SECTION 2

Text Completion

বাংলাদেশের সনৃদ্ধতম জিআরই মডেল টেস্ট সেবা: জিআরই সেন্টার
বনানী: ০১৭৬৮-০৭৭-৬৪০
লালমাটিয়া: ০১৭৬৮-০৭৭-৬৪১
সায়েন্স ল্যাব: ০১৭৬৮-০৭৭-৬৪৩

How to approach any Fill in the Blank Question

Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence questions are both, in essence, fill in the blank questions, wherein the correct word needs to be inserted in the blank(s). Thus, the basic fundamentals for both these question types are the same. The word that should go in the blank (s) cannot be a figment of your imagination; rather it has to make sense with the meaning being conveyed by the rest of the sentence. To understand the meaning of the sentence you always try to look for two kinds of clues:

1) The Keywords

2) The Connectors

Keywords are words that tell you the meaning of the word that should go in the blank.

For example consider this sentence:

> *Known for their valour, horses are used as symbols of _____ in several cultures*

>> (A) *arrogance*

>> (B) *courage*

>> (C) *fidelity*

>> (D) *speed*

>> (E) *stamina*

As most of you might have guessed, the correct answer should be (B), courage. But why can't the answer be (C), fidelity? Because the sentence talks about horses being known for their 'valour' i.e. courage, so 'valour' becomes your Keyword in this sentence. Hence, even though horses are also known for fidelity, speed, and stamina, the answer still has to be *courage* because it is connected to the keyword in the sentence.

Remember that the Keyword does not necessarily have to be a word; it can also be a phrase or a clause.

If valour were to be replaced with 'devotion' in the original sentence, then what should be the answer?

> *Known for their devotion, horses are used as symbols of _____ in several cultures*

The answer will then change to 'fidelity' i.e. loyalty, because the Keyword now becomes 'devotion'. This is how Keywords can help you decide which word to go with in the blank, so you must consciously look for the keyword in every sentence that you see.

However, sometimes the Keyword, on its own, may not always be enough to convey the entire meaning of the sentence. For example, consider a variation of the above sentence:

Although horses are known for their devotion, in some cultures they are used as symbols of _____ ___

    (A) *arrogance*

    (B) *courage*

    (C) *fidelity*

    (D) *speed*

    (E) *treachery*

The Keyword is still 'devotion' but the meaning of the sentence has reversed because of the use of 'Although'. We calls such words *Connectors* because they help you determine the connection between two parts of a sentence – whether they are connected in the same manner or in a contrasting manner.

In the above example the word that goes into the blank has to contrast with the Keyword 'devotion', so the answer should actually be 'treachery'.

Here is a list of some common 'contrasting' and some 'same-direction' Connectors:

Same Direction Connectors

    — Because

    — Since

    — And

    — Hence

    — As a result of

    — Also

    — Due to

    — Thus

    — Likewise

    — Moreover

    — Consequently

    — Additionally

    — ; (yes, the semi colon is also a same direction connector)

Contrasting Connectors

— Despite

— Yet

— But

— However

— Nonetheless

— Nevertheless

— Paradoxically

— While

— Although

— Ironically

— Rather

— Contrastingly

Note that every sentence may not necessarily have a Connector. In such sentences the thought, obviously, always goes in the same direction.

EXCEPTION - *Sometimes the Connector itself may have to be put in the blank. If you see some typical Connectors in the list of options, then check whether the sentence is actually implying a contrast or going in the same direction.*

Thus, to summarize, in every 'Fill in the blank' type question you always look for two kinds of clues - the Keyword, which has to be present in every sentence, and the Connector, which may or may not be present in every sentence.

There are two types of Fill in the Bank questions that will be tested on the GRE - Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence.

Text Completion

In a text completion question you will have a sentence given to you with one, two, or three blanks. For each blank, separate tables of options will also be provided. For a one-blank question, the table will always have five options and for a two or three blank question the table will always have three options for each blank. You need to select the correct word for each of the given blanks. Remember that no partial credit will be given; you will be marked correct only if you get all the blanks correct in a sentence.

Use your knowledge of Keywords and Connectors to make a prediction for each of the blanks and go with whichever option best matches your prediction.

You will get 6 Text Completion questions in each verbal section on the GRE (i.e. 12 questions in the entire test)

<u>Tips to keep in mind when attempting Text Completion Questions</u>

- **Have an answer in mind before you look at the options** – It is always a good idea to have an answer in mind before you look at the options. At least you should be able to predict whether the word will be a positive or a negative one or whether there should be some kind of a relation between the words in a multiple blank sentence.

  This strategy will also help you assess whether you are able to understand the meaning of the sentences correctly. If your predictions are correct but your actual answer is wrong, then you need to work on your vocabulary but if your prediction itself is incorrect then, even if you know all the words, you will not get the answer right. In this case you will need to start working on your comprehension skills.

- **Start with whichever blank looks easier** – In a multiple blank sentence, it is not necessary that you always start predicting for the first blank. Actually, in most cases, the second or third blank will be easier to predict an answer for, so start with these instead.

- **Avoid Synonyms** – If you see a pair of synonyms or similar words in a table, these will most likely not be the answer so go with one of the other options instead. For example, if the three options given to you are joy, happiness, and salubrious, then you should go with *salubrious* (even if you don't know its meaning) because joy and happiness almost mean the same whereas there can be only one correct answer for the blank.

SECTION 3

Sentence Equivalence

Sentence Equivalence

In a Sentence Equivalence question, you will have a sentence given to you with only one blank. There will be six options provided to you from which you need to select TWO options, both of which can be separately inserted in the blank. The thing to keep in mind is that both of these words, when inserted in the blank, should give the same meaning to the sentence. No partial credit will be given; you will be marked correct only if you get both the words correct in a sentence.

Use your knowledge of Keywords and Connectors to make a prediction for the blank and go with whichever two options best match your prediction.

You will get 4 Sentence Equivalence questions in each verbal section of the GRE (i.e. 8 questions in the entire test)

Tips to keep in mind when attempting Sentence Equivalence Questions

Have an answer in mind before you look at the options – It is always a good idea to have an answer in mind before you look at the options. At least you should be able to predict whether the word will be a positive or a negative one or whether there should be a relation between the words in a multiple blank sentence.

This strategy will also help you assess whether you are able to understand the meaning of the sentences correctly. If your predictions are correct but your actual answer is wrong, then you need to work on your vocabulary but if your prediction itself is incorrect then, even if you know all the words, you will not get the answer right. In this case you will need to start working on your comprehension.

Don't look for Synonyms – Some students tend to think of Sentence Equivalence questions as synonym questions i.e. they go looking for a pair of synonyms in the options and mark this pair as the correct choice. However, it is quite possible that the two correct options may not be exact synonyms, yet give similar meaning to the sentence when inserted in the blank. Thus, instead of concentrating on looking for synonyms, concentrate on understanding the meaning of the sentence conveyed by both the options.

Sometimes it is possible that three words all make sense in the blank but only two of these will provide a similar meaning to the sentence. This could be used as an elimination strategy

SECTION 4

Reading Comprehension

বাংলাদেশের জিআরই পরীক্ষার্থীদের সুবিধার্থে
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Reading Comprehension

As the name suggests, Reading Comprehension (RC) questions will test students on their understanding or comprehension of unfamiliar texts from short or long passages. Each passage will be followed by a few questions related to that passage. On an average, students will see 10 Reading Comprehension questions in each verbal reasoning section spread across 5 passages. Most of the passages appearing on the GRE will be short passages of approximately 80-150 words though students may see one or two long passages as well comprising 300-400 words.

How much Time should you spend on each Passage?

You will need to complete 20 questions in 30 minutes in each verbal section. Thus you have roughly one and a half minutes for each question. However, RC questions will take you a little longer to answer so you must save on time while answering Sentence Equivalence and Text Completion questions.

Ideally you should take at the most one minute for each Sentence Equivalence and Text Completion question, which will leave you with 20 minutes to answer the 10 Reading Comprehension questions.

Nature of Passages

The passages that you see on the GRE will primarily be from the following subject areas:

- Physical Sciences
- Social Sciences
- Humanities
- Business & Economics

The passages will not always be interesting or fun to read; as a matter of fact some of them will be downright boring and difficult to understand. The language of the passages will be similar to what you are likely to see in publications such as The Economist and The Wall Street Journal. Generally, passages from Physical Sciences and Business & Economics subject areas tend to be more detail-oriented and easier to understand than passages from Social Sciences and Humanities, which mostly tend to be of an abstract nature.

The problem most students face on RC is that they have to go through text from areas they aren't conversant with and answer questions based on this. The moment you see a passage from an unfamiliar area such as American History or Women's Suffrage, you immediately start telling yourself that you will do badly on this passage because you have no idea about the subject area. If you start with this negative thought process, things will obviously only go downhill for you.

Please keep in mind that you are not expected to have any prior knowledge of the topic in the first place. All the information that you need to answer the questions is given to you in the passage. You just need to

comprehend the passage and select the correct answer from the options provided. In fact there is a negative aspect of getting passages from your comfort area which will be discussed later in this book.

How NOT to Approach RC Passages

Whenever we read some text, it is human tendency to focus on the facts provided. We tend to focus on specific details, numbers, and dates but in the process end up missing out on the big picture, which provides the answer to the question 'WHY'. Why has the author provided these figures or details? This is the purpose of the author in writing this paragraph. If you concentrate on the details and miss out on this 'WHY' aspect, then you will always struggle to answer RC questions correctly.

This is because most questions will not directly ask you something that is clearly mentioned in the passage; rather the questions will be more roundabout and indirect in nature. The answer to most of the questions will not be clearly stated in the passage so it does not make sense to spend valuable time trying to absorb all the details mentioned in the passage.

Make a Passage Map

A good way of approaching a passage, especially a long one, is to make a map of the passage. A passage map is nothing but one or two lines for every paragraph in the passage, highlighting *why* the author has written that paragraph. Note that the passage map does not have to highlight *what* the author has written but rather *why* has he written what he has written, which means that the points in your passage map should always start with verbs such as *describe, explain, praise, criticize, condemn,* etc. Most of the time you will find this information in either the first or the last sentence of each paragraph. Students often tend to focus on the middle part of paragraphs (which contains all the details) so please make a conscious effort to go back and read the first and the last sentence of every paragraph so as to keep a perspective of why the author is writing what he is writing.

Topic, Scope and Purpose

Apart from the passage map, there are three more things you need to be absolutely clear about before you look at the first question – The Topic, the Scope and the Purpose of the passage.

The topic of the passage is nothing but a word or a phrase that captures the essence of the passage. The topic tells you what subject matter the entire passage revolves around. The GRE will rarely ever ask you to identify the topic of the passage; this is more for your understanding of the passage.

The scope of the passage basically tells you what aspect of the topic is the passage concerned with. The understanding of the scope becomes important because this helps you eliminate incorrect options quickly.

The purpose is the most important part of the passage and will answer the question – *why did the author write the entire passage?* When thinking about the purpose, think on three lines – is the author positive i.e. is he trying to praise or support something, is the author negative i.e. is he trying to criticize something, or is the author simply neutral i.e. is he just describing or explaining something. Obviously this will also clarify the tone of the passage for you. If you are clear about the purpose of the passage, you will not have to keep referring back to the passage to check each option; rather you will be able to eliminate a lot of the options just by looking at them because they contradict the author's primary purpose.

For example, if you know that the main purpose of the author is positive and there is a question asking you, to select from five options, that one option the author would most likely agree with; then you can immediately eliminate options with negative connotations because the author has a positive agenda. Thus, identifying the purpose correctly will save you a lot of time on GRE RC and also make you more confident of your eliminations.

The GRE will often ask you to identify the main purpose of the passage, so it's all the more important that you be clear on this aspect. We'll discuss this more in the section on Global questions.

Even though most RC passages on the GRE will be just one paragraph long, it still makes sense to be clear on the topic, scope, and purpose of the passage.

Avoid making this mistake

A common mistake students make while preparing a passage map is to make notes for every sentence in a paragraph. They will read one sentence and make a note for that sentence and then come back and read the next sentence and again make a note for it and so on. Needless to say this is an absolute waste of time and beats the purpose of making the passage map in the first place.

As we said earlier, the passage map should answer the *why* and not the *what*. We do not want you to write any details in the passage map. The details are already there in front of you on your screen and you can refer to them whenever a question requires you to do so. We will go as far as to suggest that you should not even try to understand everything that is written in the paragraph, as long as you are able to understand why the author has written what he has written.

For example, a paragraph could start by stating that there are two theories put forward by economists to explain how the foreign exchange markets work. The rest of the paragraph could go into explaining these two theories out of which one you may not have understood. This is fine; do not waste your time re-

reading the paragraph, just move on to the next paragraph. If there is any question on this particular theory then you can always come back and read this part again, else you would have saved yourself valuable time. It is this kind of street-smartness that will be rewarded on the GRE.

Do not confuse the author's views with his statements

While reading the passage, be careful to differentiate between when the author is stating something and when is the author attributing a comment to somebody else. For example, if the author were to make a statement such as 'Critics of the Theory of Relativity believe that the theory is incorrect' – do not construe this as the author criticizing anything. The author is merely providing you the opinion of the critics and is neutral by himself.

This is especially true in the case of passages in which the author is reviewing the work of some other author or individual. In such passages make sure that you also read the questions properly because some questions could be from the point of view of the author of the passage while some others could be from the point of view of the author or scholar whose work is being evaluated.

Engage with the Passage – Do not read Passively

While reading, try to engage with the passage. This will also help prevent your concentration from wandering. The best way to get yourself involved with the passage is to try to predict what will come next in the passage. When you do this, you are essentially putting yourself in the author's shoes and thinking like him, which will help you get a great understanding of the passage. Use the last sentence of a paragraph to predict what will come in the next paragraph.

For example, if the paragraph ends by stating that scientists have proposed a solution for a problem, the next paragraph will most probably provide you with the details of this solution. Once you see that most of your predictions are turning out to be correct, you will find it more fun to read the passage and you'll also notice an increase in your confidence levels as you go about tackling the passage.

Make Use of Transition words

While making a passage map or generally reading a passage, try to make use of transition words to understand the overall structure of the passage and also to predict what will happen next in the passage. For example, if the author starts a paragraph with the words Similarly or Likewise, then you immediately

know that whatever he has described in the earlier paragraph, the same thought process will continue in this paragraph as well.

Contrastingly, if the author is praising something in a paragraph, and the next paragraph starts with the words *However* or *Despite*, then you immediately know that the author will now talk about some negative or contrasting aspect of that thing. Transition words will make it very easy for you to understand the broad structure of a passage; these will mostly be found in the first and the last sentence of a paragraph, so pay attention to these sentences

GRE Reading Comprehension Question Pattern

The RC questions on the GRE will appear in the following three patterns:

1. **Multiple choice questions (select one out of five options)** – These are regular RC questions where a question has five options and students need to select one correct option from these. These include the Critical Reasoning type questions, which will be discussed in a separate section in this book.

2. **Multiple choice questions (select all that are correct from three options)** – This is a variation of the above pattern in which a question will have only three options. The catch is that more than one of these options could be correct. A student is required to mark all the options that are correct which could be one, two, or all three options. Generally these questions tend to be more difficult than the regular multiple choice RC questions.

3. **Highlight in the passage** – These questions do not provide any options to students, rather students are required to actually click on a specific sentence within the passage that answers the question asked. By definition, these questions will almost always be *Detail* questions. Read on to know more about 'Detail' and other question types.

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GRE Reading Comprehension Question Types

1. Global Questions

Global questions are questions that cannot be answered by reading from the passage i.e. the answer is not written in the passage. The main purpose/primary concern type questions will fall under this question type. Note that the passage will never tell you what is its main purpose. However, if you have made a good passage map then you should not have much difficulty in answering these questions.

Keep in mind that, since the answer is not given in the passage, you don't really need to go back to the passage to answer a Global question. This will also save you time.

A trick to answering Global questions is to make use of the fact that each of the options in such questions will start with a verb, which will have a positive, negative, or neutral connotation. Thus if you are clear on the author's tone, you should be able to eliminate two or three options immediately just by looking at the first word of every option.

For example, if you know that the author's tone is neutral, then options that start with words such as *arguing, praising, criticizing,* etc. will never be correct because these have either a positive or a negative connotation. The correct answer in this case would start with neutral words such as *describe, explain, analyze,* etc.

Example:

> *What is the main purpose of the author in writing the passage?*
>
> *What is the primary concern of the 3rd paragraph in the passage?*

How to identify Global Questions - Global questions will always contain phrases such as *primary purpose, main idea, main concern,* etc.

How to Approach Global Questions

- Read the question critically to understand whether it is asking for the primary purpose of the entire passage or of some specific paragraph

- Predict an answer before going through the options. If the question is asking for the main purpose of a particular paragraph you may want to refer to your passage map or even take a quick look at the relevant paragraph

- Look at the first word of every option and match it with your prediction. Eliminate the ones that are inconsistent with your prediction

- By this time you should have managed to come down to two options. Read both the options completely and try to eliminate one of them. At this point be careful of options that appear half correct and half incorrect

Common Traps to watch out for in Global Questions

— Make sure you read the question correctly. Students often assume that a primary purpose question will always ask for the primary purpose of the entire passage, whereas sometimes the question may ask you for the primary purpose of only one particular paragraph. To confuse you further, the options will contain choices that explain the primary purpose of a different paragraph or of the entire passage.

— Another common trap used by the test maker is to give options that contain details or facts mentioned in the passage, so you'll be tempted to mark these as the answer because you can see the fact mentioned in the passage. However, remember that the answer to a global question will never be mentioned in the passage. The author obviously did not write the entire passage just to provide you with some fact or detail; rather he must have had a broader agenda, which you need to identify. So, on global questions, if you see options containing details from the passage, you can be rest assured that these will not be the correct answer.

2. Detail Questions

As the name suggests, Detail questions will ask you questions related to what is explicitly mentioned in the passage. In that sense they are the opposite of Global questions as the answer to these questions will always be stated in the passage. So make sure that you go back and read the answer from the passage before selecting an option. This is where a good passage map comes in handy while tackling long passages because you don't have to waste time trying to find the answer in the entire passage.

Examples:

Which of the following is provided by the author as an example of reverse osmosis?

Each of the following is mentioned in the passage as a side effect of medicine EXCEPT:

How to identify Detail Questions - Detail questions will use language such as *the passage states that*, or *explicitly stated in the passage*. To answer Detail questions you will obviously have to refer back to the

passage. In fact we strongly suggest that you do so because a lot of students tend to go with hunches on these questions, simply because they are too lazy to go back and compare their answer with the information in the passage, and they end up getting the answer wrong as a result.

How to Approach Detail Questions

- Try to identify keywords from the question stem and match these keywords with your passage map to identify which paragraph you need to refer to in order to answer the question correctly

- Go back to the passage and research the relevant information. Do not assume that you remember the answer from the passage

- Analyze each option with a critical eye, not just for keywords but also for the thought that the option is trying to convey because the answer will mostly come from here

Use of EXCEPT on Detail questions

Since the answer to a Detail question is always written in the passage, it might seem that these questions would be relatively easier to answer. However, the test-maker has a way of making these questions confusing and lengthy by the use of words such as 'EXCEPT'.

For example, a question may state that *'According to the passage, each of the following is true of a steam turbine EXCEPT'*. In this case four of the options will be mentioned in the passage and you will need to identify that fifth option that is not mentioned in the passage. Thus, you need to check each of the options against the information in the passage, which makes the entire exercise take longer than would a regular question.

Also, the wording of the options is confusing, in the sense that there won't be that one option that contains words that have never been mentioned in the passage (thereby making it easy for you to identify this as the correct answer). Rather, all the options will contain keywords from the passage; it's just that one of them will convey some incorrect information about the keyword. Thus, make sure that you read every option with a critical eye.

Common Traps on Detail Questions

— Watch out for options that distort details from the passage, so if you are just trying to match keywords between the options and the passage you might think that this particular option is mentioned in the passage. However, the meaning conveyed by the option could be completely different from that conveyed in the passage. For this reason we do not recommend the strategy

of matching keywords, especially when you are down to two options. Read both the options completely and figure out which option conveys the same meaning as the passage.

— As explained earlier, watch out for the use of EXCEPT or NOT on Detail questions. If the question states 'The passage states each of the following EXCEPT', a common tendency on the part of students is to forget the 'except' and go with the option that contains something stated in the passage (which is obviously the wrong answer).

3. Vocabulary in Context Questions

These questions will ask you to identify the meaning of a word or a phrase as used in the passage. The keyword here is *in context* i.e. the answer always has to be with reference to the passage. The dictionary meaning of the word will rarely be the correct answer; in fact this is one of the most common wrong answer traps.

To answer these questions correctly, go back and read the sentence which contains this word or phrase (since the GRE passages do not contain line numbers, the word or phrase will be highlighted in the passage to make it easy for you to locate the same). Then read one or two sentences before and after this sentence to get an idea of the context. Now look at each option and eliminate.

Example:

> *What is the meaning of the word 'explosion' as used in the passage?*

> *The word 'cynosure', as used in the passage, is closest in meaning to*

Tip: The answer to a vocabulary-in-context question will almost never be the literal or dictionary meaning of the word so look out for such traps

4. Function Questions

Function questions will ask you to identify the function of a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a punctuation mark, etc. in the context of the overall passage. These are essentially *Why* questions i.e. they will ask you why the author uses a particular word or sentence in the passage. To answer these questions correctly, you will need to put yourself in the author's shoes and think like the author.

Obviously the understanding of the main purpose of the passage becomes crucial while answering these questions.

Please remember that the question is not asking you for your opinion on something as this is what students end up providing most of the time. It is asking you for the author's rationale behind doing something in the passage.

There is a unique problem students face when a Function question asks them to identify the function of a paragraph in the passage - they invariably end up marking the option that best describes what is contained in the passage as the correct answer. However, this gives the answer to the question *What is contained in the paragraph* whereas we need to answer the question *Why has the author written what he has written*. Please appreciate the difference between the *What* and the *Why*. To answer the *why* correctly, you will need to go back to the main purpose of the overall passage and link your answer from this.

Function questions will either start with the interrogative *Why* or they will end with the phrase *in order to – The author provides the example of the atomic clock in order to OR why does the author provide the example of the atomic clock?*

For example:

> *Why does the author use the lines 'the early bird gets the worm' in the passage'*

> *What is the function of the 3ʳᵈ paragraph in the passage? (same as asking Why does the author use the 3ʳᵈ paragraph in the passage)*

The answer to these questions will once again not be mentioned in the passage. These questions need to be answered keeping in mind the overall purpose and tone of the passage. Also remember to answer the question in a very specific manner. For example, if the question is asking you for the function of a sentence in the 3ʳᵈ paragraph then the answer to that question cannot be the function of the entire 3ʳᵈ paragraph. Answer only for the specific line or word that has been quoted in the question.

Tip: To answer logic questions correctly, students need to put themselves in the author's shoes and understand why the author is doing something. Remember that the question is not asking for the student's opinion on something.

5. Inference Questions

The dictionary meaning of the term 'Inference' is to derive by reasoning and this is exactly what you will be required to do on Inference Questions – arrive at an answer that is not explicitly stated in the passage but that can be definitely concluded given the information in the passage. So, Inference questions will

require you to arrive at an answer that can be concluded or stated based on the information provided in the passage. The answer to these questions will never be directly stated in the passage.

Inference is the most important question type on GRE Reading Comprehension and is also the question type on which students make the most mistakes. This is because students often tend to read too much between the lines i.e. they end up over-inferring from the passage. While reading between the lines may be a good quality in our day to day life (some may even say a desirable one), it's best if you avoid doing so on the GRE. Hence, make it a point to avoid strongly worded or extreme sounding options – options containing words such as *must be true, always be the case, never be the case, cannot be determined, etc.* - and go with more open ended and vague options – options containing words such as *usually, sometimes, possibly, might be true, etc.*

For example:

Which of the following is implied by the author in the 4ᵗʰ paragraph?

Which of the following options would the author of the passage most likely agree with?

How to Identify Inference Questions

Inference question stems will use subjective words such as *imply, infer, suggest, most likely agree, least likely agree, etc.* Notice the subtle difference between an Inference and a Detail question in that an Inference question uses the term *suggests* whereas a Detail question uses the term *states* (to imply that the answer is mentioned in the passage).

How to Approach Inference Questions

- Read the question critically. Inference questions can often be worded in a tricky manner. Make sure you've correctly understood whose point of view you need to answer from. For example, a question may ask you which of the options would the author of the passage most likely agree with, while another might ask you which of the options a particular character in the passage would most likely agree with.

- Once you've read the question, quickly take a look at each of the options and try to eliminate two or three that are surely incorrect because they talk about things that aren't even discussed in the passage.

- Once you have come down to two or three options, eliminate the ones that sound extreme i.e. ones that use very strong words. In case you are still stuck between two options, read each option critically and select the one that can definitely be inferred from the passage.

Common Traps on Inference Questions

— At all costs avoid making use of outside information while answering Inference questions. A common wrong answer is one that looks perfectly logical by itself but cannot be inferred from the information in the passage.

— Always avoid the tendency to over infer or to read too much between the lines. Never go with extreme options on Inference Questions.

Critical Reasoning Questions

Apart from the above five question types, the new GRE will also test you on a sixth one – Critical Reasoning questions. These questions are heavily inspired from the critical reasoning section of the GMAT (remember the GRE is now competing with the GMAT as the preferred test for B-school admissions) and involve working with arguments.

Every Critical Reasoning question that you see on the GRE will have three parts to it:

1. **The Stimulus** – This is the main body of the argument

2. **The Question Stem** – This is the one or two lines in the middle that actually tell you what you have to do – find the assumption, strengthen, weaken, etc. In *Provide a Logical Conclusion* question type, this tends to be before the stimulus.

3. **The Options** – Each question will have five options from which you will need to identify the correct one.

The stimulus will usually appear in two forms – as an argument or as several statements of facts. To understand the difference between the two, let's look at what makes up an argument. Most arguments will have the following three parts – *Conclusion, Evidence, and Assumption*.

Conclusion, Evidence, and Assumption

Let's try to understand these terms with an example:

People don't like to visit the Evergreen wildlife park in the rainy season. This year the park authorities have reconstructed all the roads inside the park, so people will like to visit the Evergreen Park in the rainy reason this year.

Conclusion – This is the point of the argument and answers the question *What* i.e. what is the argument basically stating - *that people would like to visit the Evergreen Wildlife park in the rainy season this year.*

Conclusions usually follow signalling words such as *thus, so, hence, therefore, etc.* In case there are no such words in the argument, try to paraphrase the entire argument in one sentence. This sentence would almost always be the conclusion of the argument.

Evidence – While the Conclusion tells you *What* the argument is saying, the Evidence tells you *Why* the argument is concluding what it is concluding. So in the above argument, why does the author conclude that people will like to visit the Evergreen Park this year? Because the park authorities have reconstructed all the roads inside the park, so this becomes your evidence.

Evidence usually follows signalling words such as *because, since, as a result of, etc.*

So the conclusion tells you the *what* of the argument and the evidence tells you the *why* of the argument. Another way of looking at conclusion and evidence is that a conclusion will almost always be *an opinion* whereas the evidence will almost always be *a fact*. In the above argument it is a fact that the roads have been reconstructed but it is the author's opinion that people will like to visit the Evergreen Park this year.

Assumption - Now, going back to the above argument, notice that from the given evidence we cannot necessarily arrive at the stated conclusion. The argument only states that people don't want to visit the Evergreen Park during the rainy season; it never states why people don't like to do so. So the author *assumes* that the only reason people don't like to visit the park is because of the poor road conditions within the park. If this is not assumed then the argument will fall apart.

For example, if the real reason why people do not visit the Evergreen Park was the fact that there are hardly any animals in the park, then even if the roads were made of velvet people will not visit the park because bad roads was not the reason for people not visiting the park in the first place. So, for the author to conclude that people will want to visit the park this year, he has to assume that the only reason people did not visit the park earlier was the poor road condition inside the park.

So, now that you know what components make up an argument, let's look at the relation among these. All arguments will have the following structure:

EVIDENCE + ASSUMPTION = CONCLUSION

In essence you can think of the assumption as unstated evidence or as a bridge between the evidence and the conclusion. If this bridge collapses, then you cannot arrive at the conclusion from the given evidence.

Here it is very important to note that the assumption is always *unstated* evidence i.e. it will never be written in the argument. It has to be assumed in the mind. So in a *find an assumption* question, if one of the options restates what is already mentioned in the argument, then this cannot be the assumption.

So, to summarize, with reference to the above argument:

> *The Conclusion* - people would like to visit the Evergreen Wildlife Park in the rainy season this year

The Evidence - the park authorities have reconstructed the roads within the park.

The Assumption – the only reason people do not visit the Evergreen National park in the rainy season is because of the poor roads within the park

One mistake students make is to assume that the last sentence of the argument will always be the conclusion. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The conclusion can be at the beginning of the argument, in the middle of the argument, or at the end of the argument.

Argument with conclusion at the beginning:

The Wind Wane project is an excellent one for Sihora County. The project will generate employment for the local population and also provide the residents with energy at low costs. In addition it will also lead to the opening up of new schools and colleges in Sihora County.

Argument with conclusion in the middle:

The Wind Wane project will generate employment for the local population in Sihora County and also provide the residents with energy at low costs. *So, the Wind Wane project is an excellent one for Sihora County.* In addition, the project will also lead to the opening up of new schools and colleges in Sihora County.

Argument with conclusion at the end:

The Wind Wane project will generate employment for the local population in Sihora County and also provide the residents with energy at low costs. In addition it will also lead to the opening up of new schools and colleges in Sihora County. *So, the Wind Wane project is an excellent one for Sihora County.*

So if the conclusion can be anywhere in an argument, how do you identify it. The answer is simple – by applying the *What and Why method* we discussed earlier.

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What is the author saying (Conclusion) – The Wind Wane project is an excellent one for Sihora County

Why is the author saying so (Evidence) – Because the Wind Wane project will generate employment for the local population in Sihora County, provide them with energy at low costs, and also lead to the opening up of new schools and colleges in Sihora County.

So there you have your conclusion and evidence. The *What and Why* method is especially useful because it will actually force you to understand the meaning of the argument as a whole.

Stimulus with a set of Facts

As stated earlier, some question stimulus' will contain arguments but some may just contain statements of facts without any conclusion.

For example

> The sale of automobiles has increased by more than 100% in Vino
> city in the last one year. Out of this increase, more than 70%
> comprise Multi utility vehicles and Sports utility vehicles.
> Hatchbacks comprise the rest of the 30% sales figure.

As you can see the above stimulus just gives you some facts or data without arriving at any conclusion as such.

So a stimulus can be in the form of an argument or it may just comprise a set of facts. This will to a large extent be determined by the question type that you get. For example, in a *find the assumption* question the stimulus will always be in the form of an argument and for an *Explain the Contradiction* question the stimulus will always contain facts.

Initial Steps to approach Critical Reasoning questions on the GRE

- Always start by reading the stimulus. Some students prefer reading the question stem first but to us it's a waste of time because you'll read the question stem, then read the stimulus, and then invariably read the question stem again.

- Read the stimulus critically. Pay attention to every word. In the end summarize everything in your own words. If the stimulus is in the form of an argument be clear on *What* the stimulus is stating and *Why* it is stating so.

- Read the Question stem and use the strategy to tackle that particular question type, as described in the subsequent chapters of this book

- You should take an average of two minutes to answer each Critical Reasoning question. This is an average figure, so some questions may take you longer and some may be completed in less than two minutes

Note: Critical Reasoning questions will always require students to select one correct answer from five options.

Critical Reasoning Question Types

There will primarily be the following question types that will be tested by the GRE:

1. Assumption

2. Strengthen

3. Weaken

বাংলাদেশের সর্বৃকৃতম জিআরই টিউটরিং সেবা: জিআরই সেন্টার
বনানী: ০১৭৬৮-০৭৭-৬৪০
লালমাটিয়া: ০১৭৬৮-০৭৭-৬৪১
সায়েন্স ল্যাব: ০১৭৬৮-০৭৭-৬৪৩

4. Flaw

5. Explain

6. Bold faced

1) Assumption Questions

Assumption is the most important of all the Critical Reasoning concepts/question types. This is because assumption will give you the answer to four question types – *Find the Assumption questions (but of course)*, *Strengthen questions*, *Weaken questions*, *and Flaw questions*. We will see the connection between assumptions and each of these question types later but first let's take a look at assumptions themselves.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, an assumption is basically the unstated evidence that must be true for the argument's conclusion to be true. The most important thing to keep in mind while trying to arrive at the assumption is that the author's conclusion is true, even if it is the most absurd of conclusions. A lot of the times the problem students face is that they end up questioning the logic or validity of the

author' argument. Leave that thought process for Weaken or Flaw questions. For Assumption questions you must take the author's conclusion to be absolutely one hundred percent true.

So, if the author concludes that aliens will arrive next week then you must agree with this fact; only then will you be able to arrive at the assumption correctly. For example, in this case one assumption may be that the shiny object in the sky is a space ship commanded by aliens. While it is extremely unlikely that the GRE will give you an argument such as the alien one, the reason we picked such an extreme example is to drive home the point that whatever the author states has to be taken as the truth by you. Never question the conclusion; instead focus your energies on identifying what else needs to be true for the author's conclusion to be true and you would have arrived at the assumption.

> Over the last six years, most of the students in Tupac city have regularly attended colleges in the neighbouring Mekon city to pursue their graduate degrees. However, according to a recent change in the education policies of Mekon city, the colleges in Mekon city are expected to increase their fees to almost the same level as those charged by colleges in Tupac city. Therefore it can be safely concluded that colleges in Tupac city will see a surge in the number of students enrolling with them to pursue their graduate degrees
>
> Which of the following is an assumption on which the argument depends?
>
> A. The teachers at colleges in Mekon city are generally considered superior to those at colleges in Tupac city
>
> B. Tupac city does not have good quality colleges
>
> C. The low fees charged by colleges at Mekon city is the primary reason why students from Tupac city move to these colleges
>
> D. Students who study at colleges in Tupac city do not perform better than those who study at colleges in Mekon city
>
> E. Mekon city does not have more colleges than Tupac city

Always start an assumption question by paraphrasing the conclusion and the evidence.

Conclusion (What is the author saying) – that there will be a surge in the enrolments at colleges in Tupac city

Evidence (Why is the author saying this) – because students in Tupac city who earlier used to move to Mekon city to pursue their graduate degrees will now not do so as the colleges in Mekon city will charge them the same fees as the colleges in Tupac city do.

Note that that conclusion is an opinion of the author but the evidence is a fact because the colleges in Mekon city are definitely looking at increasing their fees.

The Importance of Predicting the Assumption

On assumption questions, it always helps if you already have a rough answer in mind before you look at the options as this can prevent you from getting confused between or among very close choices.

For example, given the above conclusion and evidence set, in order to arrive at the conclusion from the given evidence what must the author of the argument be assuming?

The author must be assuming that the low fees charged by colleges in Mekon city is the single most important factor why students from Tupac city have been moving to colleges in Mekon city. If he does not assume this, the argument will fall apart.

For example, if students have been shifting to Mekon city because the teachers in Mekon city colleges are better than those at Tupac city colleges then, even if the fees at colleges in Mekon City go up, students will keep on moving to Mekon city because the reason for the shift is the better quality of teachers.

So for the author's conclusion to be true, he has to assume that the only reason students have been shifting to colleges in Mekon city is the low fees charged by colleges in Mekon city. Option (C) states this best and hence is the correct answer.

However, just to get more clarity, let's take a look at the other options as well:

A. As we saw above, this fact actually weakens the argument because in this case the students will keep on shifting to colleges in Mekon City

B. Quality of colleges is outside the scope of the argument because the argument is only concerned with the fees charged by colleges. In fact, just like option (A), (B) could also weaken the argument by suggesting that lower fees is not the reason why students might be moving to colleges in Mekon city

C. The correct answer

D. This may or may not be the case but doesn't have to be the case for the author's conclusion to be true

E. The number of colleges in each city is irrelevant to the argument

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The Denial/Negation Rule for Assumption questions

On Assumption questions, in case you are confused between two or more options, an effective way to eliminate incorrect options is by applying the Negation rule to the answer choices. The Negation or Denial rule is based on the principle that the assumption has to be true for the argument's conclusion to be true. As a corollary to this, if the assumption is denied or negated, then the argument must fall apart.

Hence, under the Negation rule, all you do is try to deny or negate each option and check whether the argument's conclusion can still be true. If it can be true then this option is not the assumption. Likewise if denying an option makes the conclusion fall apart then this option has to be the assumption.

Let's try the denial rule with each of the options in the Tupac city vs. Mekon city question discussed above:

A. The teachers at colleges in Mekon city are generally NOT considered far superior to those at colleges in Tupac city

   Negation this option does not help in any way because the argument is never about the quality of teachers in the first place. In its original wording this option was weakening the argument, now it is not doing anything.

B. Tupac city does not have good quality colleges

   Since this option already contains the word *not*, the ideal way to negate this is to remove the *not*. Again this does not explain why students have been shifting in the first place and quality of colleges is never the issue anyway.

C. The low fees charged by colleges at Mekon city is NOT the primary reason why students from Tupac city move to these colleges

   Negating this option definitely makes the argument fall apart because in this case the students will keep on shifting to colleges in Mekon City even after the increase in fees. Then, there will be no surge in enrolments at colleges in Tupac city. So this option has to be the assumption.

D. Students who study at colleges in Tupac city do not perform better than those who study at colleges in Mekon city

   Again strike out the *do not* from this option to negate it. Like option B, if this were to be the case then the students wouldn't have been shifting from Tupac city to Mekon city in the first place

E. Mekon city does not have more colleges than Tupac city

   The number of colleges in either city is irrelevant to our argument.

So you can see the denial or the negation rule can come in very handy when you are confused between options. However *don't apply this rule on all the five options* and waste your time. Two or three options can usually easily be eliminated; apply this rule to the remaining options.

Active and Passive Assumptions

Active assumptions are those assumptions that actively support the argument. These are the predictions you come up with when you are trying to pre-phrase an assumption. Active assumptions must be true for the argument to be true.

However, do notice the fact that the moment you assume that something must be true in an argument, you automatically assume that the other possibilities must NOT be true. It is these other possibilities that we call Passive Assumptions.

For example, in the Tupac city vs. Mekon city argument discussed earlier, the moment the author assumes that the primary reason students have been moving to colleges in Mekon city is the low fees charged by these colleges, he automatically assumes that other factors (such as better quality of teachers or better infrastructure) cannot be the reason for this shift. So the following can also be the assumptions in that argument:

- The better quality of teachers at colleges in Mekon city is *not* the primary reason why students have been shifting to colleges in Mekon city

- The better infrastructure at colleges in Mekon city is *not* the primary reason why students have been shifting to colleges in Mekon city

- The large number of clubs and entertainment centres in Mekon city is *not* the primary reason why students have been shifting to colleges in Mekon city

Notice that denying any of the above assumptions will make the original argument fall apart.

As you can see we can keep on making as many passive assumptions as we want. This is the biggest difference between active and passive assumptions. There can only be one active assumption in an argument but there can be several passive assumptions. It is precisely for this reason that you cannot predict a passive assumption whereas you can predict an active assumption.

You may have noticed that all the passive assumptions written above contain the word *not*. This is the best way to identify passive assumptions since by definition they will always contain some negating word, most often *not*.

Let's look at one final example to understand active and passive assumptions.

It takes four hours to cover the distance between Aston and Torin cities by bus. John has boarded a bus at Aston city that is scheduled to depart for Torin city at 10:00 a.m. If the bus departs on its correct time, John will reach Torin city well in time to attend his interview scheduled for 4:00pm that afternoon.

Active Assumption – The bus will not get delayed on the way from Aston to Torin.

Passive Assumptions

- The bus will not have a flat tie or all four flat tires
- The bus will not be struck by lightning
- The bus will not be attacked by gunmen
- The bus driver will not decide to go to some other city, etc.

So the active assumption gives you one general assumption and the passive assumption gives you several, each of which refutes the possibility of the active assumption not being true.

Author's note: *Do not get unnecessarily confused between active and passive assumptions since on the GRE nobody will ask you to distinguish between or identify the two. Just know that there is something like a passive assumption so that when you see it on a question you don't end up eliminating it immediately because it may actually be the correct answer.*

So try this question then:

Eating unhygienic food always results in cases of stomach infection or food poisoning. Dominic is currently suffering from food poisoning, so he must have eaten unhygienic food in the last few days.

Which of the following is an assumption on which the argument depends?

(A) Eating unhygienic food will most definitely lead to food poisoning

(B) Dominic does not have a weak immune system that makes him prone to food poisoning

(C) Dominic can make out the difference between hygienic and unhygienic food

(D) Eating unhygienic food is the only way to get food poisoning

(E) Unhygienic food contains harmful bacteria and other pathogens that lead to food poisoning

The Conclusion – Dominic must have eaten unhygienic food in the last few days

The Evidence – Eating unhygienic food always leads to food poisoning and Dominic is currently suffering from food poisoning

The Assumption – The argument states that eating unhygienic food will always lead to a person getting food poisoning. There can be no question about this fact since this is given to us as evidence. However the argument never states that this is the *only* way to get food poisoning. There could also be other ways of getting food poisoning such as drinking impure water or eating hygienic food with dirty hands.

So for the author's conclusion to be true, he has to assume that the only way to contract food poisoning is by consuming unhygienic food. (D) states this best and should be the correct answer.

Let's look at the other options as well;

(A) This is clearly stated in the argument so cannot be the assumption. In fact this is part of the evidence. Remember that an assumption will never be stated, it is always assumed

(B) This option is a trap because it has been worded in the form of a passive assumption (notice the use of the word *not*). However even if Dominic does have a weak immune system, he may still have contracted food poisoning from some source other than unhygienic food.

(C) Whether Dominic is able to make out this difference is irrelevant. In fact it is possible that he could not make out this difference, which is why he ended up having unhygienic food in the first place

(D) The Correct Answer

(E) How unhygienic food leads to food poisoning is not the concern of the argument.

The following can be Passive Assumptions in the argument:

- Drinking impure water cannot lead to food poisoning, *(because if it can then maybe this is how Dominic contracted food poisoning and not by consuming unhygienic food)*

- Eating with dirty hands cannot lead to food poisoning, *(because if it can then maybe this is how Dominic contracted food poisoning and not by consuming unhygienic food)*

The wording of Assumption Questions

Assumption questions most often directly ask you to identify the assumption in the argument. However sometimes they can be worded in the form of *must be true* questions.

Here is an example:

> *Which of the following must be true for the above argument to be true?*

This shouldn't come as a surprise because conceptually an assumption must be true for an argument to be valid.

How to Approach Assumption Questions

1. Read the argument and be clear on the evidence and the conclusion

2. Know that since this is an assumption question, there has to be some piece of evidence missing from the argument

3. Try to predict this missing piece of evidence. In a *Find the Assumption* question, you must always have an answer in mind before you look at the options

4. Eliminate two or three options because they definitely appear to be incorrect. Possible wrong answer choices can be those that are outside the scope of the argument, that repeat what is stated in the argument, or that can be inferred from the argument.

5. If stuck between two or more options try the denial or negation rule
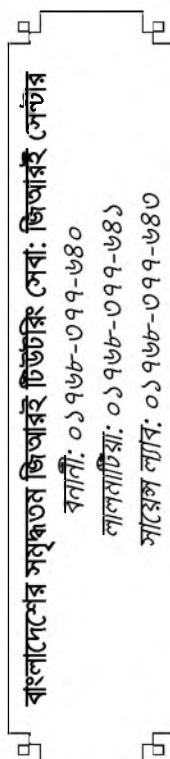
2) Strengthen Questions

Strengthen questions, as the name suggests, will require you to strengthen whatever it is that an argument is stating. However, do keep in mind that strengthen does not mean to confirm an argument. Even if an option can provide a small point in favour of the argument it is strengthening the argument. Similarly even if an option can remove a small doubt from your mind about the argument, it is again strengthening the argument.

Notice that to strengthen a stimulus, it is imperative that the stimulus have a conclusion. So strengthen questions will always contain a stimulus that is in the form of an argument.

Of all the laptops available for sale in Ireland, those manufactured by Ivy Infotech must have the fastest processors. Over the last six months Ivy Infotech has sold three times as many laptops as its closest competitor. Additionally Ivy Infotech's order books are full for the next 12 months.

Which of the following options, if true, most strengthens the argument?

A. Ivy Infotech is the oldest manufacturer of laptops in Ireland

B. Ivy Infotech has the largest market share in laptop sales in Ireland for the past five years

C. Ivy Infotech sources its processors from the company which is the world's biggest manufacturer of laptop processors

D. All the laptops available for sale in Ireland are same in every aspect except for their processors

E. The Irish populace prefers laptops with faster processors

Since this is a strengthen question, you know that the stimulus will be worded in the form of an argument. So the first step is to identify the conclusion and the evidence of this argument.

Conclusion (What is the argument stating) – Laptops manufactured by Ivy Infotech have the fastest processors.

Evidence (Why is the argument stating this) – Because Ivy Infotech has sold the maximum number of laptops in the last six months in Ireland.

But does this make sense? Can't there be some other plausible reason why the people in Ireland are buying Ivy Infotech's laptops?

Maybe these laptops have a very sleek design, maybe they have a very long batter life, or maybe they are the cheapest laptops in the market. There can be several other reasons (other than fast processors) why the Irish are buying laptops manufactured by Ivy Infotech. This brings us to the assumption. Remember that since the stimulus is in the form of an argument, it must contain an assumption.

Assumption (the unstated evidence) – So let's try to predict the assumption. It will be something on the lines of 'the only difference among the different laptops available in Ireland is the speed of the processor; the laptops are the same in every other aspect', because then if the people are still buying Ivy Infotech's laptops then these laptops must have the fastest processors, else people would be buying some other company's laptops.

Strengthener – So now that we have identified the conclusion, the evidence, and the assumption, the option that best tells us that the assumption is true has to strengthen the argument. (D) does this best and should be the correct answer.

For clarity, let's also take a look at the other options:

A. The argument is only concerned with processor speeds accounting for high sales. It has got nothing to do with how old a company is.

B. Again this option doesn't tell us why Ivy Infotech has the largest market share. Is it the processor speed or some other reason?

C. Very well but it is possible that the other competitors of Ivy Infotech also source their processors from this same company

D. The correct answer. If the only difference among the laptops is the processor speed and if people are still buying laptops manufactured by Ivy Infotech, then these laptops must have the fastest processors.

E. The option uses the word 'prefers' which doesn't tell you anything. You could prefer flying by a private jet to flying by a commercial airline but you mostly still have to fly by a commercial airline. So the Irish could prefer laptops with faster chips but might buy some other laptop which has a slightly slower processor but a much longer battery life or which is much cheaper in price.

Strengtheners and Assumptions

Did you notice something interesting in the above question – the correct answer is almost a paraphrase of the assumption that we had predicted earlier i.e. the strengthener is the same as the assumption. If you think about it, conceptually this has to be the case. An assumption is unstated evidence that strengthens an argument so if this unstated evidence is stated in the form of an option, then it will obviously strengthen the argument. So a strengthener will either be the assumption itself or it will supply some evidence that will make it more likely for the assumption to be true.

Thus the answer to a strengthen question will a lot of the times be the assumption, though you may not consciously realize this all the time.

Active and Passive Strengtheners

Since strengtheners follow from the assumption, it is but obvious that, just like we had active and passive assumptions, we'll also have active and passive strengtheners. An active strengthener will give you a positive point i.e. a point in favour of the argument whereas a passive strengthener will remove one or more of the negative points from the argument.

The following can be some passive strengtheners for the Ivy Infotech example:

- Sleek design is not the reason why the Irish are buying Ivy Infotech's laptops

- A longer battery life is not the reason why the Irish are buying Ivy Infotech's laptops

- The fact that Ivy Infotech's laptops are the cheapest laptops available in the market is not the reason why the Irish are buying Ivy Infotech's laptops

Notice that all these passive strengtheners again use the word not, just as passive assumptions do.

So a passive strengthener, in essence, removes a doubt from your mind about the argument whereas an active strengthener gives you some supporting point in favour of the argument

Always strengthen the connection between the Evidence and the Conclusion

While strengthen questions are generally easy, there is one folly that you must guard against – you must, at all times, try to strengthen the connection between the evidence and the conclusion. Never strengthen the conclusion in isolation (even if the argument asks you to strengthen the conclusion).

> I read in the newspaper this morning that in the last one month 20
> children have been kidnapped in Sodham County, when they stepped
> out of their house alone at night. So I conclude that if you are a child

staying in Sodham County, it is unsafe for you to step out alone at night.

Which of the following two options strengthens my argument?

1. I read this article in a newspaper that is a very trustworthy newspaper known for its honest credible reporting.

2. Two child kidnappers, who have recently been released from prison, have been seen loitering around in Sodham County at night over the last month.

While a lot of you may have gone with option two as the correct answer, it is in fact incorrect. Why am I concluding that if you are a child in Sodham County it is unsafe for you to step out alone at night? Not because I know something about the child kidnappers, but because I read something in the newspaper.

Another person could very well come and tell me that the newspaper is known for false reporting and for sensationalising things, facts which would weaken my argument. The opposite facts, as stated in option one, will then obviously strengthen my argument because my evidence is the newspaper article.

So the takeaway is that you always try to strengthen the link between the evidence and the conclusion. The evidence is there for a purpose and you must make use of it.

How to Approach Strengthen Questions

1. Read the argument and be clear on the evidence and the conclusion

2. Try to predict the assumption because the strengthener will, in some way, be linked to this

3. Go through the options and eliminate those that weaken the argument or are otherwise outside the scope of the argument

4. Remember to take into consideration the evidence as well; don't just strengthen the conclusion in isolation

3) Weaken Questions

Weaken questions, as the name suggests, will require you to weaken or raise doubts about whatever it is that an argument is stating. In that sense these are the exact opposite of Strengthen questions that you saw in the previous chapter.

Do keep in mind that weaken does not mean to negate an argument. Even if an option can raise a small doubt in your mind about the validity of the argument, it is weakening the argument. Similarly if an option removes a strengthener from an argument, it is again weakening the argument.

Notice that to weaken a stimulus, it is imperative that the stimulus have a conclusion. So weaken questions will always contain a stimulus that is in the form of an argument.

For conceptual clarity, let's look at the same example that we saw in the previous chapter but with different options.

> Of all the laptops available for sale in Ireland, laptops manufactured by Ivy Infotech must have the fastest processors. Over the last six months Ivy Infotech has sold three times as many laptops as its closest competitor. Additionally Ivy Infotech's order books are full for the next 12 months.

Which of the following options, if true, most weakens the argument?

A. Ivy Infotech was severely criticised last year for manufacturing laptops with slow processors

B. Apart from laptops, Ivy Infotech also manufactures desktops and tablets, sales of which have declined drastically in the last six months

C. At the same time last year, Ivy Infotech had sold 60% more laptops than it has this year

D. All the laptop manufacturers in Ireland, including Ivy Infotech, source their processors from the same company

E. Due to production bottlenecks, the production of laptops by Ivy Infotech's rival companies has fallen by more than 60% in the last six months

Since this is a weaken question, you know that the stimulus will be worded in the form of an argument. So the first step is to identify the conclusion and the evidence of this argument.

Conclusion (What is the argument stating) – Laptops manufactured by Ivy Infotech have the fastest processors.

Evidence (Why is the argument stating this) – Because Ivy Infotech has sold the maximum number of laptops in the last six months in Ireland.

But does this make sense? Can't there be some other plausible reason why the people in Ireland are buying Ivy Infotech's laptops? Maybe these laptops have a very sleek design, maybe they have a very long batter life, or maybe they are the cheapest laptops in the market. There can be several other reasons (other than fast processors) why the Irish are buying laptops manufactured by Ivy Infotech. This brings us to the assumption. Remember that since the stimulus is in the form of an argument, it must contain an assumption.

Assumption (the unstated evidence) – So let's try to predict the assumption. It will be something on the lines of 'the only difference among the different laptops available in Ireland is the speed of the processor; the laptops are the same in every other aspect', because then if the people are still buying Ivy Infotech's laptops then these laptops must have the fastest processors, else people would be buying some other company's laptops.

Weakener – So now that we have identified the conclusion, the evidence, and the assumption, the option that best tells us that the assumption may NOT be true has to weaken the argument. In essence, this option will provide us with some other reason (other than faster processors) why the sales of Ivy Infotech's laptops have been very high. (E) does this best and should be the correct answer.

For clarity, let's also take a look at the other options:

A. This was last year while the increase in sales has been this year. It is very much possible that because of this criticism Ivy Infotech equipped its laptops with faster processors. So by no stretch does this option weaken the argument.

B. Desktops and tablets are outside the scope of the argument. The fact remains that Ivy Infotech's laptops have outsold those of its rivals by a large margin. We need to show that this was not because of the faster processors and this option fails to do so.

C. This option states that overall Ivy Infotech has performed worse this year than it did last year but we are not concerned with this. The fact remains that Ivy Infotech's laptops have outsold those of its rivals by a large margin. We need to show that this was not because of the faster processors and this option fails to do so.

D. Looks good but doesn't necessarily weaken the argument. All the companies in Ireland source their processors from the same company

does not mean that the processors are all the same. Those sourced by Ivy Infotech could very well be faster than those sourced by its rival firms.

E. This option gives you an alternative reason why Ivy Infotech has sold more laptops than its rivals. It was not because of demand side issue but because of supply side constraints. Because of the production bottlenecks at its rival companies' plants, Ivy Infotech's laptops were probably available in the market in much larger numbers than those of its rivals, which is why they sold more. Hence this option weakens the argument by providing you with an alternative explanation to the one mentioned in the stimulus.

Weakeners and Assumptions

Common sense dictates that the only way in which an option can weaken an argument is by raising doubts about the validity of its assumption. When you make an assumption, you immediately deny the possibility of any other scenario being true. The weakener will provide you with these alternate scenarios and hence raise doubts in your mind as to which explanation is the correct one.

Remember that an option will never weaken the argument by questioning its evidence or by trying to negate its evidence. The evidence is a fact so it can never be questioned. What can be questioned however is the conclusion that is arrived at by using this evidence. You can't question facts but you can always question an opinion.

So the answer to a weaken question will usually be the option that provides you with alternatives to what has been assumed in the argument.

Always weaken the connection between the Evidence and the Conclusion

Just like strengthen questions, on weaken questions also you must, at all times, try to weaken the connection between the evidence and the conclusion. Never weaken the conclusion in isolation (even if the argument asks you to weaken the conclusion).

According to a recent survey conducted in Unitown City, people who drove SUV's were much more likely to flout traffic rules than people who drove regular sedans. Hence, if the government wishes to reduce the incidence of road accidents, it should ban the sale of SUVs in the city.

Which of the following two options most weakens the argument?

1. The road condition in Unitown City is very poor, and it is much easier to drive SUVs on these roads than regular sedans.

2. The survey size comprised 5% of the population of Unitown City.

The conclusion of this argument is based on the evidence of the recent survey. The only way to weaken this argument is by questioning the integrity of this survey. Notice that you cannot state that the survey was never conducted, you can only question its integrity.

Option two states that the survey only comprised a very small population of Unitown City so it may not be representative of the entire population of Unitown City. For example, it is possible that people drive rashly in the neighbourhood where this survey was conducted, but the people in the rest of the city are safe drivers. Thus, option two definitely weakens the argument.

As against this, option one provides you with a reason why people should be allowed to drive SUVs. But if driving SUVs is going to lead to more accidents, then this may not be a good enough reason not to ban the sale of SUVs in the city. Hence this option is outside the scope of the argument.

So the takeaway is that you always try to weaken the link between the evidence and the conclusion. The evidence is there for a purpose and you must make use of it.

How to Approach Weaken Questions

1. Read the argument and be clear on the evidence and the conclusion

2. Try to predict the assumption because the weakener will, in some way, try to convince you that this assumption may not be valid

3. Go through the options and eliminate those that strengthen the argument or are otherwise outside the scope of the argument

4. Remember to take into consideration the evidence as well; don't just weaken the conclusion in isolation

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4) Flaw Questions

Flaw questions will ask you to identify a flaw in the author's reasoning. Keep in mind that all arguments have the same fundamental flaw – that they rely on one or more unstated assumptions. So in a flaw question you basically need to question the assumption made by the author.

Ronald scored 600 on the GMAT while Derek scored 338 on the GRE. So Ronald performed much better than Derek did.

Which of the following is the most serious flaw in the argument?

(A) The argument does not take into account the possibility that Ronald's score could be a fluke

(B) The argument does not take into account the past academic records of Ronald and Derek

(C) The argument arrives at an extreme conclusion on the basis of unverified data

(D) The argument assumes that standardised test scores are the best predictor of future success of an individual

(E) The argument discounts the possibility that the GRE and the GMAT may have different scoring scales

Since this is a flaw question, you know that the stimulus will be worded in the form of an argument. So the first step is to identify the conclusion and the evidence of this argument.

Conclusion (What is the argument stating) – Ronald has performed better than Derek.

Evidence (Why is the argument stating this) – Ronald scored 600 on the GMAT and Derek scored 338 on the GRE, and since 600 is more than 338, Ronald must have performed better.

But does this make sense? Those of you who are aware of the GMAT scoring pattern would obviously know that a 338 (out of 340) on the GRE is a much better score than a 600 (out of 800) on the GMAT. However the argument does not assume that you will know this or need you to know this.

For all you know the GRE could be scored out of 1000 and the GMAT could be scored out of 2000. The important thing is to notice that the argument does not mention this fact, which will then take you to the assumption.

Assumption (the unstated evidence) – The assumption now is fairly easy to predict – that the GRE and the GMAT are scored on the same scoring scale. Only if this is assumed can the argument conclude what it is concluding; if you negate this fact then the argument will fall apart.

Flaw – The flaw will always question the assumption. It will raise doubts in your mind as to what if the assumption was not true. Out of the five options in the above argument, (E) does this best and hence is the correct answer. The argument does not take into account the possibility that the GRE and the GMAT may have different scoring scales and that a 338 on the GRE may actually be a better score than a 600 on the GMAT.

For clarity, let's also take a look at the other options:

A. It really doesn't matter how Ronald arrived at that particular score as long as there a possibility that this score could still be worse than Derek's score

B. Past academic records are irrelevant because the argument is only concluding for the current tests taken by Ronald and Derek. The argument does not make a conclusion that Ronald in general is a better student than Derek.

C. There is nothing in the argument to suggest that the data is unverified.

D. The argument does not make any conclusions about how successful will the two candidates be in future.

E. The correct answer.

Flaw and Assumptions

As we have seen, the answer to a flaw question will always be linked to the assumption of the argument. In essence, the flaw is the fact that the argument is relying on an assumption in the first place. So a flaw will simply end up questioning the assumption at all times.

The wording of the Flaw Question stem

A flaw question will either directly ask you to identify the flaw in the argument or it could also make use of terms such as *vulnerable to the objection* or *vulnerable to the criticism*. Here are some common ways of wording flaw questions:

- The argument is flawed primarily because

- Which of the following most strongly indicates that the logic of the above argument is flawed?

- The argument is most vulnerable to which of the following criticisms/objections?

How are Flaw Questions different from Weaken Questions

So are flaw questions the same as weaken questions? The answer is that the two are similar but not the same.

There is one big difference between the two – a flaw is always from within the argument; it is simply the assumption stated in some other words and will never mention additional evidence. As against this a weakener will almost always mention additional evidence that can question the validity of the argument's assumption. You can only weaken an argument by bringing in an additional point whereas the flaw will always be inherent in the argument.

Because of this fact an option that mentions a flaw will always be worded in the form of a question or a doubt whereas an option that mentions a weakener will always be worded in the form of a fact or evidence.

For example, in the Ronald vs. Derek argument, the following can be a possible weakener:

- The GRE is scored out of 340 whereas the GMAT is scored out of 800

Now do you notice how this option is different from the one that mentioned the flaw? The flaw was just raising a doubt that the two scoring scales may be different whereas this option provides a fact that confirms that the two scoring scales are different.

Typical Flaws present in Arguments

There are some typical flaws that the GRE likes to test students on. Let's take a look at some of them:

i.   **Mistaking Correlation for Causation** – In such cases, the argument will state that X and Y take place together or one after the other, so X is the cause of Y i.e. what appeared to be a simple correlation is actually a cause and effect relation.

> The days on which Kevin wears a black shirt, he performs
> much better in his practice tests than he does on days on
> which he wears a shirt of some other colour. So on the day of
> the final test, Kevin must ensure that he wears a black shirt.

ii. Confusing you with Absolute numbers and Percentages – In such arguments, the author will try to confuse you by providing absolute numbers as evidence and concluding for a percentage or vice versa. You've already seen an example of this in the argument at the beginning of this chapter (Ronald vs. Derek). Here's another one:

> 10% of the total houses in London are for sale and 30% of the total houses in New York are for sale. So there are more houses for sale in New York than in London.

iii. **Representativeness** – In such arguments the author will assume a small sample size to be representative of a much larger population or group.

> The mayor of Rodham City does not seem to be very popular with the city's residents. Out of the 20 people that I spoke to this afternoon, as many as 15 said that they hated the mayor.

You'll see each of these argument types in much more detail later in this book when we discuss some typical argument patterns tested on the GRE.

How to Approach Flaw Questions

1. Read the argument and be clear on the evidence and the conclusion

2. Try to predict the assumption because the flaw will always question the assumption in some manner

3. Look for some typical flaws based on the wording of the argument. If the argument mentions numbers, look for a correlation-causation problem; if it mentions a survey, look for a problem of representativeness, etc.

4. Remember not to confuse a flaw with an option that weakens the argument. If confused, go with the option that is directly connected to the argument's assumption

5) Explain Questions

Explain questions will ask you to provide the most logical explanation for the situation described in the stimulus. This stimulus will usually contain a contradiction or an anomaly i.e. a contrary to fact situation. Also the stimulus will always contain facts and won't be in the form of an argument.

Leading book publishers had predicted that the rampant illegal sharing of books online would have a detrimental impact on the sales of their physical books. However, the more illegal online sharing sites increase in popularity, the more physical books are being sold.

Which of the following options best explains why the sales of physical books have been increasing with the increase in online piracy?

A. The illegal sharing of books online has not become as popular as was expected

B. People in general find it more difficult to read books on a computer screen than reading a physical book

C. Book publishers have, in the last few years, invested heavily in advertising their books

D. A lot of people have discovered new authors through online book sharing sites and subsequently bought other books written by these authors because it is easier to read a physical book

E. The government has introduced heavy fines for those downloading books from online sharing sites

An explain question will never contain an argument so don't waste your time looking for the conclusion, evidence, and assumption. Instead try to quickly paraphrase the contradiction in the stimulus – it was expected that people will stop buying physical books because they could now download books for free from illegal online book sharing sites. However, as the free illegal book sharing sites gain popularity, the sales of physical books has also been growing similarly.

The correct option needs to explain why this has been the case. So let's take a look at each option in the question above:

A. This option directly questions a fact mentioned in the stimulus, which is something that can never be done on any CR question. The arguments states that illegal online book sharing is becoming more and more popular and we need to accept this fact as it is. We just need to show the connection between this fact and the fact that the sales of physical books have also been growing similarly.

B. This looks very good. However notice that it just provides you with a reason why people may not want to read books online. So in this case the sales of physical books should have remained unaffected or declined marginally. Then why have the sales been increasing? This option doesn't explain this fact. Remember that the correct answer has to explain both sets of facts and not just one of them.

C. This again addresses one part of the contradiction - why have the sales of books been increasing. But this option does not show the link between increase in illegal online sharing of books and the increase in sales of physical books.

D. The correct answer. This choice correctly identifies a link between the two sets of facts mentioned in the stimulus. People discover new authors through online book sharing sites, they like the book that they have read, and so they subsequently buy other books by these authors in the physical format because it is easier to read in this form.

E. Like B, in this case also the sales of physical books should have remained steady or changed slightly but what explains the increase in sales of physical books?

Based on the above analysis we can arrive at certain tips to keep in mind while attempting *Explain the Contradiction questions*.

Tips for Explain questions

— Make sure you have identified the discrepancy in the argument before looking at the options — A lot of times students rush to the options without realising what exactly they have to explain. As a result they go through all the five options and are not able to eliminate anything, so they go

back and again read the stimulus to understand the discrepancy. Then they once again go through all the options leading to wastage of precious time.

— **Never explain just one side of the stimulus** – As you saw in some of the options above, the correct answer has to explain both sides of the contradiction and not just one side.

— **Never deny the evidence** – This applies to all Critical Reasoning question types. Never try to negate or question the evidence or facts provided in the stimulus. Take this as true at all times

— **The answer will always be from the outside** – The answer to an explain question will always be a new point that somehow explains the contradiction in the stimulus, so don't eliminate an option just because it contains terms that have not been mentioned in the stimulus. As long as it explains the discrepancy, it could very well be the correct answer

Common wrong answer choices on Explain questions

- Options that explain only one side of the contradiction

- Options that negate or question the validity of the facts/evidence provided in the stimulus

How to approach an Explain Question

1. Read the stimulus. If it contains an argument then it most likely will not be an explain question. However if it contains a discrepancy/contradiction/anomaly, then it has to be an *Explain* question

2. Read the question stem to confirm that you are indeed looking at an *Explain* question

3. Don't bother making a prediction because there are several possibilities that can explain the situation. Quickly scan through the options eliminating the common wrong answer types discussed above

4. By this time you should have come down to two choices, if not arrived at the correct answer. If confused go back and read the stimulus to understand the stimulus better. Restate the contradiction or discrepancy in your own words and check which option is best explaining both sides of it. Select this option and move on.

6) Bold Faced Questions

In bold faced questions, two complete sentences or parts of sentences are highlighted in bold. The question will usually ask you to identify the role being played by the two bold or highlighted parts in the overall context of the argument or passage.

The difficulty with bold faced questions is that while you have to read the entire stimulus to understand what it is trying to state, you have to answer only for the bold part. A common trap the test maker uses is to give you options that describe the role played by the non-bold parts of the stimulus so as to trick you into going with these options.

The stimulus of a bold faced question will usually be in the form of an argument because only then can different sentences play different roles. In fact the stimulus will usually contain several arguments and counter arguments so as to make it difficult for you to grasp what exactly the parts in bold are doing.

Bold faced questions are generally regarded by test takers as one of the most (if not the most) difficult question types on the CR section. There are two reasons why these questions appear to be more difficult than the others:

1) You only have to answer for the bold parts

2) The confusing language of the options. All the options will use abstract language such as *the first is the opposition of the supposition assumed in the argument*

The options that you see on bold faced questions will always be worded in the form of *the first is doing x and the second is doing y*, further highlighting the fact that you only have to answer for the bold parts.

There is not one good reason for granting men paternity leave from work, while there are several good reasons to deny. For one, it would be an additional expense to businesses. Businesses are already facing tough times all over the world, so adding additional overhead is not an option. If the father acts like a father, he and the child will bond. If the father doesn't act like a father, he and the child will not bond, regardless of whether he is at home or at work.

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

(A) The first is the primary conclusion of the argument and the second is a secondary conclusion

(B) The first is the advocacy of the argument and the second raises doubts about this advocacy

(C) The first provides evidence as to why a policy should not be adopted by businesses and the second further strengthens this evidence

(D) The first is a conclusion that the argument disagrees with; the second provides the reasoning behind this disagreement

(E) The first is the primary conclusion of the argument and the second provides reasoning supporting the primary conclusion

The argument provides reasons why men should not be granted paternity leave. The first bold part states the overall conclusion of the argument, and the second provides a reason in support of this conclusion. (E) states this best and is the correct answer.

Let's also look at the other options for more clarity:

A. While the first is indeed the primary conclusion of the argument, the second is not a secondary conclusion. In fact the second supports the primary conclusion of the argument by providing a reason why paternity leave is not required

B. While the first can be considered an advocacy, the second does not by any stretch raise doubts about this advocacy

C. The first bold part does not provide any evidence, it just provides the conclusion. The evidence is in the rest of the argument

D. The argument in fact agrees with the first bold part

E. The correct answer as described in option (A)

List of Common roles played by the bold parts

- **Final Conclusion** – This is the point that argument is trying to make

- **Intermediate Conclusion** – This often contrasts with the final conclusion

- **Counterpoint** – This is a statement that opposes something stated earlier in the argument

- **Background information** – This provides some context for the issue described in the argument

- **Prediction** – This will always be an opinion and talk about something happening in the future

- **Objection** – Questions or doubts something stated in the argument

On bold faced questions, once you've read the stimulus and before you look at the options, make a rough assessment of what exactly is the connection between the two parts of the argument in bold. This need not be a very precise relation, even something on the lines of *the first and the second are saying opposite things* or *the first is an evidence or a cause and the second is the conclusion or the effect* will do as this will help you eliminate incorrect options.

Remember that on bold faced questions you may not always be able to select the answer; rather you will often end up eliminating wrong answer choices to arrive at the correct answer. For example you could be stuck between two options both of which may look fine to you. Then you'll have to get down to reading every individual word in the shortlisted options and try to eliminate the incorrect ones.

For example if you know that the argument is neutral (i.e. it does not take any sides) and one of the options mentions the phrase *the author advocates* you immediately know that this cannot be the answer because the author is not advocating anything in the entire stimulus.

Approach to Bold faced questions

1. Read the stimulus/passage and try to understand its overall meaning. The stimulus of bold faced questions usually tends to be long, so spend some time on this. As you read try to make out what role each sentence may be playing from the list of common roles that you saw earlier in this chapter

2. Once you've read the entire argument go back and just read the bold parts and try to identify the relation between them.

3. Quickly scan through all the options eliminating ones which are clearly incorrect. For example, if you have identified that the first bold part is an evidence, any option that states that the first bold part is a conclusion can immediately be eliminated.

4. Once you've narrowed down your choices to two or three, go through every word of the options and try to spot something that contradicts what is stated in the argument

Now let's also take a look at some typical argument structures that the GRE uses. The questions will still be the same as we saw in the preceding chapters; nobody will ask you to identify the structure of the argument. It's just that if you spot the structure of the argument, it'll become very easy for you to arrive at the correct answer because you will know what exactly you are looking for even before you look at the options. You've already seen some of these in the Flaw chapter; now we'll take a more in-depth look at them.

1) Cause and Effect Arguments

These arguments basically state that just because two things happen together or one after the other, one is the cause of the other. Let's take a look at a very simplified example,

Jason is very intelligent because he studied at Harvard.

Cause – The fact that Jason has studied at Harvard

Effect – Jason becoming intelligent

If you look at this argument in terms of facts and opinion, the facts are that Jason is intelligent and that he has studied at Harvard. However the opinion is the connection between these two facts – that Jason is intelligent *because* he studied at Harvard.

Assumption – When the author concludes that the reason for Jason's intelligence is the fact that he studied at Harvard, he automatically assumes that nothing else could be responsible for Jason's intelligence except the fact that he studied at Harvard.

Cause and Effect Arguments and Weaken questions

On most occasions whenever you get cause and effect type of arguments, the question stem will require you to weaken the argument. There are two ways of weakening cause and effect type of arguments:

i) **By providing another reason for the effect** – As we saw above, in a cause and effect argument the author assumes that nothing else could be responsible for the effect in question. So if we can show that another cause could also lead to the same effect, then the argument is immediately weakened because we don't know what is leading to the effect for sure.

For example, the following can be a weakener for the Harvard argument above:

Both of Jason's parents are geniuses.

So then maybe Jason is very intelligent because of genetic reasons and not because he went to Harvard.

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ii) **By showing that the cause and effect could actually be upside down** – This is a slightly more difficult to spot method of weakening cause and effect arguments. Even if two things happen together and we know that there definitely is a cause and effect relation between them, how do we know which of the two is causing the other; is X causing Y or is Y causing X. So if the argument concludes that X is causing Y, one way of weakening the argument is to show that it is actually Y that may be causing X.

For example

> *Because Jason was very intelligent, he got admitted into Harvard.*

So it's is not that Jason became intelligent after going to Harvard but rather that he was intelligent which is why he could go to Harvard in the first place.

So if the argument in the stimulus is of the form A is causing B, then it can be weakened in the following two ways:

i) By showing that C can also lead to B

ii) By showing that it is not A that is causing B, but B that is causing A

Let's look at a proper example now.

> A study has found that new ventures that are funded through bank loans are more likely to succeed than those funded by an entrepreneur's friends and relatives. The reason for this is not difficult to fathom. The obligation to pay a fixed instalment to the bank every month prevents the entrepreneur from getting complacent and increases his motivation to succeed.

> Which of the following raises the strongest doubt on the above argument?

> (A) Banks only fund those business ventures that have a very high probability of succeeding

> (B) The study also showed the some ventures that had been funded by an entrepreneur's friends and relatives were extremely successful

> (C) Most entrepreneurs agree that the pressure of repaying the bank loans acts as a positive stimulus for them

> (D) It is an accepted fact that only those entrepreneurs opt for bank funding who are unable to generate funds from personal sources

(E) According to a different study, there is a strong correlation between an entrepreneur's educational background and the nature of his business venture

It's best to summarise cause and effect arguments in the form of a cause and an effect:

The Cause – Funding through bank loans

The Effect – A high probability of success for a new venture

As we saw there are two ways of weakening cause and effect arguments – either provide some other cause for the same effect or reverse the cause and the effect.

Option (A) reverses the cause and effect in the argument and is the correct answer. This option states that the cause was the business venture's high probability of success and the effect was funding provided by the bank. Had the bank felt that the venture may not succeed, it would not have funded the venture in the first place. So it is not because of the bank funding that the venture succeeded but because the venture was going to succeed that the banks funded it in the first place.

Let's look at the other options for clarity.

(A) The Correct Answer

(B) This doesn't tell you anything because of the use of the word *some*. Some ventures were successful and some were not. Had the option stated that *most* such ventures are very successful then it could have negated the argument (but this won't be the case because in that case the argument would be questioning the evidence itself, which can never be the case)

(C) This option actually strengthens the argument

(D) Under what conditions an entrepreneur opts for bank funding is irrelevant to the argument

(E) The nature of the entrepreneur's business venture is of no consequence to the argument.

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2) Representativeness

Representativeness arguments will involve arriving at a generalized conclusion for a large population based on a sample or survey of a small sub set of the population.

For example,

> In response to a recent survey conducted by a newspaper in Quantos city, 70% of the respondents stated that they are very happy with the performance of the mayor and 20% stated that they are reasonably happy with the performance of the mayor. Only 10% of the respondents stated that they were unhappy with the mayor's performance. So, it seems safe to say that the residents of Quantos City are in general happy with the mayor's performance.

The Conclusion - The residents of Quantos City are in general happy with the mayor's performance.

The Evidence – The majority of respondents to a survey have expressed satisfaction with the mayor's performance.

The Assumption – The assumption is where the representativeness factor will come into play. What if this survey was conducted only amongst the economically well off residents? It is possible then that the poorer residents of Quantos City may actually be unhappy with the mayor's performance but their views haven't been taken into consideration at all in this survey.

So for the argument to hold true, the author of the argument has to assume that the survey mentioned in the argument is representative of the opinion of the entire population of Quantos city.

In general, whenever you see the terms *survey, poll, research, study, etc* mentioned in the evidence of any argument, immediately question whether this survey/poll/research is representative of the larger population as a whole. This will always be the assumption in the argument.

Then if you have to strengthen the argument, you will have to show that the survey/poll/research is indeed representative of the larger population whereas if you have to weaken the argument you will have to show that the survey/poll/research may not be representative of the larger population.

A strengthener for the above argument could be

> *The survey gave adequate importance to all demographic groups in Quantos City*

And a weakener could be

> *The survey comprised only 10% of the total population of Quantos City*

Notice that the strengthener and the weakener do not confirm or negate the argument. The strengthener simply removes one doubt from your mind and the weakener plants a doubt in your mind.

3) Number Arguments

Number Arguments are a mix of Maths and reasoning questions. These arguments will typically try to confuse you with their use of numbers.

For example

> Last year 300 undergrad students of Villa College managed to gain admission to the top ten graduate schools in the country. However, only 100 undergrad students of Havary College managed to gain admission to these schools. Thus, if you wish to study in the country's top ten graduate schools, your chances are higher if you pursue your undergrad degree from Villa College than from Havary College.

The Evidence – 300 undergrad students of Villa College gained admission into the country's top ten schools whereas only 100 undergrad students of Havary College gained admission to these schools

The Conclusion – A student's chances of gaining admission into one of the country's top ten graduate schools are higher if he attends Villa College than if he attends Havary College

On the face of it this argument looks very plausible. After all 300 is a much greater number than 100. However what if the total number of applicants at Villa College to the country's top ten graduate schools is 1000? Then the probability of a student getting into one of these top schools is 0.3 or 30%. And what if the total number of applicants at Havary College to the country's top ten graduate schools is 200? Then the probability of a student getting into one of these top schools is 0.5 or 50%.

So the chances of a Havary College student getting into a top graduate school are higher than those of a Villa College student. But this fact will make our argument fall apart. This leads us to the assumption in the argument.

The Assumption – The assumption has to be that the number of applicants to the country's top graduate schools from Villa College and Havary College is the same. Only then can 300 reflect a higher probability than 100.

So as you can see, number questions can be extremely confusing because the argument may appear completely logical to you at face value. It would help if you knew some common traps that the test maker uses to create number argument questions:

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i. **A higher percentage could lead to a lower number and vice versa**

You can only make sense of percentages when you have a total number given to you. Looking at percentages in isolation can distort your perception of the data.

> For example, in Year 1 the total radio sales in country X were
> 100000 units and in Year 2 the total sales came down to 60000
> units. In Year 1, 40 % of all radio sets sold were of Company A
> and in Year 2 this percentage increased to 60%

So you notice that even though Company A's share of the total radio sales increased from 40% to 60%, the total number of radio sets sold by Company A actually fell from 40000 in Year 1 to 36000 in Year 2.

ii. **A higher number could lead to a lower percentage and vice versa**

Again looking at absolute numbers, without taking into consideration the relevant percentages, can distort your perception of the data.

> For example, 10 students who study from Professor Roberts
> scored in the 90th percentile in their tests whereas 60 students
> who study from Professor Brown scored in the 90th percentile
> in the same test.

From the above data you may infer that Professor Brown is perhaps a better teacher than is Professor Roberts. However such an inference will be extremely erroneous because we don't know the total number of students taught by each of the Professors.

For example, if Professor Roberts taught only 20 students, then 50% of his students scored in the 90th percentile, and if Professor Brown taught 300 students, then only 20% of his students scored in the 90th percentile.

Tips for making Inferences from Number Arguments:

— For any number argument question you need three details – the total number, the absolute number and the percentage

— If the stimulus contains percentages, avoid answer choices that contain absolute numbers

— If the stimulus contains absolute numbers, avoid answer choices that contain percentages

Importance of Certain terms on Critical Reasoning Questions

1. **The use of some, many, most, and majority**

   While you may think that there is not much difference between these terms, there actually is a big difference. *Some* or *few* means more than one but *most* means more than 50%. This can have a huge bearing when you get down to eliminating incorrect options.

   > Four out of five students who study from Professor Larry score above 75% in their exams. So the credit for their excellent performance must go to Professor Larry.
   >
   > Which of the following two options most strongly weakens the argument?
   >
   > 1. Some students who study from Professor Larry also take additional tuitions in the subject from Professor James
   >
   > 2. Most students who study from Professor Larry also take additional tuitions in the subject from Professor James

   The argument is in the form of a cause and effect argument where the cause is Professor Larry and the effect is students getting excellent scores in their exams. The easiest way to weaken such arguments is to provide an alternative explanation (cause) for the effect.

   Both the above options provide you with an alternative explanation – the fact that students also took classes from Professor James so maybe Professor James is the cause and not Professor Larry. So does this mean that both the options weaken the argument?

   No it doesn't.

   Option one states that *some* students who study from Professor Larry also take classes in the same subject from Professor James. However, this fact doesn't tell you anything relevant because some students maybe taking these extra classes and some may not. For example, say the total number of students who take classes from Professor Larry is 100 and 5 of them also take classes from Professor James.

   Now the argument tells you that on an average 80 out of these 100 students (four out of five) score 75% or above in their exams. Then even if the 5 students who studied from Professor James scored well because of Professor James' teaching, how do you account for the remaining 75

students. It is still very probable that they performed well because of Professor Larry's teaching. So the use of *some* does not take you to the answer.

However *most* means more than 50% so out of the 100 students who study from Professor Larry, if 51 also take classes from Professor James , then it definitely raises a doubt as to whether these students are doing well because of Professor Larry or Professor James. Thus this option weakens the argument by providing an alternate explanation for the stated conclusion.

The takeaway is that words such as *some, many, and few* will rarely give you the answer; instead look out for words such as *most, majority, etc.*

However don't follow this strategy as a blind rule. There is a situation in which *some* can give you the answer. Say an argument concludes that nobody in America uses wood fired stoves anymore. Now if one of the options were to say that a *few or some* people in America still use these stoves, then this option would definitely weaken the argument.

2. The use of 'not' in the options

This will be relevant only for Assumption questions. As you saw earlier in the chapter on Assumptions, the use of *not* in one or more options is an indicator that you may be looking at a passive assumption. Let's take a look at the earlier argument once again:

> Four out of five students who study from Professor Larry
> score above 75% in their exams. So the credit for their
> excellent performance must go to Professor Larry.
>
> Which of the following is an assumption in the argument?
>
> 1. The fact that they study from Professor Larry is the only
>   reason that his students do well in the exam
>
> 2. The fact that most of the students who take classes from
>   Professor Larry also take classes from Professor James is
>   not the reason why these students perform well in the
>   exams

Option one is definitely assumed in the argument because there can be several other reasons why these students perform well in their exams – maybe they refer to several additional books, maybe they do more research on their own, etc. So for the argument to conclude that the cause of the students' good scores is Professor Larry, it has to assume that nothing else could be the cause of this.

How about option B? Interestingly, option B is also an assumption in the argument. This option logically follows from the earlier assumption. If the argument assumes that the only reason students do well is because they attend Professor Larry's classes, then it automatically also assumes that any other explanation for the said fact cannot be correct. Option B negates the possibility of one such explanation being true, so it is also an assumption in the argument.

Basically option A is an active assumption and option B is a passive assumption.

3. The use of EXCEPT in the Question stem

If we were to ask you what is the opposite of a strengthen option what will you say? Most likely 'weaken'. It is this thought process that you will have to guard against in EXCEPT questions. Technically, the opposite of a strengthen option will be an option that does not strengthen. The fact that this option does not strengthen does not necessarily imply that it will weaken the argument. It may just be an irrelevant fact, or it may be an inference, etc.

So, if the question stem tells you that *each of the given options strengthens the argument EXCEPT* then you need to identify four options that strengthen the argument and the remaining fifth option will be the answer – this option may or may not weaken the argument.

Hence, in EXCEPT questions, when you encounter an option that looks irrelevant don't eliminate it since this may be the correct answer; in fact this option will most likely be the correct answer.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Now that you have seen all the question types that will be tested on the GRE Reading Comprehension section, let's go some key strategies and points to remember that will greatly help improve your accuracy rate on the RC section of the GRE. Go through this section every time you take a full length test until all these strategies become ingrained in your mind.

The passage is not supposed to be entertaining

A lot of students complain that they find it extremely boring to practice RC passages and that doing so puts them to sleep. It is then not surprising at all that one of the biggest reasons why students perform poorly in the RC section is because they haven't practiced enough passages. Please keep in mind that the purpose of the passage is not to entertain you but to provide you with text that is dense, tedious, and difficult to comprehend. Do not go into the passage expecting to be entertained. You will see that if you go into the test expecting (and fully prepared) to read boring passages, this mindset itself will make you feel more in charge while attempting passages.

Be very careful if the passage is from your area of interest

Always remember to stick to what is mentioned in the passage and to not use outside information or your own knowledge of the subject area to answer questions. This is especially true of passages which are from your area of expertise. For example, say you get a passage about black holes, a subject about which you have considerable knowledge from before. A common trick used by the test maker is to give you an option that you know is the best answer because of your extra knowledge about black holes. However, this will be the wrong answer because it will not be supported by the limited information provided in the passage. For this reason it's best that you get a passage from an unfamiliar topic so that you can approach it objectively and without any preconceived notions.

Do not re-read sentences in the passage

A very common reason why students tend to spend a lot of time on the first read of the passage is because of their tendency to read every sentence in the passage twice or thrice. Part of the reason for this is lack of concentration. You are thinking about something else while reading a sentence so that by the time you finish the sentence you realize that you haven't understood a word of what you have read. So you go back and read the sentence again and then maybe a third time as well. Thus, you end up wasting valuable time.

However, the problem is not always that of concentration. A lot of the times the problem is more psychological in that students have developed this as a habit over the years and have convinced themselves that unless they read the text 3-4 times, they will not understand what it is trying to convey. So, on the first read they don't even make an attempt to understand what is written.

If you are also facing this problem of having to re-read sentences, try this approach - tell yourself that you will read the text only once; however, you can read as slowly as you want. It's fine even if you read at the rate of 50 words per minute as long as you do not re-read any sentence. Initially you may think that this is affecting your capacity to comprehend text (though this really shouldn't be the case since you can read as slowly as you want) but gradually you will see that you are breaking out of the habit to re-read sentences and, here is the best part, without having to sacrifice your reading speed.

Skim but don't skip

Students often ask us whether it is a good idea to read only parts of the passage and omit reading the irrelevant parts. If you notice, this question itself is illogical because you need to read all of the passage to be able to make out what is relevant and what is not. But what if you decide to follow the strategy of reading just the first and the last sentence of every paragraph and skipping the rest of it? We would not recommend that you do this because, while you will be able to answer global questions correctly, you will most likely struggle to answer Inference questions and definitely struggle to answer Detail questions, using this strategy.

For example, a question may ask you 'Which of the following is true of Sulphur according to the passage'? Now if you have only read the first and the last sentence of each paragraph, you may not have even come across sulphur if it is mentioned in the middle of some paragraph. Then you will end up having to go back and read the entire passage all over again, trying to locate where sulphur is mentioned in the passage. All this obviously leads to wastage of precious time.

So, we think it is a bad idea to skip parts of the passage. However we also think it's a bad idea to try to understand every detail mentioned in the passage. What we recommend is that you skim the passage i.e. read the passage to understand the main idea of every paragraph without getting bogged down by the specific details mentioned in each paragraph. So, while you read everything in the passage (which will make life easier for you on Detail questions), you don't try to understand all of it completely.

Remember the Common Wrong answer traps

While going through the options, you must consciously make an attempt to look for and avoid common wrong answer traps. Here are a few of these traps:

- An option containing a specific detail from the passage will never be the answer to a Global/Primary purpose of the passage question

- Extreme answers must always be avoided on Inference questions

- The answer to a Function question will be the *Why* and not the *What*

Do not get over analytical/mechanical

It is usually advised that students do not get too involved with the passage by trying to understand the meaning of every word in the passage as this could lead to a *missing the woods for the trees* kind of situation. However, the other extreme must also be avoided. What some students do is attempt the passage in an extremely mechanical manner. They get so bogged down in following a process or structure that they completely miss out on the overall meaning of the passage. What we recommend is that you follow a balanced approach – try not to focus too much on every sentence in the passage while at the same time make sure you are clear on the main idea and main purpose of the passage by the time you are done reading it.

Do not get lost in Technical Jargon

Some passages, especially those from the fields of science or law, can be extremely jargon heavy in that they make use of lots of complex technical terms. Do not let this weigh you down. Jargon is the *what* of the passage, but remember that you have to focus on the *why* – why is the author providing you with all this jargon?

So the more complex a passage, the less you should try to focus on the details mentioned in it.

Do not get into the habit of underlining or writing next to the passage in the textbook

A lot of students, instead of jotting down the passage map on a separate piece of paper, prefer to simply underline the important points in the passage itself, or take notes next to the passage in the textbook. This is a very bad habit to get into because you will not be able to underline or write on the computer screen on the actual test. In fact this can completely catch you off guard and ruin your comprehension ability as well as your timing.

Try to eliminate down to two options

On a lot of questions, especially the high difficulty ones, you will often end up eliminating wrong answer choices rather than selecting the correct one. This is true not just for RC questions but for all other question types on the GRE as well. There is nothing wrong with this approach. In fact we encourage students to start by eliminating wrong answer choices. The first time you read through the options, try to eliminate two or three that make absolutely no sense in context of the passage. This shouldn't be very difficult if you have understood the passage correctly because it is very difficult for the test makers to provide you with four or five equally confusing choices.

So, the first time you go through the options, try to come down to two possible answers. Once you do this, you have increased your chances of getting the answer correct from 20% to 50%, which are very good odds. Once you have narrowed down to two possibilities, go through each of these options and try to identify the one that better answers the question asked. It might also be a good idea to re-read the question once again at this stage, as students often tend to misread questions on the test.

Figure out which strategy works best for you

Reading Comprehension is one topic on which the same approach will not work for all students. One student may prefer to take notes while reading whereas another may prefer to do so mentally. Even for the same student, the approach could differ based on the subject area of the passage. I may want to take notes on abstract passages whereas I may not want to do so on relatively simpler detail-oriented passages.

So you need to know which strategy works best for you. The only way to do this is by trying different strategies on several passages. Here are some strategies that you could try:

- Skim through the passage while spending more time on the questions and going back and forth between the questions and the passage

- Spend more time on the first read of the passage and less time on answering each question by avoiding going back to the passage too much.

- Read the passage quickly; then go back and re-read the first and last sentence of each paragraph and try to identify the structure of the passage

- Concentrate on transition words while reading the passage while ignoring most of the details mentioned in the passage.

- Read the first paragraph. Then read only the first and the last sentence of the remaining paragraphs and try to identify the main idea and the purpose of the passage

A difficult passage does not mean difficult questions and vice versa

Just because a passage is difficult to understand does not necessarily mean that the questions from this passage will also be difficult to answer. We've come across several instances in which even if you did not understand half of the passage you could still answer most of the questions correctly by simply elimination options. On the other hand, we have also come across passages which are very easy to comprehend but which provide you with such close options that you can't help getting confused.

What we are trying to highlight is that the moment students see a tough passage, such as one on Philosophy, they tend to assume that this is a very difficult passage and that they will struggle to get the questions right. By starting with this negative mindset, students drastically reduce their chances of success and will end up marking even the simple questions incorrectly.

Easier passage with tricky options provide a different problem - one in which students think they are doing everything correctly whereas they are actually being tricked into going with the wrong options. A lot of students complain after the test that they thought they were marking everything correctly, yet they got a low score. The reasoning described earlier can explain this sort of situation.

In fact we think it is much better if you get tough passages because they keep you on your toes. You'll not get lax and you will recheck each option before marking one. Contrastingly, an easy passage lulls you into a false sense of security and makes you complacent and careless, thereby lowering your score.

Do not worry about your Reading Speed

Some students ask us whether they should join a speed reading course or buy books on the subject. Even some experts suggest that students get into the habit of reading fast. We just recommend that students get in the habit of reading, period!

GRE RC is not a test of reading speed but of comprehension. The average reading speed of humans is around 250 words per minute and the average GRE passage contains around 150 words. So it should take an average person less than one minute to read a GRE passage. However, the problem is comprehension, which is a function of things other than the reading speed.

How to improve Comprehension

To improve your comprehension levels in general, it would be a good idea to go through the following publications on a regular basis. However, do not expect this to show magical results. Reading a dozen issues of the Reader's Digest will not make you an RC expert overnight.

- The Economist
- The Wall Street Journal
- The Reader's Digest
- The National Geographic Magazine
- The Scientific American

In addition to these, it would be a good idea to read one general and one business newspaper every day, with special focus on the Editorial section of the newspapers because it contains more opinionated articles.

Practice, Practice, and more Practice

As we stated at the beginning of this book, there is no great path-breaking strategy that one can use for Reading Comprehension. While basic ideas such as not concentrating too much on every detail in the passage and finding out the main idea and primary purpose obviously remain, the best and perhaps the only way to improve RC is by practicing more and more passages, especially those from outside your comfort area. For this reason we have provided you with 100 RC practice questions in this book. This should be enough to provide you with a thorough workout of all the different subject areas which passages could come from, and of the difficulty levels and question types that could be tested.

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