

6/19/2015

Twin Passages for Main Point

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Twin Main Point Practice Passages

This article is in continuation to our previous article named "[Paragraph Summaries – An approach to Main Point](#)". In that article, we discussed in detail what a passage and a paragraph are and we presented a frame work as to how we can summarize each paragraph and then synthesize them to arrive at the main point of a passage.

This article also included details of characteristics of incorrect answer choices and the core skills you need to answer the main point question.

In this article, we have included two practice passages for main point question. Upon reading the passages, you will realize that both the passages are on the same topic. The idea behind this exercise is to show that two different passages written on the same subject matter can have two different main points.

Find it out for yourself - Read the passages, apply the framework provided in the "Main Point" article mentioned above and arrive at the correct answer choice. Post your detailed analysis for both questions. We will publish detailed official solution once we get enough responses. So get cracking. All the best!

Passage 1

Researchers argue that the brain stem comprising the medulla oblongata, the pons and the mid brain is better at handling a large amount of information. On the other hand, the Cerebral Cortex that is responsible for rational decision making is better at applying very strict, mathematical rules on fewer variables involving well-defined parameters. Consequently, researchers agree that it is better to “sleep on” certain complex decision rather than burn midnight oil to arrive at rationale solution. They believe that in these situations, rationality comes on the way of making a rational decision and that the brain stem is better equipped to handle them than the Cerebral Cortex, arguing that it’s better to leave such decisions on unconscious thought process – thinking without paying attention. There are decisions where, the researchers believe, CONSCIOUS thought outperforms unconscious thought. For example, when a decision requires application of very strict, mathematical rules, conscious thought is beneficial.

Several experiments that incorporated several combinations of plethora of specifications revealed the workings of the brain stem and the Cerebral cortex. In one such experiment, the participants were asked to choose a car from 10 leading brands of automobiles. The researchers gave them just four parameters to consider for their choice - mileage, cost, reliability, and re-sale value, asking them to take instantaneous decision. The participants came up with the second-to-none decision in this scenario, proving that the conscious mind was super-efficient in processing limited amount of data. Keeping all the other conditions fixed the researchers this time asked the participants to sleep on the choice and declare their decision later. The resulting choices that participants made were not as optimal.

In another set of similar experiments, the researchers were baffled by the appalling choices that the test group made when they conducted the same experiment with 10 leading brands, but doubled the parameters, adding such features to consider as brand appeal, durability, safety, and off-road capability. The researchers argued that Cerebral cortex could not make sense of the expanded information set that led to poor decision making. However, the decisions made by another test group that was allowed to sleep on the decision before declaring their choice were much more worthy, even though not as good as the decision produced by the conscious mind that processed fewer parameters. This led the researchers to conclude that our unconscious mind can process larger amounts of information — as long as we give it time to do so. Another suitable situation, according to researchers, to employ the goal-dependent, deliberative process in the absence of conscious attention is when we are low on energy or easily distracted at the time when we are faced with a complex decision to make. Similarly, when in high spirits, it may be better to invoke the conscious mind to arrive at a much more optimal solution.

Question

1. The reason why the author has written this passage is that he wants to:
 - A. argue that functions of Cerebral cortex only can lead to such important and complex decisions as buying a home or selecting a school.
 - B. compare and contrast the functions of brain stem and Cerebral Cortex to show the benefits of one over the other in making complex decision.
 - C. debate that all important decisions must be taken from Cerebral Cortex as it leads to rational decisions in complex situations.
 - D. summarize through examples which situations are conducive for conscious minds and when to employ brain stem to make optimal decisions of complex nature.
 - E. prove that sleeping on a complex decision is the best way to arrive at the optimal decision in complex situations.

Passage 2

Evidence has been presented that the unconscious mind, still viewed by many psychological scientists as the shadow of a “real” conscious mind, is identifiably more deliberate, action oriented and complex than its conscious counterpart. Furthermore researchers have proven that the mind is incredibly efficient at extracting meaning from stimuli of which one is not consciously aware. The claims above are made on conclusive experimentations in which test subjects who were allowed to sleep during a decision making process made more optimal decisions when compared to the subjects who were given the exact same amount of time but were not allowed to sleep, leading researchers to believe that rationality comes on the way of making a rational decision. Researchers explain that while the conscious mind can only follow strict rules, unconscious mind can handle and integrate a larger amount of information, explaining why it can make better decisions. Even more surprising than this unconscious mind’s ability is that the mental processes that drive such decision making are necessarily minimal and unsophisticated and do not require humongous amount of calories to make us arrive at the best decision whereas using conscious mind for complex decisions burns up a lot of energy, setting in fatigue, forcing the conscious mind to give up and leading to subconscious decisions. Overall, researchers agree that there is no need to have sleepless night pondering over a complex issue to resolve it when it can actually be solved more efficiently by snoring the night away.

Question

1. The purpose of the passage is to:
 - A. highlight the differences among psychologists regarding the importance of the unconscious mind in making complex decisions.
 - B. contrast and compare the workings of the rationality with that of deliberate, action-oriented, and complex decision making processes.
 - C. prove by citing results of experiments that one decision-making process is better than the other.
 - D. show that unconscious mind is not that undependable as previously thought.
 - E. ascertain that using conscious and unconscious minds together yield second-to-none judgments.

Solutions

Passage 1

Hopefully you would have read the passage and the Main Point Question. Here is how I would approach this question. The first step is to summarize individual paragraphs.

| Paragraph | My Paragraph Summary |
|---|---|
| <p>Researchers argue that the brain stem comprising the medulla oblongata, the pons and the mid brain is better at handling a large amount of information. On the other hand, the Cerebral Cortex that is responsible for rational decision making is better at applying very strict, mathematical rules on fewer variables involving well-defined parameters. Consequently, researchers agree that it is better to “sleep on” certain complex decision rather than burn midnight oil to arrive at rationale solution. They believe that in these situations, rationality comes on the way of making a rational decision and that the brain stem is better equipped to handle them than the Cerebral Cortex, arguing that it’s better to leave such decisions on unconscious thought process – thinking without paying attention. There are decisions where, the researchers believe, CONSCIOUS thought outperforms unconscious thought. For example, when a decision requires application of very strict, mathematical rules, conscious thought is beneficial.</p> | <p>Conscious mind helps in arriving at decision that requires application of strict rules on limited parameters. On the contrary, unconscious mind leads to best decisions when there is large amount of information.</p> |
| <p>Several experiments that incorporated several combinations of plethora of specifications revealed the workings of the brain stem and the Cerebral cortex. In one such experiment, the participants were asked to choose a car from 10 leading brands of automobiles. The researchers gave them just four parameters to consider for their choice - mileage, cost, reliability, and re-sale value, asking them to take instantaneous decision. The participants came up with the second-to-none decision in this scenario, proving that the conscious mind was super-efficient in processing limited amount of data. Keeping all the other conditions fixed the researchers this time asked the participants to sleep on the choice and declare their decision later. The resulting choices that participants made were not as optimal.</p> | <p>Experiment 1- Conscious mind yielded the best result when participants were given four parameters for consideration to choose a car from 10 brands.</p> <p>Experiment 2 – The decision was not that optimal when they left the decision on the unconscious mind,</p> |

In another set of similar experiments, the researchers were baffled by the appalling choices that the test group made when they conducted the same experiment with 10 leading brands, but doubled the parameters, adding such features to consider as brand appeal, durability, safety, and off-road capability. The researchers argued that Cerebral cortex could not make sense of the expanded information set that led to poor decision making. However, the decisions made by another test group that was allowed to sleep on the decision before declaring their choice were much more worthy, even though not as good as the decision produced by the conscious mind that processed fewer parameters. This led the researchers to conclude that our unconscious mind can process larger amounts of information — as long as we give it time to do so. Another suitable situation, according to researchers, to employ the goal-dependent, deliberative process in the absence of conscious attention is when we are low on energy or easily distracted at the time when we are faced with a complex decision to make. Similarly, when in high spirits, it may be better to invoke the conscious mind to arrive at a much more optimal solution.

Experiment 1 – The conscious mind made poor decision when the parameters were doubled.

Experiment 2 – When with double parameters, the participants relied on their unconscious mind, their decision was better than the one taken with conscious mind.

So basically, what the author said in the first paragraph, he proved those points by mentioning some studies in the subsequent paragraphs.

PRE-THINKING MAIN POINT – Below is the main point that I came up by combining the summaries of the three paragraphs.

Presenting experiments, the author proves that conscious mind can take best decision of complex nature if decision making requires application of strict rules on limited parameters. If larger amount of information is needed to be processed, then the unconscious mind takes the optimal decision.

So now let's do the POE to find out the correct answer:

- The reason why the author has written this passage is that he wants to:

| <u>Answer choices</u> | <u>Explanation</u> |
|---|--|
| A. argue that functions of Cerebral cortex only can lead to such important and complex decisions as buying a home or selecting a school. | Inconsistent: The author does not mention anywhere in the passage that only conscious mind can take important and complex decisions. Even unconscious mind is capable of doing so. |
| B. compare and contrast the functions of brain stem and Cerebral Cortex to show the benefits of one over the other in making complex decision. | Out of Scope: The author through examples talks about the ability of the conscious and unconscious minds. He does not even talk about the functions of these two minds. Also, he does not say that one is better than the other. |
| C. debate that all important decisions must be taken from Cerebral Cortex as it leads to rational decisions in complex situations. | Inconsistent: There is no debate of any sort in the passage. The author talks about the abilities of both the conscious and the unconscious minds equally. |
| D. summarize through examples which situations are conducive for conscious minds and when to employ brain stem to make optimal decisions of complex nature. | Correct. From the paragraph summaries we know that the experiments are the examples through which the author proved that conscious mind takes best decision when given less parameters and the unconscious mind does the same when given more parameters. |
| E. prove that sleeping on a complex decision is the best way to arrive at the optimal decision in complex situations. | Partial Scope: The author also talks about the functions of the conscious mind while making important decisions but the author talks much more than that. This choice only covers partial scope, does not talk about scenarios where the conscious mind is favored. |

Passage 2

Hopefully you would have read the passage and the Main Point Question. Here is how I would approach this question. The first step is to summarize individual paragraphs.

| Paragraph | My Paragraph Summary |
|--|--|
| <p>Evidence has been presented that the unconscious mind, still viewed by many psychological scientists as the shadow of a “real” conscious mind, is identifiably more deliberate, action oriented and complex than its conscious counterpart. Furthermore researchers have proven that the mind is incredibly efficient at extracting meaning from stimuli of which one is not consciously aware. The claims above are made on conclusive experimentations in which test subjects who were allowed to sleep during a decision making process made more optimal decisions when compared to the subjects who were given the exact same amount of information but were not allowed to sleep, leading researchers to believe that rationality comes on the way of making a rational decision. Researchers explain that while the conscious mind can only follow strict rules, unconscious mind can handle and integrate a larger amount of information, explaining why it can make better decisions. Even more surprising than this unconscious mind’s ability is that the mental processes that drive such decision making are necessarily minimal and unsophisticated and do not require humongous amount of calories to make us arrive at the best decision whereas using conscious mind for complex decisions burns up a lot of energy, setting in fatigue, forcing the conscious mind to give up and leading to subconscious decisions. Overall, researchers agree that there is no need to have sleepless night pondering over a complex issue to resolve it when it can actually be solved more efficiently by snoring the night away.</p> | <p>Unconscious mind is better in making complex decision than the conscious mind because it can process larger amount of information and uses less energy. The conscious mind can only process strict rules and uses up lots of energy, making one easily tired.</p> |

PRE-THINKING MAIN POINT – Below is the main point that I came up from the summary of this single-paragraph passage.

The unconscious mind is better in making complex decision than the conscious mind.

Now let's do the POE to see which answer choice is correct:

1. The purpose of the passage is to:

| <u>Answer Choices</u> | <u>Explanation</u> |
|--|--|
| A. highlight the differences among psychologists regarding the importance of the unconscious mind in making complex decisions. | Partial Scope: This is covered only in the beginning. This does not talk about the majority of the passage where the author also talks about the inefficiency of the conscious mind in making complex decisions. |
| B. contrast and compare the workings of the rationality with that of deliberate, action-oriented, and complex decision making processes. | Inconsistent: The author has only contrasted the functions of the two minds. He does not talk about how they work; i.e. the mechanisms that drive them. He hasn't presented any similarity between the two. |
| C. prove by citing results of experiments that one decision-making process is better than the other. | Correct. The author presents the result of an experiment that proved that the unconscious mind can make better judgment than the conscious mind because the unconscious mind can process larger amount of information without using up much calories. |
| D. show that unconscious mind is not as dependable as previously thought. | Opposite: The author talks only about the efficiency of the unconscious mind. This choice goes against the information in the passage. |
| E. ascertain that using conscious and unconscious minds together yield second-to-none judgments. | Out of Scope: Nowhere in the passage has the author spoken about using both the minds together for best decisions. |