

Wrong answer on the Durham CEM 2013 familiarization sheet

Here is a sample question on the Durham CEM familiarization sheet for students then planning to take the eleven plus examination in England

Comprehension

Carefully read through the passage of writing and answer the questions that follow. Shade your answer on the answer sheet by choosing one of the options A-D.

Mother's Day probably has its origins in Greek or Roman times. In more recent centuries, it has marked occasions when servants were granted an afternoon off work to visit their mothers. A commercial element has added a contemporary twist to the tradition with the advent of Mother's Day cards.

Example i

When does the passage suggest that the tradition of Mother's Day began?

- A No-one can guess when it may have started.
- B It is a modern invention.
- C It is likely to date back to Ancient Rome or Greece.
- D Last century, when servants were given time off work to see their mothers.

The correct answer is C. The answer C has been shaded in for you on the answer sheet.

1 What does the author say about the effect of Mother's Day cards on this tradition?

- A They provide a money-making opportunity.
- B They have brightened up the celebrations.
- C They have twisted the real meaning of Mother's Day.
- D They are not necessary for this historic celebration.

Shade your answer on the answer sheet.

The answer sheet provided says that the correct answer is A, that the answer to ‘what does the author say about the effect of Mothers day cards on this tradition,’ is ‘They provide a money-making opportunity.’

The question asks what the author *says* about the effect on the *tradition*. The author *says* “A commercial element has added a contemporary twist to the tradition with the advent of Mothers day cards.”

Although *we* may know know that mothers day cards add a money-making opportunity, especially if we happen to shop in large stores like Tesco, Walmart, or Sainsbury’s, it is not established that *the author* knows anything about the profitability of selling mothers day cards.

We might argue that referring to ‘the advent’ of mothers day cards, the author implies that they do exist in shops, and therefore at the time they were put in shops vendors and manufacturers may have had an *expectation* that they would be profitable. Yet too, this depends on the assumption that vendors and manufacturers act only in the interest of their own profit. It is also possible even from a customer-relations standpoint that the advent of mothers day cards was not directly profitable, but that particular shops wished to profit only indirectly from the goodwill of having them there.

It is also possible that owners of shops might be more motivated by goodwill than by profit, altogether.

Now, none of the answers is literally correct; none of the answers states what the author *says*. But a sensible way to interpret the problem is to consider that the correct answer should be the one statement of the four possibilities presented which the author *most directly implies* about the effect of the cards upon the tradition.

The author says that the cards ‘added a contemporary twist’ to the tradition. Answer C says they have ‘twisted the meaning’ of the tradition.

We must consider how directly ‘adding a contemporary twist’ to a tradition implies ‘twisting the meaning’ of the tradition.

Now, the author does not say that the *meaning* of the tradition has a contemporary twist added to it, the twist is added to the tradition itself.

In comparing the correctness of the indicated answer A with the possible answer C we must consider whether it is more indirect to change adding a twist to a tradition into adding a twist to the meaning of the tradition, on the one hand, versus changing adding a contemporary twist to the tradition into providing a money-making opportunity, presumably to vendors and manufacturers, on the other.

But nothing the author says at all implies that the advent of mothers day cards added a money making opportunity to anyone. While, one might say that adding a contemporary twist to a tradition does imply adding a contemporary twist to the meaning of the tradition.

By interpreting the predicate ‘of’ to be symmetric, we may correctly interpret ‘the real meaning of Mothers day’ to be a meaning such that Mothers day is the Mothers day of that meaning. Then the tradition of Mothers day is the tradition of the Mothers day of the meaning. And the contemporary twist is the twist of the tradition of the Mothers day of the meaning, therefore is a twist of the meaning.

Note that in assuming that the author is using the predicate ‘of’ in a symmetric way, we do not just mean that “A of B” is equivalent to “B of A.” That is, we do not require the author to use the word ‘of’ in the sense that to say “The color of my cat is orange” is equivalent to saying “My cat of the color is orange.”

Rather, we only require the transformation rule which in the same example says that “The color of my cat is orange” is equivalent to saying “The cat of orange color is mine.” Or for a more straightforward example, to saying that “The holy virgin mother is the holy virgin mother of son Joseph” is equivalent to “Son Joseph is Son Joseph of the holy virgin mother.” That is, schematically $A = A \text{ of } B \Leftrightarrow B = B \text{ of } A$. It is a uniqueness assertion, or, stating it more carefully we might say it is the assertion of willingness to accept an intended equivalence relation under which the things of the type of A which are equivalent to A are those which are ‘of B ’ while the things of the type of B which are equivalent to B are those which are ‘of A .’

The supposed inappropriateness of this argument is certainly not syntactical, it due to the notion that ‘Oh no, just because it is traded, doesn’t mean that it is the type of twisted meaning that we should avoid on moral grounds!’

That is, the argument against answer C and in favour of answer A is, perhaps, if one wishes to try to agree with the supposedly correct answer, that to ‘twist a meaning’ is an idiom, which refers sometimes to insidious commercialization. And the author certainly while he may have *suggested* an insidious commercialization, he did not *say* it.

Yet, an argument ruling out answer C because the author implied but did not state that the meaning is twisted, would much more strongly rule out answer A, as the author certainly never explicitly mentioned any money-making opportunity.

Saying ‘A commercial element’ implies the existence of a commercial element, but this only means people or places or things involved in commerce, not involved, and profiting, from the direct sale of Mothers day cards.

Without such a careful argument, anyway, one can envision that the author is speaking in a context, such as a village, where the sale of Mothers day cards had initially been money-making, but had later become loss-making. There is nothing the author says that directly implies that mothers day cards are money-making.

And finally, to repeat this, it is possible in some shops that it is far from money that induces the shop-keeper to stock Mothers day cards, or for his patrons to give them indeed to their mothers.

I've gone into some detail in this answer because it is not only in the CEM familiarization sheets that one sees wrong answers. There are also answers in the Maths Challenge sample sheets, and many answers in IQ tests and tests of language and ability which are totally wrong; I'd say about half the questions have totally wrong answers.

They are in every case answers based on willingness to accept the rubric of the problem as an invariant source of truth and to comply with the premise of the problem even to what extent it may be self-contradictory, to make expressions of promise to act in immediate self-interest, and to act in the type of limited self-interest defined by particular narrow and controlled conventions.