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CHAPTER EIGHT

GRE Verbal

The GRE Verbal Section is designed to measure the skills required to carefully read and understand sentences and passages written in standard written English. A GRE Verbal Section includes 30 questions of the following four question types: Reading Comprehension, Antonym, Analogy, and Sentence Completion. The questions appear in random order, which means that you might first be given a Sentence Completion question, followed by two Analogy questions, followed by a passage and several Reading Comprehension questions, followed by three Antonym questions, and so on.

This chapter provides you with useful strategies and techniques, an overview of the question types, and a breakdown of the critical reading skills that will be tested. This chapter also includes some sample practice questions with explanations.

Reading Comprehension

The GRE Reading Comprehension questions are designed to measure your ability to read, understand, and analyze a written passage. Correctly answering a question requires you to recognize both what is stated and what is implied within the passage, and to establish the relationships and ideas expressed in the passage.

The computer adaptive GRE includes a balance of reading passages across different subject matter areas, such as humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Each passage ranges from approximately 150 to 500 words in length, and will be followed by two to five questions, each with five answer choices. You should select the best possible answer for each question.

NOTE

Remember that on your actual GRE, you must answer all the questions in the order in which they are presented. We suggest that you do the same while you are practicing.

Anatomy of a GRE Reading Comprehension Question

Before you learn about strategies, you should understand what a Reading Comprehension question looks like. Consider the following:

Passage { Scientists know very little about the eating habits of our ancestors who lived over two and a half million years ago. To solve this problem, scientists have started examining chimpanzees' hunting behavior and diet to find clues about our own prehistoric past. It is not difficult to determine why studying chimpanzees might be beneficial. Modern humans and chimpanzees are actually very closely related. Experts believe that chimpanzees share about 98.5% of our DNA sequence. If this is true, humans are more closely related to chimpanzees than to any other animal species.

Question stem { 1. The main purpose of the passage is to

Answer choices {

- (A) explore biological and physiological similarities between humans and chimpanzees
- (B) examine the hunting behavior and diet of chimpanzees and compare it to human activity
- (C) discuss the health benefits of eating and hunting meat while simultaneously predicting the effect of this behavior on chimpanzee offspring
- (D) bring attention to the pioneering research of Dr. Jane Goodall in Tanzania
- (E) educate the public on the impact that tool use had on early human societies

General Strategies for Reading Comprehension Questions

Probably the biggest mistake that you could make is to read these passages as though you are studying for a college exam. The “open-book” aspect of the passage-based Reading Comprehension sections means that you should read in a way that helps your brain to work through the information efficiently. You should *not* read slowly and carefully as though you will have to remember the information for a long period of time. You should read loosely and only dwell on information that you are sure is important because you need it to answer a question. This type of reading should be very goal-oriented; if the information you are looking at does not help to answer a question that the test writers find important, you should not linger over it.

Each of the passages has numbered lines. Some of the questions will refer to a particular line or lines. When you read a question that contains a line reference, locate those lines in the passage and make a note in the margin so that you know where to begin to find the answer to the question.

The best scores on this section are usually earned by students who possess two key skills: paraphrasing and skimming. These skills, along with techniques on how to determine the main idea, read and answer the questions, and use the process of elimination, are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Determine the Main Idea

As you begin to read a passage, your first step should be determining the main idea. This technique will help you to answer the “big picture” questions, and assist you in locating information necessary to answer other question types. The main idea has three components:

- ▶ *Topic* (“What is the passage about?”)
- ▶ *Scope* (“What aspect of the topic does the passage focus on?”)
- ▶ *Purpose* (“Why did the author write the passage?”)

If you can answer these three questions, you understand the main idea. Consider the following scenarios:

1. The world’s tropical rain forests are being decimated at an alarming rate. Each day, thousands of acres of trees are destroyed in both developing and industrial countries. Nearly half of the world’s species of plants and animals will be eliminated or severely threatened over the next 25 years due to this rapid deforestation. Clearly, it is imperative that something be done to curtail this rampant destruction of the rain forests.
2. Tropical rain forests are crucial to the health and welfare of the planet. Experts indicate that over 20% of the world’s oxygen is produced by the Amazon rain forest alone. In addition, more than half of the world’s estimated 10 million species of plants, animals, and insects live in the tropical rain forests. These plants and animals of the rain forest provide us with food, fuel wood, shelter, jobs, and medicines. Indigenous humans also inhabit the tropical rain forests.

The *topic* of both passages is tropical rain forests. However, the *scope* of each passage is very different. The first passage discusses destruction of the tropical rain forests, whereas the second passage introduces the diversity of the rain forests and indicates why the rain forests are important. The *purpose* of the first passage is a call to action, while the second passage is primarily informative.

The introductory paragraph often indicates the topic or topics being discussed, the author’s point of view, and exactly what the author is trying to prove. So, read a little more slowly at the beginning until you get a grip on the three components of the main idea and then you can shift to a higher gear and skim the rest of the passage.

As you read the passage for the main idea, and particularly the author’s purpose, avoid arguing with the author. If you disagree with any viewpoints expressed in a passage, do not let your personal opinions interfere with your selection of answer choices. In addition, you should not rely on any prior knowledge you might have about a particular topic. The questions will ask about information that is stated or implied in the passage, not information that you might recall about the topic being discussed.

EXAM **PREP** Study **TIP**

Too often, test takers confuse *topic* with *main idea*. The topic of a passage only answers the question “What is the passage about?” If that is all you notice, you are missing some very important information.

The Reading Comprehension questions are not meant to test your knowledge about a particular subject. You should answer questions based only on the information presented in the passage, and not on any prior knowledge that you might have of the subject. You might be asked to draw a conclusion or make an inference, but you should do so based only on what the writer's words actually state or imply.

Skim the Passage

Don't use context clues to help you determine the meaning of any unfamiliar terms the first time that you skim through a passage. When you come to a word or phrase that is unfamiliar, just read past it. There is a strong chance that you won't need to determine exactly what that one word or phrase means to answer the bulk of the questions that accompany the passage. If you waste some of your precious time, you'll never get it back. With perseverance and practice, you will start to get comfortable with a less-than-perfect understanding of the passage.

While reading through paragraphs, follow these tips to help you gather information more effectively:

- ▶ Try to determine the subtopic for each paragraph quickly.
- ▶ Focus on the general content of each paragraph.
- ▶ Determine the purpose of each paragraph.

NOTE

The first sentence is not always the topic sentence. Don't believe those people who say that you can read the first and last sentence of each paragraph and skip the rest of the sentences completely. You are better off skimming over all of the words even if you end up forgetting most of what you read almost immediately.

Be sure to read actively. That is, think about things such as the tone and the purpose of the passage. This technique will help you to stay focused on the material, and, ultimately, will allow you to select the best answer to the questions.

The goal at this stage is to get a general understanding of the structure of the passage so that you can find what you are looking for when you refer back to the passage. Keep moving through the material.

Read and Answer the Questions

Follow these tips as you read and answer the questions in the Reading Comprehension section:

- ▶ Read the question and make sure that you understand it, paraphrasing if you need to. Use the structure of the passage to lead you to the correct answer. Go back to the part of the passage that relates to the question, and that part will probably contain the answer to your question.
- ▶ After you read the questions, take a moment to mentally summarize the main idea and the structure of the passage.

- ▶ Some of the questions on the GRE ask you to draw conclusions based on the information that you read. However, even these questions should be answered based on the information in the passage. There are always some strong hints, or evidence, that will lead you to an answer.
- ▶ Some of the questions contain references to specific lines of the passage. The trick for these question types is to read a little before and a little after the specific line that is mentioned. Remember that you must answer the questions based on the context of the passage, so be sure that you fully understand what that context is. At a minimum, read the entire sentence that contains the line that is referenced.
- ▶ Some of the questions might not tell you where to look for the answer, or they might question the passage as a whole. In situations like this, think about what you learned about the passage overall while you were skimming it. Note the subtopics for the paragraphs and let them guide you to the part of the passage that contains the information that you are looking for.

One of the important skills rewarded by the GRE is the ability to sift through text and find the word or concept that you are looking for. This skill improves with practice.

NOTE

It is possible for an answer choice to be both true *and* wrong. The answer that you choose must respond correctly to the question being asked. Simply being true is not enough to make an answer correct. The best answer is always supported by details, inference, or tone.

Apply Logic

It is important that you know the difference between information that is stated directly in the passage, and inferences and assumptions. You might be asked questions based on factual information found in the reading passages. The reading passages might also include information about which you will be asked to make an inference.

- ▶ Inferences—An *inference* is a conclusion based on what is stated in the passage. You can infer something about a person, place, or thing by reasoning through the descriptive language contained in the reading passage. In other words, the author's language *implies* that something is probably true.
- ▶ Assumptions—An *assumption*, on the other hand, is unstated evidence. It is the missing links in an author's argument. Refer to Chapter 5, "Introduction to GRE Logic," for an overview of inferences and assumptions.

Paraphrase the Questions and Predict an Answer

After you have found the information in the passage that will provide the answer that you are looking for, try to answer the question in your mind. Put the question in your

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The most complicated sounding answer choice is not always correct. The correct or best choice is the one that responds to the question, based on information and ideas that appear in the passage.

own words so that it makes more sense to you. Try to predict an answer for the question, and then skim the choices presented and look for your answer. You might have to be a little flexible to recognize it. Your answer might be there dressed up in different words. If you can recognize a paraphrase of your predicted answer, select it. Developing this skill will help you to become more time-efficient and will lead you to the correct answer more often than not.

Use the Process of Elimination

Elimination is the process most test-takers use when answering exam questions. It is reliable, but slow. However, it is still useful as a backup strategy for questions where you cannot predict an answer or when you find that your prediction is not a choice.

The process of elimination is a good tool. It just shouldn't be the only tool in your box. It can be hard to break the habit of always applying the process of elimination. You have likely developed this habit because on past exams you have been given too much time to answer questions. On the GRE, you will need to be more time-efficient, which is why you should use the process of elimination only when other strategies fail to yield an answer.

Eliminate any answer choices that are clearly incorrect, including answer choices that are outside the scope of the passage. Answer choices that fall outside the scope of the passage are very common in this section. For example, an answer choice might be too specific, too general, or have no relation to the content of the passage itself or for the question being asked.

Finally, always consider all of the choices before you confirm your answer, even if your predicted answer is among the choices. The difference between the best answer and the second best answer is sometimes very subtle.

Reading Comprehension Question Types

The following subsections discuss the types of questions you are likely to encounter on the GRE. Specific approaches to each question type are also included. You will begin to recognize the different question types as you work through the sample questions and practice exams. The most common question types include the following:

- ▶ Main idea/primary purpose
- ▶ Specific detail
- ▶ Purpose of detail
- ▶ Conclusion/inference
- ▶ Extrapolation
- ▶ Structure
- ▶ Weakening
- ▶ EXCEPT

Main Idea/Primary Purpose

These questions can ask about the main idea of the whole passage or of a specific paragraph. They also often ask about the author's point of view or perspective and the intended audience. These questions might also ask you to determine the best title for the passage.

Strategy: Answer these questions according to your understanding of the three components of the main idea, which were mentioned previously (topic, scope, and purpose). It is also worth noting that the incorrect choices are usually either too broad or too narrow. You should eliminate the answer choices that focus on a specific part of the passage and also eliminate the answer choices that are too general and could describe other passages besides the one on which you are working.

Specific Detail

These questions can be as basic as asking you about some fact that is easily found in the passage. Some questions even provide specific line references or text from the passage.

Questions that begin "According to the author" or "According to the passage" might be specific detail questions.

Strategy: When you skim the passage, make sure that you establish the structure of the passage and the purpose of each paragraph. If you have a clear idea of how the passage is organized, you should be able to refer quickly to the portion of the passage that contains the answer. Otherwise, use the line or paragraph references in the questions, if they are given. Sometimes the answer choices are paraphrased, so don't just select the answers that contain words that appear in the passage. Make sure that the choice you select is responsive to the question being asked.

Purpose of Detail

These questions ask you to determine the author's purpose in mentioning certain details, as well as how details contained within the passage might support the main idea.

Questions that begin "The author mentions ___ probably in order to" are most likely purpose of detail questions.

Strategy: Making a connection between the supporting details and the main idea of the passage helps you to answer these questions correctly. Think of the details as the building blocks of the author's thesis. This should provide you with some insight into why the author included these details in the passage. Refer specifically to any line references given in the questions.

Conclusion/Inference

These questions require you to put together information in the passage and use it as evidence for a conclusion. You have to find language in the passage that leads you to the inference that the question demands.

Questions that begin "According to the author" or "It can be inferred from the passage" might require you to locate clues or evidence that lead you to the answer.

Strategy: Understanding the main idea of the passage or paragraph, and particularly the author's tone, is key for these types of questions. Although you have to do a bit of thinking for these questions, you should be able to find very strong evidence for your answers. If you find yourself creating a long chain of reasoning and including information from outside the passage, stop and reconsider your selection.

Extrapolation

These questions ask you to go beyond the passage itself and find answers that are *probably* true based on what you know from the passage. They can be based on the author's tone or on detailed information in the passage. You are often required to reason by analogy or to discern relationships between a situation presented in the passage and other situations that might parallel those in the passage.

These questions might begin with "The author anticipates" or "Which of the following best exemplifies ___ as it is presented in the passage."

Strategy: You need to be sensitive to any clues about the author's tone or attitude and any clues about how the characters in the passage feel. Eliminate any choices that are outside the scope of the passage. As with the inference questions, the GRE rewards short, strong connections between the passage and the correct answers.

Structure

These questions might ask you to describe the structure of the passage or how a particular detail or paragraph functions within the passage as a whole.

Questions that begin "The last paragraph performs which function" or "Which of the following describes the organization of the passage" are structure questions.

Strategy: You need to recognize the author's purpose in writing the passage and determine how the author develops the main thesis or argument. If the passage is purely informational, for example, the author might simply make a statement followed by some supporting details. On the other hand, the author might offer comparisons between two different theories in order to persuade the reader that one theory is better. Pay attention to both the language and the connotation.

Weakening

These questions require you to select the answer choice that weakens the author's argument. Weakening does not necessarily mean to disprove completely; it merely means to make the conclusion of the argument somewhat less likely.

These questions take the form of "Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the author's argument in lines..."

Strategy: The best approach to answering these questions correctly is to first make sure that you understand the author's argument or main point. To weaken the author's argument, you should usually attack the author's assumptions (unstated evidence). In some cases, the correct answer actually contradicts a statement made in the passage.

EXCEPT

These questions are often phrased as follows: “The author probably believes all of the following “EXCEPT,” or “All of the following are listed in the passage as examples of biodiversity EXCEPT.”

Strategy: The best answer in these instances includes information that is *not* directly stated in the passage or *cannot* be inferred from information stated in the passage. In addition, in the first sample question—“The author probably believes all of the following EXCEPT,”—the incorrect answer choices would all be something that the passage would suggest that the author *does* believe. Likewise, in the second sample question—“All of the following are listed in the passage as examples of biodiversity EXCEPT”—the incorrect answer choices would likely be stated explicitly in the passage as examples of biodiversity.

Practice Reading Comprehension Questions

Directions: The passage below is followed by several questions. The questions correspond to information that is stated or implied in the passage. Read the passage and choose the best answer for each question.

- Line According to many scholars, Johan Gutenberg’s mid-15th century invention of the movable-type printing press fueled the scientific and cultural revolution today known as the European Renaissance. With their unique combination of easy and accurate reproduction, printed books quickly became the repository of Western knowledge, replacing
- (5) laboriously produced, handwritten manuscripts. Early works, known as *incunabula*, often married the two traditions. Texts could be printed with spaces left for scribes and illustrators to add the illuminated capitals and intricate artwork expected by wealthy patrons. Often religious texts, these volumes were designed to move believers with rich colors, florid imagery, and precious materials. Indeed, the resultant product was very much like
- (10) its predecessor, the illuminated manuscript, a book whose text was adorned with painted initials, borders, and illustrations. Today, a few treasured 15th century *incunabula* survive in libraries and museums, a testament to their robust construction and the care of their owners.
- Despite the luxury exhibited in some *incunabula* texts, movable-type print can be
- (15) argued to have been a powerful democratizing force. While running the press was not without its own expense and toil, a work printed on paper could be made available for one fifth that of a scribal text on vellum or parchment. The availability of scientific, political, and religious texts simply exploded. Nevertheless, many historians would quickly point out that Renaissance Europe was not the resplendent cultural and scientific center of the world envisioned in modern populist media. While exact rates of
- (20) literacy are extremely controversial, it is generally agreed that the vast majority of Europeans in the 15th century were uneducated and wholly disenfranchised. The lofty realms of philosophy, science, and the arts were the preoccupation of society’s elite. Hence, the printed word frequently reflected the aspirations of the aristocracy or the interests of affluent landowners and merchants, all of whom were still the primary
- (25) market for books. In this way, the perspective of the common citizen, what we may term

the “working class,” is all but absent in the profusion of communication that is the Renaissance.

- (30) Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, to whom the term “Renaissance” is attributed, makes no claim for increased equity in the authorship, publication, or ownership of printed manuscripts in 15th-century Europe. He asserts, however, that the Italian Renaissance—an intellectual movement begun a full century before the invention of the printing press—was the fall of the notion of birthright: “And as time went on, the greater the influence of humanism on the Italian mind, the firmer and more widespread
- (35) became the conviction that birth decides nothing as to the goodness or badness of a man.” While the idea of social fairness may have taken hold in the Renaissance, spread by the proliferation of ideas and texts, real economic justice was slower to develop. Just as *incunabula* bridged the transition from hand-written manuscript to fully-printed text, the Renaissance revolution held a middle ground between Medieval feudalism and
- (40) Enlightenment democracy.

1. The author is primarily concerned with

- (A) describing how movable-print type revolutionized production of the written word
- (B) explaining how Johan Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press revolutionized the production of written texts, laying the groundwork for social democracy
- (C) arguing that printed books were shoddy replacements for resplendent illuminated manuscripts
- (D) examining how the European Renaissance resulted in significantly increased social equity due to the invention of the printing press
- (E) denying that social justice always precedes economic justice in the evolution of human civilizations

The best answer is B. Only answer choice B covers the full scope of the passage. Although answer choice A states a point clearly made in the passage, it does not include the social and political concerns of the author. The other choices are either too broad or are inaccurate.

2. Which one of the following most accurately describes the author’s attitude toward “social fairness” (line 36)?

- (A) “Social fairness” is a false academic construction and is impossible to achieve in “real world” conditions.
- (B) “Social fairness” is a by-product of the Medieval period carried over to the Enlightenment.
- (C) “Social fairness” is a modern term and, therefore, irrelevant to any discussion of the Renaissance.

- (D) “Social fairness” is the ultimate goal of the human condition and is a necessary component of modern civilization.
- (E) “Social fairness” is a desirable human condition that began to be realized in 15th century Europe as a product of the Renaissance.

The best answer is E. Although academic, the author’s tone in the passage is mildly argumentative and favorable toward social reform, as indicated in answer choice E. Although the author promotes the idea of “social fairness,” the tone in answer choice D is too strong and the language too absolute. Likewise, the other answer choices are not supported by the passage.

3. According to the author, which of the following would be the most accurate description of the *incunabula*?
- (A) The intricate artwork added to printed books in order to make them more appealing to the masses
 - (B) Public funds dedicated to publishing scientific books
 - (C) Imaginary demons supposed to descend upon sleeping persons
 - (D) Cheap Renaissance paperbacks
 - (E) Early printed works that often combined printing with elements of illuminated manuscripts

The best answer is E. As defined in the first paragraph, *incunabula* are early printed works that often combined printing with elements of illuminated manuscripts. They are not the artwork added to the texts, so answer choice A is incorrect. Answer choice C is incorrect because it defines an *incubus*.

4. According to the passage, the statement made in line 22 (“uneducated and wholly disenfranchised”) regarding most 15th century Europeans serves to
- (A) preview the rise of Rousseauian pedagogic techniques in the Enlightenment
 - (B) reveal the prejudices of late 15th century book dealers
 - (C) reinforce the idea that the Renaissance was primarily an intellectual movement of and for the upper classes
 - (D) counter the descriptions usually given by academics
 - (E) explain why *incunabula* were frequently less expensive than handwritten manuscripts

The best answer is C. Despite the introduction of mass-produced books, the book market was still primarily comprised of the upper classes. The lower classes are implied to lack the academic and political education to take advantage of the newly available books. Answer choice D is incorrect because the statement counters the descriptions ascribed to “populist media,” not to academics.

5. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the argument that the printing press enabled a Renaissance strictly for the upper classes?
- (A) Most printed bibles (the most commonly printed book) were purchased by working class people.
 - (B) Johan Gutenberg frequently refused to print cookbooks or herbals.
 - (C) The advent of paper books led to a serious reduction in the price of vellum.
 - (D) The cheapest printed books often cost as much as a year's salary for a day laborer.
 - (E) William Caxton, a prolific English printer, often printed historical texts.

The best answer is A. If working class people were discovered to have owned large numbers of printed books, it would suggest that book ownership was more equitable than the author believes, and that Renaissance ideals were, in fact, reaching the masses. The other choices either strengthen the argument or are irrelevant.

Antonym

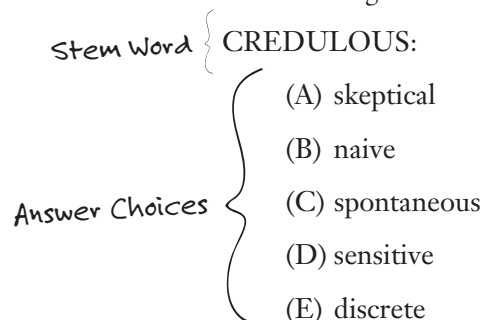
The Antonym questions on the GRE Verbal section are designed not only to test the strength of your vocabulary, but also your ability to reason from one concept to an opposite concept. You should be able to answer many questions with only a general knowledge of a vocabulary word; however, some challenging questions might require you to make distinctions between more subtle meanings.

Questions in this section will include a word in all capital letters, followed by five answer choices. You will be required to determine the answer choice that is the *antonym* of, or is most nearly opposite to, the definition of the given word.

In general, the words that appear in the antonym questions are limited to nouns, adjectives, or verbs. Answer choices will be either a single word or a short phrase. Some of the answer choices might be very similar to one another. Your job is to select the best choice from the five options.

Anatomy of a GRE Antonym Question

Before moving on to the strategies that will help you to approach these questions with confidence, you should understand what a GRE Antonym question looks like. Consider the following:



General Strategies for Antonym Questions

The following are some general strategies that will help you correctly answer GRE Antonym questions:

- ▶ Clearly define the given stem word
- ▶ Use the correct part of speech
- ▶ Beware of homonyms
- ▶ Use prefixes, suffixes, roots, and cognates
- ▶ Use connotations
- ▶ Use the given word in a sentence
- ▶ Predict an answer choice
- ▶ Use the process of elimination

Clearly Define the Given Stem Word

Because you are looking for an antonym of the given word, it's important that you first determine the meaning of the given word. If you are only somewhat familiar with the given word, it might help to use the word in a sentence or recall a quotation that includes the word. In addition, pay attention to the following suggestions to help you correctly and clearly define the given word.

Use the Correct Part of Speech

Make sure that you recognize whether the word is a noun, adjective, or verb. The best answer will use the same part of speech. The answer choices might help you to make this determination. If all of the answer choices are adjectives, for example, the given word will also be an adjective.

It is important to remember that a single word can often be used interchangeably as a verb and a noun, or a noun and an adjective, or might simply have multiple definitions.

For example, the word “bore” can be:

- ▶ A verb, as in “to cause a loss of interest”
- ▶ A verb, as in “to drill a hole”
- ▶ A verb, as in the past tense of “to bear,” which means to “support,” “carry,” or “have” something
- ▶ A noun, as in “a dull or boring person or thing”

The key to successfully answering a GRE Antonym question will often be your ability to quickly switch between possible meanings and select a correct answer based upon your reactions to the answer choices.

Beware of Homonyms

Generally, *homonyms* are words that are pronounced the same, but have different spellings and different meanings. Be sure that you are defining the correct word. For example, the words “course” and “coarse” are pronounced exactly the same, but have very different meanings. If you mistakenly define “course” as “common or rough,” you will have a hard time finding an antonym among the answer choices. Consider the following example of a question similar to those found on the GRE:

ASSENT:

- (A) indifference
- (B) disagreement
- (C) carelessness
- (D) stability
- (E) significance

The best answer is B. The word “assent” refers to “agreement,” so the correct answer is B, “disagreement.” If you had defined “assent” as “the act of climbing” (*ascent*), you would most likely have struggled to find an antonym.

Use Prefixes, Suffixes, Roots, and Cognates

If you have never seen the word before, use your knowledge of *prefixes*, *suffixes*, and *roots* to help you determine the meaning of the word.

Prefix refers to a letter or letters attached to the front of a word to produce a derivative of that word. For example, the prefix “multi-” means “many,” as in “multilingual,” which means “many languages.”

A suffix, on the other hand, is a letter or series of letters added to the end of a word, serving to form a new word or functioning as an inflectional ending. For example, the suffix “-less” means “without,” as in “careless.”

Learn to recognize roots, or stems, that some words have in common. The root provides the basis from which certain words are derived. For example, the Latin root “gen” means “birth, class, or kin,” as in “congenital,” which refers to a condition that is present at birth.

Keep in mind that GRE test writers rarely use exact opposites. In fact, you should not expect to find a perfect antonym among the answer choices. Remind yourself to look for the word that is “most nearly opposite.”

In addition, look for *cognates* from French, Spanish, or Italian (the modern versions of Latin) if you recognize them. A cognate is a word that means the same or nearly the same thing in more than one language. For example, the word *amigo*, which means friend in Spanish, the word *ami*, which means friend in French, and the word *amicable*, which means friendly in English, all come from the Latin root word for friend, *amicus*. These words are considered cognates.

Following is an example of how to use a prefix to select the correct answer:

INVARIABLE:

- (A) overstated
- (B) sufficient
- (C) erratic
- (D) reasonable
- (E) intact

The best answer is C. The prefix “in-” can mean “not, or without.” Therefore, something that is “invariable” is “not variable.” “Erratic” means “irregular, unpredictable, or subject to change,” which is most nearly opposite to “invariable.”

Use Connotations

Each word in the English language expresses two things: a *definition* and a *connotation*. A definition conveys the meaning of the word. A connotation is a positive, negative, or neutral feeling or emotion that is suggested by or associated with a word. For example, the noun “happiness” implies a positive connotation. Using connotations might help you determine the correct answer or at least eliminate a few wrong answers.

Here is an example of how to use a connotation to help you select the correct answer:

FALLACY:

- (A) tentative disagreement
- (B) personal philosophy
- (C) simple hypothesis
- (D) legitimate claim
- (E) indirect statement

The best answer is D. The word “fallacy” has a negative connotation because it relates to something that has errors, flaws, or is false. It comes from the Latin word “fallere,” which means “to deceive.” Therefore, the best answer will have an opposite, or positive connotation. Answer choice A is slightly negative, answer choice B is neutral, answer choice C is neutral, answer choice D is positive, and answer choice E is neutral but slightly negative. The connotations of the given word and the answer choices lead you to answer choice D, “legitimate claim.”

Use the Given Word in a Sentence

Unfortunately, you cannot guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word from the context in GRE antonym questions. The good news is that you have probably seen or heard the unfamiliar word, or some version of it, at some point in your life. Create a sentence that uses the word in a familiar way, and use the sentence to help you establish the definition

of the word. Substitute the answer choices for the word in the sentence; the choice that successfully reverses the meaning or tone of the sentence is the best choice. Consider the following example:

DORMANCY:

- (A) remaining active
- (B) creating confusion
- (C) lurking about
- (D) hibernation
- (E) opposition

The best answer is A. You probably have heard the word “dormant,” which means “inactive.” “Dormancy,” then, refers to the “state of being dormant, or inactive.” Use the word in a sentence: “The bear awoke after several months of dormancy.” Now, insert the answer choices; the one that changes the meaning of the sentence the most will be the correct answer. When you insert answer choice A, the sentence becomes, “The bear awoke after several months of remaining active.” Because the bear remained active for several months, it was *not* dormant during that period of time. Therefore, answer choice A is best. Answer choices B and C are nonsensical, answer choice D is a synonym of “dormancy,” and answer choice E means “being in conflict,” which is not an antonym of “dormancy.”

Predict an Answer Choice

Before you look at the answer choices, try to predict an antonym on your own. Remember that experts create incorrect answers to distract you. If you predict an answer before you look at the answer choices, you can begin to eliminate words and are less likely to get caught up in these confusing, incorrect answers. If your antonym matches one of the answer choices, it is most likely correct. The following examples and detailed explanations show you how predicting an answer can help you to eliminate obviously incorrect answer choices:

1. LOCAL:

- (A) clear
- (B) anxious
- (C) global
- (D) unusual
- (E) durable

The best answer is C. Because “local” generally refers to a specific place on earth, an antonym would most likely involve the entire earth. “Global” is a word that could easily be predicted and is the correct answer. You also could have easily eliminated most of the other answer choices by predicting an answer such as “nearby “ or “in the same city.”

2. RANDOM:

- (A) hidden
- (B) appropriate
- (C) systematic
- (D) deliberate
- (E) genuine

The best answer is C. You might have predicted “regular” or “orderly” as antonyms of “random.” Both are correct, but neither appears as an answer choice. However, “systematic” is a synonym of both of your predicted answers, so answer choice C is correct. Answer choice D, “deliberate,” might have been tempting, but “systematic” is more opposite because it implies a sense of order. Be sure to look at all of the answer choices before you select a final answer, even if your predicted antonym is among the choices. Eliminate clearly incorrect answers as you work through the choices.

Use the Process of Elimination

This strategy is useful if you are unable to find the correct answer using any of the previously mentioned strategies. Look at each answer choice and determine whether you know something about each word or phrase, and use that information to eliminate answer choices that are clearly incorrect. For example, if you find answer choices that have similar meanings, all of those choices can usually be eliminated. The process of elimination can be time-consuming, so it should generally be saved for “last-ditch” efforts in selecting the correct answer. You will probably employ this strategy in conjunction with the others mentioned, eliminating answer choices that do not fit logically into the sentence that you created.

Practice Antonym Questions

Directions: Each question below contains a word in capital letters and five answer choices. Each answer choice contains a word or phrase. Select the word or phrase that best expresses a meaning opposite to the word in capital letters.

1. RECEIVE:

- (A) decline
- (B) organize
- (C) deliver
- (D) locate
- (E) absorb

The best answer is C. The word that has a meaning most opposite to “receive” is “deliver.”

2. APEX:

- (A) lowest point
- (B) greatest length
- (C) furthest distance
- (D) shortest height
- (E) smallest curve

The best answer is A. The “apex” is the “highest point,” so the phrase with the most opposite meaning is “lowest point.”

3. INSIPID:

- (A) bland
- (B) inventive
- (C) interesting
- (D) prosaic
- (E) insubordinate

The best answer is C. The word “insipid” means “dull” or “lacking interest.” Therefore, the word with the most opposite meaning is “interesting.”

4. SOLICITOUS:

- (A) attentive
- (B) sequential
- (C) precise
- (D) sophisticated
- (E) negligent

The best answer is E. Someone who is “solicitous” is generally “caring and concerned,” whereas someone who is “negligent” exhibits “little care or concern.” Therefore, “negligent” is most opposite in meaning to “solicitous.”

5. VENAL:

- (A) eclectic
- (B) extant
- (C) ethical
- (D) esoteric
- (E) exigent

The best answer is C. The word “venal” generally refers to someone who is “corrupt,” or “open to bribery,” whereas an “ethical” person is “moral” and would not likely be “corrupt.” Therefore, “ethical” has a meaning most opposite to that of “venal.”

Analogy

An *analogy* is a comparison of two things that seem unrelated, but are actually related or similar to each other in some respect. The Analogy questions on the GRE Verbal section are designed to test your ability to recognize these relationships between words and successfully identify parallel relationships.

These questions will include a pair of words in all capital letters, followed by five lettered pairs of words. You will be required to identify the answer choice that expresses a relationship most similar to that expressed in the original pair.

Anatomy of a GRE Analogy Question

Before moving on to strategies, you should understand what an Analogy question looks like. Consider the following related word pair and answer choices:

APPRENTICE : PLUMBER :: } *Related Word Pair*

(A) player : coach
(B) child : parent
(C) student : teacher
(D) author : publisher
(E) intern : doctor } *Answer Choices*

General Strategies for Analogy Questions

Several strategies can help you correctly answer GRE Analogy questions. Following is a description of those strategies that have proven most helpful:

- ▶ Establish the relationship
- ▶ Create a general sentence
- ▶ Use the correct part of speech
- ▶ Beware of homonyms
- ▶ Recognize common relationship types
- ▶ Use the process of elimination
- ▶ Select the best answer

Establish the Relationship

Before you look at any of the answer choices, attempt to express the relationship between the original pair in your own words. If you can establish a precise connection between the words, you will most likely select the best answer choice.

Create a General Sentence

One successful technique is to create a sentence that expresses a specific relationship between the stem words, and then replace the original words from your sentence with the words in the answer choices. You should look for the simplest relationship first. If more than one answer choice expresses the same relationship, you might have to revise your original sentence to indicate a more explicit connection between the words. For example:

MUSICIAN : ORCHESTRA ::

- (A) mechanic : car
- (B) songwriter : lyrics
- (C) desk : office
- (D) player : team
- (E) actor : screen

EXAM PREP Study TIP

The GRE uses only logically strong relationships. If you find yourself saying things such as “this could be true” or “sometimes this happens,” the relationship, and thus your answer, is probably incorrect. Try for a relationship that must be true or is true all of the time.

The best answer is D. Ask yourself what a musician has to do with an orchestra. A musician plays in an orchestra. Or more specifically, a musician plays an instrument as one part of an orchestra as a whole. Your general sentence becomes “A ___ does something as one part of a ___ as a whole.”

A player participates as one part of a team as a whole. Although answer choice B includes words related to music, the exact relationship is not the same as the relationship in the question stem; a “songwriter” does not participate as one part of “lyrics” as a whole. Likewise, the remaining answer choices do not fit logically into the general sentence that you created. A “mechanic” does not do something as one part of a “car” as a whole. Although a “desk” might be considered one part of an “office,” a “desk” is an inanimate object, so it does not do something as one part of an “office” as a whole. An “actor” is portrayed on the “screen,” but an “actor” does not do something as one part of a “screen” as a whole.

Use the Correct Part of Speech

Don’t forget about other possible, secondary meanings of words. If you are having trouble creating a sentence, you might be thinking of the wrong definition or part of speech. The questions will always ask you to compare the same parts of speech. For example, if one of the words in the original pair can be used as either a noun or a verb, all of the corresponding words in the answer choices will be either nouns or verbs, but

not both. You can let the answer choices guide you in this way. Consider the following example:

CORRAL : LIVESTOCK ::

- (A) fence : posts
- (B) capture : thieves
- (C) nest : birds
- (D) devise : plans
- (E) fire : employees

The best answer is B. At first glance, you might have created a general sentence such as “A corral is an enclosure for livestock.” However, none of the answer choices fits logically into that sentence. Because “corral” is also a verb that means “to take control or possession of,” you must now consider this secondary meaning. A closer look at the answer choices shows you that the first word in the pair is either a verb, or a word that can be used as a verb *or* a noun. Create another sentence using “corral” as a verb: “The rancher was unable to corral his livestock after they escaped.” Manipulate the sentence slightly, as follows: “The police officer was unable to capture the thieves after they escaped.” The remaining answer choices do not fit logically into this general sentence.

Beware of Homonyms

Be aware of *homonyms*, which are words that sound alike but have different meanings. For example, “mettle” is a noun meaning “courage or fortitude,” whereas “meddle” is a verb meaning “to interfere.” As in the earlier discussion regarding parts of speech, let the answer choices help you determine the meaning of the words in the original pair. It is likely that you will know the meaning of some of the words in the answer choices and be able to establish a relationship between some of the word pairs listed. Use this knowledge to eliminate answer choices in which the word pairs do not have a clear connection, as well as to identify the correct meaning of the words in the original pair.

In GRE analogy questions, relationships are paramount. In other words, remember that the relationship between words is more important than the definition of each word. For example, a question stem could contain words about music, and the correct answer could contain words about athletics; in this case, the meaning of each word is irrelevant.

Recognize Common Relationship Types

GRE analogy questions require you to consider many different possible relationships. After you are able to determine a specific relationship for the original pair, select the answer choice that expresses a relationship in the same way. Most GRE questions tend to fall into one of several common categories of relationships. The following sections describe many of the common analogy relationships tested on the GRE.

Definition/Evidence

One word in a pair helps to define the other word; or, one word in a pair is a defining characteristic of the other word.

Example:

PARAGON : EXCELLENCE ::

A “paragon,” by definition, is a “model or example of excellence.”

CRATER : CONCAVE ::

A “crater” is “concave”; therefore, being “concave” is a defining characteristic of a “crater.”

Synonym/Antonym

One word in a pair is a *synonym* or *antonym* of the other word.

Example:

FASCINATION : INTEREST ::

The nouns “fascination” and “interest” have a similar meaning. They are synonyms.

STINGY : GENEROUS ::

The adjective “stingy” is the opposite of the adjective “generous.” They are antonyms.

Note that synonyms and antonyms do not have to come from the same parts of speech.

Example:

CONTRARY : OPPOSE ::

To be “contrary,” which is an adjective, is to “oppose,” which is a verb. These words have similar meanings, even though the parts of speech are not the same.

SKEPTICAL : BELIEVE ::

“Skeptical,” an adjective, means that you “do not believe,” which is the opposite of the verb “believe.” These words are opposite in meaning, even though the parts of speech are not the same.

Type/Kind

One word in a pair is a type or example of the other word.

Example:

FRENCH : LANGUAGE ::

“French” is a type of “language.”

Degree/Intensity

Both words in a pair are similar in concept, but vary in intensity. In other words, one word in the pair is stronger, harsher, or more intense. Words can also vary spatially, by size, weight, and so on.

Example:

PHOBIA : FEAR ::

A “phobia” is a “disabling, exaggerated fear,” which is far more extreme than a typical “fear.”

Purpose/Function

One word in a pair describes the purpose or function of the other word.

Example: NEEDLE : STITCH ::

The purpose or function of a “needle” is to “stitch.”

Note that “stitch” can be used as either a noun or a verb. You could also say that a “needle” is used to create a “stitch.”

Component/Part

One word in a pair represents one part of the other word, which represents a whole; or, one word is simply a component of the other.

Example:

ACTOR : CAST ::

An “actor” is one member of an entire “cast” of actors.

FLOUR : BREAD ::

“Flour” is a component of “bread.”

Cause and Effect

One word leads to or results in the other word.

Example:

PREPARATION : SUCCESS ::

“Preparation” will most likely lead to “success.”

ANTIBODIES : PROTECTION ::

The presence of “antibodies” results in “protection” against infection.

NOTE

A correct answer will never contain a relationship that has been reversed. For example, if the analogy given is TOUCH : TACTILE, the answer cannot be AUDIBLE : HEARING. Even though the relationship is the same, the order of the relationship is reversed.

Use the Process of Elimination

This strategy is useful if you are unable to find the correct answer using any of the previously mentioned strategies. Look at each answer choice and determine whether you know something about each word in the pair, and use that information to eliminate answer choices that are clearly incorrect. The process of elimination can be time-consuming, so it should generally be saved for “last-ditch” efforts in selecting the correct answer. You will probably employ this strategy in conjunction with the others mentioned, eliminating answer choices that do not fit logically into the sentence that you created.

Select the Best Answer

Remember that the test experts create incorrect answers to distract you; if you establish a relationship beforehand, you will be less likely to get caught up in any confusing, incorrect answers the test writers have set up. If your relationship matches a relationship expressed in *one* of the answer choices, it is most likely correct.

It might be difficult to determine an answer choice without eliminating a few incorrect answers first. Beware of obvious answer choices. At first glance, several choices might appear to express a similar relationship to the original pair. The correct relationship will be paralleled in only one of the answer choices; you might have to dig a little deeper to discover the true relationship. For example:

PASSENGERS : AIRPLANE ::

- (A) audience : theater
- (B) birds : nest
- (C) sailors : submarine
- (D) freight : warehouse
- (E) students : classroom

The best answer is C. One possible relationship between “passengers” and “airplane” is that passengers are in an airplane. At first glance, several answer choices appear to have the same relationship as the words in the question stem: A “theater” holds an “audience,” “freight” is in a “warehouse,” and so on. There cannot be more than one correct answer, so you should look for a more specific relationship. Create a sentence using the words in the question stem: An “airplane” *transports* “passengers” from one place to another. Only the words in answer choice C can be logically inserted into this sentence.

Be sure to consider all of the answer choices before you select a final answer, even if you think you have already found the correct one. If you are struggling to find just one correct answer, make your relationship statement more specific or, if you must, adjust the relationship entirely.

Practice Analogy Questions

Directions: Each question below contains a pair of words in capital letters and five answer choices. Each answer choice contains a pair of words. Select the pair that best expresses the relationship expressed by the pair in all capital letters.

1. VOCAL : CHORUS ::

- (A) musical : harmony
- (B) instrumental : band
- (C) honorable : student
- (D) fanatical : athlete
- (E) fearful : discord

The best answer is B. A “chorus” is a “vocal” group, and a “band” is an “instrumental” group. In fact, a good test sentence in which to insert the answer choices is: A “___” is a “___” group. Answer choice A also refers to music, but the word pair does not have the same relationship as “vocal” and “chorus.” Likewise, none of the other answer choices makes sense in the test sentence.

2. REMEDIATION : DEFICIENCY ::

- (A) reparation : misfortune
- (B) discrimination : poverty
- (C) repudiation : duty
- (D) speculation : proof
- (E) cancellation : appointment

The best answer is A. The relationship that exists between “remediation” and “deficiency” can be expressed with the following sentence: A deficiency can be corrected through remediation. “Remediation” means “the act of correcting a fault or deficiency.” A “misfortune” can be corrected through “reparation,” which means “the act or process of making amends,” so this choice best expresses the relationship that exists between the words in the question.

3. PLUNGE : FLOAT ::

- (A) dive : swim
- (B) throw : catch
- (C) wait : hurry
- (D) drive : park
- (E) gallop : stroll

The best answer is E. To “plunge” is to “fall quickly,” whereas to “float” is to “fall slowly.” The words in the question stem have relatively opposite meanings. The word pair that has the most similar relationship is “gallop,” which means to “run quickly,” and “stroll,” which means to “walk slowly.” The other word pairs are related, but not in the same way as “plunge” and “float.”

4. ANNOTATE : ESSAY ::

- (A) elevate : level
- (B) research : theory
- (C) abridge : chapter
- (D) elaborate : plan
- (E) mitigate : damage

The best answer is D. The verb “annotate” means to “provide extra information.” A general sentence that can be used to describe the analogy is: A person will “___” in order to add something extra and enhance a/an “___.” Answer choice D is correct because a person might “elaborate” on a “plan” in order to provide more detail or add something extra.

5. OBSTINATE : YIELDING ::

- (A) dogmatic : principled
- (B) serene : tranquil
- (C) bilious : irritable
- (D) cryptic : obvious
- (E) stark : austere

The best answer is D. The word “obstinate” means “stubborn,” or “difficult to manage.” The word “yielding” means “inclined to give way to.” Therefore, someone who is “obstinate” is not “yielding.” Likewise, someone who is “cryptic,” or “secretive,” is not “obvious.” The other word pairs are synonyms.

Sentence Completion

The sentence completion questions on the GRE Verbal section are designed to measure your ability to understand the intended meaning of a sentence. Each question requires you to analyze the context of a sentence and determine which word or words best complete that sentence. The GRE includes both vocabulary-in-context and logic-based sentence completion questions that are designed to test your grasp of the English language.

Questions in this section consist of an incomplete sentence that includes one or two blanks, followed by five answer choices. You should be able to determine which answer choice best fills the blank(s) of the given sentence. Keep in mind that a complete sentence is clear and concise, conveys a logical meaning, and is uniform in grammar and style.

A strong vocabulary is the cornerstone of critical reading, and the best way to develop a large and varied vocabulary is to read extensively. In addition to reading more, you might want to review the Vocabulary List included as Appendix A at the end of this book.

Anatomy of a GRE Sentence Completion Question

Before we get to the strategies, we want you to understand what a Sentence Completion question looks like. Consider the following example:

- Despite Jordan's ----- efforts, the team still suffered a ----- loss. } *Sentence*
- (A) complicated . . modest
 - (B) daring . . beneficial
 - (C) generous . . constructive
 - (D) heroic . . devastating
 - (E) selfish . . desperate
- } *Answer Choices*

General Strategies for Sentence Completion Questions

Every sentence contains hints that will help you select the correct answer. Each of the following strategies will help you decipher those hints, but remember that any given question might require you to use more than one approach:

- ▶ Understand the context
- ▶ Use context, prefixes, suffixes, and cognates to define unfamiliar words
- ▶ Identify “clue” words and phrases
- ▶ Use connotation
- ▶ Watch for idiom
- ▶ Select an answer
- ▶ Questions with two blanks

Understand the Context

GRE sentence completion questions usually test the standard meaning of a word. Pay attention to the logic and context of the sentence. Try to predict a word to insert in the blank or blanks as you read the sentence, and then look for your word or a *synonym* of your word among the answer choices. A synonym is a word with the same or a similar meaning. You should also look for *antonyms*, which are words that have the opposite meaning of your predicted word. If you locate any words among the answer choices that have a meaning opposite to the word that you would like to insert in the blank, eliminate those answer choices.

EXAM **PREP** Study **TIP**

Let the context of the sentences guide you. Make sure that you understand what is going on in the sentence, and pay attention to introductory and transition words and phrases in each sentence that might suggest a continuation, contrast, or comparison.

You should immediately begin to pick up on the idea the sentence is trying to convey, as well as any suggestions of tone or mood. Understanding the general meaning and nature of the sentence will help you to choose the most logical and stylistically appropriate answer. Examples of transition words and phrases are given in Figure 8.1, later in this chapter.

Use Context, Prefixes, Suffixes, and Cognates to Define Unfamiliar Words

Understanding the context of a sentence also helps to determine the meaning of any unfamiliar words you might encounter. Consider the following example:

Although the fossils were well preserved, paleontologists were unable to ----- the identity of the mammal species.

- (A) display
- (B) ascertain
- (C) violate
- (D) embellish
- (E) exploit

The best answer is B. You might not have heard the word “paleontologists” before, but you can deduce from the context of the sentence that they are most likely the scientists who study fossils. Another hint provided by the context is the word “although,” which suggests a contrast between the condition of the fossils and the ability of the paleontologists to identify the species. Now, you can insert the words in the answer choices into the sentence to see which one best fits the context. It does not make sense that scientists would “display” or “violate” the identity of a mammal species, so eliminate

answer choices A and C. Likewise, scientists might “embellish” or “exploit” certain findings, but these words do not accurately describe what the scientists might do with the identity of a mammal species. If you did not know the meaning of “ascertain,” you could arrive at it as the correct choice by using the context of the sentence to help you eliminate incorrect answer choices.

Also, if you have trouble establishing the meaning of an unfamiliar word from the context of the sentence, you can use your knowledge of *prefixes* and *suffixes* to help you. For example, the prefix “multi-” means “many,” as in “multinational,” and the suffix “-less” means “without,” as in “careless.”

Lastly, look for any recognizable *cognates* from French, Spanish, or Italian (the modern versions of Latin) in words that you are not familiar with. A *cognate* is a word that means the same or nearly the same thing in more than one language. For example, the word *amigo*, which means friend in Spanish, the word *ami*, which means friend in French, and the word *amicable*, which means friendly in English, all come from the Latin root word for friend, *amicus*.

Identify “Clue” Words and Phrases

When reading, pay attention to words or phrases in the structure of the sentence that indicate a relationship between ideas or tell you where the sentence is going. Consider the following examples:

Due to recent studies touting the health benefits of regular exercise, health club memberships have increased dramatically in the past year.

The phrase “due to” implies a cause of action, or suggests that one thing provides evidence for another: *Recent studies promoting the health benefits of regular exercise have led to a dramatic increase in health club memberships.*

Just as Traci’s excellent grade in Physics is a result of her diligent study habits, so too is her medal-winning performance at the track meet proof of her adherence to a difficult training regime.

The phrase “just as” indicates a comparison between the first part of the sentence and the last part of the sentence: *Traci received a good grade in Physics because she studied hard, and she won a medal at the track meet because she trained hard.*

The GRE might have left a blank for “adherence to,” and asked you to select that phrase from among the answer choices.

Transitional words often lead you to the correct answer. Even if you cannot immediately determine the best answer using “clues,” you can still use the words to help you establish the nature and meaning of the sentence.

Figure 8.1 contains tables of commonly used introductory and transitional words and phrases.

EXAM **PREP** Study **TIP**

As with Analogy and Antonym questions, Sentence Completion questions can be more easily answered if your vocabulary is strong. Review Appendix A, “GRE Vocabulary List,” to strengthen your GRE-specific vocabulary.

WORDS OR PHRASES THAT SUGGEST CONTINUATION	WORDS OR PHRASES THAT SUGGEST CONCLUSION	
Furthermore Moreover In addition	Therefore Thus In other words	
WORDS OR PHRASES THAT SUGGEST COMPARISON	WORDS OR PHRASES THAT SUGGEST CONTRAST	WORDS OR PHRASES THAT SUGGEST EVIDENCE
Likewise Similarly Just as Like	But Whereas Although Despite However	Because Since As a result of Due to

FIGURE 8.1 Common introductory and transitional words and phrases.

Use Connotation

Each word expresses two things: a *definition* and a *connotation*. A *connotation* is a positive, negative, or neutral feeling that is implied by or associated with a word. Although context is the part of a sentence that surrounds a particular word or passage and determines its meaning, *connotation* refers to the emotion that is suggested by the word itself.

For example, the adjective “thrifty” implies a positive connotation, whereas the adjective “cheap” implies a negative connotation. Both words have similar definitions, but very different connotations. Using connotations can help you determine the correct answer or at least eliminate a few wrong answers.

Here is an example of how to use connotation to select the correct answer:

Because of his -----, Max’s guests felt very welcome and comfortable staying at his house for the weekend.

- (A) animosity
- (B) hospitality
- (C) determination
- (D) wittiness
- (E) severity

The best answer is B. The sentence has a positive connotation—Max’s guests feel welcome and comfortable. In addition, the transition “because” indicates that something that belongs to Max has caused his guests to feel welcome and comfortable. “Animosity” and “severity” have a negative connotation and “determination” has a neutral connotation. “Hospitality” and “wittiness” both have positive connotations, but “hospitality” best fits the context of the sentence.

Watch for Idiom

Idiom refers to the common or everyday usage of a word or phrase. Learn to recognize idiomatic words and phrases, as they might provide additional clues regarding the intended meaning of the sentence. Idiom is part of standard written English, and must be considered when answering this type of GRE question. Ask yourself if the completed sentence “sounds” correct, and make sure that the sentence effectively combines words into phrases that express a logical idea. If any portion of the sentence becomes unclear, wordy, or awkward after you insert an answer choice, eliminate that choice.

Select an Answer

Before you look at the answer choices, try to predict an answer. If your predicted word or words match one of the answer choices, it is most likely the correct choice. Remember that the test writers create incorrect answers in an attempt to distract you— if you predict an answer you are less likely to get caught up on these confusing incorrect answers.

Be careful to consider all of the choices before you confirm your answer, even if your predicted answer is among the choices. The difference between the best answer and the second best answer is sometimes very subtle. When you think that you have the correct answer, read the entire sentence to yourself, using your choice(s) in the blank(s). If it makes sense, mark your answer on the computer screen and move on to the next question.

Questions with Two Blanks

If a sentence has two blanks, you can quickly eliminate incorrect answer choices if any word alone does not fit into the blank. When you select an answer choice for a two-blank question, always ensure that *both* the words make sense in the sentence, both logically and stylistically. It helps to focus on one blank at a time. You can start with either the first or the second blank. Remember that if one word in the answer choice doesn't fit within the context of the sentence, you can eliminate the entire answer choice. Work on both blanks together only if you have not been able to eliminate all of the incorrect answers.

EXAM **PREP** Study **TIP**

Answer choices for questions with two blanks are commonly structured to trick you into selecting an answer just because one of the words fits perfectly. To avoid making this mistake, choose an answer that effectively uses *both* words to complete the sentence.

Practice Sentence Completion Questions

Directions: The following sentences each contain one or two blanks, indicating that something has been left out of the sentence. Each answer choice contains one word or a set of words. Select the word or set of words, that, when inserted in the blank(s), best fits the context of the sentence.

1. As the employee's motives were found to be -----, no disciplinary action will be taken against him for the mistake.
 - (A) absurd
 - (B) gratuitous
 - (C) improvised
 - (D) benign
 - (E) intentional

The best answer is D. The context of the sentence indicates that the employee will not be disciplined as a result of his mistake, which suggests that the error was not intentional, and that the employee meant no harm. The word "benign" means "harmless," so it is the best choice based on the context of the sentence.

2. Jennifer loves roses for the ----- appeal of their petals and leaves, while I am most ----- by their olfactory properties.
 - (A) aesthetic . . enthralled
 - (B) acrid . . interested
 - (C) nurturing . . persuaded
 - (D) visual . . displeased
 - (E) tacit . . disenchanted

The best answer is A. Because the sentence indicates that Jennifer "loves roses," the word that best fits in the first blank should have a positive connotation. The first word in answer choice B has a negative connotation, and the first words in both answer choices D and E have neutral connotations, so none of those choices will be best. "Aesthetic" refers to "the appreciation of beauty," which makes the most sense in this sentence. Likewise, "enthralled," which means "captivated," works well in the second blank.

3. His ----- for learning history should prove to be ----- during his studies to become a history teacher.
 - (A) disdain . . useful
 - (B) penchant . . practical
 - (C) dislike . . exceptional
 - (D) affinity . . futile
 - (E) appreciation . . gratuitous

The best answer is B. To have a “penchant” for something means to have a fondness for it. A fondness for history would be practical or helpful for future studies in the field. Answer choices A and C are incorrect because anyone having “disdain” (hate) or “dislike” for history would certainly not study to become a history teacher.

4. We felt ----- once the committee issued its report that ----- our actions.
- (A) angered . . supported
 - (B) abused . . endorsed
 - (C) vindicated . . authenticated
 - (D) helpless . . applauded
 - (E) ignorant . . dignified

The best answer is C. “Vindicated” means “cleared of suspicion or doubt” and “authenticated” means “proved to be genuine.” The rest of the answer choices are contradictory in nature and do not fit the context of the sentence.

5. The air in a room that contains several houseplants can be more ----- oxygen than a room that contains no plants.
- (A) enjoyed by
 - (B) exhausted with
 - (C) obscured by
 - (D) saturated with
 - (E) complicated by

The best answer is D. The word “saturated” most accurately indicates the density of the oxygen in the room. The other answer choices do not fit the context of the sentence.

What's Next

If you require a review of the rules that govern standard written English, be sure to read Chapter 10, “Verbal Review,” before you tackle the practice tests in Part IV.