



Questions Types

Although there is by no means a hard-and-fast rule about the difficulty of the questions that fall into each category, questions in the main idea category tend to be easier while questions in the inference and application categories tend to be more difficult. Questions about the author's tone tend to appear less frequently than other questions, although there is no definitive and widely-public rule that the authors bound themselves by concerning the number of questions from each category, the following are a brief intro into types of questions that are usually on reading comprehension tests.

Main Idea

Main idea questions ask you to identify the "primary purpose" or "main point" of the passage. In order to answer these questions correctly, you must be able to identify the thesis of the passage and those ideas that support this thesis. The GMAT test-writers attempt to confuse you with a few answer choices that are supporting ideas.

Common Question Stems

- Which of the following most accurately states the main idea of the passage?

- The primary purpose of the passage is to
- The passage is primarily concerned with which of the following?
- The author of this passage is primarily concerned with
- The main point made by the passage is that
- This paragraph is mostly about _____.
- Passage talks mainly about _____.
- Text tells as a whole _____.
- Story tells as a whole _____.
- Article tells as a whole _____.
- Reading tells as a whole _____.

How to Identify Correct Answer

Main point questions ask you to identify the crux of the author's point. You must identify which ideas in the passage play a supporting role and which idea is being supported. In many ways, this is similar to identifying the premises and conclusion to a critical reasoning argument. The correct answer to a main point question is often a paraphrase of the conclusion or thesis statement of the passage. Common incorrect answer choices are those that feature supporting ideas. These answer choices are appealing to many test-takers because the material presented in them is true and based upon the passage.

Supporting Idea

Supporting idea questions are often prefaced by "according to the passage" or "the passage states that". Most of the questions that fit into this category could be called "find the fact" as they rely on your ability to find a specific piece of information, often contained in two or three sentences.

These questions tend to be more difficult than main idea questions because they require a more detailed recollection of the text. If necessary, you can return to the text and quickly re-read a few sentences.

Unlike main idea questions which are more generic in their question stem, these questions tend to incorporate an idea specific to the passage in the question stem.

Common Question Stems

- According to the passage, a questionable assumption about x is that
- The passage states that x occurs because

- According to the passage, which of the following is true of x
- The passage mentions each of the following EXCEPT
- According to the passage, if x occurs then

How to Identify Correct Answer

In trying to identify the correct answer, it is extremely important that you stick quite close to the text. The words "according to the passage" should be taken seriously. Answers that seem logical but are not directly supported by the text should be avoided.

Inference

Inference questions are often prefaced by "the passage implies" or "the author implies", where "suggests" is sometimes substituted.

In some ways, *inference* and *supporting idea* questions are similar. They both require you to stick closely to the text and rely on specific facts. However, *inference* questions tend to go a tad further and ask you to make a very small logical conclusion that is strongly implied based upon information in the passage. Answer choices that require significant assumptions or inferences will NEVER be correct. In *inference* questions, the answer lies directly in the text and requires a very small logical step (e.g., if the text says that "all the cups in the room are red", an *inference* would be that "there are no green cups in the room").

In other ways, *inference* and *application* questions are similar. They both require you to draw a conclusion, albeit a very small one, based upon what the passage states explicitly. However, the *inference* question type asks for an answer that is often a near paraphrase of a fact in the passage or a fact that the information in the passage rules out (e.g., if a species of an animal has existed for 1 million years, you can infer that the animal is not new to the earth). On the contrary, the *application* question type asks you to use the information in the passage as premises and draw a conclusion that is not directly addressed in the passage. In other words, the answer to *inference* questions is a conclusion made in the passage while the answer to *application* questions is a conclusion that is applied outside of the passage to an idea or action.

Common Question Stems

- The passage implies that which of the following was true of x

- It can be inferred from the passage that
- The passage suggests which of the following about x
- The author implies that x occurred because
- The author implies that all of the following statements about x are true EXCEPT
- We can tell from this . . .
- We can figure out that . . .
- We can guess that . . .
- We can expect that . . .
- The writer seems to expect . . .
- Pick the answer that seems most reasonable to you.
- The reason he did that was probably . . .
- You can assume . . . probably . . .
- You can conclude from this paragraph/passage that . . .
- The author suggests that . . .
- Which is more likely to happen . . . ?

How to Identify Correct Answer

The correct answer to these questions is usually an obvious logical consequence of a sentence in the text. The logical consequence will be extremely clear. The difficulty in these questions resides in finding the specific sentence in the passage that provides the premise for the conclusion in the correct answer. Stay away from answer choices that do not directly and closely follow from a statement in the passage, even if this statement seems plausible based upon the general idea of the passage or commonly accepted knowledge.

Tone & Style

Tone questions ask you to identify the attitude or mood of a specific part of the passage or of the entire passage. A common characteristic of this question type is answer choices that are marked by one to three word phrases containing adjectives. Tone questions test your ability to recognize an attitude or disposition of the author, which is signaled by the use of a handful of trigger words. Never base your guess about the author's tone on a single word--this is not enough to define the tone of the entire passage.

Tone questions tend to be among the more infrequent question types.

Common Question Stems

- The attitude of the author of the passage toward *x* is best described as one of
- The tone of the author is best described as

Passage Structure

Passage structure questions ask you to determine the relationship between different parts of a passage. The key to this question type is understanding the relationship between each idea and paragraph. You must be able to separate ideas that support a thesis from the thesis idea itself. These questions are referred to by some as *logical structure* questions.

Common Question Stems

1. One function of the third paragraph of this passage is to
2. The author uses the adjective *x* in line *y* to emphasize that
3. Which of the following best describes the relation of the first paragraph to the passage as a whole?
4. The author refers to *x* in line *y* primarily to
5. In the context of the passage, the word *x* (line *y*) most closely corresponds to which of the following phrases?

Vocabulary

Vocabulary questions ask you to take information and conclusions in the passage and extrapolate them to similar situations or ideas. The key to this

Common Question Stems

1. Fill in the blank
2. As used in the passage _____ means?

Application

Application questions ask you provide a meaning of a word as it is used in the context of the passage. Be sure to read all answers and pick the meaning that best illustrates how the word is used.

Common Question Tasks

1. **Mirroring:** Select an action or idea not discussed in the text that most mirrors an action or idea discussed in the text
2. **Predicting:** Make a prediction based upon the information in the passage

Common Question Stems

1. The author of the passage would be most likely to agree with which of the following?
2. Which of the following statements would provide the most logical continuation of the final paragraph?
3. [an idea or action described in the passage] is most similar to which of the following?

Logical Reasoning

Logical reasoning questions ask you to take information outside the passage and reason about how it will influence a point or sentence in the passage. The most common questions in this genre are those that ask which pieces of information will strengthen or weaken a point in the passage.

In some ways, these questions are similar to *application* questions in that both require you to understand the thesis of the passage (if one exists) and the relationship between ideas in the passage. However, *logical reasoning* questions ask you to take outside information and apply it to the ideas in the passage (commonly to strengthen or weaken a point in the passage). However, *application* questions ask you to take the information in the passage and apply it to an argument or action outside the passage.

In other ways, these questions are similar to *passage structure* questions in that both require you to understand the relationship between different parts of the passage and both require you to identify the thesis (if one exists). However, *passage structure* questions simply ask you to identify the roles different sentences play in the overall passage while *logical reasoning* questions ask you to take outside information and apply it to the ideas in the passage while maintaining an awareness of what these outside ideas will do to the structure and thesis of the passage.

Common Question Stems

1. Which of the following, if true, would best support x [where x is an idea or argument described in the passage]
2. The author's conclusion concerning x would be most seriously undermined if
3. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the explanation of x provided in the passage