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Text Completion & Sentence Equivalence

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Chapter 2 *of*

TEXT COMPLETION &
SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE

TEXT
COMPLETIONS

In This Chapter . . .

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TEXT COMPLETIONS

Text Completion questions on the GRE are sentences or paragraphs with 1, 2, or 3 blanks for which you must select the appropriate word or words.

Let's see an example of the simplest variety of Text Completion, one with a single blank.

Despite his intense _____, he failed to secure the prestigious university's coveted diploma.

imbibition
lugubriosity
lucubration
magnanimity
mettle

All single-blank Text Completions have exactly five answer choices, of which exactly one is correct. All the words fitting into a blank have the same part of speech.

These questions are very much like some of the questions you probably saw on the SAT.

Your task is to find the choice that **best fits the meaning** of the sentence as a whole.

The best approach will be to **anticipate an answer** before looking at the choices. Many people don't do this. Rather, they just plug the choices in one by one, rereading the sentence and stopping when it "sounds good."

Here's how you can tell: based on empirical data about the GRE, we know that problems of this type with right answer A are, on average, significantly easier than problems with right answer E. 27% of test takers got "A-problems" wrong, whereas 46% of test takers got "E-problems" wrong—almost twice as many!

Do you think that the GRE deliberately wrote problems with correct answer E to be that much harder than problems with correct answer A? That's very unlikely. What's probably happening is that people are lazy. If you don't predict the answer and just plug the choices instead—and the correct answer is A—then you get lucky. The sentence probably makes sense, and you pick A. On the other hand, if the right answer is E, then your lack of good process punishes you. You waste a lot of time plugging and re-reading, you get confused, and you go off the rails.

By the way, the new GRE doesn't actually label the choices A, B, C, D, and E anymore (as in the example problem above—the choices appear in boxes). To answer a question, you simply click on your choice, and the entire box is highlighted. You get a chance to confirm before submitting that answer. (Also, you're allowed to go back and change answers anytime before the clock runs out.)

Although the real problems don't label the answers with letters, we'll still use that nomenclature in this book, because everyone understands what we mean by "answer choice D," and because saying "the choice second from the bottom" sounds pretty silly. We'll also recommend in the following pages that you write "A B C D E" on your paper for each question in order to use Process of Elimination.

That said, single-blank questions are pretty straightforward. Follow the three-step process described in the next few pages to give yourself the best chance of getting any question right!

(By the way, we'll work through the above example in just a few minutes.)

Three-Step Process for Text Completions

Let's look at a straightforward example.

If the student had been less _____, he would not have been expelled from his grade school.



indefatigable
perseverant
refractory
playful
indigent

1. Read only the sentence.

The answer choices will distract you if you read them before you've made sense of the sentence.

2. Find the *target*, *clue* and the *pivot*, and write down your own fill-in.

The clue and the pivot are the two most important parts of the sentence. **The target is the thing in the sentence that the blank is describing.** Stating the target explicitly can help to locate the clue. Here, the target is simply *the student*.

Note: If the blank represents a missing noun, the idea of a "target" may not apply. That's okay. Targets are very helpful when the blank represents a missing adjective, and can also be useful when the blank represents a missing verb.

The clue is what forces the contents of the blank to be perfectly predictable. In other words, the clue solves the mystery of the blank. Look for dramatic action or emotion. The clue should tell us more about the target (*the student*).

In this case, the clue is *expelled*.

The pivot is what determines the relationship between the blank and the clue. Will the blank agree with the clue? Or will the blank actually disagree with the clue? It depends on the pivot.

The sentence reads *less* _____ ...*not expelled*. So the pivot is *less...not*.

Think about what this means. If the student were *less such-and-such*, then he would *not* have been expelled.

So *such-and-such* got him expelled. In other words, the blank agrees with *expelled*. *Less* and *not* cancel each other out as negatives.

Finally, **the fill-in is what you predict the answer to be.** At this point, how would you describe this student using the blank? Write down this adjective or phrase, as well as your A through E.

badly behaved

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E

3. Compare to each answer choice.

Here are the choices again. One at a time, insert the word into the blank, match to your fill-in, and mark down Good (✓), Bad (✗), Sort Of (~), or Unknown (?).

indefatigable = tireless

perseverant = determined, unstoppable

refractory = ??

playful

indigent = poor

So now your paper might look like this.

badly behaved

- A ✗
- B ✗
- C ?
- D ~
- E ~

The correct answer is in fact C, since *refractory* means “rebellious.” Even if you didn’t know what *refractory* means, you would have a good shot at getting this problem right through process of elimination. Also notice that you can imagine an interesting story around some of the wrong answer choices. If the student had been less *playful*, he wouldn’t have been expelled? What went wrong in some game? Or if the student had been less *indigent*, he wouldn’t have been expelled? How horrible—what an indictment of the administration of the school.

We should put our natural desire for good stories out of our head when we do Text Completions. What we want for our fill-in is **complete predictability and redundancy**. There should be no surprises in the blank—after all, this is a standardized test, and there is only one right answer. **Avoid interesting stories!**

Let's try it again with the example from earlier in the chapter:

Despite his intense _____, he failed to secure the prestigious university's coveted diploma.

imbibition
lugubriosity
lucubration
magnanimity
mettle



First, read **ONLY** the sentence. Find the clue (failed to secure the prestigious university's coveted diploma) and the pivot (despite). Write your own fill-in—here, *studying* would be a good choice. Now compare *studying* with every answer choice.

studying

- A ×
- B ×
- C ✓
- D ×
- E ~

The answer is C. *Lucubration* means intense study.

Of course, you may have some question marks due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, in which case you should make your best guess *without delay*—you have limited time to complete the section, and staring at the words for longer will not suddenly make up for a lack of vocabulary.

Don't worry—there's a (prodigious!) section on vocabulary coming up later in this book.

Bad News and Good News About Text Completions

Bad News: The problems are full of tough vocabulary—not just in the choices, but sometimes even in the sentences themselves.

Your mastery of a large number of GRE appropriate words is the biggest single factor that will determine your success on the problem.

However...

Good News: You get a lot of context for the vocabulary.

The context does have its drawbacks, though...

Bad News: The sentences require time to read.

Some of these sentences are pretty long. You might guess that longer sentences are harder.

That proves not to be entirely true. In fact, what seems to be the case is that the extra reading burden is offset by the fact that long sentences give you more clues to the right answer. We'll discuss longer sentences more when we move on to double-blank and triple-blank Text Completions.

How To Write Good Fill-ins

As you try to write good fill-ins, keep in mind the following simple equation:

$$\text{Fill-in} = \text{Clue} + \text{Pivot}$$

The fill-in is nothing more interesting than a simple sum, so to speak, of the clue and the pivot. The clue and the pivot tell us something *about* the target.

Let's walk through an example.

In the past decade, the coffee chain has dramatically expanded all across the country, leading one commentator to describe the franchise as _____.

First, find the target. Since the blank comes right after "describe the franchise as," it's pretty clear that the target is *the franchise*.

Next, find the clue. There could be more than one. The clue will tell us something about *the franchise*. The clue is often the most descriptive part of the sentence (e.g., *expelled*). You will often also see judgment calls as clues.

In the sentence above, *dramatically expanded* is the clue.

Then, find the pivot. Again, the pivot determines the relationship between the clue and the fill-in. The two most common possibilities are these:

- The fill-in **agrees with** the clue. This is the default.
- The fill-in **opposes** the clue. The pivot will express negation or opposition.

The pivot could also indicate a causal relation or some other type, but even then, you can often get away with simply determining whether the fill-in and the clue agree or disagree.

In the sentence above, nothing indicates opposition between the fill-in and the clue. If anything, words such as *leading* and *describe* point you toward simple agreement.

So we need a blank that expresses agreement with *dramatically expanded*.

Finally, construct the fill-in out of the clue and the pivot. Recycle words if possible. This instinct will keep you from straying too far from the given meaning of the sentence. Feel free to use a phrase.

Your fill-in might literally be this: having dramatically expanded

Be ready to **change the part of speech**, if necessary.

Or you might have gone just a little further: everywhere

Notice how uninteresting this fill-in makes the sentence. Don't over-think. In real life, you could easily imagine the fill-in taking you substantially further than *having dramatically expanded*. For instance, the commentator may add a negative spin (*overreached*), but the GRE will make the fill-in much more boring in meaning. **Assume as little as possible.**

A likely answer would be something like *ubiquitous*, a GRE favorite.

Pivot Words

Fill in your own word in this sentence:

Despite his reputation for _____, the politician decided that in a time of crisis it was important to speak honestly and forthrightly.

Did you say something like “not being direct”? The target is *the politician*. The pivot word *despite* indicates an *opposite direction*. *Honestly and forthrightly* was the clue describing the politician. Since the pivot was negative, we pivoted away from *honestly and forthrightly*.

For all her studying, her performance on the test was _____.

This one relies on an idiom. Did you say something like “mediocre” or “bad”? The expression *for all X, Y* is in play here. *For all* here means “despite.” Thus, despite her studying, her performance was *not good*.

Although he has a reputation for volubility, others at the party didn’t find him to be especially _____.

Did you say something like “talkative”? Or did you go for “not talkative”? Notice we have a clue (*volubility*, which means “talkativeness”) and a pivot word, *although*. But we also have another pivot—the *not* in *didn’t*. Pivoting twice (much like turning 180 degrees, twice) is like not pivoting at all. In our blank, we just want another word for *talkative*.

Here are some common pivot words, phrases, and structures.

SAME DIRECTION	OPPOSITE DIRECTION	CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP
; (semicolon)	Although	As a result
: (colon)	Belied	Because
Also	But	Consequently
And	Despite	Hence
Besides	In spite of	So
Furthermore	Nevertheless	Therefore
In addition	On the contrary	Thus
In fact	On the other hand	
Just as ... as	Rather than	
Moreover	Still	
Not only ... but also	Though	
So ... as to be	Whether X or Y	
X, Y, and Z (items in a list)	Yet	

Drill: Sentence Analysis (Clues, Pivots, and Fill-Ins)

Analyze each sentence for Target, Clue, and Pivot, then fill in the blank in your own words.

1. The camp established by the aid workers provided a _____ for the refugees, many of whom had traveled for weeks to get there.
2. While others had given only accolades, the iconoclastic critic greeted the book's publication with a lengthy _____.
3. Though many have impugned her conclusions, the studies on which she based her analysis are beyond _____.
4. The ancient poem's value was more _____ than literary; the highly literal work made no attempt at lyricism, and ended by warning the reader never to lie.
5. French food could be said to be the most _____ of all cuisines, considering the high saturated fat content of the otherwise delectable *bechamels* and *remoulades*.
6. It is unfair and incorrect to _____ about an entire minority group based on the actions of a few people, whether those people are reprobates or model citizens.
7. For all the clamor about bipartisanship, in the end, voting _____ to factional loyalties.
8. While digital media should theoretically last forever, in actuality, there are warehouses full of abandoned computer tape drives and other media that have since been _____ by newer technologies.
9. Chad was the most mercurial of young people, but as an adult was able to _____ his wild fluctuations in personality.
10. The _____ position he adopted on the issue belied his reputation for equivocation.

Answers: Sentence Analysis

1. This sentence is pretty straightforward—we have the clues that *aid workers* are providing something for *refugees*, who have traveled for a long time to get there. A good fill-in would be *haven* or *sanctuary*.
2. This sentence has an opposite-direction pivot: *While*. We also have the clue that the critic is *iconoclastic*. Since most critics gave the book *accolades*—and an *iconoclastic* critic would do the opposite—a good fill-in would be something like *condemnation*.
3. The target is the *studies*. This sentence also has an opposite-direction pivot: *Though*. It seems that this person's conclusions aren't so great. The studies she used, though, *are* pretty great. We want to say something good about the studies, but we have *another* opposite-direction pivot, *beyond*. We want to say that the studies are so good that they are *beyond* something bad. This sentence would almost certainly be completed with the expression *beyond reproach*.
4. The target is the poem. We know that it is *more* _____ *than literary*—so it's not very literary. We then find out that it's *highly literal* and not even trying to be lyrical—sounds like a really bad poem! It ended by *warning the reader never to lie*. Whoa—that sounds like a *terrible* poem! Maybe the kind that would appear in a children's book. A good fill-in would be *moralistic* or *didactic*.
5. The target is *French food*. We might be tempted to fill in *delicious* in the blank, but that would be incorrectly inserting our own opinion. The clue clearly says that the French food is full of fat. A good fill-in would be *unhealthy*.
6. The target is the *entire minority group*. What should we *not* _____ about them? The clue is “based on the actions of a few people.” A good fill-in might be *make stereotypes* or *infer*.
7. The target is *voting*. This sentence depends on an idiom. *For all* here means *despite*. The clue is *clamor about bipartisanship* and the pivot is *for all* (meaning *despite*). Thus, the second part of the sentence should indicate that the voting was the opposite of *bipartisan*—that is, *partisan*. Since *factional loyalties* describe a partisan environment, a good fill-in would be *conformed* or *adhered*.
8. The target is *abandoned computer tape drives and other media*. We have the clue *digital media should theoretically last forever* and the pivot *while*. Thus, the meaning is that digital media does NOT last forever. This tracks with the idea of the computer tape drives being *abandoned*. A good fill-in would be *replaced*. GRE-type words that might appear here would be *supplanted* or *superseded*.
9. The target is *Chad*, or whatever Chad was able to do to his personality fluctuations. We have a clue about Chad—he was *mercurial*, which matches the idea of *wild fluctuations in personality*. We have a pivot, *but*, indicating that we need to go in the opposite direction. Thus, Chad was able to *hold back* or *moderate* his wild fluctuations. GRE-type words that might appear here would be *temper* or *damp*.
10. The target is the *position*. We know that the person in question has a *reputation for equivocation*. Our pivot is *belied*. Thus, a good fill-in would relate to the opposite of equivocation—something like *firm* or *resolute*.

Double-Blank and Triple-Blank Text Completions

Most Text Completion questions have more than one blank. Consider the following example:

Twentieth century America witnessed a nearly (i) _____ ascent to ever greater wealth, leaving its leaders (ii) _____ of publicly acknowledging budgetary limitations.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
portentous	chary
pertinacious	opprobrious
unremitting	implicate

In the sentence, the blanks are labeled with lowercase Roman numerals.

Below the sentence, the first column contains the choices—*portentous*, *pertinacious*, and *unremitting*—for the first blank. The second column contains the choices—*chary*, *opprobrious*, and *implicate*—for the second blank.

If you took the SAT, or remember the “old” GRE, you’ll notice something very different here—*our choice for the first blank is independent of our choice for the second blank*. That is, if we choose *unremitting* for the first blank, that does NOT mean that we have therefore chosen *implicate* for the second blank—we must instead make a separate decision for the second blank.

This means that we cannot “cheat” off one column to make our decision for the other. More importantly: *there is no partial credit*. You must get *both* words right or you receive no credit for your response. Thus, our chance of randomly guessing the correct answer is quite low (1 in 9).

It is very difficult to get these questions right based on incomplete information—we must understand the sentences, and we must know all or most of the words. This is why such a large portion of this book is dedicated to vocabulary acquisition.

Fortunately, the fact that we must choose each word independently is somewhat compensated for by the fact that, for each blank, there are only three options, not five (as in single-blank Text Completions),

One more pleasant feature of double-blank and triple blank problems is that, while they may *seem* harder because they are generally longer, there are also more clues for us to find. Also, having multiple clues means that there are generally two paths: a harder path and an easier path.

Which path would you rather take?

Start with the easier (or easiest) blank

Don’t just try to fill in the first blank automatically. Look at all of the blanks and figure out which one has the easiest clue. Then create a fill-in and use that fill-in as an extra clue for the harder blank(s).

Let’s go through an example.

Even seasoned opera singers, who otherwise affect an unflappable air, can be (i) _____ performing in Rome, where audiences traditionally view (ii) _____ performers as a birthright, passed down from heckler to heckler over generations.

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Blank #2 is easier. Why? Compare the clues and pivots:

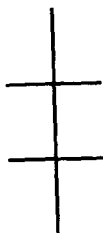
	Clues	Pivots	
Blank #1:	<i>seasoned</i> <i>unflappable</i>	<i>even...otherwise...</i>	The pivots express opposition. What is the opposite of <i>unflappable</i> ?
Blank #2:	<i>heckler</i>	none	No pivot = agreement

Our fill-in for #2 should probably be *heckling*. Remember to reuse the given language in the fill-in when you can.

Now we can use that fill-in as another clue. There is no pivot between the two blanks, meaning that the two fill-ins agree in some way. The relationship seems to be causal: the opera performers are going to react to that heckling. A likely fill-in would be *upset by* or *afraid of*.

Our paper might now look like this: afraid of...heckling

Also on your paper, draw a grid so that you can do process of elimination:



Or, if you prefer, write:

A	A
B	B
C	C

Now compare to the answer choices and mark your paper.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
intrepid about	extolling
daunted by	lionizing
tempered by	badgering

Here is an example of what a student might have written down for this question. This student wasn't sure about *tempered by*, and didn't know exactly about *lionizing* but felt that it wasn't quite right.

afraid of...heckling

x	x
✓	~
?	✓

Nevertheless, this student picked *daunted by* and *badgering*, which are the correct responses.

Remember, the only way to get credit for the question is to pick BOTH *daunted by* and *badgering*.

Now, let's see an example with three blanks.

Perceptions of the (i) _____ role of intellectual practices within modern life underlie the familiar stereotypes of the educated as eggheads, ideologues, or worse. These negative characterizations may be rooted in a (ii) _____ of the aims of academia, but they are unlikely to be (iii) _____ unless teachers take efforts to address them directly.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
incongruous	dissemination	espoused
refractory	confounding	dispelled
salubrious	corroboration	promulgated

While this sentence has three blanks instead of two, and is made up of more than one sentence, our method is the same—start with the easiest blank. The easiest blank is often the one surrounded by the most text—that is, the one that is furthest from the other two blanks and thus has the most potential clues located near it. Here, the first blank seems promising:

Perceptions of the (i) _____ role of intellectual practices within modern life underlie the familiar stereotypes of the educated as eggheads, ideologues, or worse.

The target is the *role*, and the role *underlies stereotypes* about eggheads “or worse.” So the word describing the role should be related to the idea of intellectual = egghead (a mild slang term roughly equivalent to “nerd”). Don’t ignore the phrase *within modern life*. A good fill-in would be *irrelevant*. The sentence seems to be saying that people think intellectuals are eggheads because intellectual practices are not a helpful or important part of modern life.

The second sentence mirrors that idea (*These negative characterizations...*). It seems clear that the speaker is trying to defend academia. A good fill-in for the second blank would be *misunderstanding* or *twisting* (we’re not really sure if the people who think intellectuals are “eggheads” are getting it wrong deliberately or not).

Finally, we have a negative pivot: *unlikely* (and another one, *unless*). Let’s work backwards on this sentence:

If teachers DON’T address negative stereotypes directly...

the stereotypes will continue

so, the stereotypes are *unlikely to be eliminated or corrected*

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On our paper, we might have:

irrelevant misunderstanding eliminated

Or, if you prefer:

irrelevant	misunderstanding	eliminated
A	A	A
B	B	B
C	C	C

Let's consider our choices and mark our paper appropriately:

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
incongruous	dissemination	espoused
refractory	confounding	dispelled
salubrious	corroboration	promulgated

Here is one student's attempt:

✓	x	~
?	✓	✓
x	x	x

The correct answer is **incongruous**, **confounding**, and **dispelled**.

Finally, double-blank and triple-blank questions can sometimes have choices that are phrases rather than single words. Usually in these questions, vocabulary is less of an issue, and the hard part is simply decoding the sentence.

Try this question:

(i) _____ subject of the sermon, his words possessed a (ii) _____ quality few could fail to find utterly enchanting. It was only when his conclusion devolved into a (iii) _____ that the congregation began to fantasize about returning to the comfort of home.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
In spite of the execrable	euphuistic	thoroughly fallacious slew of prevarications
Notwithstanding the salubrious	euphemistic	seemingly unending string of divagations
Because of the inauspicious	eulogistic	dubiously sanctified series of assignations

Let's attack the easiest blank first. That might be the last one, since we have the clues that the sermon's conclusion *devolved* into whatever goes in the blank, and that *the congregation began to fantasize about returning to the comfort of home*. Both clues tell us that we want a fill-in that means something like *bunch of stupid or boring stuff*.

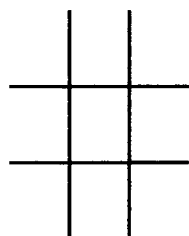
Now that we have mentally completed the last sentence, it might help to paraphrase it before using the information to work backwards and analyze the rest of the sentence. Paraphrase: *It was only when the conclusion become stupid or boring that the people got bored*. The phrase *It was only when* serves as a pivot—before things got stupid or boring, they must have been pretty good, as we can verify from the clue *utterly enchanting*.

The second blank is pretty easy: *His words possessed a _____ quality few could fail to find utterly enchanting*. That means that nearly everyone finds his words enchanting. In fact, we could recycle that word and put it in the blank—a good fill-in here would be *enchanting*.

Finally, the first blank. It's pretty hard to fill this one in without glancing at the answer choices, but let's at least try to figure out a general category of what we'll be looking for. There is a blank about the *subject* of the sermon, and then something nice about the words used in the sermon. Either these two things will go in the same direction or in an opposite direction.

We might have something like this on our paper:

something comparing *subject w/ words* enchanting stupid/boring stuff



Now let's try the choices (in any order you prefer).

In the first blank, *in spite of the execrable* makes sense—the meaning is *In spite of the bad quality of the topic, the words of the sermon were enchanting*. In the second option, *notwithstanding* is similar to *in spite of*, so we would expect something bad to come after, but *salubrious* means *healthy*. Since the third choice begins with *because*, we would expect something positive to come after it (*Because of some good quality of the sermon, the words were enchanting*). But *inauspicious* means *likely to be unsuccessful*. Only *in spite of the execrable* works.

In the second blank, only *euphuistic* works. The root *eu* means *good*, but that's not too helpful here, since all three words use that root. However, *euphemistic* (substituting inoffensive words in for more explicit or hurtful ones) doesn't make sense, and *eulogistic* (full of praise, especially for a deceased person) also doesn't match the idea of *enchanting*.

Finally, the only phrase that means anything like *stupid/boring stuff* is *seemingly unending string of divagations* (*divagations* are tangents, or instances of going off-topic). *Prevarications* are falsehoods, and *assinations* are romantic meetups.

The answer is *In spite of the execrable, euphuistic, and seemingly unending string of divagations*.

Tricky Aspects of Text Completion Sentences

Take a look at this example.

Although Paula claimed not to be _____ that she was not selected for the scholarship, we nevertheless worried that our typically sanguine friend was not entirely _____ by the decision.

This sentence is just chock-full of switchbacks. Count the oppositional pivots: *Although...not...nevertheless...typically...not entirely...*

It's easy to lose your way in a thicket of **Double-Negative Pivots**, especially under exam pressure. How many wrongs make a right?

When you face a situation such as this...

Break it down

Chop up the sentence and process it in small chunks. You can't rewrite the sentence, but focus on bits at a time. Start with the earliest or the most concrete part of the story. Then add one chunk at a time. Change complicated pivots to simple words, such as *but* and *so*.

As you go, emotionally punctuate each part of the story. Exaggerate the switchbacks in your mental voice, as if you were telling a story you really cared about. Reword as you go, if you must. Finally, as you think about the whole, discard unnecessary elements, so you don't have to hold everything in your head at once.

For the sentence above, the breakdown might go like this.

Our friend Paula is *typically* sanguine = optimistic ☺

She was not selected for a scholarship ☹

She claimed NOT to be _____

BUT

We still worried ☹

that she was NOT entirely _____ by the decision.

The fill-ins should be pretty easy to generate now: *upset/saddened* ☹ for the first blank, and *unaffected* for the second.

It looks like a lot of work, but your brain can generate this train of thought in seconds. Give it a try.

Other tricky aspects of the sentence yield to the same basic medicine: **Break it Down**.

Let's break down a few more challenging sentence types.

Unfamiliar Style or Content

"That such a _____ of precedent would be countenanced was itself unprecedented in the court, a bastion of traditionalism."

The sentence starts with a *That* clause, a hallmark of a very academic written style. Moreover, the content is about a legal matter. These two factors combine with difficult vocabulary (*precedent, countenanced, bastion*) to make the sentence forbidding.

The meaning of the sentence is something like, "That such a _____ of previously established examples would be tolerated was a surprising instance of a very traditional court going against tradition."

A good fill-in here would be something like *rejection*.

Red Herring Clues

"By rigorously observing social behavior, anthropologists _____ strict, though implicit, codes of conduct."

A few "clues" might not really be clues. ("Red herring" is an expression for something that seems like it's going to be important, but turns out to be just a distraction. The expression arose when criminals started rubbing herring—a type of fish—on trails to distract the hunting dogs chasing after the criminals.)

Here, the word *strict* turns out to be less important to the answer than *implicit*. Decoy answers might be *undermine* or *challenge* (somehow dealing with the *strict* element, but introducing too much new information in the fill-in). The real meaning of the sentence is based on the idea that, because the behavior is implicit (hinted at or unspoken), anthropologists have to be rigorous in their observations in order to detect or decode it. A good fill-in would be something like *reveal* or *make explicit*.

Blanks in Tough Spots

"If these managers (i) _____ the advantages of the new deep-sea recovery methodology to be (ii) _____ then it will rapidly be judged less useful than current alternatives by the broader business community."

Some blanks are positioned in such a way that it's hard to hold the sentence in your head. The gaps occur early or in strategic places. For instance, in the sentence above, the verb of the first clause is missing. In contrast, some easier questions let you formulate the thought relatively easily without the words in the blank or blanks.

A completed version of this sentence would read something like, "If these managers find the advantages... to be lacking, then..."

Throughout all these examples, the main thing to remember is that we have to make sense of the sentence, and the best way to do that is to **break it down into pieces and make sense of the parts**. Reword or simplify if you have to. Start at the easiest-to-understand chunk and work outwards from there.

Drill: Sentence Analysis with Multiple Blanks

Analyze each sentence for Target, Clue, and Pivot, then fill in the blanks in your own words. Here, you're just practicing the first two steps of the strategy. We'll practice complete problems soon.

1. The radio host claimed to have preternatural powers that allowed her to (i) _____ future events, from cataclysms and illnesses to global booms and personal (ii) _____.
2. The company president was not just (i) _____ but positively (ii) _____; his subordinates lived in perpetual fear of his reproof.
3. Marissa's date was neither (i) _____ nor (ii) _____; he was surly to the waiter and expatiated at great length about mechanical engineering, a topic Marissa finds quite tedious.
4. We ought not (i) _____ our leaders; it is our (ii) _____ and foibles that make us human, and only by humanizing the greatest among us can we fully understand those whose achievements we admire.
5. In her later years, the artist (i) _____ the wild, chaotic imagery of her early work and instead embraced a prim, highly (ii) _____ formalism.
6. After Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, he was greeted not with (i) _____ but with a barrage of ridicule. The London Times called the invention the latest American "humbug," disbelieving electricians declared the machine a (ii) _____, and prominent capitalists—always with an eye out to make a profit—all (iii) _____ to buy Graham's patent.
7. Louis Armstrong rose to (i) _____ in the 1920s as an innovative cornet and trumpet player. A (ii) _____ influence in jazz, he is largely credited for shifting focus from a style based on group improvisation to one based on solo performance—such as his own distinctive, even (iii) _____ solos.
8. While many people think of migraines simply as bad headaches, they are actually neurological events that can include numbness, slurred speech, and ringing in the ears, with or without headache. Even doctors are (i) _____ to this mischaracterization, thus leading to frequent (ii) _____; thus "stroke" or "fibromyalgia" patients are getting treatment that does not work and may even be (iii) _____.
9. For years, the idea that blind people can hear better than sighted people was considered something of an old (i) _____. However, functional brain imaging has recently uncovered the fact that a brain region called V1, (ii) _____ at the back of the skull and which normally only responds to light has actually been rewired in the brains of blind people and now processes auditory information in what could be termed a stunning example of the brain's (iii) _____.
10. Throughout the history of human thought, virtually every thinker has (i) _____ of the mind as a unitary entity. (ii) _____, in the 1960s Roger Sperry conducted his famous studies working with epileptics who had been treated via the cutting of the *corpus callosum*, or division between the two hemispheres, during which he was able to observe that each half of the brain could gain new information independently, and that one hemisphere could be entirely unaware of what the other had learned or experienced. Truly, our brains are not unitary, but (iii) _____.

Answers: Sentence Analysis with Multiple Blanks

1. The clue for the first blank is *preternatural powers*. A good fill-in is *predict*. The clue for the second blank is *from cataclysms and illnesses to global booms...* A *from... to...* structure will have to set up opposites. Furthermore, we can expect a comparison of *two* things with *two* other things to make some sort of logical pattern (otherwise, how could the GRE expect us to know what to put in the blanks?). A *cataclysm* is a big, bad thing and *illnesses* are a smaller, bad thing. *Global booms* are a big, good thing, so we're looking for a smaller, good thing. A good fill-in might be *windfalls* or *strokes of luck*.
2. The clue is that the subordinates lived in fear. We also have an important sentence pattern: *not just _____ but positively _____*. This pattern indicates that the second thing should be a more extreme version of the first. Good fill-ins might be *bossy* and *domineering* or even *bossy* and *terrifying*.
3. Marissa's date was neither *nice* nor *interesting*; he was surly to the waiter and expatiated at great length about mechanical engineering, a topic Marissa finds quite tedious. Notice once again the structure of comparing two things with two other things; there must be a logical pattern. In this case, the first blank (we filled in *nice*) is the opposite of *surly*, and the second blank (we filled in *interesting*) is the opposite of the part about talking in a boring way. The first thing goes with the first thing and the second thing goes with the second thing.
4. *Only by humanizing the greatest among us can we fully understand those whose achievements we admire* is a pretty big clue—that's a pretty strong statement that gives us a very good idea of the point of the sentence. We have an opposite-direction pivot (*not*)—a good fill-in for the first blank would be *idealize*. The second blank is matched up with *foibles*, so it will probably mean something very similar, perhaps *flaws*.
5. Since the later years are being contrasted with the early years, the first blank should contain something like *cast off* or *eschewed*. In the second blank, we can simply recycle *prim* or *formal*—she cast off her old, wild style to pursue a *prim*, *highly formal formalism*.
6. For the first blank, we have an opposite-direction pivot (*not with _____ but with ridicule*). Thus, *praise* would be a good fill-in for the first blank. The clue about the electricians is *disbelieving*, so a good fill-in for the second blank would be *hoax*. The third sentence is perhaps the trickiest. If read in isolation, the sentence would seem to indicate that capitalists "always with an eye out to make a profit" would want to *buy* the patent. However, this item is part of a list of ways in which Graham was *ridiculed*. Thus, a correct fill-in for the third blank would indicate that the capitalists did NOT want to buy the patent—a word like *declined* would fit nicely.
7. If Armstrong *rose*, then we're looking for a word describing a high-up position—something like *prominence* would be a good fill-in for the first blank. For the second blank, simply recycle *influence* and fill in something like *influential* (a nice GRE word might be *foundational*). For the third blank, we want something even more distinctive than *distinctive*—something like *showy*, *flashy*, or *ostentatious*.
8. Most people make mistakes in how they think of migraines—even doctors. From that clue, a good fill-in for the first blank would be *prone* (or something else indicating that the doctors also make this mistake). Following this idea, the second blank should say something like *misdiagnoses* (this idea is also supported by the use of "stroke" and "fibromyalgia" in quotation marks, indicating that the patients do not really have those conditions). Finally, there is an important sentence pattern in the final sentence: *does not work and may even be _____*. The *even* indicates that we want something even worse than *does not work*. A good fill-in would be *harmful*.
9. The opposite-direction pivot in the second sentence (*However*), followed by news of a recent discovery, indicates that whatever was thought *for years* has turned out to be incorrect. Thus, a good fill-in for the first blank would

be *folk tale* or *urban legend*. A more GRE-type word would be *canard*. The second blank should simply say something like *located*. The third blank needs to sum up the idea that part of the brain that normally only responds to light has actually been repurposed to do something else. Thus, a good fill-in would be something like *versatility* or *plasticity*.

10. The first blank should simply be a verb like *thought* or *conceived* (both words that can be followed by *of*). We learn from the first sentence that the traditional way to think of the mind is *as a unitary entity*. The next sentence describes the mind acting in a very non-unitary way (a binary way, actually). So, the word in the second blank should be something like *however*. Finally, the third blank simply needs to be the opposite of *unitary*—perhaps *modular* or *decentralized*.

Traps to Avoid During Elimination

We've just discussed traps involved in the sentences themselves, and practiced filling in our own words in the blanks. When we are doing complete GRE problems, though, as we are about to do, there are a few more traps you should watch out for as you go through the three-step process and select an answer.

Theme Trap

Give the following problem a try.

The event horizon, or boundary, of a black hole represents both (i) _____ and intangibility; space travelers would pass through this literal "point of no return" so (ii) _____ that the precise moment at which their fate was sealed would almost certainly not be registered.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
hazard	indiscernibly
irrevocability	dangerously
infallibility	heroically

Which is the easier blank?

Most would agree that the second blank is easier. The clue is *the moment... would not be registered*, and the lack of a pivot tells us that the fill-in agrees with the clue. So we might fill in something like *without registering* (again, recycling language from the sentence itself).

Turning to the first blank, we can see that the *without registering* fill-in lines up with *intangibility*, while the first blank lines up with "point of no return." So we might fill in *no return* for the first blank.

Now we match to the answer choices. Only *indiscernibly* fits *without registering*. Only *irrevocability* fits *no return*. *Irrevocability* and *Indiscernibly* are the correct responses.

A *theme trap* in a wrong answer choice shares a theme or field (such as medicine, sports, etc.) with the sentence. As a result, the choice sounds okay on its own and somehow "together" with the sentence, even though it doesn't really fit the blanks.

Notice the trap language in the choices: *hazard*, *dangerously*, *heroically*. It's possible that you might construct a narrative around the question that would make some of these trap answers appealing. Don't "write your own story," and don't just pick words that "seem familiar" or "feel right." Have the mental discipline to *follow the strategy every time*.

Easy But Not Close Enough Trap

Now try this problem.

Marie was nettled by her sister's constant jocularly and preferred a _____ approach to life.

pessimistic
grim
waggish
staid
sycophantic

It was probably pretty easy for you to identify the clues (*nettled*, *jocularly*, *preferred*) and to see that Marie is against *jocularly* or joking behavior. A fill-in might be *serious*.

Now, imagine that you go through the answer choices. *Pessimistic* and *grim* both “sort of” match, but they both seem to go too far. Just because Marie doesn't like her sister's constant joking, must she be *pessimistic* or *grim* in her outlook on life? Not necessarily. Perhaps you don't remember what *waggish* or *staid* mean, and you don't totally remember *sycophantic* either, but you're sure it doesn't mean *serious*.

So your paper might look like this:

serious

- A ~
- B ~
- C ?
- D ?
- E x

We can now identify another trap. You don't like *pessimistic* or *grim*, but you don't know the other words, so you find yourself reluctant to choose (C) or (D). Unfortunately, you're falling into a trap...

The *Easy But Not Close Enough Trap* occurs when a wrong answer choice is “in the ballpark” but something is off in the meaning—however, the word is familiar, so it's attractive.

You might be afraid to pick a word you don't know. **Overcome this fear.** As it turns out, the correct answer is *staid*, which does mean “serious, sedate by temperament or habits.”

You will also see **Reversal traps** (you miss a pivot or mix up a negative). This is a matter of attention to detail in the moment.

Finally, there are **vocab traps**. *Conversant* doesn't mean *talkative* (it means *knowledgeable*), *factitious* does not mean *factual* (it means the opposite!), and *ingenuous* can look a lot like *ingenious* if you're not reading carefully. We're going to have to do some serious vocab work! Fortunately, much of this book talks about exactly that.

Text Completion Recap

Three-Step Process	1. Read only the sentence. 2. Find the clue and pivot, and write down your own fill-in. 3. Compare to each answer choice.
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Principle for Writing Fill-ins**Fill-in = Clue + Pivot.**

The Clue describes the Target. Reuse material from the sentence when writing a Fill-in.

Principle for Two or Three Blanks

Start with the easier/easiest blank. Work outwards from the part of the sentence that is easiest to understand.

Methods	Traps
Break down tricky sentences.	Double Negative Pivots Unfamiliar Style/Content Red Herring Clues Blanks in Tough Spots
Stick to the basic process as you eliminate.	Theme: Wrong answer is thematically related to the stem. Easy But Not Close Enough: familiar, attractive word that's clearly off in some way. Reversal (pivots)

Drill: Easy Questions

Here is the first of three 20-question Text Completion drills. Remember to follow the strategy! Look for clues and pivots, write down your own fill-in on separate paper, write ABCDE or make a grid, and do process of elimination.

You won't get any more reminders after this, so it's important that you make a vow to yourself to maintain the mental discipline to use this strategy and not simply revert back to what most people do (look at the question and pick the choices that "seem best.")

You will also want to make a list of vocabulary words to look up later (if you haven't been making such a list already!). Even once you've done these drills once, you could still spend quite a long time just learning the words in these sixty problems (and then going over the problems again—another reason to work on separate paper and not in the book).

1. Although it appeared to be _____ after its stagnation and eventual cancellation in 1989, *Doctor Who* returned to BBC in 2005 to become the longest-running science-fiction show in history.

moribund
ascendant
unflagging
defunct
sated



2. _____ against China's record on environmental protection has become a ubiquitous pastime at energy summits.

Inveigling
Opining
Needling
Fulminating
Lauding

3. Queen Blanche's brothers, Louis and Robert, were appointed _____ to her spouse only in 1345, more than a decade after her coronation.

protégés
vassals
serfs
precursors
minions

4. Social critic Neil Postman identified what he saw as a sort of intellectual _____ when he wrote, "What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one."

pondering
malingering
entropy
cerebration
banishment

5. The doctor's presentation at the conference gave numerous suggestions for incurring the _____ of the treatment while obviating damage to auxiliary structures.

diagnosis
mien
prognosis
costs
benefits

6. Richardson's (i) _____ handling of the (ii) _____ scandal successfully prevented what seemed poised to become the spectacular dissipation of his coalition.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
penitent	fretful
adroit	looming
heterogeneous	ecumenical

7. The (i) _____ forces were just barely held at bay by a loyalist battalion (ii) _____ by its allies' reinforcements.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
revolting	obviated
outclassed	bolstered
fascistic	sapped

8. While it would be lovely if what he said were true, I'm afraid he is _____ liar.

a libelous
an avowed
a nullifying
an unverified
a forfeited

9. In determining the defendant's sentencing, the jury will take into account whether he acted on _____ motives or truly did act primarily to shield the neighborhood from the kingpin's reprisal.

ulterior
criminal
recidivist
lucrative
violent

10. Under the mismanagement of the Socialist Party, Burma drifted into economic _____ and isolation.

monotony
opulence
nonchalance
decrepitude
recriminations

11. As the effects of foreign competition and a sense of threatened _____ reached each canton, talk of independence grew more common.

immunity
apotheosis
belligerence
recidivism
autonomy

12. He is the most hubristic individual I've ever met, and never declines an opportunity for _____.

hedonism
augmentation
profit
aggrandizing
bluster

13. (i) _____ by circumstance, the entrepreneur once known for his overweening (ii) _____ was now seen by others as the possessor of a broken spirit and timid demeanor.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
unaffected	pretension
humbled	swagger
exalted	wealth

14. Though she had made attempts toward adopting a more (i) _____ lifestyle, she was not above indulging her proclivities towards (ii) _____ dishes.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
truculent	odious
salutary	edible
frugal	delectable

15. The discovery that exposure to allergens through the mother's diet during the last trimester could lead to complications during the first year after birth (i) _____ the UK Department of Health to (ii) _____ dietary recommendations for expecting mothers.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
prompted	intuit
instigated	codify
lulled	officiate

16. Fearful of being seen as (i) _____, the Bieber Appreciation Society struggled to include (ii) _____ voices in its monthly newsletter.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
enthusiasts	propitiatory
detractors	deprecatory
a clique	tantamount

17. The fact that bringing together criminals and their victims for a moderated conversation has been shown to vastly reduce rates of (i) _____ can be explained by the fact that those who commit crimes can only do so by convincing themselves their actions have no (ii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
violence	inconsistencies
recidivism	resonance
malfeasance	ramifications

18. The (i) _____ of monks and abbots in Eastern Christianity were typically of black cloth, indicating their spiritual indifference to matters of this world and their commitment to a (ii) _____ reality. In this regard, the contrast with the (iii) _____ garments of Buddhist monks is striking.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
vestiges	mundane	iridescent
habiliments	dogmatic	drab
paragons	transcendent	flowing

19. On one account—criticized by many—Polanski was something of a victim, haunted by the (i) _____ images of his wife's murder. On another, he is a thoroughly culpable (ii) _____, following his desires for pleasure at all costs. It is perhaps the (iii) _____ inherent in this combination of images, even more so than the director's talent, that is responsible for the lenience granted him by public opinion.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
macabre	libertine	solecism
incredible	rogue	ambiguity
mellifluous	wanton	disparity

20. The university president argued that top universities should not (i) _____ education as an academic (ii) _____; discouraging our brightest students from pursuing teaching careers does a disservice to the next generation of students by (iii) _____ them of the opportunity to learn from the cream of the crop.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
disdain	recommendation	denigrating
proscribe	topic	degenerating
circumvent	discipline	divesting

Drill: Medium Questions

1. O'Neill's Irish _____ so disconcerted the Royal visitors that they found themselves struggling in vain to continue negotiations in their normally eloquent Queen's English.

fortitude
patois
equanimity
diffidence
consternation

2. Traditional upper class _____ such as fox hunting and cricket have largely given way to more egalitarian amusements over the course of the last century.

stereotypes
disportments
vocations
canards
professions

3. Professor Honeycutt was known as a probing questioner of her students; she always wanted to get to the _____ of any intellectual matter.

emotions
academics
pith
periphery
examination

4. Seeing their only alternative to be a (i) _____ diplomacy unbecoming of political visionaries—as members of the National Liberation Organization saw themselves in those days—the militant branch veered toward a policy of (ii) _____ aggression against their perceived ethnic rivals.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
wheedling	voluble
freewheeling	unremitting
verdant	superfluous

5. A (i) _____ passed through the crowd of protesters prostrating themselves in prayer when Mubarak made the sudden announcement—only a fortnight after vowing not to give in to the popular demands for his departure—that he would resign his post as President of Egypt, (ii) _____ a period of disorder and confusion.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
frisson	marring
murmur	precipitating
panegyric	diluting

6. Known and feared for their (i) _____, the Prussians became a force inspiring terror after overcoming internal fighting through Bismarck's cunning leadership.

artillery
extravagance
opulence
covetousness
truculence

7. A perfectionist in all things, Joseph expected to immediately become (i) _____ and was downtrodden indeed when he remained a (ii) _____ despite his best efforts.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
a maven	practitioner
a musician	pundit
a virtuoso	tyro

8. (i) _____ is unlikely to serve someone surrounded by liars and (ii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
credulity	fabulists
credibility	thieves
sincerity	quibblers

9. The idea, espoused by such heavyweights as Peter Singer, that each sentient being deserves fair treatment on a par with human beings clashes with the ecological insight that _____ some members of a species is occasionally necessary to prevent the devastating effects of overpopulation.

protecting
culling
killing
reintroducing
depleting

10. While she was known to all her friends as quite the (i) _____, her private behavior belied this (ii) _____ image.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
sage	belligerent
fabulist	pedantic
raconteur	genial

11. The common opinion at the court had it that her utterances as often as not (i) _____ attitudes unbecoming of a lady. This reputation cost her the attentions of some gentlemen, above all thanks to their fear of being bested by her (ii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
eluded	subtlety
derided	doggerel
evinced	repartee

12. While courage is an important virtue to teach and his character is indeed (i) _____, a cartoon mouse with a (ii) _____ for excessive violence is hardly an appropriate mascot for a Christian children's charity.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
doughty	penchant
impetuous	kinship
heady	largess

13. The double-dealing ambassador fell under suspicion as much due to his mix of (i) _____ and backpedaling in accomplishing his ends as to a distinctly unflattering comparison with the (ii) _____ straightforwardness of his Australian counterpart.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
rapaciousness	occlusive
odium	ostensible
legerdemain	portentous

14. The most (i) _____ puzzle lay in determining how to deliver the antisense strand to the right place at the right moment, after the virus had penetrated the cell, but before it had replicated and escaped to infect other cells. To accomplish this, the synthetic strand must be sufficiently potent to be effective and strong enough to resist rapid (ii) _____ inside the body.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
recalcitrant	desiccation
abstemious	degradation
monolithic	pleonasm

15. It takes only a (i) _____ of dry shrub for an errant spark to turn into a destructive (ii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
surfeit	conflagration
scintilla	incendiary
vestige	havoc

16. The Russo-Turkish war (i) _____ Albanians, placing before them the (ii) _____ prospect of a division of their lands among competing powers. This, above all, served to bring Albanian nationalism surging out of its former (iii) _____, culminating in a successful bid for independence only a few decades later.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
rankled	volatile	latency
enervated	minatory	insularity
debased	feasible	lucidity

17. Though she acknowledges that modern farming practices are more (i) _____ than traditional agriculture, she nonetheless argues that this difference represents no real (ii) _____. Perhaps more worrying, however, is her insistence that similar claims can be advanced regarding the treatment of farmers by an often (iii) _____ social hierarchy.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
expensive	progress	iniquitous
efficient	disincentive	halcyon
polluting	countermand	stratified

18. The (i) _____ of the word *assassin* is (ii) _____ in philological circles, as the word comes from a sect of brutal killers believed to have smoked the drug hashish before going on a mission. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of scholars willing to delve into the topic, as the (iii) _____ of the sect's origins prior to the First Crusade presents a mystery worthy of any number of dissertations.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
introduction	notorious	suspicion
derivation	unheralded	opacity
connotation	enigmatic	certainty

19. Statistics often need to be (i) _____ for their real meaning: while both the population and the amount of meat eaten annually in the nation remained (ii) _____, the growing gap between rich and poor meant that the wealthy few were eating more meat than ever, while the masses suffered from a (iii) _____ of foodstuffs of all kinds.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
plumbed	plastic	deceleration
calculated	static	dearth
designed	demographic	surfeit

20. Although Cage supported the expanded reliance on electronically produced _____, most of his early music is surprisingly _____. His "Music for Marcel Duchamp," a prepared-piano work from 1947, never rises above mezzo-piano, offering instead _____ melody that maintains its softness throughout.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
harmony	deleterious	a noisome
murmur	auspicious	an undulating
clangor	subdued	an erstwhile

Drill: Hard Questions

CAUTION: These problems are *very difficult*—more difficult than many of the problems you will likely see on the GRE. Consider these “Challenge Problems.” Have fun!

1. After renouncing the significant advantages of his noble birth, he wandered from village to village as a lowly _____; this, he maintained along with other members of his order, was the life best suited to one who wished to see both the miserliness and the generosity of humanity.

vagrant
mendicant
myrmidon
proselyte
malefactor

2. One particular _____ of many grammarians is the serial comma: whether to use one or not is an issue about which they will quibble at great length and not without some pedantic pleasure.

crotchet
awl
apogee
nadir
opus

3. In contrast to American social conventions with regard to neighborly relations, in which families or individuals residing in close proximity often interact on a familiar basis, residential _____ counts for surprisingly little among the English.

commodiousness
amiability
reciprocity
propinquity
cordiality

4. It is quite dangerous to _____ through the city these days, when explosions shake the buildings to their foundations without letup.

lumber
sidle
circumambulate
traipse
trudge

5. The aristocrats' gifts, while (i) _____, served as a reminder that the power of the Crown continued to be held in some esteem even in such (ii) _____ political times.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
extravagant	mercurial
nugatory	downtrodden
sumptuous	precarious

6. Having built up to a (i) _____, the shelling stopped as suddenly as it had begun; gazing at the drooping barrels, one might be forgiven for thinking they were rendered (ii) _____ by the pathetic sight of their (iii) _____ targets.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
clangor	obsolete	ethereal
crescendo	woebegone	effulgent
euphony	erroneous	haggard

7. Despite having engineered and overseen the return of several stray dioceses that had broken away under his predecessor's (i) _____, the Bishop had a modest and open quality that (ii) _____ the (iii) _____ of his position.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
diligence	construed	tenuousness
epaulet	belied	audacity
laxity	derided	austerity

8. The (i) _____ of "surds"—irrational roots—with the Pythagoreans' faith that all phenomena in the universe could be expressed through harmonious ratios of whole numbers led the cult to (ii) _____ any mention of their existence to the uninitiated.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
absurdity	condone
incongruity	proscribe
imperilment	palliate

9. Architectural (i) _____ like Koolhaas recognized Hadid's talents early and encouraged their development. By 1977, only a few years after their initial encounter, she had perfected her (ii) _____ style, inspired equally by Malevich's sparse constructivism and the calligraphic training of her Arabic education.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
cognoscenti	fungible
illuminati	malleable
neophytes	heteromorphic

10. Aleister Crowley, despite being given to wildly fantastic claims—he insisted, for instance, that the founding book of his religion was dictated to him by a divine being who visited his hotel room wearing sunglasses and a trench coat—had his share of (i) _____ followers. These were likely spurred on more than dissuaded by the (ii) _____ cast on him by the popular press, whose dubbing him “the wickedest man in the world” was, to be fair, hardly (iii) _____ given the relative harmlessness of his eccentricities.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
sycophantic	disadvantages	glib
sordid	gauntlets	peevish
skeptical	animadversions	condign

11. The Biblical portrayal of (i) _____ times preceding the great deluge stands in stark contrast to the ancient Greek representation of the (ii) _____ past as a Golden Age from which humanity has slowly descended into godless chaos. Such observations can easily give rise to the notion that stories about the past are less faithful attempts at reconstruction than (iii) _____, expressing both our cultural fears and hopes.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
flagitious	proximate	simulacra
dubious	antediluvian	equivocations
rustic	obscure	platitudes

12. Seeing a (i) _____ disposition as perhaps the most significant source of preventable illness, 12th century physicians like Moses Maimonides aimed the bulk of their (ii) _____ pamphlets at dietary regimens, offering advice that often appears (iii) _____ to modern sensibilities.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
phlegmatic	didactic	disingenuous
costive	maleficent	risible
bathetic	tenable	burgeoning

13. Uncertain whether his (i) _____ attire could impress the suave executive—despite her frequent affirmations of fondness for rural life—Francis reduced himself to near (ii) _____ through new wardrobe acquisitions. If only he had known that her (iii) _____ concealed equally humble circumstances.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
georgic	penury	geniality
natty	malaise	sophistry
drab	lethargy	grandstanding

14. (i) _____ is unlikely to gain a reputation for reliability; Garth's poorly disguised excuses, however, were improbably interpreted by his (ii) _____, hypochondriac employer as a sign of great foresight and (iii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
an embezzler	petulant	insipidity
a malingerer	imposing	sagacity
a pilferer	gingerly	convalescence

15. History has (i) _____ Mahatma Ghandi to the extent that his quite considerable moral shortcomings—his (ii) _____ misogyny, for example—are rarely discussed and, if mentioned at all, are seen as no more than (iii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
lionized	risqué	malefactions
narrativized	incorrigible	peccadilloes
impugned	waggish	trespasses

16. The new film, though a chronicle of exploitation and iniquity, nevertheless is deeply concerned with notions of (i) _____, eventually showcasing the elimination of all the protagonist's abusers, granting the audience the (ii) _____ they've been awaiting for two hours. Despite the satisfying upheaval, however, the plodding plot en route to this (iii) _____ leaves much to be desired.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
fairness	catharsis	extravagance
slavery	relief	denouement
injustice	inconclusiveness	platitude

17. Although (i) _____ is frequently used to give otherwise insubstantial work (ii) _____ of profundity, even Wallgot's most charitable readers were known to sneer at the breadth of his references.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
stringency	an iota
insularity	a veneer
eclecticism	a medley

18. He rarely bothered to (i) _____ his lengthy tomes, but their surprising popularity with the public empowered him to avoid editorial complaints through (ii) _____ threats to sign a contract with a different publisher.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
emend	impuissant
allay	peremptory
edify	toothsome

19. In future discounting, subjects place a lower value—whether positive or negative—on events in the distant future than on (i) _____ ones, explaining the common tendency to (ii) _____ present pleasures even at the expense of a likely (iii) _____ of future detriments.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
proleptic	overestimate	malady
remote	rescind	proliferation
proximate	protract	buttressing

20. She claims it is possible to deduce matters of fact from logic and, with just as little (i) _____, aims to derive ethical and economic truths as well. The laws of logic, on her grasp, (ii) _____ her in proclaiming that “existence exists,” which is very much like saying that the law of thermodynamics is hot.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
impartiality	license
warrant	occlude
fallacy	galvanize

Answers: 20 Easy Questions

1. **Defunct.** The show stagnated and was canceled, so it's unlikely that it appeared in a positive light as on the rise or unflagging. *Moribund* and *defunct* both seem to fit, but *after* the show has been canceled, it is not about to die or on the verge of death, so *moribund* doesn't work.
2. **Fulminating.** "Inveigh" would fit, but *inveigle* is a trap. Of the others, only opining and fulminating are things one does *against* someone, but *fulminate* is negative, while *opine* is neutral.
3. **Vassals.** The Queen's brothers are unlikely to become *minions* or *serfs*, which are negative spins on "servant." We are looking for a more positive (and royal) spin: only *vassal* fits.
4. **Entropy.** Postman's quote talks about a society in which no one wants to read books anymore. This suggests an intellectual *weakening* or *going downhill* (these are good suggestions for filling in the blank). Entropy is a good match—the word literally refers to the heat death of the universe, but can be used to refer to any situation of growing chaos and disorder.
5. **Benefits.** The pivot here is "while obviating damage." It tells us that we are looking to do something that avoids damage. So we need a word for something positive having to do with the treatment. Only *benefits* fits.
6. **Adroit, looming.** His handling of the scandal was successful or skillful, so *adroit* fits best. The scandal seemed poised to ruin things—that is, it hadn't done that already. What makes the most sense here is that the scandal itself hadn't quite broken yet—it was only looming.
7. **Revolting, bolstered.** One good clue to the first blank is the word "loyalist." Those fighting the loyalists would likely be the *rebels*. We don't have any indication that the forces were *fascistic*. *Outclassed* is irrelevant here. So *revolting* fits best. The loyalist battalion was *helped* or *strengthened* by "its allies' reinforcements," so only *bolstered* makes sense. Don't be thrown off by the dual meaning of *revolting*—certainly *revolting* can mean *disgusting*, but it can also mean *engaging in a revolt*, such as against a government.
8. **Avowed.** The first part of the sentence indicates that what he said *wasn't* true, so we want something that indicates that he *is* a liar, so get rid of anything that goes in the negative direction (*nullifying*, *unverified*). A good fill-in-your-own-word might be "an established" liar. *Libelous* is a trap answer—*libel* is lying in print for the purpose of damaging someone's reputation. *Libelous liar* would actually be redundant—and, of course, we have no indication that the lying was done in print. The answer is *avowed*, which means "declared or established."
9. **Ulterior.** The pivot here is *whether...or*—we are looking for a characterization of "motives" that would make them bad (not *primarily to shield the neighborhood*). *Criminal*, *recidivist*, and *violent* are theme traps. The jury here is deciding sentencing—the defendant is already guilty, but the jury wants to know a little more in order to determine the most appropriate punishment. If he *truly* was shielding the neighborhood, he would likely get a lighter sentence than if he had *ulterior*, or hidden (generally selfish) motives.
10. **Decrepitude.** We know that Burma was being *mismanaged*, so we want something bad (and appropriate to describe an economy). Only *decrepitude* makes sense.
11. **Autonomy.** What would feel *threatened* if foreign competition grew? We might say something like *pride*, although the second clue, *talk of independence*, tells us that the clue might be more specific. *Autonomy* is very similar to *independence*.

12. **Bluster.** *Hubristic* means arrogant—a *hubristic* person would never decline an opportunity for bragging, or *bluster*.
13. **Humbled, pretension.** The clue is that the entrepreneur is now “the possessor of a broken spirit and timid demeanor”—thus, he must have been the opposite of that before the change. A good fill-in for the second blank might be “arrogance.” *Pretension* fits best; *swagger* is associated with arrogance but a very indirect match, and *wealth* adds an idea that is not indicated in the sentence. Moving on to the first blank—a good fill-in might be “brought down” by circumstance. The only answer that is a match is *humbled*.
14. **Salutary, delectable.** The first blank contrasts with “indulgence,” so it might be either “healthy” or “less extravagant,” so it seems like either *salutary* or *frugal* will work. Start with the second blank. Nobody indulges proclivities toward dishes that are *odious*; and while most dishes are *edible*, only *delectable* ones are especially tempting. Delectable dishes are particularly a threat to health; *salutary* fits best.
15. **Prompted, codify.** A discovery that pregnancy complications are being caused and can be avoided would *prompt* action—specifically, *codifying* or systematizing the recommendations.
16. **A clique, deprecatory.** The Bieber Appreciation Society clearly exists to appreciate all things Bieber, but it seems that the society has become *fearful* of being seen in a certain way. What way? Keep reading—they *struggled* to include a certain kind of voice. *Tantamount* doesn’t make sense (it means *equivalent*), and *propitiatory* would be positive towards Bieber (so why would the Bieber Appreciation Society have trouble finding such voices?). Only *deprecatory* works. If the Society is struggling to include *deprecatory* voices, it seems that they fear being seen as not having balanced views—that is, they fear being seen as *a clique*, a group of professional applauders hired to make a performance look good (or any group of uncritical admirers).
17. **Recidivism, ramifications.** The people in question are already criminals with victims, so the issue isn’t one of bringing down crime or violence in general, but of repeat offenses, i.e., *recidivism*. What meeting victims must convince the criminals of is that their actions have effects—or *ramifications*.
18. **Habiliments, transcendent, iridescent.** The first blank is referring to something made of cloth, which is contrasted with the garments of Buddhist monks. We are looking for something that means garments or clothes; *habiliments* is the only choice that fits. The second blank is looking for a description of a spiritual reality beyond this one; only *transcendent* fits (*mundane* is an antonym). The third blank is looking for a contrast with the “black” outfits of the first sentence segment; *iridescent* is the only option dealing with color and in contrast with black.
19. **Macabre, libertine, ambiguity.** The first blank could call for something like “gory” or “bloody”—something that can haunt Polanski. *Macabre* is the right answer. The second blank is a bit trickier: both *rogue* (immoral scoundrel) and *wanton* (someone unprincipled, acting on desire) fit, but *libertine*—someone who specifically is concerned with pleasure—is the best match. For the third blank, the images are *disparate*, but the disparity only leads to lenience because of the uncertainty, or *ambiguity* that it gives rise to.
20. **Disdain, discipline, divesting.** The semicolon in this sentence is a clue that the two parts of the sentence “go in the same direction”—the first part should mirror the meaning that “the brightest students pursuing teaching” would be a good thing. A good fill-in for the first word might be “put down” and a good fill-in for the second word might be “area;” the third needs something like “depriving.” Don’t fall for trap answers—“proscribe” and “circumvent” add extra meaning to the idea of “put down” (universities would not literally *ban* education, or *avoid via circumvent*). Only *disdain* fits the first blank. *Discipline* is the closest match for the second. The third is *divesting*; don’t fall for the traps of *denigrating* and *degenerating*, both work with the theme, but don’t fit into the blank; only *divesting* is a close match for *taking away*.

Answers: 20 Medium Questions

1. **Patois.** Since the negotiators' language skills are thrown into limbo, it seems like there's something about O'Neill's *speech*, not the tone or content of that speech, that is confusing them. *Patois* is a regional dialect, in contrast to the official language spoken by the negotiators (Queen's English).
2. **Disportments.** Fox hunting and cricket are not professional activities for the upper class; they are hobbies, amusements, or diversions, i.e., disportments. ("Stereotypes" is a trap, since stereotypes of the upper class might have them constantly engaging in such disportments.)
3. **Pith.** A probing questioner is looking for the central point of an intellectual matter. *Periphery* is the opposite. *Examination* doesn't help at all: the *point* of an examination is to get to the core. *Academics* is a theme trap. The only answer that means core or central point is *pith*.
4. **Wheedling, unremitting.** What would seem to be unbecoming of political visionaries is to attempt to convince someone (rather than, say, commanding or dictating terms), especially in a flattering way. That's exactly what *wheedling* means. We have no indication that the aggression undertaken was *superfluous* (if so, why would they undertake it?), and it certainly wasn't *voluble*, since that only pertains to speech. Rather, it was persistent or relentless (*unremitting*).
5. **Frisson, precipitating.** The protesters are getting what they want: Mubarak is unexpectedly resigning. "Thrill" or "excitement" may work well for the first blank, and *frisson* fits. *Murmur*, while possible, doesn't capture the sense of excitement one would expect. For the second blank, one might expect a period of disorder to begin following a political upheaval; *precipitating* is the only possibility.
6. **Truculence.** The blank is referring to something that makes the Prussians feared, and something that has led to internal fighting. *Truculence*—aggression or belligerence—is the best fit here. *Artillery* could make them feared, but that would be irrelevant to the Prussians' overcoming internal fighting through leadership. *Opulence* and *extravagance* aren't especially threatening.
7. **A virtuoso, tyro.** Since Joseph is a perfectionist, he expected to become an *expert* (or *virtuoso*) and was disappointed to remain a *beginner* (or *tyro*).
8. **Credulity, fabulists.** We are looking for a trait that is particularly unhelpful in dealing with liars. *Credibility* and *sincerity*—being a reliable truth-teller—are probably not helpful in dealing with liars, but it's *credulity*—a tendency to believe people too easily—that would be especially problematic. The second blank is looking for a rough synonym for "liars:" *fabulists*. (Note that although you might be tempted to think of "liars and thieves" as belonging together, being credulous doesn't particularly interfere with one's ability to deal with thieves—unless, of course, they are also liars or fabulists.)
9. **Culling.** The discussion has to do with removing or getting rid of individual members of a species. *Protecting* and *reintroducing* don't make sense; they are theme traps. *Depleting* can apply to a resource, but not to individuals. *Killing* and *culling* both fit, but *culling* is the better option since it is a technical term for killing individual members to avoid overpopulation. (Bonus: if you understand this sentence, you've got a handle on one of the key debates among environmentalists.)

10. **Raconteur, genial.** As the initial “while” tells us, there is a contrast between the first and second half of the sentence. The “belied” in the second half, moreover, tells us that the two blanks will have the same spin. So we can run through some combinations. A *fabulist* is someone who tells false stories, and isn’t necessarily *genial*, *belligerent*, or *pedantic*. A *sage* might be any of these, but the connection is pretty loose. A *raconteur*, on the other hand, is someone who tells amusing stories, and is thus especially likely to be *genial*.
11. **Evinced, repartee.** The opinion about her is clearly negative, so her utterances don’t *deride* negative utterances or evade (*elude*) them, but rather demonstrate (*evince*) them. One isn’t likely to fear being bested by *doggerel* (triviality) or—usually—*subtlety* (if you’re bested by subtlety, you’re likely not the sort of person who notices), but clever, quick, and witty replies (*repartee*) are threatening indeed!
12. **Doughty, penchant.** We are looking for another word for courage, but one that doesn’t carry negative connotations (the “indeed” in front of the blank indicates that the spin will be the same as the spin of “virtue”). *Doughty* means bravery or courage. But the cartoon mouse seemingly engages in excessive violence, and not just on rare occasions (who would care about that?); so it has a tendency toward or a *penchant* for violence.
13. **Legerdemain, ostensible.** The ambassador is doing something shady—which is what casts suspicion on him—and a show of deceit or sleight of hand (*legerdemain*) fits best. By comparison, the Australian ambassador must appear straightforward (*occlusion* would interfere with that) and being foreboding or pompous (*portentous*) wouldn’t make him look good; *ostensible* (seeming) fits best.
14. **Recalcitrant, degradation.** The puzzle sounds quite complicated—delivering an antisense strand to the right place at just the right moment. Only *recalcitrant* (stubborn) could be even remotely appropriate to describe a puzzle. Next, we read that the strand must be strong enough to resist something bad—*desiccation* is drying out (unlikely inside the body, and we’ve received no clue about this) and *pleonasm* is the use of redundancy in language. Only *degradation* works.
15. **Scintilla, conflagration.** We are looking for something that means “small amount.” “Surfeit” is an antonym; *vestige* sounds right, but a vestige is left over after *everything* is gone. The right answer is *scintilla*. A *havoc* is destructive, but has nothing to do with fire (which is what “spark” would lead us to expect). An *incendiary* does, but it is not quite appropriate in this spot—an *incendiary* is more of a fire-starter, like dynamite. A *conflagration* is specifically a destructive fire.
16. **Rankled, minatory, latency.** The war clearly doesn’t weaken (*enervate*) Albanians, since it encourages them to strive for independence. And while some features of the war might *debase* them, the prospect of division of their lands doesn’t do this. But it might anger, vex, or cause bitterness for them, i.e., *rankle* them. They don’t cherish the prospect—on the contrary, they find it threatening, or *minatory*. (If it were merely *feasible*, or even *volatile*, that wouldn’t necessarily lead to negative feelings.) Their nationalism surges out—it wasn’t already clear (*lucid*), and whether it was *insular* before or after doesn’t seem to make much of a difference; but if it emerged out of *latency*, that would explain why it suddenly became a force that could lead in short time to independence.
17. **Efficient, progress, iniquitous.** Only *progress* really makes sense for the second blank. As the “though” indicates, *progress* should be an apt description for the transition from traditional to modern farming, which is why she has to *argue* for the opposite conclusion. No one is likely to think that increases in expense or pollution demonstrate progress; *efficient* is the best fit. The last blank is referring to something *bad* about the social hierarchy and how it treats farmers. *Stratified* describes the hierarchy, but doesn’t say anything negative about it (aside from the fact that it is a hierarchy!). Since *halcyon* is positive, *iniquitous* or unjust is the only fit.

18. **Derivation, notorious, opacity.** The first sentence links the word *assassin* with *hashish*, so the first blank is addressing the *derivation* of the term. It says nothing about its *introduction*, since we are only told where the word originates, not how it was introduced. Since the derivation is *known*, it follows that it isn't *enigmatic*; but it is *notorious* given the shadiness involved in the derivation. The sect's origins present a mystery, so there is no *certainty* surrounding them, and *suspicion* isn't as good a match for the last blank as *opacity*, since it's lack of clarity rather than suspicion that makes for a good mystery.
19. **Plumbed, static, dearth.** The "growing gap between the rich and poor" is mentioned as a way of indicating that the meat eaten is not distributed equally; this coincides with the initial clue indicating that statistics "need to be _____ for their real meaning." (Only *plumbed*, or *examined closely* works in that blank.) Thus, the masses suffered a *lack* of foodstuffs. Only *dearth* matches. The second blank is a bit trickier: the truth is that the rich are eating more meat and the poor less, but it seems as though the statistics, on their face, don't make that clear. Thus, the statistics indicate that the amount of meat eaten *remained the same*, or was *static*.
20. **Clangor, subdued, an undulating.** We learn at the end of the sentence that Music for Marcel Duchamp *maintains its softness* and *never rises above* what presumably describes some level of volume. Only *undulating* works. Working backwards in the sentence, we discover that Music for Marcel Duchamp is an example of Cage's early music. Thus, that music must be something similar to *soft*—only *subdued* works. Finally, we have an opposite-side pivot (*although*) as well as the word *surprisingly*—Cage's later music must be noisy! Only *clangor* works.

Answers: 20 Hard Questions

1. **Mendicant.** *Malefactor* clearly doesn't work—there is no indication that he is an evildoer. The rest are trickier. *Proselyte* is close, but it isn't clear that he is a recent convert. *Vagrant* doesn't convey the sense of purpose involved. *Myrmidon* is a “suck-up” or servile person. *Mendicant* is sometimes just a synonym for *beggar*, but it also has a specifically religious connotation, which the reference to “members of his order” calls for. *Mendicant* is the best fit.
2. **Crotchet.** These answer choices are killer nouns! The fill-in shouldn't be too hard: something like *peeve* or *concern*, although the concern is not a huge one, since the grammarians argue about it “not without some pedantic pleasure.” A *crotchet* is a whimsical or stubborn notion. The others are all nonsensical: an *awl* is a hole-punching tool, an *apogee* is a climax or high point, a *nadir* is a low point, and an *opus* is musical or literary composition.
3. **Propinquity.** We are told that for Americans, familiarity follows from close proximity. The blank should be a synonym for this. Only “propinquity” fits; answer choices dealing with comfort or friendliness are traps drawing on associations with “residential” or “neighbor.”
4. **Traipse.** The answer choices are difficult: all of them mean *walk*, so nuance is key here. Walking through the city is dangerous, but it is especially dangerous to walk in a roundabout, directionless way: *traipse*.
5. **Nugatory, mercurial.** The “while” in front of the blank suggests that the gifts are valuable *only* as reminders: that is, they have no real value in themselves. *Nugatory* means “having no real value” or “having only symbolic value,” while both of the other options imply real value. The power of the Crown *continued* to be held in esteem—we are looking not just for political conditions that are bad or dangerous, but conditions that are *changeable*, so that continuity something through them is important. *Mercurial* means frequently changeable or changing.
6. **Crescendo, weebegone, haggard.** The shelling is *building up* to something—so it's not just a loud noise, or *clangor*, but the peak of the noise—a *crescendo*. The pieces of artillery seem like they are *sad*, since that would be an apt response to a pathetic sight. Only *weebegone*—extremely sad or full of woe—fits. The sight of their targets isn't likely to be *effulgent* or *ethereal*, since neither of these is *pathetic*. They are most likely *haggard*—worn out.
7. **Laxity, belied, austere.** *Epaulet* would make sense—if at all—only in an extremely metaphorical sense. *Diligence*, on the other hand, doesn't normally lead to conflict; *laxity* does. The third blank is talking about his position, which is neither daring (audacious) nor uncertain (tenuous) as far as we know—it seems quite the opposite. More likely it is strict or severe (austere). We can now turn to the second blank: we don't expect someone with an *austere* position to be modest and open, so his openness seems to misrepresent (*belie*) that austerity.
8. **Incongruity, proscribe.** For the first blank, “with” is important: although surds might be seen as *absurd* or *imperiling*, they are not absurd or imperiling *with* the Pythagorean faith. For the second blank, the seriousness of the problem would seem to suggest that the Pythagoreans wouldn't want to *condone* spreading this information; they might want to *palliate* its impact, but forbidding or *proscribing* any mention of it outright fits better.
9. **Cognoscenti, heteromorphic.** We are looking for people “in the know”: *cognoscenti*. A *neophyte* is a beginner. *Illuminati* fits a little better, but has religious overtones and doesn't necessarily refer to people who are in the know. Hadid's style mixes at least two diverse inspirations, so we would expect it to be not replaceable by something else (*fungible*) or easily changeable (*malleable*), but simply to exhibit a plurality of forms: *heteromorphic*.

10. **Sycophantic, animadversions, condign.** Followers are rarely *skeptical* and we have no reason to think they were particularly *sordid*, since we don't know what sorts of activities Crowley engaged in (short of making fantastic claims); but followers—especially followers of clearly eccentric figures—do tend to be *sycophantic*. The press is saying something bad about him, not challenging or trying to disadvantage him, so *animadversions* (“strong criticisms”) fits best. The criticism seems excessive or undeserved, i.e., not *condign*.
11. **Flagitious, antediluvian, simulacra.** The first blank gives us a contrast with a Golden Age, so it should be something bad. *Dubious* doesn't necessarily mean bad, and *rustic* isn't anywhere near negative as *flagitious*, marked by vice (and it should be *really* negative in order to give us a *stark* contrast). The Greek myths are about the *distant* or *remote* past. *Antediluvian* is the correct fit (don't be misled into thinking of *antediluvian* as a trap—it does literally mean “before the flood,” and thus doesn't apply to the Greek myths, but it also means extremely ancient, which is what we're looking for). The stories about the past—in the third blank—would be *equivocations* if *each* of them contained a mixed message; but instead it looks like the mix comes only if we are comparing Biblical with Greek stories. *Simulacra*, or (mere) images, are the right contrast for “faithful reconstruction.”
12. **Costive, didactic, risible.** *Phlegmatic* looks reasonable, especially since the topic is medieval medicine, but the emphasis on diet should turn our attention to the bowels—*costive* means having to do with constipation. The pamphlets are seemingly designed to tell people how to diet; they are educational, or *didactic*. But since today our dietary and health views are quite different from those held by medieval doctors, we are likely to find their advice funny, or *risible*.
13. **Georgic, penury, grandstanding.** His attire has something to do with rural life; *georgic* means “having to do with agriculture or rural life.” (*Natty* means *sharp, stylish* and is the opposite of what we want). It sounds like Francis spends a lot of money on clothes—spending a lot of money could reduce someone—especially someone with *georgic* means—to poverty (penury). The lady to whom he devotes his attentions, on the other hand, is *concealing* something humble; that's done not through friendliness or use of unsound arguments (*sophistry*), but by giving a showy performance (*grandstanding*).
14. **A malingerer, gingerly, sagacity.** The first blank options all involve some sort of unreliability, but the clues is that Garth's behavior is well-received by his boss who is a *hypochondriac*. Since stealing (embezzling or pilfering) has nothing to do with health, *maligner* (someone who fakes illness) fits best. The second blank asks for something similar to “hypochondriac.” The boss may be *imposing* or *petulant*, but it's only his *gingerly*, or extremely cautious, character that ties well with hypochondria. The last blank is a word similar to “foresight”; only *sagacity* fits.
15. **Lionized, incorrigible, peccadilloes.** Ghandi's moral shortcomings are overlooked or ignored. This isn't a result of *impugning*, but quite the opposite: he's been *lionized*. His misogyny, if it is a considerable moral shortcoming, can't be *waggish* or *risqué*. Only *incorrigible* fits. Finally, his moral failures are seen not just as trespasses or sins, but as small or insignificant sins, or *peccadilloes*.
16. **Fairness, catharsis, denouement.** There is a contrast between iniquity and what the film is *actually* deeply concerned with: that must be the opposite of exploitation or iniquity, i.e., *fairness*. The audience hasn't been waiting for *inconclusiveness*. Maybe it has been waiting for *relief*, but *catharsis* is a better fit, since it refers specifically to purging of built-up emotions. Finally, the plot is building up to the outcome, or *denouement*.
17. **Eclecticism, a veneer.** We are looking for something that could make a work look less insubstantial and that has to do with breadth; insularity and stringency imply the opposite of breadth; eclecticism (drawing on a wide variety of sources) fits. Eclecticism doesn't give a work a little bit (iota) or a mixture (medley) of profundity; it gives it a surface appearance (veneer) of profundity.

18. **Emend, peremptory.** For the first blank, we are looking for something the writer could do to his lengthy tomes that would appease editors; something like editing, redacting, or changing them seems to fit, and *emend* fills that spot. He avoids editorial complaints through threats, which are certainly not delicious (*toothsome*) and don't seem to be powerless—rather, they prevent complaints from publishers in advance; *peremptory* fits this role.

19. **Proximate, protract, proliferation.** The first blank asking for a contrast with “distant future”; “remote” is a synonym trap, and “proximate” fits. Since future discounting involves placing more of a premium on present than future events and pleasures are desirable while detriments are not, it follows that subjects will tend to want to promote or prolong (protract) present pleasures even if this means somehow extending, increasing, or multiplying (proliferating) future detriments.

20. **Warrant, license.** It is clear from *claims* and the general derisive tone of the sentence that the speaker does not think it is possible to deduce matters of fact from logic (that would be pretty silly, come to think about it). Thus, she has little *warrant* for doing this, and *just as little warrant* for using logic to inappropriately derive other “truths.” *License* is similar to *warrant* and serves the same function in the second sentence.