

Excerpt:

“I ran all the way to the main gate, and then I waited for a second till I got my breath. I have no wind, if you want to know the truth. I’m quite a heavy smoker, for one thing—that is, I used to be. They made me cut it out. Another thing, I grew six and a half inches last year. That’s also how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these goddam checkups and stuff. I’m pretty healthy though.” – *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger

Every ‘problem’ in the text:

- A. Problem:
 - a. When the subject says they “waited for a second”, it has multiple meanings. There is **syntactic ambiguity** because you don’t know if the subject was waiting for an entity called ‘second’ to arrive, or whether they waited for one second ‘to pass’ (which is an **ellipsis**). Furthermore, both cases are still wrong (explained below)
 - B. Correct Interpretation:
 - a. The subject waited not for 1 second, but for a moment or so (unspecified amount of time)
 - C. How I knew:
 - a. The human person cannot catch their breath within one second. Also, personal experience.
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- A. Problem:
 - a. When the subject says “I got my breath”, it does not actually mean they tangibly got a hold of their breath. This is **lexical ambiguity**, to ‘get’ breath.
 - B. Correct Interpretation:
 - a. The subject was able to breathe calmly again (calmer actually).
 - C. How I knew:
 - a. Again, personal experience, and the most common way to say ‘I was able to breathe again’
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- A. Problem:
 - a. The phrase “I have no wind” does not mean the subject does not possess wind or air from the atmosphere around. This is kind of a **metaphor**, where the subject directly refers to one thing (having enough air to breathe) by mentioning another (‘having’ wind).

- B. Correct Interpretation:
 - a. Subject is talking about how little air they can hold within their lungs.
 - C. How I knew:
 - a. It's the only logical statement explanation after talking about catching up on their breathing from the sentence before.
 - D. Additional notes:
 - a. I realized there's a bit of a connotation difference if you switch this sentence's phrases before and after the comma. At least a change in stress on specific words.
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- A. Problem:
 - a. The term "heavy smoker" can have multiple meanings, for example, is this telling us that the smoker weighs a lot? This is **structural ambiguity**.
 - B. Correct Interpretation:
 - a. In this case, "heavy smoker" means the subject smokes quite a lot, or at least believes themselves to.
 - C. How I knew:
 - a. I weighed the two options and based on real-world knowledge about the effects smoking has on your lungs and breathing, I assume they are not talking about physical weight.
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- A. Problem:
 - a. The phrase "I grew six and a half inches last year" does not explicitly refer to his height. It is assumed to be his height, but the sentence could have also referred to, say, a plant or some other object they were growing and measuring.
 - B. Correct Interpretation:
 - a. The person who said the phrase grew 6.5 inches last year in height.
 - C. How I knew:
 - a. There is no other object of reference, therefore it must be about the person themselves.
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- A. Problem:
 - a. The phrase "cut it out" is also a problem to note, because it does not mean for anything to be physically cut. This is **semantic ambiguity**.
 - B. Correct Interpretation:
 - a. In the context of smoking, 'cutting something out' refers to stopping the practice of the action or event (in this case 'to quit smoking').
 - C. How I knew:
 - a. Context of the paragraph.
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- A. Problem:
- a. The phrase “I practically got t.b.” has multiple meanings. The wrong assumption is that the subject themselves attempted practical methods in order to get ‘t.b.’ Again, **structural ambiguity**.
- B. Correct Interpretation:
- a. The subject ‘almost’ got t.b., but it wasn’t something they sought to achieve or do.
- C. How I knew:
- a. Using practical methods to give yourself t.b. is not a thing.
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- A. Problem:
- a. When talking about t.b., the excerpt uses “That’s also how...”. An assumption has to be made that the sentence directly before it must be the “also” reasoning. The problem is that tuberculosis is caused by bacteria that spreads from person to person, most commonly via oral routes. The sentence before logically does not support the next sentence. I suppose there’s a **logic error** here, but that’s not at the fault of the author, rather the character.
- B. Correct Interpretation:
- a. Unfortunately, this can’t be fixed because the excerpt sounds to be from the words of a character, and we can’t change what they are thinking or saying.
- C. How I knew:
- a. Knowledge about the real world and that height isn’t a factor to t.b.
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- A. Problem
- a. The words ‘they’ and ‘here’ do not specify anyone in the excerpt. There is **vagueness** here. The sentences for each word, such as ‘they made me cut it out’ are thus also vague when it doesn’t determine what the term ‘made’ refers to have happened.
- B. Correct Interpretation:
- a. ‘they’ may be referring to medical professionals, family, or possibly a caretaker such as a therapist. ‘here’ might be a place where physical checkups occur such as a hospital or other medical facility. ‘made’ in ‘they made me cut it out’ could be substituted for ‘forced’, ‘instructed’, etc., but we don’t know what.
- C. How I knew:
- a. I don’t, this is vagueness. I know this brings up more questions though because it doesn’t make complete sense.