

GRE Verbal Reasoning

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Verbal Reasoning

Test Design Features

The Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures of the computer-based GRE revised General Test are **section-level adaptive**. This means the computer selects **the second section** of a measure **based on your performance on the first section**. Additionally, the design of the revised test features advanced technology that allows you to freely move forward and backward throughout an entire section.

Other design features include:

- **Preview and review capabilities** within a section
- A “**mark and review**” feature to tag questions, so you can **skip them and return later** if you have time remaining in the section
- The ability to **change/edit answers** within a section

An **on-screen calculator** for the Quantitative Reasoning measure

Verbal Reasoning & Quantitative Reasoning Question Types in Brief

The questions in the GRE Test are presented in a variety of formats. Some require you to **select a single answer choice**; others require you to **select one or more answer choices**, and yet others require you to **enter a numeric answer**. Make sure when answering a question that you understand what response is required. When taking the computer-based GRE revised General Test, you are free to **skip questions that you might have difficulty answering** within a section. The testing software **also** lets you view a **complete list of all the questions** in the section on which you’re working, indicates whether you’ve answered each question, and **identifies the questions you’ve marked for review**. Additionally, you can review questions you’ve already answered and change your answers, provided you still have time remaining to work on that section.

- **Nothing is subtracted** from a score if you answer a question **incorrectly**.
- Since **no question carries greater weight** than any other, **do not waste time** pondering individual questions you find extremely difficult or unfamiliar.

During the actual administration of the revised General Test, you may work only on one section at a time and only for the time allowed. **Once you have completed a section, you may not go back to it.**

Question Types and the Order They Appear on the Test in Verbal Reasoning Measures

GRE Verbal sections **each consist of twenty questions**, which are as follows:

- Single-blank text completion
- Sentence equivalence
- Double-blank text completion
- Reading comprehension: paragraph argument question
- Triple-blank text completion

The **first question type** you'll see in the GRE Verbal is a "**text completion**," which you might know better as a "fill-in-the-blank." You'll see not only **single-blank sentences**, in which you have to choose one word that best fits the blank, but also texts with as many as **two** and **three blanks**, which can all be packed into **one sentence or**, more diabolically still, spread out over **an entire paragraph**.

Another question type is the "**sentence equivalence question**," a unique variety of text completion. The good news is that these questions each have only **one sentence and one blank**. The bad news is **you have to choose two out of six answer choices**. **There's no partial credit** (nor for two- and three-blank text completions, for that matter).

Finally, half of the test will be questions about specific **reading passages**. The reading **passages range from about 100 to 450 words** and are drawn from a variety of fields—**science, literary critique, social sciences, etc.** The GRE Verbal Section includes passages that range from relatively challenging to forbiddingly¹ dense².

Text Completion Breakdown³

Expect the following in each GRE Verbal section:

- One to two single-blank text completions
- Two to three double-blank text completions
- One to two triple-blank text completions

¹ Forbidding threatening, ominous, menacing, sinister, brooding, daunting, fearsome, frightening, chilling, disturbing, disquieting. • The dark castle looked forbidding.

² difficult to understand because it contains a lot of information
• a dense piece of writing

³ Analysis, classification, examination, investigation, dissection. • a breakdown of the figures

Reading Comprehension Breakdown

The **next** grouping you'll see in the GRE Verbal is reading **comprehension passages**. **Short passages** are less than twenty lines. Passages between twenty and forty lines are medium passages. **Long passages** are those over forty lines. **Finally, paragraph argument questions each refer to a single short- to medium-length paragraph, called the argument.**

➔➔ Across the two GRE Verbal sections, **here is a rough sampling of what to expect:**

- One long passage with four questions
- Four to five short passages with one to two questions each
- Two to three medium passages with two to three questions each
- Three to four paragraph argument questions with one question each

Sentence Equivalence Breakdown

After a few reading-comprehension questions, you get a handful of sentence equivalence questions, before a final reading comprehension set at the end of the section. There will be **a total of eight sentence equivalence questions** across both GRE Verbal sections. Keep in mind that these typically require the least amount of time. So as long as your vocab is strong, this is definitely an area that could lead to quick points.

Breaks

There is a **10-minute break following the third section** and a **one-minute break between the other test sections**. You might want to **replenish** your supply of scratch paper during a **scheduled break**. **Section timing will not stop if you take an unscheduled break**, so you should proceed with your test without interruption once it begins.

Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning Measures of the Computer-based Test

For the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning Measures of the computer-based GRE revised General Test, the reported scores are based on **the number of correct responses** to the questions included in the operational sections of the measure.

The Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning Measures are **section-level adaptive**. This means the computer selects the second section of a measure based on your performance on the first section. Within each section, **all questions contribute equally to the final score**. For each of the two measures, a raw score is computed. The raw score is the number of questions you have answered correctly. The

raw score is then converted to a scaled score through a process known as equating. The equating process **accounts for** minor variations in difficulty from test to test **as well as** the differences introduced by the section-level adaptation. Thus, a given scaled score for a particular measure reflects the same level of performance regardless of which second section was selected and when the test was taken.

Budgeting Your Time

Consider these suggestions: Spend no more than a minute on sentence equivalence and single-blank text completions. Spend an average of 1:20–1:30 on double-blank and triple-blank completions. The extra time you saved in single-blank and sentence equivalence should be used on reading comprehension.

Go for the Low-Hanging Fruit

Some questions on the GRE Verbal are easy and others are **fiendishly diabolical**. The **shocking** thing is **each question**, from the one that you get in a blink of an eye to one that has you scratching your head till long after the exam is over, is **worth the same**.

That's right: similar to the GRE Quantitative, each question within a GRE Verbal section has the same weight.

So don't spend three minutes **agonizing over** a triple-blank text completion with the words **hagiographic**⁴ and **pulchritude** (physical beauty) as answer choices. If it's a long paragraph with really difficult words, **skip it!**

In other words, if the question is clearly difficult and time-consuming, move on. Instead, go for the low-hanging fruit—the questions that are easier and take less time. The GRE allows you to scroll from question to question, so take advantage of that feature!

You Can Skip Questions

Don't freak out if you're unable to attempt every question. But there's **no penalty for guessing**, so be sure to **complete each question, even with a random guess**. There is, **however**, a penalty for rushing through a relatively easy question to try to answer every question—you get the easy question wrong. You don't get bonus points for completing the test, so make sure to **be accurate where you can**.

⁴ Hagiography = a book about the life of a person that praises them too much; this style of writing

Remember, you can skip a very long passage and come back to it if you have time. We recommend starting with questions that aren't so time-consuming. The thing to remember about a **long reading passage** is that **for those sixty-or-so lines you get four questions**. On the other hand, **each short passage is about fifteen lines long and offers up to two questions**. In other words, in some cases, **you can answer twice as many short-passage questions with the same amount of reading you would do for a long passage set**.

➔➔ The majority of test-takers will be pressed for time. Thus, for some, it won't be feasible to go back to multiple problems at the end of the section. Generally, if you can't get a question the first time, you won't be able to get it the second time around either. With this in mind, **here's the order in which we recommend using the new review list feature**.

1. Do the questions in the order in which they appear.
2. When you encounter a difficult question, do your best to **eliminate answer choices you know are wrong**.
3. If you're **not sure** of an answer, **take an educated guess** from the choices remaining. **Do NOT skip it and hope to return to it later**.
4. Using the “mark” button at the top of the screen, **mark up to three questions per section that you think you might be able to solve with more time**. Mark a question only after you have taken an **educated guess**.
5. Always **click on the review list at the end of a section to quickly make sure you have neither skipped nor incompletely answered any questions**.
6. If you have time, identify any questions that you marked for review and return to them. If you do not have any time remaining, you will have already taken good guesses at the tough ones. **What you want to avoid is surfing—clicking forward and backward through the questions searching for the easy ones**. **This will eat up valuable time**. Of course, you'll want to move through the tough ones quickly if you can't get them, but try to avoid skipping around.

Verbal Question Types in Details

Text Completion

➔ A text completion can contain anywhere from one to four sentences. The longest text completions can each run an entire paragraph. A text completion can have between one and three blanks. Every single-blank text completion will be one sentence and will contain five answer choices. The double- and triple-blank text completions, on the other hand, can run anywhere from one to four sentences. Most importantly, each blank in a double- and triple-blank text completion will always have three answer choices.

With a double- or triple-blank text completion, your chances of guessing correctly are quite low. For a triple-blank text completion, you have to get all three correct in order to get the question correct (that's a 1 in 27 chance in guessing).

➔➔ *Below are five important strategies you should follow if you want to do well on text completions.*

1. Don't dive in. Read the entire stem first. The first blank is often vague and doesn't make sense unless you have read the entire text.

2. Break down the paragraph. Text completions are sometimes a full paragraph long, so it's easy to get lost in what they're actually trying to say. A great strategy is trying to understand the "big picture." Breaking down the paragraph in your own words by paraphrasing the information will help you get a grasp on what the sentences are talking about.

3. Use your own words. Put your own word(s) in the blank or blanks. Make sure you can justify your answers based not just on the "big picture" but also on some of the specific words or phrases in the sentence itself. Rely on keywords.

4. Attempt the second (or third) blank first. Because the first blank is often difficult to deal with, try finding a word for the second or third blank first. Then work your way backwards to the first blank. This technique only applies if you can come up with a word for the second or third blank. If you can't, then work with the first blank.

5. Use the entire text completion as context. When you've finally chosen your two/ three answers, plug them back into the blanks. Does the completed sentence make sense with how you paraphrased it earlier?

Academic Structures to Know for Text Completions

In text completion sections, **there are certain phrases that may show up that can give the sentence a spin**. If you aren't familiar with these phrases, your head is *also* likely to spin. Take a look at the following two sentences.

He was, always giving to those in need.

*He was **anything but**, always giving to those in need.*

What exactly does “anything but” mean? Well, it's an expression that implies that he's many things, A, B, C, and D . . . but he's definitely *not* E. In this case, E would be the opposite of the second part of the sentence. A simple way to think about it is to replace *anything but* with *not*. As in, “he was (not)....., always giving to those in need.” The word **stingy** fits in very nicely. Notice how the words in the two blanks of the example sentences are opposite in meaning. **Generous** would make a good entry for the first sentence. The point here is to show you the meaning of *anything but* and how these idiomatic phrases can be highly misleading if you're not paying close attention.

Which sentence has the same meaning as the following sentence?

The experiment only looks like a success.

1. It is not possible to see the experiment as anything but a success.
2. The experiment seems successful, but we don't know for sure.
3. The experiment has the appearance of a success, but really is a failure.

Below are some of the most **common phrases you can expect to see on the GRE**. Keep an eye out for them when answering text completions, and be sure you feel comfortable with how they're used in sentences.

Nothing but⁵

In most cases, the phrase nothing but means “only (something).”

*When we went to her house, she was **nothing but** kind, showering us with gifts.*

*In his book critiques, Jones was **nothing but** fair, always judging an author on the merits of his or her latest novel, regardless of previous fops.*

⁵ Merely, only, just, solely, simply, purely, **no more than**. *He's nothing but a nuisance.*

What is the meaning of *chicanery*?

The defense lawyer's strategy for getting her client acquitted by knowingly misinterpreting words in an obscure precedent (model/ way/ example) was nothing but **chicanery**.

All but

The phrase *all but* is identical to “almost.” It can also mean “everything except the ones mentioned.”

Contrast the two sentences below to see the differences in how the phrase is used.

All but *the most famous actors of our day will likely not be remembered fifty years from now.*

*At the end of the marathon, Charles was **all but** dead; he stumbled across the finish line, mentioning something about his pet iguana.*

The bill's passage is all but assured.

Your objections have arrived too late; the matter is all but decided.

Which sentence has the same meaning as the following sentence?

Her appointment to the office is all but assured.

1. She has a meeting at the office, but the time is not set.
2. She will almost certainly be given a new job or leadership role.
3. She may be promoted, but it is not likely

At once X and Y

The phrase *at once X and Y* is a tricky structure! First off, **X** and **Y** are words or phrases that are **opposite in meaning**. Second, that's an “and” you see, and not an “or.” So this phrase is used to suggest an element of surprise because a person/thing has these opposing qualities.

*At once **melodious** and **dissonant**, Perkins's symphony is full of beautiful melodies that are suddenly interrupted by a burst of clashing gongs and screeching sopranos.*

melodious = X; dissonant = Y

*At once **forward-thinking** and **traditionalist**, the mayor's new plan will **usher** in unprecedented changes while using approaches that have shown enduring efficacy in the civic sphere.*

➔ *He was at once **hysterically funny**, making people roll on the floor in laughter, and overly as soon as the conversation turned to politics.*

At once *because of his extensive knowledge of ancient civilizations **and** **uninformed** because of his total lack of interest in current events, Johnson, it is said, lives in a time warp.*

Enlightened

Nothing more than = only

The phrase *nothing more than* is used to show that somebody isn't very good at something. The word that follows "than" should be a negative description.

He is nothing more than a second-rate musician, busking⁶ at a bus stop; his friends are always happy to escape his warbling⁷ falsetto⁸.

*Harry is nothing more than a seasoned Hollywood hack⁹: his scripts are all **Meretricious**.*

(All) the more so because

Used to give an important extra reason why sth is true

- *His achievement is remarkable; all the more so because he had no help at all.*

Qentin's sudden termination was shocking—all the more so because he helped build the company as many know it today.

For all

The phrase *for all* is another way of saying "despite."

For all his hard work, Michael was passed over¹⁰ for a promotion.

***For all** their talk on **purging** the environment of toxins, the two brothers can't do without their hourly smoke break.*

If anything = rather = on the contrary even

The phrase *if anything* is meant to suggest that somebody is disagreeing with something and wants to prove that the other case is actually true.

⁶ to perform music in a public place and ask for money from people passing by

⁷ (*humorous*) to sing, especially in a high voice

- Was that you I heard warbling in the bathroom this morning?

⁸ a form of singing or speaking by men using an extremely high voice

- For his role as a young boy, he had to speak in a high falsetto.

صدای تیز

⁹ journalist, reporter, newspaperman, newspaperwoman

¹⁰ 1) to take no notice of; disregard

- they passed me over in the last round of promotions.
2) to disregard (something bad or embarrassing)
- we shall pass over your former faults.

She's not thin—**if anything** she's on the plump side.

Bob: *It seems like this city is getting more dangerous every day.*

Steve: *Actually, it doesn't seem that much worse from when I first moved here. **If anything**, the crime rate has actually dropped since the city's population has almost doubled in the last ten years.*

As such

The phrase *as such* can be confusing because it is often misinterpreted as “~~therefore~~.”

1. in the capacity previously specified or understood

Correct: *She will become an icon; **as such**, she will be a role model for years to come.*

In this sentence, *such* refers to the noun *icon*, so the intended reading is

*She will become an icon; **as an icon**, she will be a role model for years to come.*

Incorrect: *We missed our train to Brussels. ~~As such~~, we will have to take another one.*

In recent years, however, it's been used with this meaning.

2. in itself or themselves

*Intelligence **as such** can't guarantee success.*

Not so much A as B

The phrase *not so much A as B* implies that to describe a situation, B is a better word or phrase than A.
The scholar was not so much insightful as he was patient: he would peruse texts far longer than any of his peers.

He was not so much jealous as downright resentful of his sister's talents, believing that their parents had put little interest in his education.

But for

The phrase *but for* is just another way of saying “except for.”

But for her eloquence, she had little aptitude as an attorney.

His contribution to cinema has been mostly forgotten but for his Oscar-winning role.

Save (for)

Similarly, the phrase *save (for)* means the same as “except (for).”

Everyone came save Ali.

They knew nothing about her save her name.

She answered all the questions save one.

Stem from

To stem from just means to “come from” or “be caused by.”

His insecurity stems from his lack of friends in grade school.

The current crises stem from the former administration's inability to rein in spending.

Practice: Easy

Writing well is not so much a matter of inspiration as it is..... (i); just as the scientist toils away in an attic, or the athlete trains even in inhospitable conditions, a writer too must be..... (ii).

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| (i) | (ii) |
| A. forethought | D. candid |
| B. perseverance | E. yielding |
| C. carelessness | F. tenacious |

Answer:

The first clue in this sentence is “not . . . a matter of inspiration.” We need words like (A) or (B). To know which one, we have to read the part of the sentence that comes after the semicolon. “Toil away” and “train . . . inhospitable conditions” is consistent with **(B)**, which means “to not give up, despite adversity.”

The second blank is consistent with the first blank. The basic structure is as follows:

Writing is not quality A, it's quality B. Examples of quality B. A writer is similar to these examples, showing (once again) writer has quality B. (F), which means “not giving up,” is similar to (B). (D), which means honest and direct, doesn't match the context. (E), which means “giving in,” is the opposite of the answer.

Text Completion Practice Questions

Leaders are not always expected to (i)_____ the same rules as are those they lead; leaders are often looked up to for a surety and presumption that would be viewed as (ii)_____ in most others.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Blank (i) | Blank (ii) |
| decree ¹¹ | hubris ¹² |
| proscribe ¹³ | avarice ¹⁴ |
| conform to | anachronism |

¹¹ **Noun:** *a presidential decree:* order, edict, command, commandment, mandate, proclamation, dictum, fiat; law, statute, act; *formal* ordinance.

Verb: *he decreed that a stadium should be built:* ORDER, command, rule, dictate, pronounce, proclaim, ordain

¹² **Noun:** arrogance, conceit, haughtiness, hauteur, pride, self-importance, pomposity, superciliousness, superiority; *informal* big-headedness.

¹³ *gambling was proscribed:* forbid, prohibit, ban, bar, interdict, make illegal, embargo, outlaw, disallow, veto; *Law* enjoin. *the book was proscribed by the Church:* condemn, denounce, attack, criticize, censure, damn, reject.

¹⁴ greed, acquisitiveness, cupidity, covetousness, rapacity, **voracity**

Select your two choices by actually clicking and highlighting the words you want.

Solution

In the first blank, you need a word similar to “follow.” In the second blank, you need a word similar to “arrogance.” The correct answers are *conform to* and *hubris*.

Strategy Tip: Do NOT look at the answer choices until you've decided for yourself, based on textual clues actually written in the sentence, what kind of word needs to go in each blank. Only then should you look at the choices and eliminate those that are not matches.

An example with three blanks:

For Kant, the fact of having a right and having the (i)_____ to enforce it via coercion cannot be separated, and he asserts that this marriage of rights and coercion is compatible with the freedom of everyone. This is not at all peculiar from the standpoint of modern political thought—what good is a right if its violation triggers no enforcement (be it punishment or (ii) _____)? The necessity of coercion is not at all in conflict with the freedom of everyone, because this coercion only comes into play when someone has (iii)_____ someone else.

Blank (i)

technique

license

prohibition

Blank (ii)

amortization

reward

restitution

Blank (iii)

questioned the hypothesis of

violated the rights of

granted civil liberties to

Solution

In the first sentence, use the clue “he asserts that this marriage of rights and coercion is compatible with the freedom of everyone” to help fill in the first blank. Kant believes that “coercion” is “married to” rights and is compatible with freedom for all. So you want something in the first blank like “right” or “power.” Kant believes that rights are meaningless without enforcement. Only the choice *license* can work (while a *license* can be physical, like a driver's license, *license* can also mean “right”).

The second blank is part of the phrase “punishment or _____,” which you are told is the “enforcement” resulting from the violation of a right. So the blank should be something, other than punishment, that constitutes enforcement against someone who violates a right. (More simply, it should be something bad.) Only *restitution* works. Restitution is compensating the victim in some way (perhaps monetarily or by returning stolen goods).

In the final sentence, “coercion only comes into play when someone has _____ someone else.” Throughout the text, “coercion” means enforcement against someone who has violated the rights of someone else. The meaning is the same here. The answer is *violated the rights of*.

The complete and correct answer is this combination:

1. license
2. restitution
3. violated the rights of

In theory, there are $3 \times 3 \times 3$, or 27 possible ways to answer a three-blank Text Completion—and only one of those 27 ways is correct. In theory, these are bad odds. In practice, you will often have certainty about some of the blanks, so your guessing odds are almost never this bad. Just follow the basic process: come up with your own filler for each blank, and match to the answer choices.

Strategy Tip: *Do not write your own story. The GRE cannot give you a blank without also giving you a clue, physically written down in the passage, telling you what kind of word or phrase must go in that blank. Find that clue. You should be able to give textual evidence for each answer choice you select.*

Sentence Equivalence Questions

For this question type, you are given one sentence with a single blank. There are six answer choices, and you are asked to pick two choices that fit the blank and are alike in meaning. Of the Verbal question types, this one depends the most on vocabulary and also yields the most to strategy.

No partial credit is given on Sentence Equivalence; both correct answers must be selected and no incorrect answers may be selected. When you pick 2 of 6 choices, there are 15 possible combinations of choices, and only one is correct. However, this is not nearly as daunting¹⁵ as it sounds.

Think of it this way: if you have six choices, but the two correct ones must be similar in meaning, then you have, at most, three possible *pairs* of choices, maybe fewer, since not all choices are guaranteed to have a partner. If you can match up the pairs, you can seriously narrow down your options. Here is a sample set of answer choices:

- A. Tractable
- B. Taciturn
- C. Arbitrary
- D. Tantamount
- E. Reticent
- F. Amenable

The question is deliberately omitted here in order to illustrate how much you can do with the choices alone, if you have studied vocabulary sufficiently.

Tractable and **amenable** are synonyms (tractable, amenable people will do whatever you want them to do). **Taciturn** and **reticent** are synonyms (both mean “not talkative”). **Arbitrary** (based on one's own will) and **tantamount** (equivalent) are not similar in meaning and therefore cannot be a pair. Therefore, the *only* possible correct answer pairs are (A) and (F), and (B) and (E). You have improved your chances from 1 in 15 to a 50/50 shot without even reading the question!

Of course, in approaching a Sentence Equivalence, you do want to analyze the sentence in the same way you would a Text Completion—read for a textual clue that tells you what type of word *must* go in the blank. Then look for a matching pair.

Strategy Tip: If you're sure that a word in the choices does *not* have a partner, cross it out! For instance, if (A) and (F) are partners and (B) and (E) are partners, and you're sure neither (C) nor (D) pair

¹⁵ Discourage, deter, demoralize, put off, dishearten, dispirit; intimidate

with any other answer, cross out (C) and (D) completely. They cannot be the answer together, nor can either one be part of the answer.

The sentence for the answer choice above could read as follows:

Though the dinner guests were quite _____ , the hostess did her best to keep the conversation active and engaging.

Thus, **(B)** and **(E)** are the best choices.

Try another example:

While athletes usually expect to achieve their greatest feats in their teens or twenties, opera singers don't reach the _____ of their vocal powers until middle age.

- A. Harmony
- B. Zenith
- C. Acme
- D. Terminus
- E. Nadir
- F. Cessation

Solution

Those with strong vocabularies might go straight to the choices to make pairs. **Zenith** and **acme** are synonyms, meaning “high point, **peak**.” **Terminus** and **cessation** are synonyms meaning “**end**.” **Nadir** is a low point and **harmony is present here as a trap** answer reminding you of opera singers. Cross off (A) and (E), since they do not have partners. Then, go back to the sentence, knowing that your only options are a pair meaning “peak” and a pair meaning “end.” The correct answer choices are **(B)** and **(C)**.

Let’s take a look at a sample question that could put you in a jam.

The proliferation of anti-smoking images has clearly had a(n).....effect: both the number of total smokers and the rate of lung cancer has fallen in recent years.

- A. Salutary
- B. Lasting
- C. Dramatic
- D. Ephemeral
- E. Unremarkable
- F. Beneficial

There are a few answer choices that could work here: [A] *salutary*, [B] *lasting*, [C] *dramatic*, and [F] *beneficial*. However, *lasting* is a bit suspect, because there's nothing in the sentence that implies the changes in behavior are permanent. So now you're down to three answers. Let's say you really like answer choice [C] *dramatic*. In fact, this is possibly the very word you **came up with** for the blank. However, because answer choices [A] and [F] are synonyms that work for the blank, there's no way [C] can be the answer. This is an important tip to keep in mind: **If two synonyms work for the blank, then another word cannot be the answer.**

Of course, in the world of the GRE and sentence equivalence questions in particular, it isn't always that straightforward. What if you didn't know the definition of [A] *salutary*? Would it then make sense to choose [C]? No. The vast majority of sentence equivalence answers are synonyms. Even in those sentence equivalence questions in which the two correct answers aren't strict synonyms, synonymous sentences result when you plug the words in. [C] *dramatic* and [F] *beneficial*, however, are very different words and create very different sentences. Therefore, your best bet is to first choose [A] *salutary* even though you don't know what it means. The assumption here is that [A] *salutary* is one of the two synonyms. Then you want to choose either *dramatic* or *beneficial*. One of them will most likely be the answer.

You may hesitate, thinking that the odds are 50/50. However, if you pick [C] and [F], while avoiding the word you don't know, your chances of answering the question correctly are nil, because such different words clearly create different sentences.

Here are some good strategies for dealing with sentence equivalence questions:

- Always look for synonyms.
- If you can't find any synonyms in the answer choices (given you know the definition of every word), then the correct answers will be words that aren't technically synonyms.
- If you don't know a few of the words, don't just pick two words because they're synonymous; sometimes two pairs of synonyms exist within the six answer choices.
- If no pair of words that you know creates synonymous sentences, choose a word you don't know and match it with one of the answer choices that works.

If the tips above sound like taking some big gambles, that's because approaching sentence equivalence in terms of guessing is so complex compared to the typical one in five-choice questions. Basically, you'll

want to do anything to increase **the odds of** guessing correctly. And, to do so, the steps above will be a helpful approach.

There are many practice questions in Magoosh GRE practice tests - chapter 6 - and in Manhattan Preparation GRE Strategy Guides - 4th Edition.

Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension Passage Types

You are probably already familiar with Reading Comprehension (RC) from other standardized tests. You are given a passage to read, and you are asked questions about the substance and structure of the passage.

About half of the GRE Verbal Reasoning questions will be RC questions. You can expect about five passages per section. Each passage will be accompanied by 1–4 questions, for a total of about 10 RC questions per section.

Long passages, which consist of about 460 words in three to five paragraphs, take up about 75–85 lines on the computer screen (or 25–30 printed lines in *The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test*). Since only about 25 lines fit on the screen, you will have to scroll three to four times just to read the passage. Each long passage will have about four questions associated with it (while *The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test* states that long passages can have up to six associated questions, official tests released by Educational Testing Service (ETS) always present long passages with only four associated questions). You can expect to see one long passage on your exam. There are only two examples of long passages in *The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test*.

Short passages, which consist of about 160 words in one or two paragraphs, take up about 25–33 lines on the computer screen (or 8–15 printed lines in *The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test*). Usually, you will have to scroll once to reveal the very bottom of a short passage. Most short passages will have one to three associated questions on the GRE, though it is possible to have as many as four questions. You can expect to see five to six short passages on your exam. Two examples of short passages appear in *The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test*.

Argument Structure Passages (ASPs) consist of 25–75 words in one paragraph, take up between five and eight lines on the computer screen (or two to five lines in *The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test*), and are sometimes no longer than a single sentence. You won't need to scroll to see the entire passage, and there will always be only one associated question. You can expect to see about three of these passages per exam. While the GRE still considers ASPs part of Reading Comprehension, they are significantly different from short and long passages. Short and long passages give you information about a topic, with associated questions relevant either to the structure of the passage or

its content. Argument Structure Passages feature a short argument about which you will be asked the only **salient** question that the passage allows. In other words, the passage has been written with only *one* question in mind. Because of this disparity, the recommended approach for ASPs is quite different from that for long and short passages. All RC questions appear one at a time on the right side of the computer screen. The passage will always be visible on the left side of the screen while you answer the questions associated with that passage. You are able to click through and preview all the questions associated with a given passage. This kind of previewing can be helpful, but make sure you **give the passage a start-to-finish read before attempting to answer any individual question**. This is critical for your overall comprehension.

➔ There are three question formats associated with RC passages:

1. Multiple choice, Select One: This is a traditional multiple-choice format, in which you must **select only one** of five possible answer choices (labeled A–E, with circular buttons). **Read all of the answer choices before making a decision**. All questions associated with argument structure passages will be in this format.

2. Multiple choice, Select All That Apply: This format is also multiple-choice, only now **there are just three possible answer choices** (labeled A–C, with square-shaped buttons), and **you must pick all of them** that apply. At least one must be correct, and it is just as likely that all three will be correct as that **any one or two of them will be**. This type of question makes guessing more difficult, as there are technically seven different combinations of answers (A, B, C, A–B, A–C, B–C, and A–B–C), and there is no partial credit given for half-right answers. Make sure to evaluate each answer choice on its own; this question format should almost feel like three different questions in one.

3. Select-in-Passage: This question format asks you to click on the sentence in the passage that **correctly answers a given question**. For longer passages, the question will specify **only one or two paragraphs with an arrow**, and you will be unable to highlight anything in the rest of the passage. From a guessing perspective, the larger the specified area, the harder this type of question becomes.

One section on the GRE test to which students pay the least attention is reading comprehension. They likely figure, “**I know how to read**. I’ll just **do a couple of practice passages**—if that¹⁶—to get the hang of it.”

¹⁶ At most: “My car is so old that, if I were to sell it, I would get a hundred pounds, **if that**.”
“There is not much to discuss, so today’s meeting should be over in half an hour, **if that**.”

Yet reading comprehension is, **for many, the most difficult section** to improve on. For one, reading comprehension **isn't just about reading; it's about understanding how the test writers phrase questions and create trap answers**. These questions will test your ability to work without utter certainty (the way you would in math) and instead weigh **two answers that are almost identical, one being slightly better** than the other. **Discerning** these nuances—in a stressful environment—is **one of the keys to doing well on the reading passages**.

Doing well is also about **pacing**. You might be able to apply the strategies you learn here, but if you do so in a way that wastes time, you're hurting yourself. **Practicing speed without compromising accuracy** is no easy feat, and it takes plenty of grit¹⁷—you may want to give up long before you start **seeing substantial progress**. You'll also have to be patient, especially if you're not an avid reader, as your brain adapts to the kind of **elevated language** seen on the test. But practicing diligently will reward you on test day. You'll develop a sense of pacing that shouldn't interfere with your performance on the rest of the GRE Verbal. Finally, practicing reading comprehension questions is important for your performance on the entire test. Even if you're a strong reader and are faced with what you think are relatively easy questions, you might still be worn down by the time you reach the end of the verbal section. That's why honing¹⁸ your ability to focus for several hours is so important: **the amount of concentration required on the reading passages can be a significant drain on your stamina**.

A Balanced Approach toward GRE Reading Passages:

One response to the challenges of Reading Comprehension is to become a **Hunter**. Hunters avoid the first read-through altogether, reasoning that most questions require some kind of detailed lookup anyway—so why not just skip the initial reading and go right to the questions? As their name implies, Hunters simply go hunting for the answer in a passage they have never read. This strategy seems to

¹⁷ the courage and determination that makes it possible for sb to continue doing sth difficult or unpleasant

¹⁸ **1.** to develop and improve sth, especially a skill, over a period of time

- ~ **sth** She honed her debating skills at college.
- It was a finely honed piece of writing.
- ~ **sth to sth** His body was honed to perfection.

2. ~ **sth (to sth)** to make a blade sharp or sharper

Syn: sharpen

- The knife had been honed to razor sharpness.
- The hook should be honed to a needle-sharp point.

save time up front, but you have to spend a lot more time per question. More importantly, this approach leads to many wrong answers. Without a good general understanding of the passage, Hunters can fall prey to trap answers.

At the other extreme, some GRE test-takers become **Scholars**. Scholars do a very careful first readthrough, paying attention to details. “After all,” Scholars worry, “I could be asked about any aspect of the passage—and if I skim over anything, how can I be sure that that one clause was not important, even critical, to my overall understanding?” One obvious problem with this method is that it takes far too much time. More importantly, if you read *too* slowly and pay *too* much attention to all the details, you can easily lose sight of the big picture: the gist and structure of the whole passage. And the big picture is what you absolutely need to take away from the first read.

The middle ground between Hunters and Scholars is occupied by **Big-Picture Readers**, who take a balanced approach. Before trying to answer the questions, they read the passage with an eye toward structure. At the beginning of the passage, Big-Picture Readers go slowly, ensuring a solid grasp of the basics. But they go quickly at the end, **keeping** minor details **at arm's length**¹⁹. They read *actively* but *efficiently*.

The goal of big picture reading is to avoid finishing a passage and feeling that you just wasted your time—either because you got lost in the weeds or because you skimmed over the passage at too removed a level to grasp any content. **How do you become a Big-Picture Reader on the GRE? Some Principles of Active, Efficient Reading** will be elaborated upon later. Keep in mind that **these rules apply more directly to long and short passages than to Argument Structure Passages, which do not feature nearly as much “content,” in terms of either length or detail.**

Meet the GRE Reading Passage

What exactly is a GRE reading passage? And what makes it so special (and difficult!)? To answer this, we’re going to give you two short passages that cover an identical topic.

*Detecting art **forgeries** has become less difficult, **thanks to** innovations in technology. Computer algorithms are now able to determine the number of brushstrokes common to each artist. A forger, guided only by the naked eye, would have difficulty determining how many brushstrokes an artist used on a particular canvas because these **intricate** details require many brushstrokes. Forgeries, once*

¹⁹ avoid intimacy or close contact with sb/sth

It's not easy to become friends with Sophie; she tends to keep everyone at arm's length.

thought to be genuine, are now—thanks to computer analysis—turning up in auction houses throughout the world.

*The use of technology to detect art forgeries has become increasingly common **now that** computer algorithms are able to capture details so subtle that they **elude** the human eye altogether. **Nonetheless**, the forgers are gaining an understanding of the way that the algorithms function and as a result are creating forgeries capable of **foiling**²⁰ the algorithms. **While** such attempts at reverse engineering a painting are not always successful—often a forger will focus on an aspect of the painting that is only part of or not at all included in the algorithm—sometimes the computer technology is **beguiled** by the hand of an adept forger into identifying a forgery as a genuine work of art. **Yet** computer algorithms should not be discounted altogether, because they are still capable of exposing fake works and, when used in conjunction with an art expert’s testimony, provide the most accurate means we have of determining the authenticity of a work of art.*

The **first paragraph** is **highly readable** and **engaging**—the type of article you’d expect to read in a popular magazine. The **second paragraph**, on the other hand, might lead readers of a popular magazine to unsubscribe. The sentence structure is more **advanced**, the style more sophisticated. The third sentence in particular is **convoluted**; students will likely reread it several times. Phrases such as “beguiled by . . . art” are elevated in style, making the sentence even more difficult to parse.

While it’s easy to get lost in the **thicket**²¹ of words, the GRE passage writers are very **deliberate** about including “**signpost**” words—words that **indicate the relationship between sentences and clauses** within those sentences. Understanding how these important words function will help you navigate the twists and the turns of the passage. In the second passage, we have boldfaced these signpost words. **Generally speaking, they fall into three categories: Same, Opposite, Cause and Effect.**

1. **Same:** the statement in one clause/sentence is similar to the idea that preceded it
Examples: *additionally, also, moreover, likewise, too, furthermore*

²⁰ to prevent someone or something from being successful = thwart, frustrate, counter, balk, impede, obstruct, hamper, hinder

- The prisoners' attempt to escape was foiled at the last minute when police received a tip-off (piece of information, warning, lead, forewarning).

²¹ a large number of things that are not easy to understand or separate = tangle, mass, knot, mesh, mishmash

- He spent the morning trying to work his way through **a thicket of statistics.**

Example sentence: Researchers have found evidence that the **indigenous** sloth population is decreasing. **Additionally**, evidence shows that the **native** toucan population is languishing.

2. **Opposite:** the statement in one clause/sentence is opposite to another written idea

Examples: *yet, though, however, but, nonetheless, nevertheless, at the same time, notwithstanding, still, that said*

Example sentence: **Though** evidence shows that the indigenous sloth population has decreased in recent months, much of this can be attributed to seasonal variations in the animal's numbers.

3. **Cause and Effect:** the idea expressed in one clause is the result of an idea discussed in an adjacent clause

Examples: *since, so, because, consequently, as a result, due to, given*

Example sentence: **Given** the recent destruction of the rainforest, the sloth population is deprived of its natural habitat and is rapidly decreasing in number.

➔ Picking up on these signpost words, especially those that indicate “opposite,” will help you see a pattern common to many GRE passages. In our earlier excerpt, the author conveys a thought (forgers can't always fool the algorithms) only to limit the statement in the following sentence (but they're often able to do so).

➔ This is called qualifying a statement. It's what often makes GRE passages tricky to understand, since the author isn't taking a “yes-or-no” position on an issue. Instead, he or she is arriving at a reasoned position that leans toward “yes” or “no.” In this case, the author believes that it's not easy to trick a computer, but (first qualification) an adept forger can do so. Finally, the author adds that computers are still an important part of identifying forgeries. Anticipating the signposts and the qualifications will help you better package the information as you read—and better navigate the twists and turns of the passage.

Attacking the Passage

It might seem obvious that the first thing to do is read the passage. But what exactly does it mean to “read” the passage? For instance, you could **skim** fifty lines, **getting a general sense** of what the passage is about, but not really being able to articulate any of the supporting details or counterarguments. Likewise, you could **carefully read each paragraph, taking** assiduous **notes**. The two strategies are on opposite sides of the spectrum, and **neither is recommended for the GRE**. Instead, **your reading pace should be somewhere in the middle**. What's just as important, though, is *how* you read the passage. You'll want to use an important technique: **active reading**.

Seven Essential Tips for Active Reading

1. Get Excited!

Perhaps art forgeries interest you. But for many readers, they're unfamiliar **footing**, because few of us have ever really given the topic much thought. The GRE intentionally picks such topics because they don't want to give students with specialized knowledge an advantage. To ensure this, they select topics that can be highly esoteric (the advent of bicycle riding in nineteenth-century America is one such topic from *The Official Guide to the GRE revised General Test, Second Edition*).

Coupled with the dense prose, these obscure topics induce boredom in many test takers. Even if they can't stop their minds from wandering, readers nonetheless start stringing words together, losing a sense of the main ideas in each paragraph. They hope that by brute force they'll get to the end of the passage and will have a sudden moment of enlightenment. Not very likely! By not engaging the "active reading brain" from the beginning, readers tend to make "word salad" out of the passage.

To combat this tendency, convince yourself that the topic matter is super interesting, that it rivals front-page news (the proliferation of mollusks in the South Pacific? Whoa, tell me more!). This mindset will help turn your "active-reading brain" on so that you can take advantage of the other tips.

2. Understand the big ideas in each paragraph.

Each paragraph is packed with lots of information: big ideas, supporting details, qualifications, and even multiple viewpoints. However, every GRE passage has a **simple story—the gist or core meaning of the passage**. You must find this simple story on the first read-through. How do you identify this simple story? Here are **three different methods**. Also, for now, do not worry about whether, or how, you write down the simple story as you read a passage. Just focus on finding that story.

1. Text it to me. As you read, ask yourself this question: how would you retell all this stuff to an intelligent but bored teenager in just a couple of sentences? Can you give him or her just 5–10 words to describe a paragraph? You will find yourself cutting out the trivia. Simplifying does not contradict the principle of being engaged with the content of the passage. You should be extremely interested in the passage, so you know what is important.

2. Make a table of contents. Alternatively, you can create a short table of contents. Use five words or fewer for the headline of each paragraph. As written, these headlines may not sound exactly like a story, but they outline the same narrative.

3. Look for content and judgment. The parts of a simple story can generally be classified as Content or Judgment, as follows:

Content: the scientific, historical, or artistic subject matter of the passage

- (a) Causes (effects, evidence, logical results)
- (b) Processes (steps, means, ends)
- (c) Categories (examples, generalities)

Judgment: what the author and any other people believe about the Content

- (a) Theories and Hypotheses
- (b) Evaluations and Opinions
- (c) Comparisons and Contrasts
- (d) Advantages and Disadvantages

3. Unpack the Beginning

You must understand **the first few sentences** of every passage, because they supply critical context for the entire passage. If you do not grasp these sentences at first, you have two choices. Either you can take more time with them right away, or you can read a little further and gather more context. In the latter case, you *must* go back and re-acquire those initial sentences later.

All too often, GRE students satisfy themselves with an impressionistic sense of the beginning of a passage. However, **forming an impression is not the same as comprehending the passage**. Given the importance of the initial sentences, **try to grasp 100% of the beginning of any passage (even if you only grasp 40% of the end)**. That is far better than comprehending 70% of the text throughout.

Complicating matters, **the GRE often opens passages with long, opaque sentences**. How do you make sure you understand them, either now or later? The process of making the story real can help. **You can also use the unpacking technique**. Academic language is often dense, with long noun phrases formed out of simple sentences. **To unpack an academic-style sentence, turn it into a few simple sentences that express essentially the same meaning.**

In general, you should *not* write this unpacking out (except as an exercise) or apply it throughout the passage. Like making the story real, unpacking is a powerful tool to smash open resistant language, especially at the start of the passage. Use this technique judiciously.

Consider this example opening of a passage:

In a diachronic investigation of possible behavioral changes resulting from accidental exposure in early childhood to environmental lead dust, two sample groups were tracked over decades.

The steps to unpacking a complex sentence are as follows:

- 1. Grab a concrete noun first.** Pick something that you can touch and that causes other things to happen. Do not necessarily pick something at the start of the sentence. A good candidate is **lead dust**. The first sentence could simply be this: *There was lead dust in various environments.*
- 2. Turn actions back into verbs.** In academic language, verbs are often made into noun or adjective phrases. Re-create the verbs. Also, feel free to start with *There is* or *There was*. For instance, *exposure* becomes *were exposed*; *behavioral* becomes *behaved*.
- 3. Put only one simple thought in a sentence,** such as *There was lead dust in various environments.*
- 4. Link each subsequent sentence to the previous one, using *this* or *these*.** For instance, *This resulted in...* This process mimics speech, which is usually easy to understand. So the second sentence could read, *Young children in these environments were exposed to this dust by accident.*
- 5. Simplify or “quote off” details.** If a jargon word is used in an important way, put quotes around it. Think to yourself “...whatever that means...” and keep going. If the term is necessary, you will figure it out from context later. For instance, the term “*diachronic*” needs a pair of quotes, so that you do not focus on it. You might even think of it just as “*d-something*.”

The final list of a few simple sentences could come out this way:

1. There was lead dust in various environments.
2. Young children in these environments were exposed to this dust by accident.
3. This exposure may have changed how the children behaved.
4. This whole matter was investigated.
5. In this investigation, two sample groups were tracked over time. ↓↓

This unpacked “story” is easier to dive into and understand than the original sentence—even though the story contains nearly twice as many words! Also note that the subject and verb of the original

sentence do not appear until the end. This phenomenon is very common. Often, it is easiest to understand the outer “frame” of the original sentence *last*.

Again, it is often not practical to employ such an elaborate process in real time on the GRE. However, knowing how to break down a complex sentence into its component ideas can help you read more efficiently in general. In addition, you can use this technique if you are stuck on one of the early sentences, although it will require some effort.

Incidentally, the 10-dollar word *diachronic* means “happening over time” in certain technical settings. If you needed to know that word, you would be able to infer its meaning from context. For instance, the passage might contrast this decades-long *diachronic* investigation with a *synchronic* study of a cross-section of people all examined at one time. **For GRE passages, you need to have an educated adult's working vocabulary, but you will not need advanced knowledge of truly specialized jargon.**

4. Link to What You Have Just Read.

As you read further, continue to ask yourself about the **meaning** and **purpose** of what you are reading. What does this sentence mean *in relation to everything else I have read*? Why is this sentence here? What function does it serve in relation to the previous text?

In the unpacking technique, you saw the power of linking. Complicated ideas can be made digestible by breaking them into pieces and hooking them together. In writing, you do not always use *this* and *these*, but you often put references to *old* information at the beginnings of sentences, even complex ones, to hook them to previous material. Likewise, you tend to save *new* information for the ends of sentences.

What kinds of relationships can a sentence have to the previous text? In general, you should think about these possibilities:

1. Is the new sentence **expected or surprising**?
2. Does it **support or oppose** earlier material?
3. Does it **answer or ask** a question?

More specifically, the **Content/Judgment** framework that you encountered before can guide you. Do *not* use this framework as a checklist. Rather, simply be aware of the various possible relationships:

Content: the scientific or historical subject matter of the passage

(a) Causes (effects, evidence, logical results)

(b) Processes (steps, means, ends)

(c) Categories (examples, generalities)

Judgment: what the author and any other people believe about the Content

(a) Theories and Hypotheses

(b) Evaluations and Opinions

(c) Comparisons and Contrasts

(d) Advantages and Disadvantages

Do not overanalyze as you read. You have been linking sentences together and making sense of them as a whole for many years; in fact, you are doing so now, as you read this chapter. The above is just a description of the process.

5. Don't get bogged down by the tough parts.

As mentioned in the previous tip, you don't want to spend too much time trying to understand a paragraph. Often, there's a sentence, usually toward the end of a paragraph, that's difficult to understand. Although it's easy to get a feeling of dread that you'll miss something huge if you don't entirely understand the sentence, that's typically not the case. If you can sum the sentence up at the level of specificity, say, of "the author is disagreeing with some aspect of theory," that will be enough.

The point is you might not even have to deal with this thorny²² patch of text. But if you do, then going back to the passage—which is one of the key elements of attacking questions (more on that in a later section)—will allow you to see the text with "fresh eyes" and without the cognitive load of having to read the entire passage.

6. Note any counterarguments or additional points of view.

As you read the passage, go faster after the first few sentences. In your working memory, hold the growing jigsaw puzzle that is the big picture of the passage. As you read text later in the passage, ask whether what you are reading adds anything truly significant to that jigsaw puzzle. Toward the end, only dive into information that is clearly part of the big picture.

Do *not* get lost in details later on in the passage. Do *not* try to master every bit of content. You must read the whole passage—but keep later parts at arm's length.

²² 1. prickly, spiky, barbed, spiny, sharp; *technical* spinose, spinous.

2. *the thorny subject of confidentiality*: problematic, tricky, ticklish, delicate, controversial, awkward, difficult, knotty, tough, taxing, trying, troublesome; complicated, complex, **involved**, intricate; **vexed**; *informal* sticky.

Only **pay close attention to the following elements later on in a long passage:**

1. **Beginnings of paragraphs.** The first or second sentence often functions as a topic sentence, indicating the content and/or purpose of the paragraph.
2. **Big surprises** or changes in direction.
3. **Big results**, answers, or payoffs.

Everything else is just detail. Do not skip the later text entirely. You must pass your eyes over it and extract *some* meaning, so that if you are asked a specific question, you remember that you saw something about that particular point, and you know (sort of) where to look. Moreover, those big surprises and results can be buried in the middle of paragraphs. Nevertheless, do not try to grasp the whole passage deeply the first time through. Your attention and your working memory are the most valuable assets you have on the GRE in general and on Reading Comprehension in particular. Allocate these assets carefully.

➔➔ The passages—especially the long ones—will usually describe a complex issue. The author will either take a specific stance or describe a specific stance within the debate. Then, another viewpoint will be offered, a counterargument to the point the author brought up. It's not as straightforward as the author saying, "I think that forgers cannot outsmart computer technology," and the counterargument saying, "I think they can." Rather, it will be far more nuanced, something along the lines of "even if forgers are unable to replicate an artist's brushstroke, they only need to be able to do so with enough accuracy to foil a computer." The counterargument might be "even a deviation in brushstroke that is too minor for the human eye to detect is sufficient for a computer to detect." Again, the difference is over something very detailed in the argument—a difference in brushstrokes, if you will. A question or two on these small areas of contention often pops up. By being alert to these counterarguments the first time you read through, you give yourself a much better shot of answering the questions correctly.

7. Watch for signposts.

Signposts, as we discussed earlier, both hold the passage together and tell you where the passage is going. Knowing the signposts and how they function is a big part of active reading. If you forget the

specific definition of a signpost (“notwithstanding” is commonly misconstrued, for one) or gloss over²³ it altogether, you’ll likely misunderstand what the author is saying.

Relationship	Signal
Focus attention	As for; As to; Concerning; Regarding; In reference to
Add to previous point	Furthermore; Moreover; In addition; Additionally; As well as; Also; Likewise; Too; Besides; What is more
Provide contrast	On the one hand / On the other hand; While; Rather; Instead; In/By contrast; Alternatively; Conversely
Provide conceding contrast (author unwillingly agrees)	Granted; It is true that; Certainly; Admittedly; Despite; Although; Even though; Though; Notwithstanding
Provide emphatic contrast (author asserts own position)	But; However; Even so; All the same; Still; That said; Nevertheless; Nonetheless; Yet; Despite this; At the same time
Dismiss previous point	In any event; In any case
Point out similarity	Likewise; In the same way; Similarly; In like manner; In similar fashion
Structure the discussion	First/First off, Second, etc.; To begin with; Next; Finally; Again
Give example	For example; In particular; For instance
Generalize	In general; To a great extent; Broadly/Generally speaking
Sum up, perhaps with exception	In conclusion; In brief; Overall; Except for; Besides
Indicate logical result	Therefore; Thus; As a result; So; Accordingly; Hence
Indicate logical cause	Because; Since; As; Resulting from
Restate for clarity	In other words; That is; Namely; So to speak
Hedge or soften position	Apparently; At least; Can, Could, May, Might, Should; Possibly; Likely
Strengthen position	After all; Must, Have to; Always, Never, etc.
Introduce surprise	Actually; In fact; Indeed; Yet; Surprisingly; Oddly; Ironically
Reveal author's attitude	Fortunately; Unfortunately; <i>other adverbs</i> ; So-called

²³ 1) to hide under a deceptively attractive surface or appearance

2) to deal with (unpleasant facts) rapidly and cursorily, or to omit them altogether from an account of something

Active Reading in Action

Now that we've discussed how to actively read, it's time to apply what we've learned.

Exercise 1:

In problems #1–4, make each excerpt real. Start with one specific term that you can visualize, and pair it with other words or actions. Associate these terms with your real-world knowledge. If possible, do the exercise in your head, but don't hesitate to jot down notes if needed. Check the answer after trying each problem.

1. *Computer models of potential terrestrial climate change over the next century...*
2. *Various popular works of art have been influenced by syncretic²⁴ religious traditions such as candomblé, santeria, and voodoo, but few such works treat these traditions with appropriate intelligence or sensitivity.*
3. *Given the complexity of the brain's perceptual and cognitive processes, ...*
4. *The rise of Athenian democracy in ancient times can be considered a reaction to class conflict.*

Solutions

Make Ideas Real

These specific examples will likely be different from your own. On the GRE, you will *never* write down full examples such as these. Rather, practice the process so that you can carry it out quickly in your head.

Words	Real Ideas
1. Computer models of potential terrestrial climate change over the next century...	Big computers in some laboratory running programs about <i>potential terrestrial climate change</i> (how the Earth's weather might change) over the next 100 years...
2. Various popular works of art have been influenced by syncretic religious traditions such as candomblé, santeria, and voodoo... but few such works treat these traditions with appropriate intelligence or sensitivity.	<i>Make up actual examples.</i> The latest Dan Brown book and James Bond movie. These books & movies show a voodoo ritual or something. (Ignore the word "syncretic.")

²⁴ Characterized by syncretism; aiming at a union or reconciliation of diverse beliefs, conventions, or systems.

Syncretism = the amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.

	These books and movies disrespect real voodoo and related religions. (If you've seen <i>Live & Let Die</i> , you get the picture!)
3. Given the complexity of the brain's perceptual and cognitive processes, ...	<p>The brain is complex. It does complex things, like a computer in your skull.</p> <p>perceptual: how we see and hear cognitive: how we think and reason</p> <p>Given all that, ...</p>
4. The rise of Athenian democracy in ancient times can be considered a reaction to class conflict... struggling with each other. The workers versus the nobles.	<p>Athenian democracy in ancient times: People in togas²⁵ voting in a public square.</p> <p>Marble statues and pillars everywhere.</p> <p>You can think of all that as the result of class conflict: different economic and social groups struggling with each other. The workers versus the nobles.</p>

Exercise 2:

Unpacking

In problems #5–8, **unpack** each complex sentence. **Find a noun to start and form a sentence with just a portion of the information in the sentence.** Then **create a second sentence that adds some additional information to the first.** **Keep going** until you have “unpacked” all of the detail in the sentence (this might take five or so sentences). Write the sentences down as you work. (You won't write this all down on the real GRE; you're training yourself now to be able to do these exercises mentally by the time you take the real test.)

5. The simplistic classification of living things as plant, animal, or “other” has been drastically revised by biologists in reaction to the discovery of microorganisms that do not fit previous taxonomic schemes.

²⁵ a loose outer piece of clothing worn by the citizens of ancient Rome

6. Despite assurances to the contrary by governments around the world, the development of space as an arena of warfare is nearly certain, as military success often depends on not ceding²⁶ the “high ground,” of which outer space might be considered the supreme example.

7. Since the success of modern digital surveillance does not **obviate** the need for **intelligence** gathered via old-fashioned human interaction, agencies charged with counter-terrorism responsibilities must devote significant effort to planting and/or cultivating “**assets**”—that is, spies—within terrorist organizations that threaten the country.

8. Students learning to fly fixed-wing aircraft are taught to use memory devices, such as the landing checklist GUMPS (“gas, undercarriage, mixture, propeller, switches”), that remain constant even when **not every element** of the device is relevant, as in the case of planes with nonretractable²⁷ landing gear.

Solutions

These unpacked sentences are **examples of the process**. Your versions will likely differ. Again, don't write down unpacked sentences during the GRE. This exercise is meant to develop your mental muscles, so you can take apart complex academic language.

5. *The simplistic classification of living things as plant, animal, or “other” has been drastically revised by biologists in reaction to the discovery of microorganisms that do not fit previous taxonomic schemes.*

Living things can be classified as plant, animal, or “other.”

This classification is simplistic.

In fact, it has been drastically revised by biologists.

Why? Because certain Ms have been discovered.

These Ms do not fit previous “**taxonomic**” schemes (i.e., classifications).

²⁶ **cede** [si:d] *formal verb transitive* [**cedes ceding ceded**] to give something such as ownership to someone else, especially unwillingly or because forced to do so = surrender, concede, relinquish, yield, part with, give up; hand over, deliver up, give over, make over, transfer; abandon, forgo, sacrifice; *poetic/literary* forsake.

- Hong Kong was ceded **to** Britain after the Opium War.

²⁷ not retractable

retractable that can be moved or pulled back into the main part of sth

- a knife with a retractable blade

6. *Despite assurances to the contrary by governments around the world, the development of space as an arena of warfare is nearly certain, as military success often depends on not ceding the “high ground,” of which outer space might be considered the supreme example.*

Space could be developed as an arena of warfare.

In fact, that's nearly certain to happen.

(Even though governments **say otherwise**.)

That's because to win wars, you often have to hold the “high ground.”

And outer space may be the best “high ground” around.

7. *Since the success of modern digital surveillance does not obviate the need for intelligence gathered via old-fashioned human interaction, agencies charged with counter-terrorism responsibilities must devote significant effort to planting and/or cultivating “assets”—that is, spies—within terrorist organizations that threaten the country.*

There is something called “modern digital surveillance” (say, spy **bugs** in cell phones).

This kind of surveillance has been successful.

But you still need people to gather “intelligence” by talking to other people.

So, the CIA, etc. has to work hard to put “assets” (spies) inside Al Qaeda, etc.

8. *Students learning to fly fixed-wing aircraft are taught to use memory devices, such as the landing checklist GUMPS (“gas, undercarriage, mixture, propeller, switches”), that remain constant even when not every element of the device is relevant, as in the case of planes with nonretractable landing gear.*

There are people who learn to fly “fixed-wing aircraft.”

These students learn memory devices.

An example of a memory device is GUMPS, which is a landing checklist.

These memory devices stay the same no matter what.

In fact, they stay the same even when part of the memory device does not apply.

An example is planes with “nonretractable” landing gear.

Exercise 3: Read the following passage, and then complete the exercises on the next page.

Pro-Drop Languages

*In many so-called “pro-drop” or pronoun-drop languages, verbs inflect²⁸ for subject number and person. That is, by adding a prefix or suffix or by changing in some other way, the verb itself indicates whether the subject is singular or plural, as well as whether the subject is first person (I or we), second person (you), or third person (he, she, it, or they). For example, in Portuguese, at least partially a pro-drop language, the verb *falo* means “I speak”: the –o at the end of the word indicates first person, singular subject (as well as present tense). As a result, the subject pronoun *eu*, which means “I” in Portuguese, does not need to be used with *falo* except to emphasize who is doing the speaking. In this regard, Portuguese can also be called a null-subject language, since no word in the sentence *falo português* (“I speak Portuguese”) plays the precise role of subject. Some pro-drop languages omit object pronouns as well.*

It should be noted that not every language that drops its pronouns inflects its verbs for subject characteristics. Neither Chinese nor Japanese verbs, for instance, change form at all to indicate the number or person of the subject; however, personal pronouns in both subject and object roles are regularly omitted in both speech and writing, leaving the meaning to be inferred from contextual clues. Despite these similarities, Chinese and Japanese verbs are extremely different in other respects, since Chinese is an analytic language, in which words typically carry only one morpheme, or unit of meaning, whereas Japanese is an agglutinative language, in which individual words are often composed of many glued-together morphemes.

*It should also be noted that not every language that inflects its verbs for subject person and number drops subject pronouns in all non-emphatic contexts. Linguists argue about the pro-drop status of the Russian language, but there is no doubt that, although the Russian present-tense verb *govoryu* (“I speak”) unambiguously indicates a first person, singular subject, it is common for Russian speakers to express “I speak” as *ya govoryu*, in which *ya* means “I,” without indicating either emphasis or contrast.*

Nevertheless, Russian speakers do frequently drop subject and object pronouns; one study of adult and child speech indicated a pro-drop rate of 40-80%. Moreover, personal pronouns must

²⁸ if a word inflects, its ending or spelling changes according to its ↑ grammatical function in a sentence; if a language inflects, it has words that do this

- Verbs inflect for tense and person.
- Most languages of the world inflect.

in fact be dropped in some Russian sentences in order to convey particular meanings. It seems safe to conjecture that languages whose verbs inflect unambiguously for the person and number of the subject permit the subject pronoun to be dropped, if only under certain circumstances, in order to accelerate communication without loss of meaning. After all, in these languages, both the subject pronoun and the verb inflection convey the same information, so there is no real need both to include the subject pronoun and to inflect the verb.

9. Unpack the first two sentences of the first paragraph; that is, break them down into a series of simple linked sentences.

10. How does the second sentence of the first paragraph relate to the first sentence? What words indicate this relationship? Use the Content/Judgment framework, if it is helpful:

Content:

- (a) Causes (effects; evidence; logical result)
- (b) Processes (steps; means; end)
- (c) Categories (example; generality)

Judgment:

- (d) Theories/Hypotheses
- (e) Evaluations/Opinions
- (f) Comparisons/Contrasts
- (g) Advantages/Disadvantages
- (h) General Judgments (support/oppose; expected/surprising; answer/ask questions)

11. How do the third and fourth sentences of the first paragraph relate to what came before? Use the Content/Judgment framework.

12. Analyze the second paragraph using the Content/Judgment framework. What does this paragraph say, in brief? How does this paragraph relate to the first paragraph? Where are the big surprises and big results, if any? Perform the same analysis on the third paragraph.

13. Perform the same analysis on the fourth paragraph.

14. What is the simple story of this passage? Try one or more of these different styles:

- (a) Full Sentences

Summarize each paragraph in just a couple of sentences.

- (b) "Text It To Me"

Summarize each paragraph in 5–10 words or abbreviations.

Use symbols (such as "=" to equate two things).

Still try to express full thoughts.

(c) Table of Contents

Give each paragraph a title or headline of no more than five words.

Do not try to express full thoughts.

Solutions

9. The first two sentences could be unpacked in the following way:

There are languages called “pronoun-drop” languages.

In many of these languages, verbs “inflect” for number and person.

That is, you change the verb itself somehow.

This change shows who is doing the action (I, you, or someone else).

The verb tells you whether that subject is singular or plural.

The verb also tells you whether that subject is first, second, or third person.

10. The second sentence restates and **explains** the first sentence. A clear clue is given by the first three words: *In other words*. The second sentence provides **specific examples** to help the reader understand a general assertion in the first sentence: *verbs inflect for number and person*. Also, the second sentence is **neutral in tone** and attitude.

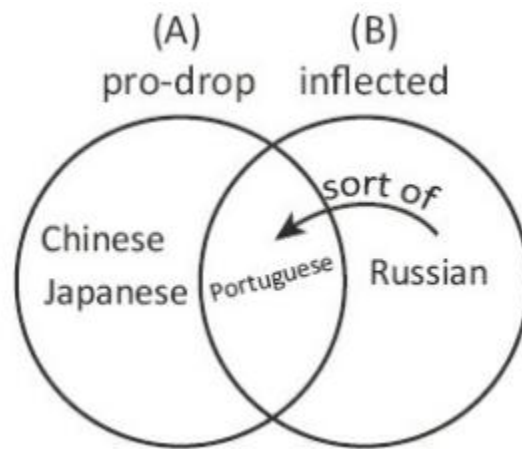
11. The third and fourth sentences provide an **even more specific example** of the phenomenon described in the first two sentences (*verbs inflect for number and person*). A clear clue is given at the start of the third sentence: *For example*. In the third sentence, you read about how the Portuguese verb *falo* is inflected. In the fourth sentence, you are told that the pronoun *eu* does not need to be used with *falo*. Again, the third and fourth sentences are **neutral in tone** and attitude.

12. The second paragraph provides **qualification and contrast** to the first paragraph. The second paragraph also provides **specific examples** to support this contrast.

In brief, the second paragraph indicates that some pro-drop languages do *not* have verb inflections. For example, Chinese and Japanese are pro-drop but not inflected.

The third paragraph indicates that an inflected-verb language might *not* drop its pronouns. For example, Russian is inflected but not pro-drop. Logically, the categories of (A) “pro-drop” and (B)

“inflected verbs” can be seen as overlapping circles on a Venn diagram²⁹. The assertion in the first paragraph is that these two circles overlap. In other words, *some A = B*. The second and third paragraphs counter that these circles do not completely overlap, nor does one circle completely contain the other. That is, *not all A = B*, and *not all B = A*. (For some passages, creating a T-chart, picture, or Venn diagram can be an excellent and appropriate note taking method.)



The “big surprises” and results are these two qualifications. You do not have to master the examples, although you should read them and make some sense of them. Moreover, at this stage, you might not grasp the nuances of the complicated Russian example. This is okay, as long as you understand the big picture of this paragraph.

13. In the first two sentences, the fourth paragraph provides a **contrast to the contrast** by continuing with the example of Russian, which turns out to be at least somewhat pro-drop.

Then the fourth paragraph proposes a **hypothesis** (inflected-verb languages are at least partially prodrop) that follows from the Russian example. Finally, the paragraph offers a **rationale** for that hypothesis.

In brief, the third paragraph makes these points:

- Actually, Russian *is* sometimes pro-drop.
- Hypothesis: Inflected-verb languages are at least partially pro-drop.
- Why? The inflection and the subject pronoun are redundant.

²⁹ a picture showing sets (= groups of things that have a shared quality) as circles that cross over each other, to show which qualities the different sets have in common

The author is **qualifying** the example of the Russian language. Fortunately, you are given a **clue** in the very first word of the sentence, **Nevertheless**, which highlights a contrast to what came immediately prior. What follows *Nevertheless* is a position that the author wants to **espouse**³⁰. The “big result” is the hypothesis in the third sentence. Note that this is the first time that the author goes beyond straight reporting and makes a claim: he or she states that *it is safe to conjecture* something.

14. The simple story of the passage can be expressed in at least three different styles.

Full Sentences

1. Many “pronoun-drop” languages have verbs that “inflect,” or change.

- The inflected verb tells you something about the subject.
- So you can drop the subject pronoun.
- Portuguese is an example.

2. *Not* every pro-drop language has verb inflections.

- Chinese & Japanese are examples.

3. Likewise, *not* every inflected-verb language is pro-drop!

- Russian is an example.

4. *But*, Russian is actually sort of pro-drop.

- So I think inflected-verb languages are all sort of pro-drop.
- Why? The inflected verb and the pronoun tell you the same thing.

Text It To Me

1. Pro-drop = inflect verbs. No subj.

2. Not all pro-drop = inflect.

3. Not all inflect = pro-drop, either.

4. But actually, inflect = sort of pro-drop. Why repeat urself?

Table of Contents

1. “Pronoun-Drop” Languages & Inflected Verbs

2. One Exception

3. Another Exception

Exercise 4:

³⁰ Adopt, embrace, take up, accept, welcome; support, back, champion, favour, prefer, encourage; promote, endorse, advocate.

The following **passage** is both **difficult** and not that interesting (at least for most). So you might want to review **the first tip**, the one about **getting excited!** You should also do the following: **after each paragraph, jot down a paraphrase of what you just read**. Ultimately, you'll want to **take a “mental snapshot” of the passage**, but for now, write out your paragraph paraphrases **and a one-sentence summary of the entire passage** once you finish reading. **For the last paragraph, which is very long, try to paraphrase two main points.**

For the summary, **don't be too specific** (that's not the point), **nor be too general** and just write down the topic (it's about how the human brain learns). To give you a sense of what you should come up with, we've included example paragraph paraphrases and an example passage summary after the passage.

The view that the brain is unable to regenerate and grow was long ago overturned and replaced with the view that the brain is plastic, meaning that it can and does heal itself in response to injury. However, recent studies performed on the brains of deceased individuals indicate that scientists have in fact underestimated the plasticity of the human brain.

The studies found that oligodendrocytes, the cells that form myelin sheaths, which allow the brain's one hundred billion neurons to communicate with one another, do not perish the way they do in the brains of rat and mice—which until now had formed the basis of understanding of the human brain. Rather, oligodendrocytes in human brains lose only one per three hundred cells per year, a state contrasting greatly with that found in the brains of mice and rats, in which the oligodendrocytes are replaced every time the animal needs to produce more myelin. The implication is that the human brain is more prepared for trauma because it can quickly replenish myelin, unlike the brains of rats and mice, which must create entirely new oligodendrocytes to do so.

To substantiate such a claim, researchers must demonstrate more convincingly the relationship between the ability of existing oligodendrocytes to replace old oligodendrocytes and the speed of myelin regeneration. Moreover, scientists need to show that myelin regeneration is not the only significant factor to contribute to plasticity. For instance, the brain tends to employ both hemispheres to a far greater degree than before following trauma, especially if that trauma involves a task typically limited to one side of the brain. For example, those with strokes to the

left hemisphere, which is responsible for speech, will enlist³¹ parts of their right hemisphere when forming sentences. Determining to what degree, compared to the brain of a mouse, the human brain engages both hemispheres will provide researchers with a deeper understanding of what role oligodendrocytes play in plasticity. Nonetheless, such a relationship might be difficult to ascertain since the oligodendrocytes themselves might play a role in how efficiently the brain uses both hemispheres to perform a task traditionally limited to one hemisphere. What is clear from the research is that to understand plasticity, researchers must study the human brain whenever possible.

Example Paragraph Phrases and Passage Summary

Note: We've included abbreviations of the more difficult terms, which is something you should, too. For instance, even if you're taking mental snapshots, you shouldn't repeat "oligodendrocytes" syllable for syllable since it adds unnecessary strain to your brain. Instead, just abbreviate as something simple like "oligos."

1st paragraph: Plasticity has been the dominant view for a while but human brains may be even more plastic than previously thought.

2nd paragraph: Oligos form myelin, which helps brain function. Rats need to replace oligos, unlike humans; human brains are therefore more plastic.

3rd paragraph: Oligos might play a part in how both hemispheres are used, so it's hard to determine how plastic the human brain is.

Passage summary: The primary purpose of this passage is to talk about myelin regeneration and how it's different in humans from that of mice and rats.

Final note: Like learning any new skill, learning active reading might at first seem **awkward** and time-consuming. But by practicing and getting the hang of juggling lots of information in your head, you'll become faster. The real **upside**³² is the confidence you'll have answering questions, which can suck up a lot of time if you find yourself **vacillating** between a few answer choices.

³¹ 1. intransitive to join the armed forces

- They both enlisted (**in** the navy) a year before the war broke out.
- 2. transitive *slightly formal* to ask for and get help or support from someone
- We've got to enlist some people to help prepare the food.
- The organization has enlisted the support of many famous people in raising money to help homeless children.

³² the advantage of a situation ≠ downside

Attacking Questions

Answering questions isn't just a matter of reading the question and looking for the answer. In fact, that could result in missing a question that you might have gotten right had you followed the method below, which we call RIPHAM.

Read question

Yes, this one is pretty obvious. But what is important is that you read the entire question, word for word. In a timed situation, it's easy to miss an important word or two that can lead you to misinterpret the question. And skimming the question—taking in only a few words—can lead you to reconstruct a different meaning than the one intended.

Ignore answers

This is much easier said than done because the answer choices are right in front of you, like a finish line at the end of the race. Yet you should think of them not as offering salvation, but as luring you with a false promise of success. The reason is that when we go directly to the answers, our brains are in "confirmation mode." That is, we get attached to the part of the answer choice that sounds right. The test writers know this, so they create answer choices that are mostly correct, save for a word or two that makes the answer choice slightly off.

Paraphrase question

This step, while not always necessary, makes the next step a lot easier. What often happens is that when you read the question and head to the passage to look for supporting text, you suddenly forget what the question was asking. To prevent this from happening, take a short second to simplify what the question is asking. That way you'll be able to "store" this information as you hunt for the supporting evidence.

Hunt in the passage

The answer to every reading comprehension question is always in the text. This part of the passage is called the supporting text. This might seem like an obvious point, but it's one that many seem to forget as they struggle with two answer choices: one that's right and one that's almost right. It's easy to convince yourself of either one if you stare at them long enough. But by going back to the passage, you can rely on the supporting text to help you make an informed decision. Luckily, many questions give you a specific line reference so you know where to hunt for the information to support your answer

-
- It's annoying that we can't travel until Thursday, but the upside is that the fare's cheaper then.

to the question. When you see that line reference, read one sentence above the cited line (for context) and, if necessary, one sentence below. The answer is almost always contained in those lines. And for those **thorny** patches we talked about earlier, you're more likely to understand the text the second time around. But **don't skim too quickly**. Make sure you're taking in the information. **Other questions don't tell you where in the passage to look**. But these questions do **give you keywords that are clustered in a certain part of the passage**. So **if you actively read correctly, you'll have a sense of where words occurred—a "geography of the page"**—and you'll know where to hunt for the supporting text. For instance, **if the question is asking about "myelin replacement in rats," you might remember that this phrase appeared in the second paragraph**. If not, **you skim the entire passage looking for the phrase**. Make sure to **have at least a few words in this phrase**. You don't want to search just for "rat" or "myelin." Finally, you can **tackle questions that ask about the main idea or the function of the paragraph both by returning to the passage and by relying on your mental snapshots**. **If the question asks about the function of a specific paragraph, you might want to quickly reread that paragraph**. **If you've actively read the first time around, you can skim the paragraph more easily**. And **for main idea questions, you can rely on your first read-through**. **If that's not enough, don't read the entire passage but reread the first paragraph and the topic sentences of the subsequent paragraphs**. This will give you an idea of the author's main idea vs. ideas that are too narrow.

Anticipate answer

This step is about how you engage with the supporting text. Once you've found this information, make sure you're able to understand how it answers the question. Then, **rephrase the text in your own words so you can simplify the ideas** (which will be important for the next step). Essentially, you're providing the answer to the question; **you're doing the thinking rather than letting the answer choices do the thinking for you**. Remember, to rephrase is not the same as to reinterpret, so make sure you stick to the text as much as possible.

Match

Finally, match your answer—which should be **based on a simplification of the text**—to an answer choice. **In the case that you're left with two answers**, as often happens on tough questions, **don't be afraid to go back to the text yet again**. To help differentiate between those two answer choices, you'll also need to **know the way test writers create traps**, the way they create that almost-right answer, and just what exactly makes it incorrect.

Answer traps

The key to understanding answer traps is to constantly be asking yourself the following: “What makes a wrong answer choice wrong?” **Most wrong answer choices will fall into one of the following categories:**

1. Uses words in passage but twists the author’s meaning. One thing our brain loves is familiarity. We **latch on to**³³ words and phrases we remember seeing in the passage, convincing ourselves that the answer is correct. Meanwhile, we forget to put all those words together to see that they result in a statement that’s incorrect. In other words, the test writers will twist what the author is saying while using familiar words.

2. True, but in a different part of the passage: Sometimes an answer choice is actually correct, in the sense that it is supported by the passage. The problem is that it doesn’t answer the question at hand. Therefore, always **read the question carefully so that you know what it’s asking.**

3. True in the real world, but not found in the passage. Sometimes, an answer choice will sound true, as far as common sense goes. But it won’t actually be covered in the passage. If it’s not supported by the passage, it’s incorrect.

4. Everything is right except one thing. We call this the “rotten fruit” error. Think of how you shop for fruit. When you pick up an apple, you don’t look at the one shiny spot and say, “Hey, I’ll buy this apple.” Instead, you turn it over **meticulously**, looking for that one rotten spot. Likewise, on the reading comprehension answer choices, you shouldn’t just look at the part that’s right. Instead, you should “turn over” the entire answer choice, making sure that each word/phrase is valid.

Putting It All Together

Now that you’ve actively read the passage on neuronal regeneration and the different kinds of traps the test creates, let’s try a few practice questions. As you answer these questions, remember to apply the RIPHAM method and to see which one of the above four categories the wrong answer choices fall into. (On actual practice questions, you might only want to do that when you’re down to two possible answers).

³³ 1. to become attached to sb/sth

• antibodies that latch onto germs

2. to join sb and stay in their company, especially when they would prefer you not to be with them

3. to develop a strong interest in sth

• She always latches on to the latest craze.

Questions

1. The passage mentions **that both hemispheres of the brain respond to injury in order to**
- A. discuss how myelin regeneration may serve a greater function than previously thought
 - B. show that brain plasticity is not limited to one factor
 - C. suggest that oligodendrocytes might have a role in how the two hemispheres work
 - D. highlight one way in which stroke patients recover
 - E. question the connection between oligodendrocytes and the speed in which myelin is replaced

Explanation

Reread this supporting text:

Moreover, scientists need to show that myelin regeneration is not the only significant factor to contribute to plasticity. For instance, the brain tends to employ both hemispheres to a far greater degree than before following trauma, especially if that trauma involves a task typically limited to one side of the brain. For example, those with strokes to the left hemisphere, which is responsible for speech, will enlist parts of their right hemisphere when forming sentences.

From this text, you'll see that (B) is the correct answer. (A) takes elements from the passage and twists them into the wrong idea. Both (C) and (E) refer to the wrong part of the passage. And nothing about (D) is correct.

2. According to the passage, one reason that knowing how much the human brain relies on both hemispheres does not provide an adequate basis for determining the role of oligodendrocytes in brain plasticity is that

- A. brain trauma is rarely limited to one side of the brain
- B. myelin regeneration might not be the only measure of brain plasticity
- C. the human brain is too complex for scientists to understand
- D. the oligodendrocytes might be involved in how the brain uses both hemispheres
- E. it's only recently that scientists have begun to use human brains to understand how new cells grow

Explanation

You might notice that this question stem is very complex. In this case, you'll want to use the "P" from RIPHAM, which stands for "paraphrase."

Simplified: Knowing how much the human brain relies on both hemispheres doesn't tell us how oligos are related to plasticity because . . .

Reread this supporting text:

Determining to what degree, compared to the brain of a mouse, the human brain engages both hemispheres will provide researchers with a deeper understanding of what role oligodendrocytes play in plasticity. Nonetheless, such a relationship might be difficult to ascertain since the oligodendrocytes themselves might play a role in how efficiently the brain uses both hemispheres to perform a task traditionally limited to one hemisphere. What is clear from the research is that to understand plasticity researchers must study the human brain whenever possible.

You'll see that (D) is the correct answer. (A) is wrong and not supported at all by the text. (B) doesn't answer the question. (C) is debatable and not supported by the text. (E) contains information not mentioned in the passage.

Miscellaneous Reading Tips

1. Practice, as much as possible, using official material. **Content-wise**³⁴, nothing beats practicing with actual GRE questions from ETS. The style and tone of the passages, the way questions and answer choices are worded, and the subtlety between the correct answer and the incorrect answers can only be found in actual questions.

2. Know why the wrong answers are wrong. The wrong answers are the soul of the reading comprehension questions. Often times, you may know the general answer to a question. General knowledge isn't what the GRE is testing, though. It's testing whether you can tell the difference between an answer choice that's almost right and one that's right. Only by having a strong sense of why the correct answer is correct and the incorrect answer incorrect will you truly have mastered a question.

3. Reread passages. Are you worried by the thought of practicing over and over with the same reading passages? It's understandable, but unless you have an amazing, photographic memory, you'll probably have forgotten most, if not all, of a passage you read six weeks ago. It's also not about getting questions right. It's about knowing why the correct answer is correct and the wrong answer wrong.

³⁴ **-wise [-wise]** suffix (in adjectives and adverbs)

1. in the manner or direction of
 - clockwise
2. (informal) concerning
 - Things aren't too good businesswise.

The chances that you'll remember the exact distinctions between answer choices are fairly small. Think of it this way: each time you go through the same passage and answer choices is a fresh opportunity to exercise your analytical muscles.

4. Be aware of your mistakes. Often, there's a pattern to your mistakes. It could be that you infer too much on inference questions or that you often miss the single word in the passage that makes all the difference. It could be misinterpreting answer choices. Anticipating your personal common mistakes can help you improve.

Short vs. Long Passages

What follows looks at Short and Long Passages. **Any general rules laid out here should be taken to apply *only* to Short and Long Passages. Argument Structure Passages will be discussed later.**

Short and Long Passages are **quite similar** in both their overall **content** and their associated **question types**. However, there are **a few important differences between the two**:

1. Length. Long passages aren't just slightly longer than short passages. They're *significantly* longer. A long passage can be as much as **three times as long as a short passage**. This means you'll need to take far more time not only to read and outline the passage, but also to answer specific questions that require you to search through the passage for an answer. Keep this in mind when you're pacing yourself on the test. **Only one of your Verbal sections should have a long passage**. If you struggle to finish your Verbal sections in the time allotted, you might consider searching out and dealing with the long passage *first*. Just remember, **long passages generally have four associated questions**, and the last thing you want to do is miss all of them because you didn't pace yourself well.

2. Number of questions. Again, long passages will generally, but not always, have four associated questions. **Short passages will usually have between one and three**. Obviously, the more questions associated with a passage, the more essential it is that you grasp the passage.

3. Complexity of detail. Because of the length disparity between short and **long passages**, you should expect far more detail in a long passage. Generally, **the first paragraph will be some kind of introduction**, and the next two to three paragraphs will be full of dense details requiring significant **unpacking**. It may take multiple reads to fully understand these details, or you may skip some complex detail entirely.

4. Complexity of argument. **Because long passages tend to be 3–4 paragraphs, it's possible to create complex arguments**. It's possible to begin by positing an old theory, then twisting to reveal a new theory, then twisting *again* to present problems with the new theory. Your outline for long passages should reflect this increased complexity. **In a 1–2 paragraph short passage, there is usually only room for one twist**.

Components of Passages

Reading Comprehension passages cover a wide range of topics and are structured in many different ways. However, all passages are made up of certain components. By understanding and looking for these components, you can more easily grasp the meaning and structure of the passage.

Any Reading Comprehension passage has four possible components:

1. **The Point**
2. **Background**
3. **Support**
4. **Implications**

Here, these components are considered in turn.

The Point

The Point is **the most important message of the passage**. In other words, the author has written the passage in order to convey the Point, even if nothing else gets through to the reader. The Point explains why the passage is interesting, at least in the author's opinion.

Every passage, long or short, contains a Point. Perhaps **surprisingly, the Point is sometimes made explicit in a single sentence**. In the “Pro-Drop Languages” passage, the Point is the hypothesis put forward in the fourth paragraph:

It seems safe to **conjecture** that **languages whose verbs inflect unambiguously for person and number permit pronoun dropping**, if only under certain circumstances, **in order to accelerate communication without loss of meaning**. ↓↓

The author wants you to remember this Point. Of course, **the author also wants you to understand how pro-drop languages work in general, how some pro-drop languages do not inflect their verbs, and so forth**. But the most important message is this hypothesis, which is also the most important claim that the author puts forward.

How does the Point relate to the simple story of the passage, as discussed earlier? Very simply, **the Point is the crux of the simple story**. After all, the Point is the most important message that the author wants to convey. **You can also relate the Point to the Content/Judgment framework. The Point contains the most important Judgment made by the author about the central Content of the passage**. Thus, a crucial task for you as a reader is to **find the Point!**

→→ Where is the Point in the passage? It can be almost anywhere. The way to find the Point is to ask, “What is the most important message that the author is trying to convey in this passage?” Occasionally, the Point is at the very beginning of the passage; often, the first paragraph sets up a situation and the *second* paragraph contains a “twist” that constitutes the Point. The Point may be any kind of important message, but across sample passages, there are a few common varieties that sometimes overlap:

- (a) **Resolution:** resolves an issue or a problem
- (b) **Answer:** answers a question (similar to Resolution)
- (c) **New Idea:** describes a surprising new idea, theory, or research result
- (d) **Reason:** explains an observation

During the GRE, you will *not* have to classify the Point as one of the preceding types. Rather, this list is meant to help you identify and understand the Point as you read a variety of passages.

Notice that **the Point is related to a passage's purpose**. The point is what the author wants to *convey*. The purpose of a passage is generally to convey that Point. However, the purpose can often be described more broadly or abstractly as well. For instance, the purpose of the “Pro-Drop Languages” passage is to describe how languages may be categorized as pro-drop and as verb-inflecting, and to discuss the complex relationship between these two types of languages. ↑↑

Also note that the Point may not make a lot of sense on its own. For instance, in order to understand and be convinced that *languages whose verbs inflect unambiguously for person and number permit pronoun dropping*, you need to understand the rest of the “Pro-Drop Languages” passage. Occasionally, the Point is spread across two sentences, or it may be less than explicit. However, most passages have a clear Point within a single sentence.

→ Note that passages do not always make impassioned arguments or take strong positions, so the Point of a passage might be less of a claim and more of a main message about the topic. The author may simply wish to inform the reader of this fact, rather than convince the reader of a debatable position. Simply looking for the Point as you read will make you a more active reader. You will find that your comprehension of each passage will improve as a result.

Background, Support, and Implications

The other components all relate to the Point in some way:

1. The Background is information you need to understand the Point. The context and the basic facts about the topic are given in the Background. This component may be brief.

2. The Support consists of assertions and opinions *for* the Point. **The Support might include concessions to the other side of the argument. This component is always present and often constitutes a substantial portion of the passage.**

The Background and the Support may be intertwined. It is never important to determine whether a particular sentence is Background or Support. **A sentence can provide background information and support the Point at the same time.**

3. The Implications result from the Point. In other words, the author now assumes that you are convinced of the Point and so begins to enumerate the consequences. **Implications are not always present, but when they are, they tend to be important.**

Although you do not have to separate Background and Support in every case, you should understand what you are reading in terms of the four components:

1. Is this the main message? If so, this is the Point.
2. Is this just background information? If so, this is Background.
3. Is this supporting evidence for the main message? If so, this is Support.
4. Is this an implication of the main message? If so, this is an Implication.

Foreshadowing

Some part of the Background or the Support may also function as foreshadowing. **Foreshadowing sets up the Point.** It often does so by standing in contrast to the Point:

Foreshadowing		Point
Problem.....	leads to	Resolution
Question.....	leads to	Answer
Old Idea.....	leads to	New Idea
Observation.....	leads to	Reason or New Idea

Foreshadowing is not always present. Do not rely on foreshadowing to identify the Point. However, if foreshadowing is present, it can help you to find the Point more quickly and easily.

Exercise: Answer the questions below by referring to the following passage.

Although organic agriculture may seem to be the wave of the future, some experts believe that the next stage in agricultural development requires the widespread adoption of something very inorganic: fertilizer made from powdered rocks, also known as rock flour. The biochemical processes of life depend not only on elements commonly associated with living organisms, such as oxygen, hydrogen, and carbon (the fundamental element of organic chemistry), but also on many other elements in the periodic table. Specifically, plants need the so-called big six nutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulfur, and magnesium. In modern industrial agriculture, these nutrients are commonly supplied by traditional chemical fertilizers. However, these fertilizers omit trace elements, such as iron, molybdenum, and manganese, that are components of essential plant enzymes and pigments. For instance, the green pigment chlorophyll, which turns sunlight into energy that plants can use, requires iron. As crops are harvested, the necessary trace elements are not replaced and become depleted in the soil. Eventually, crop yields diminish, despite the application or even over-application of traditional fertilizers. Rock flour, produced in abundance by quarry³⁵ and mining operations, may be able to replenish trace elements cheaply and increase crop yields dramatically.

*It may also be possible to restore forest health through the application of rock flour. Near Asheville, North Carolina, as part of a greenhouse study, hundreds of red spruce and Fraser fir trees were planted in depleted mountain soils that were remineralized with rock flour to varying degrees. Rock-dusted trees not only grew significantly faster than controls, at rates correlating with the application amount, but also manifested improved resistance to disease, demonstrated by increased survival rates. Preliminary field trials have also indicated that remineralization helps **alleviate** the **deleterious** effects of acid rain, which drains key nutrients from forest soils.*

Not all rock flour would be suitable for use as fertilizer. Certain chemical elements, such as lead and cadmium, are poisonous to humans; thus, applying rock flour containing significant

³⁵ noun, verb BrE ['kwɒrɪ] NAmE ['kwɔːrɪ] NAmE ['kwaːrɪ] (pl. **quarries**)

1. countable a place where large amounts of stone, etc. are dug out of the ground
 - a slate quarry
 - the site of a disused quarry
2. singular an animal or a person that is being hunted or followed **Syn:** ↑ prey
 - The hunters lost sight of their quarry in the forest.
 - The photographers pursued their quarry through the streets.

amounts of such elements to farmland would be inappropriate, even if the crops themselves do not accumulate the poisons, because human contact could result directly or indirectly (e.g., via soil runoff into water supplies). However, most rock flour produced by quarries seems safe for use. After all, glaciers have been creating natural rock flour for thousands of years as they advance and retreat, grinding up the ground underneath. Glacial runoff carries this rock flour into rivers; downstream, the resulting alluvial³⁶ deposits are extremely fertile. If the use of man-made rock flour is incorporated into agricultural practices, it may be possible to make open plains as rich as alluvial soils. Such increases in agricultural productivity will be necessary to feed an ever more crowded world.

1. What is the Point of this passage? Justify your choice. Categorize the Point: (a) Resolution, (b) Answer, (c) New Idea, or (d) Reason. (The Point may fall into more than one category.)
2. Identify the other components of the passage, if present: Background, Support, and Implications. Again, justify your assignments.
3. If there is foreshadowing, categorize it: (a) Problem, (b) Question, (d) Old Idea, or (d) Observation. (Like the Point, foreshadowing may fall into more than one category.)
4. What is the simple story of this passage?

Solutions

1. The Point of this passage is contained in the first sentence of the first paragraph: *Some experts believe that the next stage in agricultural development requires the widespread adoption of something very inorganic: fertilizer made from powdered rocks, also known as "rock flour."* This is the most important message that the author intends to convey. Two other candidates for the Point say nearly the same thing, as they extol³⁷ the potential benefits of rock flour. In fact, these other sentences are perhaps even more emphatic than the Point itself, but they are slightly narrower in scope.

³⁶ before noun (geology)

made of sand and earth that is left by rivers or floods

- alluvial deposits/soil/plains

³⁷ to praise sb/sth very much

- ~ sb/sth Doctors often extol the virtues of eating less fat.
- ~ sb/sth as sth She was extolled as a genius.

(a) Last sentence, first paragraph: *Rock flour...may be able to replenish trace elements cheaply and increase crop yields dramatically.* This sentence explains *how* rock flour may be able to help you achieve *the next stage in agricultural development*. Thus, this sentence is **Support** for the Point.

(b) Second to last sentence, third paragraph: *If the use of man-made rock flour is incorporated into agricultural practices, it may be possible to make open plains as rich as alluvial soils.* This sentence practically **restates the Point in concrete terms**. However, those concrete terms (*open plains, alluvial soils*) are **more specific** than the Point. Thus, this sentence should **also** be classified as **Support** for the Point.

Categorization of the Point

The Point is a **New Idea**: a new type of fertilizer that may seem surprising initially. Alternatively, the Point can be considered the Resolution to a Problem (the depletion of trace elements essential for plant growth). As was mentioned in the text, **it is not important for you to determine whether the Point is a New Idea or a Resolution; it could be both**. These categories are only there to help you recognize and understand the Point.

2. The other parts of the passage can be labeled **thus**³⁸:

Background: First paragraph

First clause, first sentence: *Although organic agriculture...future,*

Second sentence: *The biochemical processes...periodic table.*

Third sentence: *Specifically,...magnesium.*

Fourth sentence: *In modern...traditional chemical fertilizers.*

These sentences give information, but they do not **delineate**³⁹ the problem that must be solved.

Support: First paragraph

Fifth sentence: *However, these fertilizers omit...pigments.* all the way through to Third paragraph

Second to last sentence: *If the use...alluvial soils.*

³⁸ in this manner

- do it thus
- I picture the process *thus*.

³⁹ 1. to describe or draw something carefully so that people can understand it:

The document delineates your rights and your obligations.

2. to make the borders between two areas very clear:

The boundaries of these areas should be clearly delineated.

This Support begins from the *However*, which introduces the problem. The rest of that paragraph explains the problem that rock flour solves. Note that the Support includes the qualifications and concessions in the first half of the second paragraph.

Implications: Second paragraph

Last sentence: *Such increases...more crowded world.*

This sentence tells you the result of the Point. That is, if you accept the Point, then with the *resulting increases in agricultural productivity*, you may be able to *feed the world!*

3. The first clause of the first sentence (*Although organic agriculture may seem to be the wave of the future*) is foreshadowing. This foreshadowing sets up the Point by telling you what may seem to be the solution (implying that something else *is* the solution). Note that this foreshadowing is immediately followed by the Point itself. This **juxtaposition** is not unusual. The category of foreshadowing is Old Idea (the old “new idea” of *organic agriculture*, as the author implies). Thus, you can now see that the Point is really New Idea: an idea that may solve a problem, of course, but you do not learn about that problem in the foreshadowing. That is not the only foreshadowing in this passage. For example, the middle of the first paragraph contains foreshadowing: *In modern industrial agriculture, these nutrients are commonly supplied by traditional chemical fertilizers. However...*The word *However* foreshadows the idea that some nutrients are *not* commonly supplied by traditional fertilizers.

4. As you saw in the last chapter, the simple story of the passage can be expressed in at least three different styles:

Full Sentences

(1) Some think the future of agriculture depends on rock flour (= powdered rock).

- Plants require certain elements.
- Normal fertilizers do not give you the trace elements such as iron.
- Rock flour might fill the gap.

(2) Rock flour might also help forests.

(3) Some rock flour is bad, even poisonous. *But* most would be fine.

Glaciers make natural rock flour, which is good for the soil. If you use rock flour, maybe you can feed the world.

Text It to Me

(1) Agricult. future = rock flour (= powder). Gives plants missing trace elems.

(2) Rock flour = good for forests.

(3) Some flour = bad. But glaciers make it & it's good. Might feed the world.

Table of Contents

(1) Rock Flour as Future of Agriculture

(2) Rock Flour Helps Forests

(3) Concerns; Reassuring Glaciers

Short Passages

Short passages consist of about 160 words in one to two short paragraphs, usually with one to three associated questions. If you struggle with pacing on the GRE, you might want to do a quick preview of the number of questions associated with a given passage. If it's only one, you might be able to afford skipping or skimming that passage. Previewing also helps you to know what to pay special attention to while reading the passage.

Timing for Short Passages

To determine how much time to spend on a passage, use this as a rule: **you have about 1.5 minutes per Reading Comprehension question, total.** The total number of minutes includes time for reading the passage and answering all the questions. So, if a short passage has two questions associated with it, you would have roughly *3 minutes* to read and sketch the short passage and then answer the two associated questions.

Out of this 3-minute period, you should spend approximately 1.5 minutes reading the passage. Then you should spend an average of 45 seconds actually answering each question. You should try to answer General questions in about 30 seconds. Specific questions will be more time-consuming, since they demand that you review the text of the passage. You should allocate up to 60 seconds for any Specific question.

When you encounter a short passage, create a Headline List of the passage during your first reading.

A Headline List serves two main purposes:

1. It provides a general structure and overall understanding without getting you bogged down in details.
2. Identifying and writing down key elements of the passage will force you to read *actively* as opposed to passively, promoting a fast first reading of a passage that still gives you enough time to answer questions.

The Headline List

To create a Headline List, follow these steps:

1. A headline summarizes the main idea of a newspaper article. Likewise, **your Headline List should summarize or indicate the main idea of each paragraph.** Most paragraphs have one topic sentence. Generally, the topic sentence is the first or second sentence, although it can also be a combination of the two.

Read the first sentence or two of the first paragraph. Identify the topic sentence and summarize it concisely on your scratch paper in the form of a headline. Use either the Text It to Me style or the Table of Contents style (a headline of five words or fewer). If you cannot identify a topic sentence, then your headline should summarize the main idea or purpose of the paragraph in your own words.

2. **Read the rest of the paragraph with an eye for big surprises and results.** As you read the rest of the paragraph, briefly summarize anything else that is very important or surprising in the paragraph. Often, this will consist of jotting down just a word or two. You may not add anything to the original topic sentence if the paragraph fits neatly within the scope of that sentence.

3. **If there is a second paragraph, follow the same process.** Each paragraph may introduce a whole new idea. Therefore, your approach to any second paragraph should be the same as with the first paragraph. As you create your Headline List, relate the headlines to each other. How much do you read before stopping to take notes? It depends. If the passage is really tough, slow down and go sentence by sentence. If the passage is easier and you think you are getting it, read more (even a whole paragraph) before taking notes on that chunk. Stopping to take notes can take you out of the “flow.” At the same time, you should force yourself to stop periodically and consider adding to your Headline List.

4. Once you have finished the passage, **identify the passage's Point.** After you have finished reading the passage and creating the Headline List, make sure you know what the Point of the passage is. If it is not in your Headline List already, be sure to add it. Then, label or mark the Point, so that you articulate it to yourself. Now proceed to the first question.

Common Notations

To create your Headline List as quickly as possible, consider the following notations:

1. Abbreviate long terms, particularly proper nouns.
2. Use arrows (e.g., →) to indicate cause-effect relationships or changes over time.
3. If a passage contains speakers, writers, points of view, arguments, etc., keep them organized by placing the person with the opinion before a given opinion with a colon. For example, if a passage says that historians believe that economic interests led to the outbreak of war, you might write: **H: econ int war.**
4. If you write down examples, mark them with parentheses or “Ex.” For example: **Insects = inflexible (wasp).**

5. **Number each paragraph.** Paragraph breaks are important to remember. You will have your own note taking style. For instance, if you are a visual thinker, you may draw pictures or use graphs to show relationships. Regardless of the notations you use, practice them and keep them *consistent*.

Using Your Headline List

How do you use your Headline List to answer questions about the passage? You should be able to answer all *General* questions without referring either to your notes or to the passage. General questions **pertain to** the passage's main idea, its purpose, or its structure overall.

As for *Specific* questions, you will have to return to the passage to find particular details. Do not depend on your memory, as the GRE knows how to take advantage of this. *Prove* your answer in the text. In many cases, you will be able to find the relevant details on your own. But you can also use your Headline List as a search tool to help you know which paragraph to check.

Model Short Passage: *Insect Behavior*

Insect behavior generally appears to be explicable in terms of unconscious, inflexible stimulus-response mechanisms. For instance, a female sphex wasp leaves her egg sealed in a burrow alongside a paralyzed grasshopper, which her larvae can eat upon hatching. Before she deposits the grasshopper in the burrow, she inspects the burrow; if the inspection reveals no problems, she drags the grasshopper inside by its antennae. As thoughtful as this behavior appears, it reveals its mechanistic character upon interference. Darwin discovered that prior removal of the grasshopper's antennae prevents the wasp from depositing the grasshopper, even though the legs or ovipositor⁴⁰ could also serve as handles. Likewise, Fabre moved the grasshopper a few centimeters away from the burrow's mouth while the wasp was inside inspecting. The wasp returned the grasshopper to the edge of the burrow and then began a new inspection. Fabre performed this disruptive maneuver forty times; the wasp's response never changed.

Model Headline List: *Insect Behavior*

Insect behav. = unconsc. stim/resp. = inflexible ← Point

— Ex: wasp

D: w. won't drag g. w/o ant.

F: endless cycle

⁴⁰ a specialized organ for depositing eggs in a position suitable for their development that is frequent in insects

The Headline List summarizes the topic sentence of the paragraph, and the example is briefly listed. Likewise, the two experiments are simply bullet points. Note that single letters can stand for whole words (w = wasp, g = grasshopper). Remember that you are not taking notes that you need to study from later! In this example, the Point of the passage is the first sentence of the paragraph. The rest of the passage is Support for the Point.

➔ **Note:** Standard five-choice multiple-choice Reading Comprehension questions continue to appear on the revised exam. You are likely familiar with how these work. There are two *new* Reading Comprehension formats that will appear on the revised test. **Select One or More Answer Choices** and **Select-in-Passage**

Select One or More Answer Choices and Select-in-Passage

For the question type “Select One or More Answer Choices,” you are given **three statements about a passage** and asked to “indicate all that apply.” **Either one, two, or all three can be correct** (there is no “none of the above” option). There is no partial credit; you must indicate all of the correct choices and none of the incorrect choices.

Strategy Tip: On “Select One or More Answer Choices,” don't let your brain be tricked into telling you, “Well, if two of them have been right so far, the other one must be wrong,” or any other arbitrary idea about how many of the choices should be correct. Make sure to consider each choice independently! You cannot use “process of elimination” in the same way as you do on normal multiple-choice questions.

For the question type “Select-in-Passage,” you are given an assignment such as “Select the sentence in the passage that explains why the experiment's results were discovered to be **invalid**.” Clicking anywhere on the sentence in the passage will highlight it. (As with any GRE question, you will have to click “Confirm” to submit your answer, so don't worry about accidentally selecting the wrong sentence due to a **slip** of the mouse.)

Strategy Tip: On “Select-in-Passage,” if the **passage is short**, consider **numbering each sentence** (i.e., writing 1 2 3 4 on your paper) and **crossing off** each choice as you determine that it isn't the answer. If the **passage is long**, you might write a **number** for each **paragraph** (I, II, III), and tick off each number as you determine that the correct sentence is not located in that paragraph.

Example:

Physicist Robert Oppenheimer, director of the fateful Manhattan Project, said, "It is a profound and necessary truth that the deep things in science are not found because they are useful; they are found because it was possible to find them." In a later address at MIT, Oppenheimer presented the thesis that scientists could be held only very **nominally** responsible for the consequences of their research and discovery. Oppenheimer asserted that ethics, philosophy, and politics **have very little to do with** the day-to-day work of the scientist, **and that** scientists could not rationally be expected to predict all the effects of their work. **Yet**, in a talk in 1945 to the Association of Los Alamos Scientists, Oppenheimer offered some reasons why the Manhattan Project scientists built the atomic bomb; the justifications included "fear that Nazi Germany would build it first" and "hope that it would shorten the war."

For **question #1**, consider each of the three choices separately and indicate all that apply.

➔ **1.** The passage implies that Robert Oppenheimer would most likely have agreed with which of the following views:

- Some scientists take military goals into account in their work
- Deep things in science are not useful
- The everyday work of a scientist is only **minimally** involved with ethics

Question 2

➔ Select the sentence in which the writer implies that Oppenheimer has not been consistent in his view that scientists have little consideration for the effects of their work.

(Here, you would highlight the appropriate sentence with your mouse. Note that there are only four options.)

Solutions

1. **(A) and (C):** Oppenheimer says in the last sentence that one of the reasons the bomb was built was scientists' *hope that it would shorten the war*. Thus, Oppenheimer would likely agree with the view that *Some scientists take military goals into account in their work*. **(B) is a trap answer using familiar language from the passage.** Oppenheimer says that scientific discoveries' possible usefulness is not why scientists make discoveries; he does not say that the discoveries aren't useful. Oppenheimer specifically says that ethics has *very little to do with the day-to-day work of the scientist*, which is a good match for *only minimally involved with ethics*.

Strategy Tip: On “Select One or More Answer Choices,” write A B C on your paper and mark each choice with a check, an X, or a symbol such as ~ if you're not sure. This should keep you from crossing out all three choices and having to go back (at least one of the choices must be correct). For example, say that on a **different** question you had marked

- A. X
- B. ~
- C. X

The answer choice you weren't sure about, (B), is likely to be correct, since there must be at least one correct answer.

2. The correct sentence is: **Yet, in a talk in 1945 to the Association of Los Alamos Scientists, Oppenheimer offered some reasons why the Manhattan Project scientists built the atomic bomb; the justifications included “fear that Nazi Germany would build it first” and “hope that it would shorten the war.”** The word “**yet**” is a good clue that this sentence is about to express a view contrary to the views expressed in the rest of the passage.

Exercise for Short Passages:

A. Read the following passage and create a Headline List within 2.5–3 minutes (note that this is a bit more time than you'll want to spend on the actual exam). After answering the questions below the passage, compare your Headline List to the sample in the answer key. How well did your Headline List succeed in pushing you to read actively? How well did it capture the simple story of the passage without getting **bloated**⁴¹ with details?

Arousal and Attraction

In 1974, psychologists Dutton and Aron discovered that male subjects who had just crossed a precarious⁴² wire-suspension bridge reacted to an attractive female interviewer differently than subjects who had instead crossed a low, solid bridge. Specifically, in response to a questionnaire

⁴¹ swollen, **distended**, tumefied, bulging, inflated, enlarged, expanded, dilated

⁴² 1. (of a situation) not safe or certain; dangerous

- He earned a precarious living as an artist.
- The museum is in a financially precarious position.
- The world is a precarious and unstable place.

2. likely to fall or cause sb to fall

- That ladder looks very precarious.
- The path down to the beach is very precarious in wet weather.

that secretly measured sexual arousal, subjects from the wire-suspension bridge revealed significantly more sexual imagery than the others; moreover, a far greater fraction of wire-suspension subjects than of solid-bridge subjects contacted the interviewer afterward. Dutton and Aron explained their results in terms of misattribution. In their view, subjects crossing the wobbly⁴³ bridge experienced physiological fear reactions, such as increased heart rate. Such reactions with ambiguous or suppressed causes are easily reinterpreted, in the presence of a potential partner, as sexual attraction. However, Foster and others later found that an unattractive interviewer is actually perceived as much less attractive by subjects physiologically aroused by fearful situations. Thus, the arousal is reinterpreted either as attraction or as repulsion, but in either case, the true cause is masked.

1. What is the Point of this passage? Justify your choice.
2. Identify the other components of the passage, if present: Background, Support, and Implications. Again, justify your assignments.
3. Based on the passage, which of the following could be reasonably assumed about passengers of a particularly turbulent flight? Select all that apply.
 1. They would be likely to misattribute the cause of a sexual attraction they felt to a fellow passenger during a lull in turbulence.
 2. They would be likely to misattribute the cause of a sexual attraction they felt to a fellow passenger a few days after the flight.
 3. They would be more likely to find themselves viscerally⁴⁴ disgusted by a baggage handler at their arrival gate whom they typically would have found merely unappealing.

Solutions:

Arousal and Attraction—Headline List

Psychs D+A:

—Wire bridge: aroused → attr.

⁴³ 1. *a wobbly table*: Unsteady, unstable, shaky, rocky, rickety; unsafe, precarious; uneven, unbalanced
2. *her legs were a bit wobbly*: Shaky, quivery, weak, unsteady; *informal* trembly, like jelly.
3. *I feel so wobbly*: Faint, dizzy, light-headed

⁴⁴ 1. *literary* based on deep feeling and emotional reactions rather than on reason or thought
• visceral hatred/excitement
• His approach to acting is visceral rather than intellectual.
2. specialized relating to the large organs inside the body, including the heart, stomach, lungs and intestines

Expl: misattrib. physiol. fear AS attractn.

BUT actually: attr. OR repuls. masks the cause ← Point

2. The Point of the passage is in the last sentence: *Thus, the arousal is reinterpreted either as attraction or as repulsion, but in either case, the true cause is masked.* The author is taking a little stand here. Everything in the passage leads up to this Point.

3. The paragraph is all Background and Support, leading up to the Point at the end.

4. This is a Select-one-or-more question that asks you to **extrapolate**⁴⁵ from the bridge example to an example involving an airplane. This isn't nearly as complicated as it sounds, as a turbulent flight would be almost exactly like crossing a wobbly bridge.

(A) CORRECT. This example is analogous to the one given in the passage. A passenger on a turbulent flight would still likely be experiencing “physiological fear reactions” even during a **lull** in the turbulence. This physiological arousal can be “reinterpreted either as attraction or repulsion,” so any feeling of attraction is likely to be caused by the fear reaction.

(B) The passage stresses the manner in which the researchers interviewed subjects *immediately* after crossing the bridge, when the “physiological fear reactions” were still fresh. A few days after a turbulent flight, passengers would be unlikely to continue to experience those reactions.

(C) CORRECT. This example is analogous to the one given in the passage. A passenger coming off a turbulent flight would likely still be experiencing “physiological fear reactions,” which you are told can cause repulsion as easily as attraction. The passage states that an “unattractive interviewer is actually perceived as much less attractive by subjects physiologically aroused by fearful situations.”

B. Animal Treatment

*In the early nineteenth century, educated Britons came to accept the **then-novel** notion that animals must be treated **humanely**, as evidenced by the outlawing of certain forms of domestic animal abuse, as well as the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824. This trend may be regarded as part of a broader embrace of compassionate ideals, such*

⁴⁵ to estimate sth or form an opinion about sth, using the facts that you have now and that are valid for one situation and supposing that they will be valid for the new one

- ~ **(from/to sth)** The figures were obtained by extrapolating from past trends.
- ~ **sth (from/to sth)** We have extrapolated these results from research done in other countries.
- The results cannot be extrapolated to other patient groups.

نتیجه گیری کردن، (از روی چیزهای دانسته) دانسته یابی کردن، ندانسته جویی کردن، ملاک قرار دادن، استنتاج کردن

as abolitionism and alleviation of poverty. For instance, in 1785 a Society for the Relief of Persons Imprisoned for Small Sums persuaded Parliament to restrict that archaic punishment, and similar societies focused on various issues of humane treatment emerged around this time. However, a deeper explanation should be traced to socioeconomic conditions related to ongoing industrialization. Those protesting cruelty to animals were city-dwellers who viewed animals as pets rather than as livestock, despite the **ubiquity** of horse transport. In fact, nature was no longer considered **menacing**, since society's victory over wilderness was conspicuous. Animals were to some extent romanticized as **emblems** of a **bucolic**⁴⁶, preindustrial age.

1. What is the Point of this passage? Justify your choice.
2. Identify the other components of the passage, if present: Background, Support, and Implications. Again, justify your assignments.
3. Based on the passage, which of the following is true about the first few decades of the 19th century? Select all that apply.
 - A. English society was becoming more compassionate towards some oppressed animals and humans.
 - B. England was entering a more bucolic age of industry.
 - C. Some viewed industrialization as a victory over wilderness.
- ➔ 4. Select the sentence that, according to the author, would best explain the early 19th-century trends towards more humane treatment of animals.

Solutions:

Animal Treatment—Headline List

19th c.: Educ B's: animal cruelty = bad

Why: Part of broader embrace of compassn. Ex's ← Point

Deeper Why: Industzn → citydwellers ← Point

—Nature romantic

1. The Point here is complicated; it needs to be synthesized from key ideas spread throughout the paragraph. The main message of the author can be written **thus**: 19th c. British rejection of cruelty to

⁴⁶ connected with the countryside or country life = rustic, rural, pastoral, country, countryside

- a stream winding through stately parks and bucolic meadows

animals was part of a broader embrace of compassion, but actually stemmed from a romanticization of nature by city dwellers.

2. The paragraph begins with Background (rejection of animal cruelty), then moves to Support (causes of this rejection).

3. This is a Select-one-or-more question asking about the beginning of the 19th century. The passage mentions a few dates, all of which will be useful in determining what was true at the dawn of the 19th century.

(A) CORRECT. The passage states that, in the early 19th century, some “forms of domestic animal abuse” were outlawed and society was also embracing “abolitionism and alleviation of poverty” (both of which are aimed at humans).

(B) The last sentence says that, in the 19th century, animals became emblems of a “bucolic, pre-industrial age.” The point is that that bucolic age was coming to an end at this time. England was not “entering” that age.

(C) CORRECT. The author's “deeper explanation” relates the trends to “ongoing industrialization,” as city-dwellers came to view animals more as pets. The passage then states that “nature was no longer menacing, since society's victory over wilderness was conspicuous.” Society, in this context, is the city-dwellers who are living a more “industrialized” life.

➔ 4. This is another **Select-in-Passage** question asking for examples. The second sentence states, “This trend may be regarded as part of a broader embrace of compassionate ideals, such as abolitionism and alleviation of poverty.” This sentence provides one possible explanation, but the author presents a “**deeper explanation**” later on. “However, a deeper explanation should be traced to socioeconomic conditions related to ongoing industrialization,” is the correct sentence.

Long Passages

Long passages consist of approximately 450–475 words spread over three to five paragraphs and 75 to 85 lines on the computer screen. Most likely, you will see one long passage per GRE exam (one Verbal section will have a long passage, and one will not). Each long passage will likely have four questions.

Long passages present much the same challenge as short passages, but with increased length and complexity. Further, because there are multiple associated questions, it is not typically advisable to guess on the entire passage. However, the individual questions associated with long passages will not be any harder, on average, than questions for shorter passages.

As discussed in the case of short passages, what really makes the difference between an easy, or “friendly,” passage and a difficult, or “unfriendly,” one is your background (*How much do you like this topic? What do you already know about this topic?*), as well as your status on the exam at that moment (*Are you ahead of pace or lagging behind? How are you feeling about how you are doing? How is your energy level, your focus, your processing speed?*).

If the long passage turns out to be friendly, then simply read it and take any notes you like (indeed, it is a good habit to take light notes every time).

On the other hand, when the passage is unfriendly (as, in fact, the majority of long passages are likely to be), you need to **know what to read and what not to read**, and you need a **robust note-taking process**, in order to get through the passage actively, rapidly, and effectively. Also, remember that a passage that looks friendly at first glance may turn ugly in the middle. Concentrate on the main ideas and continue to take light notes.

The note-taking process is largely the same for long passages as for short ones, except that **you will pay a bit more attention to the first paragraph of a long passage**. As with short passages, the note taking process serves two main purposes:

1. It provides a general structure and overall understanding without getting you bogged down in details.
2. It promotes an efficient first reading that still gives you enough time to answer questions.

Headline Notes

The creation of your notes has several key elements:

1. The first paragraph of a long passage sets the basic context and gives shape to the text. As such, you'll start out reading more slowly and carefully.

Unlike most short passages, long passages often have a first paragraph that is substantially more important than the other paragraphs, setting the tone and (typically) describing what the rest of the passage will be about. As a result, take a little more time to summarize the first paragraph, making sure that you thoroughly understand the main idea as well as any big surprises or contrasting ideas.

As with short passages, you must decide how frequently you stop to take notes: after each sentence, after a couple of sentences, or after the entire paragraph. Base your decision on how well you are grasping the content and purpose of the text, as well as the length of the paragraph **at issue**⁴⁷. The more difficult the passage, the more frequently you should stop to process what you have read. (Note: if something is too detailed, however, don't get bogged down; start skimming and looking only for “big” ideas.)

2. Note the main point of each remaining paragraph. As you get further into a long passage, you will be able to pick up speed and pay less attention to detail. Continue to read for main ideas and contrasts or surprises; save the detail for later.

Pay special attention to the first one or two sentences of the paragraph; this is where you'll discover the purpose of the paragraph. Once you've grasped that purpose, read the remaining sentences quickly. If you see any other “big” ideas, or any significant contrasts (“However,...”), pay attention and jot down a note. You can mostly ignore any details or examples that go along with the main idea. If you are asked a question about this detail, you will come back to reread these sentences at that point.

In fact, it is actually *counterproductive* to try to absorb many details during your initial read-through, since doing so takes you away from the main goal of grasping the overall point and the major ideas presented in the passage. You wouldn't want to depend on your memory when answering detail questions anyway; check for proof in the passage.

Be on the lookout for big surprises or important results. Sometimes, the GRE buries such surprises or results within the body of a later paragraph, and you don't want to miss these!

Focus on constructing the simple story and you will read with the appropriate level of attention: not too close, not too far away, but just right.

⁴⁷ in question, in dispute, under discussion, under consideration, for debate

3. Once you have finished the passage, identify the Point. In a long passage, you will most likely encounter the point during the first paragraph, as the vast majority of long passages reference the main idea right at the beginning. You can't be 100% sure, though, until you have finished reading the passage. When you're at the end, make sure that you've noted the point before you start looking at any answer choices. A solid understanding of the main idea is crucial to your success on RC.

Using Your Notes

The purpose of your notes is twofold: to help you grasp the main ideas and to know where to look for certain details. If you've done your job well, you'll be able to answer all *General* questions without referring to the passage and you may not even need to refer to your notes.

As for *Specific* questions, you will need to re-read the details in the passage. If you don't happen to remember where something was mentioned, use your notes as a guide—this is precisely why you created them! Also, note that if you can answer a detailed question using just your notes, then you wrote too much down. You will never be asked about every aspect of the passage, so don't waste time taking notes on every last detail when you'll never need most of the information.

Timing for Long Passages

As with short passages, **you have 1.5 minutes per question, total**, including time to read the passage, take notes, and answer all of the questions. Typically, each long passage has four questions associated with it, so you'll have **roughly 6 minutes** to do everything.

Out of this 6-minute period, spend approximately 2–3 minutes reading and generating your Skeletal Sketch. Then spend about 45 seconds per General question, and between 45–60 seconds per Specific question.

Repeated practice will be key, as will analyzing your process. Study the model given later, and do the Exercise. After finishing a particular passage-and-questions set, ask yourself:

- Did I miss any major messages on my initial read-through? Why?
- How can I avoid repeating that mistake in future?
- Did I get too bogged down in any detail on my initial read-through? Were there any indications not to pay so much attention to that detail?
- How could my notes be better? (Consider rewriting them to match your “ideal.”)
- How could I answer the questions more effectively? What kind of wrong answers was I drawn to and why? If I guessed, was the basis for my guess optimal or at least reasonable?

- How could I answer the questions more efficiently? Could I have found the relevant detail more quickly? Could I have eliminated some of the answers more quickly?

Common Structures of Long Passages

Long passages often have more of a narrative, or sequence of events, to their simple story than short passages do. As a result, it's useful to create an executive summary of the story.

Here are a couple of **executive summaries** of some long passages on the GRE. (Of course, there can be many others! These are only two examples.)

1. A Theory

Introduction: an area of scientific or historical **research**.

A **theory** about that area of research exists.

Here is **support** for that theory.

(Possibly) Here are **implications** of that theory.

Point: the theory itself exists / is valid OR an assertion about the theory is made, e.g., **Theory X can now be tested**. In the latter case, support for the assertion is given.

2. A Couple of Theories

Introduction: a **phenomenon** in some area of scientific or historical research.

Here are a couple of **theories** about that phenomenon.

Here is **support** (possibly positive and negative) for each of those theories.

Point: **Theory X is best or they all fall short or more research is needed**.

Model Long Passage: *Electroconvulsive Therapy*

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is a controversial psychiatric treatment involving the induction of a seizure in a patient via the passage of electricity through the brain. While beneficial effects of electrically induced seizures are evident and predictable in most patients, a unified mechanism of action has not yet been established and remains the subject of numerous investigations. According to most, though not all, published studies, ECT has been shown to be effective against several conditions, such as severe depression, mania, and some acute psychotic states, that are resistant to other treatments, although, like many other medical procedures, ECT has its risks.

Since the inception of ECT in 1938, the public has held a strongly negative conception of the procedure. Initially, doctors employed unmodified ECT. Patients were rendered instantly

unconscious by the electrical current, but the strength of the muscle contractions from induced, uncontrolled motor seizures often led to compression fractures of the spine or damage to the teeth. In addition to the effect this physical trauma had on public sentiment, graphic examples of abuse were documented in nonfiction or loosely fictional books and movies, such as Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which portrayed ECT as **punitive**⁴⁸, cruel, overused, and violative of patients' legal rights. Indeed, the alternative term "electroshock" has a negative connotation, **tainted** by these depictions in the media.

In comparison with its earlier incarnation, modern ECT is **virtually** unrecognizable. The treatment is modified by the muscle relaxant succinylcholine, which **renders** muscle contractions virtually nonexistent. Additionally, patients are given a general anesthetic. Thus, the patient is asleep and fully unaware during the procedure, and the only outward sign of a seizure may be the rhythmic movement of the patient's hand or foot. ECT is generally used in severely depressed patients for whom psychotherapy and medication prove ineffective. It may also be considered when there is an imminent risk of suicide, since antidepressants often require several weeks to show results. Exactly how ECT exerts its influence on behavior is not known, but repeated applications affect several important neurotransmitters in the brain, including serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine.

The consensus view of the scientific and medical community is that ECT has been proven effective, but the procedure remains controversial. Though decades-old studies showing brain cell death have been refuted in recent research, many patients do report **retrograde amnesia** (of events prior to treatment) and/or **anterograde** amnesia (of events during or shortly after treatment). Patients have also reported that their short-term memories continue to be affected for months after ECT, though some doctors argue that this memory malfunction may reflect the type of amnesia sometimes associated with severe depression. A recent neuropsychological study at Duke University documents a significant decline in performance on memory tests, **ironically** accompanied at times by self-reports of improved memory function; however, the researchers recommended only that these potential **detriments** be weighed against the potential benefits of ECT in any particular case.

⁴⁸ 1. *punitive measures*: penal, disciplinary, corrective, correctional, retributive.

2. *punitive taxes*: harsh, severe, stiff, stringent, burdensome, demanding, crushing, crippling

Model Headline Notes: *Electroconvulsive Therapy*

1. ECT contro. psych. treat: Electr. into brain → seizure
—Beneficial, but mech not understood
** Effective for some conditions; has risks
2. Since 1938, public dislikes ECT
3. Modern ECT totally diff
4. ECT effective but still contro ← Point

Notice that the first paragraph includes the most detail, as this sets the context for everything to come. The remaining notes are much more concise, consisting only of a brief summary of the main idea of each body paragraph. Note that for each of the body paragraphs, the main idea is found in the first one or two sentences of the paragraph. This is often the case.

The Point of the passage is contained in the first sentence of the last paragraph: *ECT has proven effective, but it remains controversial*. This is the most important message that the author wants to convey. Of course, you need the rest of the passage to supply context (e.g., to explain what ECT is in the first place). In fact, the last sentence of the first paragraph is very similar to the Point, and nicely foreshadows the overall message.

Notice that the summary here does *not* exactly fit one of the patterns mentioned earlier. The summary here might best be expressed as “A Judgment about a Method”: *Here is a method. It is effective but controversial*.

Exercise:

Read the following passage and take notes in 2–3 minutes. Afterward, using the sample given, critique your notes by identifying ways in which they succeed, as well as ways in which they could be improved.

Passage 1: *Ether's Existence*

In 1887, an ingenious experiment performed by Albert Michelson and Edward Morley severely undermined classical physics by failing to confirm the existence of “ether,” a ghostly massless medium that was thought to permeate the universe. Although the implications of this experimental failure were not completely evident for many years, they ultimately paved the way for Einstein's special theory of relativity.

Prior to the Michelson–Morley experiment, nineteenth-century physics conceived of light as a wave of electric and magnetic fields. These fields were governed by Maxwell's equations, which predicted that these waves would **propagate** at a particular speed c . The existence of ether was hypothesized in part to explain the propagation of light waves, which was believed to be impossible through empty space. Moreover, the ether provided the theoretical baseline for the speed of light predicted by Maxwell's equations: light was to travel at speed c relative to the ether. Physical objects, such as planets, were also thought to glide frictionlessly through the unmoving ether.

The Michelson–Morley experiment relied on the concept that the Earth, which orbits the Sun, would be in motion relative to the fixed ether. Just as a person on a motorcycle experiences a “wind” caused by the cycle's motion relative to the air, the Earth would experience an “ethereal wind” caused by its motion through the ether. Such a wind would affect our measurements of the speed of light. If the speed of light is fixed with respect to the ether, but the earth is moving through the ether, then to an observer on Earth light must appear to move faster in a “downwind” direction than in an “upwind” direction.

In 1887 there were no clocks sufficiently precise to detect the speed differences that would result from an ethereal wind. Michelson and Morley surmounted this problem by using the wavelike properties of light itself to test for such speed differences. In their apparatus, known as an **interferometer**, a single beam of light is split in half. Mirrors guide each half of the beam along a separate **trajectory** before ultimately reuniting the two half-beams into a single beam. If one half-beam has moved more slowly than the other, the reunited beams will be out of phase with each other. In other words, peaks of the slower half-beam will not coincide exactly with peaks of the faster half-beam, resulting in an interference pattern in the reunited beam. However, this interference pattern failed to appear. No matter how they positioned the arms of the interferometer in relation to the theoretical ethereal wind, Michelson and Morley detected only a tiny degree of interference in the reunited light beam—far less than what was expected based on the motion of the Earth. This null result helped demolish the ether construct and replace it, in the end, with a far stranger view of time and space.

1. What is the Point of this passage? Justify your choice.

2. Identify the other components of the passage, if present: Background, Support, and Implications. Again, justify your assignments.

3. What is the executive summary of this passage?

4. Select the sentence in the final two paragraphs that explains why Michelson and Morley had to depend on interference patterns to test their theory.

5. Which of the following would the author of the passage be likely to agree with? Indicate all that apply.

- A. Michelson and Morley's experiment failed to produce meaningful results.
- B. The lack of precise stopwatches did not significantly impact Michelson and Morley's eventual results.
- C. 20th century physics would not necessarily have progressed as quickly as it did without Michelson and Morley's experiment.

Solutions

Ether's Existence—Notes

1. 1887, M+M experim. undermined class. physics ← Point
→ No ether (ghostly medium thru-out univ)
—not apparent right away, but led to Einstein's rel.
2. Before: light = wave of fields
3. M+M used Earth's motion in ether (like wind)
4. → looked for speed diffs, found ~0

Notice that you have to delve more deeply into the last paragraph than just the first sentence. You do not have to master how an interferometer works (thankfully!), but you have to have read through nearly everything in that last paragraph to understand the main idea, which is distributed throughout.

2. The Point of the passage is contained in the first sentence of the passage: *In 1887, an ingenious experiment performed by Albert Michelson and Edward Morley severely undermined classical physics by failing to confirm the existence of "ether,"...* (Of course, don't copy this word for word into your notes, but instead abbreviate it dramatically, as shown above.) Everything else in this passage is secondary to this assertion.

3. The first paragraph gives Background on the ether (*a ghostly massless medium that was thought to permeate the universe*) and also gives an Implication (*Although the implications...theory of relativity*). The rest of the passage is a combination of Background knowledge and Support for the assertion made in the Point.

4. The summary might be called “An Experiment”: *M+M's shook physics, paved the way for Einstein. Here is what people used to think existed. Here is what M+M did to look. Here is what they found: Nothing!*

5. This is a Select-in-Passage question asking for a particular detail. You can look to where *interference* is mentioned, and then try to work backwards to figure out why Michelson and Morley needed it. The first sentence of the final paragraph states: *In 1887 there were no clocks sufficiently precise to detect the speed differences that would result from an ethereal wind*. Because they couldn't simply time the light, Michelson and Morley had to depend on the interference patterns of split light beams.

6. This is a very general Select-one-or-more question, which could draw from information provided anywhere in the passage.

(A) The passage indicates that the experiment *failed to confirm the existence of “ether,”* but this does not mean that the experiment failed to produce any usable or meaningful results. In fact, the results of the experiment were far-reaching; the end of the first paragraph says that the *implications ultimately paved the way for Einstein's special theory of relativity*.

(B) CORRECT. You are told in the final paragraph that Michelson and Morley *surmounted* the problem of not having precise enough clocks. That means that the lack of such clocks did not significantly impact their results.

(C) CORRECT. The second sentence of the first paragraph tell you that the results of the experiment “paved the way for Einstein's special theory of relativity.” In other words, without the experiment, it is *possible* that physics would not have progressed as quickly.

Passage 2: Ether's Existence

Read the following passage and take notes in 2–3 minutes. Afterward, using the sample given, critique your notes by identifying ways in which they succeed, as well as ways in which they could be improved.

In Europe, medical prescriptions were historically written in Latin, for many centuries the universal medium of communication among the educated^{M8}. A prescription for eye drops written in Amsterdam could be filled in Paris, because the abbreviation OS meant “left eye” in

both places. With the disappearance of Latin as a lingua franca⁴⁹, however, abbreviations such as OS can easily be confused with AS (“left ear”) or per os (“by mouth”), even by trained professionals. Such misinterpretations of medical instructions can be fatal. In the early 1990s, two infants died in separate but identical tragedies: they were each administered 5 milligrams of morphine, rather than 0.5 milligrams, as the dosage was written without an initial zero. The naked decimal (.5) was subsequently misread. The personal and economic costs of misinterpreted medical prescriptions and instructions are hard to quantify. However, anecdotal⁵⁰ evidence suggests that misinterpretations are prevalent. While mistakes will always happen in any human endeavor, medical professionals, hospital administrators, and policymakers should continually work to drive the prescription error rate to zero, **taking simple corrective steps** and also pushing for additional investments. Certain **measures** are widely agreed upon, even if some are difficult to enforce, given the decentralization of the country's healthcare system. For instance, the American Medical Association and other professional organizations have publicly advocated against the use of Latin abbreviations and other **relics** of historical pharmacology. As a result, incidents in which qd (“every day”), qid (“four times a day”), and qod (“every other day”) have been mixed up seem to be on the decline. Other measures have been taken by regulators who oversee⁵¹ potential areas of confusion, such as drug names. For instance, the FDA asked a manufacturer to change the name of Levoxine, a thyroid medication, to Levoxyl, so that confusion with Lanoxin, a heart failure drug, would be reduced. **Likewise**, in 1990 the antacid Losec was renamed Prilosec **at the FDA's behest**⁵² to differentiate it from Lasix, a diuretic⁵³. Unfortunately, since 1992 there have been at least a dozen reports of accidental switches between Prilosec and Prozac, an antidepressant. As more

⁴⁹ a shared language of communication used between people whose main languages are different

زبان بين المللى

- English has become a lingua franca in many parts of the world.

⁵⁰ 1. *anecdotal evidence*: unscientific, unreliable, based on hearsay.

2. *her book is anecdotal and chatty*: narrative, full of stories.

⁵¹ supervise, superintend, be in charge/control of, be responsible for, look after, keep an eye on, inspect, administer, organize, manage, direct, preside over.

⁵² *noun* instruction, requirement, demand, insistence, bidding, request, wish, desire, will; command, order, decree, ruling, directive

at sb's behest/at the behest of sb = because someone has asked or ordered you to do something

- The budget proposal was adopted at the president's behest.

⁵³ a substance that causes an increase in the flow of urine

drugs reach the market, drug-name “traffic control” will only become more complicated. Other measures are controversial or require significant investment and **consensus**-building. For instance, putting the patient's condition on the prescription would allow double-checking but also reduce patient privacy; thus, this step continues to be debated. Computerized prescriber order entry (CPOE) systems seem to fix the **infamous** problem of **illegible** handwriting, but many CPOE systems permit naked decimals and other dangerous practices. Moreover, since **fallible**⁵⁴ humans must still enter and retrieve the data, any technological fixes must be accompanied by substantial training. Ultimately, a multi-**pronged**⁵⁵ approach is needed to address the issue.

1. What is the Point of this passage? Justify your choice.
2. Identify the other components of the passage, if present: Background, Support, and Implications. Again, justify your assignments. What is the executive summary of this passage?
3. Select the sentence in the middle two paragraphs that provides a reason why prescription errors could become more common in the future.
4. Based on the passage, which of the following could help reduce the number of prescription errors?
 - A reduction in the use of **anachronistic** terminology
 - A law forcing drug companies to name their products in ways that make confusion with preexisting drugs less likely
 - Better training for nurses and nurse practitioners who enter prescriptions into databases

Prescription Errors—Notes

1. Eur: **Rx** in Latin hist.

⁵⁴ error-prone, errant, liable to err, open to error; imperfect

⁵⁵ prong *noun* tine, spike, point, tip, projection.

-pronged

two-pronged/three-pronged, etc.

having the stated number of prongs

- *figurative* To tackle inflation, the government have evolved a three-pronged strategy (= a plan that involves three ways of dealing with the problem).

BUT now → mistakes
—Can be fatal. Ex: 2 babies.

2. Cost Rx mistakes = hard to quant, but lots

All should elim errors ← Point

3. Some steps = agreed.

4. Other steps harder, need multi-prong

Incidentally, **Rx** is an abbreviation for “prescription,” probably originating from Latin. If you happen to encounter a passage on prescription drugs, feel free to use this abbreviation; otherwise, use it to locate a pharmacy when traveling abroad!

1. The Point combines the last sentence of the second paragraph with the end of the fourth paragraph: *While mistakes will always happen in any human endeavor, medical professionals, hospital administrators, and policymakers should continually work to drive the prescription error rate to zero, taking simple corrective steps and also pushing for additional investments.* This is the strongest and most general claim made by the author. The author finishes the point via the end of the fourth paragraph: *Ultimately, a multi-pronged approach is needed to address the issue.*

2. What comes before the Point is a mixture of Background (e.g., the use of Latin on medieval prescriptions) and Support (e.g., the explanation of the fatal tragedies). After the Point is mostly Implications (various potential steps with pros and cons). The last two paragraphs could be interpreted as Judgments on specific tactics, *given* that everyone would like to drive the error rate down to zero.

3. This Select-in-Passage question is quite specific. Notice that it doesn't ask for problems with the prescription-writing process, but a reason why the problem could get worse. The final sentence of the third paragraph states: *As more drugs reach the market, drug-name ‘traffic control’ will only become more complicated.* While other sentences mention other CURRENT problems with drug-name confusion, this is the only sentence giving a reason why things might get WORSE in the future.

4. This Select-one-or-more question asks about prescription errors; note the types of errors described in the passage.

(A) CORRECT. The third paragraph describes the confusion caused by the use of the terms “qd,” “qid,” and “qod.” Clearly the phasing out of this terminology could reduce prescription errors.

(B) CORRECT. The third paragraph describes *a dozen reports of accidental switches between Prilosec and Prozac*. If these two products had more distinctive names, prescription errors could be reduced.

(C) The passage does not suggest this remedy, nor does it provide any reason to think that nurses and nurse practitioners would make fewer mistakes than do doctors.

Argument Structure Passages

Introduction to Argument Structure Passages

Reading Comprehension also contains another type of passage: Argument Structure Passages (ASPs).

Expect to see about 1–3 ASPs per section; each passage will be accompanied by a single question. These individual questions shouldn't take any longer than a similar question on a Short or Long passage. Though there aren't multiple questions to preview, you absolutely must **read the question before you read the passage**, as it will tell you exactly what kind of ASP you're dealing with.

ASPs on the GRE involve reading brief arguments (each argument is generally one to three sentences long) and answering questions relating to those arguments. These arguments are made up of premises⁵⁶, counterpremises, assumptions, and conclusions. Some arguments will also contain background information or context; this information helps you to understand the topic under discussion but is not actually part of the argument itself. The main point of the argument is the **conclusion**, which is logically supported by the premises (and assumptions). Conclusions are in the form of an opinion or a claim; they are not pure facts. Most arguments contain conclusions, but not all of them.

Premises provide support for the argument's conclusion. They may be facts, opinions, or claims. If they are opinions or claims, they will not be the overall claim the author is making; rather, they will be some intermediate claim the author is using to support the overall claim (conclusion).

Counterpremises undermine or go against the conclusion. Occasionally an argument will present both sides of an argument, with evidence to support both. The passage will still come down one way or the other in terms of an overall conclusion, but some of the provided evidence will be used as premises and some as counterpremises (supporting a kind of counterconclusion).

Assumptions are unstated pieces of information that the argument requires to function.

Here's a simple example to illustrate:

⁵⁶ a statement or an idea that forms the basis for a reasonable line of argument

- the basic premise of her argument
- a false premise
- His reasoning is based on the premise that all people are equally capable of good and evil.

While the plot of the movie was compelling, the acting was **atrocious**⁵⁷. Thus, the movie will not win an Oscar.

Conclusion: Thus, the movie will not win an Oscar.

Supporting Premise: The acting was atrocious.

Counterpremise: The plot of the movie was compelling.

Assumption: Atrocious acting prevents a movie from winning an Oscar (any kind of Oscar!)

Identifying the Parts of an Argument

In order to do well on Argument Structure Passage questions, you must be able to identify the parts of an argument as shown above. Consider the following argument and try to find the different pieces. Don't read on until you've tried it!

Studying regularly is one factor that has been shown to improve one's performance on the GRE.

Melissa took the GRE and scored a 150. If she studies several times a week, Melissa can expect to improve her score.

In analyzing an argument, **look first for the conclusion**, which is the main point of the argument. The conclusion can be the last sentence of an argument, but not always. Sometimes the conclusion is the first sentence or in the middle of the paragraph.

Where is the conclusion? The main claim of this argument is the last sentence:

If she studies several times a week, Melissa can expect to improve her score.

Note that the conclusion is not just that she'll improve her score. The conclusion does cover the full If-Then statement: if she does X, she can expect Y to happen. After finding the conclusion, look for the premises that support or lead to the conclusion.

Where are the premises? Each of the first two sentences is a premise:

Premise: Studying regularly is one factor that has been shown to improve one's performance on the GRE.

Premise: Melissa took the GRE and scored a 150.

⁵⁷ 1. *atrocious cruelties*: brutal, barbaric, barbarous, savage, vicious; wicked, cruel, nasty, heinous, monstrous, vile, inhuman, black-hearted, fiendish, ghastly, horrible; abominable, outrageous, hateful, disgusting, despicable, contemptible, loathsome, odious, abhorrent, sickening, horrifying, unspeakable, execrable, egregious.

2. *the weather was atrocious*: appalling, dreadful, terrible, very bad, unpleasant, miserable; *informal* abysmal, dire, rotten, lousy.

Finally, what does this conclusion assume? It assumes that studying “several times per week” is the same as studying “regularly.” **Maybe “regularly” means every day! In that case, studying several times a week may not be enough.**

Recognizing Argument Structure Passages

The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test does not differentiate between regular Reading Comprehension passages and Argument Structure Passages, but the difference is critical to your process. Your first job on any passage will be to categorize it.

How? You'll use the question stem! Before you dive into the argument itself, you're going to read the question stem to determine what you've got.

→ You can distinguish between RC questions and ASP questions. These question types appear **only on ASPs**:

- Analyze Argument Structure: These questions will highlight a sentence or two in the passage, and then ask you what purpose they're serving in the argument. Generally, when you see the word “argument,” you should think ASP.
- Strengthen/Weaken: If a passage asks you to strengthen (support) or weaken (undermine) the argument, it's an ASP.
- Resolve a Paradox/Explain a Discrepancy: If the question asks you to resolve or explain something puzzling, then you've got an ASP.

These question types appear only on **RC passages**:

- Main Idea, Tone, and Attitude: ASPs are generally too short to get across any kind of overall main point or tone.
- Look-Up Detail: Any question that begins “According to the passage” or asks what the author talked about in detail signals a regular RC passage.
- Author's Purpose: Some questions ask why the author mentioned a particular detail. If you see the language “in order to” in the question stem, then you know you've got a regular RC passage.
- Select-in-Passage or Select-One-or-More questions always signal a regular RC passage. ASP questions always ask you to choose exactly one answer choice from a listed set of five answers.

This question type can appear on **both RC passages and ASPs**:

- **Inference:** When the question asks what is inferred, implied, or suggested, there's no good way to know whether you're dealing with regular RC or an ASP. Here's the good news: it doesn't matter! The solution process for Inference is the same regardless of the type of passage.

You don't need to memorize the above right now; you will see plenty of examples later.

Four-Step Process

You'll use a four-step process for every ASP you encounter:

Step 1: Identify the question type.

Step 2: Deconstruct the argument.

Step 3: State the goal.

Step 4: Work from wrong to right.

An overview is below; later, you'll go through the process in detail for each question type.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The vast majority of question stems will allow you to categorize a question, which will direct everything else you do. However, if the question stem is not immediately helpful or the question type is difficult to identify, do not dwell on the issue. Go ahead to the next step; afterwards, you can reexamine the question.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The question type will help you anticipate what to expect from the argument. For example, some types do have conclusions and others don't; after you've identified the question type, you'll know whether to look for a conclusion when reading the argument. You'll also take light notes during this stage.

Step 3: State the Goal

You'll have a particular goal that you're trying to accomplish for each question type. For example, on Strengthen questions, the goal is to find the answer that makes the conclusion at least a little more likely to be true or valid. This step only takes about 3–5 seconds, but don't skip it! Make sure that you have a clear idea of your goal before you move to the final step.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

As on any RC question, process of elimination rules the day. As a general rule, cross definite wrong answers off first and then compare any remaining tempting answers. Certain question types have common traps in the wrong answers; it's important to be familiar with those before test day.

Taking Notes

When doing Argument Structure Passages, you are going to take some light notes as you do for regular Reading Comprehension passages. These notes are going to be even more abbreviated, though, and are going to focus on the flow of the information. What leads to what?

There are any number of ways to take notes; a few ideas are presented below and you can choose what you think would work best for your brain. First, though, make sure you know what these notes are supposed to accomplish.

You already know that arguments contain different pieces of information: a conclusion, premises, and so on. Your two main goals are to:

1. Classify each piece of information.
2. Understand how the different pieces of information fit together.

Option 1: Stream-of-Consciousness Notes

This option tends to work for people who prefer to jot down notes as they read. Read the first sentence (or enough of the first sentence to come up with a “big idea”). Then, jot down a (heavily abbreviated!) note and move on to the next sentence. At times, you may decide not to jot down a particular detail (e.g., background information may not be necessary to write down). Each new idea gets its own line.

➔ When you're done, determine the conclusion (if applicable—not all arguments have conclusions!). Place a C next to it (it's also a good idea to put a circle around the C). Put + (plus) signs next to any premises that support that conclusion. Put – (minus) signs next to any counterpremises that go against the conclusion.

Here's an example:

Environmentalist: *The national energy commission's current plan **calls for** the construction of six new nuclear power plants during the next decade. The commission argues that these plants are extremely safe and will have minimal environmental impact on their surrounding communities. However, all six nuclear power plants will be located far from densely populated areas. Clearly, the government is **tacitly** admitting that these plants do pose a serious health risk to humans.*

Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the environmentalist's claim of an unspoken government admission?

Sample Notes:

NEC plan: 5 NP next 10yr

This is a fact, not a conclusion. I don't know yet whether it will support or go against the conclusion.

NEC: v. safe, low enviro impact

Okay, this group is claiming something.

BUT NP not in pop areas

Big contrast. Another fact.

Gov admits NP = health risk

Okay, this is the big claim.

Now that you know what's going on, go back and add labels to each line:

NEC plan: 5 NP next 10yr

– NEC: v. safe, low enviro impact

+ BUT NP not in pop areas

C Gov admits NP = health risk

The first line represents context; these plants are going to be built. This information doesn't actually work for or against the argument. The second line represents information that goes against the conclusion. The author thinks these nuclear plants are bad, but the NEC thinks they will be safe. The third line represents the author's sole premise and helps to support the author's conclusion. Since the NEC isn't placing any of these nuclear power plants in populated areas, the author concludes that the nuclear power plants must represent a health risk.

What does the author assume when drawing this conclusion?

One thing the author assumes is that there is no other reason why the nuclear power plants might be located in less populated areas. Perhaps the power plants need a lot of land and there isn't enough room in populated areas. If you think of that when reading the argument, you can add it to your notes:

[no other reason NP not in pop areas?]

Note the brackets; these indicate that the argument itself doesn't mention this information. Rather, it's something you thought of yourself.

Option 2: The T-Diagram

This option tends to work for people who prefer to read the entire argument first and then jot down notes.

Step 1. First, draw a large T on your scratch paper.

Make it asymmetrical, leaving more room on the left side, which will be the “pro” side. In most arguments, you will have very little on the “con” side (to the right).

Step 2.

Conclusion

Second, read the argument and look for the conclusion. Once you find the conclusion, **write it above the top line of the T**, abbreviating heavily.

Step 3.

Conclusion

– Pro

– Pro

– [Assumption]

– Con

Third, add the rest of the argument information to the diagram. Write anything that supports the conclusion on the left side of the T (“Pro” or “Premise”), and write anything that goes against the conclusion on the right side of the T (“Con” or “Counterpremise”). Finally, if you happened to think of any assumptions while reading, place them in brackets somewhere below the T. Make sure you can differentiate between information stated in the argument and your own thoughts when looking at your notes.

Here's how the original argument might look in T-diagram form:

Environmentalist: The national energy commission's current plan calls for the construction of six new nuclear power plants during the next decade. The commission argues that these plants are extremely safe and will have minimal environmental impact on their surrounding communities.

However, all six nuclear power plants will be located far from densely populated areas. Clearly, the government is tacitly admitting that these plants do pose a serious health risk to humans.

Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the environmentalist's claim of an unspoken government admission?

plnts = ↑ hlth rsk

plnts far frm pop areas [No other reason for distance?]

Comm: plnts safe, ↓ enviro impct

Note that this diagram contains different abbreviations from the first one. We did that on purpose to illustrate that everyone will take notes differently. There is more than one way to write something down; use what works best for you.

Option 3: Draw! Create a Map! Develop Your Own Style

There are many different ways someone might choose to take notes. For example, some people are more visual and might feel most comfortable drawing or mapping out the information. You aren't obligated to follow one particular method; you can develop your own as long as you are accomplishing three goals:

1. If the argument does contain a conclusion, then you do need to find and note it. The conclusion (when present) is the most important part of the argument.
2. If the argument contains any kind of "flow" of information (e.g., one thing leads to another or one thing goes against another), then you definitely want to take note of how that information fits together.
3. You need simple and consistent ways to note important information. You don't need to designate the conclusion with a C, but you do need to designate the conclusion the same way every time. You don't want to spend time thinking about how to write something down or wondering what one of your abbreviations means.

If your note-taking style accomplishes those three goals at a minimum, then your process is good.

Strategies for All Question Types

Boundary Words in the Argument

For any question, it is helpful to focus your attention on the **boundary** words and phrases provided in the argument. These words and phrases narrow the scope of a premise. For example:

Premise: *The percentage of literate adults has increased.*

The boundary word “percentage” limits the scope of the premise. It restricts the meaning to percentage only, as opposed to the actual number of literate adults. For all you know, the actual number went down. The boundary word “adults” also limits the scope of the premise. It restricts the meaning to adults only, as opposed to the total population, or children.

Here is another example:

Conclusion: *Controversial speech should be allowed, provided it does not incite major violence.*

The boundary phrase “provided it does not incite major violence” limits the scope of the conclusion. It restricts the meaning to some types of controversial speech, as opposed to all types of controversial speech. The boundary word “major” limits the exception—controversial speech should not be allowed when it incites major violence, as opposed to any violence. Note that the argument doesn't define what constitutes major vs. minor violence.

Boundary words and phrases are vital because they provide nuances to the argument and these nuances will often be major factors in the answer choices. These details can single-handedly make some answer choices correct or incorrect. Therefore, in your diagram, be sure to include boundary words and underline them or capitalize them for emphasis. This will help you identify answer choices that try to trick you on the argument boundaries.

Extreme Words in the Argument

Another general strategy for all ASP questions involves **extreme** words and phrases in the body of the argument. Extreme words, such as “always,” “never,” “all,” and “none,” are the opposite of boundary words—they make the argument very broad or far-reaching. **Using extreme words opens up an argument unreasonably, making it very susceptible to strengthening or weakening.**

For example:

Conclusion: *Sugar is never healthy for anyone trying to lose weight.*

The extreme word “never” unreasonably opens up this argument, placing no limitation on the claim that sugar is unhealthy. A more moderate conclusion would argue that sugar is often unhealthy, or that excessive sugar is unhealthy. The extreme word “anyone” further opens up this argument. A more moderate conclusion might be that this claim applies to most people trying to lose weight. Note any extreme language used in premises or conclusions; any such words will likely be very useful in responding to the question.

Boundary Words in the Answer Choices

Boundary words in the answers are just as important as boundary words in the body of the argument, though for a different reason. A correct answer choice must be 100% correct. As long as you interpret the words legitimately, such a choice must be valid no matter which way you interpret it. This principle provides an approach to evaluating answer choices. When you see boundary words in an answer choice, ask yourself, “What is the most extreme example I can think of that would still fit the wording of this answer choice?” Then, using the conclusion and the question asked, see whether your extreme example allows you to eliminate that answer choice.

For example, an answer choice might say:

(D) Some teachers leave the profession entirely within three years of beginning their teaching careers.

You might choose to address one of two different boundaries here. The word “some” refers to some number of teachers but does not specify the size of the group. The phrase “within three years” refers to a period of time but does not specify the exact length of time.

If you choose to address the word “some,” you could say that 1% of teachers leave within three years, or that 99% of teachers do so. Either way, the statistics still fit the criterion that some teachers do this. Suppose the conclusion asserted that new teacher turnover is having a major impact on the industry. If only 1% of new teachers leave within three years, then new teacher turnover will probably not have much of an impact.

Alternatively, you could interpret “within three years” to mean that many teachers in this category leave after 1 day of teaching. You could also imagine that many teachers in this category leave after 2 years and 364 days of teaching. Again, either way, the statistics still fit the criterion that new teachers leave the profession within 3 years of beginning their careers. Depending upon the conclusion and the question, you would then try to disprove answer choices by using these extreme interpretations.

Extreme words, such as “only” or “never,” can appear in correct answers as long as those same extreme words, or synonyms, appear in the original argument. If the answer choice uses an extreme word that is not explicitly supported by the text of the argument, eliminate that choice.

Process of Elimination

It is important to eliminate answer choices on your scratch paper. **Do not eliminate answer choices in your head!** As you go through many different questions during the test, it is very difficult to keep straight which answer choices you have ruled out. You do not want to find yourself re-evaluating answers that you have already eliminated or—even worse—accidentally choosing an answer that you meant to eliminate! **By the end of the Verbal Section of the GRE, your scratch paper will be filled with columns or rows of “A–E” (and a bit of “A–C”) with incorrect answer choices crossed out and correct answers circled. Study this way when practicing as well; don't write in your books, since you can't write on the problem itself during the real test.** Even if you believe you have found the correct answer, always check all of the answer choices on Verbal questions. You may find that another answer choice might be better, and you will have to rethink your initial choice.

Argument Question Types

Question Type	Example	How to Recognize
1. Strengthen the Conclusion	Which of the following, if true, most strongly supports the scientists' hypothesis?	In the question stem: <i>strengthen, support</i> , or similar will often (but not always) include the words “if true”
2. Weaken the Conclusion	Which of the following, if true, most seriously undermines the mayor's claim?	In the question stem: <i>weaken, undermine</i> , or similar may ask what <i>supports</i> the idea that something will <i>not</i> be successful will often (but not always) include the words “if true”
3. Analyze the Argument Structure	In the argument above, the two portions in boldface play which of the following roles?	In the question stem: <i>role</i> or similar In the argument: boldface font
4. Draw a Conclusion	Which of the following	In the question stem:

(Inference)	conclusions can best be drawn from the information above?	<i>conclusion, assertion, infer, or similar</i>
5. Resolve a Paradox	Which of the following pieces of evidence, if true, would provide the best explanation for the discrepancy?	In the question stem: <i>paradox, discrepancy, resolve, or similar</i>

The GRE may make a question a bit more complex by structuring it as a “Fill-in-the-Blank” question. This is not a new type of question; rather, it is a disguised version of one of the question types listed above. The Fill-in-the-Blank form is sometimes harder to categorize than the more typical ones; you'll see examples below. Once you recognize that a “Fill-in-the-Blank” question is of a certain type, you can use the standard strategies associated with that type. Let's take a look at each question type in more detail.

1. Strengthen the Conclusion

On Strengthen questions, your goal is to find an answer that makes the conclusion a little more likely to be valid. The conclusion likely won't be made perfect—just somewhat better than it was before.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

Strengthen the Conclusion questions ask you to provide additional support for a given conclusion. The question stem may appear in a number of forms:

- Which of the following, if true, most **strengthens** the argument above?
- Which of the following, if true, most strongly **supports** the scientists' hypothesis?
- Which of the following **provides the strongest reason** to expect that the plan will be successful?
- Shuai will win the tournament **because** _____.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Strengthen arguments will always contain conclusions; because your task is to strengthen the conclusion, your first task is to find that conclusion. Also take note of the premises offered to support the conclusion and think about the gaps in the argument. What is the author assuming must be true in order to draw that particular conclusion?

You may or may not be able to brainstorm any assumptions made by the author; it's worth spending about 15 to 20 seconds to try. For example, **consider this short argument**:

Shuai is the number one tennis player in the country. She lost in the final match of last year's national tennis championship, but she will win the tournament this year because _____.

What is the author assuming in drawing this conclusion? Shuai is the number one player, which sounds great, but she did lose last year. The author is assuming that there is some reason that Shuai will have a better chance this year. Perhaps she wasn't the top-ranked player last year. Perhaps the player who beat her last year has retired. Perhaps Shuai has gotten better than the player who beat her last year. Who knows? The correct answer will provide some reason to support the idea that Shuai will win this year (though the answer won't absolutely guarantee that Shuai will win).

Step 3: State the Goal

For Strengthen questions, the correct answer will be a new piece of information that will make the conclusion at least a little more likely to be valid or true. It could be inserted into the argument as a new premise supporting the conclusion.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

Use an S-W-Slash Chart to keep track of the answers. Each answer choice will either strengthen the conclusion (S), weaken it (W), or do nothing to it (~). (Technically, that symbol is called a **tilde**⁵⁸, but “slash” is easier.) Label each letter on your scrap paper accordingly.

Cross off W and ~ answers immediately. If you have more than one S, compare the answer choices. Only one choice will strengthen the conclusion in the end, so see whether you mistakenly labeled something an S when it should have been labeled something else. If they both still look good, then try to decide which one supports the conclusion more strongly. Pick and move on!

At times it may not be entirely clear whether an answer choice strengthens or weakens the conclusion. For example, an answer choice may serve to strengthen the conclusion, but only in an indirect or arguable way. If that is the case, write down S~ in order to indicate that the answer choice is **borderline**. As you assess the other choices, determine whether you need to refine your categorization

⁵⁸ *BrE* ['tɪldə] *NAmE* ['tɪldə] noun

1. the mark (~) placed over letters in some languages and some vowels in the International Phonetic Alphabet to show how they should be pronounced, as in *España*, *São Paulo* and *penchant* /['pɔ̃ʃɑ̃] /

2. (*also* ,**swung** 'dash) the mark (~), used in this dictionary in some parts of an entry to represent the word in blue type at the top of the entry

of that answer choice. Depending upon the other answer choices, it may be obvious that this answer choice is wrong or, alternatively, that it is the best answer.

Here's an example (real test questions will have five answer choices):

At QuestCorp, many employees have quit recently and taken jobs with a competitor. Shortly before the employees quit, QuestCorp lost its largest client. Clearly, the employees were no longer confident in QuestCorp's long-term viability.

Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the claim that concerns about QuestCorp's viability caused the employees to quit?

- (A) Employees at QuestCorp's main competitor recently received a large and well-publicized raise.
- (B) QuestCorp's largest client **accounted for** 40% of sales and nearly 60% of the company's profits.
- (C) Many prospective hires who have interviewed with QuestCorp ultimately accepted jobs with other companies.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The “most strengthens” and “if true” language indicate that this is a Strengthen the Conclusion question.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The question stem provides the conclusion: concerns about Q's viability caused employees to quit. One set of notes might look like this:

+ Q lost client, then E quit, went to compet

C E lost conf in Q viab

Step 3: State the Goal

The author assumes that the employees weren't quitting for some other reason. One way to strengthen the argument would be to show that there was some significant negative consequence because the largest client left.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

Use an S-W-slash chart to categorize and eliminate answer choices.

(A) Weaken or slash. If the competitor is offering more money, then perhaps that's why the employees switched companies; if so, this choice weakens the argument. Note that this choice doesn't actually say

that the competitor is now paying more money than QuestCorp, so perhaps this information is irrelevant. Either way, this choice does not strengthen the argument.

(B) Strengthen. The largest client accounted for a very large percentage of both sales and profits. This piece of information does strengthen the idea that some employees may have lost confidence in QuestCorp's long-term viability.

(C) Slash. The argument concludes something about QuestCorp employees, not people who interviewed with QuestCorp but ultimately accepted a job elsewhere.

Answer choice (B) is correct.

Wrong Answer Choice Types

1. No Tie to the Conclusion

Many wrong answers will be tied to a premise but not to the conclusion. The answer choice could provide unnecessary information about that premise or talk about something **tangential** to the argument, **such as answer (A) above** ↑. A few wrong answers with “No Tie to the Conclusion” do bring in language from the conclusion, but they do not meaningfully support the conclusion. Deceptive answers such as these seem relevant. Make sure that the answer you choose is not simply related to the conclusion, but in fact supports it. **Also, some wrong answers can be “Real-World Plausible.” You are not assessing a choice's truth in the real world—only whether the choice strengthens the particular argument given.**

2. Wrong Direction

Many wrong answers on Strengthen questions in fact weaken the argument. **Make sure that you note whether a particular question is a Strengthen the Conclusion or a Weaken the Conclusion question so that you do not mistakenly pick the wrong answer.** **In the example provided above, answer choice (C) is an example of this deceptive answer type.** ↑

2. Weaken the Conclusion

Weaken the Conclusion questions are exactly like Strengthen the Conclusion questions in every way except the obvious (they want you to weaken instead of strengthen!).

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The question stem may appear in a number of forms:

- **Which** of the following, if true, most seriously **weakens the argument**?

- Which of the following, if true, could present the most serious disadvantage of XYZ Corporation's new marketing initiative?
- Which of the following, if true, most strongly supports the view that the drug treatment program will **not** be successful?

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Weaken arguments will always contain conclusions; because your task is to weaken the conclusion, your first task is to find that conclusion. Also take note of the premises offered to support the conclusion and think about the gaps in the argument. What is the author assuming must be true in order to draw that particular conclusion?

You may or may not be able to brainstorm any assumptions made by the author; it's worth spending about 15 to 20 seconds to try. For example, consider this short argument (the same one you saw in the Strengthen section above):

Shuai is the number one tennis player in the country. She lost in the final match of last year's national tennis championship, but she will win the tournament this year.

Which of the following, if true, most undermines the author's claim?

What is the author assuming in drawing this conclusion? Shuai is the number one player, which sounds great, but she did lose last year. The author is assuming that there is some reason that Shuai will have a better chance this year.

The correct answer will provide some reason to weaken the idea that Shuai will win this year (though the answer won't absolutely guarantee that Shuai will lose). Perhaps the same player who beat her last year will be in the tournament again this year. Perhaps another player, who has beaten Shuai recently, will be playing in the tournament. Perhaps Shuai will be injured or sick.

Step 3: State the Goal

For Weaken questions, the correct answer will be a new piece of information that will make the conclusion at least a little less likely to be valid or true. If it were inserted into the argument, the conclusion would be doubtful.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

Use an S-W-Slash Chart to keep track of the answers. Each answer choice will either strengthen the conclusion (S), weaken it (W), or do nothing to it (~). (Technically, that symbol is called a tilde, but “slash” is easier.) Label each letter on your scrap paper accordingly.

Cross off S and ~ answers immediately. If you have more than one W, compare the answer choices. Only one choice will weaken the conclusion in the end, so see whether you mistakenly labeled something a W when it should have been labeled something else. If they both still look good, then try to decide which one weakens the conclusion the most. Pick and move on!

At times it may not be entirely clear whether an answer choice strengthens or weakens the conclusion. For example, an answer choice may serve to weaken the conclusion, but only in an indirect or arguable way. If that is the case, write down **W~** in order to indicate that the answer choice is **borderline**. As you assess the other choices, determine whether you need to refine your categorization of that answer choice. Depending upon the other answer choices, it may be obvious that this answer choice is wrong or, alternatively, that it is the best answer.

Here's an example:

The national infrastructure for airport runways and air traffic control requires immediate expansion to accommodate the increase in private, smaller planes. To help fund this expansion, the Federal Aviation Authority (the FAA) has proposed a fee for all air travelers. However, this fee would be unfair, as it would impose costs on all travelers to benefit only the few who utilize the new private planes.

Which of the following, if true, would cast the most doubt on the claim that the proposed fee would be unfair?

- (A) The existing national airport infrastructure benefits all air travelers.
- (B) The fee, if imposed, will have a negligible effect on the overall volume of air travel.
- (C) The expansion would reduce the number of delayed flights resulting from small private planes congesting runways.
- (D) Travelers who use small private planes are almost uniformly wealthy or traveling on business.
- (E) A substantial fee would need to be imposed in order to pay for the expansion costs.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The “cast the most doubt” and “if true” language indicate that this is a **Weaken the Conclusion question**.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The question stem indicates the conclusion: the proposed fee would be unfair. One set of notes might look like this:

Fee unfair

Cost for all, benefits only for priv planes	
---	--

Step 3: State the Goal

The author assumes that the benefits will apply only to those flying in the private planes. One way to strengthen the argument would be to show that there was some benefit for a greater group, or perhaps for all of the people who would be paying the fee.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

Use an S-W-slash chart to categorize and eliminate answer choices.

- (A) Slash. The argument concerns a fee needed in order to expand the existing infrastructure. The status of the existing infrastructure is irrelevant to the argument.
- (B) Slash. A negligible impact is a very small impact. The fee, though, is intended to be used for infrastructure expansion. The argument makes no claim about what will happen with the overall volume of air travel.
- (C) Weaken. This choice offers a benefit for all air travelers: if the expansion can reduce congestion, and therefore the number of delayed flights in general, then others besides the private plane travelers will benefit from the fee.
- (D) Slash. The wealth or employment status of the passengers does not address whether the fee benefits just these passengers versus all of the passengers.
- (E) Strengthen or slash. The amount of the fee does not address whether the fee is unfair. If anything, you might argue that a very high fee is even more unfair, in which case this choice would strengthen the argument, not weaken it.

Answer choice **(C)** is the correct answer.

Wrong Answer Choice Types

1. No Tie to the Conclusion

Answer (A) in the problem above is an example of a tempting wrong answer of the No Tie type. ↑

2. Wrong Direction

Answer (E) in the problem above is a possible example of a Wrong Direction trap. ↑

3. Analyze the Argument Structure

Analyze the Argument Structure questions [ask you to describe the role of a part or parts of the argument](#); these portions will be [shown in bold font](#). Annoyingly, the arguments **tend to** be complex, often with an argument/counterargument structure. Be prepared with guessing strategies (discussed below).

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The question type will be immediately apparent because of the boldface font in portions of the argument. The question will typically ask what “role” the bold portions play in the overall argument.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The boldface portions can play one of three primary roles:

1. (C): The statement in boldface is the author's [Conclusion](#).
2. (S): The statement in boldface is a premise that [Supports](#) the author's conclusion.
3. (W): The statement in boldface is [something else](#) (usually [Weakens](#) the conclusion, but not always).

Find the author's conclusion, then [classify each statement according to the categories C, S, or W](#). These arguments tend to be longer than average; note that [you do not need to categorize the entire argument, just the two statements in bold font](#). **Do not go to the answer choices until you have found the conclusion and categorized the statements!**

Step 3: State the Goal

Your goal is to [categorize the boldface statements and then to find an answer choice that matches your categorization](#). **Note also whether the boldface statements are on the same side of the fence (categories 1 and 2) or on opposite sides of the fence (1 versus 3 or 2 versus 3).**

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

The wrong answers will provide descriptions of the wrong combination of categories. For example, you might decide that the first boldface is a C while the second is an S. One wrong answer might describe the combination C, W (in that order). Another might describe the combination W, C. Both would be wrong if you are looking for the combination C, S.

Here is an example:

Mathematician

*Recently, Zubin Ghosh made headlines when he was recognized to have solved the Hilbert Conjecture, postulated a hundred years ago. Ghosh posted his work on the Internet rather than submit it to established journals. In fact, **he has no job, let alone a university position**; he lives alone and has refused all acclaim. In reporting on Ghosh, the press unfortunately has reinforced the popular view that mathematicians are antisocial loners. **But mathematicians clearly form a tightly knit community**, frequently collaborating on important efforts; indeed, teams of researchers are working together to extend Ghosh's findings.*

In the argument above, the two portions in boldface play which of the following roles?

- (A) The first is an observation the author makes to illustrate a social pattern; the second is a generalization of that pattern.
- (B) The first is evidence in favor of the popular view expressed in the argument; the second is a brief restatement of that view.
- (C) The first is an example of a generalization that the author contradicts; the second is a **reiteration** of that generalization.
- (D) The first is a counterexample to a generalization that the author asserts; the second is that generalization.
- (E) The first is a judgment that counters the primary assertion expressed in the argument; the second is a circumstance on which that judgment is based.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The boldface font in the argument and the word “role” in the question stem indicate that this is an Analyze the Argument Structure question.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The author's conclusion is that mathematicians actually form a tightly knit community. The counterargument is that mathematicians are antisocial loners. Now, label each statement as either Conclusion (C), Support (S), or Weaken / Something Else (W).

The first boldface represents an example that supports the counterargument; label this statement W.

The second boldface represents the author's conclusion, C.

Step 3: State the Goal

You're looking for an answer that describes the first statement as a W and the second statement as a C. Note that these two statements are on opposite sides of the fence (the first goes with the counterargument and the second goes with the author's argument).

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) This answer says that the author uses the first statement to illustrate a pattern. On the contrary, the author believes that the pattern described by the counterargument is not valid. Eliminate answer (A).

(B) The first portion of this answer is accurate: the first statement does support the popular view, which goes against the view held by the author. The second half of this answer, though, is inaccurate. The second statement does not restate the popular view; rather, it provides the author's opposing view. Eliminate answer (B).

(C) The first portion of this answer is accurate: the first statement does support an idea that the author contradicts. The second statement, though, is not "that generalization," or the popular view. Rather, the second statement reflects the author's opposing point of view. Eliminate answer (C).

Note that answers (A), (B), and (C) all describe the two statements as being on the same side of the fence. That's not what you want! You're looking for the two statements to be on opposite sides of the fence.

(D) CORRECT. The author does assert something and the first statement does go against that assertion; the first half of this answer is accurate. The second half of this choice refers to "that generalization," or the generalization that the author asserts. The author asserts his own conclusion, so the second half of this answer is also accurate. Leave this answer in.

(E) The first does counter the author's assertion, or conclusion, though note that this answer choice describes the first statement as a "judgment." It is not a judgment; rather, it's a fact or example. The

second half of the choice says that the second boldface statement is based on the first statement; in fact, the second statement goes against the first one. Eliminate answer (E).

The correct answer is **(D)**.

Alternative Approach

If you have trouble with the above approach, or you hit a very confusing or convoluted argument, you can try an alternative method for steps 2 through 4 that should help you to eliminate some answers (though you may not be able to eliminate all four wrong answers).

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Read the passage and label each boldface statement as one of the following:

(F) Fact (a verifiable statement)

(O) Opinion (a minor claim, or an opinion of someone other than the author)

(C) Conclusion (the major claim of the author)

In the case of the problem above, the first statement represents a Fact while the second statement represents the Conclusion.

Step 3: State the Goal

You're looking for F followed by C.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

When working through the answers, look for words that can indicate the type of statement: (F) Fact = "evidence" "circumstance" "finding" (O) Opinion = "judgment" "claim" "position" (taken by someone else) (C) Conclusion = "position" (taken by the argument) "assertion" (of the author)

Do *not* dive very deeply into the content of the answer choices; rather, focus on moving pretty quickly and eliminating answer choices that do not match the Fact/Opinion/Conclusion classification. In the case of the above problem, you can confidently eliminate answer (E) because a judgment is not the same thing as a fact. Answer (A) is questionable; an observation can be a fact, but facts are more often described as evidence or examples. If you had to guess, you probably would not guess (A) on this one.

With this alternate method, you can avoid getting bogged down in the messy details and make a good guess without spending too much time, but you might not be able to eliminate all of the wrong answers.

If you can figure out how to categorize only one of the two boldface statements, then assess the corresponding half of the answer choices. Eliminate whatever answer choices you can, choose immediately from among the remaining answer choices, and move on.

4. Draw a Conclusion (Inference)

Draw a Conclusion questions are very similar to Inference questions for regular Reading Comprehension passages. You need to find the answer that logically follows, or must be true, based upon the information given in the argument.

It's critical to make a distinction between conclusions given in an argument and conclusions (or inferences) given in answer choices. **When an ASP provides a conclusion for you in the argument itself, that conclusion is pretty faulty. It's an arguable statement, or claim, that is only partially supported by the premises of the argument, and you can find lots of gaps in the argument.**

By contrast, if you are asked to draw a conclusion or to infer something yourself, that conclusion must be able to be *proven* from the given premises. The conclusion should not require you to make any additional assumptions at all, even tiny ones. **The correct answer to a *Draw a Conclusion* question is not a claim or an arguable statement. Rather, the correct answer *must* be true based directly and only upon the information given in the argument.**

Step 1: Identify the Question Type.

The question stem may appear in a number of forms:

- If the statements above are true, which of the following must be true?
- Which of the following conclusions can best be drawn from the information above?
- The statements above, if true, best support which of the following assertions?
- Which of the following can properly be inferred from the statement above?
- (A full argument) Students typically study five days a week. Therefore,

The last is an example of a Fill-in-the-Blank format. The word “therefore” signals that the correct answer is the conclusion of the argument.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Draw a Conclusion questions do not contain a conclusion in the argument. The argument will contain only premises and these premises will be primarily factual (though some might be more on the opinion or claim side). As with the other question types, jot down some light notes. If you can brainstorm any

possible conclusions, do so—but remember that you might not think of actually what the correct answer will say.

Consider the following simplified example:

Samantha and Isabel are the only two people in the dining room. They are both women.

What can be safely inferred from these facts? That is, what absolutely *must* be true as a result?

Must be true: *There are no men in the dining room.*

This conclusion may not seem very meaningful or important in a real-world sense, but this is what the correct answer to a Draw a Conclusion question is like. **Avoid grand conclusions in these problems. A correct answer might simply restate one or more of the premises, using synonyms. Alternatively, a correct answer might be a mathematical or logical deduction.**

Step 3: State the Goal

You need to find the answer choice that must be true **given** some or all of the information found in the argument. (Note that the correct answer is not required to use *all* of the given information.)

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

Eliminate any answers that require additional assumptions or outside information in order to be true. The wrong answers will all include something that doesn't have to be true.

Consider the following example:

In certain congested urban areas, commuters who use public transportation options, such as trains and subways, spend approximately 25 percent less time in transit, on average, to reach their destinations than commuters who travel by car. Even individuals who drive their entire commute in carpool lanes, which are typically the least congested sections of roadways, still spend more time, on average, than commuters who use trains and subways.

The statements above, if true, best support which of the following assertions about commuting in the congested urban areas mentioned above?

- (A) Waiting in traffic accounts for approximately 25 percent of the commuting time for individuals who drive to their destinations.
- (B) Walking between a subway or train station and one's final destination does not, on average, take longer than walking between one's car and one's final destination.
- (C) Using carpool lanes does not, on average, reduce driving time by more than 25 percent.
- (D) Individuals who commute via public buses spend approximately 25 percent more time in transit than those who commute using public trains or subways.

(E) Subways and trains are available in the majority of congested urban areas.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The word “assertion” coupled with the fact that the assertion is in the answer choices indicates that this is a Draw a Conclusion/Inference question.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

One set of notes might look like this:

Pub trans (trn, sub): ~25% < t than ppl using car

Even true for carpool

Step 3: State the Goal

You're looking for something that must be true using at least some of the presented information. It might be tempting to conclude that people “should” use public transportation—but note that this doesn't have to be true. Don't introduce opinions or real-world logic.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) While waiting in traffic probably does account for *some* of the commuting time, there's no reason why it must account for approximately 25% of that time. This might be an appropriate answer for a Strengthen question, but not for an Inference question. Eliminate answer (A).

(B) Careful! This one is tempting initially because it might cause someone to think, “Oh, wait, did they account for the time it takes to get from the subway to work or your house? Maybe this is it!” The difficulty here is that this length of time does not have to be similar to the length of time it takes to walk from the car to the final destination. The argument compares the overall commute time, not the time for smaller pieces of the commute. Eliminate answer (B).

(C) The argument does mention that “even” when someone uses a carpool lane, which should save time, it's still faster to take public transportation. Given that info, if public transportation also takes about 25% less time than using a car, then it actually must be the case that using a carpool lane does not (on average) save more than 25% of car commuting time. If it did, then carpooling might actually be faster than taking public transportation. Leave this answer in.

(D) The argument does not make a comparison between different forms of public transportation. Rather, it compares all of public transportation to all commuting by car. Eliminate answer (D).

(E) Tricky! Again, this one might make someone think, “Oh, they're assuming that public transportation is actually available!” Note first that this argument is assuming nothing at all—it does not contain a conclusion and, by definition, only arguments containing conclusions also have assumptions. Next, the argument provides actual data for areas that do have public transportation, so that's the only concern. Finally, the argument never specifies that these areas must have subways and trains, specifically (buses are also public transportation), nor does it specify that a “majority” of these areas have public transportation. In fact, the argument refers only to “certain congested urban areas.”

The correct answer is (C). Note that the correct answer addressed only one narrow part of the situation. It did not assume anything or go at all beyond the scope of the information given in the argument.

Wrong Answer Choice Types

As with the earlier question types, knowing the common wrong answer types will help when you get stuck between two choices.

1. Out of Scope: For Draw a Conclusion questions, “Out of Scope” answers require you to assume at least one piece of information not explicitly presented in the argument. For example, answer choice (A) in the above example goes beyond the scope of the argument by bringing in waiting time.

A subset of Out of Scope answers will contain information that seems “**Real-World Plausible.**” In other words, this information is very plausible, or likely to be true in the real world. For example, in answer (D) above, it seems reasonable that buses would take longer than subways or trains—after all, buses share the road with cars.

A Real-World Plausible answer may even contain what people would reasonably surmise to be true in an article or conversation about the general topic. The Draw a Conclusion question type, however, requires you to find something that must be true according to the given premises, not something that could be true or merely sounds reasonable. If you cannot say that the premises prove an answer choice to be true, eliminate that answer choice. Do not bring external knowledge into the picture on Draw a Conclusion questions.

2. Wrong Direction: “Wrong Direction” answers might provide a conclusion that is the opposite of what the argument says. For example, a Wrong Direction answer choice for the argument above could just be the opposite of the correct answer:

*Using carpool lanes **does**, on average, reduce driving time by more than 25%.*

This statement actually asserts the opposite of what the premises together imply, but because it brings up some of the issues one might expect to see, it would be easy to misread and then choose this choice.

5. Resolve a Paradox

This question type poses two seemingly contradictory premises and asks you to find the answer choice that best reconciles them.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The question will often, though not always, indicate what the discrepancy is or provide a keyword pointing to the discrepancy in the argument. For example:

Which of the following statements, if true, would best explain the sudden drop in temperature?

Which of the following, if true, most helps to resolve the paradox described above?

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Like Draw a Conclusion passages, Paradox passages do not contain a conclusion in the argument. The argument will contain only premises and these premises will be primarily factual (though some might be more on the opinion or claim side). Jot down some light notes and articulate the paradox to yourself.

Consider the following simplified example:

According to researchers, low dosages of aspirin taken daily can significantly reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke. Yet doctors have stopped recommending daily aspirin for most patients.

What? That doesn't make any sense! If aspirin is beneficial, why wouldn't doctors recommend it for patients?

There must be some other reason why they wouldn't want patients to take aspirin. Perhaps there are some other side effects that are worse than the possible benefits. The correct answer will contain some new information that helps to explain why the doctors no longer recommend daily aspirin. If you insert the correct answer into the argument, someone who reads it would then say, "Oh, I see! Now it makes sense why they've stopped recommending aspirin."

Step 3: State the Goal

Your goal is to find an answer that explains why the surprising facts given in the argument are not so paradoxical after all. The correct answer should resolve whatever paradox caused you to think, "Wait, that doesn't make sense!"

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

As with all ASPs, read through each answer. Eliminate choices that do not serve to explain or resolve the paradox presented in the argument.

Consider the following example:

In a recent poll, 71% of respondents reported that they cast votes in the most recent national election. Voting records show, however, that only 60% of eligible voters actually voted in that election.

Which of the following pieces of evidence, if true, would provide the best explanation for the discrepancy?

- (A) The margin of error for the survey was plus or minus five percentage points.
- (B) Fifteen percent of the survey's respondents were living overseas at the time of the election.
- (C) Prior research has shown that people who actually do vote are also more likely to respond to polls than those who do not vote.
- (D) Some people who intend to vote are prevented from doing so by last-minute conflicts on election day or other complications.
- (E) Polls about voting behavior typically have margins of error within plus or minus three percentage points.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The word “discrepancy” in the question stem indicates that this is a Resolve the Paradox question.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Poll: 71% of ppl said they voted

Rec: 60% of eligible voters voted

Step 3: State the Goal

The goal is to find something that resolves the apparent discrepancy in these two numbers. First, the people who responded to the poll might not be the same group of people who were eligible to vote. Alternatively, there might be a reason why people said they voted when they actually didn't. Possibly there is some other reason to explain what happened.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right ↓

(A) This choice begins promisingly by discussing a margin of error. However, a margin of error of 5 percentage points will not close the 11 percentage point gap between the two statistics in the argument. Eliminate answer (A).

(B) Fifteen percent is larger than the 11-point discrepancy in the argument. The percentage, however, applies to the percentage of respondents living overseas at the time of the election. If absentee ballots are allowed, then these people could still have voted. This choice doesn't definitively resolve the paradox. Eliminate (B).

(C) If people who do vote are also more likely to respond to polls, then those people are overrepresented in the polling results. That is, they represent a greater proportion of the people answering the poll than they do of the overall population; this explains why a greater percentage of poll respondents said they had voted. Keep this answer in.

(D) This is probably true, but it does not explain the discrepancy in the statistics presented in the argument. The 60% figure represents people who actually did vote, not those who intended to vote but didn't.

(E) This choice does not explain the discrepancy in the statistics presented in the argument; this poll might not have the same margin of error of "typical" polls. Even if you do adjust for a 3% margin of error, 11% still represents a substantial gap.

Wrong Answer Choice Types

1. Out of Scope

A common wrong answer type will discuss something that is not at issue in the paradox, such as answer (D) in the above example. The people who intended to vote but didn't are not at issue in the argument.

Alternatively, this type might address one of the premises but not actually address the discrepancy itself between the two premises. Choices (A) and (B) fall into this category.

2. Wrong Direction

A choice of this type will support the fact that the discrepancy exists rather than explain why there is not actually a discrepancy after all. Choice (E) in the above example falls into this category: a 3-percentage-point margin of error supports the idea that an 11-percentage-point gap represents a discrepancy. Note that you are not supposed to explain why the apparent discrepancy exists. Rather, you must explain why the apparent discrepancy is not a real discrepancy after all.

Exercise:

Use the four-step process taught for all ASPs, as well as any specific techniques recommended for that question type (e.g., the S-W-Slash chart). Consider all five answer choices before you make your final decision!

1. John was flying from San Francisco to New York with a connecting flight in Chicago on the same airline. Chicago's airport is one of the largest in the world, consisting of several small stand-alone terminals connected by trams. John's plane arrived on time. John was positive he would make his connecting flight 30 minutes later because _____.

Which of the following most logically completes the argument above?

- (A) John's airline is known for always being on time
- (B) a number of other passengers on John's first flight were also scheduled to take John's connecting flight
- (C) at the airport in Chicago, airlines always fly into and out of the same terminal
- (D) John knew there was another flight to New York scheduled for one hour after the connecting flight he was scheduled to take
- (E) the airline generally closes the doors of a particular flight 10 minutes before it is scheduled to take off

Solution

The solution key sometimes shows sample notes to illustrate how they might look and to help you brainstorm abbreviations and other note-taking methods.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The blank in this Fill-in-the-Blank question is preceded by the word because, most commonly signaling a Strengthen question, but you'll need to read the argument to be sure. The beginning of that sentence contains the conclusion, so this is indeed a Strengthen question.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The Chicago airport is busy and very large, consisting of several small stand-alone terminals. Despite this, John thinks he will make his connecting flight.

Step 3: State the Goal

The correct answer choice will make it a little more likely that John's conclusion is valid. The information needs to support the idea that he'll make the connecting flight despite the size of the airport.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) Slash. This is a general observation about the timeliness of John's airline, but it does not provide any new information—the argument already states that John's particular flight arrived on time. The fact that his connecting flight will probably depart on time might even weaken the argument.

(B) Slash. Airlines have been known to delay flights in order to ensure that a large number of passengers can make the connection, but you should not have to make an additional assumption in order to say that this choice strengthens the given conclusion.

(C) **CORRECT.** Strengthen. John will not have to take a tram to another terminal in order to reach his connecting flight. The premises describe the individual terminals as “small.” If he can walk to his next flight in a small terminal, then 30 minutes is likely enough time to make the connection.

(D) Slash. This choice is out of scope. The argument concludes that John will make his current flight; the following flight has no bearing on John's ability to catch the flight on which he is currently booked.

(E) Slash/weaken. If anything, this choice weakens the idea that John will catch the connecting flight by shortening the length of time he has to get to the second flight's gate. He now has only 20 minutes, not 30.

2. Media Critic: Network executives have alleged that television viewership is decreasing due to the availability of television programs on other platforms, such as the internet, video-on-demand, and mobile devices. These executives claim that **declining viewership will cause advertising revenue to fall so far that networks will be unable to spend the large sums necessary to produce programs of the quality now available.** That development, in turn, will lead to a dearth of programming for the very devices that cannibalized television's audience. However, technology executives point to research that indicates that **users of these platforms increase the number of hours per week that they watch television** because they are exposed to new programs and promotional spots through these alternate platforms. This analysis demonstrates that networks can actually increase their revenue through higher advertising rates, due to larger audiences lured to television through other media.

The portions in boldface play which of the following roles in the media critic's argument?

- (A) The first is an inevitable trend that weighs against the critic's claim; the second is that claim.
- (B) The first is a prediction that is challenged by the argument; the second is a finding upon which the argument depends.
- (C) The first clarifies the reasoning behind the critic's claim; the second demonstrates why that claim is flawed. (D) The first acknowledges a position that the technology executives accept as true; the second is a consequence of that position.
- (E) The first opposes the critic's claim through an analogy; the second outlines a scenario in which that claim will not hold.

Solution

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The boldface font indicates that this is an Analyze the Argument question. Note that the question stem references the “media critic's argument”—this is the conclusion you want.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The first three sentences describe the network executives’ argument: alternate viewing platforms will cause fewer people to watch TV, resulting in lower advertising revenues. The networks then won't have enough money to continue producing high-quality programming, so everyone will lose, even the people who are watching on alternate viewing platforms. The fourth sentence begins with the word “however.” The argument goes on to indicate that technology executives have research that contradicts the network executives’ view. The media critic then concludes that the networks can actually *increase* their advertising revenues. The first boldface portion opposes this position by predicting smaller audiences; label it W. The second boldface lends support to the critic's conclusion by citing evidence that alternate media platforms lead their users to watch more television; label this one S.

Step 3: State the Goal

The correct answer will first describe a W and then a S.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) The first boldface statement does weigh against the critic's claim, but it is a prediction, rather than an inevitable trend. The second boldface statement is a premise supporting the claim; it is not the conclusion itself.

(B) CORRECT. The critic's conclusion about a potential increase in network revenue is contrary to the first boldface statement's prediction about shrinking audiences and falling revenue. Also, the critic's

argument does depend upon the second boldface statement's assertion that users of alternate devices will actually watch more hours of television.

(C) The first boldface statement opposes the critic's claim, rather than clarifies it. The second boldface statement is used to support the critic's claim; it does not indicate that the critic's claim is flawed.

(D) The argument does not indicate whether the technology executives accept or deny the prediction of the network executives. (Given, though, that the technology executives think that people will watch more television, not less, it doesn't seem likely that the technology executives will agree with the network executives.) The second boldface statement contradicts the first one; it does not follow as a consequence.

(E) The first boldface statement offers a prediction, not an analogy. The second boldface statement is in agreement with, not in opposition to, the critic's claim.

3. In the last year, real estate prices, such as those for houses and condominiums, have gone up an average of 7% in the city of Galway but only 2% in the town of Tuam. On the other hand, average rents for apartments have risen 8% in Tuam over the last year, but only 4% in Galway.

Which of the following is an inference that can be reasonably drawn from the premises given above?

(A) In the last year, the ratio of average apartment rents to average real estate prices has increased in Tuam but fallen in Galway.

(B) Tuam has experienced a greater shift in demand toward the rental market than Galway has.

(C) It has become easier for Galway real estate to be bought and sold, whereas it has become easier for Tuam real estate to be rented.

(D) The supply of rental apartment units has decreased more in Tuam than in Galway.

(E) The average amount spent on housing is higher in Galway than it is in Tuam.

Solution

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The word "inference" indicates that this is a Draw a Conclusion/Inference question. Expect to see only premises in the argument.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

One set of notes might look like this: Past yr: RE \$ > 7% in G but 2% in T Avg rent > 4% in G but 8% in T

Notice two things. First, the argument gives only percentages, not real numbers; you can't conclude

anything that involves real numbers, including where rents or home prices are higher. Second, rents are increasing at a faster rate in Tuam but home prices are increasing at a faster rate in Galway.

Step 3: State the Goal

What must be true according to the given information?

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) CORRECT. While it isn't possible to conclude anything about real numbers, you can use percentages to determine something about ratios. In Tuam, rents have gone up at a faster rate (8%) than have real estate prices (2%). Thus, the ratio of average rents to average real estate prices must have grown in that city—the numerator has grown faster than the denominator. In contrast, Galway rents have gone up at a slower rate (4%) than real estate prices (7%). Thus, the ratio of average rents to average real estate prices has actually decreased.

(B) It is not necessarily true that Tuam has experienced a greater shift in demand away from buying and toward the rental market; that is only one possible explanation. For instance, the larger increase in Tuam rents could be explained by a reduction in the supply of rental units in Tuam.

(C) This might be true but does not have to be. The premises do not indicate whether Galway real estate is easier or harder to be bought and sold, or whether Tuam real estate is easier or harder to be rented. The premises simply indicate the growth in prices and rents.

(D) It is not necessarily true that the supply of rental units has decreased more in Tuam than in Galway. For instance, there could be a sudden growth in demand in Tuam for rental units (e.g., because of an influx of young singles who are eager to rent), causing rents to increase more rapidly.

(E) The premises indicate nothing about the actual amounts of money spent in the two towns. You are given only percentage growth rates.

4. Due to the increase in traffic accidents caused by deer in the state, the governor last year reintroduced a longer deer hunting season to encourage recreational hunting of the animals. The governor expected the longer hunting season to decrease the number of deer and therefore decrease the number of accidents. However, this year the number of accidents caused by deer has increased substantially since the reintroduction of the longer deer hunting season.

Which of the following, if true, would best explain the increase in traffic accidents caused by deer?

- (A) Many recreational hunters hunt only once or twice per hunting season, regardless of the length of the season.
- (B) The deer in the state have become accustomed to living in close proximity to humans and are often easy prey for hunters as a result.
- (C) Most automobile accidents involving deer result from cars swerving to avoid deer, and leave the deer in question unharmed.
- (D) The number of drivers in the state has been gradually increasing over the past several years.
- (E) A heavily used new highway was recently built directly through the state's largest forest, which is the primary habitat of the state's deer population.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The words “explain” and “if true” signal that this is a Resolve a Paradox question. Look for the paradox!

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Attempting to decrease the number of deer in his state, a governor extended the recreational hunting season. However, since the reintroduction of the longer hunting season, the number of accidents caused by deer has not declined—instead, it has increased substantially.

Step 3: State the Goal

You need to find the answer choice that explains why the accidents have increased rather than decreased as expected. Perhaps the traffic accidents weren't caused by deer in the first place. Perhaps the accidents are caused by deer fleeing the hunters, in which case a longer hunting season would probably lead to more accidents.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

- (A) If many hunters hunt once or twice per hunting season regardless of the length of the season, then a longer hunting season wouldn't make a difference to the situation. However, this would not explain the observed *increase* in accidents.
- (B) If the deer are “easy prey,” then the governor's extension of the hunting season should be *effective* in reducing the deer overpopulation. This does not explain the increase in traffic accidents.
- (C) Careful! This does explain how accidents occur but does not explain why there are more accidents this year, after the governor put in place a plan designed to reduce accidents.

(D) This answer choice would contribute to an explanation of a gradual increase in traffic accidents over the last several years. However, it does not explain a substantial increase in accidents from just last year to this year. Both the extent of the increase and the time frame serve to make this answer choice an unsatisfactory explanation of the observed rise in accidents.

(E) CORRECT. A new highway system recently built directly through the primary habitat of the state's deer population provides a specific explanation as to why the number of accidents involving deer has increased: more people are driving in the area where deer live. It also explains the time frame of the increase.

5. Political Analyst: After a coalition of states operating under a repressive regime collapsed, some hoped that freedom would bolster the population of the largest state, Algan, but as a result of dislocation and insecurity, the Algan population continues to dwindle at the rate of 700,000 a year. The government proposes to address the problem with a wide range of financial incentives, along with investments in improved health care, road safety, and the like. These are positive measures, but **they have been tried before, to little avail.** A better plan to reverse the population decline is to improve Algan's governance in both the public and the private sphere. **If a greater part of the population participated in important decisions and shared in Algan's wealth, then larger families would result.** In addition, if corruption and greed among the elite were curbed, public health would improve, and average life expectancy would increase.

The two boldfaced statements serve what function in the argument above?

- (A) The first is the main point of the analyst's argument; the second is a premise that supports the first.
- (B) The first is a premise that undermines an alternative to the analyst's proposal; the second is a premise that supports the analyst's main claim.
- (C) The first is a premise that contradicts the main point made by the analyst; the second is the main point of the argument.
- (D) The first is a premise that supports a proposal; the second is that proposal.
- (E) The first is a conclusion that the argument endorses; the second is a premise that opposes that conclusion.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The bold font indicates that this is an Analyze the Argument Structure question. Expect two opposing points of view in the argument. Use the CSW or FCO technique to label the two boldface statements.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The analyst recounts a proposal by the Algan government to increase the Algan population. The analyst acknowledges that the proposal contains good ideas but dismisses the plan with the implication that, because the measures have not worked in the past, they will not work now. The analyst then offers a “better plan” (the analyst's conclusion) and offers two premises (the two if-then statements) in support of this better plan.

Step 3: State the Goal

The first boldface statement dismisses the government's plan; as such, it is in support of the analyst's conclusion. Label it with an S. The second boldface directly supports the analyst's proposal; it is also an S.

Step 3: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) The first statement supports the analyst's proposal by undermining the government's plan; it is not the conclusion of the argument. The second statement is a premise in support of the argument's proposal, not in support of the first statement.

(B) CORRECT. The first statement does undermine the alternative proposal made by the government. The second statement does support the analyst's conclusion by showing one way in which better governance might lead to a population increase.

(C) The first statement does not contradict the analyst's conclusion; rather, it undermines the government proposal. The second statement is not the analyst's conclusion; rather, it supports the conclusion.

(D) The first statement only indirectly supports the analyst's proposal by showing that the government's plan is less likely to succeed. The second statement is not a proposal at all; rather, it is support for the analyst's proposal.

(E) The first statement is not a conclusion at all, but a premise in support of the analyst's conclusion. The second statement is a premise, but it does not oppose either the first statement or the analyst's conclusion; rather, it is in support of the conclusion.

6. Displayco is marketing a holographic display to supermarkets that shows three-dimensional images of certain packaged goods in the aisles. Displayco's marketing literature states that patrons at supermarkets will be strongly attracted to goods that are promoted in this way, resulting in higher profits for the supermarkets that purchase the displays. Consumer advocates, however, feel that the

displays will be intrusive to supermarket patrons and may even increase minor accidents involving shopping carts.

Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the position of the consumer advocates?

- (A) The holographic displays are expensive to install and maintain.
- (B) Many other venues, including shopping malls, are considering adopting holographic displays.
- (C) Accidents in supermarkets that are serious enough to cause injury are rare.
- (D) Supermarkets tend to be low-margin businesses that struggle to achieve profitability.
- (E) Studies in test markets have shown that supermarket patrons quickly become accustomed to holographic displays.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The words “weaken” and “if true” indicate that this is a Weaken the Conclusion question. Find the conclusion and look for an answer that makes this conclusion at least a little less likely to be valid. Note that the question stem specifically references the conclusion of the “consumer advocates.”

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

One set of notes might look like this: D: 3D goods → cust want → > profits CA: bad, accident The company, Displayco, points out the potential benefits of its new technology: increased profits for the stores. The advocates, though, point out a possible negative effect: shopping cart accidents. Note that the advocates don't deny that stores will increase their profits; rather, they offer other reasons for avoiding use of the technology. At the least, then, the advocates assume their concerns outweigh the possible benefits of increased profits.

Step 3: State the Goal

Find an answer that makes the advocates' conclusion at least a little less likely to be valid. Use the S/W/slash technique to eliminate answers.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) Slash/Strengthen. This answer choice may weaken Displayco's claim that the stores will have better profits; if anything, this would strengthen the advocates' argument. This choice does not influence whether patrons will find the displays intrusive and distracting.

(B) Slash. The potential adoption of holographic displays by other venues does not impact the concerns of consumer advocates that the displays will be intrusive and distracting. It could be the case that holographic displays will be intrusive and distracting in all of these other venues as well. Alternatively,

the argument might not apply to other venues where there might not be potential for minor shopping cart accidents.

(C) Slash. One might think that this answer choice would weaken the consumer advocates' argument. However, the consumer advocates' argument did not claim that the minor accidents would result in injury. Minor accidents can be bothersome to patrons without causing injury.

(D) Slash. While this choice might help Displayco to convince supermarkets to use its product, you were asked to weaken the consumer advocates' concerns. The struggles of supermarkets to achieve profitability is not relevant to the consumer advocates' specific concerns.

(E) CORRECT. If studies in test markets have shown that patrons quickly become accustomed to holographic displays, then patrons are much less likely to find the displays intrusive after an initial adjustment period. Further, if patrons become used to the displays, the displays are less likely to increase the frequency of minor accidents involving shopping carts. Note that this choice does not completely dismiss the advocates' concerns; rather, the concerns are diminished just a little bit.

7. Brand X designs and builds custom sneakers, one sneaker at a time. It recently announced plans to sell "The Gold Standard," a sneaker that will cost five times more to manufacture than any other sneaker that has ever been created.

Which of the following, if true, most supports the prediction that The Gold Standard shoe line will be profitable?

(A) Because of its reputation as an original and exclusive sneaker, The Gold Standard will be favored by urban hipsters willing to pay exceptionally high prices in order to stand out.

(B) Of the last four new sneakers that Brand X has released, three have sold at a rate that was higher than projected.

(C) A rival brand recently declared bankruptcy and ceased manufacturing shoes.

(D) The market for The Gold Standard will not be more limited than the market for other Brand X shoes.

(E) The Gold Standard is made using canvas that is more than five times the cost of the canvas used in most sneakers.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The question stem asks you to "support" a particular "prediction"; this is a Strengthen the Conclusion question type.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The conclusion is located in the question stem: The Gold Standard shoe line will be profitable. The passage states only that the costs of manufacturing this shoe are exceptionally high. Profit equals revenue minus cost. If costs are exceptionally high, the only way a profit can be made is if revenue is also exceptionally high.

Step 3: State the Goal

Find an answer that makes the conclusion at least a little more likely to be valid. Keep an eye out for information about revenue, as that may be the assumption that is addressed in the correct answer.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) CORRECT. Strengthen. If some potential customers are willing to pay exceptionally high prices, then the exceptionally high costs might be offset enough for the shoe line to be profitable. (Note that this answer doesn't indicate that the new shoe line definitely will be profitable, only that it is a little more likely to be.)

(B) Slash. A higher sales rate than projected does not actually give you any information about profitability. In any case, the results of past releases are not necessarily indicative of the case at hand.

(C) Slash. One can argue that this is good for Brand X, in that it will mean that there is one less competitor, or that this is bad for Brand X, in that it is indicative of a sagging sneaker market. In any case, there is no direct connection between this rival brand and the potential profitability of The Gold Standard.

(D) Slash. You have been told nothing that connects the market to profitability. The size of the market does not necessarily have any bearing on profitability.

(E) Slash/Weaken. This is perhaps one reason why manufacturing costs are so high, but you already knew the costs were high from the argument. If anything, this piece of information weakens the conclusion by providing more information about the high costs.

8. With information readily available on the internet, consumers now often enter the automobile retail environment with certain models and detailed specifications in mind. In response to this trend, CarStore has decided to move toward a less aggressive sales approach. Despite the fact that members of its sales personnel have an average of 10 years of experience each, CarStore has implemented a mandatory training program for all sales personnel, *because* _____.

- (A) the sales personnel in CarStore have historically specialized in aggressively selling automobiles and add-on features
- (B) the sales personnel in CarStore do not themselves use the internet often for their own purposes
- (C) CarStore has found that most consumers do not mind negotiating over price
- (D) information found on the internet often does not reflect sales promotions at individual retail locations
- (E) several retailers that compete directly with CarStore have adopted “customer-centered” sales approaches.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The word “because” just before the blank signals a possible Strengthen question, but you'll have to read the argument to be sure. The “Despite X, CarStore has implemented Y, because [answer]” structure indicates that this is actually a somewhat less common type: Resolve a Paradox.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The argument describes CarStore's decision to move toward a less aggressive sales approach in response to consumers coming into the stores with all kinds of information they have already found on the internet. Surprisingly, despite the fact that its sales personnel are very experienced, CarStore is implementing a mandatory training program. Why?

Step 3: State the Goal

Find an answer that explains why CarStore would require its very experienced sales team to go through a mandatory training program.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right.

(A) CORRECT. If the sales personnel at CarStore have historically specialized in aggressive sales tactics and promoting add-on features, but CarStore wants to move to a less aggressive approach, then the sales team will need to learn new sales tactics. This explains the need for a mandatory retraining program.

(B) Though it may be helpful for the sales personnel of CarStore to use the internet to research car details so that they can relate to many of their customers, this choice refers to the sales team using the internet to research their own purchases, not necessarily for cars. The mandatory training must have something to do with the job of selling cars, so this choice is irrelevant to the given situation.

(C) The fact that consumers do not mind negotiating over price, if true, suggests that a less aggressive sales approach may not be necessary. This does not fit logically with the overall argument about CarStore adopting a new, less aggressive sales approach.

(D) The fact that information gained from the internet may not be exhaustive or up-to-date is irrelevant to the argument, which centers on the need for training salespeople in a new sales approach. Also, experienced salespeople would presumably know about location-specific sales promotions.

(E) What is a “customer-centered” sales approach? Perhaps CarStore already does this. This choice seems to imply that competitors are already using the less-aggressive approach, in which case perhaps CarStore needs to retrain its employees in order to stay competitive, but there is really no way to tell what “customer-centered” actually means.

9. Government restrictions have severely limited the amount of stem cell research that companies in the United States can conduct. Because of these restrictions, many U.S.-based scientists who specialize in the field of stem cell research have signed long-term contracts to work for foreignbased companies. Recently, the U.S. government has proposed lifting all restrictions on stem cell research.

Which of the following statements can most properly be inferred from the information above?

(A) Some foreign-based companies that conduct stem cell research work under fewer restrictions than some U.S.-based companies do.

(B) Because U.S.-based scientists are under long-term contracts to foreign-based companies, there will be a significant influx of foreign professionals into the United States.

(C) In all parts of the world, stem cell research is dependent on the financial backing of local government.

(D) In the near future, U.S.-based companies will no longer be at the forefront of stem cell research.

(E) If restrictions on stem cell research are lifted, many of the U.S.-based scientists will break their contracts and return to U.S.-based companies.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The word “inferred” indicates that this is a Draw a Conclusion/Inference question type. There won't be a conclusion in the argument.

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

Two things have already occurred: the U.S. government has restricted stem cell research for companies in the U.S. As a result, U.S.-based scientists in this field have chosen to work instead for foreign-based companies. One thing has been proposed: the U.S. government is considering lifting the restrictions on this type of research.

(A) CORRECT. If U.S.-based scientists signed contracts with foreign-based companies *specifically because* of government restrictions in the U.S., then the new companies with which these scientists signed must operate under fewer restrictions. Therefore, at least some foreign companies must work under fewer restrictions than some American companies do.

(B) Under the current terms, stem cell research is restricted for everybody in the U.S., so foreign professionals in this field would not necessarily want to come to the U.S. While it is possible that once the restrictions are lifted, American companies will want to hire more scientists and will seek them overseas, the government has only proposed to lift the restrictions; it hasn't actually done so.

(C) This passage is about government restrictions in the U.S.; financial backing in particular is out of the scope of the argument.

(D) You are not given any information regarding America's current or future position in terms of stem cell research. Though government restrictions and scientists switching companies could be issues related to a company's prosperity, you are given no information about how these directly affect America's position.

(E) Though this could happen, it is impossible to conclude for certain that it will happen.

10. Traditionally, public school instructors have been compensated according to seniority. Recently, the existing salary system has been increasingly criticized as an approach to compensation that rewards lackadaisical teaching and punishes motivated, highly qualified instruction. Instead, educational experts argue that, to retain exceptional teachers and maintain quality instruction, teachers should receive salaries or bonuses based on performance rather than seniority.

Which of the following, if true, most weakens the conclusion of the educational experts?

(A) Some teachers express that financial compensation is not the only factor contributing to job satisfaction and teaching performance.

(B) School districts will develop their own unique compensation structures that may differ greatly from those of other school districts.

(C) Upon leaving the teaching profession, many young, effective teachers cite a lack of opportunity for more rapid financial advancement as a primary factor in the decision to change careers.

(D) A merit-based system that bases compensation on teacher performance reduces collaboration, which is an integral component of quality instruction.

(E) In school districts that have implemented pay for performance compensation structures, standardized test scores have dramatically increased.

Step 1: Identify the Question Type

The words “weaken” and “if true” indicate that this is a Weaken the Conclusion question. Look for the conclusion made by the “educational experts.”

Step 2: Deconstruct the Argument

The argument is concerned with how public school teachers are compensated. According to the argument, educational experts claim that a system of teacher compensation based on performance rather than seniority would help to retain exceptional teachers and maintain quality instruction. What are the experts assuming? Can “performance” actually be measured in a meaningful way? Should it be based on how much the students like the teacher? A fun but incompetent teacher might be beloved by students. A challenging teacher might receive lower teacher ratings even though his students learn more.

Step 3: State the Goal

The correct answer to this Weaken question will make the experts’ conclusion at least a little less likely to be valid.

Step 4: Work from Wrong to Right

(A) Slash. The fact that other factors also contribute to job satisfaction and teaching performance neither weakens nor strengthens this argument. Either way, the teachers are getting paid; the issue is whether that pay should be based on performance or seniority.

(B) Slash. Nothing in the argument indicates that one universal system of compensation must be adopted in order to implement this plan. It is very possible that several effective models of performance-based pay could be developed and implemented successfully.

(C) Strengthen. This choice indicates that many young, effective teachers are extremely frustrated by the traditional pay structure, in which financial advancement is directly tied to seniority. This bolsters

the experts' argument: these young but effective teachers who are leaving the profession might stay longer if they had better opportunity for advancement based on performance.

(D) CORRECT. Weaken. This choice indicates that collaboration among teachers is integral to high quality instruction and that a system of compensation based on teacher performance reduces collaboration. Thus, the effect of a merit-based system of pay might undermine quality instruction, which is one of the two stated goals of the educational experts.

(E) Strengthen. The educational experts' argument in favor of performance-based compensation is bolstered if standardized test scores have dramatically risen in school districts that have instituted such pay structures.

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