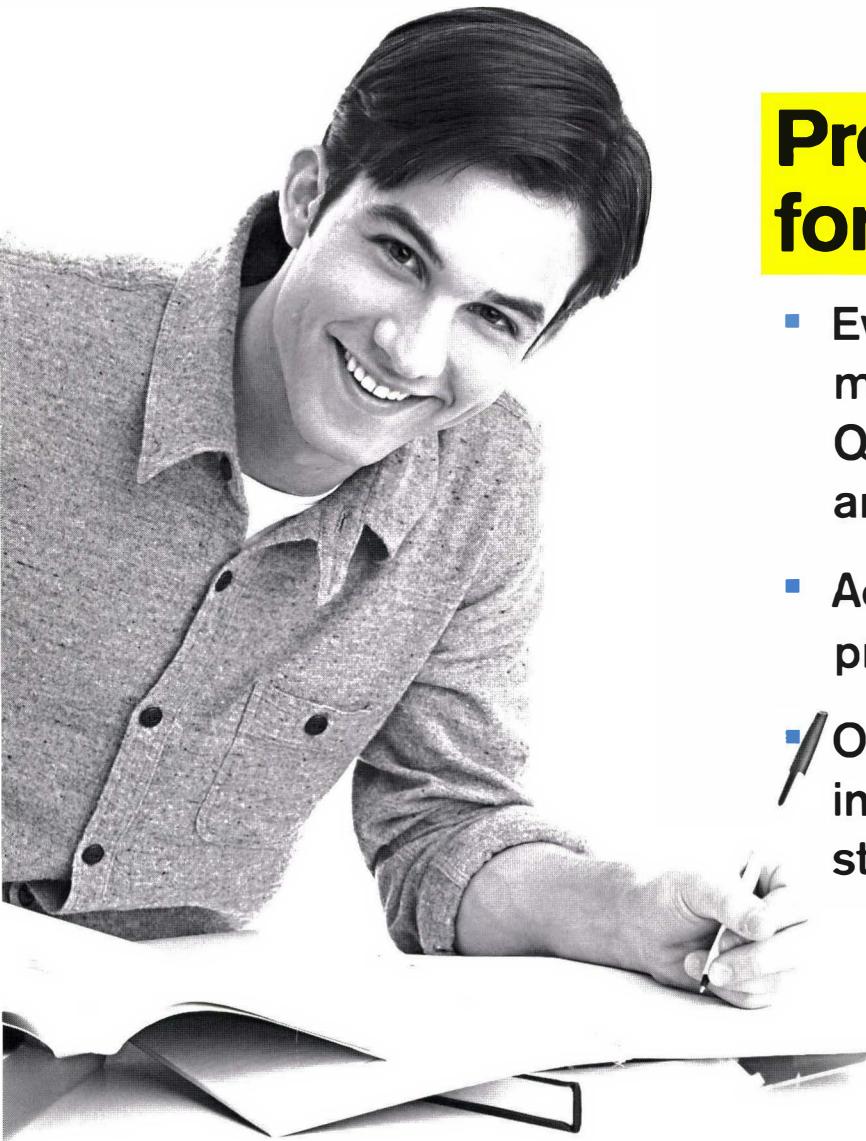




Cracking the

GRE® 2013



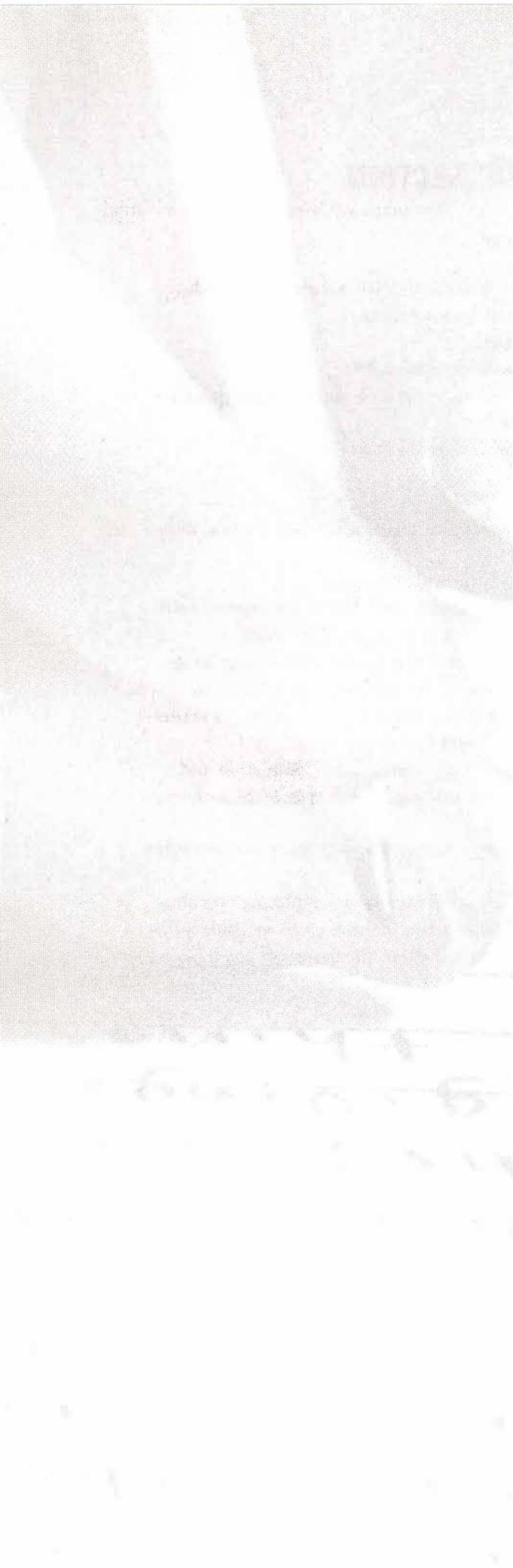
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Part II

How to Crack the Verbal Section

- 3 The Geography of the Verbal Section
- 4 Text Completions
- 5 Sentence Equivalence
- 6 Reading Comprehension
- 7 Vocabulary for the GRE



Chapter 3

The Geography of the Verbal Section

The Verbal section of the GRE is designed to test your verbal reasoning abilities. This chapter will explain what types of questions ETS uses to accomplish that. You'll also see how the concepts of Personal Order of Difficulty and Process of Elimination apply to the Verbal section. Finally, you'll learn what role vocabulary plays in achieving a good score on the Verbal section.

WHAT'S ON THE VERBAL SECTION

Now that ETS has redesigned the GRE, the company claims that the new Verbal section will accomplish the following:

- Place a greater emphasis on analytical skills and on understanding vocabulary in context rather than in isolation
- Use more text-based materials
- Contain a broader range of reading selections
- Test skills that are more closely aligned with those used in graduate school
- Expand the range of computer-enabled tasks

While those sound like lofty and admirable goals, what they really translate into are the following changes:

- There won't be questions that involve analogies or antonyms on this test, as there have been on past tests (and good riddance!).
- You'll see new question types that weren't on the old version of the test: Critical Reasoning questions and Sentence Equivalence (in which you search for synonyms—somewhat easier and more reasonable than the antonyms questions, but not by much).
- The test writers made minor tweaks to the Text Completion and Reading Comprehension questions (we'll get into how these are constructed later in this section).
- You'll see some wacky-looking question formats that you've probably never seen before.
- Though they say the new version of the test de-emphasizes vocabulary, there's no getting around the fact that the more vocabulary you know when you sit down to take the test, the better off you'll be.

Of course, ETS claims that the new GRE is a better and more valid test than the previous incarnation, but we have our doubts. For one, there hasn't been much testing done on the new question types. In other words, ETS hasn't extensively tried these questions out on test takers to see how well they evaluated knowledge or ability. Second, the new test is longer and less convenient for students—but more on that later. Suffice it to say that we're not totally convinced that this test represents an improvement over those of the past.

There are three types of questions on the Verbal section of the test: Text Completion, Reading Comprehension, and Sentence Equivalence.

Text Completions

Text Completion questions consist of a short section of text, between one and five sentences, with one to three blanks. A one-blank Text Completion will have five answer choices while a two-blank or three-blank Text Completion will have three choices per blank. Your job is to find the best word for each blank.

They look like this:

Fables often endure due to their (i) _____, often telling one simple narrative, based around one character. This is both by design, because direct statements are more easily remembered than florid ones, and by accident: As fables are passed from teller to teller, (ii) _____ details fall away, leaving only the essential story.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
bombast	superfluous
objectivity	requisite
simplicity	apocryphal

Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension questions make up the lion's share of the verbal portion of the test. You will be given a passage that may vary in length from one to five paragraphs with one to five questions per passage. Reading Comprehension questions might ask you for the main idea of the passage; they might ask about specific pieces of information in the passage; they might ask you about the structure or tone of a passage; they might ask you about vocabulary in the passage, the point of view of the author, or about the argument being made in the passage. The good news about Reading Comprehension questions is that they rarely depend upon vocabulary, and the answers are always in the passage.

There are three question formats:

Multiple Choice

Question 20 is based on this passage.

After examining the bodies of a dozen beached whales and finding evidence of bleeding around the animals' eyes and brains as well as lesions on their kidneys and livers, environmental groups fear that the Navy's use of sonar is causing serious harm to marine animals. A leading marine biologist reports that sonar induces whales to panic and surface too quickly, which causes nitrogen bubbles to form in their blood.

The argument above relies on which of the following assumptions?

- Marine biologists have documented that other marine animals, including dolphins and sea turtles, have exhibited kidney and liver lesions.
- No studies have been conducted on the possible detrimental effects of sonar on marine animals.
- Whales in captivity panic only when exposed to man-made, rather than natural, sound waves.
- The presence of nitrogen bubbles in the blood has been demonstrated to cause damage to various internal organs.
- It is unlikely that the symptoms found in the beached whales could be caused by any known disease.

Select All That Apply

Questions 10 and 11 are based on this passage.

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 formal elements, their denunciation 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 his leniency toward his protagonist, an unabashed hedonist. To the critics, allowing an evil character to escape his just desserts was an unforgivable sin. In their minds, Wilde's work was corrupting the genteel reading public by failing to show the proper consequences of immoral behavior.

Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

The author of the passage would probably agree with which of the following statements?

- Most critics of Oscar Wilde's novel objected primarily to the lifestyle of its author.
- If *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were written in the twentieth century, the critical reaction would be less severe.
- Some critics of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* believed that an author of a book had a moral responsibility to the book's audience.

Select in Passage

Question 16 is based on this passage.

Called by some the "island that time forgot," Madagascar is home to a vast array of unique, exotic creatures. One such animal is the aye-aye. First described by western science in 1782, it was initially categorized as a member of the order Rodentia. Further research then revealed that it was more closely related to the lemur, a member of the primate order. Since the aye-aye is so different from its fellow primates, however, it was given its own family: *Daubentoniidae*. The aye-aye has been listed as an endangered species and, as a result, the government of Madagascar has designated an island off the northeastern coast of Madagascar as a protected reserve for aye-ayes and other wildlife.

Click on the sentence that would most seriously weaken the author's claim that "this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life's variety."

Sentence Equivalence

Sentence Equivalence questions are similar to Text Completion questions. You will be given a single sentence with one blank and six answer choices. Your job is to select two words from the answer choices that could fit in the blank. Here's what they look like:

He was a man of few words, _____ around all but his closest friends.

- laconic
- garrulous
- ascetic
- taciturn
- tempestuous
- ambiguous

HOW IS THE GRE VERBAL SECTION STRUCTURED?

The GRE now has two scored multiple-choice verbal sections. Each will be 30 minutes long with 20 questions per section. The way you perform on one verbal section will affect the difficulty of the next verbal section you are given. Verbal sections tend to follow the same order. Roughly your first six questions will be Text Completion, your next five or six will be Reading Comprehension, followed by about four Sentence Equivalence, and then another four or five Reading Comprehension questions. In profile, your two verbal sections will look something like this:

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Section 3																				

Section 3 Text Completion Reading Comprehension Sent. Equivalence Reading Comprehension

Section 5 Text Completion Reading Comprehension Sent. Equivalence Reading Comprehension

BASIC STRATEGIES FOR THE GRE VERBAL SECTION

Here are some strategies that will help you on the Verbal section. We'll show you how to use them as we go through specific question types in the chapters ahead, but for now read through the strategies and get a sense of what they are before moving on.

Personal Order of Difficulty

One very important thing to keep in mind as you go through the Verbal section is that you can control which questions you do and when you do them. Once again, you're able to skip around the test, so do the questions in any order you like. If you come to a question that stumps you, skip it and move on to the next one. Go back to the hard ones at the end of the section if you have time—remember that all questions are worth the same number of points, so you won't get any more credit for answering a hard question than answering an easy one—use your time wisely.

We call this method the Two-Pass system. In the Two-Pass system, you do the following:

1. **First Pass:** Go through the test, doing all the questions you feel confident on. Skip any questions that are confusing or seem to be taking you a while to work out.
2. **Second Pass:** Return to the questions you skipped and give them a shot; you'll feel more relaxed because you'll have completed most of the section and done well on it, and you can settle in and give them your full attention.

Process of Elimination (POE)

One important point to keep in mind here is that on verbal questions, your goal is to find the “best” answer. Note that this doesn’t mean the same thing as finding the “right” answer or the “correct” answer. On this section, it’s essential that you get into the habit of considering every answer choice, even if you’re pretty sure you’ve already found the answer. After all, there’s no way of saying one answer is the “best” unless you’ve compared it to all the others.

Sometimes it’s far easier to find the wrong answer to a verbal question than the right one; after all, statistically there are far more wrong answers on the test than correct ones. This is where the Process of Elimination comes into play. If you can recognize a bad answer and eliminate it, you will greatly increase your odds of choosing the right answer if you must guess on a question.

Intelligent guessing—guessing after eliminating at least one answer choice—is a good way to get the best GRE verbal score you can get. Consider the following question:

When studying human history, one must be aware that the _____ between historical periods are arbitrary; certainly none of the people alive at the time were aware of a shift from one era to another.



judgments
ideologies
innovations
demarcations
episodes

Here's How to Crack It

If you encountered this question on the GRE, you might not know what the best answer is (you'll learn how to approach questions like this in Chapter 4). However, you might see that some of the answers simply don't make sense. Choices (A), (B), and (C) don't seem to fit the sentence at all. By eliminating these wrong answers, you've suddenly given yourself a great chance of choosing the correct answer just by guessing, since only answer choices (D) and (E) are left. And if you realize that choice (E) doesn't make sense either, then you know the correct answer is (D), even if you're not sure what "demarcations" means. Sometimes it's easier to find the wrong answer than the right answer.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY

Although ETS says that vocabulary is de-emphasized on this test, having a wide vocabulary will still help you on the GRE. Text Completion questions and Sentence Equivalence questions rely heavily on vocabulary, and reading passages can and will contain some tough words in both the passages and in the answer choices.

To that end, working on improving your vocabulary can translate into higher scores on the GRE. We've provided you with the Hit Parade in Chapter 7; it's a list of words commonly used on the GRE, but that's only the beginning. As you read books and newspapers, watch movies or television, or talk to your smarter friends, keep track of any and all new vocabulary words you read or hear, write them down, look them up, and remember them. Chances are they'll come in handy on test day.

Three Kinds of Words

As you encounter difficult words throughout this book, put them in one of these three categories:

- **Words you know**—These are words you can define accurately. If you can give a definition of a word that's pretty close to the dictionary definition, then it is a word you know.
- **Words you sort of know**—These are words you've seen or heard before, or maybe even have used yourself, but can't define accurately. You may have a sense of how these words are used, but beware! Day-to-day usage is often different from the dictionary meaning of words, and the only meanings that count on the GRE are those given in the dictionary. ETS likes using words that have secondary meanings, and some of the words in this category may have secondary definitions that you're not aware of. You have to treat these words very differently from the words you can define easily and for which you know all the meanings. Every time you encounter a word you sort of know in this book, be sure to look it up in the dictionary and make it a word you know from then on.
- **Words you've never seen**—You can expect to see some words in this book you've never seen before. After you encounter a word like this, look it up! If it's been on the GRE one year, there's a good chance it will show up again.

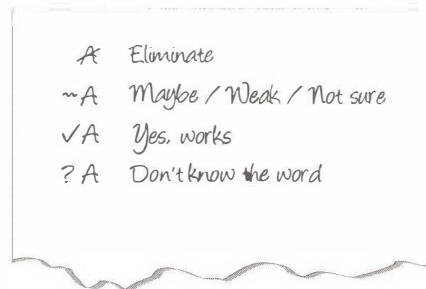
GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR THE GRE VERBAL SECTION

Scratch Paper—Say No to Multitasking

Scratch paper is every bit as important on the verbal side of the test as it is on the math. When you answer a verbal question in your head, you are really doing two things at once. The first is evaluating each answer choice; the second is keeping track of which answer choices are still in and which ones you don't like. This is multitasking, and the problem with multitasking, studies have shown, is that you end up doing both tasks worse! Multitasking leads to inefficient use of time as you end up revisiting answer choices that you've already evaluated, and it leads to errors as you distract your brain with other tasks while making crucial choices.

The better approach is to engage your hand and take a load off your brain by parking your thinking on the page. The answer choices represent ETS's suggested answers. They are carefully designed to mislead the tired test taker. Because of this, you should always have a clear sense of what you're looking for before you get to the answer choices. When you do get to the answer choices, it's a simple assessment: Does it match your answer or not? This is an easy call to make. If the

answer is a vocabulary word, 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 it is a Reading Comprehension question, either the answer matches your answer, it does not match, or you're not sure. As you evaluate each answer choice, mark your assessment on your scratch paper. Verbal scratch paper looks like this:



We will discuss different strategies for setting up scratch paper for specific question types later on, but there are four basic symbols you will use for all questions:

- ✗ **Eliminate**—When an answer choice is clearly wrong, get rid of it. Having it there as an option is nothing but a distraction, so make it go away.
- ~ **Maybe**—Don't be afraid of the Maybe. GRE students often get hung up considering a particular answer choice. On the first pass through the answer choices, this is time wasted. It is entirely possible that the other four answer choices are wrong, or that you find one that is clearly better. Before you invest too much time (too much time means more than 5 seconds) on any one answer choice, give it the *Maybe* and move on. You can always come back to it and give it more time *if* you have to, but you never want to give it more time *than* you have to. If you're not sure or you don't love it, just give it the *Maybe* and move on.
- ✓ **Yes, Works**—When you have one that works, give it the check mark.
- ? **Question Mark**—If you don't know the meaning of a word, mark it with a question mark. You must be honest with yourself here. You do yourself no favors by acting like you know a word more than you actually do. You cannot eliminate a word just because it looks bad. You don't have to pick it, but if you don't know it, you can't eliminate it.

You are taking a two-pass approach through the answer choices. On the first pass, it's a simple question of *Maybe* or *Gone*? Park your thinking on the page and nine out of ten times your scratch paper will be able to answer the question for you. If you have two question marks and a check, you're done. The check is your answer. If you have two maybes and a check, you're done; the check is your answer. If you have four eliminates and a question mark, the question mark is your answer.

Using scratch paper on the Verbal section is a habit. It's something you do every time. Over time, it should just become automatic. When you're working on a verbal question, your hand should be moving. This will save you time and mental effort. Remember that it is a four-hour exam, and over four hours, your brain will get tired. Saving mental effort makes a difference and helps to avoid mistakes. The job of the techniques is to help you with the hard problems, but it is also to ensure that the questions you should be getting right, you are getting right. Both jobs are equally important. Start using scratch paper now and force yourself to keep doing it until it becomes habit.

Take the Easy Test First

The GRE is all about accuracy. It's not the number of questions you answer that determines your score; it's the number of questions you answer correctly. It is more important to get questions correct than to get to answer all questions. Since all questions within a given section count equally toward your score, you might as well do the easy ones first. If you love Text Completion, but hate Reading Comprehension, then do the Text Completion first.

Work slowly. Work for accuracy. Skip often. When a question pops up that you don't like, click to the next one. You can always come back and answer it later, time provided, but take the easy test first. Invest your time in those questions you like. That way, when you run short on time, you have nothing left but the questions you don't like doing anyway. Another way to think about it is to play to your strengths. As you work through this book and learn new techniques, the types of questions you decide to skip might change. Just because they give you questions in a specific order doesn't mean you have to answer them in that order.

You are in control of question order. Take the easy test first!

Bend—Don't Push

Over a period of four hours, your brain will get tired. When that happens, you will misread a question, a sentence, or an answer choice. It is inevitable. When you go back and look at these questions later, you will smack your forehead and think, "That was so stupid! Why did I do that? That's not what it says at all. I thought..." Everyone has these moments. It happens because most of us no longer read things word for word. We read in chunks. We don't read words anymore; we recognize words. Sometimes, especially when our brains get tired, we get these chunks wrong or we recognize a different word. The problem is that once you have seen a question or a word wrong, it is all but impossible to see it correctly.

The solution is to walk away. Distract your brain by working on a few other questions, and then come back to the question that gave you trouble and see it with fresh eyes. The minute you run into any resistance, walk away. When you are left with two answer choices and you would swear that both are correct, walk away. When you have eliminated all of the answer choices, walk away. When a sentence isn't quite coming into focus, walk away. Do not continue to push on a question that is giving you problems. Walk away, distract your brain, and then go back.

The time that you would otherwise spend struggling with a hard question, you can now invest in an easier one. Then, when you have two minutes left, use the Review screen to guess on all unanswered questions.

Got it? Now you're ready to move on and learn more about the types of questions you'll see on the Verbal section. Let's get cracking!



Need more practice?

The Princeton Review's *Verbal Workout for the New GRE*, Fourth Edition, includes hundreds of drill questions for the Verbal and Analytical Writing sections.

Summary

- The GRE Verbal section consists of two, 30-minute sections, each containing 20 questions.
- The Verbal section is made up of Text Completion, Sentence Equivalence, and Reading Comprehension questions.
- Use the Two-Pass system along with your own Personal Order of Difficulty to focus your time on the questions you feel more comfortable working on.
- Success on the Verbal section of the exam involves using Process of Elimination to eliminate “worse” answer choices.
- Vocabulary is an important aspect of success on the GRE Verbal section. Classify words on the GRE in three categories: words you know, words you kind of know, and words you’ve never seen before. Work on your vocabulary.

Chapter 4

Text Completions

If you took the SAT, you probably remember sentence completion questions. Well, they're back, retooled and renamed for the GRE. Text Completion questions test your ability to figure out which word or words best complete a given sentence or group of sentences. On the GRE, the sentence can have one, two, or even three blanks that you must fill. This chapter will show you The Princeton Review approach to Text Completions, a tried-and-true approach that will help you focus on exactly the parts of the sentences that you'll need to figure out the best answer. Along the way we'll provide you with some valuable tips on using Process of Elimination to help you when you don't know all the vocabulary on a question.

THE FORMAT

Text Completion Directions

On the test, the directions will look something like the italicized blurb below. Make sure you learn them now so you don't waste time reading them on test day.

For the following questions, select one entry for each blank from the corresponding column of choices. Fill all blanks in the way that best completes the text.

Text Completion questions often use difficult vocabulary words. Make sure you look up any words you don't know.

The "best" answer is what ETS says is the "best" answer.

On each Verbal section of the GRE you can expect to see about 6 Text Completions. Text Completion questions on the GRE will have one, two, or three blanks. One-blank Text Completions will have five answer choices, while two- and three-blank questions will have three choices for each blank.

Some blanks are designed to test vocabulary, and others are designed to test comprehension. The vocabulary blanks have hard words; the context blanks often include prepositions and trigger words.

The blanks may operate independently or in conjunction with each other. If they operate in conjunction, the word you select for one blank will affect the meaning of the sentence, and therefore the word that might fit in another blank. This is a big help! When you find the word for one blank, it can help you determine all of the others.

The first thing to note is that every answer choice will fit grammatically into the sentence, and quite a few of them will make a degree of sense.

The answer choices represent ETS's suggestions for what to put into the blank. The answer choices have been carefully selected and tested by thousands of students for their ability to tempt you into the wrong answer. As a test taker, don't trust their suggestions and certainly don't rely on them. It may seem like these questions are all about vocabulary, but the battle is generally won or lost before you ever get to the answer choices.

The next step is to find the story. This step is what you should invest your time on for text completion questions. You must stay with the sentence or passage until the story that is being told is crystal clear in your head. If you go to the answer choices before the story is clear to you, the choices may change your perception of what the story should be. Don't even give them the chance. Stay with the passage until it is clear, or walk away and do a different question.

The answer choices represent ETS's suggestions for what to put into the blank. They are carefully selected to mislead you. Don't use them.

Here's an example:

Robert Ingersoll, although virtually unknown today, was _____ orator of the nineteenth century; people traveled hundreds of miles to hear his eloquent speeches.



a domineering
an eminent
an unobjectionable
a conventional
an execrable

Here's How to Crack It

1. **Set up your scratch paper with a column of answer choices, A through E.**
2. **Cover up the answer choices.** That's right, literally take your hand, put it on the screen, and cover up your answer choices.
3. **Find the story.** Who or what is this sentence about, and what are we told about this person or thing? In this case the sentence is about Robert Ingersoll. What are we told about him? He was some kind of orator, but we don't know what kind because that is the blank. What else are we told about him? The sentence is like a small reading composition passage, and you can use only things you are specifically told in the text. Robert Ingersoll gave eloquent speeches, and people travelled hundreds of miles to hear them. That's all we know.
4. **Speak for yourself.** Use the information you're given in the sentence to come up with your own word for the blank. Be as literal as you can. If you can recycle part of the sentence, feel free to do so. In this case we can say that Robert Ingersoll was the most *sought out* or *eloquent* orator of the nineteenth century. That is all we can say because that is the only information we are given in the text.
5. **Use Process of Elimination.** Only when you have come up with your own word from the blank are you protected against the mind games in the answer choices. You now know exactly what the blank needs, and you therefore have a way of evaluating the answer choices. Use your words as a filter to eliminate wrong answers. Use your scratch paper to track your progress. Don't get hung up on any individual 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 as, or is it similar to, *sought after* or *eloquent*? No. Eliminate it.
- Does *eminent* mean the same thing as, or is it similar to, *sought after* or *eloquent*? Possibly. Leave it in.
- Does *unobjectionable* mean the same thing as, or is it similar to, *sought after* or *eloquent*? No. Cross it off.
- Does *conventional* mean the same thing as, or is it similar to, *sought after* or *eloquent*? No. Cross it off.
- Does *execrable* mean the same thing as, or is it 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. Since *eminent* is the only choice left, select it as your answer. The best answer is choice (B).

What if you’re stuck between two answer choices? Mark the question and walk away. Do two other questions and then come back. As always on the GRE, the minute you encounter the least resistance, walk away and come back. 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.

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

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

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.

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

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 as, or is it similar to, *problematic* or *worse than problematic*? No. Eliminate (A).
- Does *indulgence* mean the same thing as, or is it similar to, *problematic* or *worse than problematic*? No. Eliminate (B).
- Does *calamity* mean the same thing as, or is it similar to, *problematic* or *worse than problematic*? Hmm, possibly. Leave it in.
- Does *regency* mean the same thing as, or is it similar to, *problematic* or *worse than problematic*? No. Eliminate (D).
- Does *sovereignty* mean the same thing as, or is it similar to, *problematic* or *worse than problematic*? 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 these questions.
To whom or what is the blank referring? 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.

Change Direction		Same Direction
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; on Text Completion questions, you can expect both of these sentences to 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.

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.

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.

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



Parking Your Thinking on the Page

With both Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence questions, the battle is won or lost before you ever get to the answer choices. If the story being told is not crystal clear in your mind, you will get the question wrong, no matter what vocabulary words are thrown at you. Once you get to the answer choices, either a word works, a word doesn't work, or you don't know the word. Making that assessment takes seconds. Using your hand to track your progress through the answer choices will help with efficiency, accuracy, and mental stamina.

To watch a short video of the process in action, register your book at PrincetonReview.com/cracking.

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
mischievousness
vision
liveliness

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

2 of 6

While grizzly bears have long, flat, and somewhat blunt claws, black bears have short, curved, _____ claws.



obtuse
abominable
barren
acute
fearful

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

3 of 6

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



transient
maladjusted
static
disturbed
discreet

6 of 6

It is usually desirable to expand the yield of harvest when _____ outlays of time, exertion, and other variable factors of production are not also required.



predestined
correlative
analogous
deliberate
indeterminate

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:

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:

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)

receptivity
intransigence
compromise

Blank (ii)

autonomy
legislation

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, the word *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.



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)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
incorporated	energize	balk at
synthesized	delineate	revel in
alleviated	recast	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:

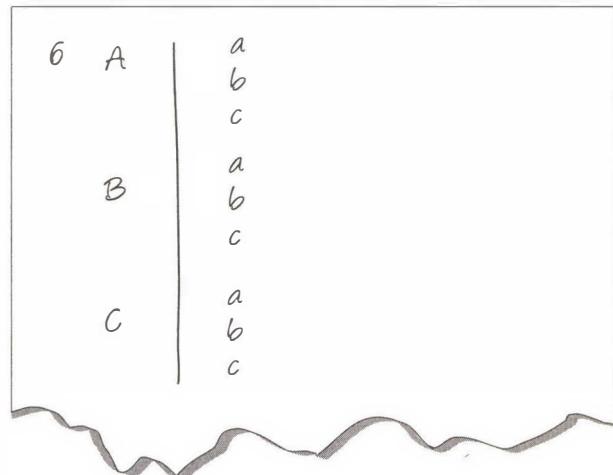
Jenkins is an artist known for engendering strong reactions in his viewers; in fact, some of his more (i) _____ paintings have caused viewers extreme (ii) _____.



Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
ominous	discouragement
accomplished	discomposure
innovative	resoluteness

Here's How to Crack It

The minute you recognize that this is a relationship between the blanks question, make your set-up on your scratch paper. It should look like this:

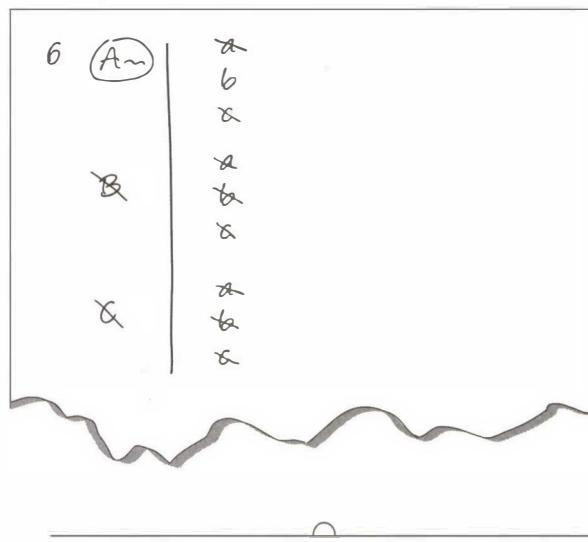


You are not looking at three individual options for the first blank and three individual options for the second blank; you are looking at nine possible combinations, only one of which will work. The first blank will depend entirely on the second blank. We know for sure that the two must work together. In this case, there is nothing to do but Plug In and eliminate. If the first word is *ominous*, the second word must describe a strong negative reaction. *Discouragement* doesn't quite make sense, so cross off *a*. *Discomposure* is possible, so give it the maybe and give the *A* in the first column the maybe, because there is at least one combination with this word that could work. *Resoluteness* is positive, so you can eliminate it.

Now try *accomplished*. If this is the first word, we need a strong positive for the second word, so you can eliminate *a* and *b*. *Resoluteness* does not really follow from *accomplished*, so cross off *c* in the second column and *B* in the first column.

Now try *innovative*. With this as your first word, we need a strong positive for the second word, so you can eliminate *a* and *b*. *Resoluteness* does not really follow from *innovative*, so cross off *c* in the second column and *C* in the first column.

Now look at your scratch paper. At this point, your scratch paper can answer the question for you. There is only one possible combination that could work. Pick *ominous* and *discomposure*, and you are done. Your scratch paper should look like this:



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

THE LAST WORD—VOCABULARY

Study vocabulary every single day.

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

With global interconnectedness on the increase, the conviction of the United States to remain neutral in World War I seemed ever more _____.



presumptuous
futile
contemptuous
pragmatic
admirable

4 of 10

The practice of purchasing books was primarily a (i) _____ of the well-to-do until the early 1900s, when the increased popularity of dime novels, an expansion of the number of bookstores, and the introduction of the paperback made books (ii) _____ the average man.



Blank (i)

tragedy
prerogative
plight

Blank (ii)

dislikeable to
excitable to
attainable by

2 of 10

Upon visiting the Orient in 1850, Gustave Flaubert was so _____ belly dancing that he wrote, in a letter to his mother, that the dancers alone made his trip worthwhile.



overwhelmed by
enamored of
taken aback by
ensconced by
flustered by

3 of 10

The human race is a very (i) _____ species, as the facade of calm that covers our anxiety and (ii) _____ is flimsy and is effortlessly ruptured.



Blank (i)

fragile
purposeful
daring

Blank (ii)

terror
vulnerability
humor

5 of 10

Increasingly, the boundaries of congressional seats are drawn in order to protect incumbents, as legislators engineer the demographics of each district such that those already in office can coast to (i) _____ victory. Of course, there is always the possibility that the incumbent will face a challenge from within his or her own party. Nevertheless, once the primary is over, the general election is (ii) _____.



Blank (i)

an ineluctable
an invidious
a plangent

Blank (ii)

seldom nugatory
remarkably contentious
merely denouement

6 of 10

While some professors, soon to find themselves listed under “emeritus,” may still insist that video games will never be a proper object of study, the rising generation of academics is inclined to view such talk as positively (i)_____ . They note that (ii)_____ is one of the fastest-growing fields at the modern university.

**Blank (i)**

antediluvian
pusillanimous
jejune

Blank (ii)

ludology
kinesiology
cybernetics

9 of 10

As Molly was (i)_____ Spanish with her friends before their trip to Chile, she discovered that although she could comprehend her friends, she could not (ii)_____ her thoughts in the (iii)_____ language.

**Blank (i)**

mastering
disregarding
practicing

Blank (ii)

acknowledge
articulate
disencumber

Blank (iii)

inherent
objective
unfamiliar

7 of 10

Political predictions generally prove fairly accurate when the presumption that the future will be similar to the past is (i)_____. In periods with substantial (ii)_____ in the political world, however, predictions can be (iii)_____ wrong.

**Blank (i)**

disproved
stipulated
fulfilled

Blank (ii)

upswing
insurgencies
changes

Blank (iii)

thoughtfully
perilously
carelessly

10 of 10

People accustomed to thinking that the human lifespan (i)_____ the outer bound of animal longevity tend to dismiss tales of musket balls being found in the shells of living turtles. Leading (ii)_____ Samantha Romney, however, argues that while such stories may be apocryphal, some turtles do indeed exhibit a phenomenon known as “negligible (iii)_____ ,” showing no signs of aging even as they pass the two-century mark.

**Blank (i)**

belies
demarcates
antedates

Blank (ii)

herpetologist
ichthyologist
ornithologist

Blank (iii)

rejuvenation
superannuation
senescence

8 of 10

Water is one of the few molecules that is less (i)_____ as a solid than as a (ii)_____ ; if you need (iii)_____ , just look at the floating ice in your water glass.

**Blank (i)**

intriguing
dense
aqueous

Blank (ii)

vapor
plasma
liquid

Blank (iii)

an illustration
an imbibement
a discordance

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 these questions: To whom or what is the blank referring? 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 shows 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.

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:

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.

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*.

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:

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 questions 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.** *Whom* 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 10 or 15 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.

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? *Acrimonious 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 *acrimonious* 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 _____ and which arise through experience.

- intractable
- nascent
- erudite
- innate
- predilection
- inborn



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?

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*
- *Andro/anthro*—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:

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 to see if you can lump them into synonym/no synonym groupings. First, eliminate choices that have no synonyms among the answer choices.

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, 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 answers.

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:

There's no substitute for a strong vocabulary.

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. Choice (A) looks like 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 knowing only 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.

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



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 at 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



4 of 5

Despite the vast amount of time Francis dedicated to learning six different languages, he was _____ communicator; his mastery of vocabulary and grammar failed to redress his inability to construct cogent prose.

- a florid
- an inept
- a prolific
- an astute
- a morose
- a maladroit



5 of 5

The twins' heredity and upbringing were identical in nearly every respect, yet one child remained unfailingly sanguine even in times of stress while her sister was prone to angry outbursts that indicated an exceptionally choleric _____.

- genotype
- environment
- physiognomy
- incarnation
- temperament
- humor



Summary

- The approach for Sentence Equivalence questions 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 each 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 12 lines to more than 50 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.



Access free, full-length online practice tests when you register at PrincetonReview.com/cracking.

Reading Comprehension and the Computer

Reading Comprehension questions are 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 bar to read the whole passage. The questions appear one at a time on the right side. It's very important to practice reading comprehension on the computer with The Princeton Review's online practice tests or ETS's free *POWERPREP II* software (see Chapter 1), 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. But you can start practicing good habits right now. As you work through this chapter, and any time you practice reading comprehension on paper, 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.

Let's get started.

READING AND THE GRE

Although it might seem that 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 questions. We'll go over these in detail in a moment.

Let's look at each step in some more detail.

ATTACK THE PASSAGE

Imagine you drop out of an airplane and land on a random college campus. You walk into a random building, pop into the first lecture hall you see, and stand in the back for 10 minutes. When you come out, someone asks you a bunch of questions about what you've just heard. That is what reading comprehension is like on the GRE. You don't pick the topic; you don't start from the beginning; there is no title, no outline, and no table of contents. You are not in control.

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

The creators of the GRE are going to give you short and long passages filled with tons of information that you will never be tested on. They will try to suck you into these dense, badly written science or humanities passages in order to get you to waste time and to confuse you with useless information. Your job is to read as little of the passage as you need to get started on the questions and then to let the

questions tell you which facts to care about. To get started on the questions, you need to know only the main idea of the passage, the structure, and the tone.

Understanding Structure in Writing

While the reading passages on the GRE may not represent some of the most engaging writing you've encountered, it is important to keep in mind the author's basic goal. Nonfiction writers want their writing to be understood; if you can't follow their arguments or their progression of ideas, they've failed in their jobs as writers. When you're reading or skimming a passage on the GRE, a good grasp of the structural elements in writing will aid your understanding.

First, pay attention to the structure of each paragraph. The most important information is probably going to be found at the beginning and end of the paragraph. If, while reading a passage, your eyes start to glaze over, rest assured you're not the only one. Good authors know this and make sure to put key points where they are likely to stand out. So, focus on the beginning and end of each paragraph.

Second, look for trigger words. Writers use these words as signposts to direct your reading. When you see same direction words such as *for example*, *in addition*, *and*, or *furthermore*, you know the author is going to be supporting an earlier statement. If you already understand the point of the paragraph, feel free to skim through these lines. However, opposite direction words like *although*, *but*, *yet*, and *however*, signify an important shift. Writers use words like this to direct the reader's attention to an important change or revelation in the progression of ideas.

Finally, the conclusion of the piece offers the author one last chance to get his or her point across. Always read the last paragraph. Does the piece wrap things up nicely or is there some doubt? Does the author suggest further avenues of inquiry? The way the passage ends can help you to understand the author's main point or primary purpose in writing the passage.

Paying attention to structural clues like the ones mentioned here can help you be a more effective reader. Following these principles in your own writing wouldn't hurt either.

Fortunately, you know most of this already. The truth is that all GRE passages are really about one of two things: a problem or a change. You may think a passage is about art history or geology or different kinds of rocks on Jupiter, but really, it's either about a problem or a change.

Furthermore, once you know whether it is about a problem or a change, you even know what the passage is likely to cover.

Problem passages cover these questions:

1. What is the problem?
2. What caused the problem?
3. What are the effects of the problem?
4. Are there any solutions?

Change passages cover these questions:

1. What was the old way?
2. What is the new way?
3. What caused the change?
4. What are the effects of the change?

Knowing how passages are organized will change the way you read. This information puts you back in control by allowing you to categorize the information you're given and to anticipate what is coming next. Remember: On the first reading, you just need the basics. Don't get sucked into details you don't need to know.

There is one golden rule of reading comprehension: Always go back to the passage to find proof. If you cannot put your finger on a line that proves your answer choice, you cannot pick it.

Once you know whether a passage is about a problem or a change, you just need enough information to answer the four standard problem or change questions. Feel free to skim the rest. If you are asked a question about something you skimmed over, you can always go back to find it.

When you see reading comprehension passages, practice categorizing them as problem or change, and then practice anticipating what each paragraph is going to be about. Once you get good at this, you will find that *you* are in control, not them.

Try reading the following passage:

Prior to 1735, there was no legal precedent for freedom of the press. 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!

Problem or change? _____

What was the old way? _____

What is the new way? _____

What caused the change? _____

What are the effects of the change? _____

Yes, the preceding passage is about freedom of the press, but it's really about a change. According to the old way, there was no freedom of the press, and reporters could be arrested. After the adoption of the new way, reporters writing verifiable facts could not be charged with libel. The cause of the change was the trial of John Peter Zenger, and the effect of the trial was the precedent of freedom that eventually became enshrined in the U.S. Constitution some 45 years later.

If you said that a lack of freedom of the press was a problem, don't worry. It was. The important thing is that you were the one in charge when you were reading, and you were the one asking the questions. Instead of passively letting information wash over you, hoping the important parts of the passage would stick, you became an active reader.

Now try again on a longer passage. Remember to skim through the details, but pay attention when you see trigger words. You just need enough information to answer the basic questions. Ignore everything else until you are asked a question about it.

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 deserts 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?

Problem or change? _____

What is the problem? _____

What caused it? _____

What are the effects? _____

Are there any solutions? _____

Here we have a longer passage about the critical response to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. You know that it is a problem in the very first sentence when you are told that the novel created "an uproar" and in the second sentence when you are told that critics "attacked" it. The cause of the problem doesn't come until the last third of the passage. The protagonist was a hedonist, but Wilde did not punish his character for his sins. The effect of this problem was the outrage from critics. No solution is offered. Everything else is just details. Trigger words such as "Wilde's ultimate sin" and "it was instead. . ." are good indicators that something important is being said.

Purpose

You will often see questions that ask about an author's purpose—that is, why the author bothered to write the passage, paragraph, or sentence at all. Purpose can be summed up with the acronym PRICE. The purpose of a paragraph, passage, or even an individual sentence is to Predict, Recommend, Inform, Correct, or Evaluate.

Most passages or paragraphs simply inform. Whenever an author begins to offer an opinion, however, he or she may be evaluating an argument, correcting a misperception, predicting an outcome, or even recommending a behavior.

With longer passages, it is helpful to go paragraph by paragraph and note the subject (the old way, the new way, the nature of the problem, and so on) and the purpose of each paragraph. Jot this information down on your scratch paper. Doing so will force you to actively assess each paragraph and will give you a map that you can use to find the answers for specific questions.

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

Here is a longer passage to try.

Scientists researching the aging process are increasingly investigating the role of telomeres, portions of DNA on the ends of chromosomes found in every cell. The exact relationship between telomeres and aging is unknown. 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.

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.

Problem or change? _____

What was the problem? _____

What caused it? _____

What were the effects? _____

Is there any solution? _____

The preceding passage is a long science passage with lots of technical information. In essence, however, it is about a problem. Scientists think that there is a link between telomeres and aging, but they don't know. The cause of the problem is that there is a link between the length of a telomere and the health of cells. The effect of this problem is lots of studies showing links between telomeres and different health problems. The solution, of course, is more research. The exact relationship is still unknown.

When you map the passage, paragraph by paragraph, you should come up with something like this:

Paragraph 1: What's a telomere? (Inform)

Paragraph 2: Shorter tel = dead cell (Inform)

Paragraph 3: Effects of shorter tels (Inform)

Paragraph 4: Caution against conclusion (Inform)

Paragraph 5: Possible effects of finding link (Predict). Beating again unlikely
(Evaluate)

That is as much information as you need to answer Main Idea and Purpose questions, and as much as you need to get started on specific questions. If a question asks about the connection between telomeres and cell health, you know where to go. Until then, feel free to skim over the details.

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. **Multiple Choice.** These are the standard, five-answer multiple-choice questions that ask you to choose a single answer.
2. **Select All That Apply.** These questions ask you to select more than one answer, similar to the way you answered Sentence Equivalence questions.
3. **Select in Passage.** 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 Tasks

While it might seem like there are tons of different reading comprehension tasks, there are really only two major types 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 tasks may show up in any of the question formats above. Let's look at some of these questions in more detail.

Fetch Questions

Fetch 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. **Avoid Extreme Statements.** 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 short passage you saw before.

Prior to 1735, there was no legal precedent for freedom of the press. 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:

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
- sought out Andrew Hamilton to defend him
- based his criticisms on factual issues



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

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 "sought out Andrew Hamilton to defend him." One might assume that since Hamilton defended him, Zenger must have sought Hamilton out 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 sought out 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)

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.

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.

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

Which of the following would most effectively replace the phrase predicated on as it is used in the passage?



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

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.

Select-in-Passage Questions

Think of these as regular fetch questions, but the answer choices are in the passage rather than part of the question. Most of the time you will find these questions on short passages, but should they occur on a long passage, ETS will limit the scope of the question to a single paragraph. Follow the same steps as you would on a fetch question. Put the question into your own words. Anticipate the answer; then select it from the five or six sentences in the paragraph or passage.

Here's a practice select-in-passage question:

Prior to 1735, there was no legal precedent for freedom of the press. 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.

Select the sentence in which the author offers an opinion.



Here's How to Crack it.

Select the sentence in which the author offers an opinion.

First, read the question and summarize it in your own words. The question is looking for an opinion, as opposed to a fact, and specifically, the author's opinion. Note that there are actually only seven sentences in this passage, so you have seven answer choices. One of them must contain an opinion. The other six, therefore, must be factual. This is a great case for POE. Write A, B, C, D, E, F, and G on your scratch paper so you have something to eliminate.

Sentences 1 and 2—All dates and facts. Cross off (A) and (B).

Sentence 3—More facts. Cross off (C).

Sentence 4—More facts. Cross off (D).

Sentence 5—More facts. Cross off (E).

Sentence 6—The author describes Hamilton’s defense as “brilliant.” This is an opinion, not a fact. This is a possible answer. Give it a check.

Sentence 7—More facts. Cross off (G). The correct answer is sentence 6.

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.

Here's a practice reasoning question and another familiar passage to work with:

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 chunky 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.

What sort of information do we need from the passage in order to answer this question?

The author of the passage would probably consider which one of the following situations most analogous to the response of the critics in the highlighted sentence?



- A college professor lowers a student's grade from an A to a B because the student is chronically late to class.
- An accountant refuses to help his clients cheat on their income tax returns.
- A politician attacks the character of his opponent even though it is his opponent's positions that the politician disagrees with.
- A district attorney indicted a person on a misdemeanor charge because he lacks the evidence to convict the person on a felony charge.
- A reporter files a story despite not having been able to verify all her sources.

Here's How to Crack It

This question wants us to figure out what the response of the critics is and then find a situation that is similar to it. First, return to the passage and read the highlighted sentence. Next, state in your own words what that part of the passage says. Based on the sentence, it appears that the situation is that “the people attacked this thing for one reason, but there was really another reason they didn’t like it.”

Now you’re ready to return to the answer choices and look for the best match. The situation in the first answer choice is not the same as what we’ve written; here the professor is penalizing a student for the student’s poor performance in class. Eliminate it. Choice (B) doesn’t match—the accountant is refusing to do something illegal. The third choice seems like a good match; the politician attacks his opponent for one reason (his character), but there was another reason (his policies) for his dislike of the candidate.

Let’s check the remaining choices to make sure our answer is the best answer. In choice (D), the district attorney indicted on a lesser charge because of a lack of evidence for a more serious charge. This is somewhat similar, in that there is an overt element (the misdemeanor charge) and also a second factor which is not overt (the felony charge). However, the part of the answer choice that mentions the lack of evidence makes this choice worse than (C). It goes beyond the information presented in the passage because the original situation in the passage doesn’t mention a lack of evidence on behalf of the critics. Finally, choice (E) is not a match at all. This situation involves a reporter who puts forth something that has not been verified, which isn’t the same as criticizing something for one reason when there is another, deeper reason. Thus, choice (C) is our answer.

Ready for another reasoning question? It's based on the passage we just used.

Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

The author of the passage would probably agree with which of the following statements?



- Most critics of Oscar Wilde's novel objected primarily to the lifestyle of its author.
- If *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were written in the twentieth century, the critical reaction would be less severe.
- Some critics of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* believed that an author of a book had a moral responsibility to the book's audience.

Here's How to Crack It

To answer this question, we have to figure out which answer choice the author might agree with. How the heck are we supposed to know what the author might think? Well, all we know about what the author thinks is what's found in the passage. In many ways, "author-agree" questions are very similar to inference questions. In both types of questions, the best answer may not be explicitly stated in the passage, but there will be sufficient evidence in the passage to support the correct answer. The key here is to take each answer choice one by one and return to the passage to look for proof for it.

On Select All That Apply questions, don't feel compelled to choose more than one answer—sometimes only one choice will be correct!

The first choice states that most critics objected to Wilde's lifestyle. Can you find any evidence of this in the passage? No. Nowhere does the passage mention his lifestyle. It says that the critics disagreed with the "thematic content," but we can't assume that Wilde based his work on his own lifestyle (and of course, you can't use any outside knowledge you may have of Wilde's licentious life). Remember: You have to stay inside the scope of the passage—don't go beyond the information given. Thus, choice (A) is no good.

Now look at the second choice. Is there any evidence about how the author would feel if the book were released today? Nope. Of course, you may assume that the author would agree with this choice, but again, on the GRE that isn't good enough. We need direct evidence from the passage and there is none for this choice. So, goodbye to choice (B). Let's go to the third and final answer. Return to the passage and look for the part about the book's audience. The last two lines make it clear that some critics saw Wilde's book as corrupting the public and for this they attacked it. This would support choice (C), so that's our best answer. Notice that in these multiple-choice, multiple-answer questions, there need not be two answers—sometimes there will just be one!

FIND AND PARAPHRASE THE ANSWER

Because the right answer to every Reading Comprehension question is literally right in front of you, ETS goes to great lengths to disguise the correct answer and to make the wrong answers more appealing. ETS does this by making the best answer a clever paraphrase of the words in the text, one that basically states the same idea but usually avoids repeating words verbatim from the text. By paraphrasing, ETS is able to create right answers that “fly under the radar”; they don’t stand out and they’re easy to dismiss in favor of the trap answers.

When tackling Reading Comprehension questions, your ability to paraphrase information is key. Try to take the dense and complicated ETS text and distill it to its simplest parts. For example, if the ETS text states “normative models of political behavior, despite being rife with questionable cultural assumptions that threaten to invalidate their claims of objectivity, still provide social scientists with useful ways of evaluating cultural practices,” you might paraphrase this sentence as “this thing has problems but can still be useful.” Sure, this paraphrase strips out all the important details, but on a multiple-choice test, you don’t always need the details. You just have to pick the best answer from among the available choices.

Successful paraphrases give you the essence of the idea without the complication of details. Practice paraphrasing to see your reading comprehension score rise.

USE PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

As you’ve surely noticed by now, the answer to a Reading Comprehension question is the one that is supported by evidence from the passage. Regardless of the question type or format, that rule is immutable. Here is a recap of other guidelines to use when you’re using POE:

ETS constructs correct answer choices that cannot be disputed. The more extreme a choice is, the less likely it is to be the answer.

1. **Avoid Extreme Statements.** ETS prefers wishy-washy statements to extreme ones. When in doubt, pick the answer that has a weaker tone.
2. **Half Right = All Wrong.** ETS likes to write answer choices that are half right; which also means that 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.
3. **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. Eliminate them!
4. **Beyond the Information Given.** These answers go too far beyond what is written in the passage. If you can’t point to a part of the passage that matches information in the answer choice, that choice is probably wrong.

Let’s explore these guidelines in a little more detail.

Avoid Extreme Statements

Extreme statements are answer choices that make absolute claims. There are very few absolutes in the world, so you shouldn't expect ETS reading passages (which are all excerpted or based on actual academic papers) to contain extreme statements.

Certain words make choices extreme and, therefore, easy to dispute. Here are a few of these words.

Extreme answers
are bad!

- must
- the best
- the first
- only
- each
- totally
- every
- always
- all
- no

You shouldn't automatically eliminate a choice that contains one of these words, but you should turn your attention to it immediately and attack it vigorously. If you can find even one exception, you can eliminate that choice.

Other words make choices moderate, more mushy, and therefore hard to dispute. Here are a few of these words.

Moderate answers
are good!

- may
- many
- can
- sometimes
- some
- often

For example, consider the following two answer choices:

- There is assuredly life on other planets or moons in the solar system.
- Scientists believe that there may be life on other planets or moons in the solar system.

Without even looking at a passage, you should pick the second answer choice because it's more wishy-washy; the first choice is too strong for ETS's liking.

Half Right = All Wrong

Careful reading of the answer choices is essential on Reading Comprehension questions. Remember that your job is to find flaws in answer choices and eliminate them. Many people focus on what they like about an answer, rather than what's wrong with it. ETS loves to write answer choices that start out fine, but then say something wrong. Don't be taken in by the part of the answer you like. Use a critical eye when applying POE; don't look for reasons to keep disputed answer choices, look for reasons to eliminate them. One word can make an answer choice wrong if that word isn't supported by the passage.

If an answer choice is half wrong, it's all wrong.
Focus on flaws and on Process of Elimination.

Look at the following example for the next three example questions:

Within the atmosphere are small amounts of a number of important gases, popularly called “greenhouse gases,” because they alter the flow of life- and heat-energy through the atmosphere, much as does the glass shell of a greenhouse. Their effect on incoming solar energy is minimal, but collectively they act as an insulating blanket around the planet. By absorbing and returning to the earth’s surface much of its outgoing heat, these gases trap it within the lower atmosphere. A greenhouse effect is natural and essential to a livable climate on Earth.

The passage states which of the following about the effect of greenhouse gases on the environment?

- Although their effect on incoming solar energy is minimal, the presence of artificial greenhouse gases is a danger to the planet.
- The composite effect of the gases is necessary for maintaining a climate favorable to life on Earth.



In this case, the first answer starts out great—the passage does indeed state that the gases have a minimal effect on solar energy. But look at the rest of the passage. Does the passage ever talk about “artificial” greenhouse gases? Nope, so the first answer is half right, but all wrong. The second choice, however, is entirely supported by the passage. The second sentence states that “collectively they act...,” while the final sentence says the greenhouse effect is “essential to a livable climate on Earth.”

Garbled Information

One of ETS’s favorite tricks is to write answer choices that contain information from different parts of the passage than the one to which the question refers. If you aren’t being careful, you’ll think, “I remember something like that from the passage” and pick the wrong answer choice. This is one reason it’s so important to use lead words and line references to guide you to the right part of the passage. Never answer a question from memory.

ETS also likes to conflate different parts of a passage to create an answer that uses a lot of words from the passage, but doesn’t say a whole lot. For example, use the passage from the previous section to answer the following question:

The passage suggests which of the following about “greenhouse gases”?



- They are a natural source of heat energy within the atmosphere.
- They contribute to creating a habitable environment on Earth.

The first answer choice uses a lot of words from the passage, but says a whole lot of nothing. It garbles the information in the passage, which states that greenhouse gases “alter” heat energy. They are not a source of it. The second choice, which is the correct choice, is a nice paraphrase of the last sentence. It may not sound as “correct” as the other choice, but close examination shows it to be the better answer.

Beyond the Information Given

ETS takes its reading passages from textbooks, collections of essays, works of scholarship, and other sources of serious reading matter. However, be careful not to answer questions based on the fact that you did your undergraduate thesis on the topic, or that you once read a newspaper article about the topic at hand. The answers are in the passage; don’t use outside knowledge.

Remember: All of the answers you need are on the screen.

Often, these answers will make common sense, but unfortunately you can’t use that as a criterion on the GRE. Which of the following answer choices is beyond the information in the passage from before?

The author of the passage would probably agree with which of the following statements?



- Without the presence of greenhouse gases, it is unlikely that the earth would be able to support life.
- Air pollution may contribute to an increase in greenhouse gases, which will in turn lead to eventual warming of the earth.

Clearly, here the second choice is beyond the information given in the passage. It may be true and it makes common sense, but the passage never addresses it. Thus, it cannot be the correct answer on a GRE Reading Comprehension question.

Reading Comprehension Drill

Answers can be found in Part V.

Questions 1 through 4 are based on the following reading passage.

Called by some the “island that time forgot,” Madagascar is home to a vast array of unique, exotic creatures. One such animal is the aye-aye. First described by western science in 1782, it was initially categorized as a member of the order Rodentia. Further research then revealed that it was more closely related to the lemur, a member of the primate order. Since the aye-aye is so different from its fellow primates, however, it was given its own family: *Daubentoniidae*. The aye-aye has been listed as an endangered species and, as a result, the government of Madagascar has designated an island off the northeastern coast of Madagascar as a protected reserve for aye-ayes and other wildlife.

Long before Western science became enthralled with this nocturnal denizen of Madagascar’s jungles, it had its own reputation with the local people. The aye-aye is perhaps best known for its large, round eyes and long, extremely thin middle finger. These adaptations are quite sensible, allowing the aye-aye to see well at night and retrieve grubs, which are one of its primary food sources, from deep within hollow branches. However, the aye-aye’s striking appearance may end up causing its extinction. The people of Madagascar believe that the aye-aye is a type of spirit animal, and that its appearance is an omen of death. Whenever one is sighted, it is immediately killed. When combined with the loss of large swathes of jungle habitat, this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life’s variety.

1 of 10

Based on the information given in the passage, the intended audience would most likely be

- visitors to a natural science museum
- professors of evolutionary science
- a third-grade science class
- students of comparative religions
- attendees at a world culture symposium



2 of 10

The author’s attitude toward the aye-aye, as represented in the highlighted text, could best be described as

- admiring
- mystified
- reverent
- appalled
- lachrymose



3 of 10

Select the sentence in the first paragraph that would most seriously weaken the author’s claim that “this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life’s variety.”



4 of 10

Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.



Which of the following statements can be logically inferred from the passage?

- Taxonomic classifications are not always absolute.
- The traditional religion of Madagascar involves augury.
- There are no longer enough resources on the main island to support the aye-aye population.

Questions 5 through 6 are based on the following reading passage.

A novel that is a bestseller is often, because of its popularity, not taken seriously as literature. Critics seem to presuppose that great literature must be somehow burdensome on the reader; it must be difficult for the uninitiated to understand. It is precisely this inverted snobbery that has hindered Isabelle Allende's *House of Spirits* from gaining the critical attention it deserves.

Published in 1982, the novel draws deeply on the author's own family history. Allende is the niece of former Chilean president Salvador Allende, who was murdered during a right-wing military coup in 1973. Yet rather than the to-be-expected socialist harangue, Allende subtly works her political message within the fabric of the compelling narrative she weaves. While Allende borrows a bit too freely from her mentor Gabriel García Marquéz's work, she nevertheless has a powerful and original voice within the construct of magical realism.

6 of 10

It can be inferred from the passage that

- Allende's novel is a retelling of her family's political struggles
- Allende's novel would have received more favorable reviews if critics had believed it to be great literature
- Allende learned about magical realism from Gabriel García Marquéz
- Allende's novel could have been more compelling if she had included a stronger political message
- readers might have expected Allende's work to be more political than it actually was

5 of 10

The author of the passage would probably consider which of the following situations to be most analogous to the critics' viewpoint as it is described in the highlighted sentence?



- Avant-garde movies with complicated storylines are deemed cinematically superior works to Hollywood blockbusters with straightforward narratives.
- Scientific journals are thought of as providing inferior coverage of naturalistic events than coverage provided by nature documentaries.
- Poetry is considered superior literature to prose because it is shorter, and therefore the message it conveys is more easily understood.
- Political diatribes are viewed as falling outside the accepted literary canon because they are too controversial.
- A movie version of a popular novel is considered artistically superior to the original.

Questions 7 through 8 are based on the following reading passage.

Bronson Alcott is perhaps best known not for who he was, but for whom he knew. Indeed, Alcott's connections were impressive by any standards: He was a close confidante of such luminaries as Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. Yet, to remember the man solely by his associations is to miss his importance to nineteenth-century American philosophy as a whole and to the Transcendental Movement in particular. Admittedly, Alcott's gift was not as a writer. His philosophical treatises have rightly been criticized by many as being ponderous, esoteric, and lacking focus.

However, Alcott was an erudite orator, and it is in the text of his orations that one begins to appreciate him as a visionary. Most notably, Alcott advocated what were at the time polemical ideas on education. He believed that good teaching should be Socratic in nature and that a student's intellectual growth was concomitant with his or her spiritual growth.

8 of 10

It can be inferred that the author would agree with which of the following statements?



- Transcendentalism was an esoteric field of inquiry promulgated by a select group of visionaries.
- Alcott's prose style is not always easily understood.
- A Socratic pedagogical style is difficult to align with spiritual teaching.
- Alcott should be chiefly appreciated for the strengths of his association.
- The text of Alcott's orations were widely accepted by his peers.

7 of 10

It can be inferred from the passage that the author would agree with all of the following statements EXCEPT



- Alcott should be remembered for his contributions to Transcendentalism
- Alcott's ideas were ahead of those of many of his contemporaries
- Alcott believed that learning should not neglect a student's spiritual education
- Alcott's ideas about education were not always accepted by his compatriots
- Alcott should not be regarded as a particularly gifted orator

Questions 9 through 10 are based on the following reading passage.

Echinosorex gymnura, known colloquially as the moon rat or gymnure, is one of the many fascinating creatures that inhabit the jungles of Southeast Asia. A close relative of the hedgehog, the moon rat likewise belongs to the order *Insectivora* and the family *Erinaceidae*. However, the family then splits into the sub-family *Hylomyinae*, which contains three separate genera and eight distinct species. The appearance and habitat of the moon rat are actually far more similar to those of various members of the order *Rodentia*, though its eating habits are more in line with its fellow insectivores. Ultimately, the taxonomic classification of this animal is useful only when considered along with other information regarding the animal's ecological niche.

9 of 10

Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.



Which of the following scenarios demonstrates the idea put forth by the author of this passage regarding animal classification?

- While studying a population of bears, scientists rely solely on the traditional taxonomic designations to identify likely hunting grounds.
- A team of medical researchers closely monitors the actions of the animals involved in a study and compares its findings with prevailing beliefs about those animals.
- A zookeeper designs a habitat for a new acquisition disregards taxonomic classifications and instead focuses on observational data.

10 of 10

The author's tone could best be described as



- exasperated
- didactic
- ambivalent
- morose
- laudatory

CRITICAL REASONING

Critical-reasoning questions are composed of short reading passages, typically just one paragraph long, followed by a series of questions about the author's argument. You should expect to see anywhere from two to four critical-reasoning questions within your two GRE Verbal sections.

Here's a sample critical-reasoning passage and question:

For over fifty years, many evolutionary biologists posited that early fish such as *Eusthenopteron* developed limbs as a result of the need to drag themselves across short distances when their watery habitats dried up during periods of drought. However, new fossil evidence suggests that this hypothesis is incorrect. Fossilized remains of *Acanthostega*, a primitive fish, reveal that even though the animal had rudimentary limbs, it could not walk on land. *Acanthostega* lacked ankles, which means that its limbs couldn't support its weight; furthermore, its ribs were too short to prevent the organism's chest cavity from collapsing once the animal left water.

Which of the following would most strengthen the author's argument?

The answer to this question, by the way, is (D). Not sure why? Keep reading.

- The fossilized remains of the *Acanthostega* are the earliest known evidence of early fish.
- The modern descendants of *Acanthostega* are not able to drag themselves across short distances on land.
- Biologists have found that some aquatic species can successfully drag themselves across land even though these species do not possess ankles.
- Any animal with a collapsed chest cavity is not able to survive long enough to travel even a short distance across land.
- Some evolutionary biologists believe that the new fossils are not from *Acanthostega*.

What Exactly Is Critical Reasoning?

Critical reasoning is our term for a specific type of reading passage you'll encounter on the GRE. At first glance, critical-reasoning passages resemble the short Reading Comprehension passages. However, what distinguishes critical reasoning from a regular reading passage is twofold:

1. The structure of the passage
2. The types of questions ETS will ask about it

We'll show you how to identify critical-reasoning passages and the most effective way of tackling these questions as well.

BREAKING AN ARGUMENT DOWN

The key to doing well on critical-reasoning questions is understanding how ETS authors construct an argument. All arguments contain two major parts—the conclusion, or the main point of the argument, and the premise—the facts that the author gives in support of his or her conclusion. Identifying these two parts is crucial to your success on these questions. Let's start our analysis of an author's argument in a critical-reasoning passage by learning how to identify the conclusion.

Identifying the Conclusion

The conclusion is the most important part of the argument; quite simply, it is the reason the argument exists. The conclusion of an argument is generally a statement of opinion—it's the author's belief or prediction about a situation. Let's look at the sample critical-reasoning passage again:

For over fifty years, many evolutionary biologists posited that early fish such as *Eusthenopteron* developed limbs as a result of the need to drag themselves across short distances when their watery habitats dried up during periods of drought. However, new fossil evidence suggests that this hypothesis is incorrect. Fossilized remains of *Acanthostega*, a primitive fish, reveal that even though the animal had rudimentary limbs, it could not walk on land. *Acanthostega* lacked ankles, which means that its limbs couldn't support its weight; furthermore, its ribs were too short to prevent the organism's chest cavity from collapsing once the animal left water.

The conclusion is the author's main point.

You can identify the conclusion of the author's argument by asking yourself this question: What opinion does this author hold? Now underline the sentence that you think is the conclusion of the argument above.

If you underlined “new fossil evidence suggests that this hypothesis is incorrect,” you hit the nail on the head.

There are other ways of identifying conclusions in arguments. For example, often you can identify the conclusion by certain key words. Specifically, keep an eye out for the following:

An argument’s conclusion is often signaled by these words:

therefore *thus* *consequently* *and so* *in conclusion*

You should also look for any words that indicate an opinion, such as the following:

suggest *believe* *hope* *indicate* *argue* *follow*

Remember: The conclusion is often the author’s opinion about what *might* happen.

In addition, a conclusion is often a belief about what should or might happen. Look for the following:

should *would* *must* *will*

Practice: Identifying Conclusions

Underline the conclusions of the arguments in the following critical-reasoning passages. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 5

Despite the support of the president, it is unlikely that the new defense bill will pass. A bipartisan group of 15 senators has announced that it does not support the legislation.

2 of 5

The earliest known grass fossils date from approximately 55 million years ago. Dinosaurs most likely disappeared from the earth around 60 million years ago. Based on this evidence, as well as fossilized remains of dinosaur teeth that indicate the creatures were more suited to eating ferns and palms, scientists have concluded that grass was not a significant part of the dinosaur diet.

3 of 5

Automaker *X* has lost over 2 billion dollars this year due to rising costs, declining automobile sales, and new governmental regulations. Because of the company's poor financial situation, it has asked its employees to pay more for health care and to accept a pay cut. However, the workers at automaker *X* are threatening to go on strike. If that happens, automaker *X* will have no choice but to file for bankruptcy.

4 of 5

The rise of obesity among citizens of country *Y* has been linked to a variety of health problems. In response to this situation, the country's largest health organization has called for food manufacturers to help combat the problem. Since the leading members of the nation's food industry have agreed to provide healthier alternatives, reduce sugar and fat content, and reduce advertisements for unhealthy foods, it is likely that country *Y* will experience a decrease in obesity-related health problems.

5 of 5

Recent advances in technology have led to a new wave of "smart" appliances, including refrigerators that note when food supplies are low and place an order at the grocery store, washing machines that automatically adjust the wash cycle and temperature based upon the clothes in the machine, and doorknobs that can identify the house owner and automatically open the door. A technology expert predicts that, due to these new innovations, machines will soon outnumber humans as the number-one users of the Internet.

Some critical-reasoning questions ask you to find the conclusion of the argument. Here's an example:

Mutation breeding is a method of crop development that requires breeders to first find plants that randomly display the traits researchers are looking for, and then breed those plants with other plants displaying similar traits. In order to bring about the required mutations, researchers bombard plants with thermal neutrons, x-rays, and known carcinogenic chemicals in order to damage the plant's DNA. Today, almost all varieties of wheat grown commercially are products of mutation breeding. Ironically, when scientists discovered how to splice desirable genes directly into the plants, thus avoiding the use of harmful chemicals and radiation, critics derided the new process as potentially dangerous despite the lack of any supporting evidence, resulting in boycotts and bans on genetically modified foods.

The argument as a whole is structured to lead to which of the following conclusions?



- Genetically modified food may have been unfairly stigmatized by its critics.
- Mutation breeding produces safer food than does genetic modification.
- Foods produced by genetic modification are healthier than foods produced by mutation breeding.
- Researchers should stop using mutation breeding in order to modify foods.
- Genetic modification of plants is more cost effective than mutation breeding of plants.

Here's How to Crack It

The conclusion, as you'll recall, is the author's opinion or belief. As you read the argument, look for indicators of the author's opinion. The first three sentences of the argument do not state opinions; the author is simply describing the method of mutation breeding. However, in the fourth sentence, the author uses the word *ironically*. This is an indicator of how the author feels. The author believes it is ironic that genetically modified foods are banned, despite "any supporting evidence" that they are dangerous, while foods created with mutation breeding, which use "harmful chemicals and radiation" account for "almost all varieties of wheat..."

Now we just need to find an answer choice that matches this opinion. Answer choice (A) looks pretty close, so let's hang on to it. Choice (B) is the opposite of what the author argues; the argument implies that genetic modification is safer. Choice (C) is close, but the argument doesn't really discuss which foods are "healthier," just that one type is banned and the other type isn't. Choice (D) also isn't discussed. The author thinks it's ironic that genetically modified foods are banned, but never states that mutation breeding should be stopped. Finally, choice (E) doesn't work because the argument doesn't express any opinion about cost effectiveness. Thus, choice (A) is the best answer.

Finding the Premise

After you identify the conclusion of an argument, your next task is to find the argument's premise. The premise (or premises—there can be more than one) is the evidence that the author gives in support of the conclusion.

You can find the premise of an argument in two ways. First, look for statements of fact. Critical-reasoning passages are usually based on statistics, surveys, polls, or reports and all of these things are premises—in fact, these are the most common types of premises. Second, you can use a strategy we call the “Why?” Test. Once you've found the conclusion, ask yourself “Why” you should accept it; the answer or answers to that question will be the premise(s). Let's look again at the passage from the beginning of the chapter:

For over fifty years, many evolutionary biologists posited that early fish such as *Eusthenopteron* developed limbs as a result of the need to drag themselves across short distances when their watery habitats dried up during periods of drought. However, new fossil evidence suggests that this hypothesis is incorrect. Fossilized remains of *Acanthostega*, a primitive fish, reveal that even though the animal had rudimentary limbs, it could not walk on land. *Acanthostega* lacked ankles, which means that its limbs couldn't support its weight; furthermore, its ribs were too short to prevent the organism's chest cavity from collapsing once the animal left water.

Why should you believe this conclusion?

What facts does the author give in support of the conclusion? In this argument, the author provides the following facts: (1) *Acanthostega* lacked ankles, and (2) the creature's ribs were too short to prevent its chest cavity from collapsing. These facts are the premises of the argument.

Is the statement a fact, something that you could verify or prove? Then it's a premise.

Finally, just like conclusions, premises have certain indicator words.

An argument's premise is often signaled by these words:

because *due to* *since* *based on*

Practice: Finding the Premise

For each of the following arguments, identify the premise or premises that support the conclusion. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 5

Despite the support of the president, it is unlikely that the new defense bill will pass. A bipartisan group of 15 senators has announced that it does not support the legislation.

Conclusion: _____

Why?

Premise: _____

2 of 5

The earliest known grass fossils date from approximately 55 million years ago. Dinosaurs most likely disappeared from the earth around 60 million years ago. Based on this evidence, as well as fossilized remains of dinosaur teeth that indicate the creatures were more suited to eating ferns and palms, scientists have concluded that grass was not a significant part of the dinosaur diet.

Conclusion: _____

Why?

Premise: _____

3 of 5

Automaker *X* has lost over 2 billion dollars this year due to rising costs, declining automobile sales, and new governmental regulations. Because of the company's poor financial situation, it has asked its employees to pay more for health care and to accept a pay cut. However, the workers at automaker *X* are threatening to go on strike. If that happens, automaker *X* will have no choice but to file for bankruptcy.

Conclusion: _____

Why?

Premise: _____

4 of 5

The rise of obesity among citizens of country *Y* has been linked to a variety of health problems. In response to this situation, the country's largest health organization has called for food manufacturers to help combat the problem. Since the leading members of the nation's food industry have agreed to provide healthier alternatives, reduce sugar and fat content, and reduce advertisements for unhealthy foods, it is likely that country *Y* will experience a decrease in obesity-related health problems.

Conclusion: _____

Why?

Premise: _____

5 of 5

Recent advances in technology have led to a new wave of "smart" appliances, including refrigerators that note when food supplies are low and place an order at the grocery store, washing machines that automatically adjust the wash cycle and temperature based upon the clothes in the machine, and doorknobs that can identify the house owner and automatically open the door. A technology expert predicts that, due to these new innovations, machines will soon outnumber humans as the number-one users of the Internet.

Conclusion: _____

Why?

Premise: _____

What's the conclusion?
What's the premise?

Okay. So you know how to identify the conclusion and premise(s) of an argument. Are you ready to try a critical-reasoning question? Here's one way in which ETS will test your knowledge of the parts of an argument.

A common myth is that animals can sense an impending earthquake. And while most geophysicists dispute this assertion and claim that there is no way to predict an earthquake, a new hypothesis for predicting earthquakes is generating interest in the scientific community. This hypothesis is based on a well-known principle: **Subjecting rocks to extreme pressures causes the rocks to produce electrical currents**. Now, a leading physicist has proposed that this principle may help predict earthquakes. For example, an earthquake along the San Andreas Fault in California could produce hundreds of thousands of amperes (units of electrical current) that would disrupt the ionosphere surrounding the earth. **By monitoring the ionosphere for electrical fluctuations, scientists may be able to predict earthquakes.**

In the argument above, the two boldfaced statements play which of the following roles?



- The first statement expresses the conclusion of the argument while the second statement provides support for that conclusion.
- The first statement expresses the conclusion of the argument as a whole; the second statement provides a possible consequence of the conclusion.
- The first statement presents support for the conclusion of the argument as a whole; the second statement states the conclusion of the argument.
- The first statement expresses an intermediary conclusion of the argument while the second statement presents a possible objection to the intermediary conclusion.
- The first statement provides support for a conclusion that the argument opposes; the second statement expresses the conclusion that the argument as a whole opposes.

Here's How to Crack It

The key to cracking this question is using the “Why?” test. Let’s try using the “Why?” test on the two boldfaced statements and see which one works best. If we make the first statement the conclusion, we’d end up with something like this:

Conclusion: Subjecting rocks to extreme pressures causes the rocks to produce electrical currents.

Why?

Premise: By monitoring the ionosphere for electrical fluctuations, scientists may be able to predict earthquakes.

Does that make sense? Nope, so let’s eliminate any answers that say that the first sentence is the argument’s conclusion. That allows us to eliminate choices (A), (B), and (D). Now let’s see what happens if we flip the statements around:

Conclusion: By monitoring the ionosphere for electrical fluctuations, scientists may be able to predict earthquakes.

Why?

Premise: Subjecting rocks to extreme pressures causes the rocks to produce electrical currents.

That makes much more sense. Answer choice (E) states that the argument opposes the conclusion, which it doesn’t, so we can eliminate that choice. Answer choice (C) is the best answer.

The “Why?” test helps to identify premises and conclusions.

Locating Assumptions

Although ETS frequently asks critical-reasoning questions about the premise or the conclusion of an argument, there are a number of other question types that require you to work with one final part of an argument. The final part of an argument is the assumption. The assumption is never explicitly stated in the passage, which means that it can sometimes be tricky to find. Basically, the assumption is the missing link that connects the conclusion of an argument to its premise.

Let's look back at one of the arguments you've already worked on.

Conclusion: It is unlikely that the new defense bill will pass.

Why?

Premise: A bipartisan group of 15 senators has announced that it does not support the legislation.

In order for this argument to be convincing, the reader has to make an assumption that because 15 senators do not support the bill, the bill will probably not pass. If you don't assume that the opposition of 15 senators means that the bill is unlikely to pass, the argument fails. Thus, assumptions are necessary to a successful argument.

To find the assumption or assumptions in an argument, you need to look for a "gap" in the reasoning of the argument. You can often accomplish this by asking yourself the following question:

Just because (premise) is true, does it really mean (conclusion) is true?

For example, let's return to another of the arguments you've already tackled.

Conclusion: Country *Y* will experience a decrease in obesity-related health problems.

Why?

Premise: The leading members of the nation's food industry have agreed to provide healthier alternatives, reduce sugar and fat content, and reduce advertisements for unhealthy foods.

Now, let's ask ourselves the question: Just because it's true that the food industry has agreed to provide healthier alternatives, reduce sugar and fat content, and reduce advertisements for unhealthy foods, does it really mean that obesity-related health problems will decrease?

If you accept this argument, you must assume that the food industry's actions will lead to a decrease in obesity-related health problems. That's the missing link—or the assumption—required by the argument.

Practice: Locating Assumptions

For each of the following critical-reasoning questions, identify the conclusion and the premise. Then note what assumption is required to make the argument work. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 4

City University recently announced the retirement of Professor Jones. Professor Jones is a leading biologist and widely published author and her presence was a major factor in many students' decisions to attend City University. The University predicts no decline in enrollment, however, because it plans to hire two highly credentialed biology professors to replace Professor Jones.

Conclusion: _____

Premise: _____

Assumption: _____

2 of 4

It makes no sense to charge more to customers under 25 years of age who rent cars. After all, most states allow people as young as 16 to have a driver's license and all states allow 18-year-olds the right to vote.

Conclusion: _____

Premise: _____

Assumption: _____

3 of 4

It is easy to demonstrate that extraterrestrial life exists by simply looking at our own solar system. In our solar system, there are eight planets and at least one of them obviously has life on it. Thus, roughly 12.5% of planets in the universe should have life on them.

Conclusion: _____

Premise: _____

Assumption: _____

4 of 4

State A is facing a serious budget shortfall for the upcoming year. Recent polls indicate that 58% of voters in Township B approve of a proposed 2-cent gasoline tax in order to make up the deficit. It is clear, therefore, that the leaders of State A should institute the gas tax.

Conclusion: _____

Premise: _____

Assumption: _____

CRITICAL REASONING QUESTION TYPES

Now that you've familiarized yourself with the basics of an argument, let's look at the types of argument questions you'll encounter on the GRE. Each of the following types of questions will require you to first identify the argument's premise and conclusion; after that, your task will vary depending on the type.

Reasoning Questions

You can identify Reasoning questions because they will have the following question stems:

In the argument given, the boldfaced statements play which of the following roles?

Which of the following best describes the function of the boldfaced statements in the argument above?

The argument above is structured to lead to which of the following conclusions?

For Reasoning questions, you must isolate the premise and conclusion, but you don't need to find the assumption.

Assumption Questions

Assumption questions are usually phrased in the following ways:

The argument above assumes which of the following?

The argument above relies on which of the following?

The author's argument presupposes which of the following?

On assumption questions, you need to first locate the premise and conclusion. After that, look for the gap as described in the "Locating Assumptions" section above.

Strengthen Questions

Strengthen questions will ask you to make the argument stronger. You'll be asked to do this by identifying answer choices that will support the assumption. Strengthen questions are often phrased as follows:

Which one of the following, if true, would most strengthen the argument?

Which of the following, if true, would most support the author's argument?

Supporters of the argument would most likely cite which of following pieces of additional evidence?

To strengthen an argument, find the premise, the conclusion, and the assumption. The correct answer will be a premise that supports the assumption.

Weaken Questions

As we've learned, the assumption is what makes an argument work. It follows, then, that if you attack the assumption, you will weaken the argument. You can identify Weaken questions by looking for the following:

Which one of the following, if true, would most weaken the argument?

Which one of the following, if true, casts the most doubt on the argument above?

Which one of the following, if true, would most undermine the author's argument?

On Weaken questions, once again you'll need to find the premise, conclusion, and assumption. The right answer will attack the assumption, breaking the link between the premise and the conclusion.

CRACKING CRITICAL-REASONING QUESTIONS

Ready to tackle some critical-reasoning questions? Let's go through steps you take when you run into one of these questions on the test.

The Basic Approach

When you identify a question as being a critical-reasoning question on the exam, go through the following steps:

1. **Read the Question Carefully.** Don't dive into the passage without being aware of exactly what you're dealing with—start by making sure that it really is critical reasoning and not a plain old reading comprehension passage.
2. **Analyze the Argument.** Identify the premise, conclusion, and assumption of the argument.
3. **Predict the Answer.** Before even looking at the answer choices, try to answer the question in your own words.

4. **Use Process of Elimination.** Process of Elimination (POE) is a valuable tool. If you’re not sure what the correct answer is, look for the wrong answers instead; eliminate them, and even if you still can’t identify the correct answer, you have a much greater chance of guessing the correct answer.

Try going through these steps on the following question.

What type of question is this?

After examining the bodies of a dozen beached whales and finding evidence of bleeding around the animals’ eyes and brains as well as lesions on their kidneys and livers, environmental groups fear that the Navy’s use of sonar is causing serious harm to marine animals. A leading marine biologist reports that sonar induces whales to panic and surface too quickly, which causes nitrogen bubbles to form in their blood.

The argument above relies on which of the following assumptions?

- Marine biologists have documented that other marine animals, including dolphins and sea turtles, have exhibited kidney and liver lesions.
- No studies have been conducted on the possible detrimental effects of sonar on marine animals.
- Whales in captivity panic only when exposed to man-made, rather than natural, sound waves.
- The presence of nitrogen bubbles in the blood has been demonstrated to cause damage to various internal organs.
- It is unlikely that the symptoms found in the beached whales could be caused by any known disease.



Here's How to Crack It

Let's apply the four-step basic approach:

1. Read the question. This is an Assumption question—we know this because it asks you to determine what the argument relies on.
2. Analyze the argument, precisely identifying the conclusion and premise. You should come up with the following:
Conclusion: The Navy’s use of sonar is causing serious harm to marine animals.

Why?

Premise: Surfacing too quickly causes nitrogen bubbles to form in the whale's blood.

Next, we need to locate the assumption. Remember to use the question we introduced earlier—here it would be phrased as follows:

"Just because the whales have nitrogen bubbles in their blood, does that really mean that sonar is causing them serious harm?"

3. Try to predict the answer before looking at the answer choices. Remember that arguments require an assumption in order to succeed. In this case, the right answer should say something along the lines of "nitrogen bubbles do cause serious harm."
4. Use Process of Elimination. Check out the grey box for some POE tips on "assumption" questions.

Eliminate answers that aren't relevant to the argument!

Now, returning to the answer choices, let's see which one is best. Answer choice (A) is wrong; this choice doesn't connect the premise to the conclusion. Even though it states that other animals have exhibited similar symptoms, we need the answer choice to connect the symptoms—in whales—to the use of sonar. Choice (B) is wrong as well. (B) brings in information that isn't part of the original argument: It's irrelevant whether or not the Navy has conducted studies on the harmful effects of sonar. Answer choice (C) doesn't help much either; the argument is not concerned with the situations under which whales panic. Answer (D) looks pretty good. It connects the nitrogen bubbles found in the premise to the serious harm mentioned in the conclusion, so hold on to this choice. Remember that since we're looking for the BEST answer, we still need to check the final answer; however, answer choice (E) is no good. Like choice (B), this choice brings in information that isn't relevant to the argument. The fact that the symptoms are unlikely to be caused by any known disease does not make the link between the sonar and the harm to the animals. Thus, choice (D) is the best answer.

POE for Assumption Questions

When you're using POE on Assumption questions, always eliminate answer choices that do the following:

1. **Give New Information.** The assumption must link the premise and the conclusion. Any answer choices that discuss information that is not part of the original argument are wrong.
2. **Have the Wrong Tone.** The tone of the answer choice should match the tone of the argument. Arguments that have very strong conclusions require very strongly worded answer choices, and arguments that have milder tones require milder answer choices.
3. **Weaken the Argument.** The assumption is necessary to the argument. Eliminate any answer choice that would weaken or hurt the argument—unless of course you're dealing with a Weaken question!

Strengthen Questions

Here's another critical-reasoning question:

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency has announced plans for a new unmanned space probe. The probe, named Hayabusa, will rendezvous with an asteroid some 290 million kilometers away from Earth and attempt to land on the asteroid. After the landing, Hayabusa will release a robotic rover which will photograph the surface of the asteroid and also collect rock and dust samples. The probe will then return to Earth with the samples. Scientists believe that the mission, if successful, will provide important clues about the composition of the early solar system.

Which of the following, if true, most strongly supports the scientists' conclusion about the Hayabusa mission?



Remember to identify the question type first.

- Once the Hayabusa probe reaches the asteroid, researchers calculate that it will have a 60% chance of successfully landing on the asteroid.
- The asteroid targeted by the Hayabusa mission is known to have been formed at the inception of the solar system.
- The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency has yet to experience a mechanical failure with one of its unmanned space probes.
- Some astronomers believe that many asteroids originate outside the solar system and are captured by the gravitational pull of the sun and planets.
- The Hayabusa probe is the first ever to attempt a landing on an asteroid.

Here's How to Crack It

Let's again apply the four steps:

1. Identify the question. It's a Strengthen question; we know this because the word "strengthen" is actually used in the question!
2. Find the premise, conclusion, and assumption.
Here's what you should end up with:
Conclusion: The mission, if successful, will provide important clues about the composition of the early solar system.
Why?

Premise: Hayabusa will release a robotic rover which will photograph the surface of the asteroid and also collect rock and dust samples.

Assumption: Rock and dust samples from an asteroid will provide scientists with information about the early solar system.

3. Predict what the right answer should do. For a Strengthen question, look for an answer that supports the assumption. In this case, the right answer should provide some information that confirms the idea that dust and rock samples will aid scientists in understanding the early solar system.
4. Check out the grey box on this page for some POE guidelines on Strengthen questions.

Always check all five answer choices.

Looking back at the answer choices, we see that answer choice (A) is not the best answer. This answer is only half good, indicating that the probe has a better-than-even chance of landing successfully. However, it doesn't address whether the probe's mission will help scientists understand the early solar system. Eliminate this choice. Choice (B) seems to be right on the money. The answer we're looking for should support the assumption that rock and dust samples from an asteroid will provide clues about the early solar system. Choice (B) states that the asteroid in question is, in fact, from the early solar system. Keep looking through—remember that you're looking for the best choice.

Like answer choice (A), choice (C) is half right. However, while it might be helpful to know that it's unlikely that the probe will suffer a mechanical failure, you still have to assume that the mission itself will aid scientists in their attempts to understand the early solar system. That's just too much of a leap. Answer choice (D) actually weakens the argument. If asteroids come from outside the solar system, studying dust from them probably won't help researchers understand much from the solar system. Finally, choice (E) does nothing for the argument. The fact that the probe is the first of its kind says nothing about its scientific value. It looks like choice (B) is best; choose it and move on.

POE for Strengthen Questions

When you're using POE on Strengthen questions, always eliminate answer choices that

1. **Are Only Half Good.** Some answers will be on the right track, but they won't strengthen the argument enough. Again remember that you're looking for the best answer, not an answer that might be good enough. You shouldn't have to make any assumptions about the answer choice in order for it to strengthen the argument.
2. **Weaken the Argument.** Typically, one of the answer choices will weaken the argument. Unless your task is to weaken the argument, you can easily eliminate it.
3. **Do Nothing.** Some answer choices do nothing to the argument; they neither strengthen nor weaken it. Get rid of these; they're decoys.

On Strengthen questions, note that answer choices that offer new information are okay, provided of course that they help strengthen the argument. Also note that answers that have strong tones are often correct for Strengthen questions.

Weaken Questions

Try one last critical-reasoning question:

Psychologists have just completed an extensive study of recently divorced parents in order to determine which factors contributed most to the dissolution of the marriage. The researchers found that in a great majority of the cases of failed marriages, the couples ate, on average, fewer than 10 meals per week with each other. From this data, the psychologists have determined that a failure to spend time together during meal times is a major factor leading to divorce.

Which of the following, if true, would cast the most doubt on the researchers' hypothesis?



Do you recognize what type of argument this is?

- Many couples who have long and successful marriages eat together fewer than ten times per week.
- Most of the couples in the study who were unable to share meals with each other worked outside of the home.
- People who lack a regular dining schedule tend to have more disorders and illnesses of the digestive system.
- Couples in the study who reported that they ate together more than ten times per week also indicated that they tended to perceive their relationships with their spouses as healthy.
- In many cases, people in unhappy marriages tend to express their displeasure by avoiding contact with their partners when possible.

Here's How to Crack It

This is a Weaken question. Once again, we'll break the argument down into its premise, conclusion, and assumption:

Conclusion: A failure to spend time together during meal times is a major factor leading to divorce.

Why?

Premise: In a great majority of the cases of failed marriages, the couples ate, on average, fewer than 10 meals per week with each other.

Assumption: A lack of time spent eating meals together causes marital problems; there is no other cause.

The assumptions are, first, that there is no other cause, and second, that the cause and effect are not reversed. Since we want to weaken this argument, we can predict that the best answer will provide some other cause for the divorces, or show that the psychologists have the cause and effect backwards.

Check out the grey box for POE guidelines on Weaken questions.

Looking through the answer choices, you can probably see right away that answer choice (A) is not the correct answer. The argument is not about what successful couples do; it is only concerned with divorced couples. Move on. Choice (B) doesn't really do anything to the argument; it's unclear how this information would affect the causal link assumed in the argument. The same goes for choice (C): All this choice indicates is that there may be other problems linked to eating—it doesn't address the connection between dining and marriage success.

Choice (D) seems like it might strengthen the argument. These couples are reporting a link between eating together more and perceiving their marriages as healthy. Eliminate this choice. Choice (E) is the best answer. This answer choice shows that the researchers have reversed the cause and effect. It is not that a failure to dine together causes marital strife; rather, couples that are already unhappy express it by not eating together. This weakens the argument, and (E) is correct.

POE for Weaken Questions

The guidelines for Weaken questions are basically the same as those for Strengthen questions. Eliminate any answer choices that

1. **Are Half Good.** Make sure the answer attacks the assumption thoroughly.
2. **Strengthen the Argument.** Once again, one answer usually does the opposite of the question task—eliminate the odd man out.
3. **Do Nothing.** Some answer choices neither strengthen nor weaken the argument: Eliminate them.

As is the case with Strengthen questions, new information and extreme tones in Weaken questions need not be eliminated.

OTHER CRITICAL-REASONING QUESTION TYPES

The GRE also contains inference and resolve/explain questions, which require you to use different approaches from those you use for Weaken and Strengthen questions. Let's go through how to crack inference and resolve/explain questions now.

Inference and resolve/explain questions do not require you to find the premise and conclusion.

Inference Questions

An inference is a conclusion that's based on a set of given facts. You can identify inference questions because they'll look a lot like the following:

If the statements above are true, which of the following must also be true?

Which of the following statements can be properly inferred from the information above?

Based on the information above, which of the following can logically be concluded?

Here's an example:

On inference questions, you don't have to find the premise and conclusion.

The Mayville Fire Department always fills its employment vacancies "in-house"—when a firefighter retires or leaves the force, his or her position is filled by interviewing all qualified members of the Mayville Department who are interested in the position. Only if this process fails to produce a qualified candidate does the department begin interviewing potential employees from outside the department. This year, the Mayville Fire Department has hired three new firefighters from outside the department.

If the statements above are true, which of the following must also be true?



- For the coming year, the Mayville Fire Department will be understaffed unless it hires three additional firefighters.
- Firefighters hired from outside the Mayville Fire Department take longer to properly train for the job.
- At the time of the vacancies in the Mayville Fire Department, either there were no qualified in-house candidates or no qualified in-house candidates were interested in the open positions.
- The three firefighters who left the department had jobs for which no other members of the Mayville Fire Department were qualified to fill.
- The three new firefighters are the first new employees hired by the Mayville Fire Department.

Here's How to Crack It

Inference questions are often associated with critical-reasoning passages that are not structured like the clear-cut arguments we've seen thus far. Often these wacky arguments don't even have conclusions and premises; instead, they might simply resemble a set of facts.

Our strategy for approaching these types of questions, of course, begins with identifying them as inference questions. However, for Step 2, don't attempt to identify a conclusion or premise; simply read the argument. If the argument is complex or hard to follow, don't spend too much time trying to untangle it. Most of the work on inference questions should be done when you get to the answer choices.

For inference questions, don't even do Step 3 (predict the answer). There's no way to predict what sort of inference you'll be asked to make, so proceed directly to Step 4, using POE.

Check out the POE guidelines for inference questions in the grey box on the next page.

Let's start with answer choice (A). This choice says that the department will be "understaffed." Is there any part of the argument that indicates that this is true? Nope, so eliminate this choice. Answer choice (B) states that firefighters from outside the department take longer to train, but the argument says nothing at all about training. Eliminate this choice. Choice (C) states that either there were no qualified candidates in house or there were no qualified candidates interested in the jobs. Returning to the argument, we see that the hiring policy is that a vacant

Can you prove your answer choice? If not, eliminate it.

POE for Inference Questions

On inference questions, eliminate answer choices that

1. **Go beyond the Information.** Stick to the facts on inference questions. Avoid answers that are overly broad or general.
2. **Could Be True.** The correct answer on an inference *must* be true. Answers that might be true or could be true are no good.
3. **Use Extreme Language.** Be suspicious of strong language. The presence of words such as *all*, *none*, *always*, *never*, or *impossible* often means that an answer choice wrong.

The key to inference questions is using Process of Elimination: Take each answer choice and return to the argument to see if you can prove that it's true. If you can't point to the part of the argument that supports the answer choice, the answer is wrong.

"position is filled by interviewing all qualified members of the Mayville Department who are interested in the position." If this process fails, the department goes outside the department for candidates. Thus, since Mayville hired three new fire fighters from outside the department, answer choice (C) must be true.

Let's go through the remaining answers. Choice (D) is tempting, but on inference questions, we need to make sure that every part of the answer choice holds up to scrutiny. This answer states that no other members of the department were qualified to take the open positions. This could be true; however, based on the facts presented, it could also be true that there were qualified members who simply weren't interested in applying for the position. Thus, choice (D) isn't the best choice—it isn't better than (C). Finally, choice (E) goes beyond the information presented. There is no way of knowing whether these new firefighters were the first new employees. Answer choice (C) is still the best.

Resolve/Explain

Some critical-reasoning questions will present you with a paradox—a set of facts that seem to contradict each other. On these questions, your task is to find the answer choice that best explains the contradiction. You can recognize these questions because they often contain the following phrases:

Which of the following choices would best explain the situation presented above?

Which of the following, if true, would best resolve the discrepancy above?

Which of the following, if true, best reconciles the seeming paradox above?

Take a look at the following example:

Over the past 10 years, the emergence of digital file sharing technology has threatened the traditional market for compact discs. Internet users are now able to share songs from their favorite artists with little or no loss of quality in the music, acquiring the songs they desire without having to purchase the entire compact disc. Music industry leaders contend that this practice violates their copyright and causes untold financial losses. However, consumer groups report that there has been an increase in the sales of compact discs.

Which of the following, if true, would best explain the situation above?



- Some consumers who have downloaded songs from the Internet have been sued by major record companies.
- Research indicates that persons who engage in file sharing or song downloading are usually only casual music fans.
- The music industry is developing new technology to help prevent users from downloading songs.
- Music artists tend to release more material, on average, today than they did 10 years ago.
- Compact discs released now often include bonus features that are appealing to fans, such as interviews with the band and music videos, that are not available for download.

Here's How to Crack It

Like inference questions, resolve/explain questions require a slightly different approach. Step 1 remains the same—read the question and identify the question type. Once you've identified the question as a resolve/explain question, read the critical-reasoning passage. However, instead of looking for a premise and conclusion, for Step 2 you're going to look for two facts that are in conflict. The basic pattern for a resolve/explain argument is as follows:

Fact I:

But

Fact II:

For the argument in the example, two facts are in conflict:

Fact I: Internet users are able to download individual songs instead of purchasing compact discs.

But

Fact II: There has been an increase in compact disc sales.

For resolve/explain questions, as for inference questions, you can skip Step 3. You might be able to predict a possible explanation for the discrepancy, but there's no guarantee that your explanation will be similar to the credited response. Proceed to Step 4, use POE, and as you read each answer choice, ask yourself the following question:

POE for Resolve/Explain Questions

On resolve/explain questions, you should eliminate answer choices that

1. **Do Nothing.** Many wrong answers simply do nothing to the paradox.
2. **Are Only Half Right.** Some answers will deal with only half of the conflict. Make sure the answer you select addresses both facts.
3. **Worsen the Situation.** Eliminate choices that appear to make the situation worse.

How can both (Fact I) and (Fact II) be true?

Check out the POE guidelines for resolve/explain questions in the grey box.

Let's use Process of Elimination on the answer choices in our example. The first answer choice doesn't resolve the conflict. It might explain why fewer users download music, but it doesn't explain why compact disc sales have increased. Eliminate choice (A). Answer choice (B) does nothing to the paradox. The fact that the people who download music are casual fans doesn't really explain anything. Like answer choice (A), choice (C) is partly correct; however, it doesn't explain the increase in sales. Also, the answer choice states that the

industry is "developing" technology; it doesn't state that the technology has been implemented yet. So this couldn't affect the current situation. Choice (D) doesn't help much either. You might assume that more material on the market means that sales could increase even with downloading, but that line of thought requires you to fill in too many missing pieces. The correct answer should do all the work. Look at answer choice (E). This choice states that compact discs feature bonus material that can't be downloaded. This could explain both the fact that people are downloading music and that compact disc sales are increasing. Since choice (E) is a more complete explanation, it's the best answer.

WON'T ALL THIS TAKE TOO MUCH TIME?

While it may seem at first like you will need a lot of time to break down the arguments and apply the strategies, you'll get faster at doing this with practice. It's better to take your time and truly understand how the questions work than to rush through the problems, only to get them wrong.

Working more slowly increases your accuracy, which increases your GRE score!

Critical Reasoning Practice Set

In this practice set, follow the steps exactly as we've presented them. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 6

In 1989 corporate tax rates in some regions of the United States fell to their lowest level in 15 years, while the rates in other regions reached new highs. In 1974 similar conditions led to a large flight of companies from regions with unfavorable corporate tax policies to regions with favorable policies. There was, however, considerably less corporate flight in 1989.

Which of the following, if true about 1989, most plausibly accounts for the finding that there was less corporate flight in 1989?



- The regions with the most favorable corporate tax policies had many of the same types of corporations as did those with unfavorable tax policies, but this was not true in 1974.
- In contrast to 1974, office rental costs in the regions with the most favorable corporate tax policies were significantly higher than rental costs in other areas of the country.
- In contrast to 1974, in 1989, the areas with the most favorable corporate tax policies reaped the most benefit from tax incentives, although the tax codes were particularly difficult to decipher.
- Tax incentives offered by foreign countries were higher in 1989 than in 1974.
- Individual tax incentives in the areas with favorable corporate tax policies were slightly lower than they were 15 years earlier in areas with favorable corporate tax policies.

2 of 6

Nonprescription sunglasses shield the wearer's eyes from damaging ultraviolet sunlight. Squinting, however, provides protection from ultraviolet rays that is at least as good as the protection from nonprescription sunglasses. There is, therefore, no health advantage to be gained by wearing nonprescription sunglasses rather than squinting.

Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens support for the conclusion above?



- Many opticians offer prescription sunglasses that not only screen out ultraviolet sunlight but also provide corrective vision.
- Not all nonprescription sunglasses provide as much protection from ultraviolet sunlight as does squinting.
- Squinting strains facial muscles and causes headaches and fatigue.
- Many people buy sunglasses because they feel that sunglasses are fashionable.
- Some people squint even when they are wearing sunglasses.

3 of 6

Aramayo: Our federal government seems to function most efficiently when decision-making responsibilities are handled by only a few individuals. Therefore, our government should consolidate its leadership and move away from a decentralized representative democracy.

Tello: But moving our government in this direction could violate our constitutional mission to provide government of, for, and by the people.

Which of the following statements describes Tello's response to Aramayo?

- Tello contradicts the reasoning used by Aramayo.
- Tello uncovers an assumption used in Aramayo's reasoning.
- Tello brings up a possible negative consequence of accepting Aramayo's argument.
- Tello reveals the circular reasoning used by Aramayo.
- Tello shows that Aramayo overgeneralizes a very special situation.

4 of 6

Business computer systems are designed to make workers more productive by automating a portion of the work that must be completed in a business process. As a result, the employee is free to perform more tasks that require human attention. Although productivity may be lost during a learning period, many businesses experience dramatic gains in productivity after installing a new computer system. While discussing the connection between productivity gains and computer systems, a well-respected business journal recently stated that the person who serves as the Chief Information Officer is the consummate business computer system.

By comparing a Chief Information Officer to business computer systems, the journal implicitly argues that

- Chief Information Officers should always communicate the value of computer systems to their companies
- the productivity of a company can be increased through the hiring of a Chief Information Officer
- many companies have not improved their productivity with new computer systems
- Chief Information Officers are more effective than are new computer systems
- the impact of a Chief Information Officer on a company's productivity is difficult to measure

Whenever Joe does his laundry at the Main Street Laundromat, the loads turn out cleaner than they do when he does his laundry at the Elm Street Laundromat. Laundry done at the Main Street Laundromat is cleaner because the machines at the Main Street Laundromat use more water per load than do those at the Elm Street Laundromat.

Which of the following statements, if true, helps support the conclusion above?

- The clothes washed at the Elm Street Laundromat were, overall, less clean than those washed at the Main Street Laundromat.
- Joe uses the same detergent at both laundromats.
- The machines at the Oak Street Laundromat use twice as much water as do those at the Main Street Laundromat.
- Joe does three times as much laundry at the Main Street Laundromat as he does at the Elm Street Laundromat.
- Joe tends to do his dirtier laundry at the Elm Street Laundromat.

According to the Federal Postal Service bureau of information, the rate of complaints concerning late delivery was 30 times higher in 1991 than in 1964. Because the Federal Postal Service changed neighborhood routes from a multiple-truck delivery system to a single-truck delivery system between 1964 and 1991, the enormous increase in complaints must be a result of this systematic change.

Which of the following, if true, weakens the conclusion drawn above?

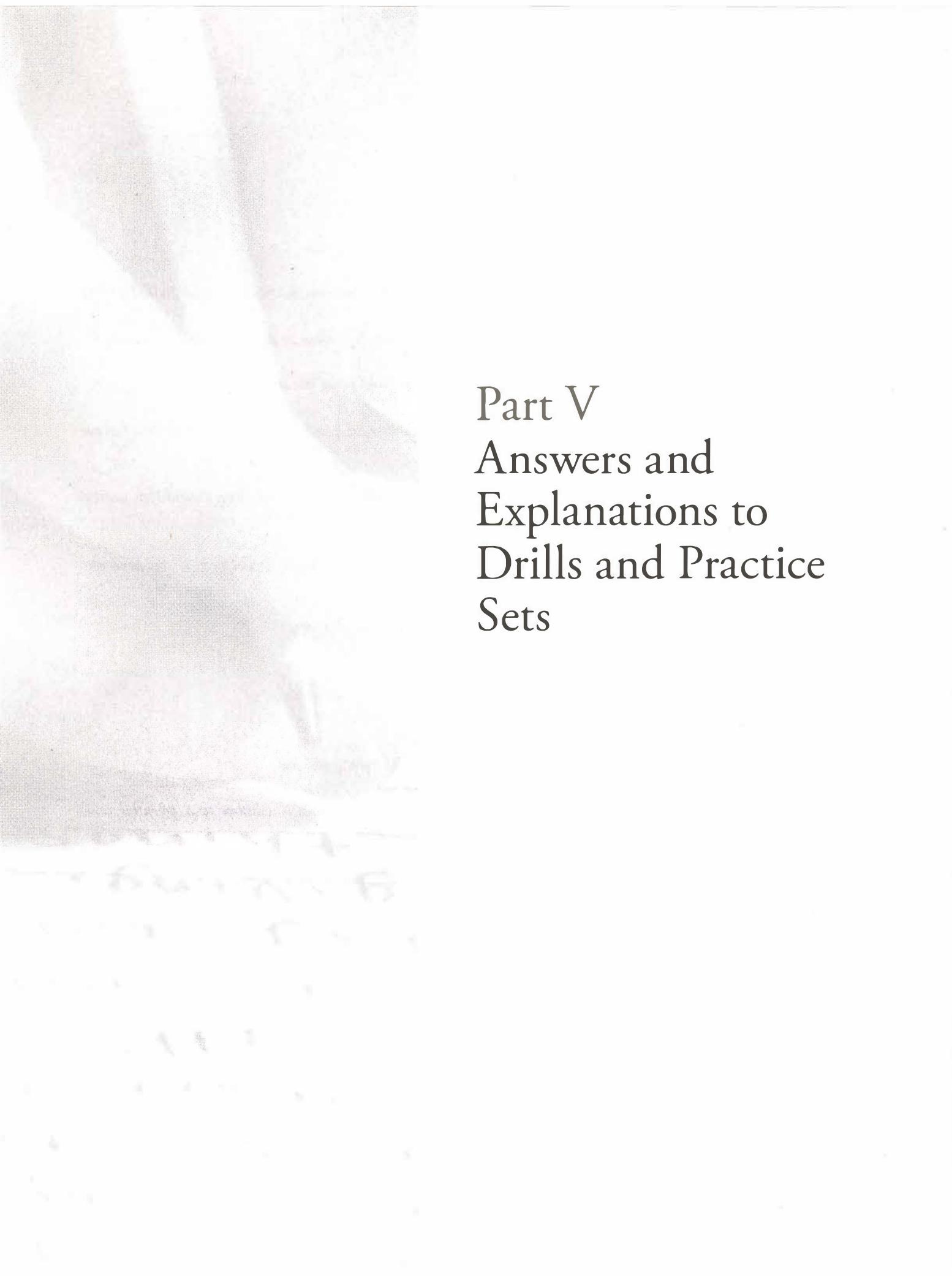
- In 1991, most late-mail complaints were reported to the appropriate Federal Postal Service office, whereas in 1964 most were not.
- Even in a multiple-truck delivery system, certain letters will arrive late.
- According to the Federal Postal Service bureau of information, most of the complaints concerning late delivery in 1991 were about registered mail.
- The bulk amount of mail processed by the Federal Postal Service was not much larger in 1991 than it was in 1964, before the systemic change occurred.
- The change in neighborhood routes from a multiple-truck to a single-truck delivery system sometimes causes enormous increase in the price of stamps.



Summary

- Before answering the questions, attack the passage. Read the passages looking for the main idea, structure, and tone.
- For short passages, read the entire passage. For medium passages, focus on the beginning and end. For longer passages, read the first few lines of each paragraph and the final lines of the entire passage.
- Take a moment to understand the question task. Fetch questions ask you to retrieve information from the passage. Reasoning questions ask you to do something more than simply figure out what the author is saying.
- Return to the passage to find the answer to the question. Don't answer from memory! Go back to the text and find the answer.
- Try to come up with an answer in your own words before looking at the answer choices ETS provides. Remember to look for paraphrases of the text, not direct quotes.
- Eliminate answers that contain extreme language, go beyond the information provided, garble the meaning of the text, or otherwise have information that you can't support from the text.
- Most critical-reasoning questions require you break down an argument. The conclusion is the main point of an argument. The premise is the fact cited in support of the conclusion.
- The assumption is used to link the premise and the conclusion with each other. Without an assumption, an argument breaks down.

- To crack a critical-reasoning question, read the question first so you understand the task. Some questions require you to identify the conclusion and the premise of an argument. Others ask you to find the assumption or to strengthen or weaken the argument.
- After reading the question, break down the argument into its premise and conclusion and, if necessary, the assumption.
- Try to predict in your own words what the correct answer needs to do in order to answer the question.



Part V

Answers and Explanations to Drills and Practice Sets

CHAPTER 4: TEXT COMPLETIONS

Practice: Finding the Clue (Page 50)

1. Your words: *bad, tortured, negative*; Underline: *reflected in the harrowing nature*
2. Your words: *highest, lofty, tallest*; Underline: *second highest mountain in the world, reaching more than 28,000 feet high*
3. Your words: *dangerous, deadly, deleterious*; Underline: *wind-chill warning, minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit or lower*
4. Your words: *leftovers, remnants, remains*; Underline: *70-year-old, from World War II*
5. Your words: *distinct, different, dissimilar*; Underline: *mammoths were hairy with long tusks, while mastodons had low-slung bodies and flatter skulls*
6. Your words: *practical, pragmatic, apolitical*; Underline: *he crafted his policies not with an eye toward their political consequences but instead toward their practical effects*
7. Your words: *amount, volume, preponderance*; Underline: *he imagined that he'd have to read for hours and hours each day to finish it all*
8. Your words: *derived, obtained, borrowed*; Underline: *from the Arabic word "Algol"*

Practice: Clues and Triggers (Page 53)

1. Your words: *poor, disastrous, bad*; Underline: *top talents, ended his career*; Circle: *but*
2. Your words: *praise, accolades, thanks*; Underline: *she brokered a diplomatic solution to a potential crisis*; Circle: *work; she*
3. Your words: *healthful, beneficial, good*; Underline: *detrimental to one's health*; Circle: *While*
4. Your words: *disconnected, separate, apart*; Underline: *technological connectivity*; Circle: *Despite*
5. Your words: *graceful, beautiful, positive*; Underline: *ugliness and clumsiness*; Circle: *Although*
6. Your words: *gauge, sign, portent*; Underline: *use holiday sales to gauge future stock prices*; Circle: *prices; thus*
7. Your words: *negativity, animosity, antagonism*; Underline: *ironic, negative view*; Circle: *while, rarely*
8. Your words: *toxicity, danger, hazards*; Underline: *devastating effects on insects*; Circle: *insects; unfortunately*

Text Completions Drill (Page 56)

1. B sorrow

The trigger *despite* tells you to change direction from the clue *smile*. Therefore, the blank must be something sad. Only *sorrow* fits. *Jubilance* and *liveliness* are the opposite of what would fit the blank. *Vision* is not a change of direction from *smile*. *Mischiefousness* means naughtiness, which is not the opposite of *smile*.

2. D acute

The trigger *while* tells you to change direction from the clue *blunt*. Thus, black bears must have *sharp* claws. Only *acute* means sharp. *Obtuse* is nearly the opposite of sharp. *Abominable*, *barren*, and *fearful* do not mean sharp.

3. C static

The semicolon in this sentence acts as a same-direction trigger, which indicates that what follows should continue the idea of “stability versus change.” To keep the flow, you’ll need replacement words for the opposing pair in the first clause. You already have *different* to stand in for *change*; you’ll need a word that describes *stability* to go in the blank. Try *stable* and use POE. An even shorter way to crack this is to use the trigger word *yet*, which tells you that the word in the blank contrasts with *different*. In either case, *static* is the only choice that makes sense.

4. E prodigious

The clue in this sentence is “property values and industrial output...rose exponentially,” which tells you the ripples were large. *Persistent* doesn’t address the rise in values and output, while neither *invaluable* nor *incredulous* makes sense in the blank’s context. *Severe*, in contrast, implies a negative economic outcome, something unlikely if values and output were increasing. *Prodigious*, which means impressively great, is the word closest to *large*.

5. B stolidity

The clue in the sentence is *inured*, which means toughened to the point where one doesn’t respond. If the voters are inured, then they would not have a strong reaction, so a good word for the blank might be *stoicism* or *ambivalence*. *Stolidity* is the best answer. Eliminate *amazement*, *exasperation*, and *alarm* because they don’t fit. They’re not confused by the tax, so eliminate *perplexity*.

6. B correlative

Find the clue. The clue is “additions...in time, exertion, and other similar factors are not also required.” You need a word such as *similar* or *related* in the blank to convey the idea that increasing yield shouldn’t require increased work. Eliminate choices (A), (D), and (E). Choice (C), *analogous*, is close, but the sentence is not trying to create an analogy. *Correlative* is the best choice.

Text Completions Practice Set (Page 63)

1. B futile

The clue is “global interconnectedness on the increase.” In such a situation, the United States might allow its own interests to be harmed if it tried to stay neutral during wartime. Thus, you need a word that means *doomed* for the blank. Something *presumptuous* is not necessarily doomed, while *pragmatic* and *admirable* take the sentence in the wrong direction. *Contemptuous*, in contrast, makes no sense in the blank’s context. *Futile* is the best choice.

2. B enamored of

Choose carefully here. The clue is “the dancers alone made his trip worthwhile.” Thus, Flaubert was impressed by them. *Enamored of* is the only choice that captures such a feeling. *Overwhelmed by* is extreme, and implies that Flaubert got into more than he could handle. *Taken aback by*, in contrast, merely suggests that our traveler was surprised by the dancers; we can’t be sure that his surprise was pleasant. Meanwhile, *ensconced in* doesn’t indicate how Flaubert felt, whereas if he were *flustered by* the performers, he wouldn’t likely have found his encounter with them *worthwhile*.

3. A fragile and E vulnerability

Try working with the second blank first. The clue is “facade of calm that covers our anxiety.” The trigger *and* tells you that you’re going in the same direction. Therefore, the word in the second blank should be something similar to *anxiety*. *Vulnerability* is the best fit. Nothing in the sentence supports a word as strong as *terror*, and *humor* goes in the wrong direction. For the first blank, if our facade is “flimsy and effortlessly ruptured,” it is likely that the human race is *delicate*. *Fragile* is the only choice that matches.

4. B prerogative and F attainable by

Try working with the second blank first. The clue is “...when the increased popularity of dime novels, an expansion of the number of bookstores, and the introduction of the paperback made books...” Therefore, find a word for the second blank similar to *accessible*. *Attainable by* is the best choice. The first blank describes the situation before books became accessible, so buying them would have been a *privilege* limited to the well-to-do. *Prerogative* is the best choice.

5. A an ineluctable and F merely denouement

If district boundaries are designed to *protect incumbents*—that is, those already in office—then *victory* for those incumbents should be close to *assured* or *inevitable*. *Ineluctable* is synonymous with these words. *Invidious* means “causing envy” and *plangent* means “full of lamentation,” neither of which is as well supported as the credited response. The second blank comes after a couple of triggers. The first is *Of course*, which might sound like the passage is continuing in the same direction, here indicates a change of direction: The author is conceding that sometimes incumbents face challenges. The second, *Nevertheless*, also changes direction, meaning that the passage has returned to where it started, arguing that elections are essentially decided before they begin. That is what *merely denouement* means. *Seldom nugatory* means rarely inconsequential, which is the opposite of what the passage calls for; *remarkably contentious* is wrong for the same reason, as that phrase would indicate that the general election is fiercely contested.

6. A antediluvian and D ludology

The first blank requires a word that describes the talk of the professors mentioned at the beginning of the passage. These professors are described as about to retire and are dismissing the study of video games, suggesting that *the rising generation* might find them old-fashioned. The word *antediluvian*—literally, before the flood—means extremely old-fashioned. *Pusillanimous* means cowardly and *jejune* means vapid and immature, so eliminate these choices. The second blank requires a word that means the study of games, and that word is *ludology*. *Kinesiology* is the study of movement, while *cybernetics* is the study of how systems regulate themselves.

7. C fulfilled, F changes, and H perilously

Try working with the first blank first. The clue for the first blank is “predictions...generally accurate.” The trigger *however* tells you that the first and second parts of the sentence are in contrast to each other. Predictions are usually right, the first part of the sentence is saying, when things go as normal. Put something like *true* in the first blank. *Fulfilled* fits nicely. The second and third blank must be filled together in order to complete the second sentence. The trigger *however* shows that the second sentence changes direction. You would expect predictions to be wrong when there are *changes*, which is a choice for the second blank. *Substantial changes* would make predictions *very* wrong, and *perilously* is the best choice.

8. B dense, F liquid, and G an illustration

The clue for the first blank is the *floating* ice. So, ice is less heavy than water. Only *dense* fits. There’s nothing to support that water is more *intriguing* than ice. All solids are less *aqueous* than liquids. For the second blank, the trigger *than* tells you to change direction from *solid*. Another clue is *water* compared to *ice*. Only *liquid* fits. For the third blank, the clue “the floating ice in your water” is offered as an example. Only *an illustration* fits.

9. C practicing, E articulate, and I unfamiliar

For the first blank, Molly *comprehends* Spanish before their trip, so she was *becoming familiar* with Spanish. Only *practicing* fits. *Mastering* goes too far. Because she’s learning Spanish, it must be a *new* language for her, and only *unfamiliar* fits for the third blank. For the second blank, the trigger *although* tells you to change direction from the clue *comprehend*. She could not *state* her thoughts. Only *articulate* means state.

10. B demarcates, D herpetologist, and I senescence

The chief difficulty in filling in the first blank stems from the fact that a verb is needed, but what exactly is “the human lifespan” doing to “the outer bound of animal longevity?” Something such as *establishes* or *serves as* would work, but those words aren’t very specific. There is, however, a word which means to set down a line as on a map—*demarcates*. *Belies* means contradicts, and *antedates* means comes before. The word in the second blank describes Samantha Romney, and all the sentence says about her is that she knows something about turtles; someone who studies reptiles is a *herpetologist*. An *ichthyologist* studies fish, and an *ornithologist* studies birds. The clue for the final blank is that the turtles in show no signs of aging, so recycle that clue and you get *negligible aging*, which must be what’s happening if these turtles are reaching the age of 200. *Senescence* means growing old—the root *sen-* is the same as that in *senior* or *senile*—and *negligible senescence* therefore sounds perfect. *Rejuvenation* means a return to youth, which is the opposite of the word needed for the blank. And while *superannuation* may sound good, it means the process of becoming obsolete, which is not quite the same thing as growing old, so *senescence* is still the better choice.

CHAPTER 5: SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE

Sentence Equivalence Drill (Page 71)

1. C modern and E contemporary

The trigger *or* tells you to change direction from the clue *ancient*. Look for words that mean *modern*. *Modern* and *contemporary* are the only words that mean modern. *Antiquated* and *archaic* are the opposite of what’s needed. *Perceptive* and *astute* are a good trap pair because they are similar in meaning and fit the incorrect clue of *observer*, but you don’t know that ancient observers were not perceptive or astute.

2. D innate and F inborn

The blank refers to personality characteristics that interest researchers. The clue is “arise through experience.” Since the sentence is about “nature versus nurture,” we need a word like *nature*. *Innate* and *inborn* fit best.

3. A aberrant and D unconventional

The blank refers to Mackenzie King’s behavior. The clue is “often used séances to contact his dead pet dog for advice,” which would be an *abnormal* behavior. *Aberrant* and *unconventional* are the only words with a similar meaning. *Repulsive* and *lackluster* don’t fit. *Poised* and *decorous* describe appropriate or formal behavior, so they are more nearly opposites of what’s needed.

4. B dynamic and F fluctuating

The clue *adaptability* and list of examples tell you that the conditions must be *changing*. *Dynamic* and *fluctuating* fit this meaning. None of the other choices fits. *Inveterate* means persisting. *Timorous* and *cowed* mean that the conditions of life are fearful. *Turgid* means complex.

5. B commandeer and F appropriate

The main clue is that the armed forces were “without an adequate number of vehicles of their own,” strongly suggesting that they were looking to get some more. Secondary clues are that time was of the essence—“days after Hurricane Zelda had passed”—and the very fact that the subject of the sentence is *armed forces*, a group capable of taking what it wants. This all adds up to something like *seize* for the blank. *Commandeer* and *appropriate* (the verb, not the adjective) both mean this; none of the other words does.

Sentence Equivalence Practice Set (Page 76)

1. B affinity and F predilection

The word in the blank is used to describe Jim’s feelings for gumdrops. The clues “enjoyed all kinds of candy” and “his absolute favorite” indicates that the blank means *liking*. Both *affinity* and *predilection* mean *liking*. *Odium* and *disregard* go in the wrong direction. *Container* might sound right, but it is not related to the clue. *Nature* does not mean liking.

2. A fiasco and B debacle

The blank concerns the Wright brothers’ first attempt at flying. The clue is that their “subsequent efforts similarly ended in failure.” Recycle the clue, and put *failure* in the blank. *Fiasco* and *debacle* are the best matches. *Triumph* and *feat* have the opposite meaning. *Hindrance* isn’t close enough, and *precedent* doesn’t mean failure.

3. D diminishes and F wanes

The clue “due to the additional demands” suggests that fuel efficiency is likely to decrease as speed increases. *Diminishes* and *wanes* both mean decreases. Eliminate *equalizes* and *stabilizes* because they mean the fuel efficiency evens out. *Adapts* and *increases* don’t fit the clue, and neither has a synonym among the other answer choices.

4. B an inept and F a maladroit

Despite acts as a change-of-direction trigger that, combined with “vast amount of time Francis dedicated to learning six different languages,” tells you that something is wrong with Francis’s communication skills. The last part of the sentence provides an additional clue: “failed to redress his inability to construct cogent prose” means that he doesn’t make sense. The blank must mean *ineffective*, so *inept* and *maladroit* are the best answers. Nothing tells us how Francis feels, so *morose* won’t work. *Astute* is the opposite of what’s needed. Though it’s possible Francis is *florid* and *prolific*, the clues don’t directly support these ideas.

5. E temperament and F humor

The main clues are that one twin is described as *sanguine*, the other *choleric*; even if you don’t know these words, the phrases “even in times of stress” and “angry outbursts” suggest that they are words used to describe *personality*. *Temperament* is a good synonym for *personality*. While it is frequently used to mean comedy, *humor* can also mean personality, especially in conjunction with words such as *sanguine* and *choleric*, which derive from the ancient belief that temperament was shaped by the levels of different fluids, or humors, in a person’s body. The remaining choices don’t fit: *Environment* means one’s surroundings, while the other three words are concerned with the physical rather than the mental.

CHAPTER 6: READING COMPREHENSION

Reading Comprehension Drill (Page 102)

1. A

The passage contains a mixture of information about the aye-aye, both from a scientific and cultural background. It gives an overview of the animal without giving a lot of detail in any one area. Choice (B) is incorrect because the passage mentions evolution only briefly, at the very end. This choice is too narrow. Choice (C) is incorrect because the style of the passage is too advanced for young students. Choice (D) is incorrect because the passage mentions religion only as it relates to the fate of the aye-aye. Choice (E) is incorrect because the information given is focused more on the aye-aye itself than on the culture of Madagascar.

2. A

The author refers to the aye-aye as a “superb example of life’s variety.” Because this is a positive statement, look for a positive answer. Choice (D) is negative. Choice (E) means sad. Choice (B) means confused. Choice (C) is positive but is too extreme. Therefore, choice (A), *admiring*, is the best answer.

3. “The aye-aye has been listed as an endangered species and...”

The author draws the conclusion that the aye-aye may become extinct because the animals are killed on sight and their habitat is being cut down. If some of the animals are in a protected reserve, then not all of them will be affected by the circumstances cited by the author.

4. A and B

Choices (A) and (B) can both be inferred from the passage. Choice (A) is supported by the first paragraph. The classification of the aye-aye changed, which demonstrates that such classifications are not absolute. Choice (B) is supported by the part of the passage dealing with the future of the aye-aye. It states that the aye-aye is seen as an omen of death in the traditional religion of Madagascar. *Augury* refers to the use of omens, so this statement must be true. Choice (C), however, is not supported. Although the passage states that the aye-aye is in danger, it does not directly discuss whether this is due to limited resources on the main island.

5. A

In the passage, the critics argue that for a piece of literature to be great, it must be hard for the average reader to understand. Answer choice (A) depicts an analogous situation of avant-garde movies deemed superior to Hollywood blockbusters simply because their storylines are more complicated and presumably harder to understand.

6. E

The passage states, “rather than the to-be-expected socialist harangue, Allende subtly works her political message within the fabric of the compelling narrative she weaves.” In other words, a reader might have expected Allende to include strong socialist propaganda within her novel, but she did not. Answer choice (A) is incorrect. Although the passage talks about Allende’s background, it is not clear that her novel is autobiographical in nature. Answer choice (B) is incorrect because although the passage states that Allende’s work would have received more critical attention if the book had been thought of as great literature, it is not clear that it would have received more favorable reviews. Answer choice (C) is incorrect because although the passage states that Allende borrowed from García Marquéz’s work, it does not state that she learned magical realism from García Marquéz. Answer choice (D) is the opposite of what the passage argues. The passage suggests that it is the very subtlety of her political message that makes Allende’s work compelling.

7. E

The passage states, “Yet, to remember the man solely by his associations is to miss his importance to nineteenth-century American philosophy as a whole and to the Transcendental Movement in particular,” which suggests the author would agree with answer choice (A). In the second paragraph, the author refers to Alcott as a “visionary,” which means ahead of his time, so the author would agree with answer choice (B). In the last sentence, the author notes that Alcott believed that “a student’s intellectual growth was concomitant with his or her spiritual growth.” This rules out answer choice (C). In the second paragraph, the author refers to Alcott’s ideas as *polemical* at the time. *Polemical* means controversial, thereby implying that Alcott’s ideas were not universally accepted, which agrees with answer choice (D). The last paragraph of the passage praises Alcott as an erudite orator, a point that is made in direct contrast with his lack of skills as a writer. Therefore, choice (E) is not supported.

8. B

In the first paragraph of the passage, the author states that Alcott’s “philosophical treatises have rightly been criticized by many as being ponderous, esoteric, and lacking focus.” The term “esoteric” means understood by only a select group. Therefore, the correct answer is choice (B).

9. B

Choice (B) is correct. The author states that taxonomic classifications should be used in conjunction with other information about the animal. In choice (B), the team uses both observed and accepted data, which would include classification. Choice (A) is incorrect because the scientists use only taxonomic information. Choice (C) is incorrect because the zookeeper uses only observed information, ignoring the taxonomic information.

10. B

The author tries to convey several facts and make a point about the appropriate use of classifications. Because *didactic* means “intended to instruct,” that’s pretty close. Choice (A) is incorrect because nothing in the passage indicates that the author is upset. Choice (C) is incorrect because the author has a definite opinion on the matter. Choice (D) is incorrect because the author does not sound sad. Choice (E) is incorrect because the passage does not praise anything.

Practice: Identifying Conclusions (Page 109)

1. “it is unlikely that the new defense bill will pass”
2. “grass was not a significant part of the dinosaur diet”
3. “automaker X will have no choice but to file for bankruptcy”
4. “country Y will experience a decrease in obesity-related health problems”
5. “machines will soon outnumber humans as the number-one users of the Internet”

Practice: Finding the Premise (Page 113)

1. Premise: A bipartisan group of 15 senators has announced that it does not support the legislation.
2. Premises:
 - (1) “The earliest known grass fossils date from approximately 55 million years ago”
 - (2) “Dinosaurs most likely disappeared from the earth around 60 million years ago”
 - (3) “fossilized remains of dinosaur teeth that indicate the creatures were more suited to eating ferns and palms”
3. Premises:
 - (1) “company’s poor financial situation”
 - (2) “the workers at automaker X are threatening to go on strike”
4. Premise: “the leading members of the nation’s food industry have agreed to provide healthier alternatives, reduce sugar and fat content, and reduce advertisements for unhealthy foods”
5. Premise: “Recent advances in technology have led to a new wave of ‘smart’ appliances”

Practice: Locating Assumptions (Page 117)

- Conclusion: There will be no decline in enrollment at the University.

Why?

Premise: The University plans to hire two highly credentialed biology professors to replace Professor Jones.

Assumption: That the two new biology professors will be at least as attractive to prospective students as was Professor Jones.

- Conclusion: It makes no sense to charge more to customers under 25 years of age who rent cars.

Why?

Premise: Most states allow people as young as 16 to have a driver's license and all states allow 18-year-olds the right to vote.

Assumption: Because people under the age of 25 have the right to vote and drive there is no reason to charge them more to rent a car.

- Conclusion: Roughly 12.5 percent of planets in the universe should have life on them

Why?

Premise: In our solar system, there are eight planets and at least one of them has life on it.

Assumption: All planetary systems in the universe have the same proportion of planets with life on them as does our solar system.

- Conclusion: The leaders of State A should institute the gas tax.

Why?

Premise: 58 percent of voters in Township B approve of a proposed 2-cent gasoline tax.

Assumption: The opinion of Township B is representative of the opinion of all of State A.

Critical Reasoning Practice Set (Page 131)

- B

Choice (B) indicates that, *overall*, it may not have been financially advantageous in 1989 for a company to move to a region with a lower corporate tax rate. For choice (A), the numbers of similar companies in regions with favorable tax policies compared to the numbers in regions with unfavorable tax policies does not explain why there was less corporate flight. The reference to numbers is out of scope. For choice (C), both the difficulty of the codes and the benefit to anyone other than the company are irrelevant. Though the tax codes may have been difficult to decipher, saving money would still have been good incentive to move. Choice (D) would make it even harder to explain that there was less corporate flight. Some companies would have relocated to foreign countries. For choice (E), individual tax rates are out of scope.

2. C

The argument concludes that there is no health advantage to wearing nonprescription sunglasses over squinting. The premise is that squinting provides as much protection from UV rays as nonprescription sunglasses. The argument assumes that UV protection is all that matters; there are no other advantages to wearing nonprescription sunglasses. Choice (C) attacks the assumption by pointing out another advantage to sunglasses. For choice (A), prescription sunglasses are out of scope. For choice (B), the sunglasses that do not provide as much protection from UV rays as squinting are out of scope. As long as some sunglasses provide as much protection, the argument could still be valid. For choice (D), why people buy sunglasses is out of scope. For choice (E), squinting while wearing sunglasses is not the issue.

3. C

You need an answer that describes Tello's response to Aramayo. Aramayo concludes that the government should consolidate its leadership because the government functions most efficiently when decisions are handled by very few individuals. To make such an argument, Aramayo must assume that there are no negative consequences of consolidating the leadership. Tello responds by pointing out a negative consequence. Choice (C) says that Tello responds in such a fashion. For choice (A), Tello does not contradict Aramayo's reasoning, despite offering a possible negative consequence. For choice (B), Tello does more than uncover an assumption: Tello attacks the assumption. For choice (B) to be correct, Tello's response would have needed to have used words to the effect "But you assume that..." For choice (D), Tello does not uncover any circular reasoning. For choice (E), Tello does not point to any overgeneralization.

4. B

This is really asking for the conclusion of the argument. Choice (B) provides the conclusion. Remember that a properly drawn conclusion should pass the Why Test. Why would hiring a Chief Information Officer improve productivity? Because Chief Information Officers are like new business computer systems, which increase productivity for companies. For choice (A), because the actual function of a Chief Information Officer is never described in the argument, you cannot conclude anything about that function. Choice (C) contradicts the part of the passage that states "many businesses experience dramatic gains in productivity after installing a new computer system." For choice (D), the argument provides no basis for comparing the efficiency of a Chief Information Officer and a new computer system. For choice (E), the difficulty of measuring the results is outside the scope of this argument.

5. B

The conclusion is that the clothes washed at the Main Street Laundromat are cleaner than those washed at the Elm Street Laundromat because Main Street uses more water. The premise is that Joe's clothes are cleaner when he does them at the Main Street Laundromat and that Main Street's machines use more water per load. This is a causal argument. One way to strengthen a causal argument is to rule out an alternate cause. Choice (B) rules out different detergents as an alternate cause. Choice (A) is just a restatement of the conclusion. For choice (C), the Oak Street Laundromat is out of scope. For choice (D), how much laundry Joe does at each Laundromat is out of scope. Choice (E) would weaken the argument.

6. A

The argument concludes that the change from a multiple-truck delivery system to a single-truck system is the cause of the increase in the rate of complaints. The premise is that the rate of complaints increased and that there had been a change in the method of delivery. The argument is causal. Choice (A) weakens the argument by providing another cause for the increased rate: Today, the complaints are being reported to the right people. This answer choice leaves open the possibility that the actual number of complaints is unchanged from 1964, but explains why the rate of complaints has risen. For choice (B), whether any mail arrives late in a multiple-truck delivery system is out of scope. For choice (C), registered mail versus unregistered mail is out of scope. For choice (D), because the argument is referring to the rate of complaints, the amount of bulk mail is out of scope. For choice (E), the price of stamps is out of scope.

CHAPTER 7: VOCABULARY FOR THE GRE

Group 1 Exercises: Matching (Page 143)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. L | 11. M |
| 2. J | 7. K | 12. I |
| 3. E | 8. B | 13. D |
| 4. G | 9. N | 14. F |
| 5. A | 10. H | |

Group 2 Exercises: Matching (Page 147)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A | 11. H |
| 2. M | 7. D | 12. I |
| 3. F | 8. E | 13. G |
| 4. J | 9. L | 14. K |
| 5. N | 10. C | |