

Parallel Flaw

1. The first part of the passage contains an implied if-then statement. It can be restated as, “If a lawyer does not return phone calls from her clients, then she cannot be a skillful, experienced lawyer.” This can be pictured as

$$\sim PC \rightarrow \sim SE$$

Part of the next sentence in the passage, “*she returns all of my phone calls,*” negates the premise in the “if-then” statement. From this, the author concludes that her lawyer is skillful and experienced. This can be summarized as follows:

$$\begin{array}{c} \sim PC \rightarrow \sim SE \\ \underline{PC} \\ SE \end{array}$$

Remember that an *if-then* statement tells us only two things: First, it tells us that if the premise is true, then the conclusion is also true. Second, if the conclusion is false, then we know that the premise is also false. (This is the contrapositive.).

Thus, the diagram presents an *if-then* statement, and then denies the premise of the statement. Thus, we cannot say anything about the conclusion, not based upon what we know generally about *if-then* statements. If the conclusion were denied, then we would know the premise is false. But if the premise is false, we can go no further. We do not know the effect of a false premise upon the conclusion. This passage is an example of the fallacy of denying the premise.

Look at the structure of the answer selections. Selection (D) contains an implied if-then statement as follows: “If a school-age child spends three afternoons a week at gymnastics

practice, then he does not have a proper balance between school work and gymnastics.” This can be depicted as

$$3G \rightarrow \sim B$$

The next part of (D) negates the premise because it states that Tom does not spend three afternoons at gymnastics practice; he only spends one afternoon there. But the argument erroneously concludes that denying the premise also denies the conclusion. Denying that Tom does not have a proper balance (or concluding that Tom does have a proper balance between school work and gymnastics) does not necessarily follow from denying the premise. Thus, selection (D) presents the same erroneous reasoning presented in the passage and it is the correct answer.

2. The author of this passage uses a false correlation in his argument. He assumes that subzero temperatures lead to heavy snow storms in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The author doesn’t recognize that some other weather condition might lead to both the subzero temperatures and the heavy snow storms. As you look over the answer selections, it appears that selection (C) makes the same mistake. In (C), it is assumed that participation in high school debate must influence students to attend law school. Instead, perhaps a student’s interest in public affairs or some other subject *causes* her to take high school debate classes *and* go to law school. The argument doesn’t contemplate another possible cause. Thus, selection (C) is the correct answer. The other selections also contain flaws, but they do not pattern the same defect contained in the passage.

3. The passage presents a false causal argument. It implies that medieval universities endured for centuries because they had no administrators, but gives no evidence for this cause and effect relationship. There may have been other factors that caused the universities' longevity. Choice (B) presents a similar false causal argument, implying the use of a computer caused the novelist's stories to be accepted for publication. The answer is (B).
As to the remaining choices, (A) is neither invalid nor a causation argument. (C) is a *valid* argument. (D) is a reasonable argument, though a bit strong. Finally, (E) is not an invalid argument.
4. The argument clearly contradicts itself. So look for an answer-choice that contradicts itself in like manner. Choice (A) is not self-contradictory. In fact, it's a fairly sound argument—eliminate it. Choice (B), on the other hand, is not a very sound argument. The police, though understaffed, may realize the seriousness of the situation and rearrange their priorities. Nevertheless, (B) does not contain a contradiction—eliminate it. Choice (C), though questionable, does not contain a contradiction—eliminate it. Choice (D), however, does contain a contradiction. It begins by stating that both the powerful and the poor had to serve in Vietnam and ends by stating that some powerful people—namely, Stevens—did not have to serve. This is a contradiction, so (D) is probably the answer. Choice (E), like the original argument, is invalid but does not contain a contradiction—eliminate it. The answer is (D).
5. The argument in the passage is circular (and filled with non-sequiturs). It is incumbent on the writer to give evidence or support for the conclusion. In this argument, though, the writer first states that democracy is the best government, the rest is merely “noise,” until he restates the conclusion. Choice (A) is a reasonably valid causation argument—eliminate. (B) argues by generalization. Although it is of questionable validity, it is not circular because the conclusion, “it will happen again,” is not stated, nor is it implicit in the premises—eliminate. (C) is not circular because the conclusion is mentioned only once—eliminate. (D) begins by stating, “I’m obsessed with volleyball.” It does not, however, provide compelling evidence for that claim: training seven days a week, rather than indicating obsession, may be required for, say, members of the Olympic Volleyball Team. Furthermore, the argument repeats the conclusion at the end. So it is circular in the same manner as the original. Hence (D) is our answer.

6. (A) No. Harold is objecting to the fact that Genevieve apparently does not practice what she preaches. She says one should avoid flying, yet she is flying more than ever before. In this argument, David is not offering advice.
- (B) No. Harold is objecting to the fact that Genevieve apparently does not practice what she preaches. She says one should avoid flying, yet she is flying more than ever before. The person in this argument is not offering advice.
- (C) No. Harold is objecting to the fact that Genevieve apparently does not practice what she preaches. She says one should avoid flying, yet she is flying more than ever before. In this argument, Susan *does* practice what she preaches—that rock climbing is safe.

(D) Yes. Harold is objecting to the fact that Genevieve apparently does not practice what she preaches. She says one should avoid flying, yet she is flying more than ever before. Similarly, the person in this answer-choice is objecting to the fact that Pat apparently does not practice what she preaches. Pat says raw green vegetables should be eaten daily, yet she hardly ever eats them.

(E) No. Harold is objecting to the fact that Genevieve apparently does not practice what she preaches. She says one should avoid flying, yet she is flying more than ever before. In this argument, Gabriel is not offering advice.