WEEK 1: READING SKILL #1

Skill aims: (1) understanding purposes of sentences in paragraphs; (2) Understanding purposes of paragraphs; (3) Understanding purposes of passages

PART 1: Purposes of Sentences

Drill #1

Read the sentence below, and use the questions that follow to help you identify the purpose of the sentence.

Far away on the path we saw Sir Henry looking back, his face white in the moonlight, his hands raised in horror, glaring helplessly at the frightful thing which was hunting him down.

1. ***What*** does the author say?

2. ***Why*** does he or she make that statement?

Drill #2

Read the sentence below, and use the questions that follow to identify the purpose of the sentence.

Consider Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," which cannot truly be considered a mystery story because Poe identifies the thief at the outset.

1. ***What*** does the author say?

2. ***Why*** does he or she make that statement?

Drill #3

Read the sentence below, and use the questions that follow to identify the purpose of the sentence.

At first glance, the question may appear unnecessary and the answer quite obvious.

1. ***What*** does the author say?

2. ***Why*** does he or she make that statement?

PART 2: Purposes of Sentences in Paragraphs

Drill #4

The most essential thing in the world for any individual is to understand himself. The next is to understand the other fellow. The truth is that life is largely a problem of running your own car as it was built to be run, and then of getting along with the other drivers on the highway. We come in contact with our fellowmen in all the activities of our lives and what we get out of life depends, to an astounding degree, on our relations with them.

Examine the sentence below, and use the questions that follow to identify the purpose of the sentence. Write your answers in the blank spaces below each question.

The truth is that life is largely a problem of running your own car as it was built to be run, and then of getting along with the other drivers on the highway.

1. What does the author say?

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2. What does the author discuss immediately before this sentence?
3. What does the author discuss immediately after this sentence?
4. Consider how these thoughts fit together. Why does he or she make that statement?

Drill #5

I am a very old man; how old I do not know. Possibly I am a hundred, possibly more; but I cannot tell because I have never aged as other men, nor do I remember any childhood. So far as I can recollect I have always been a man, a man of about thirty. I appear today as I did forty years and more ago, and yet I feel that I cannot go on living forever; that someday I shall die the real death from which there is no resurrection. I do not know why I should fear death, I who have died twice and am still alive; but yet I have the same horror of it as you who have never died, and it is because of this terror of death, I believe, that I am so convinced of my mortality.

Examine the phrase below and use the questions that follow to identify the purpose of the phrase. Write your answers in the blank spaces below each question.

So far as I can recollect…

1. What does the author say?

2. What does the author discuss immediately before this sentence?

3. What does the author discuss immediately after this sentence?

4. Consider how these thoughts fit together. What is the purpose of the phrase in question?

Drill #6

Read the paragraph below, and answer the questions that follow.

I shall read your book with trembling for you. Some years ago, when you were beginning to tell me your real name and birthplace, you may remember I stopped you, and preferred to remain ignorant of all. So I continued until the other day, when you read me your memoirs. I hardly knew, at the time, whether to thank you or not for the sight of them, when I reflected that it was still dangerous, in Massachusetts, for honest men to tell their names! They say the fathers, in 1776, signed the Declaration of Independence with the noose practically about their necks. You, too, publish your declaration of freedom with danger surrounding you on all sides. In all the broad lands which the Constitution of the United States overshadows, there is no single spot,—however narrow or desolate,—where a fugitive slave can plant himself and say, "I am safe."

Examine the sentence below and use the questions that follow to identify the purpose of the sentence. Write your answers in the blank spaces below each question.

They say the fathers, in 1776, signed the Declaration of Independence with the noose practically about their necks.

1. What does the author say?

2. What does the author discuss immediately before this sentence?

3. What does the author discuss immediately after this sentence?

4. Consider how these thoughts fit together. Why did he or she write the sentence in question?

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PART 3: Purposes of Paragraphs

Drill #7

For many years various European collections of Egyptian antiquities have contained a certain series of objects which gave archaeologists great difficulty. There were vases of a peculiar form and color, greenish plates of slate, many of them in curious animal forms, and other similar things. It was known, positively, that these objects had been found in Egypt, but it was impossible to assign them a place in the known periods of Egyptian art. The puzzle was increased in difficulty by certain plates of slate with hunting and battle scenes and other representations in relief in a style so strange that many investigators considered them products of the art of Western Asia.

1. What is the main topic of the paragraph?

2. What does the author say about that topic?

3. Why does the author write about that topic?

Drill #8

Examine the paragraph below, and answer the questions that follow.

It was at the post office that, several years ago, I saw Ethan Frome for the first time, and the sight pulled me up sharp. Even then he was the most striking figure in Starkfield, though he was but the ruin of a man. It was not so much his great height that marked him, for the "natives" were easily singled out by their lank longitude from the stockier foreign breed: it was the careless powerful look he had, in spite of a lameness checking each step like the jerk of a chain. There was something bleak and unapproachable in his face, and he was so stiffened and grizzled that I took him for an old man and was surprised to hear that he was not more than fifty-two. I had this from Harmon Gow, who had driven the stage from Bettsbridge to Starkfield in pre-trolley days and knew the chronicle of all the families on his line.

1. What is the main topic of the paragraph?

2. What does the author say about that topic?

3. Why does the author write about that topic?

Further Drill 1

Read the sentences below, and use the accompanying questions to find the primary purpose of each one. Write down your answers.

1. In Argentina, for example, inflation is expected to reach 25% annually by December of 2014.

What does the author say?

Why does he or she make that statement?

2. We have no exact knowledge of the number of auxiliary Roman troops during Augustus' time, but they probably came to be as numerous as the legionaries.

What does the author say?

Why does he or she make that statement?

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3. The fact, however, that Jane Austen had not earned more than £700 from her novels by the time of her death shows that she never became a really popular author in her lifetime.

What does the author say?

Why does he or she make that statement?

4. It has often been said that in Chinese painting, perspective is ignored. Nothing is further from the truth. This error arises from the fact that we have confused one system of perspective with perspective as a whole. There are as many systems of perspective as there are conventional laws for them.

What does the author say in the first sentence of the paragraph?

What does the author discuss immediately after this sentence?

Consider how these thoughts fit together. Why did he or she write the first sentence of the paragraph?

Further Drill 2

Read the paragraphs below, and use the accompanying questions to find the primary purpose of each one. Write down your answers.

Passage 1

Few literatures have exerted so profound an influence upon the literary history of other peoples as the poetry of the Provençal troubadours. Attaining the highest point of technical perfection in the last half of the twelfth and the early years of the thirteenth century, Provençal poetry was already popular in Italy and Spain when the Albigeois crusade devastated the south of France and scattered the troubadours abroad or forced them to seek other means of livelihood. The earliest lyric poetry of Italy is Provençal in all but language; almost as much may be said of Portugal and Galicia; Catalonian troubadours continued to write in Provençal until the fourteenth century. The lyric poetry of the "trouvères" in Northern France was deeply influenced both in form and spirit by troubadour poetry, and traces of this influence are perceptible even in early middle-English lyrics. Finally, the German minnesingers knew and appreciated troubadour lyrics, and imitations or even translations of Provençal poems may be found in Heinrich von Morungen, Friedrich von Hausen, and many others. Hence, the poetry of the Provençal troubadours is a subject of first-rate importance to the student of comparative literature.

What is the main topic of the paragraph?

What does the author say about that topic?

Why does the author write about that topic?

Passage 2

The Gallic genius is eminently a social one, but it is, of all others, the most difficult to reproduce. The subtle grace of manner, the magic of spoken words, are gone with the moment. The conversations of two centuries ago are today like champagne which has lost its sparkle. We may recall their tangible forms—the facts, the accessories, the thoughts, even the words, but the flavor is not there. It is the volatile essence of gaiety and wit that especially characterizes French society. It glitters from a thousand facets, it surprises us in a thousand delicate turns of thought, it appears in countless movements and shades of expression. But it refuses to be imprisoned. Hence the impossibility of catching the essential spirit of the salons. We know something of the men and women who frequented

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them, as they have left many records of themselves. We have numerous pictures of their social life from which we may partially reconstruct it and trace its influence. But the nameless attraction that held for so long a period the most serious men of letters as well as the merry world still eludes us.

What is the main topic of the paragraph?

What does the author say about that topic?

Why does the author write about that topic?

Passage 3

My uncle was a very learned man. Now most persons in this category supply themselves with information, as peddlers do with goods, for the benefit of others, and lay up stores in order to diffuse them abroad for the benefit of society in general. Not so my excellent uncle, Professor Hardwigg; he studied, he consumed the midnight oil, he pored over heavy tomes, and digested huge quartos and folios in order to keep the knowledge acquired to himself.

What is the main topic of the paragraph?

What does the author say about that topic?

Why does the author write about that topic?

Passage 4

Wagner's music, more than any other, is the sign and symbol of the nineteenth century. The men to whom it was disclosed, and who first sought to refuse, and then accepted it, passionately, without reservations, found in it their truth. It came to their ears as the sound of their own voices. It was the common, the universal tongue. Not alone on Germany, not alone on Europe, but on every quarter of the globe that had developed coal-power civilization, the music of Wagner descended with the formative might of the perfect image. Men of every race and continent knew it to be of themselves as much as was their hereditary and racial music, and went out to it as to their own adventure. And wherever music reappeared, whether under the hand of the Japanese or the semi-African or the Yankee, it seemed to be growing from Wagner as the bright shoots of the fir sprout from the dark ones grown the previous year. A whole world, for a period, came to use his idiom. His dream was recognized during his very lifetime as an integral portion of the consciousness of the entire race.

What is the main topic of the paragraph?

What does the author say about that topic?

Why does the author write about that topic?

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