CHAPTER

5

ASSUMPTIONS & THE LOOPHOLE

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Pay close attention. This concept is often difficult for students to understand.

Assumptions THE LINCHPIN OF YOUR LOGICAL REASONING SCORE

Let's start our discussion of assumptions with a simple argument:

PREMISE	There's banana bread on the table.
PREMISE	Camille very much enjoys banana bread.
CONCLUSION	The banana bread will disappear within 20 minutes.

Let's talk through the gap between the premises and the conclusion. The premises tell us that we've got some banana bread on the table and that Camille enjoys banana bread. That's cool, but there's not much we can infer from those premises besides the fact that Camille enjoys something on the table. Boring Inference, right? But that's good; we love boring. Boring is the valid conclusion signature.

The conclusion above is far from boring, and, hence, far from valid. It brings in disappearing banana bread and 20 minutes, new ideas that don't appear in the premises. Conclusions are supposed to be proven *by the premises*. If disappearing banana bread isn't even mentioned in the premises, chances are the premises aren't proving it 100% true. This is our gap between the premises and the conclusion, the most versatile asset you can detect on the LSAT.

The author is trying to trick you into bridging this gap for them. There's a specific, erroneous path that the untrained thinker will always take to subconsciously connect premises like these to the conclusion. Here's the erroneous thought the LSAT wants you to have: "Oh yeah, that bread is on the table and Camille is super into it. Of course, she'd eat it all. It's fine to say it would disappear." Seems reasonable, right? WRONG.

Most people don't even know they're having the thought described above. They auto-complete the argument without knowing it. Your ability to succeed at Logical Reasoning depends on your ability to notice yourself auto-completing: You can use the content of the auto-complete to your advantage. The auto-complete is *extremely* frequently the correct answer to whatever question follows the stimulus.

This chapter is about three spins on the auto-complete: the sufficient assumption (SA), the necessary assumption (NA), and the Loophole (my personal favorite). Let's talk through each of these spins one at a time.

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The Sufficient Assumption THE ARGUMENT'S SUPERHERO

A sufficient assumption proves the conclusion 100% true.

Let's design a sufficient assumption: We'll prove the banana bread will disappear in 20 minutes.

Anything is fair game as long as it ***proves*** the banana bread will disappear in 20 minutes. We can let our imagination run wild. *If* our idea is true, it will prove that the banana bread will definitely disappear. Here are a few ideas:

Notice the sufficient indicators in the paragraph to the left! Sufficient assumptions are very... sufficient.

SUFFICIENT ASSUMPTION	WHAT DOES THIS SUFFICIENT ASSUMPTION PROVE?	WHY IS THIS A SUFFICIENT ASSUMPTION?
A malevolent stranger will take the banana bread from the table in 10 minutes.	*The banana bread will disappear within 20 minutes.*	*The malevolent stranger taking the banana bread forces it to disappear.*
Camille always eats everything she enjoys within 20 minutes.	*The banana bread will disappear within 20 minutes.*	*If Camille eats the banana bread, that forces it to disappear.*
Everything on the table will disappear in 20 minutes.	*The banana bread will disappear within 20 minutes.*	*Everything on the table includes the banana bread, so it will disappear for sure.*

Some of these sound crazy, right? Who said anything about a malevolent stranger in the premises? And who says that *everything* on the table has to disappear? These are outlandishly powerful statements; these sufficient assumptions *don't have to be* true. But this is what we want! Sufficient assumptions are supposed to be powerful.

Notice a few of the commonalities between the sufficient assumptions above. They're each using powerful words (like "will," "always," and "everything") and bridging the gap between the premises and the conclusion.

The only thing that matters for the sufficient assumption is whether or not it forces the banana bread to disappear in 20 minutes. *If* it forces the banana bread to disappear, it's golden. Each of these examples makes the banana bread disappear, so they are all sufficient assumptions.

STOP

Pause right here. Pop quiz!

What does a sufficient assumption do?

Write your answer here: _____*

Write in an answer now. Look at the bottom of the page for my answer after you try yourself.

* **A sufficient assumption proves the conclusion 100%. That's the only quality a sufficient assumption has to have.**

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The Necessary Assumption THE ARGUMENT'S FOUNDATION

Necessary assumptions are provable, just like Inferences/valid conclusions.

> If the conclusion is true, the necessary assumption must also be true.

Let's see what's proven *if* the banana bread disappears in 20 minutes. Here's our argument again:

PREMISE	There's banana bread on the table.
PREMISE	Camille very much enjoys banana bread.
CONCLUSION	The banana bread will disappear within 20 minutes.

The necessary assumption is proven by the conclusion. It's what the conclusion *needs*, not what it wants (also like Batman). So what does this conclusion need? Here are a few ideas:

NECESSARY ASSUMPTION	WHY IS THIS A NECESSARY ASSUMPTION?
The banana bread is movable.	*If the banana bread disappears, then you have to be able to move it.*
No one is successfully protecting the banana bread all day.	*If the banana bread disappears, you couldn't have a successful protector on guard.*
Camille isn't saving the banana bread for a party tomorrow.	*If the banana bread disappears, then Camille isn't saving it for tomorrow.*

Do these sound super basic to you? Boring, like a valid conclusion? That's awesome. Boring is also the necessary assumption signature.

A necessary assumption is *proven by the conclusion*, just like a valid conclusion is *proven by the premises*. Like yeah... of course, no one is protecting the banana bread if it disappears in 20 minutes. Boring. That is *exactly* how you are meant to feel in the presence of a necessary assumption. It is meant to be basic, boring, obvious.

Necessary assumptions are the foundation of your argument's house. You don't have a house without a foundation, just like you don't have an argument without the necessary assumptions that come along with it. But you never think about the foundation in your house until there's a problem with it. You also never think about a necessary assumption until your attention is drawn to it or until you encounter the biggest problem an argument can face, a Loophole.

STOP

Write in an answer now. Look at the bottom of the page for my answer after you try yourself.

Pause right here. Another pop quiz! (I'm cruel.)

What does a necessary assumption do?

Write your answer here: _____**

** A necessary assumption is what has to be true, if the conclusion is true. It's the necessary foundation for the argument.

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