

GIN's RC Technique

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I will start my humble verbal suggestions with RC, mainly because I believe the importance of this section is not well understood and there are too many theories. Again the following is my own technique(it may not be 100% original of course) and should be used with precaution.

First some thoughts on RC,

Out of the 3 verbal question type RC is the easiest to explain to a person who does not know anything about GMAT. Few years ago,I was talking to a friend of mine who was curious about GMAT and asked me about question types in verbal,SC,CR and RC. When I finished explaining RC , she said:"So it is just understanding what you read" . She will never be a gmat guru but she was right. At the end of the day,GMAT RC,despite its question types,word games,close answer choices,is about understanding what one reads! So in theory if you are clever enough to understand all you read you should get all RC questions correct!!!

Yet, my humble opinion is that most testtakers, the ones who get 20-35 and who think RC was easy, make many mistakes in RC. Unlike SC, RC is very sneaky and doesnt make you feel you are getting questions wrong.

RC also carries a huge importance for the timing in verbal section. If you plan to solve an RC within 5 minutes,when you dont really understand the passage ,that time doubles immediately. Whereas, you can always pass a SC question by looking at the difference among choices, if you dont know where the info RC question is based upon in the passage, you are doomed. Worse: The additional time you spent in RC wears you out , decrease your morale. Please check your verbal mistakes, it is very likely that you will get more CR and SC wrong right after a horrible passage! At least this was happening to me.

Also, my experience with gmatprep tells me RC and CR mistakes are more damaging to the verbal score than SC ones(even after accounting for the disproportion in question number)

So RC IS IMPORTANT. DESPITE THE HYPE ABOUT SC,RC IS CRITICAL FOR A HIGH VERBAL SCORE.

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Overall Approach

I read so many general approaches to RC,

- Skim passage fast, then read very quickly answer qs.
- Skim passage,read first and last sentence of each paragraph
- Read first question first,then read passage answer first question immediately then read the rest of the passage.....

My opinion: This is not the way to go if you are serious about RC and your verbal score. So, the following is my general approach and I repeated these 2-3 times just before the verbal section on the test day.

1) **Start to read**(:this is great advice,no?) **SLOWLY**. This was one of the best advices I have seen. I read this somewhere dont remember. It is crucial. You wanna solve RC as quickly as possible so you rush into the 1st paragraph, read it in 20 sc and move to the next and basically=> You have no idea about what to expect next,you have no idea about author's position, no clue about author's goal. **YOU SHOULD READ THE FIRST PARAGRAPH SLOWLY!!!. MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE OVERALL ISSUE!!! UNDERSTAND THE TIME ARTICLE REFERS TO. DIFFERENT PLAYERS.... NEVER EVER START FAST.**

2) **Paraphrase with exaggeration!** You should think for 1-2 seconds in every 2-3 sentences and repeat your understanding in your own language. But when you paraphrase add something to it. When you repeat your understanding in your own language, say something in your mind that will make you remember that. For example, if author says scientist A was wrong. I paraphrase this in my own language: Wow look at this author , he says this stupid scientist made wrong assumptions.Lets see why?.... It may sound silly but it is very effective. This exaggeration also keeps your attention at high levels.

3)Related to the previous item: **Reading with the desire to learn and at least agree or disagree with the author!** In almost all passages, either the author or the people mentioned argue for X and some other people argue for Y OR there are two things described and author gives evidences etc. It is not easy to stay focused in a long RC passage, to achieve this,I always tried to take sides,when possible, and criticize either the author or the other parties... Since I like arguments and discussions, this technique helped me follow turns in the passage, evaluate evidences and claims, expect what might come next. **So, simply, take sides.**(even in a neutral passage that just describes a phenomenon,you can find a way to stay focused by using number 2 and 3 above). Never ever read a gmat passage as if you are reading newsweek. What all gmat books tell you is => Read to learn?! But how??? Once again,I am repeating, the only way to read to learn is to TAKE SIDES and CRITICIZE,QUESTION,MAKE FUN OF THE AUTHOR or OTHER PARTIES. BE AGRESSIVE,ACT LIKE THEIR WORST ENEMY OR BEST FRIENDS.

4)**Take notes.** I didnt take notes at all on my first gmat. I thought I wont refer to those notes anyway why bother?? I took notes this time, did I refer to the notes? NO!So what is the importances of notes. For me, notes are useful in that they help you undertand the flow of the passage. They can also, help you understand info given a bit better since you think as you write it down(but make sure you think and dont just copy and paste to the sheet!). Dont take sophisticated notes,here how my notes would look like(of course passage is made up)

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1962, New England: Feminist VS Politicians, Politicians X(for me ,this cross means something negative that is all,so it might mean dont like,oppress etc) feminists
Feminists fight protest

Samanda K. +++ (means something + so support here) feminists! BOOK.
BOOK DIFFERENT than Contemporaries BEC. 1,2,3(I would just write 1,2,3 to make sure I remember 3 reasons are given)

BUT(I would write turning points very big) AUTHOR SAYS NO! SAMANDA STUPID!
BECAUSE.... POLITICIANS ++ FEMINISTS ACTUALLY

FINALLY, INCONCLUSIVE. AUTHOR DOES NOT KNOW

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My notes would be a bit longer but definitely they would not be easy to read anyway. So my notes serve their purpose the moment I write them, that is it. MAKE SURE YOU TAKE NOTES. ESPECIALLY TOUGH QUESTIONS WILL COST YOU MORE TIME AND EFFORT IF YOU DONT TAKE NOTES.

5) Last and extremely important point in the overall approach: Once you finish the passage, the biggest mistake you can make is to go and read the question immediately. I know you say what the hell I will do??? Well, here it is, **take 10-15 sc, scroll up, and just remember what you just read in 1-2 words per paragraph and visualize the flow of the passage for the last time.** So for the above made up passage, my recap would be,

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POLITICIANS-FEMINISTS FIGHT

SAMANDA'S BOOK + FEMINIST AND DIFFERENT

AUTHOR X SAMANDA, SHE IS STUPID , EVIDENCES

STILL, AUTHOR DOESNT KNOW

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This step is so crucial and helped me so much I dont know what else I can do to make you use it. DEFINITELY GO BACK FOR 10-15 SC and RECAP THE FLOW.

These steps may seem time consuming, but trust me on two things

- Other techniques will cost you more time overall, you will need to dig and search for info, get frustrated, lost concentration. And still get more questions wrong

- Also:)) believe me you wont be able to apply this approach 100% under the test conditions so it wont be that time consuming. YET, developing this systematic approach is so important, it will help you a great deal even if you dont follow each step to the max.

FINE POINTS OF RC: WHAT WILL CHALLENGE YOU? & TIMING

Tough RCs: Lets first define ♦♦tough♦. For me, tough RCs means RCs that reduce my accuracy rate from above 90% to 60-70%. Toughness is not directly linked to the length, structure or topic of the passage. I call an RC tough when I am unsure of 2 of the 4 answers I just gave!!! So whenever you see the word ♦tough♦ in the following explanation, remember what it means in this context.

How RC becomes tough: I identified two (and 1 unique) major ways GMAT makes RC tougher and causes your verbal score take a dive towards low 30s.

a) Double or Triple Trouble: Who- What -Where-How-Why?

If you start annoying GMAT verbal, it will throw you one of these Double/Triple trouble passages. These are passages where you are presented 2 or 3 theories, items, animals, events at the same time. This is still okay right, so GMAT does another thing, it talks about 2-3 attributes of these 2-3 main things. So you might have a bug which can fly but can not walk, then you might have a bug which can walk but can not fly, then the first group can have members which are red but die at young age, then others in different colors but die old, the second group might have members which have a thick shell in red and reproduce young, the other members have no shell and reproduce when they are old etc.

This is the first trick GMAT uses. It overloads you with similar but different information for all the main things (bugs, events, people, theories etc) in the passage. Most people would say there is no need to understand those details, I say it is very important to understand the main differences between these groups as you read the passage. Passing these sections is a fatal mistake. (please ctrl+f this word in 1000 RC doc. Macropterous, give yourself 7 mins for the passage you found)

What I do: I try to;

-Identify points of difference (how do they differ) and also parity (how they are similar) between these different things. Is it the time they die? Is it whether they have a shell? Is it their color?

- Depending on the situation, I wrote down main points and try to understand where the author focuses and gives examples etc. I then paraphrase (**again using exaggeration**) my understanding.

-Also, I try to think of the questions I may get? This is critical. You should practice this in all RCs you solve and trust me it will not only help you know the questions in advance but also improve your understanding of the passage.

-In my first actual gmat and earlier prep tests I used to not read these comparisons and think these are details I have to disregard. What a mistake!!! Read this very carefully, it is correct that in RC you don't need to read all the details. BUTTTT not all details are nonsense info that author is not interested in!!!! If author gives details to prove his case or to explain an issue, you better damn read those details and read them well. Simply put, if you feel author is trying to say something to you, try to understand that section of the passage very well.

Rule of Thumb: If you read a long paragraph and except for 2-3 lines you understood everything, should you feel confident??? NO! RCs are designed in a way that you and I don't get some sections of the passages and believe me the questions will be directly from those 2-3 lines of the passage that you didn't understand. As I said above, this will happen especially with passages that compare/describe two three things. I accept that knowing what is superficial detail and what is important detail is not easy but if you work with tough RCs you will be so good at this, trust me.

One last thing that can further complicate these passages and that is used in CR as well: **Naming names:** Simply put, the passage says red bugs with shell at the beginning then somewhere in second paragraph (by the time it refers to all different bugs and makes your brain go crazy) it refers to the same bugs as **hareklesnese**. Or it talks about different books/authors and all of a sudden starts calling that one of the book/author by another name. And it does this without really warning you. This of course complicates things and becomes deadly if you are already frustrated with all the details you get and you don't notice the sudden change in names!

Last advice: Don't think not drawing a small table in 20 sec will cost you more time than not taking notes will! At the risk of overgeneralizing, I am saying that if you don't fully understand: What,Where,How, Why aspects of these tough passages, you will be literally guessing, even if you don't admit. Try macropterous, you will see what I mean. These are just like the 50-51 quant questions you solve in math section, why do you give 5-6 minutes to 1 question in quant but not spend 20-30 sec to draw a simple table in a 51 verbal question???

b) Close Answers

Sometimes the passage itself will be easy to read, probably passages on business or social sciences etc., since the passage is easy you will relax and your attention level will drop. Then, when you start reading the questions you will say: Damn, I understood everything how can I not answer these questions?. The second GMAT trick in RC is to give the test taker an easy passage with very tough questions with answer choices so close one would need to think of the meaning of 1 word etc. to click the right answer.

Cases in point are the ♦Role of Gender in Africa etc♦ RC in the new sets (key words Ghana-Kenya role of women and) and ♦Women Education in US, a discussion about an author♦ RC in old sets.

When you get these passages, understanding the passage is not enough. No matter how carefully read the passage, how effectively you take notes etc. You will have to evaluate at least 2 probably 3 answer choices. They will be very close. To trick you even more, GMAT will make the 2 choices as follows

a)Half of this choice will be exactly true and will be put in a very good format. So if author described a book, half of this choice will say, author described a book!!! So you will go: Oh this is 100% true so this might be the answer. Yet the other part will be blurry, it will use words from the passage. Your brain will remember those words and also the halo effect created by the first half(which crystal clear & correct) will make you think this is the answer.

b) This answer choice will not be so crystal clear, maybe it will say author introduces an issue and give examples,(this part will be okay but still not as good as the first part of the answer choice a) then the second part will be even less appealing but you won't think it is incorrect, you will feel it is just not that direct and ♦good looking♦♦ as the answer choice a.

In tough passages you will always face this dilemma: **YOU HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT ANSWER WHEN YOU HAVE TWO CLOSE ANSWER CHOICES AS DESCRIBED ABOVE!!!** GMAT knows that your brain will remember few words from the passage and also that you will prefer more direct and ♦♦good looking♦♦ answer. In the above example, answer choice a will be wrong because one word or one part will be wrong.

What I do: First,since I know I will do well in verbal, I know that when GMAT gives me an easy to read passage=> Answer choices will be close!!!. I spend less time on the passage. I KNOW I WILL NEED TIME WHEN ANSWERING.

Then when answering questions, I wrote on the paper the choices I eliminated (I do this in verbal when things get messy and tough) and the two left! Then I use POE by focusing on single WORDS!!! Not on the complete answers. And I always ask myself:

IS THIS REALLY TRUE? If answer says ♦author **questioned** the validity of a theory♦ I directly ask: Did the really do that? NO=> one word is wrong,the whole thing is wrong. Remember this rule if the one piece of information,verb used to describe an idea,event etc. is wrong , the answer choice will be wrong. Doesn♦t matter whether the rest,which might be 90% of the answer choice, is correct and very nicely put in words!!!! One word wrong=>GONE.

The last thing I do, I pay attention that I am extremely confident! Don♦t be confident if you don♦t know anything. But if you know a lot, you have to be very confident to eliminate the other answer choice! No matter how many questions you solve, unless you have the extreme confidence, YOU WILL BE STUCK BETWEEN TWO ANSWER CHOICES (this is correct in CR as well).

Once again I repeat, business, social sciences etc. passages are easy to read and will definitely have close answer choices. Don♦t relax when you read these passages if you wanna nail the next 4 questions!

In your prep, try to solve business and social science passages as well,don♦t just focus on science passages. Remember topic does not make a passage easy or tough.

C) Satiric/Unclear Tones: Just a short advice: Sometimes, the author will use satire or will write in a way to disguise his tone==> you wont be able to understand what he really thinks,normally it should be easy but still: If you notice author is using satire/unclear tone and you don♦t really understand what he thinks. STOP READING! UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON.WHO THINKS WHAT THEN MOVE ON.NEVER EVER READ THE WHOLE THING WITHOUT FIRST UNDERSTANDING THE POSITION OF THE AUTHOR(if he has one)

TIMING

Applying all the techniques I mentioned above,I gradually improved my speed from 9 minute for long and 7 minute for short ones to 7 minutes for long and 4-5 minutes for short ones. I generally spend 3 or 3.5 minutes to read long passages and max 2 minutes for short passages. I try to give questions around 1 min. Yet if I feel passage is easy to read I speed up and leave more time to the questions. Also, if passage is a really messy one and I feel I am getting lost and wont be able to answer questions, I definitely spend more time on the passage.

so=> Adapt your timing not only according to the length of passage but also according to how you go with reading it. If you feel you can crack the passage in 3 minutes and questions in 3 minutes, dont spend more time just because you feel you did not spend enough time.

One more tip, if you are aiming for 7 min in the real thing, aim for 6 in the practice, you will surely exceed your ideal timing in the real test. Give yourself a safety margin.

FINAL TIPS(not in order of importance and some points may have been discussed above)

- ALWAYS identify different parties in the passage. How many organizations are being mentioned? What are their position? Be aware of the different names and titles

used in the passage. DONT go and reread those sections to learn "what/who is what/who" when you get a question that uses 2 different names from the passage. Know each party and just go back to the passage to confirm your answer.

-In primary purpose,main idea etc. questions. DONT USE ANYTHING BUT POE. AND ASK YOURSELF IS THIS REALLY WHAT THE AUTHOR DOES? WOULD I WRITE THIS PASSAGE IF MY MAIN PURPOSE WAS... ALSO, FOCUS ON VERBS,ADVERBS ,ADJECTIVES IN CHOICES=> ELIMINATE CHOICES WITH WRONG WORDS(words that have nothing to do with passage,e.g(extreme case) main purpose of the passage?

a) describeb)evaluate

If the author has just listed the results of a research but did not evaluate them, b can not be correct!!! Be aware of this verbs etc.

-DO NOT DISMISS a weird looking answer right away. Especially the ones with a critical word you dont know. This is one of the biggest trick of GMAT. No one ,even native speakers, can not know the meaning of all words=> GMAT puts one weird word in the answer , you feel none of the other choices make sense,but since you dont know the meaning of that word you can not click and confirm. FOCUS ON THE WHOLE SENTENCE ,GO BACK TO THE PASSAGE AND TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN. WHATEVER YOU DO DO NOT DISMISS WITHOUT SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING.(This trick is also used by GMAT in CR question,it is a mean thing to do but I have seen it in many tough questions) . DONT GO AND CHOOSE AN ANSWER CHOICE THAT DOESNT REALLY MAKES SENSE JUST BECAUSE YOU DONT KNOW THE MEANING OF ONE WORD IN AN OTHERWISE POSSIBLE ANSWER.

- VERY IMPORTANT: In inference and suggests.. questions, you will be given a word or sentence from the passage or the question will be related to a person or something mentioned in the passage: NOW,EVERY DECENT GMATTERS KNOWS that one should go that part of that passage and read 1 or 2 lines below or above. BUTTT not everyone knows this: IF YOUR ARE ASKED AN INFERENCE QUESTION ABOUT SOMETHING MENTIONED IN THE PASSAGE AND YOU ARE GIVEN A LINE,LETS SAY LINE 33=> YOU SHOULD GO AND CHECK THAT PART OF THE PASSAGE BUTTTT ALSO YOU SHOULD CHECK THE WHOLE PASSAGE AND WHEREELSE THAT THING IS MENTIONED ,WHETHER DIRECTLY MENTIONED BY THE SAME NAME OR BY ANOTHER NAME(REMEMBER MY TIP ABOVE,SOMETIMES THE PASSAGE USES DIFFERENT NAMES FOR THE SAME THING). If you do this you will see that most difficult inference questions becomes piece of cake because once you have all information from different part of the passage, your job is just to choose the correct info. Most people just read 2-3 line above and below and then say " what the hell, none of this mentioned in here!!!". WORST....: GMAT is so clever,since it knows you will just read those lines, one of the answer choices uses the info mentioned in those lines but it is actually a bogus answer which is half true ,half false. REMEMBER if you are asked a question about black bears and you are given line 34 as reference, read those lines then check whole passage for black bear and synonyms used to refer to these animals!!! This is the only way to beat these tough inference questions.

- Suggest questions...are generally easily solved by going to the passage and just picking the info. But note that some "suggests" questions are actually inference questions. If you feel none of the answer choices makes sense in a "passage suggests"question then think about the possibility that it is a tougher question,a hidden inference question.(apply the previous technique).

- PAY ATTENTION TO THE FOLLOWING THE PASSAGE, BE ALERTED WHEN YOU SEE

- **A comparison.** Japan isyet most of other asian countries....
The comparison may be more subtle. Just keep your eyes open.

- **What others think about X**(author,thing,book,research,finding). RCs are all about opinions!!! Always understand the opinions mentioned in the passage.
OPINIONS AND POSITIONS ARE KEY TO SOLVING MOST PASSAGES.

- **WHYSSSSSSSSSS?** If author talks about something and then he gives **REASONS** for a position,belief etc. or maybe he talks about an event and gives **REASONS==> YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER THESE WHYS...** e.g Dr. Lokaromof left Russia in 1915 when he was 32 and moved to Finland,where he was able to express his identity much more freely in the democratic environment he lived in for 35 years. Yet,Karamov claims Lokaromof was enjoying free.... in Russia before 1915 anyway, Karamov agrees with previous scholars in that Lokaromof left Russia for his first love Helsinki!

If I read this , I make mental notes of 3 things: Russia was not as good for this guy as was Finland(free envir.democracy etc). **COMPARISON** But this is not necessarily the reason he left. **REASON?**The reason has been an issue discussed by scholars. A guy,(about whom author will talk more I guess), agrees with previous scholars etc..
OPINIONS

Of course, I summarize this in 3 sc and my mental notes are much shorter but wanted to write in full here.

- **Examples/Analogies/Interesting stuff:** If the author starts to explain an issue and gives examples,uses analogy or talks about something striking!!! open your eyes, you will get a question from there!!!

- **SHIFTS:** Everybody says pay attention to the connectors such as but, however etc. to notice the shift in the passage. I say, guys forget about hunting words, you wont even be able to differentiate words when you are going for above 42 in verbal. JUST FOCUS as I said earlier,takes sides, if you take sides, you wont have to notice any words. You will feel even the slightest change in the passage. EITHER SUPPORT THE AUTHOR(say to yourself,this author thinks just like me, I like this guy...) or CRITICIZE the AUTHOR(what a jerk, where the hell he comes up with this....). WHEN A SHIFT OCCURS, MAKE SURE YOU PUT A SIGN in YOUR NOTES!!!

Tips continued

- For the prep, Do not solve all 1000RC etc. Just use ctrl+f to search for questions you are weak at. If necessary read one passage just for 1 question!!! There is no point in solving many "suggests" that questions if you are already good at that. REMEMBER THE MORE YOU SUFFER BEFORE THE TEST , THE LESS YOU WILL DO SO IN THE TEST!

- This tip is also valid for RC.

==> If you feel like, none of the answer makes sense

- You are not reading the question right.You are misinterpreting the question or

the answer choices.

- Your interpretation of the relevant part of the passage is wrong.
- Close your eyes for 1 sc, take a deep breath and look at the question with a fresh mind. DO NOT STARE AT THE QUESTION for minutes, you won't get it, if you are looking at it from the wrong angle. DONT PANIC, there is nothing that is impossible to do on GMAT. It is just understanding what you read. You can surely crack it, just stay cool.

==> If you feel like there are too many answers

- You understood the question and passage correct but you fail to notice the minor differences among choices. FOCUS ON WORDS, COMPARE THE MEANING OF CHOICES WORD BY WORD!!!
- Everything sometimes really depends on the meaning of 1 or 2 words. When you face a dilemma between 2 choices, treat it as a SC question, focus on the differences between choices, if necessary write down the main verbs etc.

In terms of prep, last 2 tips,

- DO ALL , I REPEAT ALL STICKY RCs in scoretop RC forum.
- DO ALL SET RCs and also DO ALL RCs in GMATPREP.
- When you finish reading this whole post, take notes from it and just use whatever suits your style. Develop your own techniques.

Attitude: Read each gmat passages on the test as if they are given to you by Harvard or Stanford admission committee and your admission depends on your understanding and critique of these passages. Show them that you can UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU READ.

Cheers,

Gin