Verbal: reading and argument structure

Original classroom teaching; not an official form or score predictor

GRE Verbal: Reading and Argument Structure

- Follow the structure of an argument in connected **discourse** 语篇: claims, evidence and conclusions.
- Identify an **assumption** 假设, the unstated link an argument needs.
- Track whose view each sentence reports.
- Answer single-answer, select-one-or-more and select-in-passage questions exactly as instructed.

Conclusion, evidence and assumption

- Find the conclusion first: what does the writer want you to accept? Words like "therefore" and "so" often mark it.
- The evidence is what is offered in support. The assumption is the gap between them.
- A causal conclusion from timing ("Y rose after X") assumes there is no other change that explains Y.

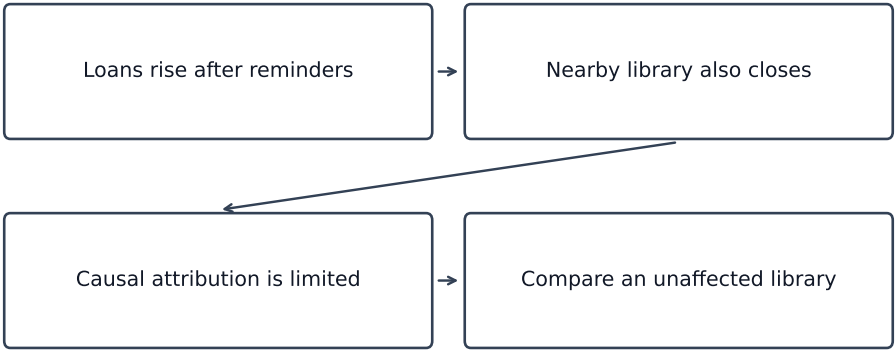
Whose view is this?

- Writers often describe a view before challenging it: "Some historians argue... However...".
- Keep the reported view apart from the author's own.
- The author's attitude shows in words like "promising", "premature", "cannot establish".

Following the instructions

- Single answer: choose one.
- Select one or more: test every option on its own; there is no partial credit, and one correct option does not make others wrong.
- Select in passage: choose the sentence that does exactly what the question describes, not a nearby one.

Figure: Following the instructions



- Timing alone cannot single out the reminders: a rival change needs a comparison

Worked example: a hidden assumption

- Evidence: sales rose after advertising increased (timing).
- Conclusion: advertising caused the rise.
- Assumption: no other change, such as a price cut or a competitor closing, explains the rise.
- An option that names a price cut in the same month weakens the argument; one showing sales stayed flat in a similar area without the advertising strengthens it.

Worked example: an original application

- Original passage: [1] A town library's loans rose after it began sending reminders. [2] During the same month, a nearby library closed for repairs. [3] The increase therefore does not establish that reminders alone caused more borrowing. [4] A comparison with an otherwise similar library unaffected by closure would help assess that claim.
- What is the main purpose?
- A.
- Prove reminders never work.

Independent transfer

- For the same passage, select every supported statement: A.
- Loans increased.
- B.
- Reminders caused none of the increase.

Common errors

- Confusing the evidence with the conclusion.
- Giving the author a view the passage only reports.
- Choosing an answer with "always", "never" or "only" when the passage is more cautious.

Common errors (2)

- In select-all questions, stopping after one correct option.
- Treating "not proved" as "proved false".

Key terms

- **discourse**: Connected language, such as a passage, with structure and meaning.
- **assumption**: An unstated premise that an argument needs.

Check yourself

- "Crime fell after streetlights were installed, so the lights reduced crime." Name one assumption.
- A passage says a theory "has been challenged but not refuted". Has it been proved?
- In a select-one-or-more question, can two options be correct?