

Lesson 2: Effectiveness of Argument

You may think of an argument as being a quarrel between people. However, in reading and writing, an **argument** consists of the following:

- A statement, which is a **conclusion** about something
- The **evidence**, which is support that is given for the argument
- The **premises** (and unstated premises, called assumptions) behind the argument

Key Ideas

- An argument is a statement that takes a position.
- An argument consists of a conclusion about the issue and supporting evidence.
- Critically reading an argument involves understanding the stated or implied assumptions behind the claim.

Writers should provide supporting evidence for their argument; otherwise, they are just making an unsupported claim. Sometimes writers clearly state the premises behind their argument, but in other cases, you may need to read carefully to **infer** their assumptions.

Read the argument below and answer the questions that follow.

In the past few years, the majority of state governments have passed laws making it illegal to send text messages while driving. These laws are clearly a good decision for which legislators should be praised. Drivers are 23 times more likely to have accidents while texting than they are while driving undistracted. It is common sense that the government has a responsibility to protect its citizens from the recklessness of a careless few.

1. What is the writer's argument about anti-texting laws?
 - (1) Such laws are a good idea because drivers are prone to accidents while texting.
 - (2) The majority of state governments have passed laws making it illegal to text while driving.
2. What evidence is given in support of the author's argument?
 - (1) Drivers are 23 times more prone to accidents while texting.
 - (2) Members of state legislatures should be praised.
3. Which of the following is likely one of the author's unstated premises?
 - (1) Drivers must police themselves to avoid dangerous situations.
 - (2) A state government has a responsibility to ensure citizens' safety.

The answer to Question 1 is (1). The author's opinion is that anti-texting laws are "good" and "should be praised." The rest of the argument supports that opinion. The answer to Question 2 is (1). A statistic such as "23 times more likely" is typical of the factual evidence you can expect to see on the GED® Test. The answer to Question 3 is (2). We know that the assumption that governments should protect citizens is a premise of the author because he praises legislators for passing these laws to make roads and highways safer.

GED® TEST TIP

On some passages, writers may use terms such as "for these reasons," "it follows that," or "therefore" to indicate their conclusion. In other cases, you may have to carefully analyze the passage to find the argument.

Practice 2

Questions 1 through 4 refer to this passage about the minimum wage.

MAKING MINIMUM WAGE WORK FOR WORKERS

The minimum wage is the lowest salary that a company can legally pay its employees. The federal minimum wage is the lowest allowed in the nation, but many states have set minimum wages higher than the national number.

Several states have taken the sensible step of automatically raising their minimum wage to adjust for inflation and consumer price increases. This policy ensures that low-paid workers are paid a stable, livable income over the long term. Raising the federal minimum wage, however, requires direct action by lawmakers. As a result, over the past 40 years, the federal minimum wage has not kept pace with the rate of inflation. Nowadays, full-time minimum-wage workers earn so little money that many have fallen below the poverty line. In the case of the minimum wage, the federal government should follow the lead of the states. Congress needs to establish automatic wage increases triggered by increases in inflation and changes to the consumer price index. That is the only way to ensure sustainable earnings for hard-working citizens.

1. Which of the following is the main point of the passage?
- A. States' minimum wages differ from the federal minimum wage.
 - B. The federal government should automatically raise the minimum wage to match price increases.
 - C. The federal minimum wage ensures a comfortable living for people earning it.
 - D. State minimum wages are the result of political games played with people's livelihoods.

2. What is the writer's argument about states that automatically raise their minimum wages?
- A. Those states' wages have not kept pace with the rate of inflation.
 - B. People earning more than minimum wage in those states are wealthy.
 - C. Those states have many workers in poverty.
 - D. Those states have systems superior to the federal system of manual increases.
3. What evidence is given to support the author's argument?
- A. Some states have minimum wages lower than the federal minimum wage.
 - B. The federal government should adjust its minimum wage automatically.
 - C. Over the past 40 years, the federal minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation.
 - D. As a result of inflation, \$1 in 1972 was worth more than \$5 is worth today.
4. Which of the following is most likely to be one of the author's assumptions?
- A. Employees under the age of 18 might be paid less than the minimum wage.
 - B. Ensuring sustainable incomes for hardworking citizens is a responsibility of lawmakers.
 - C. Employees earning the federal minimum wage cannot support themselves and their families.
 - D. The past 40 years have experienced significantly higher inflation than was expected.

Answers and explanations start on page 647.