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By Payal Tandon

# [5 STRATEGIES THAT GMAC USES TO CHANGE MEANING]

The purpose of this document is to outline 5 strategies that GMAC uses to distort the intended logical meaning of the sentence in a “grammatically correct” answer choice. This document also outlines the process that GMAT aspirants can follow so that they don’t fall into this trap.

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## 5 STRATEGIES THAT GMAT USES TO DISTORT MEANING

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A lot of you are re-taking the GMAT in December and have somewhat limited experience on how to deal with the “recent” meaning based SC questions in which the answer choices may contain more than one grammatically correct answer choice. In this case, the student is often confused as to how to select the correct answer choice. This post is designed to address the same. Read through the post to understand

1. 5 Strategies that GMAC uses to distort the intended logical meaning of the sentence in a “grammatically correct” answer choice.
2. A process to approach SC questions to answer such questions successfully
3. Official examples and exercise questions for practice.

Note, in addition to this article, we also have a full (audio-visual) concept available free of charge to all registered users. I recommend you also review that.

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### HOW IS THIS ARTICLE ORGANIZED

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My initial forum post today will summarize the 5 strategies and describe the first strategy – placement of modifiers - in detail. The second strategy will be discussed on 9<sup>th</sup> December and so on. Those who want to be notified as soon as some exercise problem is posted can follow me on the forum.

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### THE 5 STRATEGIES GMAC USES TO DISTORT MEANING

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GMAT Sentence Correction questions test the test taker on how effectively he/she can express the idea or relationship using correct expression conforming to the rules of standard written English. Many times an answer choice may be grammatically correct but may not be the correct choice because it distorts the intended logical meaning of the original sentence. The table below provides a quick summary on strategies that GMAC deploys to achieve the same.

Strategy for changing Meaning	Description	Official Question Reference
Change placement of modifiers	By changing the placement of modifier, the modified entity can be changed, thereby causing a shift or distortion in meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OGVR2#37</li> <li>• OG12#115</li> </ul>
Use different modifiers	By changing the type of modifier, meaning of the sentence can be changed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OG12#126</li> <li>• OGVR2#108</li> </ul>
Use different conjunctions	By changing the conjunctions in a sentence, meaning can be changed in several ways – independent items may be made dependent or vice versa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OGVR2#31</li> <li>• GMATPrep – Largest Trade-Book Publisher</li> <li>• GMATPrep – Edith Abbott</li> <li>• OG12#84</li> </ul>
Change Voice of the sentence	By changing voice of the sentence, the focus of sentence can be shifted enough to cause a shift in the meaning of the sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMATPrep – Declaration of Sentiments</li> <li>• GMATPrep – Synthetic Growth Hormone</li> </ul>
Remove/add words that provide context or use word differently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By removing or adding certain words that add context to the sentence, the meaning of the sentence can be changed.</li> <li>• By changing the way in which words can be used, the meaning of the sentence can be changed. This includes use of different prepositions with the word.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OGVR2#43</li> <li>• OGVR2#52</li> </ul>

### STRATEGY 1 - CHANGE PLACEMENT OF MODIFIERS

How does GMAC use this strategy: Modifiers provide additional or descriptive information about another entity in the sentence. So if these modifiers are placed at different locations in the sentence, the meaning of the sentence changes. This is how GMAC may introduce such meaning based errors. In these cases, both the placements result in logical meaning but only one is correct and that is determined by what the intended meaning of the sentence is.

Lets take a simple example below:

#### SIMPLE EXAMPLE

The **cat** with black stripes **is running** after the rat.

So here is the scene that I picture. Cat is running after the rat. Cat has black stripes. Now lets check this sentence below.

The **cat is running** after the rat with black stripes.



Now the scene that I picture is – cat is running after the rat. The rat has black stripes. So per this sentence, I no longer have any information about the stripes on the cat. But I have information about the stripes on the rat.

So simply by placing “with black stripes” differently, the meaning communicated by the sentence changes.

This is exactly how GMAT may introduce a difference in meaning.

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OFFICIAL QUESTION 1 – VERBAL REVIEW 2 – Q#37

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Now lets take an official question:

Some buildings that were destroyed and heavily damaged in the earthquake last year were constructed in violation of the city's building code.

- A. Some buildings that were destroyed and heavily damaged in the earthquake last year were
- B. Some buildings that were destroyed or heavily damaged in the earthquake last year had been
- C. Some buildings that the earthquake destroyed and heavily damaged last year have been
- D. Last year the earthquake destroyed or heavily damaged some buildings that have been
- E. Last year some of the buildings that were destroyed or heavily damaged in the earthquake had been

**Intended meaning from Choice A:** The intended meaning of the sentence from choice A can be inferred as follows:

1. Some buildings had been destroyed in the earthquake last year.
2. (Prior to the destruction) These buildings were constructed in violation of the city's building code

**Some buildings that were destroyed** in the earthquake last year **were constructed** in violation of city's building code.



Note that this sentence has two verbs and based on where “last year” is placed, it can modify either of the two verbs.

Notice that choice A is incorrect since it uses the simple past – were constructed. The correct verb should be “had been constructed” to illustrate correct sequencing with respect to “were destroyed” to show that the buildings were constructed prior to the destruction.

**Correct:** Choice B corrects this error and is the correct choice.

**Grammatically Correct but Incorrect choice (E)**– Notice how in choice E the test takers have cleverly moved “last year” in the clause that with SV pair - “some of buildings had been constructed” such that it now describes when some of these buildings were constructed. It no longer describes the timing of the earthquakes.

Last year some of the buildings that were destroyed in the earthquake  
had been constructed in violation of city’s building code.  
*when*

The intended meaning communicated by Choice E is the following:

1. Some of the buildings had been constructed in violation of city’s building code last year.
2. These buildings were destroyed in the earthquake.

Note that in choice E we now know that the buildings were constructed last year. This is the information that we did not have in choice A. Thus, the meaning communicated by this choice is certainly different from the meaning communicated by choice A. Hence, while choice E is grammatically correct, it changes the logical intended meaning and is not the correct choice.

*PS: Access our free concepts on sentence structure if you want to know how to break a compound sentence into simple sentences. Just register at e-gmat.com*

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### OFFICIAL QUESTION 2 – OG 12 – Q#112

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Now let’s take another official question. This time from OG 12.

Gall's hypothesis of there being different mental functions localized in different parts of the brain is widely accepted today.

- A. of there being different mental functions localized in different parts of the brain is widely accepted today
- B. of different mental functions that are localized in different parts of the brain is widely accepted today
- C. that different mental functions are localized in different parts of the brain is widely accepted today
- D. which is that there are different mental functions localized in different parts of the brain is widely accepted today
- E. which is widely accepted today is that there are different mental functions localized in different parts of the brain

**Intended meaning from Choice A:** The sentence is written in an awkward manner but we can certainly infer the intended meaning.

- A specific hypothesis of Gall is widely accepted today.
- What is the hypothesis? Per this hypothesis - different mental functions are localized in different parts of the brain.

Notice how we know precisely what the hypothesis is.

**Error in the original choice:** Choice A is not the correct choice since it is not written in concise manner. The expression “of there being” is very wordy.

**Choice C** corrects this error and is the correct choice.

Gall's **hypothesis** *that different mental functions are localized* in different parts of the brain **is widely accepted** today.

**Grammatically Correct but Incorrect choice B:** Notice how the *test makers have moved the descriptive “that” modifier here. Also, the information presented by “that modifier” has also been changed to make logical sense in the changed context.* The change in meaning in choice B happens because of placement and wording of “that” modifier. Instead of now stating the hypothesis, now “that” modifier talks about the mental functions. The meaning communicated by choice B is as follows:

1. Gall has certain hypothesis about different mental functions.
2. This hypothesis is widely accepted today.
3. These different mental functions are localized in different parts of the brain
4. Notice carefully that per this choice we do not know precisely what the hypothesis is. All we know is that some hypothesis of different mental functions is widely accepted and we know where the different mental functions are located.

Gall's **hypothesis** of different mental functions *that are localized* in different parts of the brain **is widely accepted** today.

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#### HOW TO EVALUATE CHOICES THAT CHANGE THE MEANING?

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1. Understand the logical meaning of the original choice. (note placement of modifiers)
2. Look for the answer choice that best communicates the same meaning in un-ambiguous and grammatically correct manner.
3. Ignore choices that may be grammatically correct but change the meaning.

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## Exercise Sentences

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### EXAMPLE 1 – HEARTLESS HUMAN BEINGS

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Heartless human beings are like wild animals, which will rip its own kin at the slightest of need and that too without a sign of remorse.

- A. Heartless human beings are like wild animals, which will rip its own kin at the slightest of need
- B. Heartless human beings were like wild animals, which have ripped their own kin at the slightest of need
- C. Human beings are like heartless wild animals, which rip their own kin in the slightest of need
- D. Human beings are like heartless wild animals, which rip at its own kin in the slightest of need
- E. Heartless human beings are like wild animals, which rip their own kin in the slightest of need.

### EXAMPLE 2 – MRS MERCKEL

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At the heart of euro crisis is Mrs. Merckel's lack of quick or bold reaction, the reason for lack of halting of the downward spiral of the euro.

- A. Mrs. Merckel's lack of quick or bold reaction, the reason for lack of halting of the downward spiral of the euro
- B. Mrs. Merckel, whose lack of quick or bold reaction is the reason that the downward spiral on the euro has not halted
- C. the lack of quick or bold reaction by Mrs. Merckel, the reason that the downward spiral on the euro has not halted.
- D. Mrs. Merckel, whose lack of quick or bold reaction is the reason of lack of halting of the downward spiral of the euro.
- E. the lack of quick or bold reaction by Mrs. Merckel, resulting in the downward spiral of the euro.

## STRATEGY 2 – USE OF MODIFIERS

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**How does GMAC use this strategy:** There are a finite number of commonly used modifiers. These modifiers typically play well-defined role. You may find below the list of modifiers and what they typically modify. E-GMAT customers may view the concept file “Types of Modifiers” to find more details on this topic.

Type of Modifier	What does it Modify?
Single word adjective	Modifies the closest noun
Single word adverb	Modifies the verb
Relative pronoun clause	Modifies the noun <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• which, that – modify things</li> <li>• who – modifies people</li> <li>• whose – modifies people or things</li> </ul>
Verb-ed modifier	Modifies the noun
Verb-ing modifier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If separated by comma, modifies preceding clause and associates with the subject</li> <li>• If separated by comma, modifies the following clause or modifies only the subject</li> <li>• If not separated by comma, modifies the noun</li> </ul>
Prepositional modifier	Modifies verb or noun – depends on the context
Noun + noun modifier	Modifies any aspect of the preceding clause

Lets take a simple example below:

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### SIMPLE EXAMPLE

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The swift cat caught the rat.



So here is the scene that I picture. Cat is swift. It caught the rat. Now lets check this sentence below.

The cat swiftly caught the rat.



Now the scene that I picture is – cat swiftly grabbed the rat. So per this sentence, I no longer know whether the cat is generally swift or not. But I do know that the cat acted swiftly and caught the rat.

So changing the modifier from “adjective” to “adverb” leads to change in the meaning communicated by the sentence.

This is exactly how GMAT may introduce a difference in meaning.

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OFFICIAL QUESTION 1 – OG 12 – Q#126

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Now lets take an official question:

The use of lie detectors is based on the assumption that lying produces emotional reactions in an individual that, in turn, create unconscious physiological responses.

- A. that, in turn, create unconscious physiological responses
- B. that create unconscious physiological responses in turn
- C. creating, in turn, unconscious physiological responses
- D. to create, in turn, physiological responses that are unconscious
- E. who creates unconscious physiological responses in turn

**Intended meaning from Choice A:** The intended meaning of the sentence from choice A can be inferred as follows:

1. Use of lie detectors is based on a certain assumption. Here is the assumption
2. Lying produces emotional reactions in an individual
3. These emotional reactions then create unconscious physiological responses.

The **use** of lie detectors **is based** on the assumption that **lying produces emotional reactions** in an individual **that**, in turn, **create** unconscious physiological responses

Note that “that clause” in this sentence clearly modifies – emotional reactions. Yes, typically relative pronoun modifiers modify the closest noun. However, they can also modify slightly far away noun when this noun is the head of the noun phrase and when such modification makes sense. E-GMAT customers can find detailed description of this concept in the concept file – Modifiers – Relative Pronouns. Also, I cover this topic in excruciating detail in one of the live sessions in the Verbal Live Complete.

This choice is absolutely correct. There are no grammatical and meaning based errors in this sentence.

**Grammatically Correct but Incorrect choice (E)** – Notice how in choice E the test makers have changed the modifier from “that clause” to “who clause”. See, “who” modifiers cannot modify things. They can only modify people. So by changing ‘thing’ modifying modifier to ‘person’ modifying modifier, now automatically the entity being modified changes to “individual”. Now the modifier no longer modifies “emotional reactions”. This changes the meaning. This results in different yet still logical meaning.

The **use** of lie detectors **is based** on the assumption that **lying produces emotional reactions** in an individual **who creates** unconscious physiological responses in turn.

The intended meaning communicated by Choice E is the following:

1. Use of lie detectors is based on a certain assumption. Here is the assumption:
2. Lying produces emotional reactions in an individual
3. The individual then creates unconscious physiological responses.

Note that without subject matter knowledge, the above cause and effect sequence appears to be logical. Lying produces certain reactions in the individual and then the individual unknowingly creates certain type of responses.

Thus, the meaning communicated by this choice is certainly different from the meaning communicated by choice A. Hence, while choice E is grammatically correct, it changes the logical intended meaning and is not the correct choice.

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### OFFICIAL QUESTION 2 – OG VERBAL REVIEW 2 – Q#108

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Now let's take another official question.

Sound can travel through water for enormous distances, prevented from dissipating its acoustic energy as a result of boundaries in the ocean created by water layers of different temperatures and densities.

- A. prevented from dissipating its acoustic energy as a result of
- B. prevented from having its acoustic energy dissipated by
- C. its acoustic energy prevented from dissipating by
- D. its acoustic energy prevented from being dissipated as a result of
- E. preventing its acoustic energy from dissipating by

**Intended meaning from Choice A:** The sentence is written in an awkward manner but we can certainly infer the intended meaning.

1. Sound can travel through water for long distances.
2. The acoustic energy of sound is prevented from dissipating because of the boundaries in the ocean. These boundaries are created by water layers of different temperatures and densities.

Now it is logical to say that because of statement 2, statement 1 happens. That is because the acoustic energy of sound is not dissipated easily, sound can travel through water for long distances. At this point you can picture in your mind that these two facts can be connected in multiple ways:

1. Use connectors that state reason such as because, since.
2. Use modifier that extends the thought of preceding clause.

**Error in the original choice:** Choice A is not the correct choice since it is not written properly.

**Choice C** corrects this error and is the correct choice. It uses noun + noun modifier construction to explain how sound can travel through water for long distances. Notice that a noun + noun modifier construction is very versatile. It can modify any aspect of the preceding clause. It need not be

necessarily connected to the subject of the clause. This is what sets it apart from a verb-ing modifier which has been used in choice E.

*Explains how this is possible*

**Sound can travel** through water for enormous distances, **its acoustic energy prevented from dissipating by boundaries in the ocean created by water layers of different temperatures and densities.**

**Grammatically Correct but Incorrect choice E:** Notice how the *test makers have changed this modifier to verb-ing modifier*. As we discussed earlier, a verb-ing modifier when separated by a comma modifies the preceding clause but is connected with the subject of that clause. It may also present the result of the action in the preceding clause. Neither of these modifications in this sentence creates an illogical meaning. Two possible interpretations are:

- Illogical meaning 1
  - Sound can travel through water for long distances.
  - Sound prevents its energy from dissipating because of the boundaries in the ocean. These boundaries are created by water layers of different temperatures and densities.
  - This is illogical since sound itself does not prevent its energy from being dissipated. The boundaries in the ocean prevent the energy of sound from being dissipated.
- Illogical meaning 2
  - Sound can travel through water for enormous distances
  - This leads to its energy being prevented from dissipation

*Illogically implies that sound "prevents its energy from dissipating"*

**Sound can travel** through water for enormous distances, **preventing its acoustic energy from dissipating by boundaries in the ocean created by water layers of different temperatures and densities.**

So as you can see, by changing the modifier, the context of the sentence changes, resulting in this case in an illogical meaning. Now at first look this choice may appear to be correct since grammatically there are no errors. However, since the correct choice must communicate intended logical meaning, this choice is not the correct answer.

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### HOW TO EVALUATE CHOICES THAT CHANGE THE MEANING?

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1. Understand the logical meaning of the original choice.
  - a. Note how the modifiers have been used.
  - b. If the meaning is not clear in the original choice, then apply your knowledge of modifiers and determine the suitable modifier for the sentence. Such pre-thinking helps when you review the answer choices.
2. Look for the answer choice that best communicates the same meaning in un-ambiguous and grammatically correct manner.

3. Ignore choices that may be grammatically correct but change the meaning. A seemingly correct grammatical choice may also communicate an illogical meaning.

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### EXERCISE SENTENCES

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#### EXAMPLE 1 – EUROPEAN LEADERS

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European leaders, who met until the early hours of Friday, agreed for signing, with the head of the World Bank, an intergovernmental treaty that would require it to enforce stricter fiscal and financial discipline in their future budgets

- A. for signing, with the head of the World Bank, an intergovernmental treaty that would require it
- B. to sign an intergovernmental treaty with the head of the world bank who would require them
- C. to sign an intergovernmental treaty with the head of the world bank, requiring them
- D. to sign, with the head of the world bank, an intergovernmental treaty that would require them
- E. for signing an intergovernmental treaty with the head of the World Bank that would require them

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#### EXAMPLE 2 - DARPA

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DARPA's Falcon Hypersonic Technology Vehicle can fly as fast as 6X the speed of sound and can attack a target 2000 miles away in 30 minutes, its engine's thrust prevented from dissipating in the stratosphere by its conical unibody design.

- A. its engine's thrust prevented from dissipating in the stratosphere by its conical unibody design
- B. preventing its engine's thrust from dissipating in the stratosphere because of its conical unibody design
- C. preventing the dissipation of its engine's thrust in the stratosphere due to its conical unibody design
- D. prevented its engine's thrust from being dissipated in the stratosphere by its conical unibody design
- E. its engine's thrust is prevented from being dissipated in the stratosphere because of its conical unibody design