

Principle Questions

- Other principle questions simply ask you for a principle that strengthens an argument, and some older principle questions asked you for a principle that is sufficient for the argument's conclusion. These two question types fall into the Active question category.
- What separates Principle questions from the other inference, strengthen, and assumption questions is that the answer choices – or, in the case of the inference type, the stimulus – will contain more general statements than the other question types.

Principle Questions

- Let's say we had this argument.
- The United States is a wealthy nation at risk of defaulting on its debt. A default would damage the prestige of the nation. Its leaders, therefore, must do everything in their power to prevent a default.
- A strengthener could be anything:
- "A default would also cause mass unemployment."
- "United States leaders have a responsibility to work to prevent actions that would damage the nation's prestige."
- A principle strengthener, however, would be much more broad in scope:
- "The leaders of a wealthy nation must do whatever they can to prevent anything that would damage the nation's prestige."
- The principle could apply to any wealthy nation, but it applies as well to the specific argument above.

June 2007, Sec II, #7

- Principle/Inference
- Unlike most principle questions, this question stem doesn't contain the word principle. But clearly the ethicist has a principle – and the word principle is used in the stimulus, so this question definitely falls into the principle category. So which one of these people is motivated by abstract principles, not self-interest or societal norms.
- A: Bobby just wants to look generous. Wrong!
- B: Wes just wants his employer to like him. Wrong!
- C: Donna didn't even do the right thing. Wrong!
- D: Jadine acted against her own self-interest because of her beliefs. Correct!
- E: Leigh acted because she was pressured by her colleagues. Wrong!

June 2007, Sec III, #14

- Principle/Conforms
- Conclusion: universities should use only open-source software.
- Evidence: open-source software, better than proprietary software, matches the values the embodied in academic scholarship, which are central to mission of universities.
- Note the “should” in the conclusion. Principle answer choices will often provide the missing link between the descriptive evidence and the moral, or prescriptive, conclusion. Whenever we see the phrase “most closely conforms to” in the question stem, we are dealing with a principle question very similar to a necessary assumption question. Answer choices that are too strong are wrong. While the negation technique doesn’t work 100% of the time of these, in most cases the negation of the correct answer will destroy the argument.

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- Strengthening Principle
- Here we have an Active Principle question. The correct answer will probably be much broader than the argument itself, but it will apply.
- This argument contains an assumption that should remind you of a common LSAT flaw. The argument concludes that romantics are wrong, that people are born evil and not made evil by institutions, on the basis of the fact that institutions are just collections of people. So the argument assumes that the parts determine the whole. A relevant objection would be maybe the whole determines the parts, and that people born into institutions are made evil by them. E weakens this objection.
- On strengthening principle questions, when in doubt, go for the more abstract, broader answer choice. The whole point of principles is that they are wider in scope than the specific content of the argument.

September 2007, Sec I, #8, 19, 22

- 8: Principle/strengthening – C is correct.
- 19: Principle/strengthening. Influence is what matters, and in E we have the most direct connection.
- 22: Principle/inference – diagram!
- $WT \rightarrow T + \sim D$
- $ID \text{ or } WT \rightarrow L$
- If you had an answer choice that said that Joe told a true statement with no intention to deceive, and he is therefore wholly truthful, that, though it seems perfect, would be wrong. When just given necessary conditions for a judgement, you can never actually make that judgement. You can only say one or both of the necessary conditions were missing and that therefore the sufficient condition is untrue, in this case, someone is not wholly truthful. When given necessary conditions, take the CP:
- $D \text{ or } \sim T \rightarrow \sim WT$
- The correct answer is D. Walter intended to deceive and is therefore a liar.

September 2007, Sec III

- 1: Principle/conforms
- Correct answer is D.
- 11: Principle/conforms
- Correct answer is D.
- 25: Principle/conforms
- Correct answer is A.

December 2007, Sec I, #17

- 17: Principle/conforms
- The stimulus describes how correlations do not necessarily imply causal relationships, and how it might be one phenomena causing two effects. This stimulus is discussing what I call the uber-cause. Remember the Driver from Lesson Two. He mistook correlation for causation, ignoring what was in fact a very likely uber-cause: that he was simply a reckless driver.