Making Inferences – Advanced

Last week we covered the basics of what inferences are, and what is a reasonable conclusion, versus a non-reasonable conclusion. This week, we are going to look at another strategy to help you make valid inference: the *if-then statement*.

The *if-then* statement asks you to look at the information presented in the reading, and see if you could rephrase it into an if-then statement, which would establish the relationship between the two ideas as one of *cause-and-effect*.

For example:

Back in the 1800’s in England, laws were applied differently depending on the gender. Many people don’t realize that women could not own land or vote. Women were barred from receiving a death sentence for crimes that if a man committed, he would be executed because people thought it would be too shocking to see a woman hanged publicly. In some places, men could be fined for certain behaviors done in the presence of a women, such as swearing or spitting.

What if-then statements could we make? Let’s go through sentence by sentence.

1. If we were back in the 1800’s, then the laws would be applied differently for men than for women.
2. If we were back in the 1880’s, then women could not own land or vote.
3. If a woman committed a capital crime (capital mean one that could earn a death sentence), then she would not be hung.
4. If a woman were hung, then the public would be
shocked.

5. If a man swore in the presence of a woman, then he could be fined.

Broken down like this you can see how much easier it is to make logical inferences. Suppose you were asked if a woman murdered her husband would she be executed? You would know the answer is “no,” even though that information is not directly mentioned in the text because of #3. If you were asked if women were in government, you would say “no” because you know they could not vote (#2). If you were asked if men could own real estate, you would say yes, because #2 indicates that women NOT owning real estate was different from what men could do.

**Exercise:** You try to do the same thing with the next paragraph. Write your answers first, and then check your work on the next page.

Many people don’t realize that our sun is actually a star. Our sun seems very large because it is so close to us; however, some stars are actually much larger than our sun. Betelguese (pronounced Beetle-Juice) a star located in the constellation *Orion*, is much larger than our own sun. In fact, if it were located where our sun is located, its surface would engulf not only Earth, but also Mars! Because other stars are so distant, they appear to be less bright, which is why we cannot see them in the daytime. Betelguese is the 8th brightest star in the night sky. To find Betelguese, first locate the constellation *Orion*, and this star forms his left shoulder.
Answer: You should have something that looks like this. If you do not, and are unclear about the purpose of the if-then statement, stop here and contact your instructor.

1. If something is far away, then it will appear smaller.
2. If something look smaller, then it *may not be* smaller if it is far away.
3. If a star is much larger than the sun, then it could be Betelguese.
4. If a star is less-bright than the sun, then it cannot be seen during the day.
5. If a star is the 8th brightest in the night sky, then it is Betelguese.
6. If you know which constellation a star is in, then it is easier to find.

From here, there are dozens of conclusions you could infer. For example, if you were asked why Star A was smaller than Star B, you would know it might be because it is smaller, but also that it might be because it is farther away.
Since you know you can see the moon during the day time, that it is not less-bright than the sun (#4), otherwise, like the stars, you could not see it.

If someone asks you about a particular star, and it is not very bright in the night sky, then you know it could not be Antares! (#5)

The if-then statement is a useful strategy that can help you make inferences and increase your reading comprehension. Complete the practice that follows and turn it in to the dropbox.

**Practice 1:** Write an *if-then* statement for each sentence in the paragraph.

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. The population in Nicaragua, hovering at approximately 6 million, is multiethnic. Segments of the population include indigenous native tribes from the Mosquito Coast, Europeans, Africans, Asians and people of Middle Eastern origin. The main language is Spanish, although native tribes on the eastern coast speak their native languages, such as Miskito, Sumo and Rama, as well as English Creole. The mixture of cultural traditions has generated substantial diversity in art, cuisine, literature, and music.
**Practice 2:** Write an *if-then* statement for each sentence in the paragraph.

Childhood obesity is a condition where excess body fat negatively affects a child's health or wellbeing. As methods to determine body fat directly are difficult, the diagnosis of obesity is often based on BMI. Due to the rising prevalence of obesity in children and its many adverse health effects it is being recognized as a serious public health concern. The term overweight rather than obese is often used in children as it is less stigmatizing.

* Example paragraphs adapted from CC Wikipedia entries