

Test Prep · GRE Verbal & Analytical Writing · Free sample

The GRE Companion Sample

One strategy chapter and Lesson 1 of each series, taken straight from The GRE Companion.

In this sample

- Strategy chapter — Reading Comprehension strategy
- GRE Verbal · Lesson 1 — How to read a GRE Verbal question
- GRE Analytical Writing · Lesson 1 — Reading the task — Issue vs Argument

The full Companion

Strategy chapters and every lesson for GRE Verbal and GRE Analytical Writing, every practice test with its answer key, and the Test Prep Learning Log at the end.

Contents, pricing, and Hub access: www.hearn.consulting/gre-companion

Reading Comprehension strategy

Read the passage before looking at the answer choices. As you read, hold three questions in mind. They are the same three questions across short and long passages, and they are the same questions a strong reader brings to a short SAT passage or an ACT Reading passage: GRE passages may be denser, more abstract, or more argumentative, but the reading task is still comprehension first. Your comprehension should drive your answer choices; the answer choices should test your reading, not replace it.

Question 1

Central idea

What is the passage about, and what is the writer's overall point?

Question 2

Support

How does the writer support that idea — what kinds of evidence, examples, or moves?

Question 3

Structure

How is the passage built? What is each part doing, and how do the parts fit together?



Working principle

Comprehension should drive answer choices. Answer choices should not drive comprehension.

Working moves by question type

Function questions	Ask what the sentence or paragraph does in the passage's reasoning, not what topic it mentions.
Detail questions	Find the exact line in the passage that answers the question. Do not guess from memory of what the passage covered.
Inference questions	Pick the smallest defensible step beyond the passage, not the most ambitious one. Strong wrong answers go too far; right answers stay close to what the passage supports.
Vocabulary-in-context questions	Read the sentence around the target word. The word's meaning is decided by the sentence, not by its most common dictionary sense.

Lesson 1

How to read a GRE Verbal question

Purpose

GRE Verbal is not a vocabulary quiz. It measures how carefully a reader tracks sentence logic, evidence, and the relationships among ideas in a sentence or passage. This lesson teaches the first move on every Verbal question: name what the item is testing before you choose an answer. Once the task is named, the routine for solving it follows.

KEY POINT

On the GRE, the first job is to name the task. The routine follows from the name.

How to recognize the task

GRE Verbal has three item types. Each one looks different on the screen, and each one rewards a different reading move.

Text Completion	One or more blanks inside a single sentence or short passage. Single-blank items show five choices; two- and three-blank items show three choices for each blank. There is one correct choice for each blank.
Sentence Equivalence	A single sentence with one blank and six answer choices. The student picks the two choices that both fit the sentence and produce equivalent sentence meanings. Two synonyms in the abstract are not enough.
Reading Comprehension	A passage followed by one or more items. The items ask about central idea, structure, function, evidence, inference, or a word in context. Some items show multiple correct answer choices, often labeled as "select all that apply."

Three-Question Verbal Routine

Use this short routine on every Verbal item, regardless of type. It is the same routine the Companion's strategy chapters describe.

Q1	What is the sentence or passage logically saying?
Q2	What relationship is the blank, question, or answer choice asking me to preserve?
Q3	What exact words in the text support or eliminate each answer?

Worked model

Three worked items follow — one Text Completion, one Sentence Equivalence, and one short Reading Comprehension passage. Each item is annotated with the Three-Question Verbal Routine and an explanation of why the other choices do not fit. Read the items first; the model is the explanation, not the practice.

WORKED MODEL

Worked model 1 — Text Completion

M1. Although the committee's report was widely praised for its rigor, several

reviewers found its conclusions surprisingly _____, recommending policies that the evidence in the report did not seem to require.

- (A) tentative
- (B) unsupported
- (C) novel
- (D) cautious
- (E) precise

How to read the item

Q1	The sentence praises the report for its rigor, then turns and says the conclusions go beyond what the evidence justifies.
Q2	The blank must name the gap between the conclusions and the evidence in the report — conclusions that the evidence "did not seem to require."
Q3	The supporting phrase is "the evidence in the report did not seem to require." That phrase names conclusions that go further than the evidence supports.
Answer	(B) unsupported.

Why the other choices do not fit

(A) tentative	A tentative conclusion is weaker than the evidence would warrant, not stronger. Wrong direction.
(C) novel	A novel conclusion may or may not be supported by the evidence. The word does not name the support gap the sentence describes.
(D) cautious	Same direction problem as tentative. Cautious conclusions ask less of the evidence, not more.
(E) precise	A precise conclusion would track the evidence closely — the opposite of what the sentence is describing.

Worked model 2 — Sentence Equivalence

M2. The diplomat's response was ____: while she expressed concern, she committed to none of the actions the press conference had demanded.

- (A) measured
- (B) calculated
- (C) evasive
- (D) noncommittal
- (E) thoughtful
- (F) restrained

How to read the item

Q1	The diplomat sounded concerned but refused to commit to any action. She avoided commitment.
Q2	The colon means the blank is defined by what follows. The blank should mean "engaging on the surface while avoiding commitment."
Q3	The supporting phrase is "committed to none of the actions." The diplomat sidestepped commitment.
Answer	(C) evasive and (D) noncommittal. Both choices produce the same sentence meaning: she sounded engaged but dodged commitment.

Why the other choices do not fit

(A) measured and (F) restrained	These two could form a pair with each other, but they describe a careful or self-controlled response, not one that avoids commitment.
(B) calculated	Calculated suggests strategic intent the sentence does not assert.
(E) thoughtful	A thoughtful response can also commit. The word does not produce the same sentence meaning as evasive or noncommittal.

Worked model 3 — Reading Comprehension

Recent research on bee navigation suggests that honeybees rely on more than the angle of the sun to orient themselves. In laboratory tests, bees that had been raised under polarized light continued to fly accurate routes even when the sun's position was obscured, indicating that they can use polarization patterns in the sky as a backup compass. Earlier accounts, which treated the sun's angle as the dominant cue, did not account for these results.

What is significant about the new findings is not that bees use polarized light — that possibility had been raised before — but that the polarization cue appears to function independently of the sun-angle cue rather than as a derivative of it. The two cues, in other words, are not redundant. A bee deprived of one can still use the other.

Original Hearn writing.

M3. The author refers to "earlier accounts" primarily in order to:

- (A) emphasize the importance of polarized light over the sun's angle as a navigational cue
- (B) suggest that earlier researchers were unable to identify any reliable navigation cues
- (C) contrast a prior explanation with one that better accounts for the laboratory results
- (D) propose a new theory of bee navigation
- (E) defend the use of polarized light as a navigational cue

How to read the item

Q1	The passage says bees use polarized light AND sun-angle as independent navigation cues. Earlier accounts had treated sun-angle as the dominant cue.
Q2	The item asks what the reference to "earlier accounts" is doing in the argument — its function — not what topic it mentions.
Q3	The supporting language is "Earlier accounts...did not account for these results." The reference contrasts a prior view with the new findings.
Answer	(C) contrast a prior explanation with one that better accounts for the laboratory results.

Why the other choices do not fit

(A) emphasize the importance of polarized light over the sun's angle.

Overreaches. The passage says the two cues are independent, not that one is more important.

(B) suggest that earlier researchers were unable to identify any reliable navigation cues. The passage says earlier researchers credited the sun-angle as the dominant cue, not that they identified no cues at all.

(D) propose a new theory of bee navigation. Out of scope for this item. The question asks about the function of one reference, not the passage's overall claim.

(E) defend the use of polarized light as a navigational cue. The passage does not defend polarized light against any challenge. The point is the independence of the two cues.

Guided practice

Three items follow — one of each type. Use the decision-type grid to name what each item is testing before you answer. Answers and commentary appear in the Answer key and commentary section.

GUIDED • ITEM 1

(Text Completion) The historian was known for _____ readings of familiar documents, finding patterns in archives that others had searched many times.

(A) cursory

(B) original

(C) routine

(D) reverent

(E) tedious

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

GUIDED • ITEM 2 • PICK TWO

(Sentence Equivalence) The senator argued that the new spending bill, despite its size, would _____ federal influence over local zoning decisions rather than expand it.

- (A) curtail
- (B) extend
- (C) reduce
- (D) consolidate
- (E) entrench
- (F) magnify

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

Reading Comprehension passage (for item 3)

When the Federal Writers' Project began collecting oral histories during the late 1930s, the goal was not to produce polished biographies but to preserve voices that no other archive was recording. Interviewers were instructed to retain dialect, hesitation, and

contradiction as features of the documentary record rather than as flaws to be corrected. The resulting transcripts, often more than a thousand pages from a single county, have since become primary sources in fields the project's directors did not anticipate, including labor history and the social history of medicine. What had been criticized as an unfocused mass of testimony now appears as one of its strengths: the very breadth of the collection makes it possible to ask new questions that earlier, narrower archives cannot answer.

Original Hearn writing.

GUIDED • ITEM 3

(Reading Comprehension) The passage suggests that the value of the Federal Writers' Project transcripts has, over time:

- (A) decreased as more polished biographies became available
- (B) been reassessed in light of research questions the project's directors did not anticipate
- (C) been confined to labor history and the social history of medicine
- (D) made earlier, narrower archives obsolete
- (E) depended primarily on the careful editing of dialect and hesitation

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

Use one row per item. Name the item type and what the item is testing before you write your answer.

Item	Type (TC / SE / RC)	What the item is testing	My answer	Brief support note
1				
2				
3				

Independent practice

Nine items follow — three Text Completion, three Sentence Equivalence, and three Reading Comprehension items on a single passage. Item type labels are not printed next to items; identify the type before you answer. Use the decision-type grid after the items.

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 4

Although the symposium had been planned as a public conversation, the moderator's reluctance to challenge any speaker rendered the event _____, with participants agreeing far more than the program had promised.

- (A) confrontational
- (B) tedious
- (C) chaotic
- (D) anodyne
- (E) impassioned

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 5

The architect's later work, while still admired, lacks the (i)_____ that defined her early designs; where her first projects felt almost reckless in their willingness to test what materials could do, her recent buildings convey a (ii)_____ that approaches caution.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) restraint	(D) urgency
(B) ambition	(E) confidence
(C) discipline	(F) prudence

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 6 • PICK TWO

Critics of the proposal called it _____, arguing that it asked for major changes from local governments while leaving the federal agency's own practices untouched.

- (A) inequitable
- (B) ambitious
- (C) one-sided
- (D) shortsighted
- (E) imprudent
- (F) inefficient

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 7 • PICK TWO

The biologist's recent paper, by tying decades of seemingly unrelated observations together, achieved a kind of _____ that earlier reviews of the field had not.

- (A) precision
- (B) synthesis
- (C) integration
- (D) brevity
- (E) detail
- (F) accuracy

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 8

What initially seemed a _____ defense of the policy gave way, in the second half of the essay, to a careful enumeration of its limits.

- (A) full-throated
- (B) reluctant
- (C) tentative
- (D) skeptical
- (E) lukewarm

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 9 • PICK TWO

Sociologists once dismissed the survey as _____, but its findings have since been replicated in studies that improved on its methods rather than abandoned them.

- (A) flawed
- (B) preliminary
- (C) seminal
- (D) discredited
- (E) provisional
- (F) ground-breaking

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

Reading Comprehension passage (for items 10–12)

For decades, paleontologists working in the badlands of what is now Montana have catalogued fossils that, taken individually, tell familiar stories about the herbivores and predators of the late Cretaceous. Taken together, however, the same fossils tell a different story — one less about which species lived in the region and more about how the region's ecosystems responded to a slowly cooling climate.

The shift in interpretation has come from improvements in dating rather than from the discovery of new fossils. Where earlier paleontologists could date a bone bed only to the nearest few hundred thousand years, refined argon-isotope methods now allow many beds to be placed within twenty thousand years of one another. At that resolution, the apparent stability of species lists across older surveys begins to dissolve. Two surveys that once looked simultaneous now resolve into a sequence, and the small changes between them — a shift in the relative proportions of duck-billed and horned herbivores, the appearance of a different small predator — read as ecological responses to changing climate rather than as random sampling.

Critics have noted that the inferred climate shifts remain modest by modern standards, and that not all of the changes in species composition track them in the expected direction. Even so, the refined chronology has reframed the questions the badlands fossils can answer.

Original Hearn writing.

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 10

The passage is primarily concerned with:

- (A) cataloguing herbivores and predators of the late Cretaceous
- (B) the role of argon-isotope dating in late Cretaceous paleontology
- (C) how a refined chronology has changed what existing fossils can be used to study
- (D) the limits of using species lists to reconstruct ancient ecosystems
- (E) a recent dispute among paleontologists working in Montana

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 11

The reference to "random sampling" (second paragraph) serves primarily to:

- (A) introduce a competing explanation that the new chronology helps rule out
- (B) defend earlier paleontologists from the charge that they overlooked climate
- (C) emphasize that the changes between surveys are too small to matter
- (D) cast doubt on the reliability of argon-isotope dating
- (E) describe how species lists are compiled in modern paleontology

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

INDEPENDENT • ITEM 12

The passage suggests that the new interpretation of the badlands fossils depends most directly on:

- (A) the discovery of previously unknown species in the bone beds
- (B) climate shifts that are large by modern standards
- (C) the replacement of older surveys with new fieldwork
- (D) a consensus among critics that earlier surveys were flawed
- (E) the ability to distinguish bone beds separated by twenty thousand years

Verbal routine

Q1 What is the text logically saying?	
Q2 What relationship must the answer satisfy?	
Q3 What words support or eliminate each choice?	
Answer	

Use one row per item. Name the item type and what the item is testing before you write your answer.

Item	Type (TC / SE / RC)	What the item is testing	My answer	Brief support note
4				

Item	Type (TC / SE / RC)	What the item is testing	My answer	Brief support note
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				

Category	Subtype	What the correct answer was supported by	What I misunderstood	Next practice move

Answer explanations

Read each item's commentary in full, including the why-other-choices-do-not-fit notes. The Learning Log step at the end of the lesson uses these notes.

- Correct answer: B.** The blank must describe readings that find new patterns in archives others have searched many times. "Original" names readings that produce findings prior readers missed.
If you missed this, log it as: TC
- Correct answer: A, C.** The sentence contrasts the blank with "expand." Both "curtail" and "reduce" produce the same sentence meaning — decrease federal influence — and form a true pair.
If you missed this, log it as: SE
- Correct answer: B.** The passage describes transcripts criticized for being unfocused but now treated as valuable, with new fields finding them useful. Choice (B) names that reassessment.

If you missed this, log it as: RC

4. **Correct answer: D.** The moderator's reluctance to challenge speakers produced an event in which participants agreed more than expected. The blank should name a bland, uncontroversial event. "Anodyne" fits.

If you missed this, log it as: TC

- 5 (i). **Correct answer: B.** The contrast is between early designs that were "almost reckless in their willingness to test what materials could do" and recent buildings that "approach caution." Blank (i) names what the early designs had; blank (ii) names the cautious quality.

If you missed this, log it as: TC

- 5 (ii). **Correct answer: F.** The contrast is between early designs that were "almost reckless in their willingness to test what materials could do" and recent buildings that "approach caution." Blank (i) names what the early designs had; blank (ii) names the cautious quality.

If you missed this, log it as: TC

6. **Correct answer: A, C.** The proposal asks more of local governments than of the federal agency. Both choices name the same asymmetric quality and produce the same sentence meaning.

If you missed this, log it as: SE

7. **Correct answer: B, C.** The paper "tied decades of seemingly unrelated observations together." Both choices name this bringing-together move and produce the same sentence meaning.

If you missed this, log it as: SE

8. **Correct answer: A.** The second half "gave way" to a careful enumeration of limits. The first half should be the opposite — an enthusiastic defense. "Full-throated" fits.

If you missed this, log it as: TC

9. **Correct answer: B, E.** The dismissal treated the survey as not yet final, against which "replication" is the contrast. Both choices name the not-yet-final reading and produce the same sentence meaning.

If you missed this, log it as: SE

10. **Correct answer: C.** The passage's central move is that better dating has reframed the questions the same fossils can answer.

If you missed this, log it as: RC

11. **Correct answer: A.** The text contrasts changes that "read as ecological responses to changing climate rather than as random sampling." "Random sampling" is the alternative the new chronology argues against.

If you missed this, log it as: RC

12. **Correct answer: E.** The passage states explicitly that the shift in interpretation came from improvements in dating, with refined methods placing beds within twenty thousand years of one another.

*If you missed this, log it as: **RC***

Debrief

What the pattern in your work on this lesson suggests. Name the pattern before moving to the Learning Log.

Pattern noticed	What it may mean	Next practice move
Most misses in one item type (TC, SE, or RC)	Task recognition is in place, but the routine for that type is not yet automatic.	Revisit the worked model for that type. Work the matching guided-practice item again and write the support before checking the answer.
Misses spread across types	Skill identification is the bottleneck — naming the task before answering is not yet a habit.	Re-do the decision-type grid for several items with the type and what-it-is-testing fields written out before any answer.
Correct answers but weak support notes	Right intuition; the supporting evidence in the text is not yet articulated.	Re-work three items and write the exact phrase from the sentence or passage that supports the answer before checking.
Uncertain answers even when correct	The routine is forming but not yet stable.	Repeat the independent-practice set on a later week. Read the Three-Question Verbal Routine again before starting.

LEARNING LOG STEP

The Learning Log is the review tool you maintain across practice. For every missed, guessed, or uncertain item in this lesson, record the category, the subtype, what supported the correct answer, what you misunderstood, and your next practice move. The Learning Log step is the final action of the lesson.

Category for this lesson. GRE Verbal / Task recognition.

Subtypes used here. Text Completion (TC); Sentence Equivalence (SE); Reading Comprehension (RC). When the item also turned on something more specific — sentence logic, paired meaning, function, central idea — record that as a second subtype in the same row.

Lesson 1

Reading the task

Issue vs. Argument

A note before you start

The prompts and examples in this Lesson Series were written for instruction and are modeled on GRE Analytical Writing task structures. Official GRE prompts are not reproduced. Before test day, confirm the current GRE Analytical Writing format and task directions in official ETS materials.

Purpose

GRE Analytical Writing measures two different kinds of work. An Issue prompt asks you to take a position on a claim and defend it. An Argument prompt asks you to evaluate the reasoning, evidence, and assumptions in a short argument someone else has made. The two tasks reward different moves. The most common failure on Analytical Writing is not weak sentences — it is answering the wrong task. This lesson teaches the first move on every prompt: name what the task is asking before you plan, and choose the planning frame that fits.

Key point

Do not start writing until you know what the task is asking you to do.

How to recognize the task

The Analytical Writing tasks look similar on screen — a short prompt followed by task directions — but they ask for different work. Read both the prompt and the directions before deciding which task you are facing.

Task family	What you are given	What you must do	What not to do
Analyze an Issue	A claim, broad statement, or recommendation about a public, academic, or social question.	Take a position on the claim. Qualify it where it should be qualified. Support it with reasons and concrete examples.	Summarize both sides without taking a position. Write a vague "it depends" essay. Ignore the task directions.
Analyze an Argument	A short argument: a conclusion supported by evidence and a chain of reasoning.	Evaluate the assumptions the argument depends on, the evidence offered, and the reasoning that connects them. Identify what would weaken or strengthen the argument.	Agree or disagree with the topic as if it were an Issue prompt. Bring in your own opinion on the subject matter.

If the prompt asks you what you think about a claim, you are looking at an Issue task. If the prompt gives you someone else's argument and asks you to evaluate its reasoning, you are looking at an Argument task. The task directions confirm which family it is.

The prompt-unpacking routine

Use the same routine on every Analytical Writing prompt. The routine branches at the last step, where Issue and Argument require different planning frames.

- 1. Name the task family.** Is this Issue or Argument? Read the prompt and the task directions before deciding.
- 2. Restate the prompt's central claim or conclusion.** For an Issue, restate the claim you are being asked to engage with. For an Argument, restate the argument's conclusion.
- 3. Identify what the directions ask you to do.** The directions are part of the prompt and shape what your essay must address. Different Issue prompts ask for different things — agree/disagree, discuss the extent, consider the most compelling reasons, address consequences.
- 4. Name the work the essay must perform.** What kind of paragraphs will this require — a clear position with reasons and examples, or a critique organized around assumptions and evidence?
- 5. Choose the planning frame.** For Issue, plan a qualified position. For Argument, plan a critique organized around the assumptions the argument depends on.

Worked model

Two worked examples follow — one Issue prompt and one Argument prompt. Each is unpacked using the breakdown table that matches its task family. No full essay appears yet. The point of this lesson is to read the task and choose the planning frame.

WORKED MODEL

Worked model A — Issue prompt unpacking

Read the prompt and the directions carefully before looking at the unpacking table.

Universities should require every undergraduate, regardless of major, to complete a yearlong course of study in a language other than their own.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim, and explain your reasoning. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider the most compelling reasons for which someone might disagree with you.

Issue prompt-breakdown

Read for	What the prompt is doing
Claim in the prompt	Universities should require every undergraduate to complete a yearlong language course outside their own language. The recommendation is universal — every undergraduate, regardless of major.
Task directions	Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree. Explain your reasoning. Consider the most compelling reasons someone might disagree.
Assumptions or tensions	That language study has value for all students; that the value is uniform across majors; that the time and tuition cost is acceptable; that a yearlong requirement is the right way to deliver the value.
Position A	Agree. Sustained language study develops cognitive flexibility, civic awareness, and professional capacities that benefit every undergraduate, and a yearlong sequence is the shortest period in which meaningful proficiency can begin to form.
Position B	Disagree. A universal requirement ignores wide differences in major, prior preparation, and post-college plans; the same

	goal could be met more honestly by a narrower or optional structure.
Qualified position	Agree with the value of sustained language and cross-cultural study, but support a structured requirement that allows fulfillment through prior coursework, proficiency testing, or recognized alternative cross-cultural study — not a single yearlong course for every student.

Model thesis direction

A universal yearlong requirement is too blunt. The underlying goal — sustained engagement with a language and culture other than one's own — is better met by a structured requirement with several recognized paths to fulfillment. The essay defends the goal, names the cost of the blanket version, and proposes a more accurate way to reach it.

Thesis direction only. The full essay is the work of Lessons 02–04.

Worked model B — Argument prompt unpacking

Read the argument carefully. Identify the conclusion, the evidence offered for it, and the assumptions that connect them before looking at the unpacking table.

The following appeared in a memo from the director of a regional public library system.

"Last year, our branch in Crestwood replaced two of its three full-time reference librarians with a self-service catalog and a part-time assistant. Circulation at the Crestwood branch rose 12 percent over the following year. Therefore, replacing reference librarians with self-service systems and part-time staff is an effective way to increase circulation. The library system should now make this change at our other three branches."

Write a response in which you discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument and explain how this evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.

Argument-breakdown

Read for	What the argument is doing
Conclusion	The library system should replace reference librarians with self-service systems and part-time staff at its other three branches.

Read for	What the argument is doing
Evidence offered	Crestwood made the staffing change and circulation at Crestwood rose 12 percent in the following year.
Assumption 1 (causal)	That the staffing change caused the rise in circulation, rather than a separate cause — a new development nearby, a marketing campaign, demographic change, post-pandemic recovery, a major new acquisition, or a change in how circulation is counted.
Assumption 2 (representativeness)	That Crestwood's experience generalizes to the other three branches — that those branches serve similar populations, with similar reference needs and use patterns.
Missing information	What other changes occurred at Crestwood that year. What "circulation" measures — physical checkouts, visits, digital use. What trends at comparable branches looked like over the same period.
What evidence would help evaluate the argument	Comparison data from branches with no staffing change over the same period. A breakdown of which services Crestwood patrons used. Survey data on whether patrons could get reference help when they needed it. Cost and service-quality data showing the change was a net gain, not a shift of cost to patrons.

Model critique direction

The argument's central problem is that it treats one branch's circulation gain as evidence both that the staffing change caused the gain and that the change will work elsewhere. The essay should evaluate the causal assumption and the representativeness assumption separately, and in each case name the specific evidence that would settle the question.

Critique direction only. The full essay is the work of Lessons 05–06.

Guided practice

Two prompts follow — one Issue and one Argument. For each prompt, name the task family, then complete the unpacking table that matches the task. Commentary on what to look for appears in the Practice commentary section.

Prompt G1

Cities should fund free public transit for all residents, even if doing so requires raising local taxes.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this recommendation, and explain your reasoning by considering the most likely consequences of adopting it.

Issue prompt-breakdown — workspace

Read for	Your notes
Claim in the prompt	
Task directions	
Assumptions or tensions	
Position A	
Position B	
Qualified position	

Prompt G2

The following appeared in an editorial in a regional newspaper.

"A neighboring county recently raised its minimum wage by 20 percent. In the year that followed, that county's overall employment rate fell by two percent. Therefore, raising the minimum wage causes employment to drop. Our county should reject any proposal to raise the minimum wage."

Write a response in which you discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument and explain how this evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.

Argument-breakdown — workspace

Read for	Your notes
Conclusion	
Evidence offered	
Assumption 1 (causal)	
Assumption 2 (representativeness)	
Missing information	
What evidence would help evaluate the argument	

Independent practice

Four prompts follow — two Issue and two Argument, in mixed order. For each prompt, name the task family in the task-identification grid, then complete the matching unpacking table. Commentary on what to look for appears in the Practice commentary section.

Task identification — workspace

Item	Task family (Issue / Argument)	Why I identified it that way	Planning frame I will use
I3			
I4			
I5			
I6			

Prompt I3

Governments should give priority in funding to scientific research that has direct, near-term economic benefits over research whose benefits are uncertain or long-term.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim, and explain your reasoning. In developing your response, consider the strongest reasons someone might disagree with the position you take.

Prompt I3 — unpacking workspace

Read for	Your notes
Claim in the prompt	
Task directions	
Assumptions or tensions	
Position A	
Position B	
Qualified position	

Prompt I4

A well-educated citizen is one who knows a single field deeply, not one who has surveyed many fields without mastering any.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim, and explain your reasoning by considering specific examples.

Prompt I4 — unpacking workspace

Read for	Your notes
Claim in the prompt	
Task directions	
Assumptions or tensions	
Position A	
Position B	
Qualified position	

Prompt I5

The following appeared in a recommendation from a hospital administrator.

"Last quarter, our emergency department reduced average patient wait times by eighteen minutes after we replaced paper intake forms with a tablet-based check-in system. Two

other hospitals in the region report similar improvements after introducing tablet check-in. We should therefore introduce tablet check-in across all of our outpatient clinics."

Write a response in which you discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument and explain how this evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.

Prompt I5 — unpacking workspace

Read for	Your notes
Conclusion	
Evidence offered	
Assumption 1 (causal)	
Assumption 2 (representativeness)	
Missing information	
What evidence would help evaluate the argument	

Prompt I6

The following appeared in a proposal from a school superintendent.

"Schools that have lengthened their school day to seven and a half hours typically report higher standardized test scores than schools with a six-hour day. Our district's scores have been flat for three years. Lengthening our school day to seven and a half hours will therefore raise our scores."

Write a response in which you discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument and explain how this evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.

Prompt I6 — unpacking workspace

Read for	Your notes
Conclusion	
Evidence offered	
Assumption 1 (causal)	
Assumption 2 (representativeness)	
Missing information	
What evidence would help evaluate the argument	

Practice commentary

This is not an answer key — there is no single correct unpacking. The commentary names what the strongest unpackings include for each prompt, so you can compare it to what you wrote and see where your reading of the task can sharpen. The Learning Log step at the end of the lesson uses these notes.

Guided practice

Prompt G1 — Issue

Task family	Issue. The prompt offers a recommendation and asks for agreement or disagreement, with reasoning that considers consequences.
Claim in the prompt	Cities should fund free public transit for all residents, even when that funding requires raising local taxes.
Task directions	Agree or disagree, and reason through the most likely consequences of adopting the recommendation.
Assumptions or tensions	That "free" changes ridership in a meaningful way; that the tax cost is bearable; that the benefit accrues broadly enough to justify a universal subsidy; that free transit is the most effective use of the same public dollars.

Qualified position students often land on. Support the goal — broad access to transit as a public good — and accept that some level of public subsidy will be necessary; argue for

income-graduated free fares funded by progressive local sources and paired with capacity investment, rather than a flat universal free system. A clear opposing position, defended carefully, is also a strong response.

Prompt G2 — Argument

Task family	Argument. The prompt gives an editorial's reasoning and asks what evidence would weaken or strengthen it.
Conclusion	Our county should reject any proposal to raise the minimum wage.
Evidence offered	A neighboring county raised its minimum wage by 20 percent, and its overall employment rate dropped 2 percent in the year that followed.
Assumption 1 (causal)	That the wage increase caused the employment drop, rather than a separate economic cycle, a sector-specific shift, or another policy change.
Assumption 2 (representativeness)	That the neighboring county's labor market resembles ours in the ways that matter — sector mix, employer size, cost of living, share of low-wage workers.
Missing information	What employment did in comparable counties without a wage change. What sectors absorbed the drop. How "employment rate" was measured, and whether hours or wages also shifted.
What evidence would help	Sector-level employment data over the same period in counties with and without the wage change; regional economic indicators; longer-term trends in employment that began before the wage change took effect.

Independent practice

Prompt I3 — Issue

Task family	Issue. The prompt asks you to agree or disagree with a funding-priority recommendation and to consider the strongest opposing reasons.
Claim in the prompt	Governments should prioritize funding for scientific research that offers direct, near-term economic benefits over research whose benefits are uncertain or long-term.
Assumptions or tensions	That near-term benefits can be reliably identified in advance; that long-term and basic research is less valuable than applied research; that government is the actor best positioned to make these tradeoffs.

Qualified position students often land on. Disagree with a strict near-term priority — the history of science shows that many of the most consequential applied advances grew from research whose payoff was not visible at funding time. A defensible position protects basic and long-horizon research while accepting that some share of public science funding should be aimed at near-term economic problems.

Prompt I4 — Issue

Task family	Issue. The prompt asks you to agree or disagree with a definitional claim about education.
Claim in the prompt	A well-educated citizen is one who knows a single field deeply, not one who has surveyed many fields without mastering any.
Assumptions or tensions	That depth and breadth are opposed rather than complementary; that "mastery" is the only valuable form of knowing; that civic life and intellectual life value the same kind of knowledge.

Qualified position students often land on. Depth and breadth serve different purposes. A well-educated citizen typically needs at least one field where the work of careful thinking is real to them, plus broader literacies that let them read across fields. A defensible essay rejects the either/or and shows what each kind of knowing does.

Prompt 15 — Argument

Task family	Argument. The prompt gives the administrator's reasoning and asks what evidence would weaken or strengthen it.
Conclusion	Introduce tablet check-in across all outpatient clinics.
Evidence offered	An eighteen-minute reduction in average emergency department wait times after the change, plus similar reports from two other hospitals.
Assumption 1 (causal)	That the tablet check-in produced the reduction, rather than a coincident change in ED staffing, patient volume, or workflow.
Assumption 2 (representativeness)	That an emergency department generalizes to outpatient clinics — settings with different patient flow, different bottlenecks, and different intake needs.
Missing information	What else changed in the ED during that quarter. How the comparison hospitals differ from this system in size, patient mix, and prior workflows.
What evidence would help	ED data isolating the intake step from other workflow changes; a small pilot in one outpatient clinic; data on where outpatient delays actually occur.

Prompt I6 — Argument

Task family	Argument. The prompt gives the superintendent's reasoning and asks what evidence would weaken or strengthen it.
Conclusion	Lengthening this district's school day to seven and a half hours will raise its standardized test scores.
Evidence offered	Schools with seven-and-a-half-hour days typically report higher scores than schools with six-hour days.
Assumption 1 (causal)	That the longer day causes the higher scores, rather than the selection pattern of which districts adopt longer days — often wealthier districts with stronger baseline scores.
Assumption 2 (representativeness)	That what worked in the comparison districts will work in this one, given its students, staff, and current curriculum.
Missing information	What students do during the additional time. How comparison districts differ from this one in funding, demographics, and prior scores. The typical size of the score gain.
What evidence would help	Data from districts demographically and economically similar to this one that lengthened their day. Within-district before-and-after data where the curriculum used in the added time is documented.

Debrief

Before opening the Learning Log, name the pattern in your work on this lesson.

Pattern noticed	What it may mean	Next practice move
Treated an Argument prompt as if it were an Issue prompt (agreed or disagreed with the topic).	The task family is not yet automatic. You read the prompt for the topic, not for the directions.	Re-do the prompt-unpacking routine on one Issue and one Argument prompt. Underline the words in the directions that name the task.
Treated an Issue prompt as a neutral summary of "both sides."	The Issue task requires a position. Summary is not the work the directions ask for.	Re-write your unpacking with a Position A, Position B, and qualified position. Choose one.
Argument unpacking named the conclusion but not the assumptions.	The hardest move on Argument is naming what the argument is taking for granted, not what it says.	Practice listing two assumptions for each Argument prompt: a causal assumption and a representativeness assumption.
Unpacking is thorough but the planning frame is not chosen.	Reading the task is in place; planning is not yet automatic.	End each unpacking with one sentence: "My planning frame for this essay is ..."

Learning Log step

The Learning Log is the review tool you maintain across practice. For every prompt in this lesson where you misread the task, hesitated on the task family, or wrote a planning frame that did not match the prompt, record an entry. Over time, the Log shows where your task-reading still slips.

Category for this lesson. GRE Analytical Writing / Task identification.

Subtypes used here. Issue task; Argument task; prompt directions; thesis direction; argument assumptions; wrong task frame.

Learning Log columns

Task type	Prompt move	What I thought the task asked	What the task actually asked

Next practice move

Fill in the Next practice move column of your Learning Log for every entry from this lesson. For Issue entries, the move is usually re-reading the directions and rewriting Position A, Position B, and a qualified position. For Argument entries, the move is usually re-naming the assumptions the argument depends on, and the evidence that would weaken or strengthen each one.

What makes a good entry

Name the task family in your own words. Quote the words in the directions that told you which task it was. Write one sentence about the planning frame the task required. Note what your first reading of the task missed. The next practice move should name one specific action — a prompt to re-read, a planning frame to rewrite, or a task family to recheck — not a general goal.