ACT Reading Passages: The Most Important Question

Who, what, when, where, why, and how. What’s the most important question on the ACT Reading test?

While you’re reading an ACT reading passage, you need to make a mental index of what you read.

When you look in the back of a non-fiction book, you’ll find an index that alphabetically lists the content of the book, along with page numbers.

When you’re going through an ACT reading passage, you should be making a similar list in your mind. You should be remembering where to find important information, and where different sections of the passage start and stop. ACT reading questions often ask you about a specific section of the ACT reading passage—for example, the part where the narrator describes his childhood home, where he discusses a childhood illness, or where he describes his school.

If you can remember where these specific sections are, you can save time. Some ACT reading questions refer to a specific line number, but many don’t, and it’s up to you to find relevant information in the passage.

In a perfect world, you should be able to remember where everything is. The ACT reading test is an open book test, meaning that you get to look at the passage to answer the questions. Where is more important than who, what, when, why, or how because if you know where the information is, you can answer all of the questions.

You may have trouble with an ACT reading question if you have trouble finding where a specific part of the passage is, if you have difficulty understanding what the passage is saying, or if you misunderstand what the question is asking.

By making a mental index of where to find everything, you can simplify your job and eliminate the first barrier to scoring well on the ACT reading test.

Until you get really good at this, you might want to practice numbering the distinct parts of the passage. Write a number next to the side of any section of the passage that you want to remember by the time you get to the questions.
“Oh, this is section one, about his dog. Oh, this is section two, about his cat. Oh, this is section three, about the benefits of a dog vs. a cat. This is section four, where the dog and cat have a fight.”

Remembering where these things are can make a positive difference for you on the ACT reading test.