



Strengthening/ Weakening an Argument

UNIT 3

3.1

CHOOSING A WEAKER OPTION



Some of the time, you may find 2 or even 3 statements that may support the premise (reason). You need to make sure that you select the statement which best supports the premise. An answer that weakens the argument can directly disprove the assumption. Any choice that states that the assumption is wrong will weaken the argument.

EXAMPLE

A NASA scientist has proposed the existence of aliens on Mars. He claims that if we can prove the presence of water or footprints on Mars, then that would serve as irrefutable proof that extraterrestrial life forms exist.

Which one of these statements, if true, best supports the above claim?

- A. *The resilient nature of life suggests that life forms can exist outside of Earth*
- B. *Mars contains moderate quantities of vapour and ice.*
- C. *There is no clear evidence that aliens exist on other planets*
- D. *The properties of Mars are most similar to Earth, so it has the greatest probability of life*

Students must make sure they know if the question is asking to strengthen or weaken the initial claim. READ CAREFULLY. We can see in the above example, the question is asking you to find a statement which best supports the initial claim. Students need to make sure to read each answer carefully, and not be too hasty to choose the first ‘good’ answer they see. Whilst D is a good option, because it mentions keywords such as ‘Mars’ and ‘probability of life’ it's not the STRONGEST option. Option B is in fact the correct answer for this question, as it provides the ‘irrefutable proof that extraterrestrial life forms exist’ that the ‘NASA scientist’ in the question is looking for. This is because vapour and ice is just another form of water.

3.2

CHOOSING AN IRRELEVANT OPTION



A statement may support the premise. However, you need to select an option that not only supports, but is relevant to the premise.

If different evidence can strengthen the argument; different evidence can weaken the argument as well. Any new information given in an answer choice that makes the assumption less likely to be correct will weaken the argument as a whole.

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Students must make sure they know if the question is asking to strengthen or weaken the initial claim. READ CAREFULLY. Carrying on with the previous example, we can see in the above question that we must find a statement to best support the claim, the claim being that we can prove the existence of extraterrestrial life on Mars if we find water or footprints. Options A, B and D (highlighted in blue) are supporting (to varying degrees) the possibility of life outside of earth. Option C (in red) however, states there is ‘No clear evidence that aliens exist on other planets’. This completely goes against the initial claim and is hence the irrelevant option. It's a very good idea to eliminate the obviously incorrect and irrelevant options, as that will narrow down your options and improve your chance of choosing the correct answer.

3.3

CHOOSING AN OPTION THAT DOES NOT DIRECTLY RELATE TO THE GIVEN PREMISE



The statement may somewhat relate or only vaguely touches on the premise.

When looking for an argument within a passage, you need to be alert that sometimes the conclusion is stated before the premises, sometimes after the premises, and sometimes embedded in the middle of the premises. Often, sentences are included that are neither premises nor conclusions; they are there for elaboration or for some other purpose, such as to entertain, to describe, to explain, to discount a possible complaint, and so forth.

EXAMPLE

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Following on with the same example from 3.1 and 3.2, Option A is an example of an answer that vaguely touches on the idea of alien life outside of Earth, but it's not specific to Mars, nor does it mention anything about footsteps or water ON MARS.

3.4

CHOOSING AN OPTION THAT DOES NOT INCLUDE ALL THE GIVEN PREMISES



Sometimes there is more than one reason for a statement. Do not choose an option where it does not support the premise fully.

EXAMPLE

Alex says “Since my parents were children, the world has changed dramatically. My quality of life, in my view, is better than theirs back then.”

Which one of these statements, if true, best negates the above claim?

- A. The newer generation has more free time than previous generations, which enhances the quality of their lives and allows them to pursue their interests.*
- B. The quality of life in current generations is quite bad.*
- C. The percentage of people with mental illnesses is much higher than it was 50 years ago*
- D. The current generation, on average, has more people living paycheck to paycheck and in poorer conditions.*

In this question, we are asked which statement **NEGATES** the initial claim that quality of life in current generations is **BETTER** than it was in the previous generation. In this question students should **IMMEDIATELY** eliminate option A because it is strengthening the initial argument, not weakening or negating it. Whilst option B looks quite good, it’s not weakening all the premises of the initial argument. Whilst it does state that the quality of life for current generations is ‘quite bad’, there is no comparison to the previous generation’s quality of life. D is the stronger option in this case, as it negates all the given premises of the initial argument. Option D compares the average of people living ‘paycheck to paycheck’ (i.e. bad quality of life) to the previous generation. This is why it is the correct answer.

3.5

CHOOSING AN OPTION THAT BOTH SUPPORTS THE PREMISE, BUT ALSO INCLUDES A NEGATING ELEMENT



You need to choose an option that supports the premise but does not have a negating element.

The start of a conclusion is often indicated by the word therefore, so, or thus. In addition to these conclusion indicators, the terms because and suppose-that signal that a reason is coming. Since the technical term for reasons is premises, the terms because and suppose-that are called premise indicators. The logical reasoner is always on the alert for premise indicators and conclusion indicators.

EXAMPLE

John says: "A new shopping mall will assist local businesses and improve respect for our neighbourhood."

Which one of these statements, if true, best supports the above claim?

- A. A shopping mall will almost definitely result in increased traffic.
- B. The shopping center's jobs are available to the locals.
- C. The addition of a retail complex will improve the quality of life for the residents in this area, as well as increasing the number of environmental riots.
- D. A shopping mall would result in increased traffic to all businesses in the area.

In this example, Option C is a perfect example of this common pitfall. Whilst it does somewhat support the premise in the original question, it also has an element which negates it with the words: "as well as increasing the number of environmental riots". The correct answer for this question is option 'B'. This is because it most STRONGLY supports the initial claim which talked about 'assisting local businesses'. An increase in traffic to all businesses in the area would greatly assist local businesses therefore making it the correct answer.

3.6

CHOOSING AN OPTION THAT AGREES WITH THE OVERALL VIEWPOINT, WHEN THERE ARE BETTER OPTIONS



If there are multiple suitable options, you need to be choosing the one that is both the most specific in its nature.

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3.8

EXTRA TIPS

1. Mark up the keywords that form the premise/conclusion

This table provides more examples of indicator phrases:

Premise Indicators

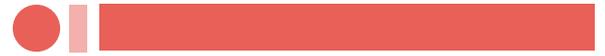
since	is implied by	as indicated by
because	given that	
for the reason that	in view of the fact that	
assuming	for granted that	
suppose	one cannot doubt that	

Conclusion Indicators

therefore	it follows that	that leads me to believe that
consequently	it shows that	in conclusion
thus	implies that	for this reason
this means	as a result	we can infer that
so	hence	accordingly
the moral is	means that can only be true if	

2. Find the related ideas in the options (synonyms, categories, examples, extensions of the reason, further evidence)

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3. Make a value judgement as to which option it best supports

For certain types of Logical Reasoning questions, we recommend trying to make a specific answer prediction before heading to the choices. For Strengthen and Weaken questions, however, predictions aren't recommended.

There's usually a variety of possible strengtheners or weakeners for any given argument, and it's generally not a productive use of your limited time on Test Day to brainstorm about all the various possibilities.

Additionally, it can be all too easy to forget whether you're looking for a strengthener or a weakener, so it's helpful to simply remind yourself of the task before you start to evaluate the choices.

4. Weigh up the different factors (premise, conclusion, how many pillars it connects with)

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QUIZ

1. People work hard to provide for their basic needs, and food is the most critical of these.

Which one of these statements, if true, best supports the above claim?

- A. For those who prepare meals primarily for consumption, it was a laborious and time-consuming process.
- B. A person's freedom from dependence on restaurants and other establishments has been restored by advances in cooking technologies.
- C. Food is required for the sustenance of daily life and fits under the most fundamental rung of Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- D. One may argue that water is essential for all living things, since without water, you will perish.

