Critical Reasoning: resolve or explain a discrepancy

A resolve-the-discrepancy question presents two facts that seem to conflict. . .



Lesson grev.cr.A4

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The idea

A resolve-the-discrepancy question presents two facts that seem to conflict and asks which option best explains how both can be true at once. First state the apparent contradiction precisely: what would you expect given the first fact, and how does the second fact violate that expectation?

What are the two facts, and why do they seem to conflict — what does one lead you to expect that the other appears to contradict?

Look for information that lets both facts be true together — a hidden difference or an offsetting factor — and reject options that worsen the conflict, restate a fact, or address only one side.

Watch every step

A gym signed up a record number of new members in January. Yet the number of people actually working out at the gym on a typical day barely changed over the course of the year.

Which of the following, if true, best explains how both facts can be true?

A. A record number of people signed up for gym memberships in January. ✗ *restates-a-fact*

B. The gym ran a New Year's promotion designed to attract as many sign-ups as possible. ✗ *one-sided*

C. The new members bought memberships that gave them unlimited daily access. ✗ *deepens-discrepancy*

✓ **D.** Most of the new members stopped visiting the gym within a few weeks of signing up.

E. The gym is located next door to a popular coffee shop. ✗ *out-of-scope*

Why D — "Most of the new members stopped visiting the gym within a. . . ." Choose the option under which both facts can hold at once.

Now a harder one

A team of scientists sampled a lake and found very few fish in it. Yet local anglers regularly pull large numbers of fish out of the same lake.

Which of the following, if true, best explains how both facts can be true?

A. The scientists sampled the open middle of the lake, while the fish gather in the weedy shallows near shore where the anglers cast their lines.

B. The scientists' sampling turned up very few fish in the lake. ✗ *restates-a-fact*

C. The anglers fish this lake because it has long enjoyed a reputation for good catches. ✗ *one-sided*

D. The scientists used nets designed to capture fish of every size. ✗ *deepens-discrepancy*

E. The lake freezes over completely every winter. ✗ *out-of-scope*

Why A — "The scientists sampled the open middle of the lake, while. . . ." Choose the option under which both facts can hold at once.

The method, in one line

Critical Reasoning: resolve or explain a discrepancy

Look for information that lets both facts be true together — a hidden difference or an offsetting factor — and reject options that worsen the conflict, restate a fact, or address only one side.

Does my choice actually let BOTH facts be true? Or does it deepen the conflict, repeat one fact, or explain only one side?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

⚠ deepens-discrepancy
Selects an option that, instead of reconciling the two facts, makes them even harder to square.

⚠ out-of-scope
Selects an option irrelevant to both facts, so it explains neither and cannot resolve the tension.

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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