Approach Note to Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension is an area that assumes terrifying proportions for most students as they grapple with an assortment of topics ranging from the law to science, economics and sports. To gain proficiency in this type of question set it is imperative to understand the types of Reading Comprehension questions that one may come across in the exam.

Types of Reading Comprehension Questions

The 'Main Idea' of the text

The questions concerning main idea of the passage are phrased as follows:

Which of the following is the main point of the passage?

The primary purpose of the passage is to…

The author is primarily concerned with…

Which of the following is the most appropriate title for the passage?

The title of the passage depends upon the content of the passage. The title will obviously be a representation in a nutshell of the central idea and contents of the passage.

Also, once the central idea is clear, it will be easier for you to understand the associated information. Associated information consists of details regarding the idea, concepts that seem to be inherent in the idea, the examples used, etc.

The 'Implied Idea' questions

It is essential to understand the implications of certain phrases, words, sentences, etc. These questions may ask about what is not mentioned explicitly in the passage, but can be logically inferred from the information given in the passage.

Some question types could be:

It can be inferred from the passage that…

The author uses the phrase '...' to mean ...

Which of the following can be inferred from the passage?

The 'Specific Detail' questions

The Specific Detail question calls for a greater scrutiny of the information presented in the passage. The questions could ask for any detail such as numbers, dates, names, places, methods mentioned, qualities of people mentioned and experiments conducted as mentioned in the passage etc. These questions refer to a point mentioned by the author in the passage as a part of the development of the theme of the passage.

Some question types could be:

The author mentions which of the following?

According to the author...

The author provides information that would answer which of the following questions?

According to the passage…etc.

Tone

In these questions the sense of the language plays a major role. Tone is manifest in the writer's use of words and syntax.

For example:

- Description without criticism or analysis would make the passage a descriptive one, while description with some analysis would render it a combination of the two.
- A detailed examination of a topic taking into consideration both its merits and demerits is the sign of an analytical passage. The writer does not usually take any definite stand vis-à-vis the topic or the argument but simply lists the facts of the case in an unbiased manner.
- An author using humorous anecdotes, puns, jocular jibes at someone or something, provides a humorous tone.

- A string of words / sentences spewing sarcasm would obviously mean that the writer's tone is sarcastic.

Last but not the least, understanding of the passage is the key to good score in this type of question set.

Practice Set I

After the dust storms had swept over the Midwest in 1935 and 1936, thousand of families left their useless farms and began traveling by automobile to California, where, they had heard, there was enough work for everybody. When they reached their destination, they discovered that workers were needed only a few weeks a year. You can easily imagine how disappointed they were. On frequent occasions they found themselves without money or food. Life was extremely inconvenient for them. Often they slept in tents or shacks, got their water from ditches, and, when night came, were without lights (for of course they had no electricity). The federal government, impressed by their misery, endeavored to help these unfortunate farmers by setting up large camps for them to live in while they looked for work.

Mark true or false

1. Dust storms ruined many Midwest farms in the 1930's
2. Farmers who were victims of the dust storms moved to California to look for work.
3. When they reached California, they discovered there was a demand for workers only for a short time each year.
4. Nevertheless, they found life in California very pleasant and easy.
5. The federal government built camps for the refugees.

Answers

1. T
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T

Practice Set II

A fair rule of the thumb is that when economists agree that a currency will rise, it will fall. Look at the dollar. Almost everybody expected it to climb this year as stronger growth in America pushed up interest rates, while rates in sluggish Europe and Japan fell. Interest rates have shifted in the dollar's favour, yet since January the greenback has dropped against most currencies; last week it nearly breached a post -- 1945 low of Y100. Heavy buying of dollars by central banks and a half point cut in Germany's discount rate on May 11th has helped to lift it again, but the underlying cause of its weakness remains: deep distrust of American's economic policy.

The dollar and bond prices have fallen despite three recent hikes by the Fed in short-term interest rates. Much of the blame for the fall lies with the Clinton administration's meddling. Until recently, officials appeared to be trying to talk the dollar down against the yen, to make American goods more competitive and so shrink America's trade deficit with Japan. This was an open invitation to the markets to sell dollars. On May 4th, as the dollar dived, Lloyd Bentsen, America's Treasury secretary, abruptly spun around and announced that he saw "no advantage in an undervalued currency." Other officials went so far as to deny that the administration ever wanted the dollar to fall. Few investors are convinced.

The market's nerves have also been rattled by Bill Clinton's new nominees to the Fed's Board of Governors: Alan Blinder and Janet Yellen are both suspected of being soft on inflation. This, in combination with the cheap-dollar policy, has cast serious doubt on the administration's support for the Fed's anti-inflation policy-and at the very time when some leading indicators of inflation are starting to flash. With the American economy in its fourth year of expansion, the remaining slack is fast disappearing. Unemployment, at 6.4% of the labour force, is now within a whisker of the rate at which inflation lids often started to climb; and commodity prices are rising. All the more important that the administration does not make the Fed's job harder through foolish talk.

Over the past year, the administration has displayed a worrying misunderstanding of the use of exchange rates as a tool of economic policy. The trouble with the textbook theory that a rise in the yen will trim Japan's trade surplus is that it assumes governments can steer currencies without touching fiscal or monetary levers. They cannot, except very briefly-and, even then, unpredictably. The yen-dollar exchange rate, for example, is influenced by investor's expectations about the relative tightness of monetary policy in America and Japan. America's former desire for a cheap dollar implied a willingness to run a lax monetary policy, which, pushed up inflationary expectations and hence bond yields. In Japan, in contrast, the severe overvaluation of the yen (relative to its purchasing-power parity of around Y150) constitutes an excessively deflationary monetary policy. Although nominal interest rates are at a record low, falling prices have left real interest rates painfully high, squeezing domestic demand and imports, Japan's trade surplus therefore still looms large.

Write the theme of the above passage in your own words:

Sample Answer:

The passage highlights how America has mishandled the Forex Policy by giving confusing signals to the public. Also it shows how America has stuck to the text book approach ignoring investor's expectations regarding dollar's value vis-à-vis Yen.