

Daily Reading Comprehension & Critical Reasoning

Rotated-genre RC passages and real-argument Critical Reasoning — CLAT-2026 grade. Read each passage and answer from the passage only.
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SECTION — READING COMPREHENSION

READING COMPREHENSION — ENVIRONMENT & NATURE · WHICH PAST SHALL WE RESTORE? THE SHIFTING BASELINE AND THE ETHICS OF REWILDING (Q1-Q5)

In 1995 the fisheries biologist Daniel Pauly gave a name to a quiet error. Each generation of scientists, he observed, takes as its baseline the state of the fishery at the start of its own career, and measures decline from there. The losses of earlier generations drop out of the ledger altogether. Pauly called this the shifting baseline syndrome, and the phrase has since escaped fisheries science to describe a general habit of mind: we mistake the world we inherited for the world as it was.

The diagnosis is usually offered as a warning against complacency, and it is a sound one. A grassland that has held no large grazers for three centuries may look complete to a visitor who has never seen anything else. Much of what passes for pristine is merely old damage that has stopped being noticed.

Yet the remedy most often drawn from the diagnosis deserves more scrutiny than it receives. If present baselines are corrupted, the argument goes, restoration should aim at an earlier and truer one: the landscape before the plough, or before our own species arrived. The difficulty is that there is no such moment of rest. Ecosystems were in motion long before anyone measured them; climates oscillated, rivers migrated and species arrived and vanished on their own schedules. To choose a date is not to recover nature's intention but to make a decision and attribute it to nature.

This does not mean that every target is as good as another. A restoration that returns a wetland to the hydrology it held a century ago can be defended by what that hydrology did (the floods it absorbed, the birds it fed, the carbon it held), and those functions can be measured and compared. What cannot be defended is the claim that the chosen past is authentic and every other past a counterfeit. The honest restorer admits that the reasons, not the date, carry the weight.

The shift matters in practice. A project justified by authenticity has no answer when the climate that sustained its target no longer exists; a project justified by function can adapt, keeping the purpose while changing the species. Pauly's insight was that memory is a poor measuring instrument. The lesson to draw is not that an older memory is better, but that memory, of any vintage, cannot settle what we ought to want.

1. Which of the following best captures the central argument of the passage?

- ☐ A. The shifting baseline syndrome shows that restoration must aim at the earliest reconstructible state of an ecosystem, since every later state embeds accumulated damage.
- ☐ B. The shifting baseline syndrome is a genuine error, but it does not license treating any earlier state as authentic; restoration targets must be justified by what they do.
- ☐ C. The shifting baseline syndrome is at bottom a fisheries phenomenon, and its extension to grasslands and other landscapes has produced considerably more confusion than insight.
- ☐ D. The shifting baseline syndrome makes every restoration target equally arbitrary, so projects should be judged by public preference rather than by any ecological measure at all.

2. It can be inferred that the author would most likely regard a proposal to restore a forest to its 'pre-agricultural' species mix, defended solely on the ground that this mix is the forest's natural state, as:

- ☐ A. well founded, because a pre-agricultural baseline predates the human disturbance that shifting baselines conceal from each generation
- ☐ B. acceptable, provided that the pre-agricultural species mix can first be reconstructed with a reasonable degree of scientific confidence
- ☐ C. misguided, because pre-agricultural forests were typically less productive than the forests managed by later farming communities
- ☐ D. inadequately justified, because it presents a chosen date as nature's own standard instead of arguing from what the mix would achieve

3. The author's attitude towards the shifting baseline syndrome as a concept is best described as:

- ☐ A. appreciative of its diagnostic force but wary of the remedy commonly drawn from it
- ☐ B. dismissive of its scientific basis while conceding its use as a rhetorical warning
- ☐ C. enthusiastic about its spread beyond fisheries and impatient with its later critics
- ☐ D. neutral and expository, reporting the concept without assessing its implications

4. As used in the fourth paragraph ('every other past a counterfeit'), the word 'counterfeit' most nearly conveys:

- ☐ A. a forgery produced deliberately by someone in order to deceive an unwary observer
- ☐ B. a copy that is materially inferior in its quality to the original it imitates
- ☐ C. a past condition treated as having no genuine claim to be regarded as natural
- ☐ D. a reconstruction that relies upon incomplete or poorly preserved historical evidence

5. The observation that a project 'justified by authenticity has no answer when the climate that sustained its target no longer exists' serves primarily to:

- ☐ A. show that the choice between two ways of justifying a restoration target has practical consequences, not merely philosophical ones
- ☐ B. concede that functional restoration also fails once a changing climate alters the conditions that its chosen species require
- ☐ C. illustrate the shifting baseline syndrome by showing how a changing climate steadily erodes our memory of past landscapes
- ☐ D. argue that restoration projects should be abandoned wherever the climatic conditions of their chosen target have since altered

READING COMPREHENSION — PSYCHOLOGY & MIND · THE MEMORY THAT REWRITES ITSELF: RECONSOLIDATION AND THE WITNESS BOX (Q6-Q10)



For much of the twentieth century, the dominant picture of long-term memory was archival. An experience, once consolidated, was thought to be stored in a fixed form, like a document in a file: consulting it might be slow or might fail, but it did not alter what was written. Forgetting was loss, and remembering was reading.

That picture has not survived the laboratory. In experiments that became influential around 2000, researchers found that a consolidated fear memory in rats, when reactivated by a reminder, became briefly unstable again. If a drug blocking protein synthesis was administered in that window, the memory was weakened, although the same drug given without the reminder did nothing. The inference drawn was that retrieval does not merely read a memory but reopens it, and that the memory must then be stored afresh, or reconsolidated, in a process that can admit change.

Work on human recollection had pointed in the same direction by a different road. Participants who watched a filmed accident and were later asked how fast the cars were going when they "smashed" into each other gave higher estimates, and were likelier a week later to recall broken glass that was never shown, than those asked about cars that "hit" each other. The question did not merely elicit a memory; it supplied material the memory later absorbed.

It is tempting to conclude from this that memory is simply unreliable, and the conclusion is sometimes drawn with a certain relish. It is also too quick. A system that updated itself at every retrieval would be a poor archive but might be an excellent guide: an animal that revises what it knows about a place each time it returns there is better equipped than one condemned to consult an obsolete map. The malleability that embarrasses the witness box may be the price of a memory built for use rather than for testimony.

The legal consequences follow not from the fact of malleability but from its timing. If every retrieval is an occasion for revision, the first account a witness gives, and the manner in which it is elicited, bear a weight that later accounts cannot. Confidence expressed at trial, after months of rehearsal and repeated exposure to the accused's face, is evidence chiefly of that history. What deserves protection is not the witness's memory in the abstract but the conditions under which it was first disturbed.

6. Which of the following best expresses the main point of the passage?

- ☐ A. Laboratory research has now shown that human memory is far too unreliable to be admitted as evidence in criminal trials at all.
- ☐ B. Memory reconsolidation was first demonstrated in rats, and its relevance to human recollection remains wholly unproven.
- ☐ C. Memory is revised when it is retrieved, a feature suited to practical use whose legal weight lies in how early recall is handled.
- ☐ D. The wording of questions put to witnesses is the principal cause of the errors made in eyewitness identification at trial.

7. The author's account of the drug experiment implies that the researchers' inference would have been considerably less secure if:

- ☐ A. the drug had weakened the memory to the same extent whether or not the reminder had first been presented
- ☐ B. the reminder had been presented to the rats without any drug being administered in the window that followed
- ☐ C. the memory under study had been a fear memory rather than a neutral memory of a familiar place or route
- ☐ D. the protein-synthesis blocker had also been given to rats that had never formed the fear memory at all

8. The phrase 'drawn with a certain relish' (fourth paragraph) suggests that the author regards those who conclude that memory is simply unreliable as:

- ☐ A. correct in substance but careless about which of the available experiments they choose to cite in support
- ☐ B. hostile to psychological research and eager to discredit the laboratory methods on which it depends
- ☐ C. reluctant to accept findings that unsettle the traditional archival picture of how memory is stored
- ☐ D. somewhat too pleased with a sceptical conclusion that the evidence they rely on does not fully warrant

9. As used in the fourth paragraph, 'malleability' most nearly means:

- ☐ A. fragility, a tendency to fade or to break down entirely with the passage of time
- ☐ B. pliancy, a capacity to be reshaped, especially by later retrieval and experience
- ☐ C. volatility, a disposition to vary from moment to moment without any clear cause
- ☐ D. credulity, a readiness to believe whatever another person proposes or insists on

10. Which of the following best describes the function of the final paragraph in relation to the paragraph immediately preceding it?

- ☐ A. It retracts the preceding paragraph's defence of memory by conceding that the courtroom exposes how unreliable memory really is.
- ☐ B. It supplies experimental support for the preceding paragraph's claim that a memory which revises itself serves an adaptive purpose.
- ☐ C. It extends the preceding paragraph's argument by showing that malleability renders all testimony given at a trial equally worthless.
- ☐ D. It accepts the preceding paragraph's reframing and draws a narrower legal lesson that turns on when the revision of memory occurs.

SECTION — CRITICAL REASONING

CRITICAL REASONING — SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY POLICY · THE ACCURACY CERTIFICATE IS THE WRONG SAFEGUARD (Q11–Q15)

The draft rules on police use of facial recognition rest on a single safeguard. No system may be deployed unless it has been certified, on a standard test set, as correctly matching faces at least ninety-nine per cent of the time. The number has an admirable firmness. It is also, as a protection for the citizen, very nearly beside the point.

Consider what the certificate measures. A system is shown pairs of photographs and asked whether each pair shows the same person; the ninety-nine per cent figure describes how often it answers correctly. But the police will not use the system to compare pairs. They will use it to search each face captured by a camera at, say, a railway station against a watchlist, and to flag any entry that resembles it. In that setting the question that matters to an innocent commuter is how likely it is that a flag raised against her is false, and that depends less on the system's accuracy than on how many people are searched and how few of them are actually wanted.

The arithmetic is unforgiving. Suppose a certified system wrongly flags only one innocent face in every thousand, far better certificate requires, and that it scans a hundred thousand commuters on a day when ten people on the watchlist pass through. It will raise about a hundred false flags against at most ten true ones. More than nine in ten people stopped will be innocent, and it will still have earned its certificate.



The certificate, then, regulates the one variable that the police do not choose and ignores the ones they do: how wide the net is cast, how long the watchlist is, and what an officer must do before acting on a flag. A rule that genuinely protected the public would cap the scale of any deployment relative to the number of people sought, confine the watchlist to persons named in a warrant, and forbid any stop on the strength of a flag alone.

The draft's authors will reply that accuracy is a necessary condition of lawful use. So it is. But a necessary condition dressed as a sufficient one is how poor regulation acquires a good conscience, and a citizen wrongly stopped will take little comfort from knowing that the machine which picked her out was, by the rules' only measure, almost always right.

11. Which of the following most accurately expresses the main conclusion of the argument?

- ☐ A. A certified accuracy threshold does little to protect citizens, so the rules should instead govern how widely and on what terms the systems are used.
- ☐ B. Facial recognition systems are too inaccurate to be trusted by the police, so the draft rules should prohibit their deployment in public places altogether.
- ☐ C. The ninety-nine per cent threshold is set far too low, so the draft rules should require a considerably higher certified accuracy before any deployment.
- ☐ D. Police officers routinely misjudge how reliable facial recognition is, so the rules should require every officer to be trained in the relevant statistics.

12. The author's proposal that no stop be made 'on the strength of a flag alone' will protect the public in the way the author intends only if which of the following is assumed?

- ☐ A. Officers who receive a flag are already unwilling, in most cases, to stop the person concerned unless the flag has been corroborated.
- ☐ B. Watchlists compiled by the police routinely include a large number of persons who have not been named in any warrant whatsoever.
- ☐ C. Some means other than the flag itself is available to an officer for checking whether a flagged person is in fact the person sought.
- ☐ D. False flags fall more heavily on members of some groups than on others within the crowds that station cameras routinely scan.

13. Which of the following, if true, would most seriously weaken the author's argument?

- ☐ A. Station cameras capture images of poorer quality than the certification test set does, so real-world accuracy falls below the certified figure.
- ☐ B. The draft's certification test measures false flags in searches of realistic crowds against watchlists of realistic length, not matches between pairs.
- ☐ C. Countries that introduced accuracy certification for police systems reported fewer public complaints about wrongful stops in the following year.
- ☐ D. The number of persons placed on police watchlists has grown steadily over the past decade and is widely expected to go on growing in future.

14. Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the author's argument?

- ☐ A. Manufacturers of facial recognition systems have lobbied hard for the ninety-nine per cent threshold to be retained in the final version of the rules.
- ☐ B. The accuracy of the leading systems on standard test sets has improved in every single year of the past decade, according to independent evaluators.
- ☐ C. Commuters surveyed at major railway stations said that they would accept being scanned if the system in use were certified as highly accurate.
- ☐ D. In trial deployments, systems certified well above the threshold produced mostly false flags when searching large crowds for a few wanted people.

15. Which of the following arguments is most similar in its reasoning to the author's criticism of the draft rules?

- ☐ A. Surgeons must hold a licence before operating; but since licensed surgeons still make serious errors in the theatre, the licensing requirement protects no patient and should simply be abolished.
- ☐ B. A screening test is certified as highly accurate; but applied to a whole population in which the disease is rare, most positives will be false, so the rules should govern who is screened and what follows.
- ☐ C. A screening test is certified as highly accurate; but since no medical test is ever perfect, every patient should be told that any result may be wrong and be advised to seek a second opinion.
- ☐ D. A speed limit is set on a busy road; but since most of the accidents on that road occur at speeds below the posted limit, the limit is plainly too high and should be lowered substantially further.

CRITICAL REASONING — POLITICAL ECONOMY · INVESTMENT WAITS FOR CUSTOMERS, NOT FOR TAX CUTS (Q16-Q20)

When the corporate tax rate was cut sharply some years ago, the case made for it was simple. Lower taxes would raise the return on new investment; firms, finding more projects worth undertaking, would build more plants and buy more machines; and the resulting capacity would lift growth and, in time, the tax base itself. The cut was expensive, costing the exchequer well over half a percentage point of national income in its first full year, but it was presented as an investment in investment.

The investment did not arrive. In the three years that followed, private corporate capital formation, measured as a share of national income, was essentially flat, and the cash freed by the cut went largely into repaying debt, building reserves and, in the case of the largest firms, raising dividends. Defenders of the policy point to the pandemic, which fell within that window, as the explanation. But the pattern was visible in the quarters before the pandemic began, and it has persisted in the years since.

The more plausible explanation is that the cut relieved a constraint that firms were not facing. A company decides to add capacity when it expects to sell what that capacity would produce. Across much of industry, plants in those years were running at little more than seventy per cent of what they could produce, and a firm with more than a quarter of its existing machines idle does not buy new machines because the tax on their prospective profits has fallen. It waits for customers. Lowering the tax on returns raises the reward of an investment that demand has already justified; it cannot supply the justification.

If this is right, the lesson for the next round of fiscal support is plain. The same sum spent on measures that raise household incomes and orders, such as rural employment guarantees, prompt payment of what the government owes its suppliers, or pub



spending that itself places orders with private firms, would do more to bring private investment forward than any further reduction in the corporate rate. None of this makes the tax rate irrelevant; a firm that already has buyers will weigh it. But the order of events matters. Firms build when they can see buyers, and the first task of fiscal policy is to let them see.

16. Which of the following best states the main conclusion of the argument?

- ☐ A. The corporate tax cut failed chiefly because the pandemic suppressed investment during the very years it was expected to work.
- ☐ B. Corporate tax cuts never influence investment decisions, and the rate should therefore be restored to its earlier higher level.
- ☐ C. Firms used the cash freed by the tax cut irresponsibly, preferring dividends and reserves to new and productive investment.
- ☐ D. Future fiscal support should aim at raising demand, because weak demand rather than taxation was holding back investment.

17. The claim that spending the same sum on household incomes and orders 'would do more to bring private investment forward' than a further tax cut assumes which of the following?

- ☐ A. Households receiving higher incomes would save most of the additional money rather than spend it on goods and services.
- ☐ B. Additional household income and government orders would turn into sales for the firms whose investment is being sought.
- ☐ C. The corporate tax rate remains higher than the rates prevailing in competing economies that compete to attract investment.
- ☐ D. Capacity utilisation has since fallen further, to well below seventy per cent, across the greater part of manufacturing industry.

18. Which of the following, if true, would most seriously weaken the author's explanation of why investment failed to rise after the cut?

- ☐ A. Several large firms that raised their dividends after the cut had also announced expansion plans that were later postponed.
- ☐ B. Capacity utilisation in the years before the cut had been at similar levels without private investment collapsing entirely.
- ☐ C. In the industries where plants were running close to full capacity, investment also failed to rise in the years after the cut.
- ☐ D. Household consumption grew more slowly in the three years after the cut than it had grown in the three years before it.

19. Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the argument?

- ☐ A. Surveys of manufacturers in those years cited insufficient orders far more often than taxes or the cost of capital as the reason for deferring expansion.
- ☐ B. The cost of the tax cut to the exchequer eventually turned out to be rather smaller than had been estimated by officials at the time it was first announced.
- ☐ C. Economists who supported the tax cut had predicted in advance that its effect on investment would appear only after a lag of several years or more.
- ☐ D. Firms that repaid debt with the freed cash reduced their interest costs considerably and reported noticeably higher profits in the following year.

20. The argument is most vulnerable to the criticism that it:

- ☐ A. relies on the testimony of the tax cut's own defenders, whose evident interest in the policy's success makes their account unreliable
- ☐ B. assumes that a policy which has failed in one set of circumstances must necessarily fail in every other set of circumstances too, whatever they are
- ☐ C. treats flat investment after the cut as proof that the cut did nothing, without asking whether investment would otherwise have fallen
- ☐ D. attributes the flat investment to weak demand while conceding elsewhere that the pandemic itself depressed demand in those very same years

RAPID FIRE — ONE-LINE RECALL

44 quick questions · not negatively marked

- | | |
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| 1. What is the 'shifting baseline syndrome'? _____ | 23. What is a counterfactual? _____ |
| 2. 'Pristine' means? _____ | 24. Neglected-counterfactual flaw? _____ |
| 3. 'Counterfeit' (as used against 'authentic')? _____ | 25. How do you test a necessary assumption? _____ |
| 4. 'Of any vintage' means? _____ | 26. Strongest type of weakener for a causal claim? _____ |
| 5. 'Oscillate' means? _____ | 27. What is a parallel-reasoning question testing? _____ |
| 6. 'Complacency' means? _____ | 28. 'Vocabulary in context' rule? _____ |
| 7. What is memory 'consolidation'? _____ | 29. Main conclusion vs intermediate conclusion? _____ |
| 8. What is 'reconsolidation'? _____ | 30. 'Plain' as in 'the lesson is plain'? _____ |
| 9. 'Malleable' means? _____ | 31. 'Rewilding' means? _____ |
| 10. 'Elicit' means? _____ | 32. 'Trophic cascade'? _____ |
| 11. 'With relish' means? _____ | 33. 'Anthropocentric' vs 'ecocentric'? _____ |
| 12. 'Relish' vs 'reluctance'? _____ | 34. 'Nostalgia' means? _____ |
| 13. What does a 'control condition' do in an experiment? _____ | 35. 'Suggestibility'? _____ |
| 14. What is a 'base-rate' error? _____ | 36. 'Misinformation effect'? _____ |
| 15. Necessary vs sufficient condition? _____ | 37. 'Corroborate' means? _____ |
| 16. What is a 'false positive'? _____ | 38. 'Veridical' means? _____ |
| 17. What does 'beside the point' mean? _____ | 39. 'Precision' vs 'recall' (of a detection system)? _____ |
| 18. 'Watchlist' in policing? _____ | 40. 'Fiscal stimulus'? _____ |
| 19. What is 'capital formation'? _____ | 41. 'Crowding in'? _____ |
| 20. What is 'capacity utilisation'? _____ | 42. 'Post hoc ergo propter hoc'? _____ |
| 21. 'Exchequer' means? _____ | 43. 'Straw man' flaw? _____ |
| 22. Supply-side vs demand-side policy? _____ | 44. 'Equivocation' flaw? _____ |

