

**Disclaimer for this CARS sheet: the vast majority of advice on this sheet is meant for you to play around with different approaches to reading and are not intended to be hard guidelines/flowcharts on how to approach CARS passages.**

**Reading the passage:**

- Paying attention to **structure**: form is often just as important as content and details of the passage
  - Often times paragraphs will follow a structure similar to this: main idea/claim + further elaboration of that idea + evidence + pivot to the next paragraph/topic with a connecting sentence that either bridges ideas between paragraphs or indicates a shift in opinion or evolution of an idea
  - However, something to keep in mind is that not every single paragraph has useful content. Sometimes paragraphs will just reiterate what was previously said and you can move through these chunks quicker, helping you save time overall in reading. You can revisit these sections if directly referenced in a question. Often you can identify repetitive content in paragraphs
- Paying attention to who said what:
  - What **opinions** are attached to what speaker or party? Is it the author's opinion or simply something the author is introducing from a third party to build their argument
- Make note of when new ideas or new individuals/groups are introduced-how does this tie into the claims made at the beginning and in the conclusion?
  - **Constantly be evaluating new ideas introduced against what has already been talked about so far**
- Look for comparisons and contrasts of concepts, this will often reveal how the author is structuring their argument or main claim by juxtaposing it with opposing ideas or by strengthening it with similar ideas (this is a subsector of looking for "transitions")
  - Key words: Yet, nonetheless, conversely, however, similarly, furthermore, instead, consequently, accordingly, for example, as it follows, therefore (not a comprehensive list)
- highlight sparingly and intentionally
  - things to focus on include OPINION statements, and new ideas/shifts from what was previously being discussed, times/locations/dates and names/large entities/groups
- **identify the central idea as soon as possible** and read the rest of the passage with that in mind
  - central idea will most often be introduced at the beginning and reaffirmed at the end
- skimming vs reading in depth vs notetaking
  - for some people reading the questions first and skimming the passage helps them have a better feeling for the main idea the passage is getting at
  - other people will avoid reading the questions first because it will cause them to cherry pick sentences that seem to fit what the questions are asking and this

sometimes results in ignoring important context. this pairs with a good initial close reading of the passage (around 5 minutes to read the passage, allot yourself extra time digest the questions and be able to go back to reference specific lines) • you're not reading these passages to learn something new or retain information/details; train yourself out of the textbook reading mentality and focus on main themes, changes in opinion and how the central idea is supported by evidence

- attitude is half the battle of getting through CARS stamina wise : pretend to be excited for the next passage and genuinely interested in every topic of every passage , **act like your favorite person is telling you about something they love**
- approaching convoluted sentences: the MCAT loves crazy run-on sentences that seem to lose the plot halfway through-this is often because they jam in a lot of details between commas-so try to cover up sections between commas to get to the heart of the sentence if you feel confused.

### Answering Questions:

- It may sound silly, but make sure you read **every single word in the question** stem and every single answer choice before proceeding with process of elimination • **Rephrase the question**
  - Helps you catch tricky wording/double negatives-ex. "would NOT weaken" = would strengthen the author's main point or what statement is NOT supported by evidence presented in the passage
  - Be very cautious of "except" and "not" type questions
- In a similar vein, be aware of modifying language in the question stem: ex. "Least supported by", "best substantiates", "most likely", "best supported by", etc. • Consider what perspective the question is asking for (author's perspective vs perspective of a specific group vs the passage main idea)
- **Process of elimination**
  - Look for **strong wording** like "never", "always", "all"
  - **Stay in scope**: what answer choice is most directly relevant?
  - Avoid trap answers: often these answer choices will use language very similar to the passage (use some of the same specific words) but will convey a significantly different idea than the passage's real main idea
  - **Eliminate similar-sounding/meaning answers**: they can't both be right! ◦ If any part of the answer directly contradicts a claim/statement in the passage, the entire answer is wrong!
  - Vibe check with yourself: are you finding that you're starting to "talk yourself" into a specific answer choice rather than actually finding direct evidence in the passage to support that choice/claim? The more logical leaps you find yourself making to justify an answer (especially if it involves using outside information you may know about the passage topic or if you start thinking "well I *feel* like this should be right if xyz were true") instead of actually concretely finding x claim and y evidence in the passage to conclude z, the more likely that the answer you settle on is wrong.

- irrelevant answers/ **out of scope**; if it's not mentioned in the passage it won't be a correct answer choice (spotting irrelevant answers requires a thorough but not obsessive initial read through of the passage)
- Between two answers?
  - consider the scope of the question stem (is it big picture or is it more specific, referencing just a paragraph or a sentence)
  - reference the passage to see if there's supporting evidence for one answer over the other but avoid the tendency to want to pick apart every little word of the passage to justify an answer

### Question Types:

- Direct interpretation/understanding:
  - These are the most straightforward types of questions as far as CARS goes-these will often reference a specific paragraph/sentence/line and test your understanding of the information conveyed. If a direct reference is included in the question stem, take care to read it within its full context.
  - For these, be particularly careful about **answering within scope**: answer choices that are overly specific or overly vague are often not correct
  - Answering within scope also means that if they're discussing a concept only in the second paragraph, limit your reasoning to whatever is mentioned in the second paragraph (this also applies for retrieval questions)
- Retrieval questions:
  - Kind of a subset of direct interpretation questions, but these will often reference a **specific phrase or even a specific word in the passage**
  - Go back in the passage, be sure to read the referenced section within full context of the sentence or the paragraph that it's in because the wrong answer choices rely on you not paying attention to the **greater context**
- Inference questions: what does the passage/author infer or imply?
  - **Do NOT** pick explicit answers for these types of questions-**anything directly stated in the passage** is not considered an inference. This is a super common mistake because it's really easy to pick things that show up in the passage directly.
  - For something to be an inference, you would have to draw a secondary conclusion from a primary statement made in the passage (**one extra logical step from what is already stated but the main message will remain very close to what's already there**)
  - Here is where you want to beware of trap answers (will often include the same language/specific words used in the passage already but will lean too extreme in its message compared to the author's original intended message)
- Beyond the text:
  - these will often introduce **new information/viewpoint** and either have to explain whether the author would agree or disagree with that stance or ask if anything in the passage would support/disprove that stance

- make sure you **understand what original relationship or idea** is being referenced and keep an eye out for answer choices that **aren't directly relevant to the issue at hand**
- evaluation based questions
  - often take some form of “author states XYZ in order to support/disprove”, “What is the purpose of “insert quote” in paragraph 2”, “How well supported is statement X?”, “How effective is the author’s argumentation”
  - **evaluate purpose, strength of supporting evidence, or additional evidence that would improve an argument**
  - trap answers will often not directly address what is referenced by the question stem but will use similar verbiage as the passage

#### Reviewing practice:

- This may seem counterintuitive, but also make sure you dedicate time to reviewing the questions you got right instead of entirely focusing on the ones you got wrong ○ This helps you positively reinforce your correct thought processes and apply the same logic to the questions you did get wrong
- write down what your reasoning was for questions you got wrong and compare it to the correct answer’s reasoning
  - try to find patterns in what you get right and wrong: consistently getting beyond the text questions wrong? focus on central themes more/identifying the main idea and opinion changes. getting inference questions wrong frequently? try to make sure it's something implied in the text and not directly stated