Critical Reasoning: strengthen the argument

A strengthen question asks which new fact, if true, makes the argument's specific. . .



Lesson grev.cr.A1

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The idea

A strengthen question asks which new fact, if true, makes the argument's specific conclusion more likely to be true. First isolate that conclusion precisely and find the gap between the evidence and it — usually an assumption that some alternative explanation is false.

What EXACTLY is the conclusion, and what gap or assumption stands between the evidence and it?

Predict the kind of fact that would close the gap — ruling out an alternative cause or affirming a needed condition — before reading options.

Watch every step

A student began drinking a cup of chamomile tea each night before bed, and since then she has been falling asleep more quickly than she used to. She concluded that the tea is what helps her fall asleep faster.

Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the student's conclusion?

A. The chamomile tea she buys costs more than the coffee she used to drink. ✗ *irrelevant*

B. She falls asleep faster now than she did before she began drinking the tea. ✗ *restates-premise*

C. Apart from the tea, she made no change to her evening routine over this period.

D. She finds the taste of chamomile tea pleasant. ✗ *different-conclusion*

E. Around the same time, she also started going to bed an hour later, when she is naturally more tired. ✗ *weakens*

Why C — "Apart from the tea, she made no change to her evening. . . ." Choose the option that makes THIS conclusion more likely to be true.

Now a harder one

A recreational runner switched to a new brand of running shoe, and the knee pain that had bothered her for months soon went away. She concluded that the new shoes were responsible for ending her knee pain.

Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the runner's conclusion?

- **A.** When she briefly returned to her old shoes for a week, the knee pain came back, then faded again once she switched back.
- **B.** Her average running times improved after she switched to the new shoes. ✗ *different-conclusion*
- **C.** Around the same time she switched shoes, she also cut her weekly running distance roughly in half. ✗ *weakens*
- **D.** The new shoes come in a brighter color than her old ones. ✗ *irrelevant*
- **E.** Her knee pain stopped after she began wearing the new shoes. ✗ *restates-premise*

Why A — "When she briefly returned to her old shoes for a week, the. . . ." Choose the option that makes THIS conclusion more likely to be true.

The method, in one line

Critical Reasoning: strengthen the argument

Predict the kind of fact that would close the gap — ruling out an alternative cause or affirming a needed condition — before reading options.

Does it support the specific conclusion (not a different one)? Does it add something new (not restate a premise)? Does it strengthen rather than weaken or wander off-topic?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

⚠ weakens

Selects an option that makes the conclusion less likely — introducing an alternative cause or contrary evidence — the reverse of strengthening.

⚠ irrelevant

Selects an option with no bearing on the conclusion, true but inert with respect to the argument's gap.

Name the trap before you pick — most wrong answers are one of these two.

Try it, then watch the walk-through

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