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# What is on the LSAT?

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When you sit for the LSAT, you will work through six total sections, four of which count toward your score. Your first five sections will consist of the four scored sections, which include two Logical Reasoning sections, one Reading Comprehension section, and one Logic Games section, and it will also include an experimental section, which does not count toward your score and may be an additional Logical Reasoning, Reading Comprehension, or Logic Games section. These five sections will each be thirty-five minutes long, and can come in any order. Your exam will always end with an essay, which, again, does not count toward your score.

The four scored sections typically total up to 100 or 101 scored questions. Of late, the Reading Comprehension section has contained 27 questions, the Logic Games section 23 questions, and the Logical Reasoning sections either 25 or 26 questions. Let's discuss each of these sections in a bit more depth.

## Logical Reasoning

**Driver:** My friends say I will one day have an accident because I drive my sports car recklessly. But I have done some research, and apparently minivans and larger sedans have very low accident rates compared to sports cars. So trading my sports car in for a minivan would lower my risk of having an accident.

The reasoning in the driver's argument is most vulnerable to criticism on the grounds that this argument

- (A) infers a cause from a mere correlation
- (B) relies on a sample that is too narrow
- (C) misinterprets evidence that a result is likely as evidence that the result is certain
- (D) mistakes a condition sufficient for bringing about a result for a condition necessary for doing so
- (E) relies on a source that is probably not well-informed

sample Logical Reasoning question taken from June '07 exam (section 1, question 21); the correct answer is (A).

Logical Reasoning questions consist of a short statement—typically two or three sentences—a question stem, and five answer choices. Most of the statements in question are **arguments**, which can be defined as reasons given to justify a point. Questions will ask you about ways to strengthen or weaken these arguments, and so on.

Logical Reasoning questions test both your reading ability and reasoning ability, as well as your mental discipline (as all sections do). In particular, you will need to understand how the different parts of a statement are meant to relate to one another, and you need to be able to evaluate reasoning relationships: in particular, over and over again you will need to see why the reasons given in an argument do **not** justify the point made. Finally, you need to be able to match an answer with the very specific tasks that various question stems present.

## Reading Comprehension

Which one of the following most accurately expresses the main point of the passage?

- (A) Rita Dove's work has been widely acclaimed primarily because of the lyrical elements she has introduced into her fiction.
- (B) Rita Dove's lyric narratives present clusters of narrative detail in order to create a cumulative narrative without requiring the reader to interpret it in a linear manner.
- (C) Working against a bias that has long been dominant in the U.S., recent writers like Rita Dove have shown that the lyrical use of language can effectively enhance narrative fiction.
- (D) Unlike many of her U.S. contemporaries, Rita Dove writes without relying on the traditional techniques associated with poetry and fiction.
- (E) Rita Dove's successful blending of poetry and fiction exemplifies the recent trend away from the rigid separation of the two genres that has long been prevalent in the U.S.

sample Reading Comprehension question taken from June '07 exam (section 4, question 1)

The Reading Comprehension section will always include four separate passages (actually, one of those passages will be a pair of shorter, related passages), one each in the humanities, history, science, and the law. The passages are all of about equal length, typically two to five paragraphs, and you will typically be asked six to eight questions about each passage (or pair), for a total of typically twenty-seven questions for the section. These questions run the spectrum from being very general, like the sample question above, to being very specific (about the meaning or intention of a word or phrase, for example).

The Reading Comprehension section is, logically enough, primarily a test of reading ability, rather than reasoning ability. Other than for perhaps just a couple of unique questions per section, your job will not be to judge the thoughts or reasoning presented in these passages. Rather, your job is simply to read it correctly. In terms of "reading correctly," the most important aspect is being able to correctly recognize reasoning structure—being able to see how the passage is intended to be organized relative to the points that are being made. Your success on both general and specific questions will consistently hinge on your ability to correctly recognize reasoning structure.

## Logic Games

A company employee generates a series of five-digit product codes in accordance with the following rules:

- The codes use the digits 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4, and no others.
- Each digit occurs exactly once in any code.
- The second digit has a value exactly twice that of the first digit.
- The value of the third digit is less than the value of the fifth digit.

sample Logic Games scenario taken from June '07 exam (section 2, game 1)

The Logic Games section will always include four games, each with five to seven associated questions, and for the past several years each games section has contained exactly twenty-three questions (though this may change, by one question either way, at any point in the near future). The four games will vary quite a bit both in terms of how complicated and detailed the game is, and how challenging the questions are.

Each game presents a scenario, and several rules that define how that scenario can be played out. The questions then test your ability to understand the situation and rules correctly, and your ability to see how rules come together. Logic Games are primarily a test of your reasoning ability—over and over again you will be required to think about how rules come together to yield inferences, and how they don't. The Logic Games section also requires a careful and correct understanding of words used to describe reasoning relationships, words like *if*, *or*, and *only*. For almost all test takers, the key to success is diagramming—the ability to represent the situation in some sort of visual form. An effective diagram helps test takers keep track of rules, and it helps them see how rules come together.

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## Tips for LSAT Prep

Every year, thousands of students are able to successfully improve their LSAT score significantly through self-preparation. But there are also many more students who *don't* improve significantly through self-preparation. The outcome has less to do with aptitude, and more to do with how the student chooses to prepare.

In order to get yourself for the LSAT, you need to make sure you cover three key bases: you need to develop an **understanding** of the nature of the exam and of the issues that are on the test, you need to develop **strategies** for particular situations and for entire sections, and you need to plenty of **experience** at solving real LSAT questions. But neither understand, strategies, nor experience is enough to guarantee improvement. Having all three is not even enough to guarantee improvement.

What is?

Put most directly: your ability to actually handle the situations that the exam presents (your skills) and your ability to consistently apply your abilities in the moment (habits). It is your **skills** and your **habits** that determine your success. As you prepare for the exam, it will helpful to keep in mind two tips:

1. The best way to develop skills is to ensure that there is great "flow" between those three aspects that are necessary for success: understanding, strategies, and experience. You will become wiser about, and better at, the LSAT when your understanding influences your strategies, when your strategies influence your experiences, when your experiences deepen your understanding, and impact your strategies, and so on. Make sure you cover all the bases necessary for success, and make sure you are constantly promoting "flow" between these bases.

2. Work on skills first, then habits. Trust me. It's easier than the other way around.

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