blueprint

CARS QUESTIONS STRATEGY GUIDE

ALWAYS ANSWER FROM THE PASSAGE

This sheet focuses on CARS questions themselves, but there are important passage elements to keep in mind as you tackle the questions.

Purpose

What idea is the author trying to communicate to the reader?

Tone

Is the author positive, negative, or neutral? Is this consistent from paragraph to paragraph?

Main Ideas

What strong points does the author establish as they build up to their purpose?

Examples

Where does the author bring in outside information to support their main ideas?

Identifying these passage features (especially the main ideas) is a great starting point for all CARS questions, so keep them in mind as you work out your answer.

CARS SKILLS

Broadly speaking, there are three CARS "skills" that the AAMC uses to categorize questions. We won't dive into each question type here, but be aware of the major differences so you can learn how to best rephrase question stems and predict answers for each type.

SKILL ONE: FOUNDATIONS OF COMPREHENSION

This category asks questions related to the written passage. Questions can include the author's main ideas, as well as their tone, word choice, and contextual vocabulary. Foundations of Comprehension questions tend to focus on a single sentence or single paragraph.

Common Types

Main idea, Detail, Opinion, Inference, and Function

SKILL TWO: REASONING WITHIN THE TEXT

These questions can be similar to Skill One but require a more complex understanding of the passage, such as comparing or contrasting multiple ideas from different paragraphs.

Common Types

Inference, Function, and Passage Support

SKILL THREE: REASONING BEYOND THE TEXT

These questions will either ask you to apply new information to the passage or to apply the passage to new information. Notice that it's critical to have a firm understanding of the passage's main ideas in both cases!

Common Types

Application and Incorporation

TACKLING CARS QUESTIONS LIKE A PRO

There are two steps you can apply to almost any CARS question:

1. INTERPRET THE QUESTION STEM.

Do this by paraphrasing the question as best you can concerning how it asks about the passage's main ideas, examples, or tone. Your paraphrases don't necessarily need to be shorter than the original question, but they should be easier for you to think about. Take care not to change the meaning of questions as you paraphrase!

Example Stem:

"The passage author would probably support which of the following?"

Paraphrased:

"Which of these is most like one of the author's main ideas or could fit in as an example in one of the paragraphs?"

2. PREDICT THE ANSWER.

Use your understanding of the author's purpose, main idea, and tone to decide what a correct answer could sound like before you look at the answer choices. Your prediction doesn't need to be perfect, and it doesn't need to be a slam dunk to help you process the question! It should only be an attempt to answer the question in a direct way using ideas from the passage.

Example Stem:

"In the last paragraph, the author uses a milkshake and Pop-Tart as an example of a reimbursable snack in order to:"

Paraphrased:

"What main idea in the final paragraph did the author support using the milkshake and Pop-Tart example?"

Prediction:

The author said that "little standardized guidance" exists, so something about those foods being allowed even though they're unhealthy.

Practicing these steps is a recipe for CARS success. Track what works for you and what doesn't. Note which of your predictions are successful versus which aren't, and begin building a portfolio of "default" predictions for question types where predicting helps you the most.

NEED-TO-NOTICE WORDS

NEGATIVE MODIFIERS

Some of these will be specially formatted in question stems, although not in answer choices. For example, NOT, EXCEPT, and LEAST are capitalized, while weaken can be italicized.

Answer choices often include synonyms, figures of speech, and their own positive, negative, or even double-negative phrases! This makes it vital to note when a question has negative phrasing and to paraphrase those questions to be more direct.

EXTREME OR DIRECTIONAL LANGUAGE

Most CARS authors don't use excessively extreme vocabulary, so we want to be careful when evaluating answers that contain words like "best," "worst," or "only." That said, many authors do offer comparisons that let us decide which options might be "better," "worse," "more ___," or "less___."

Take the following question as an example. Consider how we would need to evaluate the positive and negative words in the answer choices differently if the question stem lacked the EXCEPT. Also, note how we can simplify this question by paraphrasing, "Which of these statements would the author not endorse?" Even without reading the passage, are any of these answer choices suspiciously extreme?

The author would most likely agree with all of the following statements EXCEPT:

A. Playing on a time-appropriate instrument is the best way for a pianist to produce a historically-informed performance.
B. A pianist who has never played on a well-restored original piano might not be able to tell the difference between the original and a well-made replica.
C. The first Steinway grand piano was ahead of its time.
D. It is better to restore old pianos than to create replicas of them.

ROMAN NUMERAL QUESTIONS

There's a special plan for consistency in Roman numeral (RN) questions: a good rule of thumb is to begin tackling RNs by focusing on one that appears in two answer choices. In the following example, we can check either RN II or RN III. Whether the RN we choose is correct or not, we only need to check one additional RN to get to the answer. This method can make it much easier to tackle RN questions with longer answers or when one of the numerals is especially tough.

Kant would assert that human perception can directly perceive which of the following?
I. Things as they really are
II. Things in their phenomenal presentation to the senses
III. Emotions

A. I only
B. II only
C. III only
D. II and III only

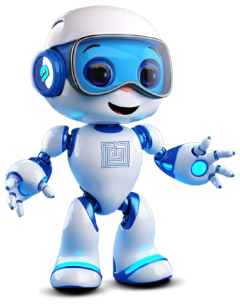
REVIEWING CARS PRACTICE

Use a Lessons Learned Journal to help you...

- Track your strengths and weaknesses
- Recognize common test patterns
- Improve your predictions

While reviewing questions you struggled with, ask yourself...

- What did you predict as a possible answer?
- If you didn't predict, why not?
- In retrospect, what could you have predicted?



Looking for additional CARS practice?

Team up with Blue, our AI-generated MCAT tutor and favorite CARS study buddy. Blue can help pinpoint your CARS strengths and weaknesses and walk you through missed passages. Create a free Blueprint MCAT account to access Blue and other free MCAT resources in minutes!