Top 12 ISEE Concepts

Free Sampler

Verbal Reasoning | Reading Comprehension | Math

Taken from the complete ISEE Study Guide (Lower, Middle & Upper)

What's Inside the Full Guide

- 230+ high-yield concepts across all five sections (Lower, Middle & Upper)
- Fixed-form format facts: 760-940 scale, stanines, retake rules (1/season, max 3 per year)
- Strategy tips with worked examples and answer logic you can reuse
- 48-Hour Rapid Review + Test-Day Blueprint included in the full guide

Each concept: Definition | Strategy Tip | Worked Example

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ISEE AT A GLANCE: FORMAT, SCORING & RULES

1. One fixed-form test

The ISEE is fixed-form, not adaptive: all test-takers see the same questions, and online and paper share the same set and timing.

2. Three levels + Primary

Lower (Gr 5-6), Middle (Gr 7-8), Upper (Gr 9-12) share five parts; Primary (Gr 2-4) is a separate online-only test.

3. Five parts, one essay

Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics Achievement + a 30-min unscored essay (sent to schools).

4. 760-940 scaled scores

Each of the four scored sections earns a scaled score from 760 to 940, plus a percentile and a stanine (1-9).

5. No wrong-answer penalty

Every multiple-choice question is worth the same - guessing is always smart; never leave a blank.

6. Retakes: 1 per season, max 3/yr

Three seasons per school year (Fall, Winter, Spring-Summer); once per season, up to three per year. All scores are reported.

7. No calculators

Calculators are not permitted on any ISEE section, at any level; scratch paper is provided.

Full 230+ concept review: ISEE Study Guide ($19)

https://www.repurposeforge.com/products/isee-study-guide

01 VERBAL REASONING

1. Word Parts Method

Most ISEE vocabulary words are built from Latin/Greek prefixes, roots, and suffixes. Breaking a word into parts gives you a defensible guess even when you have never seen the word.

Strategy Tip: In the test booklet, circle the prefix and root of an unknown word and ask: what does the root mean?

Worked Example: Unknown word "benevolent": bene (good) + vol (wish) = wishing good - kind.

2. Tone Matching

Every word carries a tone - positive, negative, or neutral. A synonym must match the stem word's tone as well as its meaning.

Strategy Tip: Sort answers by tone first; a positive stem never pairs with a negative choice.

Worked Example: "VACATION" (positive) pairs with "trip/break," not "chore."

3. Connotation vs Denotation

Denotation is the dictionary meaning; connotation is the feeling the word carries. ISEE synonym items reward connotation matching.

Strategy Tip: Ask: does this answer feel the same as the stem - approving, disapproving, neutral?

Worked Example: "THRIFTY" (positive) vs "STINGY" (negative) both mean careful with money but differ in connotation.

4. Contrast Clues

Signal words like but, although, however, yet, despite, rather flip the meaning: the blank opposes what follows or precedes.

Strategy Tip: Circle the contrast word; the blank means the OPPOSITE of the other half.

Worked Example: "Although the sky was ___ , the picnic continued as planned." -> threatening (contrast with continuing).

02 READING COMPREHENSION

5. Main Idea vs Topic

The topic is what the passage is about (one word); the main idea is what the author says about it (a full sentence).

Strategy Tip: Ask "what is the author's point about this topic?" - the correct answer is a claim, not a label.

Worked Example: Topic: honeybees. Main idea: honeybee colonies depend on a division of labor to survive.

6. Inference Questions

Inference asks what MUST be true based on the passage, even though it is not stated outright.

Strategy Tip: The correct inference follows logically and cannot contradict the text; reject choices that overreach.

Worked Example: The passage says farmers shipped grain after 1825; inference: transport costs had fallen.

7. Vocabulary-in-Context

These questions quote a word from the passage and ask its meaning as used there. The surrounding sentence defines it.

Strategy Tip: Read the sentence before and after the quoted word; plug each choice into the sentence to test.

Worked Example: "The 'immense' river" - based on context meaning huge, not "countless."

8. The Author's Purpose

Purpose questions ask why the author wrote the passage: to inform, persuade, entertain, explain, or describe.

Strategy Tip: Inform/explain passages are neutral; persuade passages take a side; entertaining writing has voice.

Worked Example: An essay arguing for longer recess has the purpose to persuade.

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03 MATH: QUANTITATIVE & ACHIEVEMENT

9. Quantitative Comparison Format

Middle/Upper QR includes QC items: Column A vs Column B. Answers: A greater, B greater, equal, or cannot be determined.

Strategy Tip: Work with the information given; variables usually require testing multiple values.

Worked Example: Column A: x+1, Column B: x+2 with no value for x -> B is always greater (B).

10. Percent Applications

Percent of a number (0.25 x 80 = 20), percent increase/decrease, sales tax, tips, discounts.

Strategy Tip: For "what percent is A of B," set A/B and convert to percent.

Worked Example: 15 is what percent of 60? 15/60 = 0.25 = 25%.

11. Ratios & Rates

Ratio (part:part), rate (per unit), unit rate (price per item), proportions (cross-multiply).

Strategy Tip: Label every rate with its units; unlabeled rates are swap traps.

Worked Example: 300 miles / 5 hours = 60 miles per hour.

12. Probability Basics

P(event) = favorable outcomes / total outcomes, from 0 (impossible) to 1 (certain).

Strategy Tip: Count the total outcomes in the problem's terms - percent or fraction both acceptable.

Worked Example: Rolling an even number on a die: 3/6 = 1/2.

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Ready for the Full ISEE Study Guide?

This sampler covers 12 of the highest-yield concepts. The complete guide covers 230+ concepts across all five ISEE sections (Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics Achievement, and the essay) with active-recall drills, worked examples, and the 48-hour rapid review.

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