

answer choice at this stage. If you're not sure, just give it the maybe and move on. You are looking for a word that means the same thing or similar to "most sought after" or "eloquent."

- Does *domineering* mean the same thing or similar to *sought after* or *eloquent*? No. Eliminate it.
- Does *consummate* mean the same thing or similar to *sought after* or *eloquent*? Maybe/not sure? Don't worry; give it the maybe and move on.
- Does *unobjectionable* mean the same thing or similar to *sought after* or *eloquent*? No. Cross it off.
- Does *conventional* mean the same thing or similar to *sought after* or *eloquent*? No. Cross it off.
- Does *extensive* mean the same thing or similar to *sought after* or *eloquent*? No. Cross it off.

Now check your scratch paper. You have four crossed-off answer choices and a maybe. This is why it doesn't pay to get too hung up on an answer choice in the first pass. If it could work, leave it in. If you're not sure, give it the maybe. Eliminate only those answer choices that are clearly wrong.

What if you're stuck between two answer choices? First, mark the question and walk away. As always on the GRE, the minute you encounter the least resistance, walk away. There can be only one correct answer to a text-completion question. If two answers look correct, you may have misread something. The only way to reset your brain is to distract it by doing a few other questions and coming back.

Finding the Clue

Next, check your proof. The correct answer will always have proof in the passage. The proof is the part of the text that tells you what goes into the blank. We call this the clue. All text-completion questions have them. The clue is like an arrow that points to one answer choice and one answer choice only. If you are stuck between two, the clue will break the tie.

The clue is like an arrow that points to one answer choice and one answer choice only.

Consider this example:

Sophocles, who wrote the play *Oedipus Rex*, was one of the most _____ playwrights of ancient Greece.

famous
bombastic
critical
prolific
eclectic

What's your word for the blank? Not sure? That's because this sentence has no clue. Now try it again:

Sophocles, who wrote the play *Oedipus Rex*, was one of the most _____ playwrights of ancient Greece, completing 123 plays in his lifetime—double that of any of his contemporaries.

famous
bombastic
critical
prolific
eclectic

Now find the story. Who is the main character? Sophocles. What are we told about him? He wrote 123 plays—double that of any of his other contemporaries. Now it's easy to fill in the blank with your own word. Sophocles was a *productive*, *bountiful*, or *copious* playwright. He wrote lots of plays. When you go to the answer choices, you know you are looking for something that means the same thing or similar to *productive* or *lots of plays*, because your clue is, "completing 123 plays in his lifetime—double that of any of his contemporaries."

More on the Clue

As you might have seen by now, finding the best answer on a text-completion question depends on your ability to find the clue. Putting it another way, there is a word or group of words in the sentence that basically tells you what the right answer is. All you have to do is find the clue and then know enough vocabulary to figure out the answer choice that matches the clue. Why would ETS put the answer to a question right in front of you? It has to, or otherwise it could reasonably be argued that there is more than one “best” answer to a question. ETS couldn’t have that—it would be deluged with complaints and challenges.

One important consequence of this fact is that the clue is everything when it comes to text completions. Find the clue and the correct answer will follow from it.

Sophocles was certainly one of the most famous playwrights of ancient Greece. While this may be true, your clue talks about the number of plays he wrote. It says nothing about how well known he was or is. While you might assume that a playwright who wrote so many plays must surely be famous, keep it literal. Assumptions will get you into trouble. The clue points to one answer choice and one answer choice only. Only *prolific* describes the number of plays written. The other four answer choices may fit the sentence, but none is the best answer choice.

In some sentences, the clue will be fairly obvious, while in others, the clue will be harder to spot. If you’re having difficulty finding the clue, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who or what is the blank referring to?
2. What other information is provided about this subject?

The answer to these questions is the clue. Let’s try finding the clue in the following text completion.

What is the blank referring to? What other information is provided about it?

1 of 20

Because his one presidential term was marked by crisis and conflict, many historians consider the presidency of John Adams _____.

Don’t go to the answer choices until you’ve come up with your own word for the blank!

an expediency
an indulgence
a calamity
a regency
a sovereignty

Here’s How to Crack It

First find the story. Who or what is the main idea? The presidency of John Adams. What are we told about his presidency? It was marked by crisis and conflict. In that case, how would historians view it? (Hint: Use your clue.) Clearly, his presidency was *problematic* at best. Use the word *problematic* and compare it to the answer choices, marking your progress on your scratch paper as you go.

- Does *expediency* mean the same thing or similar to *problematic* or *worse*? No. Eliminate (A).
- Does *indulgence* mean the same thing or similar to *problematic* or *worse*? No. Eliminate (B).
- Does *calamity* mean the same thing or similar to *problematic* or *worse*? Hmm, possible. Leave it in.
- Does *regency* mean the same thing or similar to *problematic* or *worse*? No. Eliminate (D).
- Does *sovereignty* mean the same thing or similar to *problematic* or *worse*? No. Eliminate (E).

You’ve got one answer choice left on your scratch paper. No need for further work. You’re done. The best answer is choice (C).

Now try using this technique to find the clue on the questions in the following practice.

Practice: Finding the Clue

Underline the clue in each of the following sentences. Then, think of your own word for the blank and write it down. Answers can be found in Part V.

Be systematic! Ask yourself who or what is the blank referring to? What other info is provided about that subject?

1 of 8

The _____ relationships in his life haunted Eugene O'Neill and are often reflected in the harrowing nature of many of his plays.

2 of 8

Mount Godwin-Austin, more commonly known as K2, is the second highest mountain in the world, with its _____ peaks reaching more than 28,000 feet high.

3 of 8

A wind-chill warning is issued when the temperature is projected to reach minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit or lower, the point at which the cold has _____ effects on living creatures.

4 of 8

Divers still stumble across unexploded shells, 70-year-old _____ from World War II, in the waters outside Tokyo.

5 of 8

Although some people use the terms interchangeably, mastodons and mammoths were quite _____; mammoths were hairy with long tusks, while mastodons had low-slung bodies and flatter skulls.

6 of 8

The mayor was definitely _____; he crafted his policies not with an eye toward their political consequences but instead toward their practical effects.

7 of 8

The first-year law student was amazed at the sheer _____ of the material he had to read for his classes; he imagined that he'd have to read for hours and hours each day to finish it all.

8 of 8

Our word "ghoul" is _____ from the Arabic word "Algol," the name for the Demon Star, a star in the constellation Perseus.

A Quick Word About Your Words

Once you've found the clue in a sentence, you've done most of the heavy lifting. Don't strain yourself trying to come up with the perfect GRE word for the blank. Simple words like *bad*, *good*, *different*, and *same* are perfectly okay, as long as they get the main idea of the word across.

Or, to make your life even easier, recycle! Many times, the clue itself can be recycled into your word for the blank.

Positive/Negative

In some cases, you might not be able to come up with a word, but you might know whether the word you're looking for is positive or negative. Look again at question 3 from the previous practice exercise:

A wind-chill warning is issued when the temperature is projected to reach minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit or lower, the point at which the cold has _____ effects on living creatures.

You might not have been able to think of a word that fit in the blank, but you probably guessed that these very low temperatures don't help living creatures in any way. So you can eliminate any answer choices that contain "positive" or beneficial adjectives, right off the bat. Every little bit helps!

However, don't rely on positive/negative connotations unless you have no other option. It's better to recycle the clue if at all possible.

TRIGGER WORDS

Let's take a second look at the mastodon sentence from the clue drill.

Although some people use the terms interchangeably, mastodons and mammoths were quite _____; mammoths were hairy with long tusks, while mastodons had low-slung bodies and flatter skulls.

The first part of the sentence tells us that many people use the terms mastodon and mammoth interchangeably, and yet clearly the two are quite different. If our clue is *interchangeably*, the word in the blank will be opposite of the clue. The reason you know this is because of the trigger word, "Although."

Triggers tell you whether the word for the blank should match the clue or be the opposite of the clue.

Think of it this way:

I won the lottery, *and*...

I won the lottery, *but*...

One of these stories is going to have a happy ending. One is not. Sensitize yourself to trigger words. They always play an important role in the story being told, and they always impact the meaning of the word in the blank.

Here are some of the most important text completion trigger words.

but	while	thus
although	however	similarly
unless	unfortunately	and
rather	in contrast	therefore
yet	despite	heretofore
previously		; (semicolon) and : (colon)

Note the colon and the semicolon in the preceding chart. A colon or a semicolon divides a sentence into two completely separate sentences, both of which say the exact same thing. If that sentence has a blank in it, whatever is missing from one part of the sentence will be present in the other.

Practice: Clues and Triggers

Underline the clues and circle the triggers in the following sentences; then come up with your own word for the blanks. Recycle the clues if possible. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 8

The star receiver is widely regarded as one of the top talents in the game, but his _____ performance as a rookie almost ended his career.

2 of 8

The prime minister received international _____ for her work; she brokered a diplomatic solution to a potential crisis.

3 of 8

While it is often assumed that drinking alcohol is detrimental to one's health, many studies have shown the _____ effects of having a glass or two of wine daily.

4 of 8

Despite the increasing technological connectivity of the modern world, many cultures still remain _____ from the global society.

5 of 8

Although many cultures view the toad as a symbol of ugliness and clumsiness, the Chinese revere the toad as a _____ symbol.

6 of 8

Stock analysts often use holiday sales to gauge future stock prices; thus, retail performance can be an important _____ of market trends.

7 of 8

It is somewhat ironic that while the population at large tends to have a negative view of the legal profession, individuals rarely display such _____ to their lawyers.

8 of 8

Methyl bromide is a pesticide that has devastating effects on insects; unfortunately some believe it has the same _____ to humans.

You probably noticed that sentences can have multiple triggers. For example, a same-direction and a change-direction trigger will cancel each other out, while two change-direction triggers in the same sentence will also negate each other. Look at the following examples:

Although extremely poisonous, the puffer fish is also so rare that many people insist on eating the _____ creature.

In this sentence, there is one change-direction trigger, *although*, and one same-direction trigger, *also*. But the clue is that the fish is *extremely poisonous* and *rare*. We wouldn't want to use words like *nonpoisonous* or *common* for the blank—the triggers cancel each other out.

It is somewhat ironic that while the population at large tends to have a negative view of the legal profession, individuals rarely display such _____ to their lawyers.

In this sentence, there are two change-direction triggers. The clue is “negative view,” and the word for the blank would also have to be something negative. Thus, the two change-direction triggers cancel out.

Do:

- Cover your answer choices.
- Find the story being told.
- Identify clues and note the direction of triggers.
- Walk away if the sentence is not clear.
- Read with your finger.
- Come up with your own word for the blank.
- Work quickly through the answer choices, using your scratch paper to keep track of which ones are in and which ones are out.
- If you are stuck between two choices, walk away.
- Ask yourself the question “Does the clue point to my answer choice and my answer choice only?”

Do Not:

- Stay with a sentence that you cannot fill in your own word for.
- Go to the answer choices and start plugging them in.
- Go to the answer choices until you have come up with your own word for the blank.
- Select an answer until you have a mark on your page next to each answer choice.
- Eliminate an answer choice unless you know exactly what that word means and have a good reason.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now you're ready to put all your techniques together. In the following drill, find the clue and any triggers. Come up with your own word for the blank, and then use POE to pick the best answer.

Practice your scratch paper technique.

Remember to skip and come back if the sentence is not immediately clear.

Remember to use your scratch paper. The place to invest your time on text-completion questions is in finding the story, the clues, and the triggers. Do not look at the answer choices until you have a crystal clear idea of the story being told. Your first pass through the answer choices should take ten seconds or so. Don't get hung up on any of the answer choices. Either you know the word and it works, you know the word and it doesn't work, or you don't know the word. If you're not sure, or the word only kind of works, just give it the *maybe* and move on.

Because there are words missing, the story being told in the sentence may not be immediately clear. If you are having trouble bringing the story into focus, do not continue to push. You may have misread the sentence. Further time spent at this point is time wasted. Click the Mark button; then do a few other problems and come back. Trace your finger across the screen and make sure to read every word. If it is still not clear, walk away again.

If your hand is not moving, you are getting caught thinking. Walk away and do a different question.

Text Completions Drill

Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 6

Despite the smile that spread from ear to ear, her eyes relayed a certain _____.

jubilance
sorrow
mischiefousness
vision
liveliness

2 of 6

Some historians see the Jacksonians as little more than ruthless capitalists who had _____ regard for individual welfare.

mixed
undue
inconsistent
scant
obtrusive

3 of 6

One of social science's major themes is that of stability versus change; to what extent are individual personalities _____ yet different over time?

transient
maladjusted
static
disturbed
discreet

4 of 6

The Erie Canal's completion caused _____ economic ripples; property values and industrial output along its route rose exponentially.

persistent
invaluable
incredulous
severe
prodigious

5 of 6

Voters have become so inured to the fickle nature of politicians that they responded to the levy of a new tax with _____.

amazement
stolidity
exasperation
alarm
perplexity

6 of 6

The division between child-rearing goals that emphasize originality and personalization and those that place emphasis on adoption of conventions and compliance with rules discloses a _____ that stems from the principles on which these goals are based.

contradiction
monotony
benefit
forseeability
genius

AN IMPORTANT WORD ABOUT USING POE

Sometimes you might do everything right—you might find the clue, identify the triggers, and come up with a great word for the blank—but you will still be stymied by the vocabulary that ETS uses in the answer choices and have no idea what any of the words means.

In these situations, it is important to make use of POE strategies:

1. **Never Eliminate a Word You Don't Know.** If you have any doubts about the meaning of a word, do not eliminate it! Never get rid of an answer that just doesn't "sound good" in the sentence.
2. **Spend Your Time Working with the Words You Do Know.** Focus your energies on the words you do know, trying to match them with the clues in the sentence.
3. **Use Positive/Negative Associations Wherever Possible.** Be aggressive. If you know you need a positive word, eliminate any negative words.

Take a look at the following example:

14 of 20

Years of confinement in a sunless cell had left the prisoner wan and weakened, with a shockingly _____ appearance.

sidereal
boisterous
etiolated
singular
circumscribed

Here's How to Crack It

The clue in this sentence is "wan and weakened," so we need to look for a word in the answer choices that means something like "wan and weakened." However, the answer choices are a vocabulary hater's nightmare (or a pleasant dream, for the word lovers in the audience!).

Let's go through them. Choice (A) is a tough one—if you're not sure of what this word means, you can't eliminate it. Just leave it, and we'll worry about it later. You might know that choice (B) means to be loud and noisy; if so, you can eliminate this choice. The third choice is another difficult word, so let's move on to the fourth word. You might be aware that *singular* doesn't mean weak or wan; it means being one-of-a-kind or unique, so you can safely eliminate this choice. The

Never eliminate words that you don't know.

final choice is *circumscribed*. Looking at this word, we might note it has the root *scribe* in it, which has to do with writing and drawing. Once again, it doesn't seem to match our clue so we can eliminate it. That leaves us with just two choices. At this point, you've done all you can do, so go ahead and pick one of the two. The important thing is to use careful POE to increase your odds.

By the way, the correct answer is *etiolated*, which means to cause to appear pale or sickly.

TWO- AND THREE-BLANK TEXT COMPLETIONS

Remember that we said earlier that not all text-completion questions on the GRE have just one blank: ETS will ratchet up the difficulty level of text-completion questions by presenting you with sentences that have as many as two or three blanks.

Multiple blanks aren't that big of a deal. Use the same approach as you do for single blanks.

However, the techniques you've learned in this chapter constitute the basic approach to all types of text completions, no matter how fancy. Here's an example:

8 of 20

Federal efforts to regulate standards on educational achievements have been met by
(i) _____ from the states; local governments feel that government imposition represents an undue infringement on their
(ii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
receptivity	autonomy
intransigence	legislation
compromise	comportment

Here's How to Crack It

Step 1: **Engage the hand.** Make a column on your scratch paper for blank i and blank ii.

Step 2: **Cover the answer choices and find the story.** We have a semicolon that divides the sentence into two separate but equal parts. The first part says that the states have reacted in a particular way to federal regulation, but we don't know what that way is, so let's check the second part. In the second part we're told that the local governments feel that the regulation is an "undue infringement" and an "imposition."

Step 3: **Come up with your own words for the blanks.** We know that the first word must be something negative so put a negative sign above your first column. For the second column, use the information in the story to come up with your own word. Federal standards would impact a state's ability to decide standards for itself, so try something like "rights" or "decision making" and jot it down on your scratch paper.

Step 4: **Use Process of Elimination.** Put down an "x" for any answer choice that does not work. Under the first blank, *receptivity* and *compromise* are both gone because they're positive words, and we need a negative word. The middle word stays; even if you don't know what it means, it doesn't matter. No need to spend any more time on it than that. For the second blank *legislation* is tempting, since we're talking about governments, but it's meant to be tempting. Our words are *rights* and *decision making*, neither of which means *legislation*, so put an "x" in the middle slot. *Comportment* means the way you carry yourself. That's not even related, so give that one an "x" too. *Autonomy* is the closest to *rights* or *decision making*; in fact it fits quite well. We have an answer. When you're done, your scratch paper should look something like this:

i	ii
X	✓
✓	X
X	X

Don't try to deal with all the blanks at once. Take them one at a time.

Let's try another one.

5 of 20

Many popular musicians have (i) _____ new digital technologies that allow them unprecedented control over their music. These musicians use computers to (ii) _____ and modify their songs, resulting in a level of musical precision often unattainable naturally. Of course, though, as is often the case with new technologies, some traditionalists (iii) _____ these developments.

Can you come up with your own word for the blank? Are there other words that could also work?

Blank (i)
incorporated
synthesized
alleviated

Blank (ii)
energize
delineate
recast

Blank (iii)
balk at
revel in
retaliate at

Here's How to Crack It

Don't be intimidated by the multiple-blank sentences; just try to isolate each blank and apply the strategies we taught you. You don't have to work the blanks in order: Start with whichever one of the blanks seems easiest to you.

For this one, let's start with the second blank. The clue is *modify* and the trigger is *and*, so we need to find a word that's similar to *modify*. Let's go with *alter*. Now use POE and look at the answer choices in the second box. *Energize* doesn't match our word, so eliminate it. Neither does *delineate*, which means to outline or to depict. That leaves us with *recast* for the second blank.

You may have noticed that the first blank is related to the second blank. If the musicians are modifying their songs and also have *unprecedented control* over their modification, we need a word like *using* or *embracing* for the first blank. The only answer choice in the first box that's even close to this word is *incorporated*.

Finally, we move on to the last blank. The clue here is that we're dealing with *traditionalists*. How would traditionalists react to these *new technologies*? They would probably react negatively, so we need a word like *reject* or *dislike* for the third blank.

Look at the choices in the final box. *Revel in* is a positive sentiment, so we can eliminate it. *Retaliate at* is definitely negative, but there is nothing in the sentence that indicates that the traditionalists are taking action against those using the new technology, or the new technology itself! Thus, *balk at*, which means to resist or object to, is the best answer.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BLANKS

Many two- and three-blank text completions hinge on the use of trigger words, and don't contain really strong or obvious clues that you can rely on. For example, look at the following sentence:

6 of 20

Jenkins is an artist known for engendering strong reactions in his viewers; in fact, some of his more (i) _____ paintings have caused viewers extreme (ii) _____.

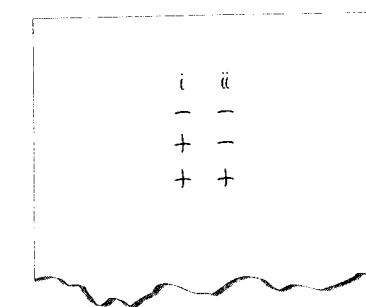
Blank (i)
ominous
accomplished
innovative

Blank (ii)
discouragement
discomposure
resoluteness

Here's How to Crack It

What if you put a positive word in that first blank, let's say *joyous*, what would happen to the second blank? You would have to put in a word such as *joy*. On the other hand, if you put in a word such as *offensive* for the first blank, you would need something along the lines of *offense* for the second blank. The very information you need for one blank is, itself, another blank. What should be a clue is another blank. In these cases all you have to go on is the relationship between the blanks.

Start by noting each answer choice on your scratch paper with a simple + or - sign. Your scratch paper should look like this:



We've already determined that there is a strong relationship between the two blanks. Both words need to be "on the same side of the fence," which is to say, closely related.

The word for the first blank is negative, so it can go with only two of the second blank words. Something ominous wouldn't necessarily cause discouragement, so you can cross off discouragement. Something ominous could cause discomposure, so this pair is possible. Moving on to the positive words, something accomplished wouldn't necessarily cause resoluteness, so you can cross off accomplished. Something innovative wouldn't necessarily cause resoluteness either, so cross both off because there is no positive pair that works. You're left with ominous and discomposure as the only two that could possibly work. If you didn't know the word discomposure but could guess that it's negative, you would still get this question right because you would have eliminated all other possible pairs.

If there is no clear clue, look for the relationship between the blanks.

Study vocabulary every single day.

Need more info? Check out the DVD.

THE LAST WORD—VOCABULARY

As we've seen, using the techniques, including POE, can help you a great deal on a great majority of text-completion questions. However, on some questions you hit the "vocabulary wall"—the point at which you're stuck because you don't know the meaning of the words in the question. The only cure for this predicament is to improve your vocabulary as much as you can before test day. Memorizing the Hit Parade (in Chapter 7) is a good start, but there are myriad other ways of increasing your vocabulary.

Here's the moral of the story: As you prepare for your GRE, try to keep learning new words every day, in whatever way works best for you.

Text Completions Practice Set

Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 10

Although the concept of vegan donuts did not appeal to Sean, he actually found them to be quite _____ once he finally tasted them.

detestable
unappetizing
bland
gleeful
scrumptious

2 of 10

Although using recorded birdcalls makes the California gnatcatcher less (i)_____ and easier to observe, it also seems to (ii)_____ its normal mating patterns.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
timid	direct
approachable	increase
tameable	upset

3 of 10

The sparring of the two lawyers appeared (i)_____; however, it is well known that, outside the courtroom, the friendship between the two is (ii)_____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
pointless	obvious
lighthearted	cooperative
hostile	concealed

4 of 10

The notion that socialism, which emphasizes collective ownership of the means of production, (i)_____ individual expression is supported by historical studies that have shown that individualism has (ii)_____ only in societies where socialist programs have been (iii)_____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
promotes	diminished	improved
inhibits	thrived	sponsored
fosters	wallowed	abandoned

5 of 10

At first, humans were (i)_____ tool users, (ii)_____ convenient sticks or stones to achieve a purpose, but then (iii)_____ the tool when finished with that purpose.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
prehistoric	employing	annihilating
casual	contriving	concealing
adept	fashioning	discarding

6 of 10

Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose social philosophy was often austere, was in his personal life a surprisingly _____ man: he attended fashionable Parisian parties, wore flashy clothing, and dated other men's wives.

flamboyant
indisputable
pristine
astute
courteous

When developing a completely new skill, it is typical to feel (i) _____. One's status as a (ii) _____, however, is usually ephemeral, as the initial sense of awkwardness soon gives way to mastery.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
calumnious	dessicant
impertinent	tyro
maladroit	demagogue

The Objectivist mantra, “A is A,” is of course a (i) _____ with which no logical person could disagree. The problem is that those who cite this axiom invariably proceed to substitute in different concepts for the first A and the second, in a feat of verbal (ii) _____ worthy of a stage magician, and then proceed as if the interchangeability of these concepts is indisputable.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
filigree	peregrination
tautology	prestidigitation
quandary	peroration

The American public venerates medical researchers because the researchers make frequent discoveries of tremendous humanitarian consequence; however, the daily routines of scientists are largely made up of result verification and statistical analysis, making their occupation seem _____.

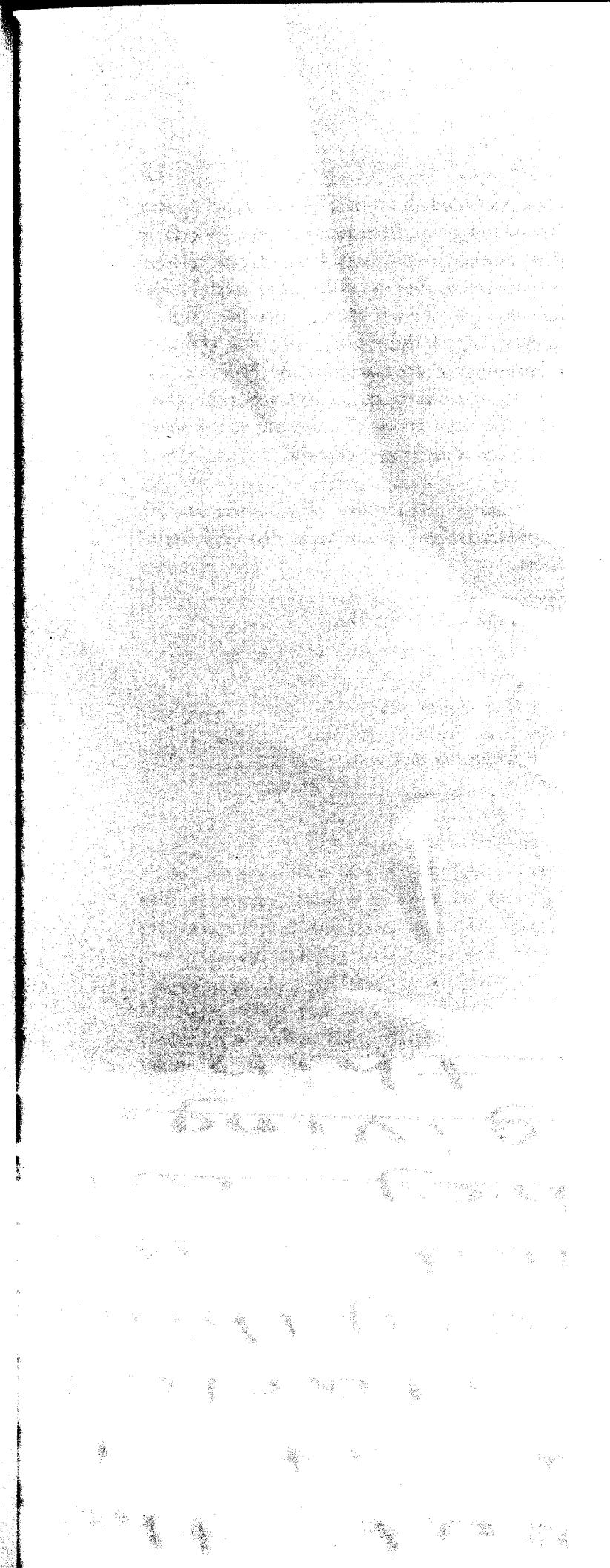
fascinating
quotidian
recalcitrant
experimental
amorphous

To his friends and social companions, Gomez seemed a pleasing combination of affable and (i) _____. His employees and business associates, however, found him to be as (ii) _____ as he was officious.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
pernicious	meddlesome
complaisant	prescient
mercurial	puerile

Summary

- In text-completion questions, come up with your own word for the blank, using the clues and triggers in the sentence.
- If you can't find the clue, ask yourself: Who or what is the blank referring to? What other information is provided about that subject?
- Trigger words tell you whether the word in the blank should be similar to the clue or opposite of the clue.
- After you've come up with your own word for the blank, use POE to eliminate words that aren't close to your word. Don't eliminate words if you are unsure of their meanings. Focus on the words you do know.
- If the sentence has two or three blanks, do the blanks one at a time. Pick the easier (or easiest) blank to start with; find the clue, come up with a word, and use POE. Then repeat for the remaining blanks.
- Keep studying vocabulary. Make sure to look up any words you don't know.



Chapter 5

Sentence Equivalence

This chapter details a variation on the text completions you learned about in the prior chapter. Sentence-equivalence questions still require you to find the best word to complete a sentence. For these questions, however, you'll have to pick the two answers that best complete the sentence; this means the two correct answers will be synonyms. Because both words create sentences that are equivalent—both have the same meaning—we refer to these types of questions as sentence-equivalence questions. This chapter will show you how to apply the strategies you learned last chapter and use Process of Elimination to answer these questions.

WHAT YOU WILL SEE

Remember in the last chapter when we alluded to the “other” type of text-completion question? Well, now it’s time to look at these questions in a little more detail. These questions are somewhat similar to the one-blank text-completion questions we worked on in Chapter 4. However, they are different in several major respects. First, these questions always have six answer choices, not five. Second,

you need to pick the two answers that complete the meaning of the sentence in the same way. Generally this will mean synonyms, but they don’t need to be exact synonyms, as long as the meaning of the sentence stays the same.

You should expect to see about three to five sentence-equivalence questions on your GRE Verbal sections.

Here's What the Directions Will Tell You to Do:

For the following questions, select the two answer choices that, when used to complete the sentence, fit the meaning of the sentence as a whole and produce completed sentences that are alike in meaning.

How does this question differ from the text-completion questions in Chapter 4?

Now, here's what a sentence-equivalence question looks like:

2 of 20

Anthropologists contend that the ancient Mesopotamians switched from grain production to barley after excessive irrigation and salt accumulation made the soil _____ grains.

- indifferent to
- inhospitable to
- unsuitable for
- acrimonious to
- benignant to
- inured to

Our goal is to choose the TWO answers that produce sentences with similar meanings. In other words, you'll be clicking on two answer choices instead of one.

Need more info? Check out the DVD.

APPROACHING SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE

Besides being similar in appearance, sentence-equivalence questions are also very similar to text completions in their structure. Sentence-equivalence questions have clues and triggers, just like the sentences we looked at in Chapter 4.

However, sentence-equivalence questions are even more vocabulary-driven, because they require you to find two answers that are synonymous.

Remember that the meaning of the sentence must stay the same. For that to occur, the meaning of the sentence must be clear to you. Just as with text completions, the place to invest your time is in the sentence.

You cannot go to the answer choices until you have a crystal clear understanding of the story being told by the sentence.

The good news is that you don't have to do this all in one go. Some of the sentences are tough, and, of course, there is information missing. If the sentence does not come into focus after the first or second reading, walk away. Mark that sentence and go do some easier ones. Often you will find that, when you return to a sentence after having done a few others, the meaning suddenly becomes clear. Also, the time you would otherwise have spent staring at a difficult problem in frustration, you have now spent getting a few other questions correct. You should always be spending your time *doing*, not *thinking*.

Tackling Sentence Equivalence

The approach to sentence equivalence is almost exactly the same as text completions.

1. **Set Up Your Scratch Paper.** You will see three to five sentence equivalence in a row. Each has six answer choices, so set up your scratch paper. If you don't, you will try to answer the question in your head rather than on your scratch paper. Doing questions in your head leads to harder work, wasted time, and more errors.
2. **Find the Story.** Who or what is the sentence talking about, and what are you told about that person or thing? Pay close attention to triggers; they are always significant clues to the direction of the sentence.
3. **Speak for Yourself.** Come up with your own word or phrase for the blank. It doesn't have to be a big ETS word. Any word or words will do as long as you keep it literal and don't add any concepts or ideas that aren't already in the sentence. If you can recycle your clue, do so.
4. **Use Process of Elimination.** Get your hand moving. Your pass through the answer choices should take ten or fifteen seconds only. Either you know a word and it works, you know a word and it doesn't work, or you don't know the word. If you're not sure, don't sit and think about it; give it the *maybe* and move on. You cannot eliminate a word if you don't know what it means.

Take a look at the grey box for the basic approach to sentence-equivalence questions, which is identical to the method for text completions you already learned. Then try it out on the question we just saw:

2 of 20

Anthropologists contend that the ancient Mesopotamians switched from grain production to barley after excessive irrigation and salt accumulation made the soil _____ grains.

- indifferent to
- inhospitable to
- unsuitable for
- acrimonious to
- benignant to
- inured to

Here's How to Crack It

First, look for the clues and triggers in the sentence. In this sentence, the clue is that the Mesopotamians “switched from grain to barley.” For this reason, the word in the blank has to mean something along the lines of *bad for* or *unsuited for*. Now it’s a matter of going to the answers and using POE.

Answer choice (A) doesn’t match the clue; eliminate it. Choices (B) and (C) are both pretty close to the words we came up with, so leave them. How about the remaining choices? *Arimonious to*, in choice (D), means using sharp language, so that doesn’t make sense. The word in choice (E) is a positive word, so you can eliminate that as well. And finally, *inured to* means to become accustomed to something bad. That doesn’t match our choices either, so eliminate it. The best answers are (B) and (C).

Keep in mind that even if you don’t know what *arimonious* or *inured* means, you can probably still get the correct answer. How? By POE of course! All the guidelines we talked about for text completions still apply here. As we said in Chapter 4, you should always work with the words you do know and leave the unknowns alone. Your scratch paper can answer the question for you. If you have two words that work and two question marks, you’re done. Pick the ones that work.

Sentence Equivalence Drill

Work the following questions, using the same approach you used for text completions. Check your answers in Part V when you’re done.

1 of 5

To any observer, ancient or _____, the night sky appears as a hemisphere resting on the horizon.

- antiquated
- perceptive
- modern
- astute
- contemporary
- archaic

2 of 5

Researchers interested in the nature versus nurture debate use identical twins who were separated at birth to explore which personality characteristics are _____ compared to those that arise through experience.

- intractable
- nascent
- erudite
- innate
- predilection
- instinctive

3 of 5

The Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, often used séances to contact his dead pet dog for advice; despite this _____ behavior, the public had so much confidence in his ability as a leader that he was in power for 22 years.

- aberrant
- lackluster
- poised
- unconventional
- repulsive
- decorous

4 of 5

The circulation of the blood makes possible human adaptability to the _____ conditions of life, such as atmospheric pressure, level of physical activity, and diet.

- inveterate
- dynamic
- timorous
- cowed
- turgid
- fluctuating

5 of 5

Arriving in New Orleans days after Hurricane Zelda had passed and without an adequate number of vehicles of its own, the armed forces began to _____ any working form of transportation they could find, including a bus that had been chartered at great expense by a group of tourists.

- repatriate
- commandeer
- extradite
- interdict
- expurgate
- appropriate

PROCESS OF ELIMINATION STRATEGIES

With six answer choices in front of you, there are many opportunities to make effective use of Process of Elimination. Here are a few things to look for.

Positive and Negative Words

One strategy that you can use to answer sentence-equivalence questions is to separate the answer choices into positive ones and negative ones. Remember how we talked about positive and negative words in Chapter 4? You don't need to know the dictionary definition of a word if you can somewhat confidently identify the word as being positive or negative. Here's how you would use them on this type of question:

Can you identify any of the words as positive or negative?

6 of 20

Despite the implications of their noble status, many aristocrats were virtually penniless and lived in a state of _____.

- indigence
- opulence
- eminence
- penury
- depravity
- complacency

Here's How to Crack It

The trigger in this sentence, *despite*, tells us that we need a word that has a meaning that's opposite to *noble status*. Also, the clue states that the aristocrats were *virtually penniless*. Therefore, we only want to consider negative words.

Let's look at the choices and see if we can figure out if they're positive or negative. The third word is *eminence*. Can you figure out if this is a positive or negative word? You might have heard the word *eminent* before, as in *an eminent doctor* or an *eminent scientist*. This is a good word, so let's eliminate choice (C). Choice (F) is *complacency*. Are there any other words you've seen that remind you of this word? You may have heard the word *placate* before. This word means to please someone. Or, how about the word *placid*? That describes someone who is calm and satisfied. Each of these words—*complacent*, *placate*, and *placid*—share the same root, *plac-*, which means to please. So it looks like we can eliminate choice (F).

We've eliminated two words, but we've still got some tough ones left. Don't give up! Look at choice (E). *Depravity* is certainly a negative word, but does it match the clue? Would you describe a penniless person as depraved? Not likely, so we can eliminate choice (E) as well. That leaves only three choices. If you were to guess at this point, you'd have a one-in-three chance of guessing correctly. Of course, if you know the meaning of just one of the remaining three words, you're in pretty good shape as well. For example, if you know that *opulence* is a positive word, then you've got the answer—it has to be choices (A) and (D), which both mean to be poor. If you know the meaning of either choice (A) or choice (D), then you have a fifty-fifty chance of guessing correctly, which is not too bad at all.

Let's move on to another strategy.

Synonym/No Synonym

If you're pretty familiar with the words in the answer choices, you can use your vocabulary to eliminate certain answers and to lump certain other answers together. You do this by looking at the choices and first eliminating any answer choice that has no synonym among the remaining choices. You can also identify pairs of words as synonyms and lump them together.

Word Roots

Learning word roots gives you the opportunity to get more bang for your vocabulary buck. You'll probably never know all the words the GRE will throw at you, but by mastering some common roots, you might know just enough about a mystery word to determine whether you should keep it or get rid of it. Here are some common roots to get you started:

- *Ben/bene*—good. Examples: *benefit*, *benevolent*, *benefactor*
- *Mall/male*—bad. Examples: *malign*, *malevolent*, *malediction*
- *Animus*—spirit, soul. Examples: *animate*, *magnanimous*
- *Cise/cide*—cut. Examples: *excise*, *homicide*, *circumcise*
- *Gen/gene*—type, kind. Examples: *genesis*, *generate*, *homogenous*
- *Port*—carry. Examples: *export*, *transport*, *porter*
- *Androlanthro*—man, person. Examples: *anthropology*, *android*

Obviously, this list barely scratches the surface of word roots but you get the idea. Look for roots in your Hit Parade words (in Chapter 7) and any other new words you learn.

Look up words you don't know.

Consider this example:

3 of 20

Because mercury has a variety of innocuous uses, including in thermometers and dental fillings, few people realize that it is one of the most substances on the planet.

- acidic
- irritating
- mundane
- deleterious
- disagreeable
- pernicious

Here's How to Crack It

Work with the answer choices and see if we can lump them into synonym/no synonym groupings. First, eliminate choices that have no synonyms among the answer choices.

We can start by eliminating choice (A). None of the other choices are similar in meaning to the word *acidic*, so choice (A) cannot be the correct answer. The same goes for choice (C). There is no other answer choice that's similar in meaning to *mundane*, so eliminate it.

Next, we'll group the remaining choices together. You might notice that choice (B) and choice (E) are synonyms for each other, which means if you select one of them, you'll have to select the other. The same logic applies to choices (D) and (F). With four answer choices left, you now have a fifty-fifty chance of getting the question right: you know that the correct answer is either (B) and (E) or (D) and (F).

The clue in this sentence is *innocuous uses* and this sentence also contains a trigger—"few people realize." We're looking for a word that means the opposite of *innocuous*, which means harmless. Choices (D) and (F) are the best answer.

IF YOU'VE NEVER SEEN THE WORD BEFORE

No matter how expansive your vocabulary is, at some point you'll probably run across a word you've never seen before. Don't panic! Just work with the words you do know and rely on your old friend POE. Take a look:

5 of 20

Despite their outward negativity, many a cynic harbors an inner faith in the _____ of mankind.

- benevolence
- precocity
- parsimony
- ignobility
- antipathy
- probity

Here's How to Crack It

First things first. The clue for this sentence is *outward negativity*, and we also have the trigger word *despite*. Thus, we need a word meaning the opposite of negativity. This question definitely calls for a positive word. That's the easy part; now we have to deal with a number of difficult words in the answer choices. Do the best you can with the words you know and leave the words you don't know alone. Starting with choice (A), it looks like we have a keeper. The prefix *bene-* is used in tons of positive words—*benefit*, *benefactor*, *benign*, *beneficent*. Choice (B) is a tough one, so let's leave it for now. The same goes for choice (C). Choice (D) isn't so bad. It has the root word *noble* in it, which is certainly a good word, but we've added the prefix *ig-* to the word. That's probably a bad thing. We should eliminate this choice. Similarly, choice (E) has the prefix *anti-*. That means against or opposite, which is also generally bad. So we should eliminate this choice as well.

So far, choice (A) is definitely in, while choices (D) and (E) are definitely out. Even without knowing either of the words in choices (B), (C), and (F), we would still have a one-in-three chance of guessing correctly—the answer is either (A) and (B), (A) and (C), or (A) and (F). Not too bad for only knowing four of the six words. If we want to take our POE a step further, we could probably even eliminate choice (B). The word has the prefix *pre-* in it, which means before. That doesn't really have much to do with good or bad, so we could probably eliminate it. That gives us a fifty-fifty chance of guessing correctly. The actual answer is choices (A) and (F). *Probity* means good behavior, while *parsimony* means stinginess.

There's no substitute for a strong vocabulary.

Sentence Equivalence Practice Set

Work the following questions, using all the techniques you've learned for sentence equivalence. Check your answers in Part V when you're done.

1 of 5

Possessed of an insatiable sweet tooth, Jim enjoyed all kinds of candy, but he had a special _____ for gumdrops, his absolute favorite.

- container
- affinity
- odium
- nature
- disregard
- predilection

4 of 5

Robert's outwardly amiable disposition belied his _____ nature; he was more than willing to badmouth a colleague's work or spread gossip if he thought it would help him advance his career.

- innocuous
- malicious
- gregarious
- insipid
- affable
- churlish

2 of 5

Although the Wright brothers first attempted flight in 1896 was a _____ and subsequent efforts similarly ended in failure, they persisted and ultimately made the first successful airplane flight in 1903.

- fiasco
- debacle
- hindrance
- feat
- triumph
- precedent

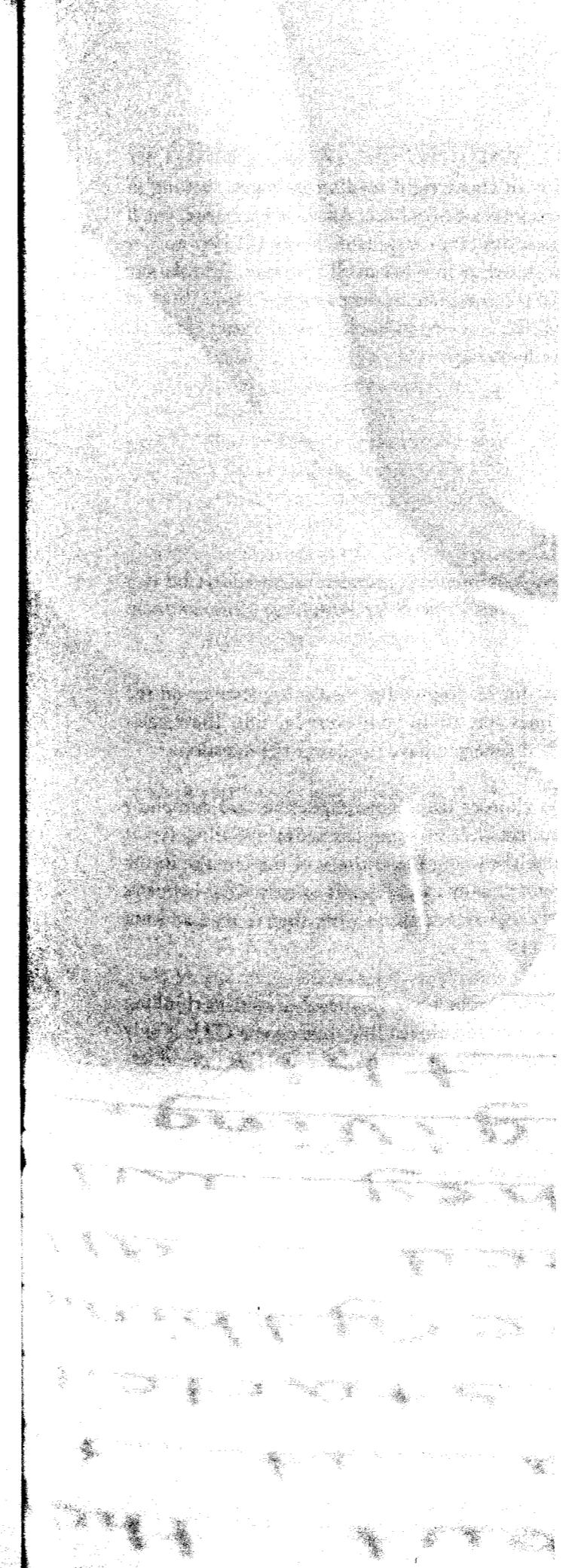
3 of 5

The fuel efficiency of most vehicles traveling speeds greater than 40 miles per hour _____ as the vehicle's speed increases, due to the additional demands placed on the vehicle.

- equalizes
- adapts
- stabilizes
- diminishes
- increases
- wanes

Summary

- The approach for sentence equivalence is the same as it is for text completions. Ignore the answer choices, look for clues and triggers, and fill your own words in for the blanks.
- Use positive and negative associations to eliminate answers.
- Try to group answers choices with their synonyms. Eliminate any choices that don't have a synonym.
- Keep working on vocabulary every day!



Chapter 6

Reading

Comprehension

Reading-comprehension questions on the GRE can be quite deceptive. On one hand, the answer to the question is somewhere in the passage. On the other hand, ETS is really good at crafting answers that seem right but are, in fact, wrong. This chapter will teach you the best way to approach the reading passages on the test and how to attack the questions. Furthermore, you'll learn how to use Process of Elimination to get rid of wrong answers and maximize your score.

WHAT YOU WILL SEE

Reading comprehension is like an open-book test: The correct answer to every question is somewhere in the passage.

On the GRE, you'll be presented with about eight reading passages, varying in length from a mere twelve lines to more than fifty lines. After each passage, you'll be asked to answer a number of questions. Your task is to choose the best answer to each question based on what is stated or implied in the passage. Translation: The correct answer to every question is somewhere in the passage. In fact, think of reading-comprehension questions as an open-book test. Your goal is simply to locate the answer within the passage.

Let's get started.

READING AND THE GRE

Although it might seem like reading-comprehension questions shouldn't be very hard, ETS makes these types of questions difficult by exploiting some common assumptions.

The reading skills you'll need to use for reading-comprehension questions on the GRE are quite different from the ones you use in your everyday life. The biggest challenge will probably be the limited time you have to answer the questions.

For one thing, ETS (intentionally) chooses reading passages that are complicated and are concerned with unfamiliar and, in some cases, intimidating topics, hoping that you'll have a tough time absorbing the entirety of the passage in the short amount of time they give you. In many cases, that is exactly what happens: Test takers spend too much time trying to understand what they've read and not enough time working on the questions.

ETS also hopes that you will overanalyze the text. This level of critical thinking is wholly appropriate for most types of academic reading, but on the GRE it only leads to trouble. The way to crack the reading portion of the GRE is to read less into the passages, not more.

Although it may sound counterintuitive, in some ways the passage itself is the least important part of reading-comprehension questions. This is for a simple reason—you don't get any points for reading the passage, and the only way to do well on the GRE is to amass as many points as possible.

Okay, you're ready to take a look at our approach to reading-comprehension questions.

READING COMPREHENSION: THE BASIC APPROACH

1. **Attack the Passage.** This step will vary slightly based on the length of the passage you're dealing with, but in each case, the goal is to read less, not more.
2. **Size Up the Questions.** Reading-comprehension questions on the GRE can ask you to do a variety of things. Make sure you know what the question's asking you to do.
3. **Find and Paraphrase the Answer.** This is the key. Always return to the passage to find your answer; never answer it from memory!
4. **Use Process of Elimination.** You can use a number of helpful POE guidelines on reading comprehension. We'll go over these in detail in a moment.

Let's start by looking at Step 1 in some more detail.

ATTACK THE PASSAGE

On the GRE, you should never read a passage just for the sake of reading it; that is, you should always have a goal in mind before you start reading. Most of the time you'll be reading with the goal of answering a particular question, but for your initial reading, you're concerned only with discovering the following:

1. **The Main Idea/Purpose.** What is the author writing about and why?
2. **The Structure.** How is the passage organized?
3. **The Tone.** How does the writer feel about the topic?

Fortunately, you can often figure these things out with just a cursory initial reading. Additionally, because the GRE is a standardized test, you can also expect that you will see many passage types that are fairly similar in their tone and organization.

Reading Comprehension and the Computer

Reading comprehension is presented on a split screen. The passage is on the left side and stays there while you work on the questions; you may have to use the scroll button to read the whole passage. The questions are on the right side and they appear one at a time. It's very important to practice reading comprehension on the computer because you'll have to get used to not being able to circle or underline words, bracket text, write notes in the margin, and so on. Reading text on a computer is also more difficult than reading text on paper. Start

The Directions

These are the directions as they will appear on your GRE:

Directions: Each passage in this group is followed by questions based on its content. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question. Answer all questions following a passage on the basis of what is stated or implied in that passage.

Here are *our* directions:

Directions: This is not really a test of reading, nor is it a test of comprehension. It's a treasure hunt! You can find all of the answers in the passage.

You don't have to read every single word of the passage in order to answer the questions.

practicing good habits right now. As you work through this chapter, and any time you practice reading comprehension, don't allow yourself to write on the passage. Anything you write must be written on scratch paper. In your preparation for the GRE, never give yourself a crutch you won't actually have when you take the real test.

Types of Passage

GRE passages cover topics in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. But regardless of the topic, the passage itself will conform to the standards of "good" academic writing—meaning that the authors will generally write in a style that's characterized by clear organization, strong topic sentences and transitions, and summary information or concluding thoughts. You should expect to see the following types of passages on the GRE:

1. **Expository Passages.** In this passage type, the author's purpose is to inform or explain something, whether it be a new finding, a viewpoint, a trend, or an occurrence. In this type of passage, the tone is generally neutral.
2. **Argumentative Passages.** Here the author's purpose is to convince the reader of the validity of a certain belief or perspective. Argumentative passages usually have stronger tones and are structured around providing support for the author's conclusion.
3. **Evaluating Passages.** Some passages will present an idea or perspective, after which the author will evaluate or critique it. In this type of passage, the tone can be strong or neutral.

Of course, other types of passages may crop up on the GRE, but in general you should expect ones that fit into the categories above. Now let's look at some passages and practice finding their main idea, tone, and structure.

Approaching Short Passages

Short passages on the GRE run about twelve to fifteen lines. Despite their brevity, they can still be difficult to follow and often a lot of information is packed into a small space. When you come across a short passage, read the entire passage quickly; pay close attention to the topic sentence, skim through the middle, and then read the last line carefully. This should be sufficient to figure out the main idea, structure, and tone.

Try reading the following passage and finding the main idea, tone, and structure:

The constitutional concept of freedom of the press traces its origins to 1735 and the libel trial of John Peter Zenger. Zenger, born in Germany, emigrated to America in 1710 and established the *Weekly Journal* in 1733. The *Journal* starkly opposed the policies of New York governor William Cosby and while Zenger did not write the majority of the critical pieces, he was arrested on libel charges in 1734. In the ensuing trial, widely followed by the populace, Zenger was defended by Andrew Hamilton, a Pennsylvania lawyer who was brought in after Cosby disbarred all the New York lawyers who offered to defend Zenger. Hamilton's brilliant defense of Zenger was predicated on the argument that since Zenger's criticisms involved verifiable facts, they could not possibly be considered libel. The judge agreed and acquitted the publisher, establishing the basic concept of freedom of the press that was to be enshrined in the United States Constitution some 45 years later.

Remember to skim! Don't read every single word of the passage, even on short passages!

Main Idea/Purpose: _____

Structure: _____

Tone: _____

This is a typical expository passage. The first sentence is important; it tells us that the topic is "freedom of the press" and that there was a trial that helped establish it. The next few sentences provide the details. A quick skim should reveal that Zenger was arrested and tried. The final sentence states that Zenger's acquittal was one of the factors that lead to the First Amendment, which mandated that the press be free.

Your answers should look something like the following:

Main Idea/Purpose: Zenger's trial set a precedent that eventually led to the concept of freedom of the press and the First Amendment.

Structure: The passage states its main idea, provides some details on the trial, and ends with the implications of the situation.

Tone: Neutral. The author simply describes what happened.

Approaching Medium Passages

On medium-length passages, which run from sixteen to twenty lines, there's slightly more information to deal with. Once again, you want to avoid getting caught up in the text; read only enough of the passage to get the general idea. It's a good idea to read the first two lines of the passage, skim the middle portion, and then read the final line: This will give you a grasp of the meaning of the passage and its structure without burdening you with too much information. Now read the following passage and jot down the main idea, structure, and tone.

What was it about Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that caused it to create such an uproar when it was published in 1891? While critics attacked the quality of Wilde's work, lambasting its plot as "incurably silly" and chiding the writer for using prose that was "clumsy" and "boring," these overt denunciations of the formal elements of Wilde's work merely masked the true concerns of many nineteenth-century critics. What these critics were actually railing against was the thematic content of Wilde's work, specifically his illustration of a lifestyle devoted to useless beauty. For many a nineteenth-century moralist, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was nothing more than a primer for spiritual depravity. Wilde's ultimate sin was not his clunky plot or his sometimes cloying prose; it wasn't even his disregard for the time-honored tradition of English propriety. It was instead his leniency toward his protagonist. Wilde propagated the disdain of critics not simply because Dorian Gray was an unabashed hedonist, but because Wilde failed to punish his subject appropriately for his hedonism. To the critics, allowing an evil character to escape his just desserts was an unforgivable sin, and it was this transgression that resulted in such opprobrium for Wilde's work. In their mind, Wilde's work was corrupting the genteel reading public by failing to show the proper consequences of immoral behavior.

Do you need to read every single word to get the main idea?

Main Idea/Purpose: _____

Structure: _____

Tone: _____

This is an Argumentative passage. The first two sentences tell us that there was some controversy when the book was released and that the author thinks that the critics had other reasons for attacking the book—besides its writing. A quick skim through the middle shows that the author thinks critics had a problem with the themes in the book. The final sentence gives more support to the argument, stating that the author believes that the critics thought Wilde was corrupting the public.

Main Idea/Purpose: To suggest that critics weren't responding only to the writing of the work, but also to its thematic content.

Structure: The author states a conclusion in the beginning and then provides details to support that conclusion.

Tone: Mostly neutral, although the author doesn't appear to support the critics' views.

Approaching Long Passages

What we consider long passages are about twice as long as medium-length passages; about forty to fifty lines long. When you come across a long passage, read the first line of each paragraph and then skim the rest of it, paying particular attention to any "trigger words" (the same types of words you encountered on text completions). When you get to the last paragraph, read the first line, skim the rest, and then read the last line of the entire passage.

You know the drill:

Scientists researching the aging process are increasingly investigating the role of telomeres, portions of DNA on the ends of chromosomes found in every cell. Unlike the rest of the chromosome, telomeres do not contain genes, the strands of DNA that code for particular enzymes and proteins. Telomeres primarily serve a protective role in cells, playing two key roles in maintaining healthy cells. First, telomeres prevent important genetic material from being lost during cell replication, functioning as a "cap" of sorts on the end of each chromosome. Second, telomeres serve as a biological marker that the chromosome is "complete"; without a telomere on the end of a chromosome, the body considers the

Make sure that you scroll down as far as you can, to guarantee that you see the entire passage.

chromosome defective and takes steps against it. While the protective role of telomeres is fairly well understood, scientists are interested in another facet of telomeres. Telomeres contain between one to two thousand copies of a particular DNA sequence. Each time a cell divides, a minuscule bit of this DNA sequence is lopped off. When telomeres become too short, the cell becomes impaired, unable to divide, and prone to malfunction. Cells with critically short telomeres eventually die, leading many researchers to compare telomeres to biological clocks or fuses, counting down to the death of a cell.

This passage contains a lot of details. Don't get bogged down in them!

Although the role of telomeres in cellular aging and malfunction is well documented, new research is focused on searching for a link between cellular aging and aging and disease in humans. One study has found that subjects with shorter telomeres are more likely to develop cancers of the lungs and kidneys than those with longer telomeres. Furthermore, the study noted that the participants with the shortest telomeres were at a higher risk of developing heart disease and also appeared more prone to infectious diseases. Another study posited a link between telomere length and life span. In that study, patients with shorter telomeres died about 4 or 5 years earlier than those with telomeres of greater length. Of course, many researchers are hesitant to conclude that shorter telomeres are a causative factor from this data, particularly because telomeres are susceptible to corruption from a number of factors besides cell division. For example, scientists have noted that telomeres are especially vulnerable to the byproducts of the body's oxidation process, by which oxygen is converted to energy. The byproducts of this process, called free radicals, can not only harm cells and DNA, but also artificially shorten telomeres. Further research is necessary to better establish what link, if any, exists between telomeres and aging. One promising avenue to consider is whether lengthening damaged telomeres has the opposite effect on subjects, making them healthier and conferring greater longevity. And while some scientists optimistically believe that a full understanding of telomeres will eventually bestow dominion over the very aging process itself, such a scenario is both unlikely and not technologically feasible at this juncture.

Main Idea/Purpose: _____

Structure: _____

Tone: _____

A quick reading of this passage should reveal the following: First, from the first sentence of the first paragraph, we learn that scientists are interested in the role telomeres play in the processes of aging and disease. Skimming through the rest of the paragraph, we see a lot of technical details, which we of course don't want to concern ourselves with.

We might note that around lines five and six the author tells us the two primary functions of telomeres. Around line nine, we also might note the trigger word *while*, which shows that scientists are interested in properties other than the two primary ones we noted earlier. From the second paragraph, we see that new research is looking for a link between cellular aging and human aging. As we quickly skim through the rest of the paragraph we see trigger words like *furthermore, another, of course*. These words all indicate that the author is simply providing more details and examples. There's no need to try to understand exactly what the examples are at this point. Moving to the final sentence, we learn that while telomere research has potential, the author doesn't feel that it will result in a cure for all of our ills.

Main Idea/Purpose: To explain the role of telomeres in the aging process and the research the scientists are doing to better understand telomeres.

Structure: The first paragraph provides background information on telomeres; the second one details the research on them.

Tone: Mostly neutral, with some caution expressed about the potential results of telomere research.

Don't get caught up in the details! Focus on the big picture.

Now that we've done some work on the passages, let's move onto the second important part of reading comprehension, the questions.

SIZE UP THE QUESTIONS

Reading-comprehension questions vary in both format and what they require you to do. Let's take a look at the different types of questions you'll see on test day, and then go through strategies for tackling each type.

Question Formats

The reading-comprehension questions on the GRE will appear in several different formats:

1. **Choose a Single Answer.** These are the standard, five-answer multiple-choice questions.
2. **Choose Multiple Answers.** These questions ask you to select more than one answer, kind of like how you answered sentence-equivalence questions.
3. **Text Selection.** These questions either refer you to a highlighted portion of the text or ask you to click on the portion of the text that contains a certain phrase or performs a certain function.

Question Types

While it might seem like there are tons of different reading comprehension tasks, there are really only two major types of questions on the GRE:

1. **“Fetch” Questions.** Some questions simply require you to go to the passage and “fetch” some information. The information you are asked to fetch might be a fact from the reading, the meaning of a word, the author’s tone, or the main idea of the passage.
2. **Reasoning Questions.** Other questions require a little more work than just returning to the passage and figuring out what the author says. Reasoning questions can ask you why an author used a particular word or sentence, what inferences you can draw from the passage, or who the author’s intended audience may be. Reasoning questions may also ask critical reasoning-style “argument” questions about conclusions, premises, and assumptions.

The best answer to a reading comprehension question has to be supported by the passage.

Each of these question types may show up in any of the question formats above. Let’s look at some of these questions in more detail.

Fetch Questions

These questions ask, in one form or another, “What does the passage say?” They are the most straightforward of reading questions, and simply require you to return to the passage and retrieve information. To answer a retrieval question, follow these steps:

1. **Read the Question.** What kind of question are you dealing with?
2. **Make the Question Back into a Question.** Often the questions aren’t questions at all; they’re really incomplete sentences. To find an answer, you must first have a question. By putting the question into your own words, you interact qualitatively and actively with the question text. There is no possibility of your eyes glazing over or your brain going on autopilot (a real likelihood with a four-hour exam). To make the

question into a question, simply start with a question word. Nine out of ten times *What* or *Why* will work, since most questions ask either *what* was said in the passage or *why* it was said.

3. **Find Proof.** This is the golden rule of reading comprehension. You will always be able to prove the correct answer with something in the passage. If you cannot put your finger on a specific word, phrase, or sentence that proves your answer choice, you can’t pick it. To help find answers in the passage, use one or both of the following techniques:
 - a. **Five Up/Five Down.** You can’t trust ETS to put the correct answer exactly where they say it will be. If they highlight a portion of the passage, start reading five lines above and read until five lines below the highlighted passage. This way, you are always looking at things *in context*.
 - b. **Lead Word.** A lead word is any word in the question that will be easy to skim for in the passage. Names, numbers, dates, large technical terms all make good lead words. Of course, once you find your lead word, read five lines up and five lines down (for a vocab-in-context question, you need to read only three lines up and three lines down).
4. **Answer the Question in Your Own Words.** The answer choices are designed to mislead you. If you know exactly what you’re looking for, you can protect yourself from their feints and tricks.
5. **Use Process of Elimination.**
 - a. **Extremes.** No matter what the passage says, ETS can phrase a correct answer any way they like. They want correct answers that are difficult to argue with. That means *wishy-washy* language (often, many, usually). *Extreme* language (is, all, every, always) is too easy to prove wrong, so it almost always is incorrect.
 - b. **Scope.** If you can’t put your finger on it in the passage, you cannot pick it. They are very good at slipping things into an answer choice that were never mentioned in the passage. Watch out for answer choices that expand the scope of the passage.
 - c. **Half Right = All Wrong.** ETS likes to write answer choices that are half right; which also means they’re half—and thus all—wrong. The first part of the answer choice will usually look good, but the second part will be incorrect. Make sure to read the entire choice carefully.
 - d. **Garbled Information.** Some wrong answer choices just take parts of the passage and garble them. These answers usually contain information that’s taken directly from the passage rather than paraphrasing it.

Correct answers are paraphrases of information stated in the passage.

Let's try a fetch question with the following passage, which you've seen before.

The constitutional concept of freedom of the press traces its origins to 1735 and the libel trial of John Peter Zenger. Zenger, born in Germany, emigrated to America in 1710 and established the *Weekly Journal* in 1733. The *Journal* starkly opposed the policies of New York governor William Cosby and while Zenger did not write the majority of the critical pieces, he was arrested on libel charges in 1734. In the ensuing trial, widely followed by the populace, Zenger was defended by Andrew Hamilton, a Pennsylvania lawyer who was brought in after Cosby disbarred all the New York lawyers who offered to defend Zenger. Hamilton's brilliant defense of Zenger was predicated on the argument that since Zenger's criticisms involved verifiable facts, they could not possibly be considered libel. The judge agreed and acquitted the publisher, establishing the basic concept of freedom of the press that was to be enshrined in the United States Constitution some 45 years later.

And here's the question:

Always go back to the passage to verify your answer. Don't answer from memory.

The passage states that Zenger did all of the following EXCEPT

- started his own newspaper
- opposed the governor's administration
- left his homeland to come to the United States
- hired Andrew Hamilton to defend him
- based his criticisms on factual issues

Here's How to Crack It

Step 1: **Read the Question.** Essentially, "What did Zenger do?" This is a fetch question.

Step 2: **Make the Question Back into a Question.** What did Zenger do?

Step 3: **Find Proof.** "Zenger" will make a nice lead word. Find the first instance of it in the passage and read from five lines above to five lines below.

Step 4: **Answer the Question in Your Own Words.** In the passage, we are told that Zenger "emigrated to America," "established the *Weekly Journal*," and "opposed the policies of New York governor William Cosby."

Step 5: **Use Process of Elimination.** Use your scratch paper. Cross off answer choices (A), (B), and (C). Now we need more information, so go back to the passage and find more instances of the lead word *Zenger*. We are told that he "was defended by Andrew Hamilton" and that his "criticisms involved verifiable facts." Choice (D) says that Zenger "hired Andrew Hamilton to defend him." One might assume that since Hamilton defended him, Zenger must have hired Hamilton to do so. Be careful, and be literal. This is how they catch smart people. If you cannot prove your answer with something stated in the passage, you can't pick it. If the passage doesn't say Zenger hired Hamilton, we can't assume it. Assumptions always get you into trouble on reading comp. If you're not convinced, don't get hung up; just give (D) the *maybe*, and move on. Choice (E) says that he "based his criticisms on factual issues." We have proof for this one, so cross it off. Choice (D) is the only one left. That must be our answer.

Keep your hand moving. Don't get hung up on an answer choice in the first pass, and be incredibly literal. If the passage doesn't say it, you can't pick it.

Let's try another fetch question. Try the next question, again based on the passage we've already studied:

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As used in the passage, the phrase "predicated on" most nearly means

- derived from
- extirpated on
- conjectured on
- covenanted on
- relegated to

Remember to keep track of new vocabulary words as you work through this book!

Here's How to Crack It

Treat this type of question just like a text-completion problem. Go back to the passage and read the sentence that contains the highlighted phrase, imagining that the highlighted portion is missing: "Hamilton's brilliant defense of Zenger was _____ the argument 'that since Zenger's criticisms involved verifiable facts, they could not possibly be considered libel.' Try to come up with your own word or phrase for the blank.

The clue is that the defense had something to do with the "argument that was...." A good phrase might be *based on* or *constructed on*. Now go to the answer choices and use POE. Does *derived from* mean based on? It's fairly close, so leave this choice. How about *extirpated*? Remember that if you're not sure of the meaning of this word, you can't eliminate it. Leave it for now. Answer choice (C) is not a match; *conjectured* means to guess or infer. A *covenant* is an agreement, so choice (D) doesn't make sense either. And *relegate* means to assign, so that's out too. If you're down to choices (A) and (B), go with the one you know works. Choice (A) definitely works, so that's our answer.

By the way, to *extirpate* means to tear up by the roots or destroy completely. Remember to keep track of new vocabulary words as you work through this book!

Here's another fetch question, and another familiar passage to work with:

Scientists researching the aging process are increasingly investigating the role of telomeres, portions of DNA on the ends of chromosomes found in every cell. Unlike the rest of the chromosome, telomeres do not contain genes, the strands of DNA that code for particular enzymes and proteins. Telomeres primarily serve a protective role in cells, playing two key roles in maintaining healthy cells. First, telomeres prevent important genetic material from being lost during cell replication, functioning as a "cap" of sorts on the end of each chromosome. Second, telomeres serve as a biological marker that the chromosome is "complete"; without a telomere on the end of a chromosome, the body considers the chromosome defective and takes steps against it. While the protective role of telomeres is fairly well understood, scientists are interested in another facet of telomeres. Telomeres contain between one to two thousand copies of a particular DNA sequence. Each time a cell divides, a minuscule bit of this DNA sequence is lopped off. When telomeres become too

short, the cell becomes impaired, unable to divide, and prone to malfunction. Cells with critically short telomeres eventually die, leading many researchers to compare telomeres to biological clocks or fuses, counting down to the death of a cell.

Although the role of telomeres in cellular aging and malfunction is well documented, new research is focused on searching for a link between cellular aging and aging and diseases in humans. One study has found that subjects with shorter telomeres are more likely to develop cancers of the lungs and kidneys than those subjects with longer telomeres. Furthermore, the study noted that the participants with the shortest telomeres were at a higher risk of developing heart disease and also appeared more prone to infectious diseases. Another study posited a link between telomere length and life span. In that study, patients with shorter telomeres died about 4 or 5 years earlier than those with telomeres of greater length. Of course, many researchers are hesitant to conclude that shorter telomeres are a causative factor from this data, particularly because telomeres are susceptible to corruption from a number of factors besides cell division. For example, scientists have noted that telomeres are especially vulnerable to the byproducts of the body's oxidation process, by which oxygen is converted to energy. The byproducts of this process, called free radicals, can not only harm cells and DNA, but also artificially shorten telomeres. Further research is necessary to better establish what link, if any, exists between telomeres and aging. One promising avenue to consider is whether lengthening damaged telomeres has the opposite effect on subjects, making them healthier and conferring greater longevity. And while some scientists optimistically believe that a full understanding of telomeres will eventually bestow dominion over the very aging process itself, such a scenario is both unlikely and not technologically feasible at this juncture.

Can you prove your answer?

Regardless of the question type, you'll still have to prove your answer with information from the passage.

The author's attitude toward a possible research project involving lengthening damaged telomeres is

- hopeful that the research will shed light on the link between telomeres and the aging process
- optimistic that researchers pursuing this project will prove whether shortening telomeres causes aging
- indifferent to the possible outcomes of such a research project
- skeptical that such research will conclusively prove that there is a link between telomeres and cell aging
- uncertain that researchers pursuing such an avenue will be able to truly achieve dominion over the aging process

Here's How to Crack It

This question asks us what the author's attitude is. Our first step is, as always, to go back to the passage; here, look for the part that discusses the research project mentioned in the question. You'll find it toward the end, about 10 lines up from the bottom. Reading the lines around that portion of the passage, ask yourself what the tone is—is the author's tone positive, negative, or neutral? Once you've answered that, you've got to find evidence to support it.

One good piece of evidence is that the author uses the word *promising*, so the attitude must be somewhat positive. Going back to the answer choices, we can eliminate any choices that are negative. That would eliminate choice (D) and choice (E). Because *hopeful* is a pretty good match for *promising*, we should leave the first answer choice. Now let's use POE on the remaining options. Choice (B) involves a classic GRE trick: Notice that later in the passage, the author states that some scientists are *optimistic*. But there's no evidence that the author is optimistic about the research "proving" the link. The author only states that it's an avenue to consider. Answer choice (C) doesn't stand up to scrutiny either. The author certainly calls the research *promising*, which precludes a tone of *indifferent*. Thus, the best answer is (A).

Now that we've cracked the fetch questions, let's move onto the next major type: reasoning questions.

Reasoning Questions

Reasoning questions ask us to go a little bit beyond what the passage states. The best answer is still based on the passage, but we need to do a little more work to get it. Our steps for reasoning questions are pretty similar to those for fetch questions:

1. **Figure Out What the Question Wants.** Reasoning questions never ask for a simple fact from the passage. Instead, you'll need to figure out what type of information the question requires before you go back to the passage.
2. **Return to the Passage.** You'll still need to return to the passage to find the answer. In general, reasoning questions will require you to read more of the passage than simple fetch questions because often you'll need to know the context for a particular piece of information.
3. **Answer in Your Own Words If Possible.** You'll be able to complete this step for some reasoning questions, but not for others. If you can't answer in your words, go right to the answers and use POE.

POE Guidelines for Reasoning Questions

On many reasoning questions you'll have to make aggressive use of POE. Much of the guidelines you used for fetch questions still apply. However, on reasoning questions, look out for answer choices that do the following:

1. **Go Beyond the Information Given.** Often, wrong answers on these questions will go too far beyond the scope of the passage. Choose the answer that is closest to the information in the passage.
2. **Have the Wrong Tone.** Some reasoning questions, such as strengthen and weaken questions, can use extreme language while others, such as inference questions, generally should not. Make sure the tone of the answer choice is appropriate to the question task.
3. **Are Only Half Right.** Again, answers that are only half right are all wrong and you should eliminate them.