

GMAT Focus Edition Verbal: Critical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension

Critical Reasoning

- **Major Traps/Test-Writing Tricks:** GMAT CR frequently uses *trap answers* that exploit common mistakes. For example, a “**180-degree reversal**” trap offers an answer that does the *opposite* of what you need (e.g. a weaken choice when asked to strengthen) ¹. An **out-of-scope trap** introduces new information not in the argument (e.g. mentioning unrelated factors). An **extreme-language trap** uses absolute terms (“always,” “never,” “all”) that overstate the argument. Conversely, a **too-weak trap** uses hedges (“may,” “might,” “some”) that fail to adequately address the argument’s logic. Other common tricks include **misdirection (“shiny penny”)** – a vivid but irrelevant detail meant to distract ² – and **word-shift traps**, where synonyms or wording are changed subtly (creating gaps in logic) ³. For instance, changing “price paid by consumers” vs. “wholesale price” can mislead (a word-shift trap) ⁴. CR answers may also **flip causation or correlation** (treating correlation as causation or vice versa) or **stretch a premise too far** (extrapolating beyond what the evidence supports) ⁵.
- **Example Trap:** If an argument asks “which weakens the conclusion?”, a trap answer might offer a premise that actually *strengthens* it (a 180° trap) ¹.
- **Focus vs. Older:** The Focus edition emphasizes **Assumption/Inference** questions ⁶. Thus, trap answers often hinge on subtle assumptions or reversed logic. However, classic traps (extreme language, irrelevant detail, negation/word-shift) remain just as important.
- **Signal Keywords (Argument Structure):** Recognizing transition words helps map an argument. Common **conclusion indicators** include words like *thus, therefore, consequently, clearly, so, as a result* ⁷. **Premise indicators** (introducing evidence) include *because, since, for, given that, due to* ⁸. **Contrast/Qualification words** (shifts in direction) include *however, but, although, on the other hand, nevertheless*; these signal a counterpoint or limitation in the argument. **Addition/Continuation words** like *furthermore, moreover, also, in addition* indicate more evidence or points. **Causal words** (in cause-effect arguments) include phrases like *leads to, contributes to, responsible for, results in, due to* ⁹. **Conditionals** (introducing hypotheticals) use *if, when, only if, unless* (sufficient vs. necessary conditions) ¹⁰. For example, “Since X, Y” signals that X is supporting evidence for Y, while “Therefore, Z” signals that Z is the conclusion drawn ⁷ ⁸.
- **Example:** In “Because demand is weak, profits have declined,” **because** marks a premise and **have declined** is the conclusion. In “Profits have declined, *therefore* the strategy failed,” **therefore** marks the conclusion.
- **Note:** Strong modals like *must/always* and quantifiers *all/every* signal absolute statements (often trap if unjustified), whereas weak modals *may/some* signal tentative claims (often too weak to justify a conclusion) ¹¹.

- **Common Reasoning Elements:** GMAT arguments contain basic building blocks.
- **Premise/Evidence:** A factual statement or datum supporting the conclusion. *Signal:* typically introduced by causal words (“because,” “since”) ⁸ . *Sample:* “Because studies show X, the argument concludes Y.” Here “studies show X” is the evidence/premise ¹² .
- **Conclusion:** The author’s main claim or inference drawn from the premises. *Signal:* often follows words like “thus,” “therefore” ⁷ . *Sample:* “Therefore, policy P is effective.” The conclusion is “policy P is effective.” ¹² .
- **Assumption:** An unstated premise linking evidence to the conclusion ¹³ . It’s the “missing link” the argument needs. *Signal:* not explicitly flagged by words, but often a necessary condition for the conclusion. *Sample:* If the argument concludes that advertising drove sales, the assumption might be “Increased advertising generally leads to more customers.” Denying this assumption would break the argument ¹³ .
- **Analogy:** A comparison used to suggest that because two situations are similar, the conclusion for one holds for the other ¹⁴ . *Signal:* answer choices may reference a parallel case (“In another city/country...”). *Sample:* “In City A, program Q reduced crime by 10%; by analogy, if City B implements Q (with similar conditions), crime should also drop.” ¹⁴
- **Prediction:** A statement about the future drawn from current evidence. *Signal:* words like “will,” “next year,” “in the future.” *Sample:* “Given the past trend of rising X, we predict that Y will increase.” For instance, “Because interest rates have been falling, analysts predict that investment *will increase*.”
- **Consideration (Counterpoint):** An alternative viewpoint or potential objection the author acknowledges. *Signal:* concessive words (“although,” “however, it could be argued that...”). *Sample:* “Although critics note factor X, the argument holds that Y outweighs X.” Here the sentence acknowledges a consideration before reinforcing the conclusion.

Reading Comprehension

- **Major Traps:** RC answer choices use many of the same pitfalls as CR. The most common traps in RC include **distortion/misrepresentation** (twisting a fact or detail from the passage) and **out-of-scope** choices (introducing ideas not in the passage) ¹⁵ . Choices with **extreme language** are suspect, since authors rarely make absolute claims. A “**half-right/half-wrong**” trap is typical: an answer may be factually correct in one part but misstates or omits another key point (often adding or subtracting a detail) ¹⁵ . Another trap is an answer that is **factually true yet irrelevant** to the question or passage ¹⁵ . For example, an option might restate a detail from the text but not answer what is asked.
- **Example Trap:** If the passage says “Recent data show a moderate increase in A, with most of the rise due to B,” a question might ask why A increased. A trap answer could say “Because of reason X outside the passage,” which is irrelevant (out-of-scope). Another trap might restate “B increased,” which is partly true but fails to fully explain the rise (half-right).
- **Focus vs. Older:** Focus RC passages are shorter (about 200–350 words) ¹⁶ , but traps remain similar. In Focus’s increased emphasis on inference questions, you may see more answer choices that subtly twist the author’s meaning. In all cases, eliminate extremes, distortions, and choices that add unsupported ideas.
- **Signal Words (Passage Structure):** Transition words reveal how the author organizes ideas. Common categories include:

- **Addition/Continuation:** *moreover, furthermore, in addition, also* (signals extra examples or reinforcement) ¹⁷ .
 - **Contrast/Counter:** *however, although, on the other hand, conversely, nevertheless* (signals a change in direction or counterargument) ¹⁸ .
 - **Reason/Cause:** *because, since, as, due to, owing to* (introduces explanation for a statement) ¹⁹ .
 - **Conclusion/Summary:** *therefore, thus, in conclusion, as a result, hence* (marks the author's inference or main point) ²⁰ .
 - **Example/Illustration:** *for example, for instance, in particular* (flags an illustrative detail).
 - **Sequence/Purpose:** *first, next, in order to, so that* (shows order or intent).
- Recognizing these helps “glue” together the argument's flow. For instance, “However” indicates contrast to the previous idea, while “Therefore” signals the author's conclusion ²⁰ .
- **Example:** In a passage, the phrase “*In addition*, recent studies found Y” signals continuation, whereas “*Nevertheless*, this solution may still fail” signals a counterpoint.
- **Common Reasoning Elements:** RC passages often contain arguments or logical structures with the same elements as in CR. Key elements include:
 - **Main Idea (Conclusion):** The central theme or conclusion of the passage. It's often located in topic sentences or conclusion sentences. *Clues:* summary words (“in summary,” “overall”) or the final paragraph. *Sample:* If the last paragraph concludes that “Policy Z will ultimately reduce emissions,” that is the passage's conclusion.
 - **Supporting Evidence/Details:** Facts, data, or examples used to support the main idea. *Clues:* specific statements and examples in the text. *Sample:* “Given that X has risen sharply, the author infers Y,” where “X has risen sharply” is supporting evidence.
 - **Inference/Assumption:** An implicit link or logical leap in the author's reasoning. *Clues:* conclusions that go beyond explicitly stated facts. *Sample:* “Because X is observed and Y is concluded, the author assumes that X leads to Y.” (E.g. inferring motives, effects, or trends not directly stated.)
 - **Analogy:** Occasionally authors use comparisons. *Clues:* references to similar events or examples. *Sample:* “Just as Strategy A worked in Country M, it should work here,” drawing an analogy.
 - **Prediction:** A forward-looking statement based on current information. *Clues:* future-tense verbs (will, may in future sense). *Sample:* “The author predicts that demand will drop next year due to the current trend.”
 - **Counterpoint/Alternative:** If present, this is an opposing view or caveat. *Clues:* words like “however,” “on the other hand.” *Sample:* “Although critics argue X, the author maintains Y,” showing a consideration of an alternate perspective.

Each of these elements appears in GMAT verbal passages. For example, in an RC passage the **main idea** (conclusion) might be introduced by a summary sentence, while **evidence** is the supporting detail earlier in the text ¹² . Similarly, if an answer choice invokes an analogy or prediction, treat it as any argument component – check if the analogy truly matches or if the prediction logically follows.

Sources: Official GMAT guides and prep resources describe these traps and cues ^{1 15 7 8 17 21} . These summaries combine expert tips (Magoosh, PrepScholar, GMAC) on recognizing CR and RC patterns ^{13 14} and recent Focus exam formats ^{6 16} .

1 5 GMAT Psychology and Avoiding Trap Answers | TTP GMAT Blog

<https://blog.targettestprep.com/gmat-psychology-and-trap-answers/>

2 3 4 GMAT Critical Reasoning – The Foundation of the Exam | mba.com

<https://www.mba.com/exams-and-exam-prep/gmat-exam/critical-reasoning-foundation-of-the-exam>

6 16 GMAT Focus Edition 2025 – Everything you need to know

<https://e-gmat.com/blogs/gmat-focus-edition/>

7 8 9 10 11 Premise Indicator Words & More LSAT Vocabulary | Blueprint Prep

<https://blog.blueprintprep.com/lsat/if-youre-studying-for-the-lsat-memorize-this-list/>

12 GMAT Verbal Guide: Critical Reasoning Questions | Leland

<https://www.joinleland.com/library/a/how-to-solve-critical-reasoning-questions-in-the-gmat-verbal-section>

13 How to Tackle Critical Reading Assumption Questions - Magoosh Blog — GMAT® Exam

<https://magoosh.com/gmat/gmat-cr-assumption-questions/>

14 How to handle analogies in Critical Reasoning Answer Choices – The GMAT Co.

<https://thegmatco.com/how-to-handle-analogies-in-critical-reasoning-answer-choices/>

15 GMAT Verbal Guide: Reading Comprehension Questions | Leland

<https://www.joinleland.com/library/a/how-to-solve-reading-comprehension-questions-in-the-gmat-verbal-section>

17 18 19 20 21 Ace GMAT Reading Comprehension with Transition Words | Prep4GMAT

http://prep4gmat.com/blog_subdomain/ace-gmat-reading-comprehension-with-transition-words/