overseeing construction of the Capitol because:

- A. he wanted to find a new project since the construction was nearly complete.
- B. Bulfinch had been appointed to take over some of Latrobe's tasks, which made Latrobe angry.
- C. the British army had damaged the Capitol, which led to work on it being stopped indefinitely.
- D. he was unhappy with Congress's lack of interest in the Capitol project during the war.

Sequence	Grade	Question type	DOK level	Reporting category	Correct response
2	8	Selected Response	2	Key Ideas and Details	D

This selected-response question requires students to use information and ideas in the text to make a supportable inference (aligns with CCRA.R.1). To answer this question, students must read the passage carefully in order to identify details relevant to Latrobe's 1813 resignation. Students must then draw a reasonable conclusion as to why Latrobe resigned, selecting the best reason from among answer choices that include reasons not supported by the text.

Correct Response

The fifth paragraph states that Congress refused to worry about the Capitol progress during the War of 1812, followed immediately by the statement that "a frustrated Latrobe resigned." Answer option D states the most supportable conclusion: Latrobe was unhappy with Congress's lack of interest in the project.

Improvement Idea Statements

Reporting category	Grade	Low statement (scored below ACT Readiness Range)	High statement (scored at or above ACT Readiness Range)
Key Ideas and Details	8	Read as many grade-level texts as you can, focusing on informational texts. Work on reading closely, determining main ideas/themes, and identifying sequences and relationships (comparative, cause/effect).	Read increasingly complex texts from a variety of genres. Work on making and supporting reasonable inferences and on identifying and inferring main ideas, themes, sequences, and relationships.

Question 3

The passage introduced in this question is adapted from “A Capital Vision From a Self-Taught Architect” by Fergus M. Bordewich (©2008 by Smithsonian Institution).

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Think about the preceding passage as you read the following.

Thornton’s design, however brilliant, was not perfect. Although the Capitol’s exterior was magnificent, Thornton lacked the architect’s ability to picture an interior in three dimensions. Thus, when professional builders examined his plans, it became clear that its columns were spaced too widely and that the staircases lacked sufficient headroom. The conference room’s interior colonnade, Thomas Jefferson objected, “will obstruct the view of the members; and if taken away, the ceiling is too wide to support itself.” Key sections of the building lacked sufficient light and air. The president’s office had no ventilation at all, while the Senate chamber was allotted only three windows.

However, elements of Thornton’s design remain, including the original western facade of the wings, the stately Law Library Door at the southeast corner of the old North Wing and much of the eastern facade. “He

Explain what new information this excerpt from “A Capital Vision From a Self-Taught Architect” adds to the discussion, begun in the passage from “A Capital Capitol,” of the problems involved in building the US Capitol. Using both the passage and the excerpt, provide three pieces of evidence to support your answer.

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Sequence	Grade	Question type	DOK level	Reporting category	Correct response
3	8	Constructed Response	3	Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	See scoring guide.

This constructed-response task requires students to make connections between information and ideas in two texts (aligns with CCRA.R.9). Specifically, this task requires students to determine how the information provided in the excerpt supplements the ideas developed in the main passage. Students must read both the passage and the excerpt carefully, compare the information provided in the two texts, and then determine how the information is related. Students must then construct a written response explaining the connection between the information in the two texts, citing evidence from both the main passage and the excerpt to support their answer.

Improvement Idea Statements

Reporting category	Grade	Low statement (scored below ACT Readiness Range)	High statement (scored at or above ACT Readiness Range)
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	8	As you read, analyze how authors present their arguments. Also read multiple texts with similar topics or similar themes and analyze connections between and among these texts.	Read increasingly complex texts from a variety of genres. Analyze how authors present arguments, focusing on strengths and weaknesses. Also, look for connections between and among related texts.

Scoring Guide

Synthesis-Compare

Explain what new information this excerpt from “A Capital Vision From a Self-Taught Architect” adds to the discussion begun in the passage from “A Capital Capitol” about the problems involved in building the US Capitol. Using both the passage and the excerpt, provide three pieces of evidence to support your answer.

Scoring Framework

This Synthesis–Compare task is scored on a 0–4-point scale. A full-credit response includes the following components:

Claim	Evidence
an explanation of how the information in the excerpt adds more information about the problems involved in building the US Capitol (1 point)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a detail from the passage or excerpt that supports the claim (1 point) ▪ a detail from the passage that supports the claim (1 point) ▪ a detail from the excerpt that supports the claim (1 point)

Acceptable Responses

The following chart is not a definitive list of acceptable responses. Other responses will also be included in the anchor papers and practice sets.

Claims	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The excerpt goes into detail about the flaws in Thornton's design. ▪ The excerpt helps explain why building was delayed in 1796. ▪ The excerpt gives more details about Thornton's design. ▪ The excerpt tells the features of Thornton's design that survived the fire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Columns were spread too widely. ▪ Staircases lacked sufficient headroom. ▪ Interior colonnade would obstruct views. ▪ Lacked sufficient light and air. ▪ western facade ▪ Law Library ▪ eastern facade

Scoring Rubric and Guidelines

<p>4 The answer includes an accurate claim, one accurate piece of evidence from the passage, one accurate piece of evidence from the excerpt, and one accurate piece of evidence from the passage or excerpt.</p> <p>EXAMPLE 1 The passage says that building was delayed in 1796. The excerpt says that Thornton’s design had many flaws like columns spread too widely, staircases that lacked sufficient headspace, and interior colonnade that obstructed views. So, the excerpt helps explain why building was delayed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extraneous material in a response, as long as it does not contradict the appropriate response, is not taken into consideration when assigning a score. ▪ Some students may offer two or more pieces of evidence that work together to communicate an implied claim. In this case, one point is awarded for each textual detail but not for the implied claim. (See Example 3.) ▪ The maximum score for a response that offers four or more pieces of evidence but no claim is score point 3. (See Example 3.)
<p>3 The answer includes an accurate claim, one accurate piece of evidence from the passage, and one accurate piece of evidence from the excerpt.</p> <p>EXAMPLE 2 The passage says that Thornton won the contest in 1773. The excerpt tells of some of the strong features of his design, like the western facade.</p> <p>The answer includes three accurate pieces of evidence, with at least one from the passage and one from the excerpt.</p> <p>EXAMPLE 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thornton won the contest in 1773. 2. western facade 3. eastern facade 4. Law Library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A supporting detail must relate logically to the claim made, or it does not earn credit. ▪ Responses do not have to be in complete sentences or paragraphs. Even a one- or two-word response can receive one point. (See Examples 3 and 5.) ▪ A claim must be paraphrased or interpreted. Supporting details include but aren’t limited to facts, figures, quotations, paraphrases, and other information and ideas from the passage. ▪ If a response gives the same answer or support twice using different words, it only earns one point.
<p>2 The answer includes an accurate claim and one accurate piece of evidence from either the passage or the excerpt.</p> <p>EXAMPLE 4 There was a fire in 1815. But the excerpt describes some of Thornton’s design that can still be seen today, so these must have survived the fire.</p> <p>The answer includes two accurate pieces of evidence: one from the passage and one from the excerpt.</p> <p>EXAMPLE 5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. lacked air and light 2. columns spread too widely 	

1 The answer is a single claim.

EXAMPLE 6

The excerpt explains how Thornton's design had a lot of problems.

The answer is a piece of evidence.

EXAMPLE 7

There was a fire in 1815.

0 The answer shows effort but offers neither an acceptable claim, nor acceptable pieces of evidence.

EXAMPLE 8

The passage is about many events.
