



## How to Read an RC Passage



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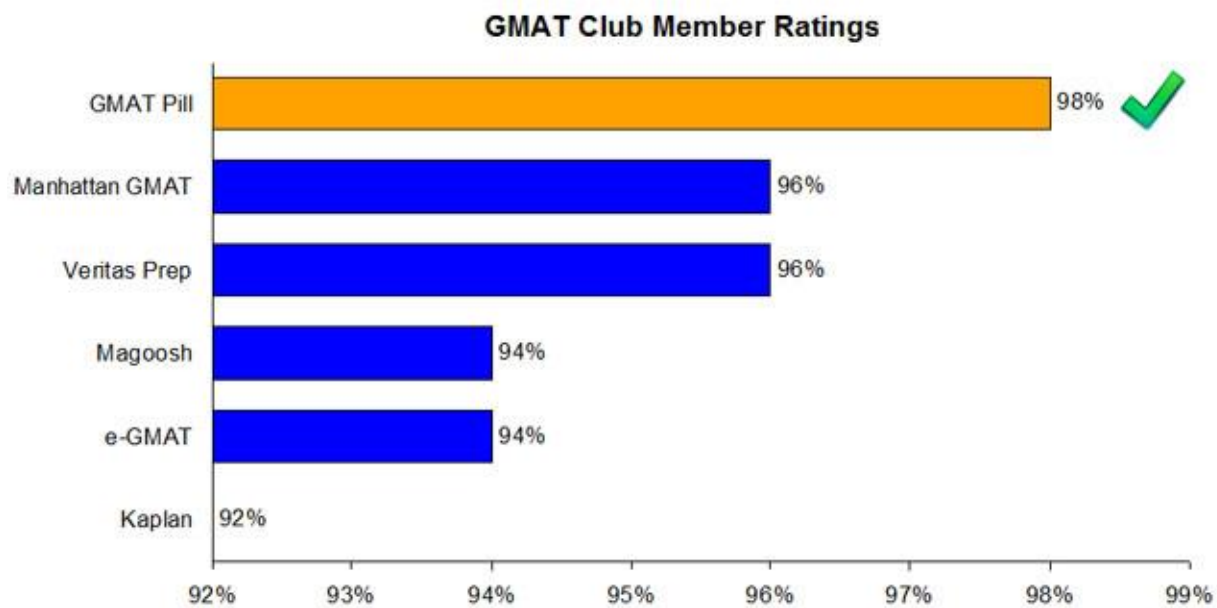
- Break down long, boring passages into its core components
- Understand what the author is trying to do from sentence to sentence
- Increase speed and efficiency by quickly identifying what is and isn't important to read
- Connect the dots to fully comprehend what author is doing throughout the entire passage (not just a portion of it)

## First, a bit about GMAT Pill...

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Focus on how to think – thought speed learning techniques.



# About GMAT Pill

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**Test Taker Information**

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]  
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 Date of Birth: [REDACTED]  
 Gender: Male  
 Country of Citizenship: India  
 GMAT ID: [REDACTED]  
 Appointment Number: [REDACTED]

**Verbal: 11 pt improvement!  
V25 to V36**

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**Optional Test Taker Information (Self-Reported)**

Graduation Date: June 2009  
 Undergraduate GPA:  
 Highest Education Level:  
 Undergraduate Institution:  
 Undergraduate Major: Engineering  
 Intended Graduate Study: Full-time student

**From 570 to 620 to 710!!**

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**Test Information (Score / % Below)**

For the Quantitative, Verbal, Total and Analytical Writing sections, the percentages shown below represent the proportion of tests taken in the previous three years with reported scores lower than this score. The percentage shown below for the new Integrated Reasoning section represents the proportion of IR tests taken so far with reported scores lower than this score. This percentage is updated monthly for the first six months and annually thereafter.

**To view the most recent percentile table, please visit [magoosh.com](#). See below for alphabetic score key.**

Test Date	Verbal	Quantitative	Total	Analytical Writing	Integrated Reasoning
25 October 2012	36 / 79%	49 / 83%	710 / 92%	5.5 / 77%	7 / 81%
08 August 2012	25 / 36%	49 / 83%	620 / 69%	5.5 / 77%	6 / 67%
04 July 2012	30 / 56%	46 / 71%	620 / 69%	5.5 / 77%	3 / 24%
30 March 2012	23 / 30%	45 / 68%	570 / 53%	6.0 / 90%	~ / ~

## GMAT Pill backwards-analyzed how Zeke Lee read RC Passages – and broke it down for you in [RC Pill](#)

Reading a boring passage can often be the toughest part on the GMAT exam for some test takers. It's a good thing I've already developed some videos documenting what's going on in my head as I read an RC passage. Here I'm going to give you a run through via text and see if you can get it. If not, try out some of the video versions in RC Pill where I use video to \*better\* convey my speed learning techniques.

Here is the passage. It's a lot to digest, how do we break it down?

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### Example Passage

The settlement of the United States has occupied traditional historians since 1893 when Frederick Jackson Turner developed his Frontier Thesis, a thesis that explained American development in terms of westward expansion. From the perspective of women's history, Turner's exclusively masculine assumptions constitute a major drawback: his defenders and critics alike have reconstructed men's, not women's, lives on the frontier. However, precisely because of this masculine orientation, revising the Frontier Thesis by focusing on women's experience introduces new themes into women's history—woman as lawmaker and entrepreneur—and, consequently, new interpretations of women's relationship to capital, labor, and statute.

Turner claimed that the frontier produced the individualism that is the hallmark of American culture, and that this individualism in turn promoted democratic institutions and economic equality. He argued for the frontier as an agent of social change. **Most novelists and historians** writing in the early to midtwentieth century who considered women in the West, when they considered women at all, fell under Turner's spell. In their works these authors tended to glorify women's contributions to frontier life. Western women, in Turnerian tradition, were a fiercely independent, capable, and durable lot, free from the constraints binding their eastern sisters. This interpretation implied that the West provided a congenial environment where women could aspire to their own goals, free from constrictive stereotypes and sexist attitudes. In Turnerian terminology, the frontier had furnished "a gate of escape from the bondage of the past."

By the middle of the twentieth century, the Frontier Thesis fell into disfavor among historians. Later, Reactionist writers took the view that frontier women were lonely, displaced persons in a hostile milieu that intensified the worst aspects of gender relations. The renaissance of the feminist movement during the 1970's led to the Stasist school, which sidestepped the good bad dichotomy and argued that frontier women lived lives similar to the lives of women in the East. In one now-standard text, Faragher demonstrated the persistence of the "cult of true womanhood" and the illusionary quality of change on the westward journey. Recently the Stasist position has been revised but not entirely discounted by new research.

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### Sample Question

The primary purpose of the passage is to

- (A) provide a framework within which the history of women in nineteenth-century America can be organized
  - (B) discuss divergent interpretations of women's experience on the western frontier
  - (C) introduce a new hypothesis about women's experience in nineteenth-century America
  - (D) advocate an empirical approach to women's experience on the western frontier
  - (E) resolve ambiguities in several theories about women's experience on the western frontier
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#### Step 1 Read first sentence:

"The settlement of the United States has occupied traditional historians since 1893 when Frederick Jackson Turner developed his *Frontier Thesis*, a thesis that explained American development in terms of westward expansion."

The main topic to visualize and think about is: "settlement of the US"

"The **settlement of the United States** has occupied traditional historians since 1893 when Frederick Jackson Turner developed his *Frontier Thesis*, a thesis that explained American development in terms of westward expansion."

American development in terms of westward expansion."

What exactly does that mean? Reread sentence. Notice that later on in the sentence it talks about "American development in terms of westward expansion"

"The **settlement of the United States** has occupied traditional historians since 1893 when Frederick Jackson Turner developed his *Frontier Thesis*, a **thesis that explained American development in terms of westward expansion.**"

Oh okay...this **passage topic is about how the US got settled down, how it got to where it is via expansion westward from the east coast to the west coast.**

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#### Step 2 Then read beginning of next sentence:

"From the perspective of women's history, Turner's ...."

OK stop there...don't read rest of sentence. Now you know rest of paragraph will talk about some perspective from the women's side.

What does that mean? Probably a women's perspective on how the US developed/expanded westward and eventually settled into what it is today.

Then scan to next sentence and notice the key word "transitive" -- big signal to read this next sentence.

"However, precisely because of this masculine orientation..."

OK stop there. "However" suggests we go in an opposite direction from where we were before. I have no clue what "direction" we were going before...but from the phrase "because of this masculine orientation" -- we immediately know that it is the WOMEN's perspective (Turner's in particular) in prior sentence that was masculine.

So, Turner's perspective on US settlement was one revolving around "masculine orientation".

Great, keep reading...we're going from "masculine orientation" to what? Keep that question in mind as you re-read the next part.

"... revising the *Frontier Thesis* by focusing on women's experience introduces new themes into women's history—woman as lawmaker and entrepreneur— ..."

So from "masculine orientation", we are going to \_\_\_\_\_?

Well, reread that long sentence by cutting the fluff:

"... revising [ some book/article by focusing on women's experiences ....] introduces new themes [ ...]—woman as lawmaker and entrepreneur— ..."

OH, so we are going from "masculine orientation" to "lawmaker and entrepreneur" for the women perspective.

Ah so that's the "direction" that we have so far. Great!

Keep reading, notice the next transitive word "consequently". This hints that it will deliver the final statement for our "direction".

"...and consequently, new interpretations of women's relationship to capital, labor, and statute."

Wait, where was the verb? Oh it was in the earlier part of the sentence. So reread it as:

"... revising [ some book/article by focusing on women's experiences ....] introduces new themes [ ...] and consequently, new interpretations of women's relationship to capital, labor, and statute."

So that was the last sentence in paragraph 1.

Rephrase in your head what happened. **We first introduced broadly the concept of US settlement via westward expansion. We then focused on the women perspective -- and saying that women perspective went from "masculine" to "professional [lawmaker/entrepreneur]" --- so this emphasis on women's experiences changed how the public perceived women in our society. There was some "change" in the perception of women during this process of US settlement via expansion westward.**

Great, we finished paragraph 1 by identifying key transitive words and cutting some of the fluff (specifically we skipped over parts of the second sentence). Then we finally figured out the

"direction" of the passage by the end of paragraph 1, specifically the last sentence helped us identify the "direction" from "masculine" to "professional" as words to describe women in society.

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### Step 3 Read Paragraph 2:

"Turner claimed that the frontier produced the individualism that is the hallmark of American culture, and that this individualism in turn promoted democratic institutions and economic equality."

OK wait a minute, let's break it down. Here's how you should have read it:

"Turner claimed ... "

Ok so this is the author making a statement. What is his statement?

"...that the frontier produced the individualism that is the hallmark of American culture, ..."

Wait what does that mean?

The "frontier" produced individualism? "Frontier" -- oh that means the frontier of American settlement. The US was expanding westward and the frontier must refer to the developments occurring during this period or at the very forefront of the expansion.

What occurred at the forefront? "Individualism."

Wait, we were talking about WOMEN before in paragraph 1 and now they are talking about INDIVIDUALISM? Ah, there must be a connection. This paragraph must be trying to make some connection between WOMEN and INDIVIDUALISM, all of which have to do with the FRONTIER.

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### Step 4 Let's read on:

"... , and that this **individualism** in turn promoted **democratic** institutions and **economic equality**. He argued for the frontier as an **agent of social change**."

OK, great ideas..INDIVIDUALISM is now linked to words like DEMOCRACY and ECONOMIC EQUALITY. And now SOCIAL CHANGE.

So this whole idea of US expansion westward created a FRONTIER where notions of INDIVIDUALISM / DEMOCRACY / ECONOMIC EQUALITY / SOCIAL CHANGE are all linked. Great!

Superb! That's the main idea of the passage direction...now that we got this, we can feel more comfortable about skipping around.

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### Step 5 Get ready to skip if you can

"Most novelists and historians writing in the early to midtwentieth century ..."

Okay now at this point, there was no key transitive phrase. Just a new sentence that seems to be a detailed sentence in support of the paragraph. Since no key words spotted, CUT THE FLUFF here and don't read anymore. Skip over this sentence and start scanning ahead for when you should start reading again.

The rest of the paragraph seems boring. I'm inclined to skip to the start of the next paragraph. But just in case, read the last sentence of paragraph 2 and see if anything changed -- whether author changed perspective or went in a new direction? If so, we want to be aware of it.

"In Turnerian terminology, the frontier had furnished 'a gate of escape from the bondage of the past.'"

OK I have no idea what is said here but most important is to see that the author **did not go in a new direction. No key transitive phrases were used.** If we reread this sentence, it's saying the "frontier" created an escape from the bondage of the past. "Bondage" is like slavery. So they are presumably saying the past, which is linked to MASCULINITY, was like prison. But now the frontier changed, social perception of women roles changed and the feeling associated with that change is one of escape from the past. Great, so that's just additional details to describe the feelings of that direction we first identified for women -- from MASCULINITY to PROFESSIONALISM.

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### Step 6 Read Paragraph 3

"By the middle of the twentieth century, the *Frontier Thesis* fell into disfavor among historians."

Holy crap! The author just changed direction. The keyword "by the middle of the 20th century" -- we're basically taking this social change for women during the frontier movement (from MASCULINITY to PROFESSIONALISM / ECONOMIC EQUALITY) and saying that it turned into a negative. At least for historians.

What does the author mean? How was it negative in the eyes of historians? Read on to find out.

"Later, Reactionist writers took the view that frontier women were lonely, displaced persons in a hostile milieu that intensified the worst aspects of gender relations."

So based on the first sentence of the last paragraph, we know we're going in that opposite direction. So whatever this sentence is saying, we know it must be going along the lines of this OPPOSITE direction.

I don't know what are who "Reactionist" writers are, but I DO know they are the ones championing a perspective that DIFFERS from what we had in the first two paragraphs -- one of WOMEN escaping slavery in the past and achieving new SOCIAL CHANGE in their favor.

So what is this negative view that "Reactionist" writers had?

Let's cut the fluff of that sentence to better understand it.

"Later, Reactionist writers took the view that frontier women were lonely, [ ... ] intensified the worst aspects of gender relations."

So they are saying these "frontier" women, these women of the new age, intensified the worst aspects of gender relations. So they are saying they took problems of gender relations and made them even bigger during this time period.

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### Step 7 Read next sentence and see if we can skip

"The renaissance of the feminist movement during the 1970's led to the Stasist school..."

Wait a minute, where did this question come from? It seems completely unrelated to our prior sentence? Well, we know based on passage structure, this sentence must support the prior sentence, so let's use that as a hint to figure out how this sentence fits in. We know it must support how "gender relations" were bad and got worse.

"The renaissance of the feminist movement during the 1970's "

-- could this possibly be related to this "opposing" / "negative" perspective? Could it be that the renaissance (which means new makeover or new change) of the feminist movement is simply the same view as those "Reactionist writers"?

To confirm, let's cut the fluff for this long and complicated sentence:

"The renaissance of the feminist movement [ ... ] argued that frontier women lived lives similar to the lives of women in the East."

Is that a good thing or bad thing? Well, we're in the paragraph where everything is negative. So the association between life of a frontier woman and life of a woman in the East must BOTH be negative.

"In one now-standard text ..."

-- okay, this next sentence dives into detail. Key transitive phrase "in this example ..." -- so we know it's in support of that negative association we made in the prior sentence.

OK, last sentence:

"Recently the Stasist position has been revised but not entirely discounted by new research."

Wait, what's going on here, it's a weird/awkward last sentence. The "Stasist position" is this very negative perspective of the last paragraph. So just replace with "negative"

"Recently the [negative] position has been revised but not entirely discounted by new research."

OK, discounted...that's another word for "dismissed" as unimportant. So, this last sentence is basically saying there have been changes to this "negative" position -- perhaps the change is saying the negative is not so negative after all. We know the degree to which it was changed to the positive was limited, since the "revision" was not entirely discounted. So if you think of it as originally 100% negative, some of the negativity was dismissed, maybe 40%. But the remaining 60% negativity is still there. So this last sentence is just taking a strong negative perspective and saying the degree to which that perspective was negative just decreased a little bit. But still largely negative.

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### Step 8 CONNECT THE DOTS

OK.. so that's the entire read. How to connect the dots?

Well, we first talked about US settlement and the westward expansion -- focusing on the women experience and we saw a change from "MASCULINITY" to "PROFESSIONALISM" to "ECONOMIC EQUALITY and SOCIAL CHANGE" -- all of this was perceived to be POSITIVE (escape from bondage in the past).

Then the notion of POSITIVE change was perceived to be NEGATIVE for the "Reactionist" writers (whoever they are) and the feminists of the 1970s. The general gist here is that the POSITIVE

change that occurred in the past is actually perceived to be a NEGATIVE by certain folks later on, no better than the life of a woman in the East.

Clearly, connecting the dots showed a POSITIVE side and a NEGATIVE side. A question about main idea will likely address the fact that both perspectives exist.

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### Step 9 Answer "Primary Purpose"

The primary purpose of the passage is to

- (A) provide a framework within which the history of women in nineteenth-century America can be organized
- (B) discuss divergent interpretations of women's experience on the western frontier
- (C) introduce a new hypothesis about women's experience in nineteenth-century America
- (D) advocate an empirical approach to women's experience on the western frontier
- (E) resolve ambiguities in several theories about women's experience on the western frontier

#### Each Answer Choice

(A) provide a framework within which the history of women in nineteenth-century America can be organized

- "framework" hmm sounds complicated but possible. "History of women in 19th century..." -- well wait, we talked about feminist movement in 1970s. That would be 20th century. So mentioning 19th century would fail to capture all the "connecting dots" of the passage

**(B) discuss divergent interpretations of women's experience on the western frontier**

**- yes, this is the only answer choice that addresses two perspectives (POSITIVES/NEGATIVES) by using the keyword "divergent"**

(C) introduce a new hypothesis about women's experience in nineteenth-century America

**- a "new hypothesis" is introduced -- true, this is the second half of the passage. But by only talking about this "new hypothesis" it fails to capture the fact that we spent 2/3 of the passage talking about the "old hypothesis". So that part is missing. Further, the word "hypothesis" is not really accurate. "Hypothesis" would indicate some prediction -- however the ideas from the "Reactionist" writers and renaissance feminists are not "predictions" -- they already occurred in the past and they are documented.**

(D) advocate an empirical approach to women's experience on the western frontier

**- "empirical"? Empirical means based off of data or observations? Further, nothing is "advocated" by the author**

(E) resolve ambiguities in several theories about women's experience on the western frontier

**- "Ambiguities"? We know there are differences between the positives and negatives. But we don't resolve any ambiguities. There isn't something that can't be understood, and then we spend the entire passage trying to explain why it is the way it is. No. We don't resolve any ambiguities here.**

We at GMATPill found (B) to be the best answer.

Using a variety of GMAT Pill RC strategies, which include eyeing transitive keywords, determining when to skip, cutting the fluff, and connecting dots, we are able to quickly answer the "Primary Purpose" RC question without spending too much time referencing the passage for each answer choice. This is how you want to answer each RC question. When you have 4-6 questions per passage, you want to have one good read covering the structure of the passage – that way answer questions related to "main idea" can be answered quickly. Only questions asking more detail will we need to refer back to the text to confirm our answer.

RC Pill Strategies are key to saving time on the exam and ensuring accuracy and efficiency at the same time. For more practice, try out the practice pill platform for more [reading comprehension questions](#). And learn more about RC Pill videos.

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