

Lesson 3: Validity of Arguments

Just because a writer makes an argument does not mean you have to accept it as **valid**, or convincing. You need to analyze the supporting evidence. Below are some types of **support for arguments** and ways that you can question their legitimacy.

Key Ideas

- An argument may or may not be valid.
- For the argument to be valid, it needs to be supported by relevant and provable evidence.
- Critical thinking requires questioning both the method of argument and the source of supporting evidence.

Type of Support	Description	Questions to Ask
Facts	Objective facts that can be tested or measured	Is the information complete, or is it partial or selectively chosen?
Data or Statistics	Numerical data that have been gathered or sampled	Do the numbers accurately represent the subject? How were they gathered?
Examples or Anecdotes	Stories to demonstrate the "truth"	Are the stories true? Are they relevant?
Authority	Testimonials from a recognized authority	Does the person really know the issue, or is he or she a spokesperson or celebrity?
Causality	Assertions that one thing caused another	Is this really a cause, or is it just a related factor?

In addition to analyzing the evidence, you need to be aware that sometimes writers use **emotional appeals** based on fear, pity, or getting you to "jump on the bandwagon."

GED® TEST TIP

When you are reading a writer's argument, don't evaluate it based on what you already believe. Think critically about whether or not the writer adequately and validly supports the argument.

Gasoline prices spiked suddenly in the Weston metropolitan area last week when the local oil refinery went offline due to a facility-wide computer malfunction. Shortly thereafter, the average number of miles driven daily by Weston residents fell by a whopping 55 percent. Clearly, the higher gas prices were responsible for the decline in miles driven.

- What is the argument in the paragraph?
 - (1) Higher gas prices were responsible for the decline in miles driven.
 - (2) The spike in gas prices was due to a computer malfunction at the local refinery.
- Which of the following undermines the writer's argument?
 - (1) Oil refineries have stopped production in the past.
 - (2) Last week, a blizzard struck the Weston area, causing a state of emergency that required all nonemergency vehicles to stay off the roads.

For the first question, choice (1) is correct. The writer concludes that high gas prices caused the decline in driving and uses the background about the refinery shutdown as support. For the second question, choice (2) is correct. The writer's argument is faulty because she assumes that the high price of gasoline was the only cause of the reduction in driving. Choice (2) supplies another reasonable explanation for the reduced driving, thereby weakening the argument.

Practice 3

Questions 1 through 4 refer to this passage about voting technology.

VOTING SYSTEMS IN THE U.S.

1 The large-scale adoption in 1996 of direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting was proclaimed as the beginning of an era of superior voting technology. For as long as elections have been held, voting systems have been flawed in various ways. In mid-18th century America, voters called out their selections publicly. This assured an accurate count but meant voting could not be private. Paper ballots, on the other hand, were anonymous but could be easily forged or miscounted.

2 The next innovation was the mechanical-lever voting machine, introduced in the late 19th century. The use of this voting system peaked in the 1960s. Over the next several decades, the mechanical-lever machines were replaced by two early electronic voting systems: bubble sheets recorded by optical scanner and punch cards processed electronically. All of these systems were prone to glitches, such as the notorious "hanging chads" and unreadable ballots in Florida after the 2000 U.S. presidential election.

Now, many jurisdictions use all-electronic DRE systems. Every step of the voting process is electronic: the ballot appears on a screen, the voter indicates his or her selection via buttons or touch-screen technology, and results are stored on a memory card. Unfortunately, some DRE systems are neither maintained nor updated regularly, creating reliability and security concerns as they continue to age. Despite their initial fanfare, DRE systems have yet to be proven the most secure and accurate voting system available.

1. The main point of the passage is that

- A. unlike optical-scanning and punch-card voting systems, DRE voting is completely electronic
- B. punch-card voting systems caused a problem in the 2000 presidential election
- C. voting systems have been developed over time to address previous systems' flaws
- D. elections in America have changed greatly over the years

2. Which of the following statements, if true, is evidence to support the writer's argument?

- A. When technology changes, voting systems change along with it.
- B. DRE voting avoids some problems associated with other voting systems.
- C. Several voting systems have become obsolete because they violated voters' privacy.
- D. No modern-day election would ever be conducted using a public voice vote.

3. What evidence is given to support the writer's argument?

- A. Voter's choices are immediately recorded digitally instead of initially using a paper ballot.
- B. Mechanical-lever voting machines were replaced by other mechanical voting devices.
- C. Punch-card voting involves electronic processing.
- D. In the mid-18th century, public votes were popular.

4. Which of the following is an example that strengthens the argument?

- A. A local businessowner reported no issues using a DRE system.
- B. DRE voting became popular as a result of the 2000 election glitches.
- C. In 2018, some DRE voters reported difficulty marking their votes accurately due to the DRE interface or hardware.
- D. Audits of elections that use DRE demonstrate this system is more accurate than paper ballots.

Answers and explanations start on page 648.