LSAT LOGICAL REASONING MASTERY

Every Question Type, Solved Step by Step



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Anatomy of an LR Argument

Every Logical Reasoning question starts with a stimulus: a short passage, usually two to six sentences. Most stimuli are arguments. Your first job on every question - before you read the answer choices, and ideally before you even read the question stem - is to dissect that argument into its parts. This chapter teaches the dissection.

Premises and conclusions

An **argument** is a conclusion supported by premises. The **conclusion** is the claim the author wants you to accept - the point of the whole thing. The **premises** are the reasons offered for believing it - the evidence.

Consider this stimulus:

> "The city's new bike lanes have reduced traffic congestion downtown. Commute times on streets with bike lanes are 15 percent shorter than on comparable streets without them. Therefore, expanding the bike-lane network will further reduce congestion."

The conclusion is the last sentence: expanding the network *will further reduce congestion*. Everything else is premises: the observed reduction, the 15 percent figure. Notice the conclusion is a prediction about the future, while the premises are observations about the past and present. That past-to-future move is itself worth noting - it is where the assumption lives (more on that below).

Indicator words

Certain words signal conclusions and premises. Learn them as a first-pass tool, but remember they are helpers, not guarantees - skilled test-makers sometimes omit them or use them misleadingly.

Conclusion indicators: therefore, thus, hence, so, consequently, accordingly, it follows that, we may conclude that, this shows that, this proves that. Recommendation words (should, ought to, must) often mark a conclusion too, but not always - "must" in particular also appears in premises and rules - so confirm with the "why?" test below.

Premise indicators: because, since, for, given that, as shown by, in view of the fact that, after all.

> Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the researchers' conclusion?
>
> (A) Students who handwrite notes tend to have better attendance records.
>
> (B) In the study, the handwriting group and the typing group were randomly assigned and had similar academic backgrounds.
>
> (C) Many students prefer typing because it is faster.
>
> (D) Handwriting notes takes more physical effort than typing.
>
> (E) The study was funded by a stationery manufacturer.

Analysis. Conclusion: handwriting *causes* better retention via deeper processing. Assumption: the two groups differed only in note-taking method - no confounder explains the retention gap. Prediction: the strengthener will rule out alternative explanations or confirm the mechanism.

- (A) Alternative explanation alert: better attendance could explain better retention. This *weakens* - or at least fails to strengthen.
- (B) Random assignment with similar backgrounds rules out the confounder threat directly: the groups were comparable, so the note-taking method is the remaining difference. This is the classic "rule out alternatives" strengthener. Correct.
- (C) Typing speed is irrelevant to the causal claim.
- (D) Physical effort does not connect to the processing mechanism.
- (E) Funding source attacks credibility - a weakener, if anything.

Answer: (B).

Worked example 2

> Stimulus: The Arden River was heavily polluted in the 1990s. After the riverside factories installed new filtration systems in 2005, fish populations in the river tripled within five years. The filtration systems clearly caused the recovery.
>
> Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the argument?
>
> (A) Fishing was banned in the Arden River in 2006.
>
> (B) Some fish species in the Arden are more sensitive to pollution than others.
>
> (C) The filtration systems were expensive to install.
>
> (D) Nearby rivers without new filtration systems did not see similar fish population increases.

2. Answer: (A). The economist moves from correlation to causation and then to a universal policy prescription. The hidden assumption: minimum wage is what differs between these countries - no confounder. Choice (A) supplies the confounder: the high-wage countries are largely the ones with extensive welfare programs that independently reduce poverty. The correlation can then be explained without any effect from the wage level, undercutting both the causal claim and the prescription.

- (B) Enforcement difficulty is a practical concern, not a challenge to the causal claim.
- (C) Measurement differences add noise but do not supply an alternative explanation for the pattern.
- (D) "A few" exceptions do not defeat a general correlation.
- (E) A possible cost for one group does not show that poverty overall would fail to fall. It is a much weaker challenge than (A), which explains away the economist's entire body of evidence.

3. Answer: (E). The coach's plan (install the facility) is supposed to fix the problem (losing rainy games). Negate (E): simulated wet-turf practice will *not* improve actual rainy-game performance. Then the facility cannot achieve its purpose, and the "so we must install it" conclusion collapses. Required.

- (A) Affordability is a practical consideration outside the argument's logic - the coach argues from competitive need, not budget.
- (B) Turf safety is never at issue.
- (C) Other teams' facilities are irrelevant to whether ours would help.
- (D) The margins of defeat do not matter - the pattern of losing is the evidence.

4. Answer: (D). Premises: every rare-collection book came from the Alden family or Professor Ruiz; the manuscript bears Ruiz's bookplate. Conclusion: Ruiz donated it. The gap: does the bookplate reliably mark Ruiz-donated books? Choice (D) closes it completely: genuine bookplate, placed by Ruiz herself, to mark books she donated. Add (D): the manuscript bears her genuine donation-marking bookplate, so she donated it. Airtight.

- (A) That Ruiz donated many books does not prove she donated *this* one.
- (B) The manuscript's age is irrelevant to its donor.
- (C) The Aldens' bookplate habits do not establish who placed this bookplate. The Aldens could have donated a book that once belonged to Ruiz and still carried her bookplate, so (C) leaves the donor open.
- (E) Generosity is a character trait, not evidence about this manuscript.