

PHASE ONE

Focus on the Main Idea

Strategy: The common strategy suggested in many books as to how to find the main idea of a passage is to look for it in the first sentence of the passage. However, in cases when you have short passage in GRE, you had better read the whole paragraph, especially when you have only one paragraph, before you decide on the main idea. You are advised to follow the same policy even if your short passage has two paragraphs.

Practice

Read the following passages and choose the best answer to each question.

Passage 1

Although many social policies and much legislation is founded on this “greatest good” philosophy, there are several problems with utilitarianism as a basis for morality. First, happiness is not so easy to quantify, and any measurement is bound to be subjective. Second, in a theory that treats everything except happiness as instrumentally rather than intrinsically valuable, anything—or, more importantly, anyone—can (and should) be treated as a means to an end, if it means greater happiness. This rejects the notion that human beings have their own intrinsic value. Further, utilitarianism puts the burden of the happiness of the masses on the suffering of the few. Is the happiness of many worth the suffering of a few? Why do those few deserve to suffer? Isn’t this burden of suffering morally irresponsible? This is the dilemma so brilliantly illustrated in LeGuin’s story.

1. Which of the following best represents the main idea of the passage?
 - A. Utilitarianism is problematic because it treats people as a means to an end.
 - B. Utilitarianism requires that a few suffer so that many can be happy.
 - C. Utilitarianism is flawed as a foundation for moral action.
 - D. Utilitarianism is often used to determine social policy.
 - E. Utilitarianism does not adequately respect minority rights.

Passage 2

A number of factors confound quantitative evaluation of the relative importance of various entry pathways of non-indigenous plant and animal species. First of all, time lags often occur between establishment of non-indigenous species and their detection, and tracing the pathway for a long-established species is difficult, especially if geographical expansion has occurred rapidly. Non-indigenous weeds are usually detected only after having been in the country for thirty years or having spread to at least ten thousand acres. In addition, federal port inspection, although a major source of information on non-indigenous species pathways, especially for agricultural pests, provides data only about species entering via scrutinized routes. Finally, some comparisons between pathways defy quantitative analysis; for example, which is more “important”: the entry pathway of one very harmful species or one by which many but less harmful species enter the country?

2. The author's central concern in the passage is to
- A. identify the problems in assessing the relative significance of various entry pathways for non-indigenous species
 - B. describe the events usually leading to the detection of a non-indigenous species
 - C. discuss the role that time lags and geographic expansion of non-indigenous species play in species detection
 - D. point out the inadequacy of the federal port inspection system in detecting the entry of non-indigenous species
 - E. explain why it is difficult to trace the entry pathways for long-established non-indigenous species

Note: When the passage is long, you are recommended to

- Read the first paragraph fully, especially when it is not longer than five or six lines
- Read the beginning of the paragraph in the body
- Read the last paragraph fully, especially when it is not longer than five or six lines

Passage 3

The social sciences are less likely than other intellectual enterprises to get credit for their accomplishments. Arguably, this is so because the theories and conceptual constructs of the social sciences are especially accessible: human intelligence apprehends truths about human affairs with particular facility. And the discoveries of the social sciences, once isolated and labeled, are quickly absorbed into conventional wisdom, whereupon they lose their distinctiveness as scientific advances.

This underappreciation of the social sciences contrasts oddly with what many see as their overutilization. Game theory is pressed into service studies of shifting international alliances. Evaluation research is called upon to demonstrate successes or failures of social programs. Models from economics and demography become the definitive tools for examining the financial base of social security. Yet this rush into practical applications is itself quite understandable: public policy must continually be made, and policymakers rightly feel that even tentative findings and untested theories are better guides to decision-making than no findings and no theories at all.

3. The author is primarily concerned with
- (A) advocating a more modest view, and less widespread utilization, of the social sciences
 - (B) analyzing the mechanisms for translating discoveries into applications in the social sciences
 - (C) dissolving the air of paradox inherent in human beings studying themselves
 - (D) explaining a peculiar dilemma that the social sciences are in
 - (E) maintaining a strict separation between pure and applied social science

VERBAL REASONING

A weapons-smuggling incident recently took place in country Y. We all know that Y is a closed society. So Y's government must have known about the weapons.

1. Which of the following is an assumption that would make the conclusion above logically correct?

- (A) If a government knows about a particular weapons-smuggling incident, it must have intended to use the weapons for its own purposes.
- (B) If a government claims that it knew nothing about a particular weapons-smuggling incident, it must have known everything about it.
- (C) If a government does not permit weapons to enter a country, it is a closed society.
- (D) If a country is a closed society, its government has a large contingent of armed guards patrolling its borders.
- (E) If a country is a closed society, its government has knowledge about everything that occurs in the country.

The upcoming presidential election in the West African republic of Ganelon is of grave concern to the U.S. State Department. Ganelon presently has strong political and military ties to the United States. However, the Socialist party is widely expected to win the election, leading to fears that Ganelon will soon break away from the pro-American bloc and adopt a nonaligned or openly anti-American stance.

2. Which of the following is an assumption made in the passage above?

- (A) A Socialist party government in Ganelon is more likely to oppose the United States than is a non-Socialist party government.
- (B) The people of the United States recognize their nation's interest in the political stability of West Africa.
- (C) A weakening of U.S. political ties with Ganelon could have serious consequences for U.S. relations with other African nations.
- (D) The Socialist party leaders in Ganelon believe that their nation's interests would best be served by an alliance with American forces.
- (E) The Socialist party will win the upcoming election in Ganelon.

Writing Strategies (ISSUE)

Writing a composition on an issue is like writing an essay on any other type of topics. That is, there should exist an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement at the end, some paragraphs in the body and finally a concluding paragraph.

Note: To write the introductory paragraph you ought to bear in mind that you should first restate the issue and then present your own position on that issue.

The paragraphs in the body each discusses one aspect of the thesis statement. And the concluding paragraph is a restatement of the issue and a summary of your position as depicted in the thesis and the body paragraphs.

Taking a position: After you restate the issue you should then take a position that would determine your line of argument in the body paragraphs. There are various positions you can take. The following presents one of such positions.

One-sided Position

Sometimes the issue presented is such that you may find it easy to completely either agree or disagree. In such cases, the paragraphs in the body each would present e.g. one reason why you agree or disagree with the issue.

Sample Issue Composition

"No field of study can advance significantly unless outsiders bring their knowledge and experience to that field of study."

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position.

The author states that each field of study can advance more drastically when it receives contributions from other fields of study or outsiders as the author puts it. I strongly agree with the assertion that significant advances in knowledge require expertise from various fields. Two examples that aptly illustrate this point involve the fields of cultural anthropology and astronomy.

Consider how a **cultural anthropologist's knowledge** about an ancient civilization is enhanced not only by the expertise of the archeologist--who unearths the evidence—but ultimately by the expertise of biochemists, geologists, linguists, and even astronomers. (BIOCHEMISTS) By analyzing the hair, nails, blood and bones of mummified bodies, biochemists and forensic scientists can determine the life expectancy, general well-being, and common causes of death of the population. These experts can also ensure the proper preservation of evidence found at the archeological site. (GEOLOGISTS) A geologist can help identify the source and age of the materials used for tools, weapons, and structures--thereby enabling the anthropologist to extrapolate about the civilization's economy, trades and work habits, life styles, extent of travel and mobility, and so forth. (LINGUISTS) Linguists are needed to interpret hieroglyphics and extrapolate from found fragments of writings. (ASTRONOMERS) And an astronomer can help explain the layout of an ancient city as well as the design, structure and position of monuments, tombs, and temples--since ancients often looked to the stars for guidance in building cities and structures.

An even more striking example of how expertise in diverse fields is needed to advance knowledge involves the area of **astronomy and space exploration**. Significant advancements in our knowledge of the solar system and the universe require increasingly keen tools for observation and measurement. Telescope technology and the measurement of celestial distances, masses, volumes, and so forth, are the domain of astrophysicists. These advances also require increasingly sophisticated means of exploration. Manned and unmanned exploratory probes are designed by mechanical, electrical, and computer engineers. And to build and enable these technologies requires the acumen and savvy of business leaders, managers, and politicians. Even diplomats might play a role--insofar as major space projects require interactional cooperative efforts among the world's scientists and governments. And ultimately it is our philosophers whose expertise helps provide meaning to what we learn about our universe.

In sum, no area of intellectual inquiry operates in a vacuum. Because the sciences are inextricably related, to advance our knowledge in any one area we must understand the interplay among them all. Moreover, it is our non-scientists who make possible the science, and who bring meaning to what we learn from it.

Now consider the outline of an essay written on the following issue based on the pattern introduced in this unit.

"Truly profound thinkers and highly creative artists are always out of step with their time and their society."

The author argues that prominent thinkers and innovative artists are not in harmony with their time and their society. This is a claim which I generally agree with. In fact, a number of examples give support to my favorable attitude towards the subject.

As the first example I can, in the area of science, refer to Galileo.

In the realm of religion, reference can be made to holy prophets.

Nima Yoshij, a famous Iranian poet, is a good example in the domain of art.

In conclusion, from what I discussed in the three body paragraphs I can easily contend that the author's statement to the effect that great scientists and artists are not in line with their time and their society is true. As was clear in all the examples presented the main reason for the claim to be true is that great thinkers almost bring in ideas that novel and at time in contras with commonly held beliefs. Hence, if you ever discover some trace of genius in yourself, brace yourself for lots of criticism and misunderstanding on the part of the people with whom you are living.

HOMEWORK

Write an essay on the following topic.

College students should base their choice of a field of study on the availability of jobs in that field.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.