

BRACKETING: An AP Multiple Choice Strategy

BRACKETING THE PASSAGE

1. Go directly to the first question. Glance at the question to see if it refers you to particular lines. If so, put a bracket and the question number to the right or left of the lines. Make your bracket a little larger than the lines mentioned. Do not read the answer choices at this time.

2. Continue bracketing the passage in this manner. The task should not take more than 60 seconds.

3. Begin reading the passage at the top. When you get to the bottom of the first bracket, stop and answer the question. (You will know if you need to read on before you can answer the question.) As you eliminate wrong answer choices and narrow toward the right answer, scrutinize each choice by trying to find fault with it. Don't let what sounds possible but was never mentioned in the passage trick you. Look back and forth between the lines you marked in the passage and the answer choices to see what is actually there.

4. Beware of the typical wrong answer choices:

- Au contraire—choice is the opposite of the right answer
- Outside scope—an aspect of the choice was never mentioned in the passage. It may sound plausible; nevertheless, the passage contains no evidence to support it
- Distortion—material from another part of the passage has been incorrectly applied
- Sounds good except for one particular word. That word invalidates the entire answer.
- Half right, half wrong
- Fits but is not the “best” answer. This choice may be of secondary importance. It may describe part of the passage but not all.

5. Mark your test paper to keep your focus:

Put a line through an individual word that invalidates the choice.

Put a dot to the side of any answer that you cannot find fault with

Put an X next to any answer that is patently wrong.

6. Once you evaluated each choice, you have probably narrowed to two possible right answers. Now look at the lines you bracketed. Pick the one for which you find confirmation in the passage. You will know that you have selected the right choice when you can find evidence in the passage to back it up. Though you are sometimes working with implied rather than stated meaning, there will be always be some sort of evidence supporting the correct choice.

FINAL TIPS

BEWARE

Watch out for questions like this: “Each of the following is true EXCEPT.” Many people miss these items because they do not pay attention to the word EXCEPT.

KNOW WHEN TO MOVE ON

If you hit an extremely difficult question, don't spend more than two minutes on it. Skip it. You will be saving more than the quarter of a point you'll lose by getting it wrong; you'll be saving time to spend on another question you can get right. You may have time at the end of the test to return to the questions you skipped, but you probably won't.

CAN'T GET IN TO THE PASSAGE?...CAN'T KEEP YOUR FOCUS?

- Read the first sentence of each paragraph and the last sentence of the passage to get a sense of the passage's subject and the direction in which it moves.
- Take notes on your scratch paper to help you keep your focus. Particularly note shifts in any argument or reports of concepts.