Critical Reasoning: identify the assumption

An assumption question asks for an unstated premise the argument needs in order. . .



Lesson grev.cr.A3

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The idea

An assumption question asks for an unstated premise the argument needs in order to hold together — not extra support, but a link without which the conclusion cannot stand. Find the gap between the premises and the conclusion; the assumption usually bridges a shift in terms or rules out an alternative the argument quietly ignores.

What is the conclusion, and what unstated link must be true for the premises to support it?

Predict the bridging assumption, then apply the negation test — negate each candidate and keep only the one whose negation breaks the argument.

Watch every step

A coach believes his team lost most of its games last season because the players were not fit enough. He has therefore introduced a much tougher fitness program, confident that it will produce more wins next season.

The coach's reasoning depends on which of the following assumptions?

A. The new fitness program will be supervised by an outside trainer. ✗ *out-of-scope*

B. The team's losses were caused by insufficient fitness rather than by factors such as skill or tactics.

C. A fitter team wins every single game it plays. ✗ *too-strong*

D. The team's fittest players were the ones who performed worst last season. ✗ *reverses*

E. The team lost most of its games last season. ✗ *restates-stated*

Why B — "The team's losses were caused by insufficient fitness. . . ." Choose the necessary assumption: the statement the argument cannot do without.

Now a harder one

A gardener used a new fertilizer on her tomato plants this year and harvested noticeably larger tomatoes than she did last year. She has concluded that the fertilizer is what made the tomatoes grow larger.

The gardener's conclusion depends on which of the following assumptions?

A. The new fertilizer tends to stunt the growth of tomato plants. ✗ *reverses*

B. Her tomatoes were larger this year than they were last year. ✗ *restates-stated*

C. The new fertilizer is sold in a larger bag than the brand she used before. ✗ *out-of-scope*

✓ **D.** No factor other than the fertilizer, such as this year's weather, accounts for the larger tomatoes.

E. The fertilizer produces the largest tomatoes that any plant can possibly grow. ✗ *too-strong*

Why D — "No factor other than the fertilizer, such as this year's. . . ." Choose the necessary assumption: the statement the argument cannot do without.

The method, in one line

Critical Reasoning: identify the assumption

Predict the bridging assumption, then apply the negation test — negate each candidate and keep only the one whose negation breaks the argument.

When I negate my choice, does the argument truly fall apart? Did I avoid restatements, too-strong claims, off-topic facts, and reversed statements?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

⚠ restates-stated
Selects an option that repeats a stated premise or the conclusion rather than supplying the unstated link the argument depends on.

⚠ out-of-scope
Selects a consideration the argument does not depend on; negating it leaves the argument intact.

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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