



Exemplar Test Items
Reading

ACT Aspire™ Reading

Introduction

Each ACT Aspire Reading test contains several passages, including literary narratives (prose fiction, memoirs, personal essays) and informational texts (social science, natural science). Within and across grade levels, the passages span a range of complexity levels in order to provide students, teachers, and parents with information about how well students understand texts of increasing difficulty. Students answer a series of multiple choice, technology enhanced (computer-based delivery only, not represented in this item set), and constructed response items in order to assess their abilities to recognize meaning in, reason logically about, and make connections between and among texts. ACT Aspire reading items operate at various Depth of Knowledge levels, or cognitive complexities, and reflect a range of difficulty appropriate for the age group.

All levels of ACT Aspire reading assessments include constructed response tasks that measure the higher order cognitive processes necessary for reading and understanding increasingly complex texts. Constructed response tasks are scored according to rubrics that allow students to receive varying amounts of credit for responses that are correct or partially correct, enabling differentiation between multiple skill levels.

Examples of the types of constructed response tasks in ACT Aspire reading assessments include the following.

- Formulate a conclusion by making connections within a passage and provide support using specific details from the text
- Formulate a conclusion by making connections between a pair of passages and provide support using specific details from both texts
- Identify cause and effect relationships within a passage and provide support using specific details from the text
- Identify similarities and differences between the key ideas of paired passages and provide support using specific details from both texts

ACT Aspire Grade 8 Reading

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article “A Capital Capitol” by Gina DeAngelis (©2006 by Carus Publishing Company).

The U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., one of the most recognizable buildings in the world, has been the working site of the U.S. Congress for more than 200 years.

In January 1791, French engineer Pierre L'Enfant was asked to design America's grand capital city. L'Enfant submitted his idea to commissioners in August. It included a grand vista about a mile long, at one end of which would be the city's “Congress House.” The U.S. government decided to hold a contest to find the best design for the new country's Capitol. The winner was a physician named William Thornton.

Construction began in 1793, when President George Washington used a silver trowel to lay the cornerstone on Jenkins Hill (known today as Capitol Hill). It was hoped that Congress, which had been meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, could move in by the turn of the century.

By 1796, though, construction already was behind schedule. Worried lawmakers decided to focus on completing the north wing of the Capitol, but parts of that still were unfinished in 1800. Both branches of Congress, the Supreme Court, the District of Columbia courts, and the Library of Congress moved in anyway.

Congress authorized more money for the Capitol in 1803 and appointed architect Benjamin Latrobe to oversee construction. He had the south wing finished by 1811, but by then, the north wing was in need of repair. The War of 1812 (which lasted until 1815) intervened, and Congress refused to worry about the building project. A frustrated Latrobe resigned in 1813.

In August 1814, an invading British force set fire to the Capitol, the White House, and other government buildings. A timely rainstorm saved the city from complete destruction, but Congress was forced to meet for a time in a cramped hotel. From 1815 to 1819, the Senate and the House gathered in a brick structure where the Supreme Court building stands today.

Congress begged the efficient Latrobe to return, which he did, until he resigned again in 1817. His replacement, Charles Bulfinch, designed a beautiful copper-covered dome for the central section of the Capitol. The building finally was completed in 1826, more than 30 years after construction began. Of course by then the United States had grown, so Congress again needed more space.

Another competition to expand the Capitol in 1850 resulted in a five-way tie. President Millard Fillmore chose Thomas U. Walter to supervise construction. Bulfinch's dome was dwarfed by the enormous new wings, so Walter came up with a design for a huge dome and displayed a drawing of it in his office. Congressmen who visited there were so impressed that in 1855, they voted to replace the original dome with Walter's grand design.

Though the outbreak of the Civil War (1861-1865) briefly interrupted construction, President Abraham Lincoln, inaugurated in 1861 beneath the half-completed dome, refused to stop the project. In December 1863, the final section of the 19-foot-tall Statue of Freedom was hoisted into place. Three years later, the building, with its great domed Rotunda that is so recognizable today, was completed.

1. **Which of the following statements best describes the main purpose of the passage?**
 - *A. To provide an overview of the stages through which the Capitol was designed and built
 - B. To describe the places Congress met during times when the Capitol couldn't be used
 - C. To analyze the interactions between the people who designed the Capitol and those who built it
 - D. To argue for the continued restoration and maintenance of the Capitol

2. **The passage suggests that compared to how much the War of 1812 slowed the construction of the Capitol, the Civil War slowed construction of the Capitol:**
 - *A. much less.
 - B. to an equal degree.
 - C. slightly more.
 - D. much more.

3. **The passage indicates that L'Enfant contributed to the U.S. capital city by designing the:**
 - *A. general layout of the city.
 - B. interior of the wings of the Capitol.
 - C. structure of the first dome of the Capitol.
 - D. Supreme Court building.

4. **According to the passage, why did Walter design a new Capitol dome?**
 - A. The original dome was disliked by several members of Congress.
 - *B. The size of the new wings of the Capitol made the original dome seem too small.
 - C. The original dome had been damaged and had become a safety hazard.
 - D. President Fillmore had asked Walter to design a new dome.

5. **The passage most strongly suggests that Latrobe resigned in 1813 from his duties overseeing construction of the Capitol because:**
 - A. he wanted to find a new project since the construction was nearly complete.
 - B. Bulfinch had been appointed to take over some of Latrobe's tasks, which made Latrobe angry.
 - C. the British army had damaged the Capitol, which led to work on it being stopped indefinitely.
 - *D. he was unhappy with Congress's lack of interest in the Capitol project during the war.

6. **What reason, if any, does the passage give for why the north wing of the Capitol was in need of repair in 1811?**
 - A. Poor workmanship had resulted in weak floors.
 - B. Fire and water had damaged the walls.
 - C. Damage caused by dust had occurred during construction of the south wing.
 - *D. The passage doesn't provide a reason why the north wing needed repair in 1811.

7. Think about the preceding passage as you read the following excerpt.

Thornton's design, however brilliant, was not perfect. Although the Capitol's exterior was magnificent, Thornton lacked the architect's ability to picture an interior in three dimensions. Thus, when professional builders examined his plans, it became clear that its columns were spaced too widely and that the staircases lacked sufficient headroom. The conference room's interior colonnade, Thomas Jefferson objected, "will obstruct the view of the members: and if taken away, the ceiling is too wide to support itself." Key sections of the building lacked sufficient light and air. The president's office had no ventilation at all, while the Senate chamber was allotted only three windows.

However, elements of Thornton's design remain, including the original western facade of the wings, the stately Law Library Door at the southeast corner of the old North Wing and much of the eastern facade. "He established for all time what the Capitol was to be. Everything that came later had to follow Thornton's design," says architectural historian William Allen.

— Adapted from "A Capital Vision From a Self-Taught Architect" by Fergus M. Bordewich (©2008 by Smithsonian Institution)

Explain what new information this excerpt from "A Capital Vision From a Self-Taught Architect" adds to the discussion, begun in the passage from "A Capital Capitol," of the problems involved in building the U.S. Capitol. Using both the passage and the excerpt, provide three pieces of evidence to support your answer.