Critical Reasoning: weaken the argument

A weaken question asks which option, if true, most undermines the argument's. . .



Lesson grev.cr.A2

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The idea

A weaken question asks which option, if true, most undermines the argument's conclusion — usually by attacking the link between the evidence and the conclusion, not the truth of the evidence itself. First separate the conclusion from the premises and locate the gap: most weakenable arguments make an unstated leap, treating a correlation as a cause or a special case as representative.

What exactly is the conclusion, and what is the gap between it and the premises — a causal leap, a comparison, a generalization?

Look for the option that makes the conclusion less likely — typically an alternative cause or an overlooked case — and set aside strengtheners, premise-restatements, and off-topic facts.

Watch every step

A city added a new bus route through its downtown, and over the following month the number of pedestrians on downtown sidewalks rose. A transit official concluded that the new route was responsible for bringing more people downtown.

Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the official's conclusion?

A. The new bus route is operated by a private contractor. ✗ *out-of-scope*

B. Downtown foot traffic was higher after the route opened than before. ✗ *restates-premise*

C. That same month, a large new shopping center opened in the heart of downtown.

D. The new route runs at a financial loss for the transit agency. ✗ *addresses-wrong-conclusion*

E. Pedestrian traffic rose most at the stops the new route served. ✗ *wrong-direction*

Why C — "That same month, a large new shopping center opened in the. . . ." Choose the option that most directly undercuts the specific conclusion.

Now a harder one

A man who had been feeling low started taking a brisk half-hour walk outdoors each morning, and over the following weeks his mood noticeably improved. Pleased with the change, he concluded that the daily walks were what had lifted his mood and resolved to keep them up.

Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the man's conclusion?

- ✓ **A.** He began the walks just as a long and stressful work project came to an end.
- **B.** His mood is better now than it was before he began the daily walks. ✗ *restates-premise*
- **C.** The daily walks have also strengthened the muscles in his legs. ✗ *addresses-wrong-conclusion*
- **D.** On the few mornings he skipped his walk, his mood for the day was noticeably worse. ✗ *wrong-direction*
- **E.** He takes his walks in a park close to his home. ✗ *out-of-scope*

Why A — "He began the walks just as a long and stressful work. . . ." Choose the option that most directly undercuts the specific conclusion.

The method, in one line

Critical Reasoning: weaken the argument

Look for the option that makes the conclusion less likely — typically an alternative cause or an overlooked case — and set aside strengtheners, premise-restatements, and off-topic facts.

Does my choice make the conclusion harder to accept? Or did I pick something that supports it, merely repeats a premise, or targets a claim the argument never made?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

wrong-direction

Selects an option that strengthens the argument (or supports its conclusion) when the task is to weaken it.

out-of-scope

Selects an irrelevant consideration that has no bearing on whether the specific conclusion holds.

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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