PSSA Test Taking Strategies for Multiple Choice and Constructed Response
Prepare Physically and Mentally
Be Physically Ready

- Get a good night’s sleep before the test. This should take priority over entertainment options.
- The morning of the test, eat a breakfast that includes protein: eggs, bacon, peanut butter, cheese, yogurt, tofu, etc.
- BE ON TIME.
- Stretch during testing breaks.
Be Mentally Prepared

- Being nervous or not caring, ruins your performance.

- Be competitive with the test makers, not intimidated by them.

- Remember, the passages were not chosen to entertain you. Keep yourself engaged through active reading, highlighting, and writing margin notes.
Before Reading Strategies

The test is on your desk.

What do you do now?
Open the Proper Mental “Files”

- Scan the test and look at the task ahead of you, but only after you have been told to start, and only the test that you are going to work on in that session.
  - Think of it as several small jobs, not one big, overwhelming one. Your confidence and positive attitude are really half the battle.
- Identify the genres and subgenres of the passages. Activate what you know about these types of reading. What kinds of questions do you expect for an informational vs. a narrative vs. a poem?
Scavenger Hunt

• Read the questions before you read the passage. Don’t read the answer choices. Doing so will take too long and confuse you later.

• In each question, highlight the key words that tell you what the test maker is looking for, such as, “main idea,” “compare,” or “in the beginning of the passage.”

• Also highlight unusual or very specific words/phrases that you can look for while reading.
MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS

A.2.4.1

1. In the student’s editorial, what is the main idea of the third paragraph?
   A Cell phones can help students keep appointments.
   B Cell phones make it easier for parents to contact students.
   C Students often have appointments like piano lessons after school.
   D Parents have to call the school office to send messages to students.

3. How is the student’s editorial organized?
   A by describing the process of parents getting cell phones for their children
   B by telling the reasons for and positive effects of cell phone usage
   C by presenting a problem concerning cell phones and how it can be solved
   D by including questions about cell phone usage in school followed by answers

B.3.3.1

2. What is the main reason information about Sara Jackson Milford is included in the student’s editorial?
   A She presents an opposing viewpoint.
   B She distracts the readers from the issue.
   C She is a familiar person to teenage readers.
   D She knows most students agree on the issue.

4. In the school representative’s editorial, what does the phrase comply with mean?
   A follow
   B memorize
   C enjoy
   D understand
B.3.1.1

5. Read the sentence from the school representative's editorial.
   "Students insist that they would remember to turn them off for class, but we know that would not work."
   What is a weakness of the school representative's opinion?
   A. The school representative is too critical of cell phones.
   B. The school representative makes an assumption that is not always true.
   C. The school representative lacks a clear understanding of students.
   D. The school representative thinks that cell phones are unnecessary.

B.1.2.1

7. Which statement from the editorials shows that one of the authors recognizes both sides of the argument?
   A. The student states, "If for no other reason, we need to have cell phones with us for safety."
   B. The school representative states, "Our school district policy has forbidden cell phones and pagers from the time they first began to appear on our campuses."
   C. The student states, "If schools don't want to remain in the Dark Ages, they have to allow students to bring cell phones to our classes."
   D. The school representative states, "Unfortunately, cell phones can also be used for less acceptable reasons than communicating with parents."

6. What does the use of first person point of view in each editorial help convey?
   A. individual beliefs about cell phone use in schools
   B. how cell phones aid communities
   C. why cell phones are disruptive at school
   D. facts about using cell phones in schools
B.1.2.1

8. What is the purpose of both editorials?
   
   A. to describe how schools handle cell phone use
   
   B. to explain how cell phones contribute to the learning environment
   
   C. to tell about the cell phone experiences of the authors
   
   D. to present a viewpoint about cell phones in school
Constructed Response

• Read the constructed response or “essay” question too before you start reading the passage.

• Highlight or underline things you are asked to do, statements like:
  ➢ Explain the main idea...
  ➢ Describe the character...
  ➢ Use 3 examples from the passage...

• Keep the constructed response prompt in the back of your mind while you are reading.

• During reading, you can mark places in the passage that you could use in your response.
OPEN-ENDED ITEM

B.1.2.1

9. Give a word or phrase that describes both the student and the school representative. Use at least one example from each editorial to explain your response.
During Reading Strategies
Active Reading Strategies

• Always read the text in the box at the top of the first page and any footnote. The main idea and more are often stated in the box, and the genre or source is often revealed in the footnote.

• Read in chunks, stopping frequently (every paragraph or sub section) to question the author. Ask yourself, “What did the author give me in this chunk of text?”

• Silently restate the main idea/key point of that chunk in your mind.

• If you can’t restate it, REREAD IT until you can. This way you’ll catch where you stopped understanding, and you’ll be more willing to reread a chunk than the whole piece.

• Label it. Highlight or make a margin note of the main idea/key point. This will help you locate relevant parts of the passage when you’re answering the questions, including the constructed response.
Highlighting Strategies

We all know to highlight what’s important as we read, but what is important here?

• What’s important in this circumstance is to highlight only main ideas/key points (yellows) and text that match the questions.

• Don’t worry about vocabulary words; they will already be underlined in the text.

• As you read, highlight any sentence that contains the unusual words that you highlighted in the questions. The answer is probably right there.

• Highlight areas that address the inferential questions about main idea, theme, conflict, character traits, etc. Label the section in the margin.

• Caution: Too much highlighting defeats the purpose of highlighting. Don’t forget the Rule of 5.
Read the following editorials about cell phones in schools. Then answer questions 1–9 in your answer booklet.

**Cell Phones in Schools**

**Student Editorial**

If schools don’t want to remain in the Dark Ages, they have to allow students to bring cell phones to our classes. They have become an essential part of our lives, and almost everyone has one or wants one.

If for no other reason, we need to have cell phones with us for safety. Our parents want us to have them so that if anything happens, we can get in touch with them right away. I read that my favorite teen actress, Sara Jackson Milford, carries a cell phone to her school so that she can call her home or her agent whenever she wants. My mom says that she has more peace of mind because she knows that I can call her whenever I need her.

Parents call us on cell phones for little everyday things, too, like reminding us of a dental appointment or a piano lesson, or telling us about a change in plans. Without our cell phones, they would have to call and bother someone in the school office to get a message to us. Or we would just wouldn’t know and would miss the appointment or lesson, or find out about a change in plans after riding the bus home instead of waiting to be picked up at school. Cell phones simplify things for everyone.

Cell phones that can take pictures are helpful, too. You can use them for class, for photo essays and things like that. They are even being used to help solve crimes. In Australia, neighborhood watch groups are using cell phones in policing their communities. In Japan, people can send pictures directly to the police. Having cell phones in school could help cut down on vandalism or other inappropriate behavior as any student could click a picture of the culprit and share it with the principal or the authorities.

The students at one high school in Florida helped to convince state legislators to change the law that banned cell phones in schools. Now individual school districts set their own policies. At this Florida high school, students can have cell phones at school, but they have to be turned off and kept in their lockers. Still, they get to have them there so that they can use them as soon as school is out. The principal said that most of the 1,700 students there have cell phones.

There’s no point in sticking our heads in the sand. The world is changing quickly, and our school policies need to change to keep up with them. Cell phones are just a fact of life. They aren’t going away.
School Representative Editorial

Our school district policy has forbidden cell phones and pagers from the time they first began to appear on our campuses. Originally we feared that they might be used for inappropriate activities. Today the picture has changed, and cell phones are much more commonly used. But that does not mean students can use their cell phones whenever and wherever they like. For their own good, students need to comply with school policy.

Think about the last time you were in a theater and someone’s cell phone rang. It is very annoying to have an evening’s entertainment interrupted by someone’s thoughtlessness. Now, imagine a classroom in which someone’s cell phone suddenly rings in the middle of a discussion or a test. It is even more disruptive in such a situation. Students insist that they would remember to turn them off for class, but we know that would not work. Parents need only consider how forgetful young people can be to know that probably more than one cell phone would be ringing during class time. I have children of my own, and I realize that there are both advantages and disadvantages to having cell phones at school. It is my sincere belief that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages.

If a crisis, such as a fire, were to occur at school, cell phones in the hands of hundreds of students would not help the situation. In fact, it would hurt. Rescue workers might be prevented from receiving the call for help as too many calls would flood the available phone lines. Also, parents receiving calls could quickly flood the area, getting in the way of firefighters and rescue workers. Just having so many calls being made could also overload cell phone systems and interrupt communication among emergency workers.

Unfortunately, cell phones can also be used for less acceptable reasons than communicating with parents. Text messaging allows students to communicate silently during a test, offering a new form of distraction. Also, phones that snap pictures can be used to invade the privacy of others in a number of unpleasant ways. Adults cannot be present in every corner of a school monitoring the students’ use of cell phones.

Our policy has been developed with the well-being of the students in mind. Providing a learning environment that is as peaceful and secure as possible is our goal. Cell phones interfere with creating such an environment.

Conc= No for safety and learning env.
After Reading Strategies
Strategies for Conquering Multiple Choice Questions

- Use the text
- Cover the answer choices
- Eliminate distracters
- Know where to look for the type of question
- Intelligent guessing
- Advice for bubbling
- Damage control
First of all...

DON’T TRUST YOUR MEMORY;
GO BACK TO THE TEXT.

It’s not cheating; you have the time, and why else did you highlight?
Pretend It’s Not Multiple Choice

• Read the stem only, covering up the answer choices, to see if you already KNOW the answer. **Don’t peek**, and predict the answer.
• Now, read ALL of the answer choices.
• See if any of the choices match your prediction.
• If your prediction isn’t one of the choices, reread the stem; you may have misunderstood the question.
• Double check your answer by going back to the text for evidence.
Where’s the Answer?
Sometimes it’s just a matter of knowing where to look.

- **In the text:** Some questions are “right there” on the page. To find these literal questions, simply go back to the text. If you’ve highlighted text that matches the questions, the answer might be staring right at you.

- **Between me and the text:** Even if the question isn’t literal, support or evidence for your inference is in the text. Go to the section that relates to that question to make a supportable inference.

  ✓ Main ideas of a passage are usually found in the **first paragraph** of informational texts. Look there and in the **title** for stated or implied main ideas.

  ✓ To find the **theme**, reread the **end** of the passage, and ask yourself, “What lesson was taught?”
Eliminate Distracters
Increase Your Odds

• Go back to the section that relates to the question.

• **Fact Check.** Read each answer, and check it in the passage. Cross out those that are obviously wrong – if any.

• If more than one choice seems true, then one of them doesn’t answer that **specific** question. Reread the stem to see which to eliminate.

• If two answers are opposites, one is often the correct answer.

• Some answers are partially true. If any part of the answer is false, eliminate it.

• For **vocabulary**, substitute each answer choice for the word in the passage to narrow your options.

• Rephrase the question: “In other words, what I’m looking for is...”
I’ve Tried All That And Still Don’t Have A Clue

• Research shows that first instincts are often correct, but we tend to second guess ourselves.

• If you cannot figure out the answer by using the text and strategies within a few minutes, go with your first impression. Don’t leave it blank. You run the risk of incorrectly numbering the rest of the test.

• **Circle** the questions you’re unsure of, even though you’ve answered them. Go back when you’re done with the section and take a fresh look. Sometimes, later questions help to answer earlier ones.
MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS

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1. In the student’s editorial, what is the main idea of the third paragraph?
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   C. Students often have appointments like piano lessons after school.
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B.3.2.1
2. What is the main reason information about Sara Jackson Milford is included in the student’s editorial?
   A. She presents an opposing viewpoint.
   B. She distracts the readers from the issue.
   C. She is a familiar person to teenage readers.
   D. She knows most students agree on the issue.

A.2.2.2
4. In the school representative’s editorial, what does the phrase comply with mean?
   A. follow
   B. memorize
   C. enjoy
   D. understand

Eliminate those that Don’t match text.
Go There and Read context.
Substitute each
Go There!
B.3.1.1

5. Read the sentence from the school representative’s editorial.

"Students insist that they would remember to turn them off for class, but we know that would not work."

What is a weakness of the school representative’s opinion?

A. The school representative is too critical of cell phones.
B. The school representative makes an assumption that is not always true.
C. The school representative lacks a clear understanding of students.
D. The school representative thinks that cell phones are unnecessary.

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6. What does the use of first-person point of view in each editorial help convey?

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B. how cell phones aid communities
C. why cell phones are disruptive at school
D. facts about using cell phones in schools

7. Which statement from the editorials shows that one of the authors recognizes both sides of the argument?

A. The student states, “If for no other reason, we need to have cell phones with us for safety."
B. The school representative states, “Our school district policy has forbidden cell phones and pagers from the time they first began to appear on our campuses.”
C. The student states, “If schools don’t want to remain in the Dark Ages, they have to allow students to bring cell phones to our classes.”
D. The school representative states, “Unfortunately, cell phones can also be used for less acceptable reasons than communicating with parents.”

If you don’t know what 1st person POV is good for, you won’t get this one.
8. What is the purpose of both editorials?

A  to describe how schools handle cell phone use

B  to explain how cell phones contribute to the learning environment

C  to tell about the cell phone experiences of the authors

D  to present a viewpoint about cell phones in school

This is an author’s purpose. The answer has to apply to BOTH
Bubbling Advice

- A dull pencil works best; it’s faster and does not snap off or tear the paper.

- DO NOT press so hard that you can’t completely erase the bubble.

- Make sure that the center of the bubble is filled in; the scanner reads from the center of the bubble.

- Erase all stray marks and smudges. They may be read as answers.
Review = Damage Control

- Go back to make sure that you’ve answered all of the questions.
- Erase all stray marks and smudges. Scanners read from left to right and stop at the first answer; they may read a stray mark or smudge as your answer!
- If you have extra or too few answer lines, there is a big problem. Most of your answers will be wrong unless you:
  1. Locate the skipped line or answer.
  2. Erase thoroughly.
  3. Recopy your answers.
Remember:

• The multiple choice section counts for the majority of your score.

• Careless errors, skipped questions, and smudges can be very damaging.

• The difference between basic and proficient boils down to missing just one less question!
The Constructed Response

Give them what they want!
The Constructed Response

The most important thing to know is that your **comprehension** is what’s being evaluated here; they want to know if you understood the reading.

- You must **answer** all parts of the question.
- You must include the **right number of specific details** from the text to support your answer.
- You must tell **why your text details support** your answer.
- You should not include things that have little to do with the passage, like your personal experiences, unless they tie **DIRECTLY** to the question.
Writing Your Constructed Response Essay

Step 2: Planning

• You will be given scratch paper during the PSSA, but you will **NOT** be told what to do with it. That’s up to you.

• You should automatically think: **Graphic Organizer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write Tools Essay Organizer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Decide what works best for your ideas.</td>
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</table>
Writing Your Constructed Response Essay

Step 4: Completing the Response

• Transfer your response from your scratch paper to the test booklet when you feel that it answers the prompt completely.

• Use your best writing skills even though your writing ability is not being scored on the PSSA Reading test.

• High level vocabulary, as well as clearly expressed and organized ideas show off your comprehension rather than getting in the reader’s way, so create paragraphs and proofread.
The word that I would use to describe both the student and the school representative is logical.

An example of the student being logical is that he said that cell phones are needed for safety. A parent might need to get in touch with a child in an emergency.

The school representative is also logical when he says that cell phones ringing in class will cause disruptions since kids will forget to turn them off.
The PSSA Format

Knowing the test’s design can help you strategically.

• There are 6 tests on this year’s PSSA:
  ➢ 3 Math
  ➢ 3 Reading

• You will alternate, starting with Math.

• On the 3 Reading sections, you will answer a total of:
  ➢ 66 Multiple Choice Questions
  ➢ 6 constructed Response Questions