



## GMAT Reading Comprehension Practice Questions

***Answer the questions after reading through the passage. Base your answers on information that is either stated or implied in the passage.***

The rich analyses of Fernand Braudel and his fellow *Annales* historians have made significant contributions to historical theory and research. In a departure from traditional historical approaches, the *Annales* historians assume (as do Marxists) that history cannot be limited to a simple recounting of conscious human actions, but must be understood in the context of forces that underlie human behavior. Braudel was the first *Annales* historian to gain widespread support for the idea that history should synthesize data from social sciences, especially economics, to provide a broader historical view of human societies over time (although Febvre and Bloch, founders of the *Annales* school, originated this approach).

Braudel conceived of history as the dynamic interaction of three temporalities. The first of these, the *evenementielle*, involved short-lived dramatic "events," such as battles, revolutions, and the actions of great men, which had preoccupied traditional historians like Carlyle. *Conjonctures* was Braudel's term for the larger, cyclical processes that might last up to half a century. The *longue duree*, a historical wave of great length, was for Braudel the most fascinating of the three temporalities. Here he focused on those aspects of everyday life that might remain relatively unchanged for centuries. What people ate, what they wore, their means and routes of travel—for Braudel these things create "structures" that define the limits of potential social change for hundreds of years at a time.

Braudel's concept of the *longue duree* extended the perspective of historical space as well as time. Until the *Annales* school, historians had taken the juridical political unit—the nation-state, duchy, or whatever—as their starting point. Yet, when such enormous time spans are considered, geographical features may have more significance for human populations than national borders. In his doctoral thesis, a seminal work on the Mediterranean during the reign of Philip II, Braudel treated the

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geohistory of the entire region as a "structure" that exerted myriad influences on human lifeways since the first settlements on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

And so the reader is given such arcane information as the list of products that came to Spanish shores from North Africa, the seasonal routes followed by Mediterranean sheep and their shepherds, and the cities where the best ship timber could be bought.

Braudel has been faulted for the imprecision of his approach. With his Rabelaisian delight in concrete detail, Braudel vastly extended the realm of relevant phenomena; but this very achievement made it difficult to delimit the boundaries of observation, a task necessary to beginning any social investigation. Further, Braudel and other *Annales* historians minimize the differences among the social sciences. Nevertheless, the many similarly designed studies aimed at both professional and popular audiences indicate that Braudel asked significant questions which traditional historians had overlooked.

### Question 1

The primary purpose of the passage is to

- A. show how Braudel's work changed the conception of Mediterranean life held by previous historians.
- B. evaluate Braudel's criticisms of traditional and Marxist historiography
- C. contrast the perspective of the *longue duree* with the actions of major historical figures
- D. illustrate the relevance of Braudel's concepts to other social sciences
- E. outline some of Braudel's influential conceptions and distinguish them from conventional approaches

### Answers and Explanations

**E**

The purpose, or main idea, of this passage is to explain Braudel's ideas and discuss how they differ from those of traditional historians. Choices (A) and (D) focus on details, and (B) and (C) focus on inaccurately stated details.

## Question 2

The author refers to the work of Febvre and Bloch in order to

- A. illustrate the limitations of the *Annales* tradition of historical investigation
- B. suggest the relevance of economics to historical investigation
- C. debate the need for combining various sociological approaches
- D. show that previous *Annales* historians anticipated Braudel's focus on economics
- E. demonstrate that historical studies provide broad structures necessary for economic analysis

## Answers and Explanations

**D**

Febvre and Bloch are mentioned only in the first paragraph. There, it's said that they "anticipated [Braudel's] approach."

### Question 3

According to the passage, all of the following are aspects of Braudel's approach to history EXCEPT that he

- A. attempted to unify various social sciences
- B. studied social and economic activities that occurred across national boundaries
- C. pointed out the link between increased economic activity and the rise of nationalism
- D. examined seemingly unexciting aspects of everyday life
- E. visualized history as involving several different time frames

### Answers and Explanations

**C**

Here, you have to find which detail is not mentioned in the passage. Choice (A) is mentioned in the first paragraph, (D) and (E) in the second, and (B) in the third.

#### Question 4

The passage suggests that, compared to traditional historians, *Annales* historians are

- A. more interested in other social sciences than in history
- B. more critical of the achievements of famous historical figures
- C. more skeptical of the validity of most economic research
- D. more interested in the underlying context of human behavior provided by social structure
- E. more inclined to be dogmatic in their approach to history

#### Answers and Explanations

**D**

Choice (A) is wrong because there's no indication that the *Annales* historians were more interested in other social sciences than in history. Choice (E) is wrong because, although it's clear that the *Annales* historians had a dogma of their own, there's no indication that they were any more dogmatic than anyone else.

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### Question 5

The author is critical of Braudel's perspective for which of the following reasons?

- A. It seeks structures that underlie all forms of social activity.
- B. It assumes a greater similarity among the social sciences than actually exists.
- C. It fails to consider the relationship between short-term events and long-term social activity.
- D. It clearly defines boundaries for social analysis.
- E. It attributes too much significance to conscious human actions.

### Answers and Explanations

**B**

Choices (C), (D), and (E) are contradicted by the passage. Choice (A) is correct, but it's not really a criticism. Choice (B) is the best answer.