

Making Inferences

An **inference** is a logical conclusion based on evidence. For instance, given the information that Sarah loves animals, you might logically infer that she would also enjoy looking at photographs of them.

A valid inference is believable and realistic. For example, it would not be logical to assume that because Sarah loves animals that she is a professional animal photographer or that she will one day be a veterinarian. If you had more information about Sarah, then you might be able to make these inferences. However, since that information has not been given, these inferences cannot be supported.

Making Inferences – Practice 1

Read this paragraph from a memoir and then answer the questions that follow.

I quickly packed my suitcase. I tossed in a change of clothes, a toothbrush, and a hairbrush. Glancing at my watch, I zipped the suitcase and walked to the front door. After I shut the window blinds, I pulled a heavy coat from the closet.

1. Based on information in the passage, what is a reasonable inference to make about the narrator’s plans?

2. Underline any words in the passage that helped you make this inference.
3. Which inference is **supported** by specific information in the passage? (Make an X next to the supported inference.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	The narrator has new luggage.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The narrator is going to take a short trip.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The narrator likes being outdoors in winter.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The narrator is going to the airport.

Making Inferences – Practice 2

Read the following passage and then answer the questions.

The paragraphs below are the final paragraphs of a letter to the editor:

Furthermore, the recycling program will create jobs. People are also needed to maintain the recycling facility and to repair machinery.

Finally, the program could transform our city. You know how you feel when you clean out a messy room? Well, that is how we all will feel when the recycling program takes effect. It will be like cleaning out the city to make it more attractive. It could be life-changing!

1. True/False. Readers can infer that the writer feels strongly about the topic of a citywide recycling program.
2. What are 2–3 words or phrases that helped you answer question 1, above?

Making Inferences – Practice 3

Read the following self-evaluation for a school project written by one member of a group.

Our group enjoyed working on the “Why It Matters” history project. Most group members contributed ideas and valuable research. It was challenging to create a presentation format that worked for all of the information. The format we chose is something we might do differently next time. I never realized just how hard it is for people to see from the back of the classroom, but now I know. I think the grade the class gave us was pretty fair, but I also think that certain group members did not deserve the same grade as others. Some of us really poured a lot of effort into this presentation while others did not. The next time we have an assignment like this, I think I will want individual group members to be more accountable and to practice our presentation a few times beforehand.

1. True/False. A reader can support an inference that this student wanted to do well on this history presentation.

2. Explain your choice.

3. What can you infer were the biggest problems with the actual presentation made for the class?

4. What evidence supports this inference?

5. True/False: Readers can infer that this student thinks she or he deserved a higher grade than the other group members.

Making Inferences – Practice 4

How to Succeed as a Volunteer

So You Want to be a Volunteer?

Many high school students like to take part in volunteer activities. Some of the perks of volunteerism include gaining useful experiences, making good friends, and building relationships with others. Perhaps best of all, volunteering gives you a chance to step outside of yourself and your own circumstances and do something to help others. Volunteering can help you gain skills necessary for any future path in life.

Treat your volunteer job as something that requires the same commitment, timeliness, and professionalism as any paid work that you might do.

Step 1: Finding a Good Fit

If you have a particular passion, it makes sense to look for an opportunity in that area. However, the actual work you do may or may not connect directly to your personal interests. For example, you may love animals, but the local shelter needs people to create flyers for an upcoming fundraiser. You might not end up working directly with the animals.

Step 2: The Interview

Most organizations interview potential volunteers. After all, the organization wants to be sure that you are a good fit for the work they have. Read about interview strategies and tips, in addition to correct interview attire, and etiquette. Also practice answering common interview questions. Even if you know that once “hired” as a volunteer you will be wearing jeans and a T-shirt every day, you aren’t “hired” yet. As a candidate, you need to present a neat and clean appearance and create a good first impression. You can never go wrong by being “overly” professional.

Step 3: The Work You Do

Just like in any job, there will likely be parts of your assigned work you find very interesting and enjoyable and parts that you do not. Some organizations might have you “work up” from basic jobs to those with more responsibility. Remember, you want to support the organization with the work that they need you to do. Timeliness, attention to detail, and a professional attitude will prove you are ready for better opportunities.

At the same time, just like in a real job, there is room for negotiation. For instance, if you would like some phone experience and you have only been doing paperwork for awhile, ask for a meeting with your supervisor and highlight how your goals will benefit the organization. Be diplomatic, proactive, and ready to compromise.

Step 4: What You Take Away

Hopefully your volunteer experience will be a positive one and allow you to learn some new skills. At the very least, you will gain experience and useful contacts to include on future college or work applications.

1. What inference(s) can you make about the author's attitude towards volunteering?

2. What support can you offer from the passage for the inference(s) above?

3. Which inferences can be supported by the text? (Make an X next to each supported inference).

<input type="checkbox"/>	Colleges usually don't accept applicants who have no volunteer experiences.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Volunteer work may not perfectly match your interests.
<input type="checkbox"/>	It can be difficult to get a volunteer opportunity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The biggest expense of becoming a volunteer is having professional clothes to wear to the interview.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A candidate's performance during an interview for a volunteer position is important.

4. Choose any two inferences from the chart above and explain why each is either supported or unsupported by the text.

Student Answer Key

Making Inferences – Practice 1

Answers will vary.

1. The narrator is probably taking a short trip. (The narrator is packing a suitcase but with only one change of clothes.)

The narrator may have not had much advance notice since the narrator seems rushed. (The narrator is packing quickly.)

The narrator may be going where the weather is cool. (The narrator takes a heavy coat.)

The narrator will likely be staying overnight. (The narrator only packs one change of clothes and closes the blinds.)

2.

I quickly packed my suitcase. I tossed in a change of clothes, a toothbrush, and a hairbrush. Glancing at my watch, I zipped the suitcase and walked to the front door. After I shut the window blinds, I pulled a heavy coat from the closet.

3. Supported inferences are:

	The narrator has new luggage.
X	The narrator is going to take a short trip.
	The narrator likes being outdoors in winter.
	The narrator is going to the airport.

Making Inferences – Practice 2

1. True.
2. life-changing; transform

Making Inferences – Practice 3

1. True.
2. The student is concerned about grades and talks about how to improve for the next assignment or presentation.
3. The biggest problems with the project were that it was not large enough for students sitting at the back of the classroom to see and that the group needed to practice their presentation before giving it. A reader could infer that the presentation did not go smoothly.
4. The student states: “I never realized just how hard it is for people to see from the back of the classroom, but now I know.” The student also states: “The next time we have an assignment like this, I think I will want individual group members to be more accountable ...”
5. True.

Making Inferences – Practice 4

1. The author believes that volunteering can be a positive experience for the volunteer and for the place where he or she is volunteering, if a few guidelines are followed. The author believes volunteering is similar to applying for and working at a job and gives advice based on this belief.
2. The author begins the passage by listing the benefits of volunteering. The rest of the passage is about guidelines a volunteer should follow to get the most out of the experience.
3. The following inferences are supported by the text.

	Colleges usually don't accept applicants who have no volunteer experience.
X	Volunteer work may not perfectly match your interests.
	It can be difficult to get a volunteer opportunity.
	The biggest expense of becoming a volunteer is having professional clothes to wear to the interview.
X	A candidate's performance during an interview for a volunteer position is important.

4. **Colleges usually don't accept applicants who have no volunteer experience.**

Although it is common knowledge that many colleges expect their applicants to have completed volunteer work, the text does not state or infer this information. The text only states that volunteer work may give a volunteer skills and/or knowledge that could be helpful in the future. Also, one's future may involve a wide range of activities, not just college.

Volunteer work may not perfectly match your interests.

This is a valid inference. In several sections, the text warns volunteers that the work they might expect to do is not the work they may be doing. In Step 1, the text states, "For instance, you may love animals but the local shelter needs people to create flyers for an upcoming fundraiser. You might not end up working directly with the animals." In Step 3, the text again reminds the reader that volunteer work may not exactly match one's interests and gives advice on how to improve one's volunteer time. Last, in Step 4, the writer seems to console the reader with a minimum expectation that even if a volunteer experience is not exactly what one would want, at least the volunteer will leave with some experience and contacts to put on future work and college applications.

It can be difficult to get a volunteer opportunity.

Although the purpose of the text is to give advice on how to get a volunteer position and the text suggests that some effort is required, the writer does not imply that getting a volunteer position is difficult.

The biggest expense of becoming a volunteer is having professional clothes to wear to the interview.

The writer does not discuss wearing professional attire in terms of an expense. The writer does not suggest that potential volunteers spend any money at all in order to look professional. Either the writer assumes that anyone reading this text will already have professional attire or assumes that the expense of getting professional clothing is not a large enough expense to discuss or give advice on.

A candidate's performance during an interview for a volunteer position is important.

The candidate's performance during the interview for a volunteer position is important is a valid inference based on the information in the text. The text explains that organizations take time to interview potential volunteers to find the right person for the job. The impression that is made during the interview will determine whether the candidate is accepted to become part of the volunteer work force or not. The text discusses proper attire and etiquette in addition to practice with common interview questions. Being prepared for the interview will help to make a good impression and may lead to a position.

