Charta | LESSON NOTES

Evaluate questions: the two-answer test

Verbal Reasoning

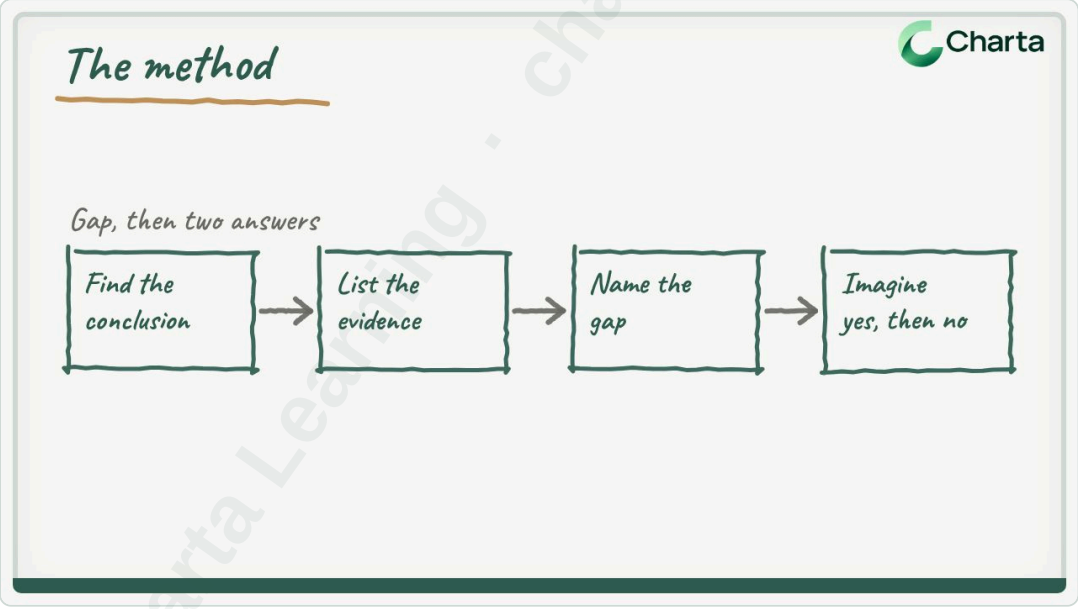
1 What the question asks

- Question line: most useful to determine, to evaluate
- Each choice is a question beginning whether
- You need not know its answer
- Would the answer change your view of the conclusion?

IN THE LESSON

- The question line says something like, which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument.
- In plain words: which piece of information would best tell us whether the argument is good or bad?
- Each choice is a question you could investigate, such as, whether fewer customers come on those days.
- You do not need to know the answer to that question.
- You need to know whether its answer would matter.
- A useful question is one where the answer could go either way, and each way would change how much you believe the conclusion.
- A useless question is one whose answer leaves the argument exactly where it was.

2 The method



IN THE LESSON

- The method starts as before.
- Step one, find the conclusion.
- Step two, list the evidence.
- Step three, name the gap.
- These three steps matter even more here, because the right answer is always a question about the gap.
- Step four is new: for each choice, imagine two answers, yes and no.
- If one answer would strengthen the argument and the other would weaken it, the question is worth asking, and that is your answer.
- If both answers leave the argument unchanged, it is a trap.
- Why does this work?
- Because evaluating an argument means finding the fact that could make it or break it.
- The two-answer test checks exactly that.

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3 The two-answer test

Answer the choice yes, then no

Answer yes	how does the argument look?	**stronger?**
Answer no	how does it look now?	**weaker?**
A split	one way up, one way down	**useful**
No change both ways	the answer does not matter	**a trap**

IN THE LESSON

- Here is the test as a picture.
- Take a choice and answer it yes.
- Ask how the argument looks now: stronger, weaker or the same?
- Then answer it no, and ask the same thing.
- The right choice gives you a split: yes pushes the argument one way and no pushes it the other.
- For example, if the argument says slow music raises takings, ask whether fewer customers come on slow music days.
- If yes, the extra spending per customer may be cancelled out, so the argument is weaker.
- If no, the plan looks sound, so it is stronger.
- A split, so that question is useful.
- A wrong choice gives the same result both ways, usually no change at all.

4 The traps in the wrong choices

- Off topic: the subject, not the conclusion
- Changes the conclusion: costs instead of revenue
- A side detail: the argument stands either way
- Fits both stories: cannot tell them apart

IN THE LESSON

- Now the traps.
- The first is off topic: a question about the subject, but not about the conclusion, such as whether the cafe sells more coffee than tea.
- The second changes the conclusion: a question about costs or profit when the conclusion is about revenue, or about how serious an incident was when the conclusion is about how many.
- The third is a side detail: interesting, but whatever the answer, the argument stands.
- The fourth is the most subtle: a question whose answer fits both stories, so it cannot tell them apart.
- You will see it in question three.
- For each choice, ask: could one answer help and the other hurt?

5 Question 1: slow music

- The owner of the Bluebird Cafe noticed that on days when she plays slow music, customers spend more per visit than on other days. She concludes that playing slow music every day will increase the cafe's total daily revenue.
- Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?

IN THE LESSON

- Question one is an easy one.
- Read it with me.
- The owner of the Bluebird Cafe noticed that on days when she plays slow music, customers spend more per visit than on other days.
- She concludes that playing slow music every day will increase the cafe's total daily revenue.
- The question: Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?
- Notice the difference between spending per visit and total daily revenue.

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6 Question 1: find the gap

Bluebird Cafe: slow music days, more spent per visit

Conclusion	slow music raises daily revenue	**the claim**
Evidence	more spent per visit	**per visit**
Gap	revenue = spend times visits	**the gap**
Prediction	do as many customers come?	**visits**

IN THE LESSON

- The conclusion: playing slow music every day will increase the cafe's total daily revenue.
- The evidence: on slow music days, customers spend more per visit.
- The gap is between spending per visit and total revenue.
- Total revenue is the spending per visit multiplied by the number of visits.
- The evidence covers only the first part.
- If slow music keeps people away, there could be fewer visits, and the total could even fall.
- So the gap is the number of customers.
- Predict a question about that: do as many customers come on slow music days?
- Whatever the answer, it would tell us a lot about whether the plan works.

7 Question 1: the five choices

- A. Whether fewer customers visit the cafe on days when slow music is played
- B. Whether the cafe sells more coffee than tea on an average day
- C. Whether nearby cafes also play music for their customers
- D. Whether the owner herself prefers slow music to other music
- E. Whether licensing slow music for the cafe costs more than licensing the other music she plays

IN THE LESSON

- Here are the five choices.
- Choice A.
- Whether fewer customers visit the cafe on days when slow music is played Choice B.
- Whether the cafe sells more coffee than tea on an average day Choice C.
- Whether nearby cafes also play music for their customers Choice D.
- Whether the owner herself prefers slow music to other music Choice E.
- Whether licensing slow music for the cafe costs more than licensing the other music she plays Which one asks about the number of customers?

8 Question 1: test each choice

Prediction: do as many customers come on slow music days?

A: fewer customers on those days?	yes weakens, no strengthens	**a split**
B: more coffee than tea?	no change either way	**off topic**
C: other cafes play music?	no change either way	**off topic**
D: the owner likes slow music?	her taste is not spending	**off topic**
E: slow music costs more?	costs, but the claim is revenue	**changes claim**

IN THE LESSON

- Choice A is the prediction.
- Try both answers.
- Yes, fewer customers come on slow music days: then higher spending per visit may be cancelled out, and the argument is weaker.
- No, just as many come: then more spending per visit means more revenue, and the argument is stronger.
- A split, so A is useful.
- Choice B, coffee or tea, does not change the argument either way.
- Choice C, what other cafes do, says nothing about this cafe's revenue.
- Choice D, the owner's taste, does not affect customers.
- Choice E is the tempting one, but it is about cost and profit, while the conclusion is about revenue.
- It changes the conclusion.
- The answer is A.

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9 Question 2: the school uniform

- A secondary school introduced a compulsory uniform. In the following year, the number of bullying incidents recorded in the school's incident log fell by a third. The headteacher concludes that the uniform reduced bullying at the school.
- Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?

IN THE LESSON

- Question two is a medium one.
- Read it with me.
- A secondary school introduced a compulsory uniform.
- In the following year, the number of bullying incidents recorded in the school's incident log fell by a third.
- The headteacher concludes that the uniform reduced bullying at the school.
- The question: Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?
- Look at where the evidence comes from.

10 Question 2: what is the evidence?

School: uniform, then a third fewer bullying incidents logged

Conclusion	the uniform cut bullying	**the claim**
Evidence	fewer incidents in the log	**a record**
Gap	less bullying, or less logged?	**the gap**
Prediction	did recording rules change?	**recording**

IN THE LESSON

- The conclusion: the uniform reduced bullying at the school.
- The evidence: the number of bullying incidents recorded in the school's log fell by a third.
- Look closely at the evidence.
- It is not the amount of bullying.
- It is the number of incidents written down in a log.
- Those can differ.
- If the rules for what counts as bullying changed, the log could fall even if pupils behaved exactly as before.
- So there are two stories: less bullying, or less recording.
- The best question is one that tells these apart.
- Predict: did the way incidents are recorded change at the same time?
- This is a gap you should look for whenever the evidence is a record or a report.

11 Question 2: the five choices

- A. Whether most bullying incidents in the log were minor rather than serious
- B. Whether pupils who wore the uniform said that they felt more part of the school
- C. Whether most bullying incidents in the log were first reported by pupils rather than by staff
- D. Whether the rules for what staff record as bullying changed when the uniform was introduced
- E. Whether the fall in logged incidents was greater among older pupils than among younger pupils

IN THE LESSON

- Here are the five choices.
- Choice A.
- Whether most bullying incidents in the log were minor rather than serious Choice B.
- Whether pupils who wore the uniform said that they felt more part of the school Choice C.
- Whether most bullying incidents in the log were first reported by pupils rather than by staff Choice D.
- Whether the rules for what staff record as bullying changed when the uniform was introduced Choice E.
- Whether the fall in logged incidents was greater among older pupils than among younger pupils Which one asks about the way incidents are recorded?

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12 Question 2: test each choice

Prediction: did the rules for recording bullying change?

A: minor or serious incidents?	seriousness, not the count	**changes claim**
B: pupils felt part of the school?	a route, not the log's truth	**side detail**
C: reported by pupils or staff?	no change either way	**side detail**
D: recording rules changed?	yes weakens, no strengthens	**a split**
E: fall bigger in older pupils?	which pupils, not the log	**side detail**

IN THE LESSON

- Choice A asks whether the incidents were minor or serious.
- That is about seriousness, while the conclusion rests on the number logged, so it does not test the gap.
- Choice B, whether pupils felt part of the school, describes how a uniform might work, but it does not tell us whether the fall in the log is real.
- Choice C, who first reported each incident, leaves both stories standing.
- Choice D is the prediction.
- Yes, the recording rules changed: then the fall may be in the log, not in bullying, so the argument is weaker.
- No, the rules stayed the same: then the fall is more likely real, so it is stronger.
- A split.
- Choice E, which pupils saw the fall, does not test the log.
- The answer is D.

13 Question 3: sea fish inland

- Archaeologists excavating a hilltop village far inland found many bones of sea fish in its rubbish pits. They conclude that the village's inhabitants traded with communities on the coast.
- Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?

IN THE LESSON

- Question three is another medium one.
- It is short, so read it with me slowly, and notice how big the jump from the evidence to the conclusion is.
- Archaeologists excavating a hilltop village far inland found many bones of sea fish in its rubbish pits.
- They conclude that the village's inhabitants traded with communities on the coast.
- The question: Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?
- Ask how else the fish could have reached the village.

14 Question 3: two ways to get fish

Inland village: many sea fish bones in the rubbish pits

Conclusion	they traded with the coast	**the claim**
Evidence	sea fish bones inland	**the fish**
Two stories	trade, or fetched them	**the gap**
Prediction	did they fish themselves?	**tells apart**

IN THE LESSON

- The conclusion: the villagers traded with communities on the coast.
- The evidence: their rubbish pits hold many bones of sea fish.
- The bones show that sea fish reached the village.
- They do not show how.
- There are at least two stories.
- In one, coastal people traded the fish inland.
- In the other, the villagers walked to the coast and caught the fish themselves, with no trade at all.
- Both stories explain the bones equally well.
- So the most useful question is the one that tells the two stories apart.
- Predict: did the villagers go to the coast and catch the fish themselves?
- Keep this in mind, because one wrong choice fits both stories, and that is the subtle trap.

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15 Question 3: the five choices

- A. Whether the fish bones were found alongside the bones of land animals
- B. Whether the village was occupied for more than a century
- C. Whether the villagers themselves went to the coast to catch sea fish
- D. Whether pottery or tools from the coast were also found in the village
- E. Whether the fish bones came from species that live in open sea or from those found in coastal shallows

IN THE LESSON

- Here are the five choices.
- Choice A.
- Whether the fish bones were found alongside the bones of land animals Choice B.
- Whether the village was occupied for more than a century Choice C.
- Whether the villagers themselves went to the coast to catch sea fish Choice D.
- Whether pottery or tools from the coast were also found in the village Choice E.
- Whether the fish bones came from species that live in open sea or from those found in coastal shallows Which one tells the two stories apart?

16 Question 3: test each choice

Prediction: did the villagers fetch the fish themselves?

A: with land animal bones?	fits trade or fetching	**fits both**
B: lived in for a century?	time, not how the fish came	**side detail**
C: villagers fished themselves?	yes weakens, no strengthens	**a split**
D: coastal pottery found too?	fits trade or fetching	**fits both**
E: open sea or shallow fish?	kind of fish, not the route	**side detail**

IN THE LESSON

- Choice A, whether land animal bones were found too, fits either story.
- Choice B, how long the village was lived in, does not tell us how the fish arrived.
- Choice C is the prediction.
- Yes, the villagers went to the coast and caught the fish: then the bones need no trade, and the argument is weaker.
- No, they did not: then trade becomes the likelier route, and it is stronger.
- A split.
- Choice D is the subtle trap.
- Coastal pottery sounds like trade, but villagers who walked to the coast could have brought pots back too.
- Either answer fits both stories, so it cannot tell them apart.
- Choice E, the kind of fish, does not show who carried them inland.
- The answer is C.

17 Question 4: chief executives and returns

- An analysis of companies listed on the Brenner stock exchange over twenty years found that those led by a woman chief executive earned higher average returns for shareholders. The analyst concludes that appointing a woman as chief executive improves a company's returns.
- Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?

IN THE LESSON

- Question four is a hard one.
- Read it with me.
- An analysis of companies listed on the Brenner stock exchange over twenty years found that those led by a woman chief executive earned higher average returns for shareholders.
- The analyst concludes that appointing a woman as chief executive improves a company's returns.
- The question: Which of the following would it be most useful to determine in order to evaluate the argument?
- The analyst sees two things together and concludes that one causes the other.
- Which way round could it be?

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18 Question 4: which way does the cause run?

Brenner exchange: woman chief executive, higher average returns

Conclusion	appointment raises returns	**the claim**
Evidence	together over twenty years	**together**
Gap	or do returns come first?	**direction**
Prediction	did strong firms appoint more?	**reverse**

IN THE LESSON

- The conclusion: appointing a woman as chief executive improves a company's returns.
- The evidence: companies led by women earned higher average returns over twenty years.
- Two things go together, and the analyst says the appointment causes the returns.
- But the cause could run the other way.
- Perhaps companies that are already doing well are more likely to appoint a woman, for example because a strong board is more open to new candidates.
- Then the high returns came first and the appointment followed.
- The best question tests the direction.
- Predict: were companies already doing well more likely to appoint a woman?
- When two things go together, always ask whether the cause could run backwards.

19 Question 4: the five choices

- A. Whether the number of women chief executives on the Brenner exchange rose over the twenty years
- B. Whether companies that were already performing well were more likely to appoint a woman as chief executive
- C. Whether most women chief executives on the exchange were promoted from within the company or hired from outside
- D. Whether women chief executives stayed in post longer on average than men did
- E. Whether the difference in average returns is large compared with the spread of returns among companies led by men

IN THE LESSON

- Here are the five choices.
- Choice A.
- Whether the number of women chief executives on the Brenner exchange rose over the twenty years Choice B.
- Whether companies that were already performing well were more likely to appoint a woman as chief executive Choice C.
- Whether most women chief executives on the exchange were promoted from within the company or hired from outside Choice D.
- Whether women chief executives stayed in post longer on average than men did Choice E.
- Whether the difference in average returns is large compared with the spread of returns among companies led by men Which one tests the direction of cause?

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20 Question 4: test each choice

Prediction: were strong firms more likely to appoint a woman?

A: more women over time?	numbers, not direction	**side detail**
B: strong firms appointed women?	yes weakens, no strengthens	**a split**
C: promoted or hired?	the route to the post	**side detail**
D: women stayed longer?	tenure, not direction	**side detail**
E: gap big against the spread?	size, not direction	**side detail**

IN THE LESSON

- Choice A asks whether the number of women chief executives rose.
- That does not tell us which came first, the returns or the appointments.
- Choice B is the prediction.
- Yes, firms already doing well were more likely to appoint a woman: then the returns may have caused the appointments, and the argument is weaker.
- No, they were not: then the reverse story fails, and the argument is stronger.
- A split.
- Choice C, promoted from within or hired from outside, is a side detail.
- Choice D, how long they stayed, is another.
- Choice E asks whether the gap is large compared with the spread.
- That tests whether the gap is real, but not which way the cause runs, which is the gap in this argument.
- The answer is B.

21 Accurate and quick

- Question line first: evaluate means whether
- Most of the time goes on the gap
- Yes, then no: up, down or same
- Cross out a different conclusion
- Two splits? Choose the one that separates the stories

IN THE LESSON

- Some habits that keep you accurate and quick.
- First, read the question line first.
- If it says evaluate, you know every choice will begin with whether, and you know to use the two-answer test.
- Second, spend most of your time on the gap.
- Once you have named it, the right choice is usually the only one that asks about it.
- Third, run the test fast: yes, then no, and say up, down or same for each.
- Fourth, cross out any choice about a different conclusion, such as costs instead of revenue.
- Fifth, if two choices seem to split, prefer the one that tells the two competing stories apart, rather than one that adds a side detail.

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22 What the four questions taught

- Part of a total: per visit is not total revenue
- A record may change: what counts as bullying?
- Two stories: trade, or fetched it themselves?
- Reverse cause: did success come first?

IN THE LESSON

- Look back at the four gaps.
- In question one, the evidence was about spending per visit and the conclusion about total revenue, so we asked about the number of visits.
- In question two, the evidence was a log, so we asked whether the recording rules changed.
- In question three, two stories explained the fish, so we asked the question that separates them.
- In question four, two things went together, so we asked whether the cause ran backwards.
- These four patterns, a missing part of a total, a record that may have changed, two competing stories, and reverse cause, cover a large share of evaluate questions.
- Learn to spot them quickly.

23 Quick check

1. A choice gives the same result for yes and no. Is it the answer?
   Answer: No: the right one splits, up one way, down the other.
2. The evidence is a count of complaints. What should you ask?
   Answer: Did the way complaints are made or recorded change?
3. Busy shops have more staff, so staff bring customers. Ask?
   Answer: Do busy shops hire more because they are busy?

IN THE LESSON

- A quick check.
- Pause after each question.
- Question one.
- A choice gives the same result whether its answer is yes or no.
- Is it the answer?
- The answer is no.
- A useful question must split: one answer helps the argument and the other hurts it.
- Question two.
- The evidence is the number of complaints a council received.
- What should you ask?
- The answer: whether the way complaints are made or recorded changed, because a record can fall without the thing itself falling.
- Question three.
- Busy shops have more staff, so a writer says more staff bring more customers.
- What should you ask?
- The answer: whether busy shops hire more staff because they are busy.
- The cause may run backwards.

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24 Recap: the evaluate method

- Conclusion, evidence, gap
- Yes, then no: the answer splits
- Name the trap in each wrong choice
- Four common gaps to look for

IN THE LESSON

- Let us recap.
- Find the conclusion, list the evidence and name the gap.
- Then put each choice through the two-answer test: answer it yes, answer it no, and see whether one answer helps the argument while the other hurts it.
- The right choice always splits.
- Name the trap in every wrong choice: off topic, changes the conclusion, a side detail, or fits both stories.
- And remember the four common gaps: a missing part of a total, a record that may have changed, two competing stories, and reverse cause.
- Practise this on every evaluate question until yes, then no, becomes a reflex.

Summary notes for the Charta whiteboard lesson. Figures are from the lesson's made-up examples.

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