

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.
Free daily practice — clatgurukul.com/daily · Pass this sheet to a friend.

SECTION — READING COMPREHENSION

READING COMPREHENSION — LITERARY FICTION · THE READER AS ACCOMPLICE: ON THE CAREER OF THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR (Q1-Q5)

Nothing in a novel is less reliable than a narrator's confidence. The observation is old, for critics have known since Henry James that a story told from inside a mind arrives shaped by that mind, but the term unreliable narrator, coined by Wayne Booth in 1961, has hardened into something cruder than he intended. In common use it names a trick: the narrator lies, a late chapter reveals the lie, and the reader, pleasantly cheated, admires the machinery. So described, unreliability is a property of the text, planted by the author and waiting to be discovered by anyone attentive enough.

It is better understood as a property of the reading. A narrator is unreliable only when we decline to take the account at its own valuation, when we construct, behind the voice we are given, a second and unspoken version of events, and hold the two together without collapsing either into the other. Nothing in the sentences compels this. The famous instances work because the novel supplies evidence the narrator does not know he is supplying: the butler who recalls, with quiet satisfaction, the evening he went on serving while his father lay dying upstairs; the governess whose apparitions are described with a precision that slowly begins to feel like invention. In each case the reader is doing the interpretive work, and the author's contribution is to make that work possible without making it compulsory.

This is why the device resists the paraphrase that blurbs and examinations demand of it. To say that a narrator turns out to be lying is to convert into a settled fact what the novel leaves as a pressure. The better books of this kind never resolve; they simply stop, leaving two accounts standing side by side, the reader's and the narrator's, with no authority above them to adjudicate between the pair.

The moral interest follows from the formal one. We read such books as we listen to a plausible acquaintance describing a quarrel: attending to the story, but also to the small self-serving emphases, the details introduced and then hurried past. What the unreliable narrator trains is not suspicion of fiction but suspicion of the ordinary confidence with which anyone, the reader included, narrates his own conduct. That this training is pleasurable rather than humiliating is the achievement of the form, and the reason it has outlasted every attempt to reduce it to a twist.

1. Which of the following best expresses the central claim of the passage?

- ☐ A. Booth's term has been misapplied by critics who forget that the device itself was invented by Henry James rather than by the novelists now usually credited with it.
- ☐ B. Novels built around such narrators are artistically superior to other novels because they refuse, on principle, to settle the question of what actually happened.
- ☐ C. Unreliability is better treated as an effect the reader produces from evidence the novel supplies than as a trick the author has planted in the text to be found.
- ☐ D. The pleasure these novels offer is chiefly the pleasure of being deceived and then shown, in a final chapter, exactly how the deception was managed throughout.

2. Which of the following is most strongly implied by the statement that the author's contribution is 'to make that work possible without making it compulsory'?

- ☐ A. A reader who takes such a narrator entirely at his word has not misread the sentences, though he has declined a reading the novel makes available to him.
- ☐ B. A novel cannot properly be said to have an unreliable narrator unless most of its readers independently arrive at the same second version of the events.
- ☐ C. Authors who wish to be understood ought to supply, somewhere in the text, an explicit signal that the narrator's account is not to be taken at face value.
- ☐ D. The evidence that undermines such a narrator is usually placed in the closing pages, where a reader is most likely to register its significance at once.

3. The author's attitude towards the common use of the term 'unreliable narrator' is best described as

- ☐ A. amused indifference towards a critical label that has never had much bearing on the way novels are in fact read by anybody
- ☐ B. open hostility towards Booth, whose coinage the author regards as the origin of a confusion that criticism has never escaped
- ☐ C. cautious approval, qualified only by a worry that the term is at present applied to too narrow a range of ambitious novels
- ☐ D. dissatisfaction with a coarsened usage, combined with respect for the effect that the term was originally intended to name

4. As used in the second paragraph, the phrase 'at its own valuation' most nearly means

- ☐ A. at the price the narrator would be prepared to pay in order to have his account believed by others
- ☐ B. on the terms the account sets for itself, as it asks to be assessed by whoever receives it
- ☐ C. in the light of the moral worth that the novel as a whole finally assigns to the narrator's conduct
- ☐ D. with the allowance a reader would ordinarily extend to any account given in the first person

5. The references to the butler and to the governess function primarily to

- ☐ A. illustrate texts in which the decisive evidence is furnished by narrators who do not perceive its significance
- ☐ B. establish that the most celebrated examples of the device all belong within a single and continuous national tradition of the novel
- ☐ C. concede that some novels do plant an explicit clue, which the author treats as an artistically inferior method
- ☐ D. contrast an early and a later stage in the development of the device across two centuries of the novel

READING COMPREHENSION — PHILOSOPHY & IDEAS · THE CORNER AND THE CHILD: MORAL LUCK AND THE LIMITS OF CONTROL (Q6-Q10)



Two drivers leave the same party, equally drunk, and take the same route home. One arrives without incident. The other, at a corner he could not have seen around, strikes a child who has run into the road. Nothing distinguishes the two men's choices, their intentions, or the care they took. Everything distinguishes what is said about them afterwards. The second will be prosecuted, will be described as having done something terrible, and will very probably agree; the first will be told he was lucky, and will believe it.

The case is the standard illustration of what Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel named moral luck, and its force lies in a contradiction we appear to hold without noticing. One principle we accept is that a person may be blamed only for what lies within his control; it is unjust to hold anyone responsible for factors he did not choose and could not have altered. Another is the ordinary practice of judgement, which tracks outcomes relentlessly. The child's presence at that corner was, from the driver's side, sheer accident. Yet no amount of reflection persuades us to blame the two drivers equally, and the man who struck the child does not experience his own case as a matter of statistics.

The dispute is over which commitment must give way. One reply holds that the practice is confused and ought to be reformed: the drivers are equally culpable, and our different treatment of them merely records the crudeness of institutions built around visible harm. Another holds that the control principle, stated so broadly, would dissolve moral judgement altogether. A person's temperament, upbringing and circumstances are no more chosen than a child at a corner; pressed with any consistency, the principle leaves nothing behind to assess.

Nagel's own suggestion was not a solution but a diagnosis. Both commitments are ours, and the conflict between them is not a muddle to be cleared up but a feature of a creature that judges itself from inside its own life and from outside it at the same time. That answer has satisfied few philosophers, and Nagel did not claim it would. Its merit is that it explains something the tidier positions cannot: why the remorse of the driver who struck the child is not irrational, and why the phrase there but for fortune consoles nobody who has actually done the harm.

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

- ☐ A. Williams and Nagel established that the control principle is false and that outcomes are, after all, the proper basis of moral assessment.
- ☐ B. The driver who kills a child is no more blameworthy than the one who happens not to, and legal practice, together with everyday judgement, ought to be reformed to reflect that fact.
- ☐ C. Moral luck arises only in cases that end in criminal harm, and it disappears entirely once judgement is confined to a person's intentions.
- ☐ D. Two commitments we hold, that blame requires control and that judgement follows outcomes, conflict, and the dispute is over whether either can be surrendered.

7. The passage most strongly suggests which of the following about the reply that the ordinary practice 'is confused and ought to be reformed'?

- ☐ A. It is the position that Nagel himself ultimately endorses, having found the control principle impossible to restrict in any way that is principled.
- ☐ B. It saves the control principle at the price of treating a deeply settled practice of judgement as little more than an institutional error.
- ☐ C. It is refuted by the observation that the driver who struck the child feels a remorse which he himself regards as entirely rational.
- ☐ D. It concedes that temperament and upbringing are unchosen and therefore cannot properly be used in assessing anybody's conduct at all.

8. The author's attitude towards Nagel's 'diagnosis' is best described as

- ☐ A. enthusiastic endorsement, on the ground that the diagnosis finally resolves the conflict the passage has been setting out
- ☐ B. dismissal, on the ground that a mere description of a conflict cannot count as philosophical work of any value at all
- ☐ C. measured, acknowledging that it settles little while crediting it with explaining what the rival positions leave unexplained
- ☐ D. regretful agreement with the majority of philosophers, who have found the diagnosis obviously mistaken in its central claim

9. As used in the second paragraph, 'tracks' most nearly means

- ☐ A. follows outcomes closely, varying as they themselves vary
- ☐ B. pursues outcomes with the settled aim of punishing them
- ☐ C. leaves a visible trace of the outcomes it has already judged
- ☐ D. searches out outcomes that someone has deliberately hidden

10. The opening description of the two drivers serves primarily to

- ☐ A. establish, by an example drawn from the law, that criminal liability is properly determined by consequences alone
- ☐ B. isolate a case in which everything within the agents' control is identical and only the outcome is different
- ☐ C. suggest that intoxication is the single factor that makes ordinary moral judgement unreliable in cases of this kind
- ☐ D. introduce a hypothetical whose artificiality the author will later rely upon in order to dismiss the problem

SECTION — CRITICAL REASONING

CRITICAL REASONING — SOCIETY & CULTURE · WHAT A LENDING FIGURE CANNOT MEASURE (Q11–Q15)

Every few years a city council commissions a review of its public libraries, and every few years the review opens with the same number: books borrowed. That figure has fallen for two decades, and the conclusion drawn from it is always the same, namely that the library is a service in decline, to be consolidated into fewer and larger branches. The reasoning deserves to be set out, because it is a good deal less sound than its familiarity suggests.

Borrowing measures one of the things a library does. Counts taken at the door tell a different story: visits to branches have held roughly steady across the same period, and in several districts have risen. What people do once inside has changed. They sit with laptops; they use the only free and warm public room within walking distance; they bring children to storytelling hours; they ask staff for help with forms that can no longer be completed on paper anywhere else. None of this registers in a circulation figure, and all of it is far more sensitive to distance than borrowing is. A reader will travel four kilometres for a novel he has reserved, because the journey is made once and the book comes home with him. He will not travel four kilometres to sit for an afternoon, and still less will he make the journey twice a week with a child.



That last point is what the consolidation proposal gets wrong. Closing small branches to fund a larger central one preserves, and may even improve, the service whose numbers are falling, while removing the services whose numbers are not. The council's own consultation found that the users least able to travel, older residents, parents of small children, and people without cars, were concentrated in precisely the branches marked for closure.

A fair review would begin from a different question: not how many books a branch lends, but what happens in a district when it shuts. Where that has been examined, the results are not reassuring. Districts that lost a branch recorded no corresponding rise in use at the surviving libraries, which suggests that the displaced users did not travel to them; they simply stopped coming. Until the council can show otherwise, it should treat the falling circulation figure as evidence about lending and about nothing else, and it should not close a single branch on the strength of it.

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

- ☐ A. Visits to the city's library branches have held roughly steady over the same two decades in which borrowing has fallen.
- ☐ B. The services that never appear in a circulation figure are more valuable to a district than the one service that does.
- ☐ C. Users least able to travel are concentrated in precisely those branches that the council has already marked for closure.
- ☐ D. The council should not close any branch on the basis of the decline in the number of books that are borrowed.

12. The argument depends on assuming which of the following?

- ☐ A. Branches that have closed in other cities were selected for closure by methods broadly similar to the council's own.
- ☐ B. The number of books borrowed from the city's branches will go on falling for at least another decade after the present review is published.
- ☐ C. The activities that do not appear in circulation figures are among the things the library service exists in order to provide.
- ☐ D. No city anywhere has succeeded in raising its borrowing figures after consolidating several small branches into one.

13. Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the argument?

- ☐ A. In the districts examined, branches were closed only where a council-run community centre offering the same rooms, computers and help with forms had opened nearby.
- ☐ B. Door counts at the city's branches include staff and delivery workers entering the building, a proportion that has not changed over the period in question.
- ☐ C. Some of the users who come to sit with laptops also borrow books, and are therefore counted in both of the two figures that the argument cites.
- ☐ D. The council's consultation was answered mainly by residents who already use one of the city's library branches at least once every month.

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

- ☐ A. A survey of branch users found that a large majority described their local library as important to the character of the district.
- ☐ B. In districts that lost a branch, use of council services requiring help in person fell, and did not recover once a larger central library opened.
- ☐ C. The central libraries built under consolidation schemes have generally offered more computers and longer opening hours than the branches they replaced.
- ☐ D. Circulation figures have fallen at roughly the same rate in cities that consolidated their branches and in cities that left their networks intact.

15. Which of the following arguments is most similar in its reasoning to the argument above?

- ☐ A. Ticket sales at the city's cinemas have fallen while their cafes are busier than ever, so the council should license cinemas as restaurants rather than as places of entertainment.
- ☐ B. Fewer patients now stay overnight at the district hospital, so its bed count should be reduced and the money saved should be transferred to its outpatient clinics instead.
- ☐ C. The number of letters posted has fallen sharply, and since a post office exists in order to carry letters, the branch network should be cut in proportion to that decline.
- ☐ D. Sales at a chain's small shops have fallen while footfall has not, and since their repair counters draw customers who will not travel far, the chain should not close them on sales figures.

CRITICAL REASONING — HEALTH POLICY · SCREENING THE WELL (Q16–Q20)

The health ministry's advisory group has recommended extending the national screening programme for thyroid nodules to adults from the age of thirty, ten years earlier than at present. The argument offered is the one always offered: earlier detection saves lives, and the test is cheap and carries no radiation risk. Neither claim is false. Taken together, they still do not support the recommendation.

Screening finds disease, which is not the same as preventing death from it. Ultrasound of the neck is very good at finding small papillary tumours, and a large proportion of those tumours, if never found, would never have produced a symptom in the patient's lifetime. Autopsy studies of people who died of wholly unrelated causes have repeatedly found such nodules in a third or more of the adults examined, in every country where the question has been asked. A programme that detects them converts healthy people into patients, who then undergo surgery, lifelong hormone replacement, and, in a minority of cases, injury to the nerve that serves the voice.

The natural test of a screening programme is whether the population screened dies of the disease less often than the population left unscreened. Where national programmes of this kind have been introduced elsewhere, recorded incidence has risen steeply, in one country fifteen-fold within two decades, while mortality from the disease has remained flat. That combination is the signature of overdiagnosis. It is not evidence that treatment failed; it is evidence that much of what was treated never required treating, and that the extra cases were drawn from the reservoir the autopsy studies describe.

Supporters answer that survival among screen-detected patients is excellent, above ninety-five per cent at ten years. This is the weakest reassurance available, since a programme that adds harmless tumours to the numerator of a survival statistic will raise that statistic whatever it does to anyone's life expectancy. The advisory group's own report cites no trial with a mortality endpoint, for the sufficient reason that none has been conducted in this age band.

The ministry should therefore decline the extension until such a trial exists. Screening is a treatment administered to people well, and the ordinary burden of proof demanded of a treatment, that it be shown to do more good than harm, applies to it, force rather than less.



16. Which of the following most accurately states the main conclusion of the argument?

- ☐ A. The ministry should not extend the screening programme to the younger age band until a trial measuring deaths has been carried out.
- ☐ B. Ultrasound screening of the neck detects small papillary tumours that would otherwise never have produced any symptom at all.
- ☐ C. Survival figures above ninety-five per cent at ten years are a misleading way of assessing the value of any programme of population screening.
- ☐ D. Screening is a treatment administered to people who are well and should for that reason be regarded with a settled suspicion.

17. The argument requires the assumption that

- ☐ A. no trial measuring deaths from the disease could be completed at an acceptable cost among adults in the age band concerned
- ☐ B. the rise in recorded incidence without any fall in mortality observed elsewhere is not explained by a real rise in dangerous disease
- ☐ C. the surgical complications described in the passage occur in a majority of the patients whom such a programme would detect
- ☐ D. the advisory group was aware of the autopsy studies and decided not to mention them anywhere in its published report

18. Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the argument?

- ☐ A. The ultrasound equipment required for the extended programme is already installed in most district hospitals and would therefore call for no further capital expenditure.
- ☐ B. Some patients whose nodules are detected choose careful monitoring rather than immediate surgery, and are then followed by their own clinicians for many years without any operation at all.
- ☐ C. In the countries where incidence rose without a fall in mortality, screening was offered mainly to adults over fifty, in whom these tumours behave far less aggressively than in adults of thirty.
- ☐ D. Hormone replacement following thyroid surgery is inexpensive and, for the great majority of patients, requires no more than a single tablet taken once each day.

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

- ☐ A. The advisory group included among its members no specialist in the behaviour of thyroid tumours that are left untreated.
- ☐ B. Patients who are told that they have a tumour report an anxiety that persists for years afterwards, whether or not they go on to have surgery.
- ☐ C. The cost of the extended programme would be met from the same budget that pays for treating patients who have symptoms.
- ☐ D. In one region that suspended a comparable programme, recorded incidence fell sharply while deaths from the disease did not rise at all.

20. Which of the following best describes the flaw the author identifies in the supporters' appeal to survival figures?

- ☐ A. It rests on a sample of treated patients far too small to support any general claim about what the programme achieves.
- ☐ B. It assumes that what holds true of the screened population as a whole must also hold true of each individual within it.
- ☐ C. It treats as evidence of benefit a figure that the programme would raise merely by adding cases that were never dangerous.
- ☐ D. It confuses the claim that screening detects these tumours with the much stronger claim that screening causes them to appear.

RAPID FIRE — ONE-LINE RECALL

51 quick questions · not negatively marked

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. 'Free indirect style' in fiction? _____ | 26. 'Circumstantial luck'? _____ |
| 2. 'Focalisation' means? _____ | 27. 'Culpable' means? _____ |
| 3. Who makes a narrator unreliable, on this passage's account? _____ | 28. 'Remorse' vs 'regret'? _____ |
| 4. 'At its own valuation' means? _____ | 29. A 'diagnosis' vs a 'solution' in philosophy? _____ |
| 5. 'Adjudicate' means? _____ | 30. 'Entrenched' means? _____ |
| 6. 'Paraphrase' means? _____ | 31. To 'dissolve' a problem? _____ |
| 7. 'Coinage' of a term? _____ | 32. 'Temperament' means? _____ |
| 8. 'Hardened into' (of a usage)? _____ | 33. 'Deontology' vs 'consequentialism'? _____ |
| 9. 'Crude' vs 'nuanced'? _____ | 34. 'Akrasia' means? _____ |
| 10. 'Compulsory' means? _____ | 35. 'Determinism'? _____ |
| 11. 'Interpretive work' (of a reader)? _____ | 36. 'Culpability' vs 'liability'? _____ |
| 12. 'Self-serving' means? _____ | 37. 'Sheer accident' means? _____ |
| 13. 'Plausible' means? _____ | 38. 'Overdiagnosis' means? _____ |
| 14. 'Blurb' means? _____ | 39. 'Lead-time bias'? _____ |
| 15. What does it mean that a work 'resists paraphrase'? _____ | 40. 'Length-time bias'? _____ |
| 16. 'Governess' means? _____ | 41. 'Incidence' vs 'mortality'? _____ |
| 17. A 'twist' in fiction? _____ | 42. A 'mortality endpoint' in a trial? _____ |
| 18. 'Suspicion' vs 'scepticism'? _____ | 43. A 'surrogate endpoint'? _____ |
| 19. 'Humiliating' vs 'chastening'? _____ | 44. 'Sensitivity' of a test? _____ |
| 20. 'Apparition' means? _____ | 45. 'Specificity' of a test? _____ |
| 21. 'Moral luck' means? _____ | 46. 'Numerator' vs 'denominator'? _____ |
| 22. Which two philosophers named moral luck? _____ | 47. An 'autopsy study'? _____ |
| 23. The 'control principle' in ethics? _____ | 48. 'Natural history' of a disease? _____ |
| 24. 'Resultant luck'? _____ | 49. 'Active monitoring' of a tumour? _____ |
| 25. 'Constitutive luck'? _____ | 50. 'Burden of proof'? _____ |
| | 51. A 'papillary' tumour? _____ |

