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introduction

The LSAT is the most significant part of the law school admissions process. It is unique among all of the major American standardized exams in that respect. Your SAT score carried far less weight when you applied for college, and if you were to apply to business school, your GMAT score would also be of far less importance. Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between the law school that you attend and your future career success, much more so than in other fields such as medicine or education. All that is to say that your performance on the LSAT can have a significant impact on the future trajectory of your legal career. In particular, a top LSAT score can open doors for you that would be very difficult to open otherwise.

But you already knew all of that. Or, if you didn't, you would have soon enough, whether or not you ever came in contact with the *Trainer*. What you really want from this book is to figure out how to get a top score.

Guess what? I have the answer for you. It's not a trick answer, and it's not a gimmick. In fact, it's an answer that you will likely agree with. I'm going to give it to you right at the end of this first lesson (please, don't peek). By the way, I also guarantee you that this first lesson will be the easiest lesson in the book—all it involves is you reading some words and thinking about some ideas. All of the other lessons will require you to do *work*. So, find yourself a comfortable chair, sit back, relax, and please continue...

The LSAT is specifically designed to judge your ability to succeed in law school. Keeping in mind what you know about law school classes and being a law student, if it were your job to design the LSAT, how would you design it? More specifically, what are the characteristics of potential law students that you think the LSAT should be designed to test?

LSAT Basics

Before we move further, let's lay out a few basic facts about the exam.

The Test Sections

The LSAT is currently being administered in person and online. When you take the official exam, you will sit for four sections, but only three of the four sections will be relevant to your score. The three scored sections will include two Logical Reasoning sections and a Reading Comprehension section. You will also have one experimental section, which will be either an additional Logical Reasoning or Reading Comprehension section. The experimental section is used to test questions for future administrations of the LSAT, and your performance on that section does not count toward your score. You are given thirty-five minutes for each section, and these four sections can come in any order. The LSAT also includes a writing component, which is administered separately from the rest of the exam. The essay is not a part of your 180 score, and carries negligible weight in the admissions process, but it is sent to schools along with your score (so don't write anything immature or potentially offensive).

Logical Reasoning

Each Logical Reasoning section will typically contain about twenty-five questions, which averages out to a little more than 1:20 per question. Each Logical Reasoning question consists of a stimulus, which is typically a short two- or three-sentence statement; a question stem, which presents the task at hand; and five answer choices, one of which will be absolutely correct, and four of which will be absolutely incorrect.

Your success on the Logical Reasoning section depends on an equal combination of your reading ability and your reasoning ability. Logical Reasoning also requires a significant amount of mental discipline, in large part because the different question stems often present similar, yet slightly different tasks.

Reading Comprehension

The Reading Comprehension section consists of four different passages. Each passage will have between five and eight associated questions, and the section will typically have about twenty-seven questions total. The four passages will cover four different subject areas: law, history, science, and social science, one passage per general subject. You don't need to have any prior knowledge of the subjects discussed in these passages. Certain questions require a general understanding of the passage, and others require a detailed understanding of specific components, but taken as a whole, Reading Comprehension questions are designed to test your ability to read for reasoning structure.

Sample Logical Reasoning Question

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All Logical Reasoning questions involve a stimulus, a question stem, and five answer choices, one of which will be correct. Most stimuli involve arguments—reasons given to justify a point. Depending on how you count them, there are about sixteen common varieties of question stems. They are all related but unique in their own ways. For this question, we are looking for an answer that allows the conclusion to *follow logically*. To *follow logically* is a big deal on the LSAT—we need an answer that, when added to the argument, *guarantees* that the support given leads us to the conclusion reached.

The author’s point is that the school is in violation of its charter. The reason he gives? The charter states that the student body must include some students with **special educational needs**, and no students with **learning disabilities** have yet enrolled in the school.

The author has made a flaw of reasoning here—he has assumed that those with learning disabilities are the only ones with special needs. It could be that students have special needs for other reasons. In order for this argument to work, we need to *know* that those with learning disabilities are the only ones with special educational needs, and answer choice (D) gives us that information. (D) is therefore correct. No other answer choice gives us the information we need to *guarantee* the author’s conclusion.

This is a question from a previously administered LSAT, and so I’ve notated where it is from, as I will all official LSAT questions we will use in this book. The notation below the question means that the question is from “**P**rep **T**est 34, **S**ection 2, and it is **Q**uestion 10.”

How Is the LSAT Scored?

The three scored sections will typically contain a total of approximately 75 questions. The LSAT is scored using a simple system that tallies up the number of questions you got right (your raw score) and compares that with how other people perform on the same exam (or, to be more specific, compares that with a *prediction* of how other people will perform on the same exam, a prediction based on data from experimental sections of previously administered exams). How you do rela-

tive to others then determines your overall score on the 120–180 scale. There is no scoring difference between getting questions wrong or leaving them blank, and each question is worth the same amount. The raw score to scaled score conversion rates are slightly different from exam to exam. Over time, however, the scoring scales, and the exam itself, have stayed remarkably consistent. The consistency of the exam is a testament (one of many) to its fine quality.

Percentile	99.9	99.5	97.5	92	80	44	13.5	2
Score	180	175	170	165	160	150	140	130

The statistics on this chart represent the average performance to score conversion rate for exams 57–61. The percentile represents how the test taker did relative to other test takers, and the overall score is on a 120–180 scale.

How Effective Are Traditional Study Methods?

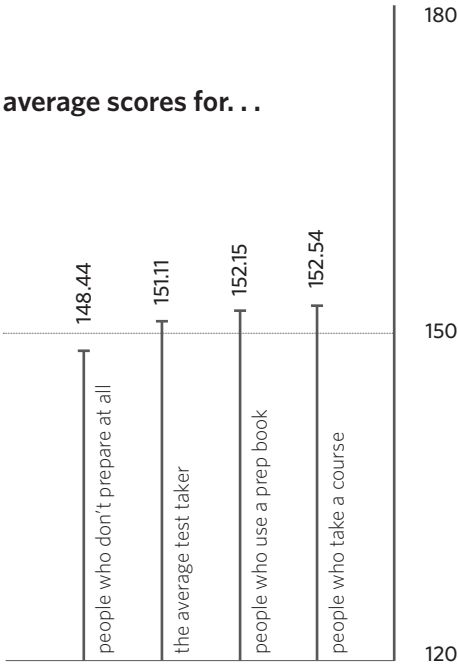
Not very.

The numbers speak for themselves: the common study methods have not been particularly effective for most people. Taking a course or using a guide does not, in and of itself, raise scores significantly over the average, even though that average includes a large number of people who choose to do nothing at all to prepare for the exam.

Still, the fact that *most* students do not improve significantly does not mean that there aren't *some* students who do figure out how to improve significantly. These are the students who get the high scores.

The emperor wears no clothes. In order to improve at the LSAT, it's helpful to know that you *shouldn't* study how most other people study.

All statistics in this book are based on information published by LSAC. The numbers on this table represent test takers from the 2010 - 2011 academic year.



What Is the LSAT Designed to Test?

The LSAT is designed to gauge your ability to succeed as a law student. What do law students have to do?

First of all, law students have to *read* a lot of very dense text—sometimes, they have to read and critically evaluate cases that are hundreds of years old. Typically, the key to correctly reading these passages as a law student is not the ability to absorb every single detail of everything you read (that would be pointless and impossible) but rather to prioritize the important information that is relevant to your purpose.

Secondly, law students have to *think* about what they read. They have to constantly think about how ideas relate to one another (say, for example, how state and federal laws come together), and they have to think about how reasoning leads to a conclusion (for example, whether the evidence provided is enough to convict someone of a crime).

The LSAT is designed to test these types of reading and thinking abilities. But, of course, the LSAT is a multiple-choice, seventy-five question standardized exam, so at its best, it can only test these skills in a very limited and abstract sort of way. The LSAT is thus primarily designed to test four very specific skills, two of which we will think of as reading skills, and two of which we will think of as reasoning skills.

Your Ability to Read for Reasoning Structure

The reading skill that is most consistently tested and rewarded on the LSAT is your ability to read for reasoning structure. Reasoning structure refers to the organization of a passage relative to its purpose; to understand reasoning structure is to understand *why* the author has included the various parts of a passage. Your ability to read for reasoning structure will be relevant to the vast majority of Logical Reasoning questions, and it will also be the *primary* skill that is tested by the Reading Comprehension section.

Your Understanding of Certain Words

Of course, a necessary and integral part of one's reading ability is an expansive and correct vocabulary, and the LSAT does test your ability to understand and use certain words. However, they are not the words you might expect. LSAT writers are not particularly interested in testing the sophistication or depth of your vocabulary. They are much more interested in testing your exact understanding of certain *commonly* used words. The words they care about are the words we all use when we create reasoning relationships, words like “or,” “only,” “therefore,” “must,” and “unless.”

Your Ability to Bring Two or Three Ideas Together

One of the two ways in which the test writers will test your reasoning ability is by creating situations in which two or three given statements can, when taken together, yield additional inferences. That is, the exam presents situations in which you have to figure new things out by bringing information together. This skill is necessary for certain Logical Reasoning questions.

Your Ability to See Why Reasons Don't Justify a Conclusion

The flip side of being able to see when two or three ideas come together to form a valid conclusion is being able to see when two or three ideas *do not* come together to form a particular conclusion. In fact, this ability—the ability to see why reasons given do not justify a conclusion reached—is *the key* reasoning issue that is tested. This will be central to your success on Logical Reasoning questions.

Simple Examples to Illustrate Issues

reasoning structure

Why are these two statements different?

A: Jane went to college, so she must be a good student.

B: Since Jane is a good student, she must have gone to college.

word meaning

What does “or” mean, exactly?

A: You can pick a boy puppy or a girl puppy.

B: To check in at the airport, you must have a driver's license or a passport.

inferences

Every day, Sarah eats either eggs or toast for breakfast. When she eats toast, she always eats jam. Sarah did not eat any jam with her breakfast this morning.

What can you infer?

reasoning flaw

Going back to the two examples for reasoning structure, if you wanted to counter both of those statements respectively, what might you say?

Reasoning Structure

In the first argument, the author's point is that Jane must be a good student. Her reasoning is that Jane went to college.

In the second argument, the author's point is that Jane must have gone to college. His reasoning is that Jane is a good student.

Word Meaning

In real life, the meaning of "or" changes based on context.

In the first instance, the "or" implies exclusivity—in real life, this statement likely means that the person can pick a boy puppy or a girl puppy, but not both.

In the second instance, the "or" does not imply exclusivity—in real life, you would likely still be able to check in at the airport if you had both a driver's license and a passport.

The LSAT requires an absolute rather than contextual understanding of words like "or." On the LSAT, the "or" is inclusive, not exclusive, unless otherwise noted.

1. And you should remember to come back and re-read some of these essays later in your studies.

The Five Mantras of LSAT Preparation

When we first start to think about the LSAT, and when we begin our studies, there are a lot of reasonable predictions we can make about how it might be designed—it's probably going to reward good reading skills, require attention paid to random details, reward a large vocabulary, require some cleverness or creativity, require mental discipline...all of these predictions are reasonable, but only some of them are actually true. The LSAT is not designed to test all of those issues.

For most LSAT students, it typically takes a lot of studying—a lot of fumbling around—until they can develop some sort of big-picture macro understanding of exactly what the LSAT tests, and how it is designed. Most students actually do not get a very clear sense of this until they are near the end of their studies, if they ever get it at all.

This puts these students at a huge disadvantage—a disadvantage that virtually guarantees that they will underperform relative to their abilities on test day. For one, it will mean that they invariably waste their study time. If you don't know exactly what you need to improve on and why, it's going to take you longer to improve.

More importantly, what will happen is that, before these students truly understand what type of thinking is rewarded and what type of thinking is not, before they develop proper instincts about the LSAT, they will have already been practicing for the exam for months, and they will have already developed habits—habits based on some vague or perhaps even flawed understanding of the test. This is a fatal issue because habits will, in large part, determine how well you perform on test day, and you cannot change habits simply by learning something new. Most students form their habits before they have the instincts to form good ones.

You can get a huge head start on your competition if you begin your studies with a clearer understanding of the exam and, more importantly, if you begin with a clearer understanding of exactly how you ought to prepare and what you ought to think about as you study. To that end, I want to begin with five short essays that together express what I think is most important for you to consider when you first begin preparing for your exam. These essays discuss what to think about and, more importantly, how to think about these things. The points I make here serve as a summary of much of the wisdom I've gained from working with thousands of students, some of whom drastically improved their scores and some of whom, unfortunately, did not.

Since you've had no exposure to the test yet, some of this will seem like we are jumping the gun a bit, and it's certainly true that the points I make will ring far truer once you have more LSAT experience under your belt.¹ However, I include these points here so that you can start off with as clear an understanding of your task as possible, and so that some of what I mention will serve as a framework that you can use as you organize and prioritize the things we will be learning in future lessons.

One: Equate Smart with Simple

We are all used to taking exams based on what we *know*. This is particularly true in elementary school, junior high school, and high school. For whatever reason, the exams we're given at these levels are almost always designed to test our ability to repeat back

the things our teachers have taught us, and at their worst, some are even designed to most reward those students who are best at mimicking the way their teachers think.²

These experiences shape how we all think about tests, and about preparing for tests. A fundamental aspect of this mindset is that we equate *knowing more* with *being more prepared* for exams. When it comes to the LSAT, this is a dangerous misconception to have.

This mindset tends to have its biggest impact on high achievers, people who are used to succeeding academically by *working harder to know more*. These students are commonly focused on developing as specific an understanding of each type of LSAT question as they possibly can, and these students are commonly drawn to learning systems that are technical and (seemingly) sophisticated.

Let me be clear. You do need to know some things to do well on this exam, of course. And in this book we will discuss everything that you need to know, at great and sufficient depth. However, success on the LSAT depends on the quality, rather than the quantity, of your understanding and your abilities. Success does not favor those who think they will get better by learning a thousand different details about every type of problem that can appear.

The LSAT is designed to be a test of how you think, not what you know. The people who write the problems have little interest in gauging your understanding of advanced logic principles, and they have little interest in testing the expanse of your vocabulary. The test writers actually have an obligation to create an exam that does not give an advantage to people of a certain background or life experience, and so they cannot create an exam that rewards, for example, an understanding of formal reasoning that only a philosophy major might have, or the meaning of technical terminology that is unique to a particular scientific field. Like the writers of *Seinfeld*, their *job* is to create a product that is about *nothing in particular*. Their job is to create an exam that determines right and wrong based on the most fundamental elements of public human interaction—our basic ability to understand and organize what we read, and our basic ability to gauge reasoning, that is, our ability to see when the reasoning given justifies a point that is being made, and when it doesn't—what most of us think of on a day-to-day basis as *common sense*.

I am not suggesting that the LSAT is easy. The LSAT is not easy! However, it's important to know that harder questions are generally not more difficult because they test more challenging concepts or require you to know unusual words. Harder questions test exactly the same things easier questions do, but in a more challenging manner. Your job is not to be a master of details, but rather a master of the fundamentals. To that end, I want to encourage you to equate *smart* with *simple* when you think of this exam.

On a practical level, this means that as you learn new concepts and strategies, and as you practice problems and review them, you want to always work toward attaining as simple and clean an understanding as possible, and you want to get in the habit of equating a simple understanding with a complete one. If you truly know what's wrong with an argument, you shouldn't need an official name or formal language to describe it—you should be able to describe it using your everyday language. If you truly feel comfortable with a type of question, you shouldn't have to remind yourself to keep ten things in your mind—you should be able to intuitively focus on just two or three fundamental concerns. Thinking about the LSAT in a simple way has numerous advantages, and will pay off with great effect both in your studies and on test day.

2. Did you ever get points taken off on a math exam for getting the right answer but “not showing your work,” or for seeing a different theme in a book than the one your teacher told you to see?

The LSAT is a test of reading ability and common sense

solutions for examples on page 13 (continued)

Inferences

Since Sarah did not eat jam, she must not have eaten toast. Since she didn't eat toast this morning, she must have eaten eggs.

Reasoning Flaw

For the first argument, the author is flawed in assuming that having gone to college ensures that Jane is a good student—maybe she got into college because of connections, never studied, and didn't do so well.

For the second argument, the author is flawed in assuming that because Jane is a good student, she must have gone to college—maybe she chose instead to join a start-up company.

When you understand things simply, it is far easier to organize what you know. You make it easier on your brain to see how this new thing you are learning is related to everything else you've just learned, and by being better able to relate ideas, you can take your thinking ability to greater depths. In the next few months, we are going to be learning a lot of concepts, and developing a lot of strategies. A simple understanding will make it far easier for you to bring together everything you learn.

Thinking simply also makes it far easier to utilize your own natural intelligence and real-life understanding. When you make your studies more complex and formal, it works as a barrier between you and your mental power—instead of using your own good sense to understand a situation, you end up trying to understand a situation in terms of how you understand certain technical terms or abstract concepts. Some LSAT teaching systems even encourage this type of disconnect,³ but you do not want anything to get in the way of using the talents of your own mind. A simple understanding, as opposed to a technical one, gives you the best chance to utilize your thinking abilities to their fullest. In my experience, when students are able to do this, most have the natural ability to score at a very high level.

3. "Don't trust yourself!" these books tell you. "Think exactly as we tell you to!" These systems aren't particularly effective.

Finally, a simple understanding will be the one that you can apply best on test day. Human beings are only capable of consciously thinking about one thing at a time. *Trying* to think of a hundred things at once does you no good, and an overly complicated understanding will put you in a place where you end up trying to do just that. A simple understanding will help you best apply what you know under pressure.

Two: Focus on What to Think About (Not What to Think)

Imagine riding an elephant.

You can just sit on top of the animal and choose not to do anything. If so, the elephant will do as it chooses, and you will go along for the ride. But if you have the understanding and motivation, you can train this elephant to do what you would like—you can train it to take you where you want to go, for example, or you can train it to lift heavy things for you. This is of great benefit because—and this is very important—you are not capable of doing the work that the elephant does. The rider who is happiest and wisest is the one who understands how to control the elephant, and does not try to do the work himself.

The analogy of a rider and an elephant is commonly used in educational circles to discuss the relationship between our conscious mind and our unconscious mind. If you don't control your unconscious, it can drift. If you train it, it can do amazing things for you.

This analogy is particularly relevant to how we perform during standardized exams. Our conscious mind is the rider. It gets all of the notoriety and attention because it is what we most notice and because it *seems* to be in control. But once that timer starts, your unconscious—your instincts and habits for what to think about and how—takes over.

Let's talk more specifically by discussing just one important skill you are going to have to showcase on test day: your ability to evaluate the reasoning in an argument. Most Logical Reasoning questions require you to evaluate the reasons an author gives in or

der to justify his or her point, and your success on the entire Logical Reasoning section hinges, in large part, on your ability to do this.

So, you know this is going to be a big part of the LSAT—how do you prepare your rider and your elephant to perform at their best?

The wrong way to go about it would be to place the burden of the work on the rider. We do this when we try to memorize a list of fifty things that could be wrong with arguments, and we do this when we use tips and tricks, “markers,” or “keywords,” to make our decisions on a technical and conscious level. We do this when we focus on what we need to know rather than what we need to think about. And, of course, we do this when we fail to train our elephant.

The right way to go about doing this is to give your “elephant” everything that it needs to properly prepare—a simple and intuitive *understanding* of the issues that will appear on the exam, logical and usable *strategies* for handling all of these issues, and, most importantly, plenty of *experience* putting this understanding and these strategies to good use (more on understanding, strategies, and experience in just a bit).

Don’t spend your time training your rider. Do not think that by hearing about some clever strategy or memorizing some trick, you can do the heavy lifting needed for success on the LSAT. Invest your energy into training the elephant and becoming a good rider. You can do this by focusing on what to think about rather than what to think, by focusing on the decisions to be made rather than the right way to make them, and by making sure you get plenty of experience with the types of situations that you are likely to face on test day.

Three: Utilize the Power of Compound Learning

An understanding of addition and subtraction properties is useful and necessary in life, but an understanding of multiplicative properties, when applied properly, is far more valuable. To explain why, I want to start with a simple fable about twin brothers Wilbur and Wallace.

Both Wilbur and Wallace were taught from an early age to save for their retirements. Wilbur loved addition, and Wallace loved multiplication. For the sixty years that Wilbur worked, he added \$1,000 each year to a retirement savings account. At the end of his work years, he retired with \$60,000.

Imagine if Wallace, who loved multiplication, put \$1,000 into an investment account after his first year of work, and *never put another dime into that account for the rest of his work years*. The account paid him about 10 percent interest per year, which is roughly what the U.S. stock market has paid historically, on average (until the past few years, anyway). Multiplying that \$1,000 with 10 percent growth each year, when he retired in sixty years, Wallace would do so with just a tad over \$300,000.

Of course, in reality, Wallace had no reason not to keep adding \$1,000 to this account each year, and so he did while continuing to earn that 10 percent. And he ended up retiring with a little over \$3,000,000. Compare that to Wilbur’s \$60,000. What drove the expansion of Wallace’s wealth? The same thing that allows us to calculate the distance to stars—the exponential power of multiplication.

If you’d like, you can use these extra wide margins throughout the book to take notes.

The way in which we build our skills is analogous to the way we build up our wealth, and in both endeavors, multiplication is a far more powerful force than addition. Simply put, when we learn by multiplying what we know, by *connecting* ideas, and by *building upon* the skills we've already developed, we learn far faster and far more effectively than when we learn in pieces—when we try to learn one thing at a time and when we try to simply *add up* the things we learn into some kind of whole. As we make our study plans, and as we think about the path that we are going to be taking toward mastery, one of the best things we can do is recognize the value of compound learning. To that end, let's use the Wilbur and Wallace analogy to think about how we can effectively utilize our study time in order to get the maximum return. How would addition-loving Wilbur and multiplication-loving Wallace think to study for the LSAT?

How to Study Like Wilbur (1.0 & 2.0)

Wilbur 1.0 studies by learning about one question type at a time. He gives himself a certain amount of time to study each type of question, game, or passage to the best of his ability, then moves on to the next. Then, a few weeks before the exam, he reviews everything he's learned. This study situation is a fairly common one, especially among those students who are part of a class and are following some sort of class schedule. Almost all classes are designed around a one-question-type-at-a-time system, and the timing of the classes determines the start and stop of when you study different types of questions.

The consequences of studying like Wilbur 1.0 are mixed. You will definitely get some question-specific learning, and over time you will definitely develop skills that you can apply to a wide range of challenges. On the negative side, you will also have a more difficult time than necessary growing and organizing these skills, and you'll make it more difficult on yourself than it needs to be to create sharp and effective instincts.

To illustrate exactly why, imagine that in your first week of studying Logical Reasoning, you work on "Identify the Conclusion" questions—questions that require you to identify the main point the author is trying to make in an argument—and the next week you study "Find the Assumption" questions—questions that require you to figure out what the author is assuming in thinking his or her point is justified. On a conscious level, it's easy for you to keep the two types of questions apart, so you don't think much about studying them one right after another, and you don't think too much about starting your studying this way. But remember, the goal of your training is not to prepare your rider, it's to prepare your elephant. What does this sort of preparation do for your elephant?

Well, in that first week, your elephant is learning to develop ways to think about and solve Logical Reasoning questions in general, and it's also developing specific systems for Identify the Conclusion questions. Some of what it learns is relevant to all of Logical Reasoning, and some of it is specific to the question type. Some of the processes that it starts to habitualize pertain to all Logical Reasoning questions, and others pertain, again, just to Identify the Conclusion problems. For the most part, your elephant is left to make most of these determinations on its own, for, at the beginning of your studies, even the rider—your conscious mind—doesn't yet really know how to organize everything you are learning.

Now comes the next week and the next type of question, and your elephant has to get used to a similar but slightly different task. It has to learn concepts and strategies that apply to that particular question, while reconciling what it is learning with what it learned in the first week. The process continues week after week, new question type after new question type, until the very end of your process, at which point you take a few practice exams and go into your test. Notice the lack of review, the minimal organization, and, most importantly, the lack of multiplication.

Now you run into an Identify the Conclusion question on the exam. You have about a minute to arrive at an answer. Will you be able to utilize what you learned back in your first week of studying to get the question correct?

Chances are, you very well might. The human mind is simply incredible, and it's very possible that you are able, in that moment, to wade through the months and months of LSAT information you've absorbed in order to find that one particular piece of knowledge that is relevant to the question at hand. But—I think you can agree—you haven't made it easy on yourself to get that question correct, and you certainly haven't given yourself the best chance to correctly utilize what you have learned.

Wilbur 2.0 studies primarily by doing full sections and entire practice exams. Afterwards, he checks his work and carefully reviews the questions he missed.

Wilbur 2.0 gets to a point where each explanation makes one hundred percent complete sense. He understands exactly why he is missing questions. Does this help? Yes, a little bit, but it likely won't lead to significant and fundamental improvement. Even though Wilbur 2.0 knows why he misses questions, every test presents a dozen different issues to study and the list never seems to end, and what he learns never seems to help on the next exam. By not providing himself with any sort of organizational framework, he limits his ability to grow his skill set to its fullest.

How to Study Like Wallace

Wallace is very interested in growing his understanding, and he knows that strong growth always begins with a solid foundation. So he spends some time thinking about what is most important to success for each of the sections, and he develops a learning schedule that allows him to grow his skills out from this foundation.

Of course, I want you to study like Wallace, and to that end I have carefully designed this training guide to be one that helps you multiply your talents as you develop new skills. Here is what that means more specifically...

For Logical Reasoning

Logical Reasoning questions present you with a short—typically two to three sentences—scenario and then ask you to respond to that scenario in some way; perhaps the author will make a point in the scenario and your job will be to select an answer that strengthens that point or weakens it.

We will begin by investing a great amount of time and energy into the one macro skill that is most important for success on the Logical Reasoning section: your ability to criti-

An **argument** consists of a point and reasons given to justify that point.

cally evaluate **arguments**. A strong majority of LSAT questions hinge on your ability to understand arguments, and, more specifically, almost all such questions hinge on your ability to see the *faults* in arguments. With that in mind, we will start our training by working at becoming expert at finding faults in arguments. We will study every type of argument flaw that can appear on the exam, and we will break down, and practice again and again, the processes necessary for you to recognize and understand them clearly.

With that foundation built, we will next move on to develop question-specific strategies, starting first with those questions that most directly ask you about the faulty reasoning (Identify the Flaw questions), and gradually panning out to other question types. At each point we will carefully point out and differentiate the characteristics and issues that are generally relevant to many different types of questions, versus those specific to the question type that we are studying.

Finally, we will discuss and practice bringing together all the various skills that you have developed, so that by the time you go into the test, you can be confident you can represent all of your abilities at their best.

For Reading Comprehension

Most of us have some familiarity with Reading Comprehension from previous standardized exams. Most of us have a general sense of what the reading challenges will be, what the questions will ask for, and so on. Of course you might expect, and it's important to know, that LSAT Reading Comprehension test writers *do not* have a *general* sense of how to create questions—they have a very specific sense of exactly what it is they are testing, and they have very specific ways of going about it.

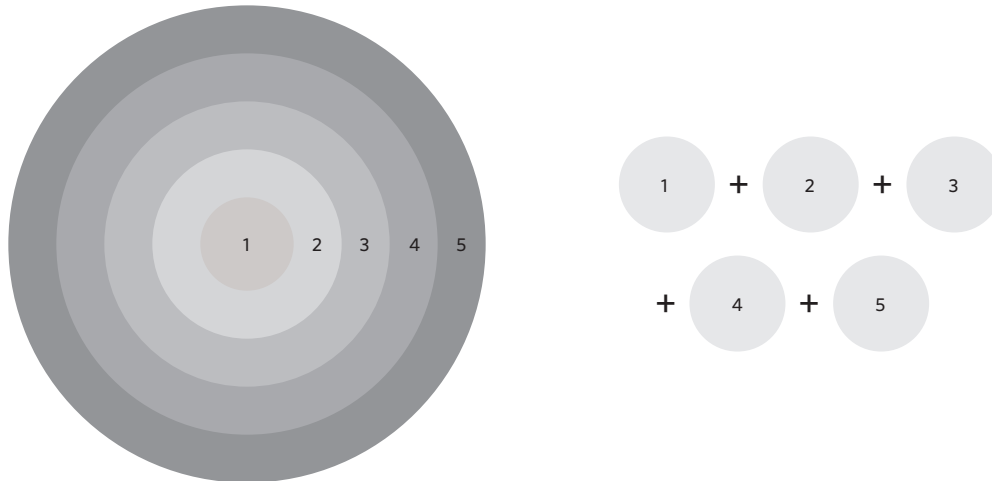
LSAT passages do not test your knowledge of the world or of history, nor do they test the expanse of your vocabulary. The test makers also care very little for your ability to critically evaluate what you read (in this section, at least). What the test writers care most about is your ability to read for structure, specifically **reasoning structure**. The majority of questions hinge on this ability. If you are consistently able to see correctly the reasoning structure of passages, you should have great success in Reading Comprehension.

So, we will begin our Reading Comprehension preparation by building up and strengthening our ability to read for reasoning structure. We will discuss in depth the types of structures you are likely to see on the exam (LSAT passages are very consistent in their structure), and get plenty of practice at seeing those structures accurately.

Once we've gotten ourselves in the habit of reading passages effectively, we will break down the various types of questions that can be asked of us in this section. We'll relate what we understand about structure to what is being asked of us in each of these questions, and we will work on developing effective problem-solving strategies. Lastly, we will work on bringing it all together for full sections.

multiplication

trumps addition



Many students think of their preparation in terms of individual steps. For example, they prepare for Logical Reasoning by trying to master just one question type at a time. Most LSAT preparation systems conform to this learn-by-addition design approach.

While learning by addition can certainly be effective, and has been for thousands of students, learning by multiplication is always *more* effective, and more efficient. For Logical Reasoning, we will start with the one skill that is most important for your success: your ability to critically evaluate the reasoning in an argument. For Reading Comprehension, we will begin by focusing on understanding and recognizing reasoning structure. As you'll soon see, the vast majority of Reading Comprehension questions will either directly or indirectly test your understanding of reasoning structure, and reading for organization rather than details will put you in the best position to answer questions. Once we have developed these strong core abilities, we will use them to sprout out a deep and varied skill set.

Reasoning structure refers to the roles that various parts of the passage play relative to one another. Main point, opinion, and background are examples of the types of roles that are relevant to reasoning structure. An effective way to think about reasoning structure is to ask, “Why has the author written this part?” If you can answer that question successfully, you can feel confident that you understand the reasoning structure.

4. Here is a riddle that I guarantee will stump almost all of your friends and family:

A father and his son get into a car accident. The man dies instantly, and the son gets taken to the emergency room. The surgeon takes one look down at him and says, “I can’t operate on him, he’s my son!” How is this possible?

Having read the main body text, hopefully you are in a better position to see the right answer: the surgeon is the boy’s mother. However, give this riddle to others, and you are far more likely to hear answers about gay parents and priests than you are about a mother who is a surgeon.

Of course, we all know that in real life there are plenty of female surgeons, but we shouldn’t feel ashamed for getting tricked by such riddles. What it does show us is that our brains commonly make incorrect associations (such as surgeon=man). The key to certain difficult LSAT questions is an ability to “disassociate” such false associations.

Four: Understanding, Strategies, and Experience Are Necessary (But Not Enough)

What determines whether someone is a great surgeon?

Is it her *understanding* of surgery? That’s certainly a big part of it, but just because someone knows a lot about surgery doesn’t mean that she⁴ will be a good surgeon. Is it the *strategies* that she chooses to employ? Again, good strategies are certainly necessary, but a good strategy poorly executed won’t give the patient the result he hopes for. Is it *experience*? Most surgeons need years of experience to reach a high level of competency, but experience alone doesn’t make you a good surgeon—especially if you are consistently bad at surgery.

Fortunately, the LSAT is far less challenging and far less stressful than surgery. Still, there are some similarities and takeaways. What defines a great surgeon? It’s not how much she knows, and it’s not her strategies nor her experience. What best defines a great surgeon is her ability to *utilize* her understanding, her strategies, and her experience to make decisions and to act correctly *in the moment*. And this is true of the LSAT as well. You need understanding, you need effective strategies, and you need experience, but ultimately your result will be based on how well you are able to use all of this in the moment. There is a better way to think about what makes for a good LSAT test taker: a good LSAT test taker is one who has *skills* and *effective habits*.

Five: Use Skills and Habits to Gauge Your Readiness

We can define skill as your ability to *utilize* your understanding, talents, and experience. It’s helpful to think of understanding, strategies, and experience as means to an end—they are useful when they combine to form and grow your skill set. As you invest time into preparing for the exam, you want to think about your improvement in terms of skills (“I am now *able* to do X,” and “I am now *able* to recognize Y,” and so on), and you want to gauge your readiness for the LSAT in terms of your skill set (“I am ready for this Reading Comprehension challenge because I am comfortable *doing* X,” or “I am not confident about this Logical Reasoning question because I don’t think I am accurate at *doing* Y,” and so on).

Thinking about your preparedness in terms of skill set will have numerous benefits for you along your training process, but here are two benefits that you should be aware of from the get-go:

Using Your Skill Set as Your Gauge Will Help You Get Rid of That “Am I Ready?” Uncertainty

For some exams that we take in life, it’s very easy for us to tell if we are “ready” for that test. If we go back to high school, if you knew how to spell the words that could show up on a spelling test, then you felt ready. However, let’s imagine that you are preparing for a job interview. At what point would you feel “ready?” Do you think you could ever feel “ready” for, say, an IQ test?

If you think of the LSAT as being some sort of undefinable abstract exercise (like an IQ test) then you inevitably come up with arbitrary and indirect ways of gauging your preparedness. You say to yourself that you are ready because you've studied as hard as you can, or because you've done every practice exam, or finished a course, or gotten the best strategies from the most expensive guru. As you get closer and closer to the test, you will find yourself feeling more and more nervous, because those are not objective and honest ways of gauging whether you are truly ready.

The only honest gauge of your preparedness is your skill set and your habits (more on habits in just a bit). If you think about your prep in terms of your skills—I need to be *able* to find the conclusion of an argument, I need to be *able* to identify what's wrong with the author's reasoning, I need to be *able* to recognize an author's purpose, etc.—then there will be far less mystery in terms of whether you are truly ready or not. Thinking in terms of a skill set doesn't mean that you'll be perfect at the test, of course, but it will mean that you will have a much clearer sense of what you are good at and what you are not, what you need to skip and where you need to slow down, and it will greatly increase the chances that the exam will go “as you expect.” This is a big deal. Most test takers suffer at least a small bit because of nervousness, and it is human nature to be more nervous when we are uncertain. You bring more certainty into the equation when you use your skill set as your gauge, and this will boost your confidence and give you a leg up on your competitors.

Using Your Skill Set as Your Gauge Will Help You Make More Effective Use of Your Study Time

We are far better at learning when there is a goal at the end of our learning process. This is true for all of us, and it's not an issue of willpower. It's an issue of human nature. That is part of the reason that babies are so good at learning—they learn because they want to be able to do things that are critically important, like walking and talking. I'm sure you see the truth of this in your own life. When you are eager to accomplish something, and set off to learn in order to accomplish that thing, you are a far better student than when you learn simply for the sake of learning (a point that our primary schools consistently miss).

U.S.E. (or S.U.E.)

Here is a very general breakdown of the understanding, strategies, and experience that are all necessary for high-level success.

Understanding of...

...the issues that underlie the questions
...the design of the test as a whole

Strategies for...

...handling specific challenges
...completing entire sections

Experience with...

...focused study on specific issues
...taking entire sections and full exams

Thinking of the LSAT, let's say that you learn how to correctly understand a particular reasoning issue, and you give yourself a pat on the back and stop there. That understanding may or may not translate to better test performance. Same as if you happen to come upon a very effective way to solve a challenging type of Reading Comprehension question—knowing this “system” may or may not translate to better test-day performance. Learning about a particular issue, or learning a particular strategy, and then *using* that understanding or strategy to deal with test-specific challenges—*applying your understanding*—is what will ensure long-lasting improvement.

When you learn concepts for the exam but don't apply them, or learn strategies but don't understand exactly how or why they work and don't practice applying them, you end up a far less efficient learner. The same goes for if you work on problem after problem, but don't think about the underlying structure of them, or fail to figure out the most efficient and effective strategies for solving them correctly. Make the development of a skill set your end goal. Don't learn a concept just for the sake of learning it, or do a problem set just to get it done—keep in mind that the purpose of what you are doing is to develop skills.

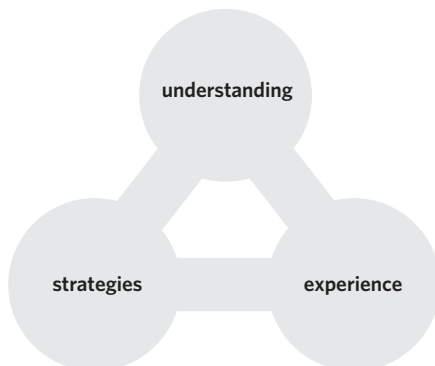
Habits

Your skills have a direct impact on your performance, and you can think of your skill set as representing your *ability* to take the exam. The stronger your skill set, the more potential you have for a higher score.

Now the question becomes “How can you ensure that you reach this potential?”

Strong habits. Simply put, your skills determine how high you can score, and your habits determine whether you will reach that potential or not. You can get better at the exam by carefully developing solid skills, layer after layer, and by working to develop consistent and useful habits. And if you focus on these two things, and if you work dili-

connection leads to success



We develop skills and habits when we account for all necessary components of the mastery process and when these critical components come together: when we understand the theory behind strategies and when our strategies help us understand the exam better, when we get experience utilizing our strategies in a variety of contexts and use our experience to shape and define our strategies, and when we get the most out of our experiences because of our understanding, and use our experiences to add to that understanding.

Using Skills and Habits to Judge Readiness

Over my years of teaching standardized exams, I've heard variations of the following statements again and again:

"I think I know everything there is to know, but I just don't feel ready."

"I know all of the best strategies, but I just don't feel ready."

"I've been studying for months and months, but I just don't feel ready."

"I thought I was ready because I finally understood everything, but the test felt much harder than I expected."

"I thought I was ready because I finally learned all of the best strategies, but the test felt much harder than I expected."

"I thought I was ready because I've been studying for months, but the test felt much harder than I expected."

Don't let this happen to you! Using your skill set to gauge your preparation will help you feel more certain about your abilities, and it will make it more likely that the exam will go as you expect it will.

gently, something magical will happen: the test will get easier. I absolutely promise you of that. Questions will start making a lot more sense, you'll be able to predict answers more and more, and you'll find yourself far less reliant on me or any other teacher to tell you what is right or wrong. And this is going to start to happen quickly.

The Key to Success

I started this lesson by promising that I would reveal the key to success on the LSAT, and here it is:

The best way to ensure success is to deserve it

Your skills and your habits will determine how well you perform on test day. These skills and habits do not come cheap—they require a great deal of desire and effort. You cannot beat the LSAT by learning clever tricks, and you cannot make up for months of not studying by cramming for a couple of weeks. This test is simply too well constructed and challenging.

The LSAT is not, as many commonly believe, simply a test of certain natural abilities in the way that an IQ test is arguably meant to be. The LSAT is actually an exam that almost anyone can get much better at; it is a test that rewards those who make the effort to get better at it. I've seen this to be true again and again with the students I've worked with personally. Getting really good at the LSAT is not that different from getting into great shape by working out—some of us naturally start off in better shape than others, but in time, those with better habits and perspective generally not only make up for any lack of natural ability, they commonly end up with just as high a ceiling as those who started out a bit ahead. For the LSAT, you can start off at 140 and get to 170, or you can start off at 160 and end up at 160. You can't determine where you begin, but what you

The Five Mantras

- 1. Equate smart with simple.**
- 2. Focus on what to think about (not what to think).**
- 3. Utilize the power of compound learning.**
- 4. Understanding, strategies, and experience are necessary (but not enough).**
- 5. Skills and habits determine outcome.**

do (or don't do) to prepare *will* determine where your score ends up. There is no magic formula to getting in shape—you have to do the physical work. There is no magic formula to getting better at the LSAT either. The best way to ensure success is to deserve it.

What does it mean to be deserving of success? I'm sure you have a very good idea, and I'm sure it's similar to what's in my head. It involves hard, earnest work and honest self-reflection.

You can master the LSAT. I know you can. But it's not easy, and it requires the right mindset. Work on developing the right skills and the right habits, and be consistent in your study efforts. Ensure that you get the most out of your prep, and that your prep is truly getting you ready for the exam.

This book is unique among the LSAT systems that are available, in that it is built upon the five fundamental tenets that we've just discussed. This book is designed to help you learn concepts simply and correctly, to relate these concepts to the optimum strategies, and, most importantly, to help you turn your understanding and strategies into skills and habits. The *Trainer* will lead you to do the smart, earnest, dedicated work that will leave you far more prepared and far more deserving of success than just about anyone else on test day.

The Road Ahead

Now that we have discussed the five basic tenets that should shape your thinking about how to prepare for the LSAT, let's briefly discuss the road that lies ahead of us.

This book is organized into twenty-seven different lessons, each meant to take between an hour and an hour and a half. These lessons are ideally meant to be done in conjunction with official practice questions and exams from LSAC's Lawhub online question bank or their printed books. Using clear, simple instruction, effective drills, and carefully chosen sample questions, we will work to develop a skill set that will leave you feeling confident and in control when you take the LSAT.

We will use the next two lessons to introduce each of the different types of sections that appear on the exam: Logical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension. Following that, we will focus for a few lessons on just one section type at a time—we'll start by spending

five lessons discussing Logical Reasoning. We'll conclude the book with some lessons that will bring together everything that we have learned.

As I just mentioned, I suggest using this book in conjunction with official questions and exams offered by the LSAC. I recommend using these official materials to do specific drill work, and for full practice exams.

At the beginning of your studies, your emphasis will be on developing your understanding and your strategies, so you will be spending the bulk of your time in the *Trainer*. Later in your studies, when your emphasis will be on firming up effective habits, the bulk of your study time will be spent practicing and reviewing practice questions and full exams. Your study schedule (to be discussed shortly) will detail how to combine the *Trainer* with your additional practice.

Let's Get Ready to Study

I hope you enjoyed the relaxing read that this lesson presented. The truth is, the next two introductory lessons will also be mostly reading. After that, however...you better be ready to exercise those mental muscles. The rest of this book is going to be about you doing the work necessary to build up those skills and habits.

Preparing for the LSAT—just getting through this book, in fact—is going to take a whole lot of effort on your part. Let's make sure you are well organized as you begin your study process so you can get off to a good start and stay on track. To that end, here are the two steps for you to take to finish off your work for today.

One: Set Up Your Study Schedule

If you go to the *Trainer* website, theLSATtrainer.com, you will see a variety of study schedules available for download. These schedules are set up to account for different study timelines, and they provide specific instructions about how to incorporate your *Trainer* work with practice using official guide questions.

Go ahead and select a study schedule, and fill in the assignments as per the instructions. Every student is different, but in general, I suggest that you limit yourself to one lesson each time you sit down to study. If you do want to study more than one lesson in one day, I suggest that you plan your study periods for different parts of the day—perhaps one lesson in the morning and one in the evening.

Two: Set Up Your Notebook

You are soon going to be absorbing a lot of information, and you are also, throughout this process, going to be constantly re-evaluating how you think about and solve questions. A notebook is a great tool to have for both organizing the new things that you learn, and keeping a record of the thought processes you have on various questions.

On theLSATtrainer.com there is a notebook organizer file that you can download. You can, of course, also easily set up your own notebook to your liking. I suggest that in any case you make sure to...

- 1) Clearly label each page of work, ideally with a date and other information such as question numbers or lesson number, so that you can more easily refer back to previous work if needed.
- 2) Separate your work for Logical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension or get separate folders for each.
- 3) Use a three-ring binder, or some other system that allows you to move around, add, and get rid of pages.

signing up for the exam

- The LSAT is administered multiple times a year, generally at least once every month or two.
- You are allowed to sit for 5 times in this current reportable period (since June, 2018), and 7 times over your lifetime.
- Most schools only consider your highest LSAT score (but you should check with the individual schools that you are interested in).
- As of this writing, the registration fee is \$238. There is a fee waiver program available for students with financial need.
- Find more information and register for the exam at www.lsac.org.