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How to Answer Weaken Question Type



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GMAT Critical Reasoning Weaken Questions follows a familiar pattern. The argument is constructed in such a way that there are enough gaps between the premises and the conclusion. The new information included in the answer choice either weakens the conclusion directly or negates the premise and in effect weakens the conclusion.

Let us see if you are naturally good at weakening arguments with the Wason 4-card trick. If you are familiar with the problem, ignore this exercise.

Wason 4-Card Trick: You are shown four cards from the same deck. Each card has a letter (A, B, C, D, E...Z.) on one side and a number on the other side. You have to test the rule *“If there is a vowel on one side, there must be an even number on the other side”* by turning the minimum number of cards from four cards.

Here are the Cards

A 7 4 L

Which cards would you turn to make sure that there is a relationship between even numbers and vowels in the set?

Think...

Think...

Done?

...

...

...

Answer Below



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Most readers pick A & 4, the two cards that fit the condition.

Why is this approach wrong?

If we turn A & 4, and both follow the **Vowel – Even number** relationship, does that mean that we can say for sure that the other two cards 7 & L follow the same rule?

No.

We have to turn the third card to make sure that the rule is universal for the set.

Explanation

If you have turned A & 7 or 4 & L, you are naturally good at weakening arguments.

The question is, you have to test the rule *“If there is a vowel on one side, there must be an even number on the other side”* by turning the minimum number of cards from **four cards**.

By turning A, we get either an even number or an odd number. The rule is followed or broken.

By turning 7, a number not mentioned in the condition (*If there is a vowel on one side, there must be an **even number** on the other side*) or a contradicting rule, we are fool proofing whether the condition is universal for the set.

In GMAT Critical Reasoning, look at the answer choices that directly weaken the conclusion. The easiest way to find out such answer choices is by eliminating the ones that do the opposite. Test creators use at least one answer choice in a cleverly worded format that strengthens the argument and another answer choice that is irrelevant. Eliminate them.

Let us try one GMAT critical reasoning weaken question:



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Q) The Chorus from Sam Smith's "Stay With Me" has an eerie resemblance to Tom Petty's 1989 song - "I Won't Back Down. Mr. Petty and Jeff Lynne, the Songwriters, filed a copyright violation case and settled out of court. Modern song creation has evolved away from the standard process - starting with the lyrics, the sheet music, and finally the tune. For new song creators, it would be impossible to fight cases where some parts of the song had similar sheet music as the songs in the 70s and 80s.

Which one of the following statements weaken the argument?

- a) According to Muzic82 - an aggregated opinion database from Music Experts, 98% of the experts felt that Sam Smith's song had a more traditional choir gospel theme than Tom Petty's Chorus.
- b) The 1985 case between Fogerty and Fantasy record where the latter sued the artist for stealing "The Old Man Down the Road" from "Run Through the Jungle," ended in a dramatic demonstration when Fogerty brought a guitar to the court and demonstrated the difference in composition. Fogerty won the case and earned the legal fees as well.
- c) In a similar case, Marvin Gayle's family was awarded \$7.3 million as compensation when Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams - the songwriter-producer of the 2013 hit "Blurred Lines", infringed on the copyright of the 1977 Marvin Gaye Song "Got to Give It Up" without any due credit.
- d) In modern songwriting - tone, intensity, and feel are equally important to identify the uniqueness of the song
- e) In another instance, 2013's #1 Song "Thrift Shop", by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, and Le1f's "Wut" had a similar pattern with identical synthesized sax, but Le1f has limited option left for a legal claim.

Let us look at the conclusion before we look at each answer choices

Conclusion: For new song creators, it would be impossible to fight cases where some parts of the song had similar sheet music as the songs in the 70s and 80s

The conclusion in simple terms: New Song Creators will unknowingly plagiarize songs from the 70s and 80s, or it is impossible to win cases where the new song has a similar tempo or tune with songs from the 70s or 80s.



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Premise 1: The Chorus from Sam Smith's "Stay With Me" has an eerie resemblance to Tom Petty's 1989 song - "I Won't Back Down. Mr. Petty and Jeff Lynne, the Songwriters, filed a copyright violation case and settled out of court.

Premise 2: Modern song creation has evolved away from the standard process - starting with the lyrics, the sheet music, and finally the tune

Can we eliminate the answer choices that are irrelevant or strengthen the conclusion?

a) According to Muzic82 - an aggregated opinion database from Music Experts, 98% of the experts felt that Sam Smith's song had a more traditional choir gospel theme than Tom Petty's Chorus.

This is a statement that doesn't address the conclusion. By using a statement like, "98% of the experts believe that Sam Smith's song is inspired by Gospel theme and not from Tom Petty's Chorus" the test creator is expecting you to know the genre of the music of the two bands. Don't fall for the trap and spend any time on the choice. The answer is out of scope.

Eliminate.

b) The 1985 case between Fogerty and Fantasy record where the latter sued the artist for stealing "The Old Man Down the Road" from "Run Through the Jungle," ended in a dramatic demonstration when Fogerty brought a guitar to the court and demonstrated the difference in composition. Fogerty won the case and earned the legal fees as well.

The Fogerty vs Fantasy record is a prime example of not just winning the case but also earning back the legal fees even if the music is similar. The conclusion and the qualifier "impossible to fight cases" is weakened by citing a the Fogerty vs Fantasy record case.

Keep it



c) In a similar case, Marvin Gayle's family was awarded \$7.3 million as compensation when Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams - the songwriter-producer of the 2013 hit "Blurred Lines", infringed on the copyright of the 1977 Marvin Gaye Song "Got to Give It Up" without any due credit.

By citing another example where a 70s/80s song is infringed upon, the statement only strengthens the conclusion instead of weakening it.

Eliminate.

d) In modern songwriting - tone, intensity, and feel are equally important to identify the uniqueness of the song.

Modern songwriting has changed. The methods of identifying the uniqueness of the song don't discount the conclusion that it is impossible to win music copyright cases

Eliminate.

e) In another instance, 2013's #1 Song "Thrift Shop", by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, and Le1f's "Wut" had a similar pattern with identical synthesized sax, but Le1f has limited option left for a legal claim.

Not all songs with similar patterns end up in copyright violation. Le1f's reason for the limited option is not clear. If the judge had dismissed the case, then we have a statement to weaken the argument.

Also, it is not clear whether Le1f's "Wut" is the 70s or 80s song, but music lovers know that he is a modern rapper. That is the beauty of GMAT Critical Reasoning questions. Any answer choice that requires outside knowledge can be easily eliminated.

Eliminate.

From the answer choices only b) weakens the claim that "New Song Creators will unknowingly plagiarize songs from the 70s and 80s, and it is impossible to fight such cases."

Correct Answer: B



Let us move into another longer weaken question.

Q) The Wilderness Act, written by Howard Zahniser and passed by the 88th United States Congress in 1964 enabled the ownership and administration of land by the Federal government for the enjoyment of American people in such a way that it remains unimpaired by human contact. The Ocean's 160 million square miles that were thought to be untouched from its vastness has been actively disrupted from commercial fishing, transportation, oil exploration and nuclear tests, leaving just 13% of the ocean untouched and drastically depleting the coral reefs in regions around heavily populated coastal cities.

The catastrophe could be primarily attributed to the American Government and International Agencies failure to realize the value of ocean wilderness and the interconnection between the terrestrial and the marine ecosystems, in addition to misallocating their budget on protecting high-risk land eco-systems.

Which of the following statements weakens the author's argument the most?

- a) The University of California - a public research university commissioned Dr McCauley's study on the interconnectivity between Pacific manta rays and native Palmyra forests, conclusively highlighting the importance of preserving native land wilderness to balance the nitrogen-15 dependent land and ocean ecosystems.
- b) The Sep 2018 commencement of negotiations under the UN Law of the Sea Convention recognizes high seas to constitute the vast majority of the ocean wilderness. The governing body is considering scientists requests to implement a high seas conservation treaty that would cut of the \$4bn subsidies a year that governments around the world are offering for commercial fishing vessels to venture into the no man's land.
- c) The data from 2016 to 2017 collected by the United Nations Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) shows a 2.7% growth in marine protected areas taking the total protected areas under government jurisdiction to 11.4% of the total territorial waters.



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d) Even though only 5% of the US land is protected under the National Wilderness Preservation System, the annual revenue of \$646 billion in consumer spending and indirect taxes, funds the conservation programs for marine ecosystems.

e) Even though an estimated 6,000 acres of open space from forests, grasslands and other terrestrial wilderness are lost every year to urban development, the lack of technology and funding to convert ocean wilderness to usable land would limit the further exploitation of the high-risk eco-system.

The length of the premises or the answer choices should not intimidate you as such questions and answer choices would have enough information to find the best option.

As always, don't get distracted by the premise. Focus on the conclusion that almost always would be located in the final paragraph.

Final Paragraph: The catastrophe could be primarily attributed to the American Government and International Agencies failure to realize the value of ocean wilderness and the interconnection between the terrestrial and the marine ecosystems, **in addition to** misallocating their budget on protecting high-risk land eco-systems.

Conclusion: American Government and International Agencies failed to realize the value of Ocean wilderness and the interconnection between the terrestrial and the marine eco-system

Note: **in addition to** is a piece of additional information and not a conclusion. Be careful of separating fillers/additional information from the conclusion.

Premise 1: *The Wilderness Act, written by Howard Zahniser and passed by the 88th United States Congress in 1964 enabled the ownership and administration of land by the Federal government for the enjoyment of American people in such a way that it remains unimpaired by human contact.*

Premise 2: *The Ocean's 160 million square miles that were thought to be untouched from its vastness has been actively disrupted from commercial fishing, transportation, oil exploration and nuclear tests, leaving just 13% of the ocean untouched and drastically depleting the coral reefs in regions around heavily populated coastal cities.*



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Can we eliminate the answer choices that are irrelevant or strengthen the conclusion?

a) The University of California - a public research university commissioned Dr McCauley's study on the interconnectivity between Pacific manta rays and native Palmyra forests, conclusively highlighting the importance of preserving native land wilderness to balance the nitrogen-15 dependent land and ocean ecosystems.

The University of California is a public university and an indirect representative of the US government that commissioned a study that found a connection between marine and territorial eco-system. The initiative weakens the author's argument that the government failed to consider the interconnection, but the first part of the conclusion involves the Ocean wilderness, which is not addressed in the option. Nevertheless, shortlist the option for the final process of elimination.

Keep it

b) The Sep 2018 commencement of negotiations under the UN Law of the Sea Convention recognizes high seas to constitute the vast majority of the ocean wilderness. The governing body is considering scientists requests to implement a high seas conservation treaty that would cut of the \$4bn subsidies a year that governments around the world are offering for commercial fishing vessels to venture into the no man's land.

This option addresses the author's concern that US and International agencies have not recognized Ocean wilderness with additional context on how proposals are being considered to discourage fishing vessels from entering the no man's land a.k.a the ocean wilderness.

Keep it

c) The data from 2016 to 2017 collected by the United Nations Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) shows a 2.7% growth in marine protected areas taking the total protected areas under government jurisdiction to 11.4% of the total territorial waters.

The subject of the argument is ocean wilderness, not territorial waters.

Eliminate.



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d) Even though only 5% of the US land is protected under the National Wilderness Preservation System, the annual revenue of \$646 billion in consumer spending and indirect taxes, funds the conservation programs for marine ecosystems.

This answer choice tries to offer an indirect benefit of focusing on land wilderness but doesn't address the core of the argument that the government has not put enough effort in conserving Ocean Wilderness. **Eliminate.**

e) Even though an estimated 6,000 acres of open space from forests, grasslands and other terrestrial wilderness are lost every year to urban development, the lack of technology and funding to convert ocean wilderness to usable land would limit the further exploitation of the high-risk eco-system.

The answer choice cites the trend in the territorial wilderness to make a probable statement that the remaining ocean wilderness would remain untouched. The explanation doesn't address the lack of initiative from the government and the international agencies. **Eliminate.**

The answer comes down to options a) and b)

a) Is an example of a US university finding the connection between marine and land eco-system, addressing the second part of the conclusion.

b) "The Sep 2018 commencement of negotiations under the UN Law of the Sea Convention recognizes high seas to constitute the vast majority of the ocean wilderness. The governing body is considering scientists' requests to implement a high seas conservation treaty that would cut of the \$4bn subsidies a year that governments around the world are offering for commercial fishing vessels to venture into the no man's land. "

By mentioning the UN Law of the Sea Convention, the answer choice addresses the author's concern of the non-involvement from the United States and International agencies while offering concrete steps (negotiations and considering scientists' requests), thus weakening the argument.

Correct Answer: B



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Answers with Detailed Explanation

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