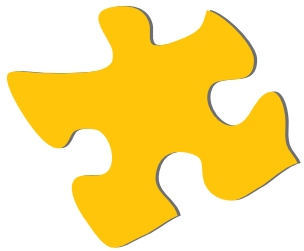


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Logical Reasoning

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Chapter 1

Logical Reasoning Overview

Logical Reasoning on the LSAT

What is Logical Reasoning?

The Logical Reasoning (LR) section of the LSAT tests your ability to analyze the logical foundations of a given argument. While knowledge of some formal logic principles can be helpful on some Logical Reasoning questions, you certainly don't need prior training in formal logic in order to succeed on the LR section. Rather, your success will be dictated almost entirely by your ability to read effectively and critically. Much of this book will be dedicated to building your reading skills in the context of LR questions.

Here is an example of a typical LR question:

[For copyright reasons, this question has been removed from this downloadable sample document.]

The correct answer is (E). We'll be taking a closer look at Assumption questions later on in the book. For now, simply note that this example illustrates the three components that make up every LR question: (1) the argument, (2) the prompt (the question), and (3) the answer choices.

Logical Reasoning on Your Exam

The entire LSAT exam is comprised of the following sections (not necessarily in this order):

SECTION	QUESTIONS	SCORED?	TIME
Logic Games	22-23	yes	35 minutes
Reading Comprehension	26-28	yes	35 minutes
Logical Reasoning (1)	24-26	yes	35 minutes
Logical Reasoning (2)	24-26	yes	35 minutes
EXPERIMENTAL	22-28	no	35 minutes
Essay	1 essay	no	30 minutes

Note that every LSAT exam will contain two Logical Reasoning sections that will count towards your final score. Thus, just about half of the total questions on the LSAT will be Logical Reasoning questions. To succeed on the LSAT, you **MUST** be comfortable with Logical Reasoning.

Keep in mind that the Experimental section could end up being a Logical Reasoning section as well. If you do receive three LR sections on your exam, only two of those three sections will actually count towards your final score (unfortunately, it's impossible to know which two as you are taking the exam).

Scoring

Each LR question, and every other question on the LSAT for that matter, is worth exactly 1 point. If you answer a question correctly, you will be credited with 1 point for that question. If you answer the question incorrectly, or if you fail to answer the question, you will be credited with 0 points for that question.

It is important to note that there is no guessing penalty on the LSAT. An incorrect answer is scored the same as a "no answer." Thus, it is to your advantage to answer every single question on the exam, even if some of those answers are wild guesses.

During the scoring of your exam, your points are totaled and then converted to a scaled score between 120 and 180. The conversion depends on the performance of all the other test-takers who took the same exam; a standardized curve is used to assign your scaled score.

From Here to 170+

The Logical Reasoning Dichotomy

When it comes to Logical Reasoning, there is a big difference between the approaches, skills, and attitudes of the average scorer and those of a top scorer:

MOST LSAT TEST-TAKERS	170+ TEST-TAKERS
Fail to recognize the tendencies of the different question types	Know these tendencies and use this knowledge to inform thinking
Don't understand the structure of arguments	Can dissect the structure of an argument
Read passively and without direction	Read with a purpose and from a perspective
Gloss over key words that change the meaning in subtle, but important, ways	Recognize detail distortions
Lack confidence in eliminating incorrect answers	Actively look for wrong answer characteristics and confidently eliminate wrong answers
Struggle to assimilate and apply all the tricks and gimmicks they've been taught	Apply their knowledge and understanding almost automatically

So, how do you move from the left column to the right? First, you must develop a solid understanding of the LR content tested on the exam. This requires a comprehensive look at the various question types that you will face.

Content: Logical Reasoning Question Types

Logical Reasoning questions can be organized into the following categories. Note the relative frequency of each question type:

QUESTION TYPE	% of TOTAL
Analyze Structure	15%
Assumptions	16%
Identify a Flaw	16%
Make an Inference	13%
Strengthen/Weaken	16%
Application	18%
Explain a Result	6%

Later on in this book, we will carefully examine each and every question type, and we will introduce the most efficient and effective methods for tackling each question type. It is worth emphasizing, however, that your ability to recognize and understand the characteristics of different question types is only one small part of achieving success on LR questions. While you will use these categorizations to learn the nuts and bolts of LR, the ultimate goal is to see these different question types as mere variations of each other. In other words, the better you get at LR, the less you will focus on the discrete categories represented in the table above and the more you will see each of these question types as a slightly different way to test how well you read.

As we mentioned earlier, your ability to read effectively and critically will drive your success on LR. This is a good time to introduce the important principles that will guide your LR process.

Process: The 3 Principles**1. Read Like a Debater**

Research shows that the best readers read with a purpose. We'll examine how to define this purpose by putting yourself in the mindset of a debater.

2. Mind the Details

The difference between a right answer and a wrong answer often comes down to one subtle detail presented in the argument or in the answer choice itself. You **MUST** mind the details! We'll see plenty of examples throughout the book.

3. Work from Wrong to Right

Wrong answers are much easier to find than right answers. To succeed on the most difficult LR questions, you'll need to change your mindset: your job is **NOT** to find the right answer, but rather to quickly identify the wrong answers.

Let's get started.

Chapter 2

Arguments: Read Like a Debater

Reading From a Perspective

Kennedy-Nixon

The first ever nationally televised presidential campaign debate took place in September of 1960. Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy and Republican incumbent Vice President Richard Nixon squared off in what would become one of the most famous debates in history. The idea of relevant experience had become a major issue in the campaign; the Republicans had cited inexperience as the main reason why Senator Kennedy was unqualified to lead from the White House. The first question of the evening was directed to Senator Kennedy (quoted from debate transcripts):

MODERATOR: Senator, the Vice President [Richard Nixon] in his campaign has said that you were naive and at times immature. He has raised the question of leadership. On this issue, why do you think people should vote for you rather than the Vice President?

MR. KENNEDY: Well, the Vice President and I came to the Congress together in 1946; we both served in the Labor Committee. I've been there [in congress] now for fourteen years, the same period of time that he has [referring to Nixon's six years in congress and eight years as Vice President], so that our experience in, uh, government is comparable...

MODERATOR: Mr. Nixon, would you like to comment on that statement?

MR. NIXON: I have no comment.

Perhaps it was a calculated move, but Vice President Nixon seemed to have bought into Kennedy's argument. He didn't even respond. Most of the time, we tend to go along with people's arguments without much thought. If they speak forcefully enough, or with enough passion (as Senator Kennedy most likely did during the debate), we end up *wanting* to go along. Let's face it: we're easily convinced and gullible, especially when politicians are talking!

Kennedy's argument above sounds great. It makes sense. 14 years equals 14 years, right? However, there are some inherent gaps in his logic. We'll get to these momentarily.

The LSAT Logical Reasoning section is all about reading an argument, such as the one given by Kennedy above, deconstructing the argument, and identifying any gaps or weaknesses in the logic used to form the argument. Complacency won't cut it. Giving the benefit of the doubt won't work. In order to be successful in this endeavor, you must be super critical of everything you read, and in order to properly focus your critical eye, you must read with a purpose.

Perspective and Purpose

Have you ever read the entire page of a book only to find that you can't remember anything you've read when you reach the bottom? If so, you're certainly not alone. It's a common issue, especially when it comes to standardized tests such as the LSAT. On the Logical Reasoning section, you will find yourself confronted with arguments and passages on topics that you're not familiar with and not particularly interested in. If you're not entirely sure what parts of the passage are important and what parts are not, the risk of "spacing out" is particularly high. When this happens, you'll find yourself rereading certain sentences two or three times as you struggle to concentrate. You might even decide to start over from the top and read the whole thing over again! This is obviously not a good use of time. So, how can you avoid this?

Research shows that the best readers read with a purpose. Consider the following scenarios:

Scenario #1: You are a student in a physics course. Tomorrow's assignment, as listed on the syllabus, appears as follows: "Read Chapter 3."

Scenario #2: You are a student in a physics course. Tomorrow's assignment, as listed on the syllabus, appears as follows: "Read Chapter 3 on Newton's Laws of Motion. When you're finished, you should be able to (1) explain each law in your own words, and (2) provide a real-life example of each law."

Both assignments require that you read Chapter 3. However, it is almost certain that students given the assignment from Scenario #2 will get the intended benefits from the chapter whereas those given the assignment from Scenario #1 probably won't. The reason is that students given the assignment from Scenario #1 have no purpose attached to their reading. Without any direction, they will become passive readers, struggling to determine what's important and what's not. Most likely, many of these students will arrive at the end of the chapter and not remember much about what they just finished reading (if they read it at all!).

On the other hand, students given the assignment from Scenario #2 know exactly what they're looking for before they start--they have a clear purpose. As they read, they will actively search for the different laws and their definitions, and they will look for real-life examples of these laws in action. They will read more quickly through the sections that aren't directly relevant to their purpose, and more slowly through those sections that *are* directly relevant. All in all, they will read faster and with greater comprehension.

In this case, the students in the second scenario were lucky: the teacher clearly defined the purpose for them. It's often difficult to know what our purpose should be when we read. The easiest way to determine *purpose* is to consider the *perspective* of the reader. Here are a few examples:

From the Perspective of...	Purpose
a beach lounge reading a novel	pure entertainment... no real purpose
a mother of two, dinner time, a pound of leftover ground beef in the freezer, reading a cookbook	look for recipes that use ground beef
a Robert Frost scholar, preparing to give a lecture on Frost's use of "nature's ritual" in his work, reading an anthology of poems by Robert Frost	connect different poems using the ritualism of nature as a theme
a sports show host, getting ready to interview Tiger Woods, reading the New York Times the morning after the biggest golf tournament of the year	scan for Tiger's tournament results, look for inexplicable events that Tiger might be able to shed light on in a live interview

Who you are and what you're reading will often determine why and how you read. Thus, we can say that *perspective* drives *purpose*.

The good majority of students taking the LSAT read without perspective, and therefore without purpose. This generally leads to slow reading and low comprehension. To better your chances of success on Logical Reasoning, you need to read quickly, efficiently, and with high levels of comprehension. Reading with a purpose will allow you to do so.

Reading Like a Debater

Let's revisit the Kennedy-Nixon excerpt in order to define the *perspective* that will drive your *purpose* when reading LR arguments. Consider Kennedy's argument one more time:

MR. KENNEDY: Well, the Vice President and I came to the Congress together in 1946; we both served in the Labor Committee. I've been there [in congress] now for fourteen years, the same period of time that he has [referring to Nixon's six years in congress and eight years as Vice President], so that our experience in, uh, government is comparable...

There are many different perspectives from which Kennedy's argument can be heard or read. Here are some:

1. Reporter

Someone listening or reading from the perspective of a reporter would listen or read with the purpose of accurately transcribing the comments. He/she would listen closely for details (1946, 14 years, etc.) to be sure they were noted accurately.

2. Historian

Someone listening or reading from the perspective of a historian might listen or read with the purpose of connecting the comments to similar arguments made in historical debates, perhaps attempting to draw out comparisons with the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates.

3. Debater

Someone listening or reading from the perspective of a debater (in this case Vice President Nixon) should listen or read with the purpose of analyzing the argument and attempting to uncover the logical gaps in the argument. **THIS IS THE BEST PERSPECTIVE TO USE FOR THE LOGICAL REASONING SECTION!**

On the LR section of the LSAT, most of the questions will ask you to analyze the argument to some degree, or to identify flaws in the argument. By reading each argument through the critical eye of a debater, your purpose will be to actively seek out the inherent gaps and flaws. So, as you read, put yourself in the shoes of Richard Nixon. Prepare yourself for an effective rebuttal, and when your chance comes, don't be caught flat-footed like he was!

Let's take a closer look at specifically what it is that you need to attend to as you read from the perspective of a debater.

The Structure of Arguments

Imagine yourself in Nixon's shoes. In order to effectively rebut Kennedy's argument, you first need to figure out what the main point of his argument is. What exactly is he trying to say? What is his conclusion?

CONCLUSION
(main point)

"...so that our experience in, uh, government is comparable..."

The conclusion of the argument is the main point, final claim, or main opinion. It is always the most important part of the argument; you must identify the conclusion if you are to have any chance at understanding, analyzing, or attacking the argument. The conclusion is sometimes triggered by words such as "so, thus, therefore, consequently."

Next, you must consider how the conclusion is drawn. What support is given for this conclusion? What are the supporting premises?

SUPPORTING PREMISES
(supporting facts)

"...we both served in the Labor Committee."

"I've been there [in congress] now for fourteen years, the same period of time that he has [referring to Nixon's six years in congress and eight years as Vice President]..."

Supporting premises are stated facts or claims that provide support for the conclusion. Premises are sometimes triggered by words such as "because" or "since." Once you've identified the conclusion and the supporting premises, you'll be in a good position to be critical of the argument. In this case, the argument is suspect because Kennedy makes a few questionable assumptions.

ASSUMPTIONS
(unstated)

assumes that two people who serve on the same committee necessarily gain the same experience

assumes that the amount of time spent in congress is a good measure of experience

assumes that the work of a Senator provides the same relevant experience as the work of a Vice President

Assumptions are the underlying, unstated pieces of the argument that need to be true in order for the argument to work. Most arguments have underlying assumptions. Often, the author of the argument takes these assumptions for granted. Your job is to actively uncover these assumptions as if you were devising your counter response in a debate. We'll discuss the nature of assumptions more carefully in a later chapter, so don't worry if you weren't able to see the above assumptions immediately.

Assuming Nixon had (1) understood Kennedy's conclusion, or main point, (2) attended to the premises that Kennedy used to support his conclusion, and (3) actively used this understanding to uncover the gaps inherent in Kennedy's argument, he could have responded much more forcefully.

Let's rewrite history:

MR. KENNEDY: Well, the Vice President and I came to the Congress together in 1946; we both served in the Labor Committee. I've been there [in congress] now for fourteen years, the same period of time that he has [referring to Nixon's six years in congress and eight years as Vice President], so that our experience in, uh, government is comparable...

MODERATOR: Mr. Nixon, would you like to comment on that statement?

MR. NIXON: Yes, I would like to comment. Senator Kennedy assumes that his work as a Senator provides the same relevant experience as my work as Vice President. This assumption is flawed. The executive experience I have gained as Vice President is much more relevant to the executive work that we all know to be the primary work of the President. In fact our experience is *not* comparable. I am much better prepared to be President.

In the next chapter, we'll discuss argument components more completely in the context of our first question type, but here's a summary of argument structure as we understand it to this point:

P	+	(A)	=	C
premises		assumptions		conclusion
stated as fact		unstated		main point/final claim
support the conclusion		most arguments have underlying assumptions		without this, there is no argument

For every Logical Reasoning argument, take on the perspective of a debater. Make it your purpose to be critical of the argument at hand. Actively search for the conclusion, the supporting premises, and the underlying assumptions.

Perspective gives you purpose, and purpose gives you focus, speed, and comprehension. Oh, and by the way, if you read from the perspective of a debater you'll ultimately be as prepared as you can be to perform the "tasks" that LR questions ask you to perform. Let's look at a real example to illustrate.

The Debater in Action

Try the following LR question. Give yourself about a minute and a half.

[For copyright reasons, this question has been removed from this downloadable sample document.]

Deconstructing the argument, we get:

SUPPORTING PREMISE: *[Removed for copyright reasons.]*

SUPPORTING PREMISE: *[Removed for copyright reasons.]*

CONCLUSION: *[Removed for copyright reasons.]*

This is a fairly basic argument. The premises are stated facts, and the conclusion is easy to spot as it is triggered by the word "therefore." The question asks us to identify an assumption upon which the argument depends. Remember, your perspective is that of a debater, and your purpose is to identify the main point (conclusion), to understand how this point is supported by the premises, and to *attempt to uncover any gaps in the logical reasoning of the argument*. Hopefully, you were able to see one very large gap in this argument. Here's a possible rebuttal you could make as a debater:

REBUTTAL: The author assumes that the musicians' corpora callosa weren't larger on average to begin with. That's a pretty big assumption!

In other words, isn't it possible that the musicians already had large corpora callosa *before* they began their musical training? If this were the case, this would destroy the argument that musical training *causes* the larger corpus callosum. Therefore, the author must be assuming that this is NOT the case in order to draw the conclusion.

Now, while you *should* actively attempt to uncover flaws and gaps, you *should not* expect or anticipate that the flaw or gap that you've identified will always be the correct answer. Sometimes the correct answer will be an assumption or flaw that you hadn't thought of (we'll see an example of this later). Other times the question won't even ask for an assumption or a flaw. In this particular case, the assumption that we identified does end up being the correct answer:

(A) *[Removed for copyright reasons.]*

We will discuss assumption questions and the nature of assumptions later on in the book. What you should take away now, however, is that active, critical reading through the eyes of a debater will help prepare you for the task of answering such questions.

Challenges in Identifying Argument Structure

In the presidential debate presented earlier, Senator Kennedy made a fairly straightforward argument. He stated a few premises...

"Well, the Vice President and I came to the Congress together in 1946; we both served in the Labor Committee. I've been there [in congress] now for fourteen years, the same period of time that he has [referring to Nixon's six years in congress and eight years as Vice President]..."

then finished with his conclusion...

"...so that our experience in, uh, government is comparable..."

Arguments on the LSAT won't always be so straightforward. Let's get familiar with the variations that the LSAT uses to make things more difficult on you.

Organizational Structure

The LSAT will often change the organizational structure of the argument components to make things a bit trickier. Here are some common orderings:

1. PREMISE-PREMISE-CONCLUSION

This is the ordering that Kennedy used in his argument. It's the simplest of the possible orderings:

My electricity bill was \$45 last month. I will be out of town more this month than I was last month. Thus, my electricity bill will be less than \$45 this month. [By the way, if you're thinking about the inherent assumptions made in this argument, you're reading like a debater!]

2. CONCLUSION-PREMISE-PREMISE

The LSAT will often construct arguments that begin with the conclusion:

My electricity bill will be less than \$45 this month. My electricity bill was \$45 last month, and I will be out of town more this month than I was last month.

3. PREMISE-CONCLUSION-PREMISE

We get the same exact argument even when the conclusion is sandwiched between premises:

My electricity bill was \$45 last month. My electricity bill will be less than \$45 this month since I will be out of town more this month than I was last month.

These three arguments are identical. The thing to notice here is that *organizational structure* has nothing to do with *logical structure*. Regardless of how we arrange the pieces, we still have two premises supporting a conclusion.

Background Information

Sometimes you'll see argument components that don't seem like supporting premises or conclusions. Often, the LSAT will include neutral background information in an attempt to orient the reader before the real argument starts:

Next week, our school board will vote on a proposal to extend the school day by one hour. This proposal will not pass. A very similar proposal was voted down by the school board in a neighboring town.

Here's a breakdown of the argument, point by point:

BACKGROUND: Next week, our school board will vote on a proposal to extend the school day by one hour.

CONCLUSION: This proposal will not pass.

SUPPORTING PREMISE: A very similar proposal was voted down by the school board in a neighboring town.

Intermediate Conclusions and the Therefore Test

A chain of logic will often contain an intermediate conclusion that supports the final conclusion:

A new lemonade stand has just opened for business in the town square. The stand will surely fail. A local juice store already sells lemonade in the town square, and consumers in the town have historically been very loyal to local businesses. The new lemonade stand will not be able to attract customers.

You can see that as we add in more and more complicating elements, the arguments become more difficult to track. In this case, there seem to be two possible conclusions: (1) The stand will surely fail, and (2) The new lemonade stand will not be able to attract customers. Remember, before we can answer any question related to such an argument, we **MUST** know what the main point, or final conclusion is. There can only be one. Let's use something called "The Therefore Test" to identify the final conclusion.

Case #1: The stand will surely fail, **THEREFORE** the new lemonade stand will not be able to attract customers.

Case #2: The new lemonade stand will not be able to attract customers, **THEREFORE** the stand will surely fail.

We've proposed two different logical statements by changing the order of the two possible conclusions. The first case doesn't make a whole lot of sense. In the second case, however, the first part of the statement clearly supports, or leads into, the second part of the statement. Because the stand will not be able to attract customers, it will surely fail. Thus, the final conclusion, the main conclusion, is that "The stand will surely fail." Any conclusion that supports the final conclusion is called an intermediate conclusion.

Let's break this argument down:

BACKGROUND: A new lemonade stand has just opened for business in the town square.

CONCLUSION: The stand will surely fail.

SUPPORTING PREMISE: A local juice store already sells lemonade in the town square,

SUPPORTING PREMISE: and consumers in the town have historically been very loyal to local businesses.

INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION: The new lemonade stand will not be able to attract customers.

Use The Therefore Test to differentiate between intermediate and final conclusions!

Opposing Points

Think about the arguments that you make on a daily basis (you probably make more than you realize). Sometimes you can strengthen your argument by conceding a point or two to the other side. In doing so, you show that you've considered alternate viewpoints, and you also steal the thunder of the person that might be arguing against you! The LSAT does this all the time. Let's revisit the lemonade argument with an added twist:

A new lemonade stand has just opened for business in the town square. It is widely agreed that the new stand sells the best lemonade in town, but the stand will surely fail. A local juice store already sells lemonade in the town square, and consumers in the town have historically been very loyal to local businesses. The new lemonade stand will not be able to attract customers.

In this case, the fact that the "stand sells the best lemonade in town" is an opposing point; it supports the other side. Notice that the contrast with the main conclusion is set up with the word "but." Here's another, slightly different example:

A new lemonade stand has just opened for business in the town square. The columnist in the local paper writes that the stand has a good chance of succeeding, but it will surely fail. A local juice store already sells lemonade in the town square, and consumers in the town have historically been very loyal to local businesses. The new lemonade stand will not be able to attract customers.

Notice again the contrast word "but." We'll see later on in the book that the correct answer to a question will often depend on your ability to distinguish between sides of an argument. So, it's very important that recognize opposing points, wherever they might appear in the argument.

No Conclusion

Sometimes an argument will have no conclusion whatsoever:

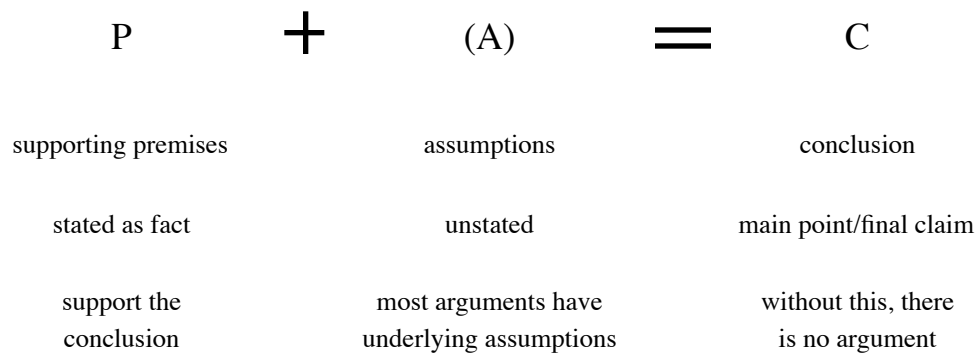
Fuel prices have increased steadily over the last three years, as has the demand for domestic air travel. Despite these trends, the average cost of a domestic airline ticket offered by FlyRight Airlines is cheaper now than it was three years ago.

Notice that there is no assertion made, no claim, no conclusion. This "argument" is not really an argument at all, but rather a list of facts. If presented with such a passage, you will most likely be asked to draw a conclusion of your own, or to explain a surprising result presented in the passage. In this case, you'd probably be asked to choose an answer that reconciles the apparent discrepancy presented.

Be aware that not all LR passages have a conclusion.

Reviewing Argument Structure

Remember that most arguments will have the following components:



Some arguments will also contain (1) background information, (2) an intermediate conclusion, or (3) opposing points. Some passages will contain no conclusion at all.

The 170+ Experience

Take about a minute and a half to answer the following Logical Reasoning question. Read as if you were preparing to rebut: actively seek out the conclusion, understand the support given for that conclusion, and be skeptical of the argument. Is the argument sound? If not, why not?

[For copyright reasons, this question has been removed from this downloadable sample document.]

Let's approach this argument in real-time through the eyes of a 170+ test-taker who reads like a debater. Notice that the process isn't necessarily smooth and flawless.

The Argument

[Argument piece #1: Removed for copyright reasons.]

[Argument piece #2: Removed for copyright reasons.]

[Argument piece #3: Removed for copyright reasons.]

Real-Time Thoughts

This feels like it'll be a supporting premise, but I'm not completely sure yet. Let's see what happens later on in the argument.

Definitely the conclusion. The author is making a definitive claim here.

I'm also noticing the contrast word "but." This means that the first statement above must NOT support this conclusion. The first statement is definitely in disagreement with this conclusion... opposite sides of the argument. The first statement is an opposing point.

Okay, so if the first statement was NOT a supporting premise, I'm going to assume that some type of support is coming?

Bingo. Here's the support.

What if I had to argue against this in a debate? Be critical. Is this a sound argument?

Well, just because promotions for other jobs were given to older people than Sullivan doesn't mean that age wasn't the primary factor in Sullivan's case. Maybe the hiring committee for this particular job felt that age was a much more important factor than for the other jobs.

This is definitely a flaw. Other situations that may or may not be directly relevant don't necessarily dictate what's going to happen in this situation. The author is assuming that they do.

The Question/Answers

[Question: Removed for copyright reasons.]

(A) [Removed for copyright reasons.]

(B) [Removed for copyright reasons.]

(C) [Removed for copyright reasons.]

Real-Time Thoughts

Okay, the author's argument was: Older people got hired for other positions, so Sullivan's older age wasn't a factor in Sullivan's case. The flaw I identified was: Just because promotions for other jobs were given to people older than Sullivan doesn't mean that Sullivan's older age wasn't the primary factor in Sullivan's case. I need to keep in mind that the answer could be something else I haven't thought of.

This statement may be true, but I don't care. It in no way addresses the author's argument (i.e. older people were promoted for other jobs, so older wasn't a factor in Sullivan's case), which is what I'm trying to find issue with.

The fact that there may be other factors as well doesn't really matter. Besides, this has nothing to do with the *premise's* relationship to the conclusion: older people got promoted in other jobs so Sullivan's older age wasn't a factor in his case. We want to find fault with that chain of reasoning.

Great, but what does this have to do with whether Sullivan's older age was a factor in his not getting the promotion?

(D) [Removed for copyright reasons.]

Hmm. We finally have an answer that addresses the heart of the argument (by addressing the supporting premise), but this isn't a match with the flaw I had identified. I'll put this on hold.

(E) [Removed for copyright reasons.]

Again, who really cares. This has nothing to do with the heart of the argument. I better go back to (D) and take a closer look before choosing it.

(D) [Removed for copyright reasons.]

Ah. The author *did* fail to consider this possibility. If this is true about the other cases, then the youngest people always got the promotion, which means Sullivan's older age could have been a factor in his case. This would definitely ruin the strength of the supporting premise, and therefore the argument as a whole.

The correct answer is (D).

Notice that the flaw that we originally felt was going to be the issue turned out not to be among the choices! Is this bad? Does this mean we wasted our time trying to uncover the gaps in our initial read? Absolutely not. Many arguments will have multiple flaws or multiple underlying assumptions. It's impossible to see all of them all of the time. There can only be one right answer.

We can see that the process of reading an argument is a game of guess and check. As a reader, you should always be guessing at a statement's purpose, anticipating the role that it will play in the argument, and adjusting/correcting your thinking as you uncover new information. Your understanding will often evolve as the argument proceeds and as you read through the answer choices. It is this *process* that will make you a better reader and better able to answer questions correctly.

Let's get some practice reading like a debater.

Drill It: Reading Like a Debater

Instructions

Deconstruct each of the following arguments by determining the role that each component of the argument plays:

- supporting premise
- conclusion
- intermediate conclusion
- opposing point
- background information

Remember that your understanding of a certain statement may evolve as you progress through the argument. As you read, attempt to identify gaps or issues in the argument's logic. If you had to rebut the argument, how might you respond? You won't be asked to answer any questions, but you should jot down any possible logical weaknesses if you see them. Keep in mind that different readers may see different weaknesses, or none at all. That's okay. Later on we'll teach you exactly what types of gaps and flaws to look for. For now, the point is to get you thinking critically as you read. **BE SURE TO CHECK THE SOLUTION AFTER EACH ARGUMENT** (don't wait until the end).

EXAMPLE

Next week, our school board will vote on a proposal to extend the school day by one hour.

Background

This proposal will not pass.

Conclusion

A very similar proposal was voted down by the school board in a neighboring town.

Supporting premise

POSSIBLE WEAKNESS: The fact that the board from the neighboring town voted the proposal down doesn't guarantee that our town's board will do the same. That's a pretty big assumption!

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