



**MCAT**

**Critical Analysis &  
Reasoning Section  
Review**

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# 10 Common Mistakes

1. Starting CARS preparation too late.
2. Prioritizing quantity of practice over quality of practice.
3. Not highlighting with purpose.
4. Spending too long reading the passage/thinking you need to understand every detail.
5. Not understanding what the question is asking.
6. Not differentiating between answer choices.
7. Choosing answers just because they are mentioned in the passage.
8. Choosing answers based on your assumptions or opinions.
9. Choosing answers just based on *vibes*.
10. Not having a growth mindset/thinking they can't improve.

# Reading Comprehension: Main Points

**What is the passage about?**

What is the importance of this topic?  
What point is the author making about it?  
What is the author's position on this topic?

**What explanations are given?**

How do these relate to each other?  
How do these relate to the thesis?

**What examples are given?**

How do these relate to each other?  
How do these relate to the thesis?



# Types of CARS Questions

**Foundations of Comprehension**  
**Reasoning Within the Text**  
**Reasoning Beyond the Text**

# Foundations of Comprehension

The topics of some passages in the Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills section will be familiar; some will not. Explanations, illustrative examples, and definitions of significant specialized terms in these passages will help you develop the strong basic foundation needed for answering all the questions you encounter in this section of the MCAT<sup>®</sup> exam.

Additionally, some questions may ask you about the overall meaning of information in the passages or the author's central themes or ideas; others may ask you to select the definitions of specific words or phrases as they are used in context. These kinds of questions help you build the foundation that will allow you to think in new ways about concepts or facts presented in the passages. Paragraph numbers may be included in questions to help you locate relevant portions of the text.

# Reasoning Within the Text

Questions that test Reasoning Within the Text rely on many of the same activities required for Foundations of Comprehension questions. One key difference is in the scope of the information needed to answer the question. The Foundations of Comprehension questions mainly focus on inferring meaning or intent from an immediate sentence context. Questions that test Reasoning Within the Text differ from those assessing Foundations of Comprehension in that they ask you to integrate distant passage components into a more generalized and complex interpretation of passage meaning.

It's important to remember that Reasoning Within the Text questions do not ask you to provide your own personal opinion. You may, in fact, disagree with the author's overall conclusion yet find that the conclusion is a reasonable inference from the limited information provided in the passage. If you happen to know some obscure fact or anecdote outside the scope of the passage that could invalidate the author's conclusion, ignore it. The content of the passage or new information introduced by the questions should be the only sources you base your responses on.

# Reasoning Beyond the Text

The final category, Reasoning Beyond the Text, requires you to use one of two analysis or reasoning skills, which in a way can be thought of as two sides of a single coin.

Questions assessing the first set of skills ask you to *apply or extrapolate* information or ideas presented in the passage to a new or novel situation – for example, extending information the author presents beyond the actual context of the passage.

The second set of skills involves considering new information presented in a test question, mentally *integrating* this new information into the passage content, and then *assessing* the potential impact of introducing the new elements into the actual passage. Reasoning about new, hypothetical elements should cause you to synthesize passage content anew and alter your interpretation of the passage in some plausible way.

Application and integration questions elicit some of the same kinds of thinking. Both types deal with changes caused by combinations or comparisons, and both test your mental flexibility. They do differ, however, and their distinct requirements are explained in more detail below. Remember, though, that as with questions assessing different levels of analysis and reasoning, you must still use only the content of the passages and the new information in the questions to determine your answers. Keep avoiding the temptation to bring your existing knowledge to bear in answering these questions.



# My Recommended Approach

## 1. Reading the Passage

- Identify the topic being discussed
- Identify the importance of this topic
- Highlight important points and people.

## 2. Analyzing the Question

- Rephrase the question in your own words
- Identify if passage information is needed to answer the question

## 3. Answering the Question

- Find passage information on this topic.
- Rephrase the answer choices into simpler ideas
- Do any answer choices reflect the same idea as the supporting evidence you found?
  - Yes? → Pick that one
  - No? → Eliminate the ones that are 100% irrelevant.
    - Analyze the differences between the remaining answers.
    - Based on the passage information, which one is *closest* to the idea/relationship being expressed in the passage.

# **CARS PASSAGE BREAKDOWN**

CARS DIAGNOSTIC TOOL: PASSAGE 12

P1 Can Achilles really be the first hero of literature? He seems a fool, an infantile narcissist. The first word of *The Iliad* is *menin*—in old Greek, “rage” or “wrath”—the kind of rage that has an element of divine fury in it and destroys armies and breaks cities. But to us, Achilles’ anger seems less divine than egotistical. His war booty has been stolen by another man. Is not the immense size of his anger almost absurdly out of proportion to its cause?

P2 He is very young, a compound of muscle and beauty with so powerful a sense of his own precedence that he is willing to let the war go badly when his honor is sullied. The Trojans kill many Greeks and come close to burning the Greek ships and cutting off their retreat. Hoping to stem the tide, Achilles’ beloved friend Patroclus enters the battle wearing Achilles’ armor and, as a substitute for Achilles, is slain.

P3 Enraged, inconsolable, Achilles prepares at last to enter the battle. The sky darkens, the underworld nearly cracks open. Huge forces, unstoppable, move into place. Achilles begins to fight, expelling his anguish in a rampage.

P4 The Western reader comes from a society that is nominally ethical. The U.S. legal and administrative system, presidential utterances, popular culture (in which TV police officers rarely fail to care for the victims of crime) are swathed in concern. Since many U.S. citizens believe their society is actually indifferent to hardship, it is no surprise that irony and cynicism barnacle their attitudes toward public life. By contrast, the Greek view was savage, but it was offered without hypocrisy. Accepting death in battle as inevitable, the Greek and Trojan aristocrats of *The Iliad* experience the world not as pleasant or unpleasant, or as good and evil, but as glorious or shameful—a noble rather than an ethical conception of life.

P5 How can a man who stays out of the action through many days (and many thousands of lines), angrily keeping to his tent as friends and enemies die, remain the hero of an epic? The answer suggests why *The Iliad*, for all its frightening strangeness, will not easily yield its place or its predominance at the beginning of our literary tradition.

P6 Achilles' rage has the remarkable effect of stunning this haughty young man into a new conception of war. Suddenly, he is groping toward an idea of honor that does not depend on the bartering of women and goods or on the opinions men have of one another's prowess. "We are all held in a single honor. . . . A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much." For the greatest warrior in the world, that is a devastating admission. From the Western point of view, Achilles has jumped forward to a private, or even spiritual, sense of worth: Honor is a matter between one and Zeus or between one and oneself, and in the end, no one can be compensated for the death of another; the worth of life is immeasurable. Achilles has come close to breaking with the honor/shame code of Homer's warrior society.

P7 Rage such as Achilles', once awakened, cannot be silenced. The questions he asks about war and death remain unanswered in the poem, because they cannot be answered. *The Iliad*, for all its vaunting glory, remains in tension with itself, questioning, and even subverting, its own ethos, and it leaves one profoundly uneasy. Achilles knows he will attain immortal renown as a hero, yet he is the only one who takes the measure of death.

# Main Idea Check

**1. What is the topic of this passage in 1 word?**

- Achilles

**2. What is the importance of this topic? What point is being made?**

- Discussing Achilles as the first hero of literature.

**3. What is the author's opinion of this topic?**

- First discusses doubt people may have, but then the rest of the passage is about explaining why he is a "hero".



# Question 1:

## What is the question asking?

- What is the difference between Greek's idea of rage and Achille's anger ***before*** Patroclus died.

## What information do we need?

- What did the passage say is the difference between the Greek's idea of rage and Achille's anger ***before*** Patroclus died?

## What does the passage say?

- Paragraph 1: Greek...kind of rage...has an element of divine fury... Achilles' anger seems less divine than egotistical."
  - Greek's rage is god-like (divine)
  - Achille's anger not god-like, selfish (egotistical)

The difference implicit in the passage between the Greek concept of rage and Achilles's anger prior to the death of Patroclus is a distinction between:

A the divine and the all-too-human.

B classical and modern conceptions of human nature.

C restraint and excess.

D the quest for glory and the quest for booty.

# Question 1:

- How do the answer choices compare to the information you found?**
  - Greek's rage is god-like (divine)
  - Achille's anger not god-like, selfish(egotistical)
- Is there an answer choice that matches what the passage said?**
- If not, are there any answer choices that are 100% wrong?** (Look for things that are out of scope or irrelevant)

The difference implicit in the passage between the Greek concept of rage and Achilles's anger prior to the death of Patroclus is a distinction between:

- A** the **divine** and the **all-too-human**. ✘
- B** classical and modern ~~conceptions of human nature~~. ✘
- C** restraint and excess. ✘
- D** the ~~quest for glory~~ and the ~~quest for booty~~. ✘

## Question 2:

### ❑ What is the question asking?

- What is the author's description of Greek ideas and how does it relate to the statement "sometimes war is antiwar because it prevents an even bigger war" → we fight to stop more fights

### ❑ What information do we need?

- What does the author say about Greek ideas?

### ❑ What does the passage say?

- Paragraph 4: "...the Greek view was savage....experience the world....as glorious or shameful – a noble rather than ethical conception of life.
- Greek's view it as glorious or noble, NOT ethical (right vs. wrong).

It has been argued that sometimes war is antiwar because it prevents an even bigger war. How does this argument relate to the author's description of Greek ideas?

**A** It sees war as political; the Greeks saw war as ethical. ✘

**B** It considers war in moral terms; the Greeks considered war in terms of glory. ✘

**C** It puts war in a heroic context that is similar to Greek ideas. ✘

**D** It affirms the Greek belief about the worth of human life. ✘

## Question 2:

### How do the answer choices compare to the information you found?

- Greek's view it as glorious or noble, NOT ethical (right vs. wrong).

### Is there an answer choice that matches what the passage said?

### If not, are there any answer choices that are 100% wrong? (Look for things that are out of scope or irrelevant)

It has been argued that sometimes war is antiwar because it prevents an even bigger war. How does this argument relate to the author's description of Greek ideas?

A It sees war as political; the Greeks saw ~~war as ethical.~~ ✘

B It considers war in moral terms; the Greeks considered war in terms of glory. ✘

C It puts war in a ~~heroic context~~ that is similar to Greek ideas. ✘

D It affirms the Greek belief about the ~~worth of human life.~~ ✘

## Question 3:

### What is the question asking?

- What point is Achille's quote supporting?

### What information do we need?

- What point was the quote made in reference to?

### What does the passage say?

- Paragraph 6: "...he is groping toward an idea of honor that does not depend on the bartering of women and goods or on the opinions men have of one another's prowess."
  - Achille's view of honor has changed.

The author quotes the lines "We are all held in a single honor. . . . A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much" (paragraph 6) to support the conclusion that Achilles:

A questioned the concept of honor in war. ✕

B was angered by the death of Patroclus. ✕

C thought that all people should have equal rights. ✕

D had deep faith in his gods. ✕

## Question 3:

**How do the answer choices compare to the information you found?**

- Achille's view of honor has changed.

**Is there an answer choice that matches what the passage said?**

**If not, are there any answer choices that are 100% wrong?** (Look for things that are out of scope or irrelevant)

The author quotes the lines "We are all held in a single honor. . . . A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much" (paragraph 6) to support the conclusion that Achilles:

A questioned the concept of honor in war. ✕

B was ~~angered by the death of Patroclus.~~ ✕

C thought that all people should have ~~equal rights.~~ ✕

D had ~~deep faith in his gods.~~ ✕

## Question 4:

### ❑ What is the question asking?

- Why did the author mention Western culture?

### ❑ What information do we need?

- What is the purpose of the discussion of Western culture?
- **What does the passage say?**
- **Paragraph 4:** “The Western reader comes from a society that is nominally ethical... Greek view was savage...glorious or shameful...a noble rather than an ethical conception of life.”
  - Contrasting western readers/cultures and Greek readers/cultures.
  - Explaining to Western readers the differences between western and Greek culture’s views of death/the world as it relates to *The Iliad*.

What is the function of the author’s discussion of Western culture (paragraph 4)?

- A To suggest that Western culture is less moral than was Greek culture ✕
- B To emphasize the similarities between the culture of the West and that of Greece ✕
- C To help Westerners to understand the poem in the context of Greek culture ✕
- D To explain the literary importance of *The Iliad* in all cultures ✕

## Question 4:

### How do the answer choices compare to the information you found?

- Contrasting western readers/cultures and Greek readers/cultures.
- Explaining to Western readers the differences between western and Greek culture's views as it relates to *The Iliad*.

### Is there an answer choice that matches what the passage said?

- ### If not, are there any answer choices that are 100% wrong? (Look for things that are out of scope or irrelevant)

What is the function of the author's discussion of Western culture (paragraph 4)?

A To suggest that Western culture is ~~less moral~~ than was Greek culture

B To ~~emphasize the similarities~~ between the culture of the West and that of Greece

C To help Westerners to understand the poem in the context of Greek culture

D To explain the ~~literary importance~~ of *The Iliad* in all cultures

# Question 5:

## ❑ What is the question asking?

- Achille's idea about the value of life is NOT in agreement with which answer choice?

## ❑ What information do we need?

- What is Achille's opinion on the value of life?
- **What does the passage say?**
- **Paragraph 6:** "Achilles has jumped forward to a private, or even spiritual, sense of worth: Honor is a matter between one and Zeus or between one and oneself, and in the end, no one can be compensated for the death of another; the worth of life is immeasurable."
  - You cannot be repaid/make up for killing another
  - The value of life is too large/priceless → life is precious

Someone who accepted Achilles' conclusion about the value of life would probably NOT be inclined to:

**A** struggle against death when diagnosed with a fatal disease. ✕

**B** bring children into the world. ✕

**C** protest against war. ✕

**D** accept public accolades for killing enemy soldiers. ✕

## Question 5:

**How do the answer choices compare to the information you found?**

- You cannot be repaid/make up for killing another
- The value of life is too large/priceless → life is precious

**Is there an answer choice that matches what the passage said?**

- If not, are there any answer choices that are 100% wrong?** (Look for things that are out of scope or irrelevant)

Someone who accepted Achilles' conclusion about the value of life would probably NOT be inclined to:

A struggle against death when diagnosed with a fatal disease. ✕

B bring children into the world. ✕

C protest against war. ✕

D accept public accolades for killing enemy soldiers. ✕