John is 50 years old, can his son be 65?
Evaluating NLP Models’ Understanding of Feasibility
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Abstract
In current NLP research, large-scale language models and their abilities are widely being discussed. Some recent works have also found notable failures of these models. Often these failure examples involve complex reasoning abilities. This work focuses on a simple commonsense ability, reasoning about when an action (or its effect) is feasible. To this end, we introduce FeasibilityQA, a question-answering dataset involving binary classification (BCQ) and multi-choice multi-correct questions (MCQ) that test understanding of feasibility. We show that even state-of-the-art models such as GPT-3, GPT-2, and T5 struggle to answer the feasibility questions correctly. Specifically, on MCQ and BCQ questions, GPT-3 achieves an accuracy of just (19%, 62%) and (25%, 64%) in zero-shot and few-shot settings, respectively. We also evaluate models by providing relevant knowledge statements required to answer the question. We find that the additional knowledge leads to a 7% gain in performance, but the overall performance still remains low. These results make one wonder how much commonsense knowledge about action feasibility is encoded in state-of-the-art models and how well they can reason about it.¹

1 Introduction
 Commonsense reasoning has been a key aspect of AI since its advent in the 1950s. It is closely associated with reasoning about actions and their effects, which is considered a big challenge, especially for deep learning-based AI approaches and language models (LeCun, 2022; Dalvi et al., 2018; Banerjee et al., 2020). While several datasets have been developed to evaluate large-scale language models, in this paper, we propose a dataset focused on reasoning about actions and their effects; specifically, the ability to reason if an action or its effect is feasible.

¹Dataset, baseline approaches, and instruction-tuned modeling approaches are freely available at https://github.com/kevinscaria/feasibilityQA

Figure 1: Illustrating a binary classification (BCQ) and a multiple choice question (MCQ) from FeasibilityQA. The correct answer options (False in BCQ and (45, 37) in MCQ) are highlighted in bold.

Figure 1 illustrates an example of our dataset; given the information “Sam gave 50 dollars to the shopkeeper to buy a book and the shopkeeper returned some money”, it is not possible to compute the exact price of the book; however, it can be established that the feasible price of the book is less than 50 since the shopkeeper returned some money. We often come across such questions in our daily life and find it trivial to reason about them. Therefore, in order to develop NLP systems that can reliably reason about real-world situations, it is important to evaluate their understanding of feasibility.

Recently, many datasets have been created that test different reasoning skills such as pronoun resolution (Sakaguchi et al., 2021; Levesque et al., 2012), commonsense reasoning (Singh et al., 2021; Mihaylov et al., 2018; Banerjee et al., 2021), numerical reasoning (Mishra et al., 2022b; Ravichander et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020; Amini et al., 2019; Mishra et al., 2022e; Creswell et al., 2022; Pal and Baral, 2021), qualitative reasoning (Tafjord et al., 2019b,a), discrete reasoning (Dua et al., 2019), and temporal reasoning (Zhou et al., 2019). However, they do not have an ample number of examples that test understanding of feasibility.
In this work, we address the above limitation and introduce FeasibilityQA, a dataset consisting of questions that require an understanding of feasibility. This dataset comprises of two types of questions: binary classification (BCQ) and multi-choice multi-correct questions (MCQ). In BCQ, the task is to determine whether the question is feasible or not given a context; in MCQ, the task is to select all feasible answers to the given question. The dataset consists of around 5K instances covering diverse aspects of feasibility. Table 1 illustrates examples of various categories of feasibility questions.

We conduct comprehensive experiments with GPT-3, GPT-2, and T5 models (Brown et al., 2020; Radford et al., 2019; Raffel et al., 2020) in zero-shot and few-shot settings and show that all of these models struggle to correctly answer feasibility questions. Specifically, on (MCQ, BCQ) questions, GPT-3 achieves an accuracy of just (19%, 62%) and (25%, 64%) in zero-shot and few-shot settings, respectively.

Prior work has found that explicitly providing relevant knowledge helps the model reason better and improves its performance (Chen et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2019; Banerjee et al., 2019; Varshney et al., 2022a). We explore this aspect of reasoning by explicitly providing relevant knowledge statements and find that it leads to a 7% improvement in performance. However, the overall performance still remains low. We further investigate GPT-3’s ability to reason about feasibility questions by prompting it to generate the reasoning chain. In many cases, we find that GPT-3 successfully generates the correct reasoning chain but still fails to output the correct answer. This analysis further leads to several interesting findings (Section 3).

### 2 FeasibilityQA

#### 2.1 Dataset Creation

For creating data instances of FeasibilityQA, we first create a context statement that describes a real-life situation. Then, we write two binary classification questions and one multiple choice question conditioned on the context that tests the understanding of feasibility.

**Dataset creation and verification process**

Seven computer science graduate students were involved in creating the dataset. Dataset creation consists of 3 phases. First, in the data creation stage, each student created 700 samples over the period of 3 months. In the next phase, each dataset creator’s questions were verified by a different student to ensure fairness during data validation. The 3rd stage of the validation was done when all the questions were compiled and cross-verified. In each verification stage, the dataset creators rejected some samples where the inter-annotator agreement was low. 2

#### 2.1.1 Context Creation

We create context statements from real-life situations spanning diverse topics such as elementary physics, profit-loss scenarios, temporal comparisons, and quantity comparisons. We divide the contexts into the following five categories:

- **Attribute comparison**: This category consists of questions that test feasibility aspects involving the comparison of attributes of two quantities. **Implicit numerical**: Questions in this category involve fundamental mathematical facts that test the ability to use those facts in real-world situations.
- **Change with action**: This category tests the abil-

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2All the dataset creators are authors of the paper.
ity to perceive a change in an item or state as an outcome of an action. **Change with time:** Here, questions test the understanding of feasibility related to temporal-based events. **Non Numerical:** This category includes questions where numbers are not explicitly involved in reasoning about feasibility. Table 1 provides examples of these categories. More details about them are in Appendix A.

**Motivation behind category selection** The motivation behind developing a large language model such as GPT-3 is to mimic human intelligence and come closer to Artificial General Intelligence. We attempt to gauge the performance of models’ intelligence by developing simple commonsense reasoning questions. GPT-3 models are few-shot learners but find it hard to do proper numerical reasoning. Earlier datasets like this attempted to analyze numerical reasoning in this aspect. We are also trying to study it in the aspect of feasibility. Previous datasets, such as Numsense (Lin et al., 2020) and MC Taco (Zhou et al., 2019), do not have such a category, and we tried to bridge those gaps.

We think that these five categories are also a good representation of numerical feasibility. We found that questions from those categories had an adequate amount of complexity that the average human could easily figure out. So we expected that large language models should also be able to understand and answer accordingly. We created these categories to compare the models’ numerical reasoning ability with and without knowledge. This gives us insights into whether knowledge helps in each aspect. We hope that these comparative studies across these five preliminary categories will inspire more future categories.

**Target of our dataset:** Our selection of categories in feasibility is inspired by the limitations in existing datasets since it is not possible to cover all the aspects of feasibility exhaustively.

### 2.1.2 Question Creation

From each context, we create two binary classification and one multiple-choice question. Recall that in our questions, the context may not provide sufficient information to find the exact answer. However, the information is sufficient to test the validity of question/answer options (notice the use of the word ‘could’). In question creation, we ensure that all our contexts and questions describe realistic situations, e.g., we keep a range of numerical entities and units appropriate for their context. Table 1 illustrates examples of our dataset.

**BCQ:** For each context, we create two binary classification questions where the correct answer is *True* for one and *False* for the other. Evaluating models’ consistency in answering two contrasting hypotheses conditioned on the same context provides an additional benefit.

**MCQ:** For each context, we create a multi-correct multiple-choice question. Here, a context-question pair and the corresponding answer options are given, and the task is to select all feasible options for the question. We ensure that there is also a *None* option, which needs to be selected when all the other options are not feasible. For a question, *one or more options* (including ‘None’) could be correct.

### 2.2 Dataset Statistics

Our dataset consists of 1536 contexts and 4608 context-question pairs (3072 BCQ and 1536 MCQ). The category-wise distribution of the dataset is present in Table 2. BCQ dataset is label balanced, i.e., 1536 instances for each of *True* and *False* labels. MCQ dataset has a varying number of correct options. Table 3 shows the number of correct answers in the MCQ category.
Table 4: Exact match accuracy of three models in BCQ (Binary Classification) and MCQ (multi-choice multi-correct) tasks across three settings. w/o K and w/ K represents without knowledge and with knowledge respectively.

|                  | BCQ (%) | MCQ (%) | BCQ (%) | MCQ (%) | BCQ (%) | MCQ (%) |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                  | w/o K   | w/ K    | w/o K   | w/ K    | w/o K   | w/ K    |
| Zero Shot        | 62.96   | 69.11   | 19.43   | 25.89   | 0.19    | 0.45    |
| One Shot         | 57.94   | 64.66   | 20.94   | 24.15   | 0.58    | 1.69    |
| Few Shot         | 64.72   | 68.55   | 25.94   | 37.23   | 0.97    | 0.39    |

Table 5: Recall scores of GPT-3 on MCQ task.

|                  | w/o Knowledge | w/ Knowledge |
|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Zero Shot        | 42.9          | 56.8         |
| One Shot         | 17.9          | 34.3         |
| Few Shot         | 39.8          | 55.8         |

Table 6: Pairwise Accuracy of GPT-3 in BCQ Task.

3 Experiments

3.1 Performance Evaluation & Metrics

For BCQ, we calculate exact match accuracy against the gold label (True or False) for each question. We also use a stricter evaluation metric, pairwise accuracy, to better estimate the model’s capability of understanding feasibility. Here we only consider a sample to be correct if both BCQ (True and False questions) are correctly answered by the model for one context statement. For MCQ, we evaluate exact match accuracy, i.e., the model’s prediction is considered to be correct if all the correct answer options are predicted. We also compute recall, which we define as the number of correct answers predicted by the model out of all the correct answer options. Other results (false positive, false negative, category-wise) are in Appendix B.

Models: We evaluate the performance of GPT-3 (Text-DaVinci-002, with 256 max tokens, top p of 1, and frequency & presence penalty of 0), T5-11B, and GPT-2 large models on our dataset.

3.2 Results

Low Performance of All Models: Table 4 shows the accuracy of all three models in zero-shot, one-shot, and few-shot settings. On BCQ, GPT-3 achieves exact match accuracy of just 62.9%, GPT-2 and T5 perform even worse and achieve close to the majority baseline (50%). GPT-2 gets an exact 50, indicating that the model does not understand such feasibility reasoning. On MCQ, which is a more difficult task than BCQ, all models, including GPT-3, achieve a very low strict accuracy score. This highlights that feasibility questions are challenging for even state-of-the-art models.

Decrease in performance in one-shot setting: In the one-shot setting, the model’s prediction is heavily influenced by the label of the example (one) presented to the model. This phenomenon is also observed in several prior zero-shot, and one-shot studies (Zhao et al., 2021). A similar trend is observed in the chain of thought experiments (results described in Table 8).

Providing Knowledge Improves GPT-3’s performance by ~7% across all settings. The accuracy particularly increases (~12%) in the MCQ task in the few-shot setting. Although GPT-3 performs better than T5 and GPT-2, it achieves just 68.5% and 37.2% on BCQ and MCQs, respectively.

GPT-3 achieves High Recall Scores on MCQs: In Table 5, we show recall scores of GPT-3 on MCQs. GPT-3 achieves a high score (up to 70%), highlighting that it gives correct responses but fails to give all the correct responses.

Pairwise Evaluation: Recently, instance-level analysis of the evaluation data has received considerable research attention (Zhong et al., 2021; Varshney et al., 2022b; Rodriguez et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2022a). Motivated by this, we analyze GPT-3’s performance on BCQ questions using the stricter pairwise accuracy metric. Even though the model performs ~63% using exact match accuracy, Table 6 shows that the models’ performance is at most ~43% via pairwise accuracy, highlighting a performance gap. The accuracy increases (~13%) when knowledge is introduced, and the gap between different settings also narrows down, indicating that the addition of knowledge helps.

Please refer Appendix B.2 for details
Table 7: Category wise Exact Match Accuracy of GPT-3 on BCQ and MCQ in one-shot setting.

| Category               | BCQ    | MCQ    |
|------------------------|--------|--------|
|                        | w/o K  | w/ K   |
|                        | w/o K  | w/ K   |
| Attribute Comparison   | 58.2   | 62.5   |
| Non Numerical          | 77.2   | 89.4   |
| Implicit Numerical     | 54.7   | 50.9   |
| Change with Action     | 66.3   | 78.2   |
| Change with Time       | 58.3   | 66.6   |

Table 8: Exact Match Accuracy of GPT-3 on BCQ and MCQ tasks with chain of thought setting.

| Category               | BCQ    | MCQ    |
|------------------------|--------|--------|
|                        | w/o K  | w/ K   |
|                        | w/o K  | w/ K   |
| Zero Shot              | 61.3   | 70.2   |
| One Shot               | 59.7   | 67.2   |
| Few Shot               | 65.4   | 69.1   |

Figure 2: Answers with explanations given by GPT-3 on FeasibilityQA dataset.

Investigating Chain of Thoughts Prompting:
Recent work has demonstrated the success of learning from instructions (Wei et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Mishra et al., 2022d,c; Lu et al., 2022; Parmar et al., 2022; Mishra and Nouri, 2022; Luo et al., 2022) and chain of thought (Wei et al., 2022) and scratchpad prompting (Nye et al., 2021). To test this on FeasibilityQA, we add explanations to one-shot and few-shot examples provided in the context. Table 8 shows marginal improvement. More details are in Appendix C.

A Case Study on Prompting GPT-3 to Provide Explanation:
We further investigate the reason behind GPT-3’s poor performance on FeasibilityQA by prompting it to provide the reason behind its answer. Specifically, we add “Explain the reason behind your answer” in the prompt. Figure 2 illustrates a response from GPT-3. The answer demonstrates that it did not understand the numerical value of Abraham’s age. We also provide additional knowledge to assist the model, as shown in Figure 2. Even with knowledge, the model could not understand the feasible age.

4 Conclusion
In this work, we proposed FeasibilityQA, a question-answering dataset that evaluates the understanding of feasibility. We conducted extensive experiments with several state-of-the-art models in zero-shot, one-shot, and few-shot settings and show that these models struggle to answer the feasibility questions correctly. We also experimented by providing additional knowledge (relevant to the question) and showed that it leads to a small gain in performance, but the overall performance still remains low. We further analyzed the performance of models that reveals several interesting findings. Finally, we release our dataset and hope that our work will encourage further research in feasibility reasoning, an important yet underexplored aspect of commonsense reasoning.

Limitations
Like any other commonsense reasoning ability, the concept of feasibility, in general, can be applied in numerous real-world situations. In our dataset, we try to cover a diverse set of such situations that test the understanding of feasibility, but it is in not an exhaustive list. In the future, we will expand the category space by either converting existing numerical datasets into feasibility questions or manually creating new category spaces. Along with the dataset, we release the list of contexts and situations on which the question is based. In the future, this would help expand the dataset to cover other domains and situations. The human evaluation of the dataset could also be an interesting
study, but it can be an expensive. The selection of humans in terms of their educational background and age is also required for unbiased evaluation. A completely random selection of humans is also required for a comprehensive study. Finally, our dataset includes questions in only one language, i.e., English.

Ethical Considerations

The names used in this dataset are selected from the most common English names. In question creation, we ensure that all our contexts and questions describe realistic situations, e.g., we keep a range of numerical entities and units appropriate for their context. No personal information from data creators has been collected during the creation of the dataset.

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Appendix

A Dataset characteristics

In this section, we describe FeasibilityQA in more detail. Table 1 shows illustrative examples of each category discussed in section 4. Each row of the 4th Column of the table shows three questions that were prepared in response to a context. Table 2 gives the distribution of each category of the dataset. We will explain the motivation behind each category. Please note that the explanations are with respect to examples presented in Table 1.

Attribute Comparison shows the comparative properties between two similar objects. The context from attribute comparison is designed to show that quantities can be measured using words like higher and lower, and the model has to understand the relation between them to answer different questions. In this example, it is not possible that the smaller bottle can have a volume of 33 units since the larger one is 32 units.

Change with Time gives the events that have time as the changing factor. The context is designed to test the model’s ability to deduce time-based changes and how certain actions/ events/ quantities can or cannot be done before/ after a certain time. In this case, it is impossible that Edward’s age could be 19 on his last birthday as his current age is 16.

Change with Action describes the actions which alter certain quantities/events and test the model’s ability to understand that. In this case, it is demonstrated that selling/giving away a certain quantity reduces it. In the example, it is demonstrated that selling all 273 items at least 1 dollar will leave Joshua with at least 273 dollars. Hence the question that he could have 260 dollars is false.

Implicit Numerical Knowledge tests the model’s ability to understand numerical entities as facts and how to manipulate them in different situations. In this case, using the knowledge (or without using it) that four quarters make 1 dollar, the model needs to understand how many quarters will be used in 12 dollars, which is 48 quarters. Hence the question tells us that Christopher can have 52 quarters.

Non Numerical category tests the model’s understanding of very broad domains. They do not have to be numerical based in all the cases. The dataset contains diverse topics ranging from physics, mathematics, biology, and numerical reasoning. A total of 422 subcategories are present in the dataset. Table 2 shows the distribution of BCQ and MCQ questions across different categories in the dataset.

B Other performance results

B.1 Performance Metrics

For the MCQ setting of the dataset, we study true positive, false positive, and false negative rates as the evaluation metrics. Each metric definition is listed below:

False Negative rate is defined as the number of
**Table 9: False Positive rate of GPT-3 on MCQ section**

|          | w/o Knowledge | w/ Knowledge |
|----------|---------------|--------------|
| Zero     | 0.17          | 0.13         |
| One      | 0.36          | 0.32         |
| Few      | 0.33          | 0.24         |

**Table 10: False negative rate of GPT-3 on MCQ section**

|          | w/o Knowledge | w/ Knowledge |
|----------|---------------|--------------|
| Zero     | 0.42          | 0.42         |
| One      | 0.21          | 0.24         |
| Few      | 0.18          | 0.20         |

**Table 11: Category wise Accuracy of GPT-3 on BCQ and MCQ task in zero-shot setting.**

| Category                          | w/o Knowledge | w/ Knowledge |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Attribute Comparison              | 51.2          | 55.8         |
| Non Numerical                     | 72.7          | 85.7         |
| Implicit Numerical                | 52.9          | 52.0         |
| Change with Action                | 60.7          | 65.3         |
| Change with Time                  | 55.5          | 55.5         |

**Table 12: Category wise Accuracy of GPT-3 on BC and MCQ task in few-shot setting.**

| Category                          | w/o Knowledge | w/ Knowledge |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Attribute Comparison              | 64.5          | 69.5         |
| Non Numerical                     | 85.9          | 99.4         |
| Implicit Numerical                | 60.8          | 56.6         |
| Change with Action                | 73.7          | 86.8         |
| Change with Time                  | 64.8          | 74.1         |

Incorrect predictions the model gave as correct. For example, if the model gave output as A, B, C, and the predicted result is A, C, then B is missed. The number of false negatives would be 1 (B).

**False Positive rate** is defined as the number of correct predictions the model gave as incorrect. For example, if the given output is A, B and the predicted result is A, B, C, then the number of false negatives would be 1 (C).

### B.2 Results

False positive results shown in Table 9 follow trends similar to accuracy where the performance of one-shot experiments is worse than zero-shot and few-shot. But with the addition of knowledge, the false positive rate decreases.

As shown in Table 10, the False negative rate decreases from zero-shot to few-shot experiments, but contrary to other experiments, it increases with the addition of knowledge in almost all the cases.

Table 11 shows the category-wise results in zero-shot settings for BCQ and MCQ tasks. For the BCQ task, accuracy was lowest in the Attribute comparison category and highest in Non-Numerical Category. Performance of the Non Numerical category improved significantly in with knowledge setting.

In the MCQ portion of the dataset, the performance gap between Non-Numerical and other categories reduces significantly. It is still the best-performing category for the model, but the Change with Action Category also produced similar results. There was no significant improvement in both Non-Numerical and change with action as observed in the Non-Numerical with the addition of knowledge.

Table 12 shows the category-wise results for BCQ and MCQ tasks in few shot setting. For the BCQ task, accuracy was lowest in the Attribute comparison category and highest in Non-Numerical Category. Performance of the Non Numerical category improved significantly in the knowledge setting with accuracy reaching above 90% for the first time in any of the categories.

In the MCQ portion of the dataset, the performance gap between Non-Numerical and other categories reduces significantly. It is still the best-performing category for the model. There was a significant improvement in Non Numerical and change with action and change with time categories with the addition of knowledge.

**Exact 50% accuracy of GPT-2:** The input format for all models was as follows: Zero-Shot, Question (Different questions), and Options (True or False). Example(s) preceded the question in the one-shot and few-shot settings. Based on this format, GPT-2 gave the probability of “False” higher in all cases. Since the dataset is label balanced, all the True hypothesis questions were incorrectly predicted, hence giving a 50% accuracy.
Table 13: Illustrating chain of thought approach on some examples of feasibilityQA dataset in 1 shot setting without providing knowledge. 1st set of rows demonstrate the example fed into GPT-3 for 1 shot learning. 2nd and 3rd set of rows show GPT-3’s response to Context, Question and Options asked.

Table 14: Illustrating chain of thought approach on some examples of feasibilityQA dataset in 1 shot setting with providing knowledge. 1st set of rows demonstrate the example fed into GPT-3 for 1 shot learning. 2nd row shows GPT-3’s response to Context, Question and Options asked.

C Case study: Chain of Thought Reasoning Approach

Table 13 and 14 show the unsuccessful attempts in the chain of thought reasoning approach. Table 13 shows the setting where the 1st example is fed into the model as an example of how to reason out the answer. The reason and answer were clearly mentioned that told that evaporation leads to a decrease in water level and hence water level should decrease. This led to a decrease in water level; hence, the correct answers were quantities less than 63; 59 and 61.

The 2nd and 3rd sets of rows show the Context, question, and options supplied to GPT-3, and we get responses in GPT-3 Answer row. The logic given for the addition of a number is wrong.
Adding a negative number should decrease the value, and hence rest of the answer will be wrong. In the 3rd row GPT-3's response, the logic used to calculate the answer is correct, but it was unable to calculate that 1600 was double 758. Both parts are highlighted in the table.

The situation did not improve much when knowledge was supplied with other rows, as shown in Table 14. The model was able to interpret the logic correctly but could not associate that logic with numerical quantities.