The Loophole   WHAT IF... CATASTROPHE?

And finally, we arrive. The Loophole is the cornerstone of our work in Logical Reasoning. Remember the catastrophe we were ruling out in some of our necessary assumptions? This is a section all about that catastrophe.

The Loophole is the flipside of the necessary assumption. It's like an evil twin, which let's be honest, is always more fun than the original. Necessary assumptions are about safety. The Loophole is about danger.

The Loophole's mission reminds me of my favorite Omar moment from *The Wire*. Omar is seeking revenge against Marlo, and steals a bunch of his money, shooting a few of his lieutenants. Then Omar sets the money on fire and tells Marlo's man, "Now you make sure you tell old Marlo I burned the money. Cause it ain't about that paper. **It's about me hurtin' his people and messin' with his world." That's you vs. the author of the stimulus.** All you want to do is hurt his people and mess with his world. But hurting the author is easier said than done. You're helping the author without even knowing it.

You know how sometimes you'll accidentally omit words when you're writing? Like you'll forget to put in a really obvious "the" somewhere. For example, "I went to store" sounds dumb, but sometimes our brains auto-correct it. We fill in the gap unconsciously. You can read over a paper with an omitted word a couple times and never see what's missing. You are doing the exact same thing with arguments. **You are filling in the author's missing links for them without even knowing it.**

Whenever you meet an argument, think of its worst-case scenario. What is the author trying to hide from you? What are they hoping you won't notice? **There's almost always a big problem the stimulus author wants you to overlook.** They lay the breadcrumbs for you to unconsciously connect their dots for them.

Don't give the author more credit than they have earned with their exact words on the page. Don't give the author the benefit of the doubt. Don't respect them because it's the LSAT and it's intimidating. You are Omar. They are Marlo.

Your Loophole is how you call the author out on their nonsense. It's also the single most versatile thought you can have on the LSAT, and our training regimen for the rest of this book is built upon the Loophole.

QUICK LOOPHOLE FAQ

Q.   *How do you design a Loophole?*

A.   Loopholes ask, "What if… really bad thing for the argument?" **Always start your Loophole thought process with "What if…"** This will free your mind to **get creative and use your common sense** against the argument. Loopholes don't have to be true, but they could be, and their mere possibility is a problem for the argument. Complete your "What if…" statement with a situation that destroys the argument's validity. That's your Loophole.

Q.   *How will I know that my Loophole works?*

A.   Your own wits! Ask yourself if the conclusion is still proven in the face of your Loophole. If the Loophole works, the conclusion should no longer be ironclad.

> Loopholes are powerful, just like sufficient assumptions.

Q. *Why am I doing this?*

A. Because it will give you the answer to most of the questions in Logical Reasoning.

Let's return to our coffee argument one last time:

> *Coffee is a delicious beverage, and I love anything delicious. Besides coffee, I only find candy canes and Reese's Pieces delicious. Therefore, I will drink coffee tomorrow.*

Here are some worst-case scenarios for this argument:

> *What if I won't be able to drink delicious things tomorrow?*
>
> *What if someone stops me from drinking everything I find delicious tomorrow?*
>
> *What if all the coffee is too hot to drink tomorrow?*

The answer to each of these what ifs is that the conclusion is no longer valid. That's how you know the Loophole works. If the Loophole is true, the conclusion is screwed.

Notice anything about all these Loopholes? They are the negated necessary assumptions! BOOM.

LOOPHOLE	NECESSARY ASSUMPTION
What if I won't be able to drink delicious things tomorrow?	*I will be able to drink something I find delicious tomorrow.*
What if someone stops me from drinking everything I find delicious tomorrow?	*No one will stop me from drinking everything I find delicious tomorrow.*
What if all the coffee is too hot to drink tomorrow?	*Not all of the coffee will be too hot to drink tomorrow.*

The Loophole and the necessary assumption are two sides of the same coin. You can use either of them to find the other one as your needs require. Why does this work out so perfectly? Because of the contrapositive of our Assumption Chain!

Here is the Assumption Chain you've seen several times:

$$\text{Sufficient Assumption} \longrightarrow \text{Conclusion True} \longrightarrow \text{Necessary Assumption}$$

The contrapositive of that statement is:

$$\sim \text{Necessary Assumption} \longrightarrow \sim \text{Conclusion True} \longrightarrow \sim \text{Sufficient Assumption}$$

This contrapositive tells us that a negated necessary assumption will destroy the conclusion. What does the Loophole do? It destroys the conclusion. Sounds similar, right? **The Loophole and the negated necessary assumption are the same thing.** Meaning, we can rewrite the contrapositive like so:

$$\text{Loophole} \longrightarrow \sim \text{Conclusion True} \longrightarrow \sim \text{Sufficient Assumption}$$

The Loophole (also known as the negated necessary assumption) disproves the conclusion. How cool is that? **The absolute coolest.**

THREE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LOOPHOLE

1. **The Loophole shalt not negate the premises.**

Remember how I told you not to burn down your blocks in the Arguments & Inferences Chapter? Negating the premises is burning down your blocks.

The premises are true. The sooner you accept that, the better. The biggest mistake rookie Loophole designers make is saying, "What if that premise isn't true?" You have to attack the *relationship* between the premises, the space in between them. Focus on how they (don't) add up.

2. **The Loophole shalt not negate the conclusion.**

Saying, "What if the conclusion doesn't have to be true?" is like driving to the end of a footrace and declaring yourself the gold medal winner. You didn't run the race to earn the medal; you just kind of showed up pretending you had.

Obviously, the conclusion doesn't have to be true, unless it's proven to be true, which isn't the case on most LSAT stimuli. You can't just declare the endpoint true. The Loophole shows *why* the conclusion doesn't have to be true.

3. **The Loophole is there. Thou shalt figure it out.**

Countless students have said, "But I just can't figure out the Loophole." I always respond, "I don't believe you."

In the beginning, it can be difficult to find the right balance that enables you to quickly design a validity-destroying Loophole. But you can do this. Have the patience with yourself to build this skill. The students who tell me this are eventually able to quickly and intuitively design Loopholes. But this only happens once they stop letting themselves give up.

Let's start by talking through a few common Loopholes that you will *definitely* encounter on the LSAT. This is far from an exhaustive list of the Loopholes you'll see on the test, but they are a great place to start.

✱ Be prepared to deploy what you learn in the next few pages on real Logical Reasoning questions. These are the LSAT shortcuts you've been waiting for.