

Understanding Question Types to Answer Comprehension Questions

Comprehension forms a large weightage in the O level English syllabus. As such, it is of importance that you understand the question types and recognize what is required to answer them.

1. The Factual Question

This type of question requires you to retrieve facts in the given passage. Examples of factual questions are the 5W1H, as listed below;

Question type	Question Requirement	Example
Who	Identify person/persons	Who won the soccer match yesterday?
Where	Identify place/places	Where did he go to after the match?
When	Asks for time of occurrence	When did he meet his friends?
Why	Asks for reasons for occurrence	Why did he meet his friends?
How	Asks for method or process	How did he convince his mother to allow him to attend the party?
What	Can be tricky, depends on how it is phrased.	What was the reason for him to join the soccer team? (actual Why question → Why did he join the soccer team?) What did John do to convince him to join the soccer team? (actual How question → How did John persuade him to join the soccer team?)

2. The Vocabulary Question

This type of question tests for the meaning of words and phrases used in the passage. There are 3 methods to unstitch the meaning of the words;

a) Using contextual clues

Look for clues in the passage on how the word/phrase is being used. The answer given must be the contextual meaning, and not the usual dictionary definition.

Example: ‘..the **beautiful** scenery was worth the hike up’

Beautiful in this context is used to describe a scenery, meaning breathtaking or spectacular, instead of handsome or pretty when used to describe a person.

- b) Analysing compound words (two or more words)
 Breaking down words into their singular form will allow for easier deciphering of compound words.

Example: backbreaker

Word 1	Word 2	Meaning
Back – part of human body	Breaking – action of collapse	Something strenuous which results in body aches/pain

3. The Rephrasing Question (In Your Own Words Question)

This question type requires you to answer or express certain phrases in your own words. The rephrased sentence must not lose meaning when compared to the original one.

Example:

From passage	Answer in your own words
<i>“Being involved in major sports reduce social isolation”</i>	Sports programme can help girls and women to be <u>accepted into society</u> OR Playing sports help to reduce the <u>rejection they face from the community</u>

4. Other tips on acing the Comprehension paper

a) Vocabulary

To understand what you are reading, you need to understand most of the words in the text. Having a strong vocabulary is a key factor of reading comprehension. You can learn vocabulary through instruction but most of learnt diction is learnt through active reading.

Besides reading intensively, there are also other active activities that will encourage vocabulary widening. Have debates on new ideas which will inadvertently include new words.

b) Tapping on prior knowledge

Most of you relate to your own past experiences when tackling a Comprehension piece. It is therefore very important that you have the background or prior knowledge to apply onto the piece that you are attempting. It gives relevance and familiarity, which raises confidence when attempting the paper.

While some papers might not directly invoke your prior knowledge, say a piece on World War 2. It is important that you have insights and knowledge to understand that it was a difficult time and is able to relate to the story. You can use this background information to make inferences and draw conclusions.

You can build an extensive prior knowledge bank by reading, having conversations as well as thorough media outlets. Life experiences will also build knowledge so exposure is key. Make connections between new and existing knowledge by asking open ended questions, which requires more thinking and linking of ideas.