

## Constructed-Response Study Guide

The constructed-response format requires that you carefully read a short passage and then write a short answer response to a question about the passage. Let's take a look at a generic constructed-response question:

Directions: For this question, you will read an excerpt from a novel and then write a brief response.

Passage:

The remainder of my schooldays were no more auspicious than the first. Indeed, they were an Endless Project that slowly evolved into a Unit, in which miles of construction paper and wax crayon were expended by the State of Alabama in its well-meaning but fruitless efforts to teach me Group Dynamics.

Question:

Chapter 4 of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel by Harper Lee, opens with these lines. Explain how the author uses metaphor and word choice to help readers better understand Scout, the narrator of the novel.

### Strategies for Constructed-Response Questions

**1. Read the question(s) first.** Most test-takers would naturally read the passage first and then move to the question(s). But remember, you are reading the passage in order to get the answers to the questions right. Before you spend time reading the passage, read the question(s) you'll be required to answer so that you can think about why you are reading it. Reading specialists call this practice "setting purpose for reading." I suspect that you'll find this a more efficient and effective approach than reading the passage first.

**2. Actively read each passage.** As you read the passage, take notes, keep your mind on the question(s) you'll have to answer, and think about your response as you read. It's fine for you to make notes, underlines, or other marks in your test booklet.

**3. Reread each question, and then make a brief plan or sketch of the points of your response.** For example, a brief plan for the sample question above might look like this:

- Metaphor: Formal schooling is a never-ending unit plan.
- Meaning: Scout views her formal school experience as unchallenging, ineffective, and boring. In addition, her school experiences have not taught her how to get along with others.

- Word choice: Auspicious, expended, fruitless.
- Meaning: Word choice demonstrates that Scout is bright, literate, and clever and suggests that she is clearly learning to think critically outside of her formal school experiences.

**4. ACE it!** Remember: **Answer (or Address)** the prompt, **Cite quotations** from the passage, **Elaborate** on the meaning of the quote, (repeat C and E if necessary), and **Sum it Up!**

**5. Review your response.** Were you clear, concise, specific, and accurate? Did you answer all parts of the question? Did you include the required number of examples?

Here is a sample response to our generic question on *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

Harper Lee opens Chapter 4 of *To Kill a Mockingbird* with the metaphor that school is a never-ending unit plan. By this, the author is showing the main character's view that formal schooling is pointless drudgery. The narrator, Scout, sees formal schooling as ineffective in its attempts to teach her to get along with others—in her words, "Group Dynamics." Furthermore, the author's word choices, such as auspicious, fruitless, and expended, provide the reader with the idea that Scout may be finding her formal experiences ineffective and unchallenging because she is learning more outside of school than during school. Lee presents Scout as a character who appears to be a bright, reflective, and critical thinker.

Highlight the **Answer** to the prompt in yellow.

Highlight the **Citation(s) or quotation(s)** in blue.

Highlight the **Elaboration** on the meaning of the quotation(s) in pink.

Highlight the **Summary Sentence** in purple.

## How to Read the Passage

1. Remember to read the questions first.
2. Read the passage carefully, closely, and actively. By carefully, I mean read slowly enough to comprehend what you've read. By closely, I suggest that you consider the literary elements the author uses. By actively, I mean to make margin notes, underline key points, and think about why this information is included.
3. Ask questions as you read. What issues does this passage raise? What literary elements does this passage feature? Keep in mind that all information in the passage is included on the test for a reason. Reading and knowing the questions before you read the passage really pays off here. You can read the passage actively and efficiently to get ideas for your constructed response. This should save you time as well.

## Try it Yourself

Directions: For this question, you will read poem and then write a brief response.

First Lesson

Philip Booth

Lie back daughter, let your head  
be tipped back in the cup of my hand.  
Gently, and I will hold you. Spread  
your arms wide, lie out on the stream  
and look high at the gulls. A dead-  
man's float is face down. You will dive  
and swim soon enough where this tidewater  
ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe  
me, when you tire on the long thrash  
to your island, lie up, and survive.  
As you float now, where I held you  
and let go, remember when fear  
cramps your heart what I told you:  
lie gently and wide to the light-year  
stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.

Question:

Identify the extended metaphor in the poem and explain how it develops the theme.  
Include two examples from the poem to support your answer.