



This exercise sheet accompanies my three videos on “Examining Assumptions”. In these videos I demonstrate a technique for reading essay questions critically, by rooting out any assumptions that the question might be making. Watch the videos and then have a go at the exercises below.

An implicature is a proposition that is *assumed* or *implied* by a question or statement, but not stated explicitly. Eg: ‘Jane is sad too’ implies: ‘Someone else is sad’; ‘There are at least two sad people.’

PART A: Find the implicature(s) in each of the following questions and statements. Underline the word(s) that indicate implicature (if possible), and write the implicature(s) as grammatical sentences.

1. Is John still studying geology?
2. Even Ali is late for the meeting!
3. Was *The Terminator* a brilliant or terrible film?
4. Why has Tina become so miserable?
5. Some sandwiches contain lettuce.
6. Charlotte ate the sandwich.

PART B: Find the implicature(s) in each of the following essay questions. Underline the word(s) that indicate implicature (if possible), and write the implicature(s) as grammatical sentences. Careful to distinguish what is *asserted* (the surface statement, eg: ‘Jane is sad’) from what is *assumed* (the statement that is implied but not stated directly, eg: ‘More than one person is sad’).

7. Is ‘the Third World’ still a useful concept?
8. Why has the rollout of autonomous vehicles been so slow?
9. Is the Tea Party an interest group, a faction, or a party?

10. How do computers think?
11. "Some landscapes are shaped by human activities." Discuss.
12. Why has the US Congress become so dysfunctional?
13. How should we account for the failure of Descartes' mind-body thesis?
14. What has knowledge got to do with bravery?
15. Was New Labour an ideology or a style of governing?
16. "The problem with geothermal energy is its adverse effect upon land stability."
Discuss
17. "A racial pattern so obvious, even the Supreme Court might see it." Discuss this view of preemptory challenges in death penalty cases.

PART C: For each of the implicatures you identified in Part B, say how likely these assumptions or implied statements are to be true, to the best of your knowledge:

Definitely true / Probably true / Probably false / Definitely false / I can't say*

*If you can't say whether an assumption is true or not, try to explain why. Is it just because *you* don't know enough? Is the assumption true in some senses, false in others? Is it *impossible* to say?

PART D: Take a look at past examination papers for your own courses. Can you identify any hidden assumptions underlying any of the questions?