UNDERSTANDING PURPOSE IN READING PASSAGES

Reading test passages include a variety of subjects and writing styles. No matter what the subject matter, a writer’s purpose (why a passage is written) influences writing style (how a passage is written). Understanding why and how a passage is written can help readers decode the meaning of passages. Writing to persuade, explain, and entertain are three common purposes for writing, and most reading test passages fall into one of these categories. Take note of the point of view, organizational structure, tone, language and literary devices which characterize each of the three categories.

WRITING TO PERSUADE (PERSUASIVE)

Type: Argumentative writing
Main Idea: the argument itself, pro or con
Purpose: to convince the reader of a point of view
Point of View: the writer’s subjective, biased point of view
Organizational Structure: comparison and contrast, cause and effect, facts and statistics, emotional appeal
Tone: authoritative, compassionate or judgmental, defensive, sarcastic, ironic, and even humorous
Language: subjective, argumentative, opinionated, factual, and emotional
Literary Devices: statistics, facts, opinions, descriptive language, appeals to emotion or intellect

WRITING TO EXPLAIN (EXPOSITORY)

Type: informational, descriptive, or researched writing
Main Idea: stated or unstated overall point of the passage (not argumentative or biased)
Purpose: to inform, to instruct, to educate
Point of View: objective, non-biased point of view of the author
Organizational Structure: general information, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, definition and example, chronologic order of events, or step by step instructions
Tone: informal/formal, unemotional, or academic
Language: unemotional, informational, factual, descriptive, formal
Literary Devices: factual information, statistics, chronologic order of events

WRITING TO ENTERTAIN (LITERARY)

Type: narrative, writing which appeals to the reader’s imagination
Main Idea: usually inferred
Purpose: to entertain, enlighten, or elicit emotion
Point of View: that of the narrator (usually first or third person)
Organizational Structure: varies depending on the type of writing (it may tell a story, contain dialogue, describe a person or place, etc.)
Tone: depends on the type of writing (emotional, humorous, ironic, moral, sarcastic, etc.)
Language: descriptive, emotional, wide use of adjectives and adverbs
Literary Devices: irony, allusion, metaphor and simile, sarcasm, personification, alliteration, hyperbole