

• Reading Comprehension 4 Level 10

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

This November, I encourage the people of Arkansas to vote NO on a referendum to repeal the state's motorcycle helmet law. The state's current helmet law saves hundreds of lives per year, and it is senseless that people should be injured or killed merely because they are too vain to wear a helmet. Furthermore, helmet laws help to reduce public expenditures on health care and have even been shown to deter motorcycle theft. For these reasons, the citizens of Arkansas must oppose this referendum.

One hardly needs to appeal to statistics to show that helmets protect motorcyclists against injury or death. For those who are **skeptical**, however, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) calculates that in an accident helmets reduce the likelihood of fatal injury by 29%. After California passed its helmet law in 1992, that state saw motorcycle-related fatalities decrease by 37% in a single year. These statistics are impossible to ignore. If motorcyclists wish to protect themselves against injury and death, they should wear a helmet whenever they ride.

Many opponents of the helmet law agree that helmets save motorcyclists' lives, but insist that the decision to wear a helmet should be left to the individual rider. Perhaps this argument would be valid if motorcyclists were the only ones negatively affected by their decision, but this is not the case. A 2002 study by the NHTSA concluded that only about half of all injured motorcyclists were properly insured, which means many of these riders likely relied on public funds to subsidize their healthcare costs. If the citizens of Arkansas choose to repeal the helmet law, we can expect these costs to rise significantly, and at a time when our state is in a financial crisis.

Helmet laws can also help reduce motorcycle theft. Few thieves think to bring a helmet with them when they steal a motorcycle, which makes them much easier for police to spot. In addition to making it easier to apprehend motorcycle thieves and recover stolen bikes, evidence shows that helmet laws can deter motorcycle theft from happening in the first place. After Texas enacted a statewide helmet law, cities there saw rates of motorcycle theft drop by up to 44%. A drop in the rates of motorcycle theft directly reduces law enforcement expenses related to this crime, which is another benefit to all citizens.

Opponents of the helmet law offer two main arguments. First, the law's detractors argue that properly educating riders is the best way to avoid accidents. I agree entirely; all motorcycle riders should be properly educated and should ride their bikes responsibly. Some accidents, however, are unavoidable, and as I have argued, helmets significantly reduce health care expenditures associated with all accidents. Second, opponents argue that helmet laws infringe on their personal freedom. Again, I agree that the government should avoid constraining individual choice whenever possible, but as I have shown, the decision to wear a helmet does not affect only the rider, so this issue is not a simple matter of individual liberty. The government must not allow a few individuals to make society bear the burden of their irresponsible choices.

In a perfect world, helmet laws would not be necessary because all riders would wear them voluntarily. However, we do not live in a perfect world. Therefore we must require motorcyclists to make this socially responsible decision. As I have argued, helmet laws not only benefit motorcyclists, but all citizens. Please join me this November in voting NO on the referendum to repeal the state helmet law.

Questions

- 1) As used in paragraph 2, which is the best antonym for **skeptical**?
- A. doubtful
 - B. trustworthy
 - C. sympathetic
 - D. gullible
 - E. perceptive
- 2) Which of the following statements, if true, would provide the strongest evidence against the author's claims in this passage?
- A. Studies show that over 80% of motorcyclists wear a helmet even when not required to do so by law.
 - B. After enacting its helmet law, Wisconsin saw no significant decrease in healthcare costs related to motorcycle injuries.
 - C. Automobiles are a much more common target for theft than motorcycles.
 - D. Only about 15% of motorcycle accidents can be attributed to negligence on the part of the motorcyclist.
 - E. Even in states with helmet laws, as many as 10% of motorcyclists elect not to wear a helmet.
- 3) The main purpose of paragraph 5 is to
- A. expose the logical flaws in potential counterarguments
 - B. assert that the helmet law does not encroach upon personal freedom
 - C. emphasize the importance of rider education in preventing motorcycle accidents
 - D. prove that the author shares common ground with opponents of the law
 - E. underscore the author's claim that irresponsible motorcyclists cost everyone money
- 4) The tone of the author can best be described as
- A. fiery
 - B. rigid
 - C. coercive
 - D. firm
 - E. sly
- 5) Which of the following statements can be described as one of the author's unstated assumptions?
- A. Motorcyclists should be properly educated and should ride responsibly.
 - B. Helmets help to prevent injury in only the most serious motorcycle accidents.
 - C. Motorcycle theft is a major problem in Arkansas.
 - D. Individuals are responsible for ensuring their own safety and protection when the government fails to do so.
 - E. Individuals should be responsible for the costs of their own medical care if they bear some responsibility for their injuries.

Answers and Explanations

1) **D**

skeptical (*adjective*): not easily convinced; having doubts or reservations.

In paragraph 2, the author writes, “One hardly needs to appeal to statistics to show that helmets protect motorcyclists against injury or death.” He or she then relates a series of statistics that support the point that helmets protect motorcyclists, “for those who are skeptical.” The author notes that most people do not need statistical evidence to believe that helmets protect motorcyclists, but he or she relates those statistics anyway for the benefit of people who are *skeptical*. From this information the reader can infer that a person who is skeptical does not believe things easily or is doubtful. The word *gullible* applies to someone who believes things too readily, so it is a good antonym for skeptical. Therefore **(D)** is correct. *Doubtful* is a synonym for skeptical, so **(A)** is incorrect. If a person is *trustworthy*, he or she is able to be trusted. This does not mean that the person necessarily trusts others easily, so **(B)** is incorrect. A person who is doubtful is not necessarily hostile to an idea, merely questioning. This means *sympathetic* is not a good antonym for skeptical, so **(C)** is incorrect. A person who does not believe things easily does not necessarily lack perception, so *perceptive* is not a good antonym for skeptical. This means **(E)** is incorrect.

2) **B**

In the final paragraph, the author exposes one of his or her key assumptions: that wearing a helmet is a “socially responsible decision.” While the author does note that the helmet law benefits motorcyclists, much of his or her argument rests on the idea that the helmet law benefits “all citizens,” not just motorcyclists, because the helmet law reduces public healthcare expenditures for uninsured, injured motorcyclists. The strongest evidence against the author’s claims would call these larger benefits to society into question. If one could prove that helmet laws did not significantly reduce public health care expenditures related to motorcycle accidents in Wisconsin, then the author would have to admit that wearing a helmet is not such a matter of social responsibility, as he or she claims, but rather a choice that only affects the individual rider. Therefore **(B)** is correct. Proving that 80% of motorcyclists wear a helmet voluntarily might weaken the author’s argument that the helmet law is necessary, but the author’s points about health care expenditures and motorcycle theft would still apply to the remaining 20% of riders who do not wear a helmet. Since the expenditures related to these riders would still exist, the author’s argument would still be valid. This means **(A)** is incorrect. The author does not claim that motorcycle theft is as common as automobile theft, only that a helmet law would help to reduce motorcycle theft and the law enforcement expenses associated with it. This point would remain valid regardless of the proportion of motorcycle theft to automobile theft. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The author notes in paragraph 5 that he or she agrees with the argument that rider education is the best way to prevent motorcycle accidents. However, the author also argues that some accidents are “unavoidable.” As the author notes, the cost of health care expenses does not depend on who is at fault in the accident, so **(D)** is incorrect. Proving that 10% of riders elect not to wear a helmet even when required to do so by law might weaken the author’s argument, because it suggests that helmet laws are not completely effective. However, the author does not make any claims about how many riders in states without helmet laws elect not to wear a helmet, so this piece of evidence does not directly contradict any of the author’s points. Furthermore, the author could still argue that reducing the number of riders without a helmet is a worthy goal, even if the number does not decrease to zero. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

3) **A**

The first sentence of paragraph 5—“Opponents of the helmet law offer two main arguments”—informs the reader that, in this paragraph, the author will address counterarguments to his or her claim. The author addresses two specific counterarguments: that rider education is the best way to prevent accidents and that requiring riders to wear a helmet restricts riders’ personal freedom. The author agrees with the basic premise of each of these arguments, but goes on to critique the logic that leads from these premises to the conclusion that the helmet law should be repealed. This means that the main purpose of paragraph 5 is to expose the logical flaws in potential counterarguments. Therefore **(A)** is correct. While the author agrees in paragraph 5 that “the government should avoid constraining individual choice whenever possible,” the author’s larger intent is to prove that the helmet law’s restriction of individual choice is justified by the law’s benefits for the larger community. Moreover, this is only one of the ideas presented in the paragraph. The author also examines the argument that rider education is the best way to prevent accidents. A statement of the paragraph’s main purpose should explain not just one of the paragraph’s ideas, but provide a reason why all of the ideas are in the paragraph. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The author agrees in paragraph 5 that rider education can prevent accidents, but this is only one of the ideas presented in the paragraph. A statement of the paragraph’s main purpose should explain not just one of the paragraph’s ideas, but provide a reason why all of the ideas are in the paragraph. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The author does attempt to establish common ground with opponents of the law by agreeing with two of their basic premises. However, the main purpose of the paragraph is not simply to agree with opponents of the law, but to show why their arguments are logically invalid. The reader can determine this because after the author agrees with the basic premises of the counterarguments, he or she goes on to identify why these premises do not logically lead to a justification of the repeal of the helmet law. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. In paragraph 5, the author reiterates his or her claim that the general public bears part of the financial burden for motorcycle accidents. In this paragraph, however, this claim is presented as a supporting detail rather than the main idea, so it is an inadequate statement of the paragraph’s main purpose. This means **(E)** is incorrect.

4) **D**

Throughout the passage, the author states his or her points clearly and directly. In the first and final paragraphs in particular, the author states exactly what he or she would like the reader to do: vote no on the referendum. The author even capitalizes the word “NO” in order to emphasize this point. He or she also uses logic rather than emotion to argue this claim. The author is firm and confident about his or her position and argues for it in no uncertain terms, so we can describe the tone as firm. Therefore **(D)** is correct. A fiery tone implies a style of rhetoric that expresses intense emotion. Since the author of this passage does not attempt to persuade the reader with emotion, but instead with logic, **(A)** is incorrect. While the author’s tone is firm, a rigid tone implies an unwillingness or inability to consider other viewpoints. Particularly in paragraph 5, when addressing counterarguments to the main claim, the author shows that he or she has carefully considered the counterarguments and looked for common ground with opponents. This shows some flexibility, so **(B)** is incorrect. While the author is attempting to persuade the reader, a coercive tone

implies the use of force or deception in order to convince. The author does not use these methods, so **(C)** is incorrect. A sly tone implies the use of deception or trickery in order to persuade. In this passage, the author relies primarily on logic to persuade the reader, and the arguments are clearly stated and straightforward. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

5) **E**

Throughout the passage, the author argues that it is unfair that the public bears the healthcare costs associated with motorcycle accidents in which the rider did not wear a helmet. Though the author does not state it directly, implicit in this argument is the assumption that individuals should be responsible for paying their own healthcare costs when they are in an accident if they bear some responsibility for their injuries. Therefore **(E)** is correct. The author does agree that educating motorcyclists is important. As he or she states in paragraph 5, “all motorcycle riders should be properly educated and should ride their bikes responsibly.” While the author agrees with this statement, he or she acknowledges it explicitly. Therefore it is not an unstated assumption, so **(A)** is incorrect. The author does not make any assumption about the types of motorcycle accidents in which helmets help to prevent injury, so **(B)** is incorrect. The author does not make any assumption about whether motorcycle theft is a major or minor problem in Arkansas, so **(C)** is incorrect. The author may agree with the statement that individuals should be responsible for ensuring their own safety and protection. However, the author notes in paragraph 5 that some accidents are “unavoidable.” In addition, the author’s opposition to the helmet law is based on his or her belief that individuals cannot or will not ensure their own safety and protection, and therefore they need a law requiring them to wear helmets. This means the author does not assume that individuals are responsible for ensuring their own safety and protection when the government fails to do so. This makes **(D)** incorrect.