

Lesson 6: Conclusions and Generalizations

Key Ideas

- A conclusion is an idea figured out from different pieces of information.
- You can use your knowledge of the real world to help you draw conclusions when you read.

GED® TEST TIP

Be sure to read an entire passage before answering the questions about it. That way, you'll take all the information into account and won't "jump to conclusions."

Conclusions

A detective draws a **conclusion** when he looks at different pieces of evidence and figures out who committed a crime. A doctor draws a conclusion when she looks at different symptoms and figures out what illness a patient has. You, as a reader, can draw a conclusion when you take pieces of information and put them together to figure out something that the writer has not directly stated.

See what conclusions you can draw from this notice sent by an employer.

Thank you for sending your resume in response to our newspaper advertisement. We consider our company—and especially our employees—to be the best. And we want to keep it that way. For that reason, we carefully review each resume that is sent to us. We want to ensure that our company and the new employee we hire are a perfect match.

This process, of course, takes some time. We want to assure you that your resume is part of this process and will be reviewed. If we feel we have an opening that matches your qualifications, we will contact you. If you have not heard from us within ten business days of the postmark of this notice, be assured that we will keep your resume on file for one year and review it when future openings arise.

- If a job applicant has not heard from this company three weeks after reading this notice, what can she conclude?
 - (1) The review process is taking longer than expected.
 - (2) She did not get the job that she applied for.

Option (2) is correct. The notice says that the review process takes some time. It also says that the company will contact the applicant if it feels she matches the opening. Finally, if she doesn't hear from it within ten business days, her resume will go on file. You can conclude that the review process takes about ten business days, and if she hasn't been contacted in that time, she didn't get the job.

- What kind of notice can you conclude this is?
 - (1) a personal note sent to this individual applicant
 - (2) a form notice sent to all applicants

Again, you're correct if you chose (2). The way the notice is worded, with no personal details, lets you conclude this. You can also use your knowledge of the real world and business form letters to conclude that this, too, is a form.

- What conclusion can you draw about the company's attitude?
 - (1) It cares about its employees and their job satisfaction.
 - (2) It cares only about profits and employee productivity.

You are correct if you chose (1). The fact that the company states not only that it considers its employees to be the best but also that it takes the time to communicate sincerely with potential employees lets you conclude that.

Practice 6.1

Questions 1 through 5 refer to the following excerpt from an autobiography.

EXCERPTED FROM *THE STORY OF MY LIFE*

1 Once there were eleven tadpoles in a glass globe set in a window full of plants. I remember the eagerness with which I made discoveries about them. It was great fun to plunge my hand into the bowl and feel the tadpoles frisk about, and to let them slip and slide between my fingers. One day a more ambitious fellow leaped beyond the edge of the bowl and fell on the floor, where I found him to all appearance more dead than alive. The only sign of life was a slight wriggling of his tail. But no sooner had he returned to his element than he darted to the bottom, swimming round and round in joyous activity. He had made his leap, he had seen the great world, and was content to stay in his pretty glass house under the big fuchsia tree until he attained the dignity of froghood. Then he went to live in the leafy pool at the end of the garden, where he made the summer nights musical with his quaint love-song.

2 Thus I learned from life itself. At the beginning I was only a little mass of possibilities. It was my teacher who unfolded and developed them. When she came, everything about me breathed of love and joy and was full of meaning. She has never since let pass an opportunity to point out the beauty that is in everything, nor has she ceased trying in thought and action and example to make my life sweet and useful.

3 It was my teacher's genius, her quick sympathy, her loving tact which made the first years of my education so beautiful.

From *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller.

1. What can you conclude about the writer's view of learning?

- A. It is rewarding and one of life's joys.
- B. It is better with a strict teacher.
- C. It happens very slowly, if at all.
- D. It happens most often when you are alone.

2. What conclusion can you draw about the writer's character?

The writer is

- A. self-centered and demanding
- B. confused and searching
- C. fearful and shy
- D. insightful and grateful

3. If Helen's teacher was trying to teach her addition, what method would the teacher most likely use?

- A. make Helen stand and recite addition facts for one hour every day
- B. assign an abundance of addition homework
- C. show Helen how addition is used in everyday life
- D. ask a well-known mathematician to teach the subject

4. How are the thoughts in this personal account organized?

- A. as a comparison with a frog followed by a contrast
- B. as a problem followed by its solution
- C. in chronological order, or time sequence
- D. as an anecdote followed by a generalization based on the anecdote

5. Later in her story, Helen compares a child's mind to a shallow brook "which ripples and dances merrily over the stony course of its education. . . ." Based on this information and the excerpt above, what is similar about the tadpole and a child?

- A. They learn from others.
- B. They are eager to grow into adulthood.
- C. Youth can make them do dangerous things.
- D. Their development is not entirely smooth.

Answers and explanations start on page 646.

Key Ideas

- A generalization is a broad statement about a group or class.
- When assessing a generalization, evaluate the writer's evidence.
- An important factor in thoughtful reading is distinguishing between faulty and valid generalizations.

GED® TEST TIP

If you see a generalization, look for supporting evidence that may be introduced by phrases such as "for example," "such as," or "for instance."

Generalizations

A **generalization** is a broad statement about a group of people, objects, or things or about a type of event. Usually, it takes something that is true in one specific case and extends it to every possible case. For example, "My hometown celebrated Independence Day with fireworks last summer," is a fact about a specific Fourth of July in a specific town; a generalization could be "Every Independence Day, my hometown celebrates with fireworks."

- Identify one statement with *F* for a fact and the other with *G* for generalization.
- (1) Every clerk in the store focuses on customer service more than any other aspect of the job.
 - (2) Tina, the manager of the women's shoe department, helps customers select just the right pair of shoes.

If you identified option (2) as being a fact and option (1) as being a generalization, you were correct. One hint that (1) is the generalization is the word "every." Words like *all*, *never*, and *always* show up in sentences that make broad, sweeping statements. The sentence about Tina, on the other hand, gives specific information about a specific person and so is not a generalization.

Generalizations can be valid and true when properly made. A writer can support a generalization with an example (like Tina, above) and information that shows why the example represents the whole group. Often, a generalization is too broad to apply to every member of a group, and a good writer will acknowledge that there are exceptions.

"Dogs are typically more attached to their owners than cats are, due in part to their evolution as pack animals. My dog will jump up to meet me as soon as I get home from work, while my cat will continue napping serenely until hunger motivates him to do otherwise."

- What example is given to support the generalization that "Dogs are typically more attached to their owners than cats"?
- (1) Dogs evolved as pack animals.
 - (2) The author's dog jumps up to meet her, while her cat ignores her.

The example of the author's dog's attachment to her, (2), illustrates and supports the generalization that most dogs show greater attachment to their owners. The specific example helps to show that the statement is based on experience.

Writers sometimes make the mistake of drawing **faulty generalizations** based on too little information. Imagine a person who bites into an apple, finds a worm, and concludes that all apples have worms in them. Since a generalization is a broad statement, a **valid generalization** requires broad knowledge to justify it. A generalization about American cities is more likely to be faulty if the writer bases it on only one city but more likely to be valid if the writer supports it with knowledge of 20 cities. With a larger sample, the writer is also better able to know whether to qualify a generalization as something that is true in most, but not all, cases.

- Identify one statement with *FG* for a faulty generalization and the other with *VG* for a valid generalization.
- (1) Every breed of dog has four legs, so almost all dogs have four legs.
 - (2) Some dogs bark at kids, so all dogs must dislike or fear children.

You are correct if you chose (1) as the valid generalization: the writer shows awareness of many different types of dogs. Choice (2) is a faulty generalization; dogs may bark at children for reasons other than fear or dislike.

Practice 6.2

Questions 1 through 3 are based on the following newspaper editorial.

OPINION: DOUBTS ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING

1 Shady Hollow was hit yesterday with record cold temperatures. And yet, despite this deep freeze, we'll continue to be subjected to the doctrine of global warming.

2 There is plenty to be said for fuel economy—anyone who lived through the energy crisis of the 1970s learned that lesson the hard way—but it's time we dispense with the terror campaign of doomsday climatology and recognize it for the pseudoscience that it is. Whenever Shady Hollow gets a big hit of winter weather, common sense tells us that the idea of "warming" seems fishy, yet climatologists insist on playing the same tune. More and more, this tune is taken up by policy-makers and government bodies, who steer our administrations accordingly. It must be the case that ivory towers have good weather stripping and excellent heating systems; as for the man on the street, he's finding his street a chilly one these days.

3 The simple fact is that it is logically impossible to reconcile a record cold temperature with the idea that it's getting warmer. A record cold temperature, and this may be worth spelling out, means exactly this: it has never been colder on this date in recorded history. If "warming" means what it sounds like it means—that temperatures are rising, not falling—then there is a real problem here, because that is quite simply not what is happening.

4 It may take years to get out from under the orthodoxy of the accepted opinion on climate change, but the facts themselves will not go away. Sooner or later, we'll be forced to acknowledge that we're still bundling up, and when that happens, we can stop building policy discussions around fictions.

1. What is a generalization that is made in paragraph 3?

- A. Shady Hollow has the coldest temperatures in the region.
- B. Global warming can only be valid if it predicts high temperatures.
- C. On the whole, temperatures are not rising.
- D. If children are taught a simpler theory, then a more complex theory should be set aside.

2. What evidence does the author give to support his generalization about global warming?

- A. Shady Hollow was hit with a record cold temperature yesterday.
- B. Ivory towers have good weather stripping.
- C. It may take years to change opinions on climate change.
- D. There is plenty to be said for fuel economy.

3. Which of the following pieces of information would put the author in a better position to make a generalization about climate change?

- A. an account of the energy crisis of the 1970s
- B. minutes of policy discussions from the 1970s through today
- C. interviews with the "man on the street" from the 1990s through today
- D. nationwide data tables of temperatures from the 1980s through today

Answers and explanations start on page 646.