

If it's Friday in March, it's time for another hip-hop themed GMAT Tip post, and this week we'll again keep it old school with a tip of the hat to Geto Boys and their 1991 track "Mind Playing Tricks on Me" — one of the most influential hip hop tracks of all time, and a song that should be influential in your GMAT Prep, as well. After all, at the end of his first verse Scarface offers arguably the most truthful line about the GMAT ever recorded on wax:

*It's f***ed up when your mind is playing tricks on you.*

Willie D even lays it on a bit more GMAT relevant with the next verse and his famous and oft-sampled lyrics:

I make big money, I drive big cars
Everybody knows me, it's like I'm a movie star
But late at night, something ain't right...

And then he talks about the delusions that befell him as a confident superstar, and those that can befall even the most confident GMAT test-taker. The GMAT is hard enough as it is, but like Scarface said it's even more messed up when your mind is playing tricks on you. So let's examine several ways in which your mind can play tricks on you on the GMAT:

1) You see an "easy" question and think you're performing poorly.

This is a common and potentially-devastating mind trick, and one that we've written about [before](#). Because the GMAT is adaptive, students often read into the difficulty levels of each question. Seeing a hard question you might think you're doing well, and that's not that dangerous. But on the other side, when students perceive that a question is easy they sometimes panic, thinking that that question is evidence that their hard work has been for naught. In the article linked above, you can read about how a student who would actually score above the 90th percentile on the quant section became so distraught after seeing an "easy" quant question late in that section that she completely bombed the verbal because of crying and hyperventilation.

But here's the thing: your mind can play tricks on you. An "easy" question has two major explanations that don't include "you're blowing it":

- It could be an unscored, and in fact easy, item that the GMAT shows you as a research item (somewhere around 1/5 of all GMAT questions you see will not count, but will instead be there to collect data about the item: is it hard? easy? fair?).
- It could be a hard question that looks easy. Wolf-in-sheep's-clothing questions are among the hardest out there because if you don't see the difficulty, you breeze through it without even trying to attack it. Consider the question:

The audience at a concert included only G's and Hustlers. When Warren opened his set, the audience included 12 G's for every 7 Hustlers. If no one left the concert, but one mixed group of G's and Hustlers arrived in time for Snoop to headline the show, what was the ratio of G's to Hustlers during Snoop's set?

(1) The group included 77 G's.

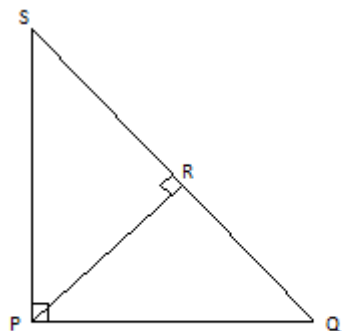
(2) The group included 132 Hustlers.

Now you might immediately think that, when given a ratio (but no total number) and then two numbers, you cannot determine the new ratio. So you might — in true old school hip hop form — declare this question an Eazy E and start to worry whether it is evidence that you're doomed to failure on the quant section. But there's a catch: 77 G's and 132 Hustlers are both numbers divisible by 11. 77 is 7(11) and 132 is 12(11). So actually, because the ratio of new additions is the same as the initial ratio, the ratio does not change and you can answer this question with both statements. The answer is C, but if you missed that catch you not only got this question wrong, but your mind may have played tricks on you and ruined your confidence. Do not let that happen!

If you see an easy question, first check to see that you haven't missed the difficulty completely, and then if you still think it's easy just chalk it up to "it's experimental". Save your confidence and keep plugging away. No one has ever been helped by knowing they weren't doing well, but many have seen their dreams derailed because they thought they weren't doing well. As Tupac would say, Keep Ya Head Up.

2) Graphs and figures may be different than they appear.

You may have seen this in March 9's [post](#), with this question:



In triangle PQS above, if $PQ = 3$ and $PS = 4$, then $PR =$

- (A) $9/4$
- (B) $12/5$
- (C) $16/5$
- (D) $15/4$
- (E) $20/3$

You'd be amazed at how many people immediately look at that figure and assume that line PR bisects line QS, making the split lengths of each of the smaller triangles 2.5. The figure looks a lot

like you can do that... but you have conclusive evidence otherwise! The lengths PQ and PS of the larger triangle are 3 and 4 — it's not a symmetrical figure, so that line will definitely not split it directly in half. But figures may make you think that you see a relationship that isn't there. So even when a figure or graph is drawn to scale, don't assume that your eye is precise... double-check the given information (numbers, definitions, etc.) to ensure that your mind isn't playing tricks on you.

3) You think you see something that you expect to see... but that isn't really there.

Your mind does weird things to you when you think you see something that you expect to see — you've studied so much for this test that you are looking for ways to employ your favorite formulas or shortcuts, even when they're not really there. In keeping with triangles, consider this question:

What is the perimeter of right triangle ABC?

- (1) Line AC has a length of 4
- (2) Line BC has a length of $4\sqrt{2}$

Even though you have no evidence that this is an isosceles right triangle, the presence of those two lengths "x" and " $x\sqrt{2}$ " make your mind immediately think that the sides have to be 4, 4, and $4\sqrt{2}$. But in the Pythagorean relationship $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$, you don't have any evidence here that $4\sqrt{2}$ is "c". It could be that 4 is a, $4\sqrt{2}$ is b, and then you'd have to find c by employing that theorem: $4^2 + (4\sqrt{2})^2 = c^2$, so c would be $\sqrt{48}$. But your mind will play tricks on you — so don't let it. Don't be baited by figures that look like something they just quite aren't, and don't be so quick to think you see what you expect to see.

The last verse of Geto Boys' track concludes with a story of Bushwick Bill and a Halloween Trick-or-Treating incident gone awry as he and his friends end up in a violent street brawl. Or did they? He ends the track by saying "then I felt just like a fiend... it wasn't even close to Halloween... ", noting that his hands were all bloody from punching on the concrete. He was violently attacking a foe that wasn't even there.

Don't let that be you on the GMAT. You're ready to do battle with this test, but if you let your mind play tricks on you you'll

expend your valuable energy and mental inertia chasing hallucinations of isosceles triangles, CR conclusions, and delusions of bombing-the-test panic that aren't even there. Beware your mind's propensity for playing tricks on you and double-check frequently to get your senses back. You're probably doing well, so don't let an easy-looking question scare you. You know that the test likes to let your mind run wild with definitions or properties that aren't really there... so make sure that you check your assumptions to make sure they're facts.

When Peter Gibbons makes it big in his office in the movie "Office Space", he struts around to another Geto Boys track: Damn it Feels Good to Be a Gangster. Don't let your mind play tricks on you, and you, too, can walk out of the test center — in slow motion for effect, carrying your 700+ score report — knowing how good it feels to be a gangster.