



June 6, 2013

Dear Mr. Blake:

This is in response to your email communication dated May 13, 2013 regarding question 25 in Section 3 of *The Official LSAT PrepTest 64*. Members of the Test Development staff at LSAC have carefully reviewed the question and did not find it to be defective.

Question 25 reads:

Journalist: The trade union members at AutoFaber Inc. are planning to go on strike. Independent arbitration would avert a strike, but only if both sides agree to accept the arbitrator's recommendations as binding. However, based on past experience, the union is quite unlikely to agree to this, so a strike is likely.

Which one of the following arguments exhibits a pattern of reasoning most similar to that exhibited by the journalist's argument?

The credited response is option (D):

(D) Lopez will run in tomorrow's marathon. Lopez will win the marathon only if his sponsors do a good job of keeping him hydrated. But his sponsors are known to be poor at keeping their athletes hydrated. So it is probable that Lopez will not win the marathon.

While you appear to agree that option (D) is the best answer to the extent that, compared with the other options, the reasoning in (D) is the most similar to that in the stimulus argument, you contend that the stimulus argument is flawed whereas the argument in (D) is not, rendering the two arguments fundamentally *non-parallel*. Thus, you believe that the item itself is flawed.

Your contention that the stimulus argument is flawed appears to be based on the assumption that the journalist's argument can be adequately analyzed as simply a deductive argument. You suggest that whereas the argument demonstrates that one sufficient condition (arbitration) for a particular outcome (no strike) has been shown unlikely to hold, the argument does not establish that the outcome itself is unlikely since there may be other conditions under which that outcome could hold. Thus, you maintain, the argument's conclusion does not follow deductively from the given premises (it is not a valid *modus tollens* argument, as you take the argument in (D) to be).

However, the journalist's argument cannot be adequately analyzed as simply a deductive argument. It is an example of a reasonable informal, nondeductive argument that draws a conclusion about the probability of an outcome based largely on probabilistic reasoning. In analyzing this argument, there are certain features that should be taken note of. First, the argument is made by a journalist. In the context of journalism, it is a reasonable application of the "principle of charity" in argument interpretation to presume that the information provided by the journalist constitutes a relatively complete picture of the relevant facts. While there might be other conditions under which the strike could be averted, the journalist apparently does not think them important or likely enough to mention. The argument is not about them. Second, the argument begins with the statement: "The trade union members at AutoFaber Inc. are planning to go on strike." In informal, everyday English, an unqualified assertion of the form 'X is planning to do Y'—*Sam is planning to leave work at 4:00 today, The teacher is planning to give an exam next week, The mayor is planning to run for reelection*—invites the inference 'It is likely that X will do Y'. Accordingly, in the case of the journalist's argument, it is reasonable to infer from the first statement in the argument that *a strike is likely*. Note that this inference is reinforced by

subsequent use of the word "avert" in relationship to the strike: 'to avert an outcome X by doing Y' suggests that X is likely unless some positive action Y is taken to prevent X.

The argument identifies a sufficient condition under which a strike would be averted: a strike would be averted by independent arbitration, provided that a necessary condition holds, namely, that both sides agree to accept the arbitrator's recommendations as binding. It is argued, however, based on past experience, that this necessary condition is unlikely to hold. Thus, the argument concludes, a strike is likely. The pattern of reasoning in the argument can be characterized as follows:

S is likely.	implication of first statement
If A, then not S.	
A only if B.	
B is unlikely.	[based on past experience]
(So, A is unlikely.)	implicit inference, intermediate conclusion
Therefore, S is likely.	

S = union members will strike	A = arbitration	B = both sides accept arbitrator's recommendations as binding
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Notice that the journalist's argument is not invalid or a bad argument. It does not, as you suggest, require one to infer that a strike is likely merely from the claim that arbitration is unlikely (a sufficient condition doesn't hold). The conclusion that a strike is likely is inferred from this claim together with the fact that union members are planning to strike. The journalist's argument contains a pattern of reasoning like a deductive *modus tollens* argument (lines 3 through 5), but its conclusion does not follow from that reasoning alone. It is based on an additional non-deductive inference that is reasonably well-supported.

Your observation that a strike might be averted for some other reason—"government intervention, an excellent offer on the part of the employer, etc."—has no bearing on the issue of whether the argument, as given, is a cogent one. The argument is not strictly deductive and the mere possibility of other conditions sufficient to avert the strike does not by itself undermine the nondeductive evidence that a strike is likely.

Finally notice that the pattern of reasoning in lines 3 through 5 of our analysis of the journalist's argument is highly similar to the pattern of reasoning in response (D). The argument in (D) concludes that Lopez is unlikely to win the marathon based on the observation that a necessary condition for Lopez's winning is unlikely to hold:

A only if B.	
B is unlikely.	[based on past experience]
So, not-A is likely. (A is unlikely.)	

A = Lopez will win marathon	B = sponsors keep Lopez hydrated
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Although it is true that response (D) does not contain all the elements of reasoning found in the journalist's argument, it does exhibit a pattern of reasoning that is highly similar to the reasoning exhibited in a central portion of the journalist's argument. No other response exhibits a pattern of reasoning as similar to that exhibited in the journalist's argument. Thus, (D) is the best answer.

We hope that this answers your concerns. Thank you for your interest in the LSAT.

Sincerely,

Stephen W. Luebke  
Principal Test Specialist

