Charta | LESSON NOTES

Structure questions: what is it doing?

Verbal Reasoning

1 What the question asks

- Primarily serves to; mentions in order to; relates to
- Not what a part says, but what it does
- Name the job with a verb
- The part the question names, not its neighbour

IN THE LESSON

- Structure questions say things like, the second paragraph primarily serves to, the author mentions this in order to, or, the final paragraph relates to the second in which way?
- None of them asks what a part says.
- They ask what it does.
- A paragraph can introduce a problem, describe a view, explain a cause, give an example, raise an objection, concede a point, or draw a consequence.
- So your answer must start with the right verb.
- Two choices may describe the content correctly, but only one names the job correctly.
- And the job must be the job of the part the question names, not of the paragraph next door.

2 Verbs for jobs

Put a verb on every paragraph as you map it

Verb	The job
Introduce	sets up a topic
Describe; explain	how or why
Illustrate	an example
Object; concede	against; grant, but
Draw a consequence	what follows

IN THE LESSON

- Here are the verbs you will use most.
- Introduce: the part sets up a topic or a problem.
- Describe or explain: it tells how something works or why it happened.
- Illustrate: it gives an example of a point already made.
- Object or challenge: it argues against a view.
- Concede: it grants a point to the other side, usually followed by but.
- And draw a consequence: it says what follows from something established earlier.
- Learn to put one of these verbs on every paragraph as you map it.
- Then structure questions become a matter of matching your verb to the choice's verb.

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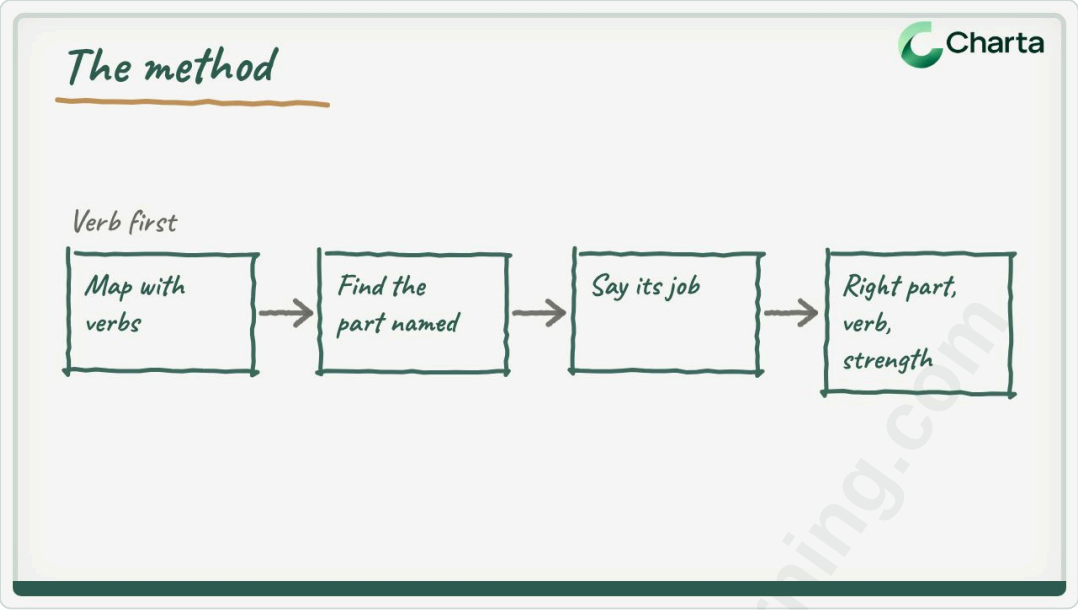
3 The method



IN THE LESSON

- Here is the method.
- Step one, map the passage with a verb for each paragraph: introduces the mailbox rule, explains the telephone case, and so on.
- Step two, find the exact part the question names, a paragraph or a sentence, and read it again with the sentences around it.
- Step three, say its job in a few words, with a verb, and say what it relates to.
- Step four, test each choice: is it about the right part, does it use the right verb, and does it claim no more than the part does?
- Why the verb first?
- Because structure choices are written so that the content sounds right, and the verb is where they go wrong.

4 The traps in the wrong choices

- Wrong part: describes the paragraph next door
- Wrong verb: argue, when it describes
- Too strong: may becomes will, or never
- Invents an example or an objection

IN THE LESSON

- Here are the traps, by name.
- The first is the wrong part: a correct description of a different paragraph.
- In a three paragraph passage, two wrong choices often describe the other two.
- The second is the wrong verb: it says argue where the author describes, or defend where the author concedes.
- The third is too strong: it turns may into will, or a narrow point into a sweeping one, such as can never be told apart.
- The fourth invents an element: it says the part gives an example, or answers an objection, when no example or objection appears.
- For each choice, ask: right part, right verb, right strength, nothing invented?

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5 Question 1: the mailbox rule, part one

- Under the rule that English and American courts adopted in the nineteenth century, an acceptance of a contract offer sent by post took effect the moment the letter was posted, not when it arrived. The mailbox rule, as it came to be called, settled a practical difficulty. Letters took days to travel, and someone had to bear the risk that the offer would be withdrawn, or the letter lost, while the acceptance was in transit. Judges reasoned that the person who made the offer had chosen to invite a reply by post and could protect himself by stating that he would be bound only on receipt.

IN THE LESSON

- Our first passage is the easy one: the mailbox rule, which you met in the detail and application lessons.
- Read along once more, and this time put a verb on each paragraph.
- Under the rule that English and American courts adopted in the nineteenth century, an acceptance of a contract offer sent by post took effect the moment the letter was posted, not when it arrived.
- The mailbox rule, as it came to be called, settled a practical difficulty.
- Letters took days to travel, and someone had to bear the risk that the offer would be withdrawn, or the letter lost, while the acceptance was in transit.
- Judges reasoned that the person who made the offer had chosen to invite a reply by post and could protect himself by stating that he would be bound only on receipt.

6 Question 1: the mailbox rule, part two

- The spread of the telephone and of other instantaneous means of communication unsettled the rule's foundations. For acceptances spoken over the telephone, courts held that acceptance took effect only when it was heard by the offeror, since the speaker could tell at once whether the line had failed and repeat himself. Instantaneous communication, the courts reasoned, removes the period of uncertainty that justified the postal rule, and it places the risk of a failed message on the party best able to notice it.

IN THE LESSON

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- Instantaneous communication, the courts reasoned, removes the period of uncertainty that justified the postal rule, and it places the risk of a failed message on the party best able to notice it.

7 Question 1: the mailbox rule, part three

- Electronic mail poses a harder case than either. A message is usually delivered within seconds, which suggests treating it like a telephone call, yet the sender typically has no immediate confirmation that it was received or read, which suggests treating it like a letter. Courts and legislatures have not answered uniformly. Some statutes now provide that an electronic message is received when it enters a system that the recipient has designated, regardless of whether it is opened, an approach that borrows from both traditions without following either entirely.

IN THE LESSON

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8 Question 1: map the passage

The mailbox rule: the map

Paragraph 1	explains the postal rule	**explain**
Paragraph 2	describes the telephone, and why	**describe**
Paragraph 3	presents email as harder	**introduce**
Paragraph 2 job	a faster medium, and the reason	**the job**

IN THE LESSON

- Here is the map with verbs.
- Paragraph one explains the postal rule and the judges' reason for it.
- Paragraph two describes how courts handled the telephone, a faster medium, and explains their reasoning: instant messages remove the uncertainty, so acceptance counts when heard.
- Paragraph three introduces electronic mail as a harder case and reports that the answers vary.
- The question asks what the second paragraph primarily serves to do.
- So our job sentence: it describes how courts treated a faster form of communication, and why.
- Notice what it does not do.
- It does not argue for anything, and it does not deal with email or with the postal rule's origin.

9 Question 1: the question

- The second paragraph of the passage primarily serves to:
- A. introduce the difficulties that electronic mail poses for contract law
- B. explain the origin of the rule governing acceptances sent by post
- C. describe how courts handled a faster form of communication and why
- D. argue that the mailbox rule should be abolished for all forms of communication
- E. summarise statutes that define when an electronic message is received

IN THE LESSON

- Here is the question, and the five choices.
- The second paragraph of the passage primarily serves to: Choice A.
- introduce the difficulties that electronic mail poses for contract law Choice B.
- explain the origin of the rule governing acceptances sent by post Choice C.
- describe how courts handled a faster form of communication and why Choice D.
- argue that the mailbox rule should be abolished for all forms of communication Choice E.
- summarise statutes that define when an electronic message is received Check that each choice is about paragraph two.

10 Question 1: test each choice

The second paragraph of the passage primarily serves to:

A: introduce email's difficulties	that is paragraph three	**wrong part**
B: explain the postal origin	that is paragraph one	**wrong part**
C: faster medium, and why	the telephone, with reasons	**the answer**
D: argue to abolish the rule	it reports, it does not argue	**wrong verb**
E: summarise email statutes	end of paragraph three	**wrong part**

IN THE LESSON

- Choice A, introduce the difficulties of electronic mail, describes paragraph three.
- Wrong part.
- Choice B, explain the origin of the postal rule, describes paragraph one.
- Wrong part again.
- Choice C matches our job sentence: describe how courts handled a faster form of communication, and why.
- Right part, right verbs.
- Choice D says the paragraph argues that the mailbox rule should be abolished for all forms of communication.
- The author only reports the courts' reasoning about the telephone, so the verb is wrong and the claim is far too strong.
- Choice E, summarise statutes about electronic messages, describes the end of paragraph three.
- The answer is C.

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11 Question 2: the craft guilds, part one

- Historians once treated the craft guilds of medieval and early modern European towns largely as cartels. By limiting the number of masters, fixing prices, and blocking outsiders from practicing a trade, guilds were said to have enriched their members at the expense of consumers and to have slowed technical change by forbidding new methods that threatened established workshops. Records of guild disputes, in which members sued interlopers or petitioned against labour-saving tools, seemed to confirm the picture.

IN THE LESSON

- Our second passage is a medium one: the craft guilds, from the main idea lesson.
- The question is about a single sentence near the end, so map the passage and then read that sentence slowly.
- Historians once treated the craft guilds of medieval and early modern European towns largely as cartels.
- By limiting the number of masters, fixing prices, and blocking outsiders from practicing a trade, guilds were said to have enriched their members at the expense of consumers and to have slowed technical change by forbidding new methods that threatened established workshops.
- Records of guild disputes, in which members sued interlopers or petitioned against labour-saving tools, seemed to confirm the picture.

12 Question 2: the craft guilds, part two

- More recent work has complicated this picture without overturning it. Some economic historians argue that guilds also solved real problems in markets where buyers could not easily judge quality. A purchaser of cloth or silverware often could not tell, at the point of sale, whether the fabric would shrink or the metal had been debased. Guild inspections and marks offered a guarantee that individual sellers could not credibly provide alone, since a single dishonest workshop could damage the reputation of every producer in the town. Apprenticeship rules, similarly, may have protected masters' investment in training by preventing apprentices from leaving once they became productive.

IN THE LESSON

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- Guild inspections and marks offered a guarantee that individual sellers could not credibly provide alone, since a single dishonest workshop could damage the reputation of every producer in the town.
- Apprenticeship rules, similarly, may have protected masters' investment in training by preventing apprentices from leaving once they became productive.

13 Question 2: the craft guilds, part three

- Critics of this revision respond that the benefits were real but could have been secured more cheaply. Quality marks, they note, did not require limits on the number of masters, and towns without strong guilds sometimes developed municipal inspection that served the same purpose. The point is well taken, but it shifts the question from whether guilds did anything useful to whether their useful functions justified their restrictive ones, a question that the surviving evidence, mostly generated by the guilds themselves and by their legal opponents, may be too partial to answer.

IN THE LESSON

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14 Question 2: map the passage

The craft guilds: the map

Paragraph 1	describes the cartel view	**describe**
Paragraph 2	revises it: real benefits	**challenge**
Paragraph 3	critics: cheaper ways	**object**
Last sentence	grants it, but a bigger question	**concede**

IN THE LESSON

- Here is the map with verbs.
- Paragraph one describes the old view of guilds as cartels.
- Paragraph two presents a revision: guilds also guaranteed quality and protected training.
- Paragraph three begins with the critics' objection to the revision: the benefits could have been had more cheaply.
- Then the last sentence: the point is well taken, but it shifts the question, from whether guilds did anything useful to whether their useful functions justified their restrictive ones, which the evidence may be too partial to answer.
- Two moves in one sentence.
- Well taken grants the critics' point: that is a concession.
- But it shifts the question opens a larger question.
- So the job: grant the objection, and show that a larger question remains open.

15 Question 2: the question

- In the last sentence of the third paragraph, the author says the critics' point is "well taken, but it shifts the question." The sentence primarily serves to:
- A. concede the critics' point and so restore the older view of guilds as chiefly cartels
- B. grant the critics' objection and conclude that the evidence rules out any verdict on guilds
- C. limit the critics' objection to those towns that developed municipal inspection
- D. defend the revisionists by stressing that the critics admit the benefits were real
- E. grant the critics' objection while showing that it leaves a larger question open

IN THE LESSON

- Here is the question, and the five choices.
- In the last sentence of the third paragraph, the author says the critics' point is "well taken, but it shifts the question." The sentence primarily serves to: Choice A.
- concede the critics' point and so restore the older view of guilds as chiefly cartels Choice B.
- grant the critics' objection and conclude that the evidence rules out any verdict on guilds Choice C.
- limit the critics' objection to those towns that developed municipal inspection Choice D.
- defend the revisionists by stressing that the critics admit the benefits were real Choice E.
- grant the critics' objection while showing that it leaves a larger question open Look for the choice that captures both moves in the sentence.

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16 Question 2: test each choice

In the last sentence of the third paragraph, the author says the ...

A: concede; cartel view back	it never restores that view	**too strong**
B: grant; no verdict is possible	the evidence may be partial	**too strong**
C: limit it to some towns	the point is granted fully	**invented**
D: defend the revisionists	it concedes the critics' point	**wrong verb**
E: grant; larger question open	concede, then redirect	**the answer**

IN THE LESSON

- Choice A gets the concession right, but says the sentence restores the old view of guilds as cartels.
- The author never says that.
- Too strong.
- Choice B also grants the objection, then says the evidence rules out any verdict.
- The author says only that the evidence may be too partial, so this turns may into will.
- Too strong again.
- Choice C says the sentence limits the objection to towns with municipal inspection, but the author grants the point without any limit.
- Invented.
- Choice D says the sentence defends the revisionists, but it concedes the critics' point.
- Wrong verb.
- Choice E matches both moves: grant the objection, while showing that it leaves a larger question open.
- The answer is E.

17 Question 3: surging glaciers, part one

- Most glaciers advance and retreat slowly, their fronts moving a few metres a year in response to changes in snowfall and temperature. A small minority behave very differently. For decades such a glacier may creep along or even thin and recede; then, over a period of months to a few years, it flows tens or hundreds of times faster than usual, its front lurching forward by kilometres before the glacier falls quiet again. These episodes, called surges, recur at fairly regular intervals for a given glacier, and they appear to bear little relation to the climate of the years in which they occur.

IN THE LESSON

- Our third passage is a hard one: the surging glaciers, from the application lesson.
- The question asks how two paragraphs relate, so note the word because at the start of the last one.
- Most glaciers advance and retreat slowly, their fronts moving a few metres a year in response to changes in snowfall and temperature.
- A small minority behave very differently.
- For decades such a glacier may creep along or even thin and recede; then, over a period of months to a few years, it flows tens or hundreds of times faster than usual, its front lurching forward by kilometres before the glacier falls quiet again.
- These episodes, called surges, recur at fairly regular intervals for a given glacier, and they appear to bear little relation to the climate of the years in which they occur.

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18 Question 3: surging glaciers, part two

- That independence from climate is the key to explaining them. A surge seems to be triggered not by outside conditions but by changes at the base of the glacier. During the quiet phase, ice accumulates in the upper reaches, steepening the glacier and increasing the pressure at its bed. Meltwater produced by friction and by heat from the ground below collects beneath the ice. In most glaciers such water drains away through channels; if those channels become choked, water pressure rises until the ice is partly lifted from its bed and slides with little resistance. When the drainage reopens, often abruptly in a burst of muddy water from the glacier's front, the surge ends.
- Because surges are internally driven, a surging glacier's advance cannot be taken as a sign that the regional climate has turned colder or snowier. Scientists who reconstruct past climates from the former positions of glacier fronts have therefore learned to exclude surge-type glaciers from their samples, lest a surge be mistaken for evidence of cooling.

IN THE LESSON

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- A surge seems to be triggered not by outside conditions but by changes at the base of the glacier.
- During the quiet phase, ice accumulates in the upper reaches, steepening the glacier and increasing the pressure at its bed.
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- In most glaciers such water drains away through channels; if those channels become choked, water pressure rises until the ice is partly lifted from its bed and slides with little resistance.
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- Because surges are internally driven, a surging glacier's advance cannot be taken as a sign that the regional climate has turned colder or snowier.
- Scientists who reconstruct past climates from the former positions of glacier fronts have therefore learned to exclude surge-type glaciers from their samples, lest a surge be mistaken for evidence of cooling.

19 Question 3: map the passage

Surging glaciers: the map

Paragraph 1	describes surges	**describe**
Paragraph 2	explains the cause: inside	**explain**
Paragraph 3	because inside, exclude them	**consequence**
Relation	3 draws a consequence from 2	**the job**

IN THE LESSON

- Here is the map with verbs.
- Paragraph one describes surges: sudden advances at fairly regular intervals, unrelated to climate.
- Paragraph two explains their cause: changes at the base of the glacier, trapped water lifting the ice, not outside conditions.
- Paragraph three begins, because surges are internally driven.
- That word because tells us the paragraph builds on the cause from paragraph two.
- It then says what follows: a surge is not a sign of a colder climate, so scientists reconstructing past climates exclude surge-type glaciers.
- So the relationship: paragraph three draws a consequence, for how evidence is read, from the cause that paragraph two explained.
- It gives no example, raises no objection and does not explain anything new.

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20 Question 3: the question

- The final paragraph relates to the second paragraph in which of the following ways?
- A. It illustrates the second paragraph's explanation with a case in which a surge was mistaken for cooling
- B. It applies the explanation to argue that a surging advance can never be told apart from real cooling
- C. It explains why surges recur at regular intervals, a point left open in the first paragraph
- D. It defends the second paragraph's explanation against the objection that surges respond to climate
- E. It draws a consequence for reading evidence from the cause of surges that the second paragraph explained

IN THE LESSON

- Here is the question, and the five choices.
- The final paragraph relates to the second paragraph in which of the following ways?
- Choice A.
- It illustrates the second paragraph's explanation with a case in which a surge was mistaken for cooling Choice B.
- It applies the explanation to argue that a surging advance can never be told apart from real cooling Choice C.
- It explains why surges recur at regular intervals, a point left open in the first paragraph Choice D.
- It defends the second paragraph's explanation against the objection that surges respond to climate Choice E.
- It draws a consequence for reading evidence from the cause of surges that the second paragraph explained Which choice names the job without inventing anything?

21 Question 3: test each choice

The final paragraph relates to the second paragraph in which of ...

A: illustrates with a real case	no actual case is given	**invented**
B: never told apart from cooling	they can be identified	**too strong**
C: explains regular recurrence	never explained there	**wrong part**
D: defends against an objection	no objection is raised	**invented**
E: a consequence for evidence	because, so exclude them	**the answer**

IN THE LESSON

- Choice A says the final paragraph illustrates the explanation with a case in which a surge was mistaken for cooling.
- No actual case is described.
- Scientists exclude surge-type glaciers lest that happen.
- Invented.
- Choice B says a surging advance can never be told apart from real cooling.
- But scientists exclude surge-type glaciers, which means they can identify them.
- Too strong.
- Choice C says the final paragraph explains why surges recur at regular intervals.
- It does not, and no paragraph does.
- Choice D says it defends the explanation against an objection, but no objection is ever raised.
- Invented again.
- Choice E matches: it draws a consequence for reading evidence from the cause that paragraph two explained.
- The answer is E.

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22 Accurate and quick

- A verb on every paragraph
- Read the sentence and its neighbours; find signal words
- Say the job before the choices
- Cross out choices about other paragraphs
- Is that example or objection really there?

IN THE LESSON

- Some habits that keep you accurate and quick.
- First, put a verb on every paragraph as you map it: introduces, describes, explains, objects, concedes, draws a consequence.
- Second, when a question names a sentence, read it with the sentence before and after, and look for signal words: because, however, but, for example, well taken.
- Third, say the job in your own words, with a verb, before reading the choices.
- Fourth, cross out any choice about a different paragraph at once.
- In a three paragraph passage that often removes two choices.
- Fifth, check what the choice claims the part contains: an example, an objection, a verdict.
- If it is not there, the choice is wrong.

23 What the three questions taught

- Wrong paragraph, or the wrong verb
- One sentence, two moves: concede, then redirect
- Because signals a consequence
- Never accept an invented example or objection

IN THE LESSON

- Look back at the three questions.
- In the mailbox passage, three of the wrong choices described the other two paragraphs perfectly, and one used the wrong verb, argue, for a paragraph that only describes.
- In the guilds passage, one sentence made two moves, a concession and a redirection, and the right answer captured both while the traps turned may into will, or concede into defend.
- In the glacier passage, the word because showed that the last paragraph drew a consequence, and the traps invented an example and an objection that were never there.
- Verbs, signal words and a refusal to invent: those three habits solve most structure questions.

24 Quick check

1. An accurate description of the wrong paragraph. Answer?
   Answer: No: the wrong part.
2. 'The point is well taken, but ...' What job?
   Answer: Conceding, then turning to something else.
3. A choice says 'gives an example'; there is none. Trap?
   Answer: An invented element.

IN THE LESSON

- A quick check.
- Pause after each question.
- Question one.
- A choice describes the content of the third paragraph accurately, but the question asks about the second.
- Can it be the answer?
- The answer is no.
- It is the wrong part.
- Question two.
- A sentence begins, the point is well taken, but.
- What job is the sentence most likely doing?
- The answer: conceding a point, and then turning to something else.
- Question three.
- A choice says a paragraph gives an example, but the paragraph contains no example.
- What trap is that?
- The answer: an invented element.
- The choice claims the part contains something it does not.

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25 Recap: the structure method

- Verbs on every paragraph
- The part named; its neighbours; signal words
- Right part, right verb, right strength
- Name the trap in each wrong choice

IN THE LESSON

- Let us recap.
- Map the passage with a verb for every paragraph.
- Find the exact part the question names, read it with its neighbours, and look for signal words.
- Say its job in a few words, with a verb, and say what it relates to.
- Then test each choice for the right part, the right verb and the right strength, and check that it invents nothing.
- Name the trap in every wrong choice: wrong part, wrong verb, too strong, or an invented element.
- Practise putting verbs on paragraphs on every passage you read, and structure questions will start to answer themselves.

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

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