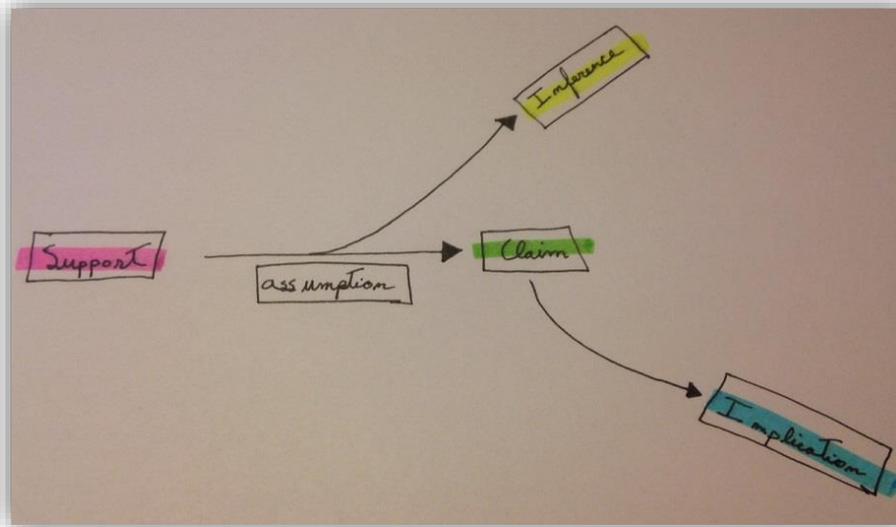


## MCAT CARS Argumentation -

### The Parts of an Argument:

There are five major parts to any argument. Not every argument has every part, but most have at least a few. Many of these are already going to be familiar. Well over half of the questions on the CARS section are going to deal directly with one of these five parts, so if you can practice seeing them, you're going to be eating up points like they are candy. Take a look at this diagram and as well as the definitions below.



We'll start with the two most basic parts and then build from there.

**Claim** – The claim is the point the author is arguing for. (E.g. *Burritos are better than pizza.*) Claims are almost always stated. They have to be for there to be an argument.

**Support** – The support is the evidence the author provides to convince you his claim is the case. (E.g. *9 out of 10 people would prefer to eat a burrito over a slice of pizza.*) Support is almost always stated in some form, however a weak or poor argument may lack support in part or completely.

The **assumption** is the connection between the support and the claim. In the example of burritos, the assumption is that there is a correlation between the number of people who eat burritos and whether or not a burrito is better than a taco. Assumptions are *usually not stated*. If the assumption turns out to be incorrect, then the entire argument falls apart.

Next we'll take a look at the two more nuanced components of an argument. Both of these are unstated and thus more difficult to see. This is the area from which most of the CARS sections most difficult questions come from.

**Implication** – An implication is a necessary but unstated conclusion of the argument. It has to be true in all cases for it to be an implication. (E.g. Since burritos are better than pizza, because more people eat burritos, *we should open a burrito stand instead of a pizza parlor.*)

**Inference** – Inferences are the most squishy of them all. They require a leap to a necessary and unstated conclusion about the evidence and assumptions of the argument. (E.g. Mexican food is better than Italian food.) We'll go into another example below to make this clearer, so don't worry if it's still a little fuzzy.

## Modality

Modality is a blanket term for the *modal qualifiers that show what kind and degree of reliance is to be placed on the conclusions, given the arguments available to support them.*\* Or said in less snobby terms:

**Modality is a measure of the strength of the claim of an argument.**

Every argument has a certain modality, which is to say that every argument can be evaluated on a scale in terms of strength or weakness, conditions, and/or limitations. Modality pops up all over the MCAT. You're going to see it in the passages, questions, and answer choices. If you are able to recognize the strength of claims in terms of degrees as modal qualifiers do, you'll be able to see right through wordy passages and instantly know if a passage is making a strong claim, a weak one, or one somewhere in between. Sometimes the CARS will ask you to evaluate the strength of a claim made by the author.

The most important use of modality on the MCAT will show up in the answer choices. This is the easiest way for the MCAT to make a wrong answer choice look pretty good. They'll take a reasonable answer to the question, but then jack it up on modal steroids and make it too extreme (or starve it for two weeks and make it too weak). Then they'll throw it into a question. You'll read it and think, well that isn't quite right, but it sure sounds like something the author was getting at in the passage. Hey, it even uses some of the same language...and you pick (C). Unfortunately, (C) has the little sleeper cell "always" in there and the author doesn't make the claim that XYZ is *always* this way or that. BOOM. Question = wrong.

## Breaking Modality Down:

All modal qualifiers fall along a scale. If you can try to picture something like this in your head, it might be useful to try and place whatever argument you're evaluating on a scale.

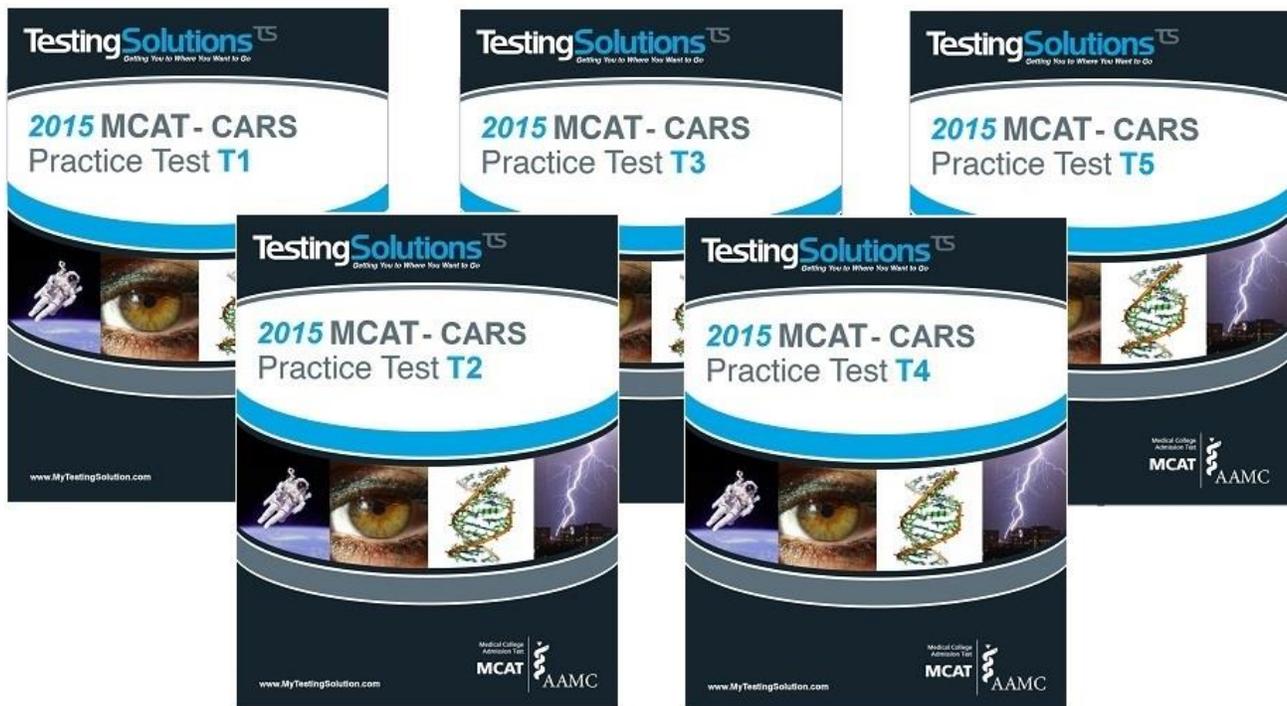


I've included a table below with some common modal qualifiers. You don't need to memorize them, and we're going to talk some about how to use keywords in practicing for the CARS, but for now just become familiar with them and try to keep an eye out when you're reading passages and answering questions.

<u>Strong Claim</u>	<u>Moderate Claim</u>	<u>Weak Claim</u>
Never	Most	Occasionally
Always	Often	Intermittently
Necessarily	Possibly	In some cases
Every	Frequently	
Only	In large measure	
Absolute	Probably	
Continually		

If you practice keeping an eye out for modal qualifiers, before you know it, you'll develop an intuition about the strength of a claim, support, or assumption of the author and will know instantly if an answer choice doesn't match up. It will come with hard work if you practice.

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