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# **Text Completion & Sentence Equivalence**

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## **Chapter 3**

*of*

TEXT COMPLETION &  
SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE

SENTENCE  
EQUIVALENCE

## In This Chapter . . .

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- Sentence Analysis
- Answer Choice Analysis
- Finding Near-Synonym Pairs
- When to Use Answer Choice Analysis
- What If I Don't Know the Words?
- Why It Is Important to Learn Words in Context

## SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE

Sentence Equivalence questions on the GRE are very similar to single-blank Text Completion questions, with one twist—there are six answer choices, and TWO of them are correct. For example:

The judge dismissed Steffen's lawsuit, ruling that since Steffen had been first to \_\_\_\_\_ the contract, the company he was suing was no longer obligated to uphold the provisions of the original agreement.

- ☐ forswear
- ☐ transmute
- ☐ breach
- ☐ abrogate
- ☐ vituperate
- ☐ slake

Note that the answer choices are marked not with letters (as in, choices A–F), but with checkboxes. Throughout the exam (in math, too), the GRE uses circular radio buttons for questions with one correct answer and square checkboxes to indicate questions with more than one correct answer.

To get a Sentence Equivalence question correct, you must select BOTH correct answers—there is no partial credit. In the question above, the correct answer is **breach** and **abrogate**, which both mean “violate.”

Let's see what ETS has to say about the approach for this question type, and then we'll revisit this question.

According to ETS:

*Like Text Completion questions, Sentence Equivalence questions test the ability to reach a conclusion about how a passage should be completed on the basis of partial information, but to a greater extent they focus on the meaning of the completed whole. Sentence Equivalence questions consist of a single sentence with just one blank, and they ask you to find two choices that both lead to a complete, coherent sentence and that produce sentences that mean the same thing.*

Success on a Sentence Equivalence question sometimes depends on hard vocabulary words in the answer choices, sometimes depends on hard vocabulary words or complex sentence construction in the sentence itself, and sometimes hinges on all of these things at once.

Although the idea of “two correct answers” is an interesting test-making twist, it doesn't actually make the questions any harder for you. In fact, it opens up the strategic tool of Answer Choice Analysis, which will be explained in this chapter.

Many of the skills you have already learned for Text Completion still apply here: for instance, looking for clues and pivots, and filling in your own word in the blank.

There are two main methods of attack for a Sentence Equivalence question:

- Sentence analysis
- Answer choice analysis

Let's discuss each in turn.

## Sentence Analysis

Like Text Completion questions, Sentence Analysis questions ask us to fill in a blank based on the information contained in the text around it.

As with Text Completions, it is very important to remember that the sentences are NOT anything like sentences pulled from a newspaper, with a few words blanked out. In such a “real life” case, we actually might not be able to fill in the missing word—what if the missing word were the crucial turning point of the sentence?

On the GRE, things have to be much more concrete. In order to construct a Sentence Equivalence question that has two objectively correct answers and four objectively incorrect answers, *the test makers have to specifically construct sentences that have clues planted in them for you to find.*

The clue is always there.

It is your job to ask:

1. What is the blank “about?” We’ll call this the “target.” To find the target, ask which of the nouns in the sentence the blank is describing, or who is doing the action in the blank, and to what.

*Note:* If the blank represents a verb, you might have two targets. In “The ornery critic \_\_\_\_\_ the play,” the *critic* is performing the action and the *play* is receiving the action. In such a case, think of the target as the relationship between the subject and object. Ask “What did the critic do,” “What happened to the play,” or “What did the critic do to the play?”

2. What does the sentence tell us about the target? This is the “clue.” DO NOT GUESS, ASSUME, OR USE OUTSIDE INFORMATION. The clue will be physically present in the sentence.
3. Does the sentence have a “pivot?” Pivots indicate whether the blank is on the same side as or the opposite side from the clue.
4. What word would I use to fill in the blank in my own words (a “fill-in”), based on the clue?

Remember the four parts: *Target, Clue, Pivot, Fill-In.*

Let’s see an example.

The village’s water supply had been \_\_\_\_\_ by toxic industrial byproducts that had seeped into groundwater.

- ☐ adumbrated
- ☐ vitiated
- ☐ abashed
- ☐ adulterated
- ☐ truncated
- ☐ abridged

The blank is about the water supply. Thus, “water supply” is the target. What do we know about it? That “toxic” substances seeped into it. There is no pivot (like “but” or “however”) that sends us in the opposite direction. So we are looking for a pair that means something like “contaminated.”



The answer is **adulterated** and **vitiated**. **Adulterated** means “contaminated” and **vitiated** means “spoiled, made defective, corrupted.” (Of the incorrect answers, **truncated** and **abridged** are similar in meaning, and **adumbrated** and **abashed** are unrelated.)

Let’s try one more.

Unlike the more genial researchers, who often went out together after work, the \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Spicer believed that only intelligence should matter, and thus made few friends at the lab.

- ☐ sedulous
- ☐ baneful
- ☐ standoffish
- ☐ partisan
- ☐ glacial
- ☐ assiduous

The blank is about Dr. Spicer. He or she is the target. The clues are that Dr. Spicer believes that “only intelligence should matter,” has “made few friends,” and is NOT “genial” (we know this because of the pivot “unlike”). Thus, we are looking for a word in the blank that means “unfriendly.”

The answer is **standoffish** and **glacial**. Both words can mean “emotionally cold and distant.” (**Glacial** can also mean slow, physically cold, or pertaining to glaciers.) **Sedulous** and **assiduous** mean hardworking or persistent. **Baneful** means harmful and **partisan** means biased, in favor of only one’s own side or party.

Note that this example had an opposite-side pivot. Here is a reminder of some of the common pivots that appear in GRE sentences:

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

Let’s try a drill.

**Drill: Sentence Analysis**

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Analyze each sentence for Target, Clue, and Pivot, then fill in the blank in your own words. (This drill is kept succinct, as a similar practice set appears in the Text Completion chapter; the skill is the same for both question types.)

1. The biography was neither encomium nor condemnation, but rather a \_\_\_\_\_ look at a life, its facts verifiable and delivered without commentary.
2. Now a virtual recluse, she stewed in solitude at the realization that her \_\_\_\_\_ friends had betrayed her.
3. While several months of progress had been made on the new highway plan in the early part of the year, it was now questionable whether the plan would ever re-emerge from its current state of \_\_\_\_\_, its funding held up while politicians bickered about the changing state of the economy.
4. Josh's generally lackadaisical attitude towards his work caused his boss to suspect that his "moral objection" to the task was really just a way to \_\_\_\_\_ his duties.
5. In isolation, the data is but \_\_\_\_\_ scatterplot; it took an insightful professor to explain its significance to the student researchers.\*

\* In situations where "a" or "an" comes before the blank, the "a" or "an" will often be included with each answer choice rather than in the sentence itself so that some of the answer choices can begin with vowels and some with consonants.

## Answers: Sentence Analysis

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1. The target is the “biography.” What we know about it is that it is neither “encomium nor condemnation”—even without knowing the word “encomium,” we could probably figure out from the “nor” that the phrase means “neither praise nor criticism.” Thus, the biography must be neutral or in the middle. “Its facts verifiable and delivered without commentary” corroborates this—a good word to fill in the blank would be something like **objective**, **disinterested**, or **unbiased**.
2. The target is the “friends.” Since she is now a “virtual recluse” and these friends “betrayed” her, a good word to fill in the blank would be something like **former** or **erstwhile**.
3. The target is the “highway plan.” “While” is an opposite direction pivot, indicating that the fill-in should be on the opposite side of making progress. Indeed, we are given the clue that the project’s funding is held up (tied up or delayed). A good fill-in would be something like **gridlock**, **deadlock**, or simply **not moving**.
4. The target is both “Josh” and his “duties”—or, the relationship between Josh and the duties. The clues are that the boss “suspects” (which has a negative connotation) that Josh’s “moral objections” (the quotes in the original sentence also indicate suspicion) are motivated by something else. One more clue fills in the blank for us—the fact that Josh is “lackadaisical” (casual or lazy). A good fill-in would be **avoid** or **shirk**.
5. The target is the “data” or “scatterplot,” words referring to the same thing. We know that “in isolation” (which sounds bad), it is “but” some quality. “But” in this context means “merely” or “only.” The clue is that the insightful professor was able to make the data meaningful; therefore, before the professor’s involvement, the data did not appear meaningful to the students. A good word might be something like **an inscrutable** or **an unfathomable**.



## Answer Choice Analysis

When ETS introduced the Sentence Equivalence format, most people's natural response was, "So we pick a pair of synonyms, right?" ETS officials insist that the two correct answers don't have to be synonyms:

Do not simply look among the answer choices for two words that mean the same thing. This can be misleading for two reasons. First, the answer choices may contain pairs of words that mean the same thing but do not fit coherently into the sentence, and thus do not constitute a correct answer. Second, the pair of words that do constitute the correct answer may not mean exactly the same thing, since all that matters is that the resultant sentences mean the same thing.

Hmmn. When the two correct answers are inserted into the sentence, the resulting sentences mean the same thing? Sounds like those words would have to be pretty close, right?

Theoretically, the GRE could give a question like this one:

Miriam broke up with John because he was \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ boring
- ☐ handsome
- ☐ limber
- ☐ unintelligent
- ☐ kind
- ☐ fun

Since Miriam "broke up" (our clue) with John (our target), we are looking for something bad. There are only two matches: **boring** and **unintelligent**. These two words certainly are not synonyms, although each makes sense in the sentence.

However, we have seen little evidence for this type of "loose construction" on the GRE. A question like the one above, in which the correct choices really aren't synonyms, would have to have answers that fall into pretty easily distinguishable categories (e.g., "something bad"). We think most of those questions would fall on the easy side.

On the actual GRE, it is almost always the case that the two correct answers are pretty close to being synonyms. Here's an example:

Many people at the dinner party were inordinately interested in questioning the \_\_\_\_\_ new guest, who refused to reveal his profession or even the origin of his exotic accent.

- ☐ acerbic
- ☐ mysterious
- ☐ insightful
- ☐ trenchant
- ☐ intrepid
- ☐ inscrutable

Let's look for clues. The blank describes the new guest. We know that this guest is very cagey about himself. We're looking for a word like *secretive* or *mysterious*.

As it turns out, **mysterious** and **inscrutable** are the correct answers. **Inscrutable** means “not able to be scrutinized” and often indicates hiding emotions. It’s not exactly the same thing as **mysterious**, but there’s a substantial overlap in their meanings.

We’ve discovered that most correct answer pairs are at least as closely related as these two. For the purposes of this book, we’ll call them “near-synonyms.”

## Finding Near-Synonym Pairs

Most Sentence Equivalence questions have a built-in “backdoor strategy:” answer choice analysis. This is because most sets of answer choices are “two by two”—that is, among the six choices there are two pairs of synonyms and two “loose,” unrelated words.

Typical “two by two”:

horrible  
nice  
pleasant  
impoverished  
terrible  
dying

**Horrible** and **terrible** are a pair. **Pleasant** and **nice** are a pair. **Impoverished** and **dying** are unrelated.

Here is a weaker variant of a “two by two”:

wicked  
healthful  
evil  
qualified  
gifted  
well-practiced

**Wicked** and **evil** are a pair. **Gifted** and **well-practiced** are “sort of” a pair—that is, **gifted** implies an ability that comes from within, whereas **well-practiced** implies an ability that comes from, obviously, practice. However, both are different paths to the same goal (being talented or skilled). They’re a weak pair.

In any sentence, it should be pretty easy to tell whether **wicked/evil** or **gifted/well-practiced** is the more appropriate match. However:

*In the case that a set of choices provides a closely related pair and a less closely related pair, the more closely related pair is more likely to be the answer.*

Occasionally, three words will seem to match up (a “triplet”). Usually, in this case, two are really synonyms and the other is off in terms of spin or strength. For instance, in the case of *excoriate*, *admonish*, and *castigate*, the real pair is *excoriate* and *castigate*—both mean to criticize or scold very harshly, and *admonish* means to scold mildly. (Note that if all three “triplets” really were synonyms, they would necessarily all be wrong as a result, since there can only be two correct answers. However, this is unlikely.)

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False triplet:

determined  
talkative  
hapless  
unsuccessful  
unlucky  
resolute

**Determined** and **resolute** are a pair. **Hapless**, **unsuccessful**, and **unlucky** seem to be a “triplet.” (**Talkative** is not related to the others.)

However, **hapless** really does mean **unlucky** (“hap” is actually a rarely-used Old English word for “luck” or “lot”). A person can be unsuccessful without being unlucky. **Hapless** and **unlucky** are the true pair.

It is also possible to have just one pair, or three:

Only 1 pair:

pale  
flexible  
hidden  
celebrated  
equitable  
fair

**Equitable** and **fair** are a pair. The other four words are unrelated.

3 pairs:

candid  
latent  
ingenuous  
inimical  
dormant  
hostile

**Candid** and **ingenuous** are a pair. **Latent** and **dormant** are a pair. **Inimical** and **hostile** are a pair.

While all of these answer choice patterns are possible, the most common by far is the “two by two.”

## When to Use Answer Choice Analysis

To use Answer Choice Analysis as your main tool for Sentence Equivalence questions, you can actually proceed to the choices first, before even reading the sentence. For instance:

*Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah  
\_\_\_\_\_, blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah.*

- ☐ myrmidons
- ☐ aesthetes
- ☐ tyros
- ☐ lackeys
- ☐ anchorites
- ☐ novices

Go straight to the words and attempt to make pairs: **myrmidons** and **lackeys** are people who use flattery of superiors to try to gain advantage (i.e., “apple-polishers,” “bootlickers”). **Tyros** and **novices** are both beginners. An **aesthete** loves or studies beauty, and an **anchorite** is a recluse, especially a religious hermit, and thus those two words are not related.

Therefore, the answer must be **myrmidons/lackeys** or **tyros/novices**. The only question we need to ask is, “Does the sentence call for a “suck-up” or a beginner? Here is the complete problem:

It may be true that everyone likes flattery, but a good manager is not unduly persuaded by it, and thus not taken in by \_\_\_\_\_, who use wheedling and fawning to get ahead.

- ☐ myrmidons
- ☐ aesthetes
- ☐ tyros
- ☐ lackeys
- ☐ anchorites
- ☐ novices

Of course, the question is calling for **myrmidons** and **lackeys**.

This approach can be very effective in cases where you know all of the words in the choices. However, since most test-takers don't have strong enough vocabularies to be able to complete the Answer Choice Analysis consistently, Sentence Analysis will probably be a first line of attack for many people, and Answer Choice Analysis a back-up plan.

**Drill: Answer Choice Analysis**

For each set of choices, match up the "pairs." Most, but not all, sets of choices consist of two pairs of near-synonyms and two other, unrelated words. A few will have one or three sets of near-synonyms.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. verbose<br>turbid<br>diffident<br>prolix<br>self-effacing<br>pious       | 7. eclecticism<br>aberrance<br>deviation<br>idiosyncrasy<br>adulation<br>eccentricity |
| 2. amicable<br>pithy<br>scholarly<br>arcane<br>succinct<br>esoteric         | 8. bevy<br>modicum<br>paucity<br>excess<br>surfeit<br>bunch                           |
| 3. distend<br>traduce<br>alienate<br>flatter<br>slander<br>complement       | 9. machicolation<br>epitome<br>scruple<br>apothegm<br>contumely<br>maxim              |
| 4. auxiliary<br>cardinal<br>principal<br>ordinal<br>collateral<br>prefatory | 10. pique<br>slake<br>quench<br>succor<br>fructify<br>stimulate                       |
| 5. hawkish<br>cogent<br>turgid<br>eloquent<br>bombastic<br>intelligible     |   |
| 6. pellucid<br>transparent<br>rustic<br>sedulous<br>assiduous<br>earthy     |   |

## Answers: Answer Choice Analysis

1. 2 pairs: **Verbose** and **prolix** are a pair, each meaning “talkative.” **Diffident** (lacking confidence) and **self-effacing** (putting oneself down) are a pair—they are not perfect synonyms, but they are close enough for SE questions on the GRE. **Pious** and **turbid** have no relationship.
2. 2 pairs: **Pithy** and **succinct** both mean “short and to the point.” **Arcane** and **esoteric** both mean “obscure or specialized, known to only a few” (of information). **Amicable** and **scholarly** are not related.
3. 1 pair: **Traduce** and **slander** are a pair, meaning “tell malicious lies about.” **Complement** and **flatter** are a TRAP—**complement** (to complete, to make up a whole with) is NOT the same word as “compliment” (to say something nice about). **Distend** and **alienate** are also unrelated.
4. 2 pairs: **Auxiliary** and **collateral** mean “secondary, off to the side.” **Cardinal** and **principal** (first, main) are actually synonyms with each other *and* antonyms with auxiliary and collateral. **Ordinal** and **prefatory** are not related.
5. 2 pairs: **Turgid** and **bombastic** are a pair. **Bombastic** means “pompous, overinflated” and is used to describe speech. While **turgid** can simply mean “swollen,” when it is applied to speech, it has the same meaning of “overinflated, showing off.” **Eloquent** and **cogent** are a weak pair—**eloquent** means beautiful and articulate (of speech), and **cogent** means compellingly persuasive. **Intelligible** and **hawkish** are not related.
6. 3 pairs: **Pellucid** and **transparent** are a pair (see-through), as are **rustic** and **earthy** (primitive, of the earth, undeveloped), and **assiduous** and **sedulous** (hardworking).
7. 2 pairs: **Aberrance** and **deviation** are a pair (being different from the normal). **Eclecticism**, **idiosyncrasy** and **eccentricity** may all seem similar. However, **idiosyncrasy** and **eccentricity** (harmless personal oddness) are a true pair. **Eclecticism** (having mixed, wide-ranging tastes) is somewhat different, and is also unrelated to **adulation**.
8. 2 or 3 pairs: **Bevy** and **bunch** are a pair, as are **surfeit** and **excess**. **Modicum** and **paucity** are questionable as a pair because they differ in spin—**modicum** means a little, and **paucity** means not enough.
9. 1 pair: **Apothegm** and **maxim** are a pair (proverb, pithy statement). **Machicolation**, **epitome**, **scruple**, and **contumely** are unrelated.
10. 2 pairs: **Pique** and **stimulate** are a pair. **Slake** and **quench** (satisfy, especially of thirst) are a pair. **Succor** (provide comfort or relief) might seem temptingly related the second pair, but one **succors** a person, and one **slakes** or **quenches** a desire. **Fructify** is unrelated.



## What If I Don't Know the Words?

It almost seems as though this new question type on the GRE was designed to prevent lucky guesses. On a typical standardized test multiple-choice question with choices A-E, a test taker has a  $1/5$  chance of randomly guessing the correct answer. On a Sentence Equivalence, a random guess of 2 out of the 6 answers has only a  $1/15$  chance of being correct.

If you know *one* of the correct choices and randomly guess on the other, your chance of getting the question correct is  $1/5$ .

Thus, it is very important that you assiduously augment your vocabulary, which is why so much of this book is dedicated to learning words.

That said, a little answer choice analysis can be helpful in making a good guess.

Most SE questions match the “two by two” format—that is, the answer choices contain two pairs of near-synonyms and two other “loose” words. Thus, if you can find a single pair of synonyms in the choices, there is about a  $1/2$  chance that that pair is correct (we say “about” one half, since not all sets of choices follow a “two by two” format). Here is an example:

- ☐ agog
- ☐ akimbo
- ☐ obeisant
- ☐ dyspeptic
- ☐ kowtowing
- ☐ crotchety

If you were able to pick out that **dyspeptic** and **crotchety** were a pair—or that **obeisant** and **kowtowing** were—then you should test that pair in the sentence and pick it if it seems to be a good match. (As will be the case in most questions, the two remaining words, **agog** and **akimbo**, have no relationship.)

If the pair that you are able to find is not a fit for the sentence, cross off both words. You now have a  $1/6$  chance of guessing correctly.

If you cannot find a synonym pair, you are unlikely to get the question correct. Accept that fact and don't waste time. Your strategy here is simply to make a guess and move on, conserving time for questions you will be able to answer later.

Although the new GRE allows you to move around within a section and come back to questions you previously left blank or wish to reconsider, keep in mind that, **if you don't know the words, you won't do any better by attempting the question twice**—you'll only waste time and lower your overall score.

If you don't know the words, **do not leave the question blank**. Make your best guess and move on. Don't waste time coming back—spend that extra time on Reading Comp or other vocabulary questions you are able to answer more effectively.

In sum: learn the words!

## Why It Is Important to Learn Words in Context

ETS tells us not only to check that the two answers we select for a question create sentences that mean the same thing, but also to make sure that each one “produces a sentence that is logically, grammatically, and stylistically coherent.”

Hmmn. Asking test takers to check that the completed sentences are “grammatically coherent” implies that some of the choices will create sentences that are not. Here’s an example:

Education advocates argued that the free school lunch program was vital to creating a school environment \_\_\_\_\_ to learning.

- ☐ conducive
- ☐ inimical
- ☐ substantial
- ☐ appropriate
- ☐ beneficial
- ☐ hostile

“Education advocates” are certainly in favor of learning; our fill-in might be something like *helpful*.

Looking at the choices, **conductive**, **appropriate**, and **beneficial** all seem to be matches.

However, if you replace each word into the sentence, one choice creates an incorrect idiom. “Conductive *to*” works, and “beneficial *to*,” but “appropriate to learning” is not a correct idiom—instead, we would say “appropriate *for* learning.”

Thus, it is important not only to memorize dictionary definitions of words, but also to be able to use those words in context, in a grammatically correct way.

Here’s another example:

He’s a \_\_\_\_\_ fellow, always grandstanding and deploying his formidable lexicon for oratorical effect.

- ☐ declamatory
- ☐ grandiloquent
- ☐ didactic
- ☐ florid
- ☐ titanic
- ☐ cabalistic

The target is “he” and the clue is “grandstanding and deploying his formidable lexicon for oratorical effect”—that is, he speaks in a pompous way, as though showing off his vocabulary for an audience.

The word **florid** seems appropriate—it means “flowery” and often applies to speech, as in “florid poetry.” But wait! **Florid** applies to writing, speech, decor, etc.—not the people who produce those things! (Actually, you can apply **florid** to people, but in that context it means “flushed, ruddy,” as in having rosy cheeks, which is not appropriate here.)

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The answer is **declamatory** and **grandiloquent**, both of which describe pompous orators (that is, people who make speeches) or the speech of such people.

Memorizing that *florid* means “flowery” is better than nothing, but doesn’t really tell you what kinds of things to describe with that word, or how to use it metaphorically. Once again, it is important to learn words in context.

There are several ways to do this. Manhattan GRE’s vocabulary flashcards provide example sentences for all 1,000 words. Many online dictionaries provide quotes from literature in which the word being defined is used in context. In some cases, it is fruitful to simply Google a word to see how different writers are using it. (Try the phrase “tired old canard” and see what beliefs other people think are false but just won’t go away.)

Whatever your process, you want to learn words as organically and surely as you know words like “enthusiastic” or “darkness”—for instance, you would have no trouble at all if “darkness” were used metaphorically (“While she at first resisted going on antidepressants, she ultimately decided that she would do anything that might lift the darkness”), or if “enthusiastic” were used sarcastically (“As enthusiastic as I am about unnecessary surgery, I will have to decline your offer to appear on an extreme makeover reality show”).

To perform excellently on the GRE, that’s how well you want to know your new words: inside and out. You want to be *flexible* in how you use and interpret those words. The “Learning Vocabulary” chapter of this book provides more guidance for formidably aggrandizing your lexicon.

## Drill: 20 Easy Questions

1. The children's story—seemingly a simple tale of animals gathering for a picnic in the forest—took a \_\_\_\_\_ turn at the end, admonishing readers to always be honest.
  - ☐ magnanimous
  - ☐ beneficent
  - ☐ didactic
  - ☐ garrulous
  - ☐ moralistic
  - ☐ futile
2. Floodwaters had already breached the library's walls, but hopeful volunteers in hip boots worked tirelessly to \_\_\_\_\_ the damage.
  - ☐ mitigate
  - ☐ exacerbate
  - ☐ abase
  - ☐ bolster
  - ☐ forestall
  - ☐ amalgamate
3. The candidate campaigned on a platform of across-the-aisle cooperation, but many commentators were surprised that he indeed turned out to be less \_\_\_\_\_ than his predecessor.
  - ☐ irate
  - ☐ divisive
  - ☐ impulsive
  - ☐ political
  - ☐ infuriated
  - ☐ combative
4. When Steven got angry about politics, whether it was during an argument with his family or with just a coworker, it proved almost impossible to \_\_\_\_\_ him.
  - ☐ condemn
  - ☐ pacify
  - ☐ judge
  - ☐ incense
  - ☐ mollify
  - ☐ influence
5. The graduate student's experiment yielded results as surprising as they were promising; her next step was to pursue additional data that would \_\_\_\_\_ her findings.
  - ☐ undergird
  - ☐ buttress
  - ☐ gainsay
  - ☐ undermine
  - ☐ eschew
  - ☐ expatiate

6. There is no fundamental difference between a person who quietly \_\_\_\_\_ a bigoted viewpoint to a friend and one who spews chauvinist vitriol on television.
- ☐ eschews
  - ☐ espouses
  - ☐ professes
  - ☐ denies
  - ☐ abnegates
  - ☐ arrogates
7. The \_\_\_\_\_ behind Rachel Carson's famous environmentalist manifesto *Silent Spring* was a 1957 lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding aerial pesticide spraying.
- ☐ stimulus
  - ☐ conspiracy
  - ☐ atrocity
  - ☐ impetus
  - ☐ catastrophe
  - ☐ climate
8. A commentator with a more \_\_\_\_\_ worldview would not find it so easy to divide up the nation into good guys and bad guys.
- ☐ belligerent
  - ☐ subtle
  - ☐ philosophical
  - ☐ aberrant
  - ☐ peaceful
  - ☐ nuanced
9. Joyce's "Finnegan's Wake," written in a stream of consciousness style full of convoluted puns and obscure allusions, has a deserved reputation for linguistic \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ elaborateness
  - ☐ opacity
  - ☐ meaninglessness
  - ☐ informality
  - ☐ uniqueness
  - ☐ density
10. The financial situation in many European nations is \_\_\_\_\_ enough that even a small incident could lead to catastrophe.
- ☐ calamitous
  - ☐ unstable
  - ☐ illegitimate
  - ☐ unsafe
  - ☐ precarious
  - ☐ cataclysmic

11. While the argument for global warning may not be \_\_\_\_\_ by the record low temperatures reported this year, this data does not undermine the overall trend of steadily higher global temperatures.
- ☐ buttressed
  - ☐ fortified
  - ☐ subverted
  - ☐ defined
  - ☐ supplanted
  - ☐ subordinated
12. Steve's debate teacher argued that pithy quips and gibes, while sometimes effective, had no place in a \_\_\_\_\_ argument.
- ☐ polite
  - ☐ shallow
  - ☐ competitive
  - ☐ serious
  - ☐ cantankerous
  - ☐ substantive
13. Last year it was discovered that South Park \_\_\_\_\_ part of its *Inception* spoof from a similar College Humor sketch.
- ☐ amalgamated
  - ☐ filched
  - ☐ indulged
  - ☐ combined
  - ☐ poached
  - ☐ assumed
14. Some critics view Abstract Expressionism, which is characterized by geometric shapes and swathes of color, as a \_\_\_\_\_ of realist painting.
- ☐ rejection
  - ☐ manifestation
  - ☐ refutation
  - ☐ interpretation
  - ☐ commemoration
  - ☐ elucidation
15. America's first spy, Nathan Hale, was captured by the British when he attempted to \_\_\_\_\_ British-controlled New York City to track enemy troop movements.
- ☐ thwart
  - ☐ penetrate
  - ☐ infiltrate
  - ☐ permeate
  - ☐ research
  - ☐ conquer



16. Romantic comedies of the 1950s were characterized more by sexual \_\_\_\_\_ than the straightforward vulgarity that characterizes dialogue in today's "rom-coms."
- ☐ conversation
  - ☐ blatancy
  - ☐ insinuation
  - ☐ illusion
  - ☐ innuendo
  - ☐ banter
17. Inflation isn't dead, only \_\_\_\_\_; as the economy turns around, the purchasing power of the dollar is likely to fall again.
- ☐ paralyzed
  - ☐ dormant
  - ☐ indigent
  - ☐ itinerant
  - ☐ problematic
  - ☐ latent
18. Some boxers talk about trying to access their more \_\_\_\_\_ selves in order to counter the fact that civilized people generally don't punch each other in the face.
- ☐ seething
  - ☐ barbaric
  - ☐ irate
  - ☐ insidious
  - ☐ dynamic
  - ☐ primitive
19. Many people assume that creative work is less \_\_\_\_\_ than manual labor, but they underestimate the difficulty of being entirely self-motivated (as well as writing one's own paychecks).
- ☐ inventive
  - ☐ collaborative
  - ☐ serious
  - ☐ arduous
  - ☐ taxing
  - ☐ grave
20. The education debate is only getting more \_\_\_\_\_ as politicians demonize teachers unions, and every special interest group jumps into the fray.
- ☐ vehement
  - ☐ overt
  - ☐ heated
  - ☐ problematic
  - ☐ tired
  - ☐ unavoidable

## Drill: 20 Medium Questions

1. While many individual religions insist on the primacy of their particular deity, syncretism advocates the \_\_\_\_\_ of multiple religious beliefs.
  - ☐ exclusion
  - ☐ marriage
  - ☐ commingling
  - ☐ division
  - ☐ commutation
  - ☐ partitioning
2. The ambassador was invested with \_\_\_\_\_ power by his government and hence was able to finalize the agreement personally.
  - ☐ tertiary
  - ☐ plenary
  - ☐ enigmatic
  - ☐ tyrannical
  - ☐ complete
  - ☐ dictatorial
3. Sometimes it seems that today's politicians will exploit any opportunity to \_\_\_\_\_ their views, no matter how sordid or partisan.
  - ☐ declaim
  - ☐ invoke
  - ☐ exclaim
  - ☐ parrot
  - ☐ adduce
  - ☐ trumpet
4. The many chapters of the organization decided that a mandatory national \_\_\_\_\_ would be necessary to reconcile what had become a haphazard and often chaotic set of bylaws and regulations.
  - ☐ introduction
  - ☐ conferment
  - ☐ intervention
  - ☐ colloquium
  - ☐ symposium
  - ☐ mediation

5. Though it seems implausible that one could be a great writer without some experience of life, many famous authors have led a \_\_\_\_\_ and solitary existence.
- ☐ idiosyncratic
  - ☐ cloistered
  - ☐ harbored
  - ☐ enigmatic
  - ☐ sheltered
  - ☐ cryptic
6. Though he wasn't particularly well-known as a humanitarian, his deep sense of responsibility for the suffering was real, and was only belied by an outward appearance of \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ concern
  - ☐ ambivalence
  - ☐ mirth
  - ☐ jouissance
  - ☐ insouciance
  - ☐ indifference
7. Excessive patriotism is by definition \_\_\_\_\_, as the apotheosizing of one country necessarily requires some amount of demonization of other people.
- ☐ minatory
  - ☐ xenophobic
  - ☐ unethical
  - ☐ bigoted
  - ☐ nationalistic
  - ☐ truculent
8. One possible explanation for the mandatory debauchery of most bachelor parties is that if the husband-to-be is able to practice \_\_\_\_\_ in those circumstances, he must be ready for marriage.
- ☐ continence
  - ☐ sobriety
  - ☐ fiat
  - ☐ tenacity
  - ☐ abstemiousness
  - ☐ autonomy
9. Jon Stewart's "Rally to Restore Sanity" was purportedly organized to prove that it was possible to discuss politics humorously but civilly, without \_\_\_\_\_ those on the other side of the fence.
- ☐ bespeaking
  - ☐ eulogizing
  - ☐ lampooning
  - ☐ calumniating
  - ☐ caricaturing
  - ☐ maligning

10. Though practiced, very few forms of corporal punishment have been \_\_\_\_\_ by the military, due less to the Geneva Conventions than to the overwhelmingly negative popular response to reports of abuse.
- ☐ recognized
  - ☐ sanctioned
  - ☐ endorsed
  - ☐ considered
  - ☐ rejected
  - ☐ polarized
11. The budget debate progressed well for the first few months (in spite of all the ardent and sometimes bitter squabbling), but slowly descended into a \_\_\_\_\_ of competing interests and claims.
- ☐ quagmire
  - ☐ tragedy
  - ☐ feud
  - ☐ morass
  - ☐ quarrel
  - ☐ conspiracy
12. The difference between similes and metaphors is subtle but, for the poet who takes his or work seriously, absolutely \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ synoptic
  - ☐ null
  - ☐ optional
  - ☐ crucial
  - ☐ nominal
  - ☐ climacteric
13. It is \_\_\_\_\_ reasoning to read Keynesian economics as recommending a perpetual raising of the debt ceiling, when Keynes states clearly that deficit spending must be done responsibly.
- ☐ indigenous
  - ☐ corrupt
  - ☐ fraudulent
  - ☐ fallacious
  - ☐ specious
  - ☐ deceitful
14. In many ways, teenage rebellion can be seen as the effect of a communication gap between an older generation's calcified language, and the protean \_\_\_\_\_ of the new generation.
- ☐ patois
  - ☐ defiance
  - ☐ volatility
  - ☐ insubordination
  - ☐ despondence
  - ☐ jargon

15. His cantankerous reputation was cemented by years of \_\_\_\_\_ at every conceivable opportunity.

- ☐ imputing
- ☐ grousing
- ☐ assaulting
- ☐ protesting
- ☐ convulsing
- ☐ imbibing

16. Last St. Patrick's Day, the police were called when they heard of a small \_\_\_\_\_ in progress outside of a bar.

- ☐ fracas
- ☐ discourse
- ☐ altercation
- ☐ battle
- ☐ colloquy
- ☐ mutiny

17. Given her sheltered upbringing and the limited breadth of experience foisted on her by economic circumstance, her work reflected a surprisingly \_\_\_\_\_ sensibility.

- ☐ shallow
- ☐ eclectic
- ☐ profound
- ☐ catholic
- ☐ callow
- ☐ facile

18. Many people expect documentary filmmakers to be dispassionate and objective, but Michael Moore is famous for the fact that he never misses a chance to \_\_\_\_\_ against those he disagrees with.

- ☐ rail
- ☐ advertise
- ☐ fulminate
- ☐ inveigle
- ☐ strain
- ☐ aspirate

19. The movie critic was best remembered for the way he used the language of food to describe films, like the way he praised Iñárritu's action sequences by comparing them to a \_\_\_\_\_ gazpacho.

- ☐ insipid
- ☐ spectacular
- ☐ brilliant
- ☐ piquant
- ☐ zesty
- ☐ stupefying

20. Every few years, someone manages to survive a skydive with a parachute that doesn't open, often with only a few broken bones, some \_\_\_\_\_, and a gash or two.

- ☐ lacerations
- ☐ trauma
- ☐ bruises
- ☐ scratches
- ☐ lesions
- ☐ contusions



## Drill: 20 Hard Questions

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1. As \_\_\_\_\_ from Japan, he was called upon to answer questions about the Japanese government's position on various issues.
  - ☐ a plenipotentiary
  - ☐ a tyro
  - ☐ a legate
  - ☐ an anchorite
  - ☐ an ascetic
  - ☐ a sybarite
  
2. While the group's street protests assumed an assertory, uncompromising tenor, once admitted to the halls of power to begin formal lobbying, the group's leadership wisely chose to \_\_\_\_\_ the stridency of their rhetoric.
  - ☐ metamorphose
  - ☐ gild
  - ☐ wane
  - ☐ palliate
  - ☐ succor
  - ☐ damp
  
3. The women's rights movement has been mostly \_\_\_\_\_ in the Middle East, but it is likely that activists will be newly galvanized by the political upheavals currently sweeping the region.
  - ☐ subverted
  - ☐ quiescent
  - ☐ interminable
  - ☐ bootless
  - ☐ abeyant
  - ☐ feckless
  
4. Debate rages on between proponents of corporal punishment and the death penalty and their detractors, though even the most rabid supporter agrees that punishments must be \_\_\_\_\_ and the justice system evenhanded and thorough.
  - ☐ meet
  - ☐ clement
  - ☐ delimited
  - ☐ condign
  - ☐ tantamount
  - ☐ merciful

5. Peer-reviewed journals are a sacred cow of most scientific rationalists, but studies have shown that the premise of impartiality is \_\_\_\_\_, as results tend to be colored by the personal proclivities and suppositions of the experimenters.
- ☐ imbecilic
  - ☐ prejudicial
  - ☐ fatuous
  - ☐ chimerical
  - ☐ notional
  - ☐ vexing
6. The description of the restaurant as a garden of \_\_\_\_\_ delights is fair enough, as Chef Marcel conjures up a menu of texture and taste that interrogates one's very notion of what constitutes a meal.
- ☐ salubrious
  - ☐ edacious
  - ☐ carnal
  - ☐ voluptuous
  - ☐ terrestrial
  - ☐ gustatory
7. Most of his books drone on and on for chapter after chapter, each one providing yet another example of his thesis, the \_\_\_\_\_ of which can be found in précis form in the tome's first few pages, and which is recapitulated from that point on.
- ☐ gist
  - ☐ pip
  - ☐ pith
  - ☐ stub
  - ☐ nimbus
  - ☐ nut
8. In order to ascertain the efficacy of the new GRE vis-à-vis the old one, it will be necessary not only to collect, but also to \_\_\_\_\_ detailed score reports from test takers from both groups, as only by studying the differences and similarities in results can proper inferences be drawn.
- ☐ aggregate
  - ☐ ratiocinate
  - ☐ collate
  - ☐ juxtapose
  - ☐ agglomerate
  - ☐ interpose

9. In World War I, trenches were dug so that the soldiers could avoid the near constant \_\_\_\_\_ from the other side of the line of battle, but not even a trench could protect a battalion from grenades or aerial bombardment.
- ☐ enfilades
  - ☐ provocations
  - ☐ fervency
  - ☐ imprecations
  - ☐ goadings
  - ☐ salvos
10. Cary Grant's reputation as a suave and \_\_\_\_\_ ladies man extended beyond the silver screen to his real life, where he was known to never let a woman pull out her own chair (this, of course, was well before the feminist revolution caused a difference in opinion about such behaviors).
- ☐ consummate
  - ☐ genteel
  - ☐ debonair
  - ☐ waggish
  - ☐ couth
  - ☐ cosmopolitan
11. Non-violent communication states that the attempt to find parity in a relationship is a fallacious principle, as any notion of fairness is entirely \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ subjective
  - ☐ introverted
  - ☐ pragmatic
  - ☐ utilitarian
  - ☐ illicit
  - ☐ personal
12. Education has become a kind of albatross in American politics, in that a speech with any hint of \_\_\_\_\_ is actually more pernicious to a politician's reputation than one with numerous signs of ignorance, or even outright stupidity.
- ☐ gnosticism
  - ☐ erudition
  - ☐ patrimony
  - ☐ condescension
  - ☐ cerebrality
  - ☐ bloviation

13. Laurent Cantet's *Time Out* tells the true story of a man so obsessed with retaining the \_\_\_\_\_ of plenitude even after he is discharged from his company that he doesn't even tell his wife and his kids about it.
- ☐ corollaries
  - ☐ paradigms
  - ☐ trappings
  - ☐ prepossessions
  - ☐ appurtenances
  - ☐ consequences
14. What people fail to remember about Don Juan is that his astronomical number of amatory adventures were due more to his \_\_\_\_\_ approach to seduction than any surfeit of charisma or skillfulness.
- ☐ sumptuous
  - ☐ pollarded
  - ☐ covert
  - ☐ indiscriminate
  - ☐ aleatory
  - ☐ sybaritic
15. Even the most far-reaching campaign finance reform proposals will fail to attenuate the influence of \_\_\_\_\_, which doesn't just buy speedboats and golf weekends in the Bahamas, but directly relates to a politician's capacity to run for office.
- ☐ lobbying
  - ☐ venality
  - ☐ tit-for-tat
  - ☐ graft
  - ☐ lucre
  - ☐ payola
16. In their landmark study of Victorian literature's relationship to feminism, Gilbert and Gubar \_\_\_\_\_ the many ways in which 19<sup>th</sup> century women writers created characters that fit into archetypes of "angel" and "monster."
- ☐ interrogate
  - ☐ interpolate
  - ☐ debunk
  - ☐ limn
  - ☐ explode
  - ☐ castigate

17. While it's inarguably racist to imply that there is some kind of inbuilt \_\_\_\_\_ in certain countries, it's more reasonable to say that certain cultures are more willing to prioritize relaxation and a sense of moderation between work and play.
- ☐ obtundity
  - ☐ enfeeblement
  - ☐ enervation
  - ☐ languor
  - ☐ effeteness
  - ☐ lethargy
18. Autodidacts may argue that the enforced lucubration of a standard education is \_\_\_\_\_, but while some people are able to learn without outside guidance and strictures, most people learn better when accountable to others.
- ☐ slack
  - ☐ prudent
  - ☐ lax
  - ☐ extraneous
  - ☐ unnecessary
  - ☐ sagacious
19. The best of Sigur Ros' music evokes \_\_\_\_\_ landscape, as if the music had transported one to some twilit avenue in a long since abandoned city.
- ☐ a caliginous
  - ☐ an urban
  - ☐ a crepuscular
  - ☐ a precipitous
  - ☐ an avuncular
  - ☐ a civic
20. Some historians argue that at least in so far as the broad strokes are concerned, cataclysmic events such as the Great Depression are \_\_\_\_\_, due to what some have termed "the inertia of history."
- ☐ ineluctable
  - ☐ incontrovertible
  - ☐ interminable
  - ☐ infallible
  - ☐ inexorable
  - ☐ unspeakable

## Answers: 20 Easy Questions

1. **Didactic, Moralistic.** The children's story was "seemingly" simple—which means it was not actually simple. Instead, the story took some kind of "turn"—meaning that it changed in some way—and "admonished readers to be honest." That is, it took a turn of *talking about morals* or *prescribing correct behavior*.

*Magnanimous* and *beneficent* are an incorrect pair. *Garrulous* and *futile* have no relationship.

2. **Mitigate, Forestall.** Floodwaters breaching a library's walls sound very bad—the water is already inside. The pivot "but" tells us that the sentence is going to change direction, and indeed, the volunteers are "hopeful," so we're looking for something good in the blank—although it doesn't seem like they're going to cure the problem entirely. A good fill-in would be something like *limit* or *hold back*.

*Exacerbate*, *abase*, *bolster*, and *amalgamate* do not contain any pairs.

3. **Divisive, Combative.** The most important word here is the pivot "indeed," which tells us that the candidate actually stayed true to his campaign promise. That means he acted cooperatively, which is contrasted with the actions of his predecessor. A good fill-in would be *uncooperative*.

*Irate* and *infuriate* are an incorrect pair. *Impulsive* and *political* have no relationship.

4. **Pacify, Mollify.** This short sentence has no pivots, so we're looking for a word that describes something you'd do to an angry person. Assuming you don't want to make them angrier (and why would you?), we're looking for something like *calm*.

*Condemn*, *judge*, *incense*, and *influence* do not contain any pairs, though *condemn* and *judge* are close.

5. **Undergird, Buttress.** The target is both the data and the findings—the blank contains what the data will do to the findings. We have the clue that the results were promising (but surprising, indicating some uncertainty about the apparent conclusion), and we have a same-direction pivot ("so"). Thus, her next step would likely be to *verify* or *corroborate* the findings.

*Gainsay* and *undermine* are a pair. *Eschew* and *expatiate* are unrelated.

6. **Espouses, Professes.** This sentence originally posits that there is "no fundamental difference" between two things, but the overall point is that the two things *do* look different on the surface. That means we want someone who does the opposite of "spewing chauvinist vitriol on television," such as someone who quietly *expresses* it. A good fill-in would be *communicates*.

*Denies* and *abnegates* are an incorrect pair. *Eschews* is also pretty close to that pair. *Arrogates* has no relationship to the others.

7. **Stimulus, Impetus.** To solve this, we need to consider what effect a lawsuit regarding aerial pesticide spraying would have on an environmentalist. Likely it would either inspire or outrage them. The former, however, makes more sense when we learn that the person in question wrote a book. A good fill-in would be *inspiration*.

*Atrocity* and *catastrophe* have similar spins, but they are not really a pair. *Climate* and *conspiracy* have no relationship.



8. **Subtle, Nuanced.** In this sentence, the commentator is described as finding it easy to split people into “good and bad.” This is a very simplistic way of looking at the world. Someone with a more *complex* worldview would be unlikely to break things down so simplistically.

*Belligerent, philosophical, aberrant, and peaceful* have no relationship.

9. **Opacity, Density.** Joyce’s book is described as “stream of consciousness,” with “convoluted puns and obscure allusions.” The adjectives “convoluted” and “obscure” are the most important part of this sentence. They tell us that the novel is likely hard to understand. A good fill-in would be “difficulty.”

*Elaborateness* could potentially work, but it has no pair. *Informality, meaninglessness, and uniqueness* have no relationship. While *meaninglessness* might seem tempting, it’s too extreme to be correct.

10. **Unstable, Precarious.** The situation in Europe is described as bad enough that even a small incident might lead to a total catastrophe. This means that everything is very close to disaster. We could fill in the blank with something like *shaky*.

*Calamitous* and *cataclysmic* are an incorrect pair. They describe how things might become, but not how they are now. *Illegitimate* and *unsafe* have no relationship.

11. **Buttressed, Fortified.** The second half of this sentence is not relevant to the blank. All we need to notice is the description “record low temperatures” and pivot “while.” Clearly, record low temperatures would not help an argument about global warming. A good fill-in would be *helped*.

*Subvert* and *subordinate* are an incorrect pair. *Defined* and *supplanted* have no relationship.

12. **Serious, Substantive.** The types of things Steve’s teacher doesn’t like are the key to this sentence. He’s arguing that “quips” (witty remarks) and “gibes” (taunts) don’t belong in a certain kind of argument. *Serious* and *substantive* is the only set that works.

*Polite* could work, but it has no pair. *Shallow, cantankerous, and competitive* have no relationship.

13. **Filched, Poached.** The most important word here is the adjective “similar.” If both South Park and College Humor created a similar spoof, then one of them must have *stolen* the sketch from the other.

*Amalgamated* and *combined* are an incorrect pair. *Indulged* and *assumed* have no relationship.

14. **Rejection, Refutation.** Abstract Expressionism is described as “characterized by geometric shapes and swathes of color.” Clearly this is very different from “realist painting.” A good fill-in would thus be something like *repudiation*.

*Interpretation* and *elucidation* are an incorrect pair. *Manifestation* and *commemoration* have no relationship.

15. **Penetrate, Infiltrate.** We are told that Nathan Hale was American, and that he was captured by the British. That means he must have been involved in some kind of espionage in “British-controlled” New York. A good fill-in would be *break into*.

*Thwart* and *conquer* are a near-pair, but not quite the same. *Permeate* and *research* have no relationship.

16. **Insinuation, Innuendo.** The pivot “more by X than Y” implies some kind of contrast between the two elements. The second element here is “straightforward vulgarity.” We want to contrast that with something. The adjective “sexual” may seem to confuse things; we need a word that will undercut it, such as *allusion*.

*Conversation* and *banter* are an incorrect pair. *Blatancy* and *illusion* have no relationship.

17. **Dormant, Latent.** Our blank is there to describe “inflation” (in a way that contrasts with being entirely “dead”). We’re told that in the future, the purchasing power of the dollar may fall, which means there will be inflation. So inflation may come back at any time. A good fill-in would be something like *dormant* (there aren’t a lot of simple words that get across this meaning).

*Paralyzed, indigent, itinerant, and problematic* have no relationship.

18. **Barbaric, Primitive.** Boxers are described as having to punch each other in the face, which isn’t “civilized.” In order to do this, they would need to access a part of themselves that was *not-so-civilized* (which will work well-enough as a fill-in here).

*Seething* and *irate* are an incorrect pair. *Insidious* and *dynamic* have no relationship.

19. **Arduous, Taxing.** This sentence describes creative work as having a particular difficulty, namely that one must be “self-motivated.” Some might contrast this with manual labor, but the author of the sentence wants to render them equivalent. Thus a good fill-in would be *difficult*.

*Serious* and *grave* are an incorrect pair. Never in the sentence is it discussed whether or not creative work is more serious than blue-collar work. *Inventive* and *collaborative* have no relationship.

20. **Vehement, Heated.** If politicians “demonize” teachers unions and other jump into the “fray,” the debate will get more and more *passionately angry*.

*Overt* and *unavoidable* are not quite a pair (*overt* means “done openly,” and *unavoidable* means “impossible to ignore”). *Problematic* and *tired* have no relationship.

## Answers: 20 Medium Questions

1. **Marriage, Commingling.** This sentence begins with the pivot “while,” before describing religions that insist on “the primacy of their particular deity.” “Syncretism” is then introduced as relating in some way to “multiple religious beliefs.” Because of the opening pivot, we know syncretism should be in favor of multiple religious beliefs. We could fill in something like *inclusion* or *mixture*.

*Division* and *partitioning* are an incorrect pair. *Commutation* and *exclusion* have no relationship.

2. **Plenary, Complete.** The target is the ambassador’s power. We have a same-direction pivot (“hence”), and the clue is that, due to this power, he “was able to finalize the agreement personally” (seems like a lot of power for a diplomat). A good fill-in would be something like *a lot of* or *total*.

*Tyrannical* and *dictatorial* are a pair. *Tertiary* and *enigmatic* are unrelated.

3. **Declaim, Trumpet.** The portion of this sentence after the comma is not actually relevant to the blank. All we need to determine is what most politicians do in regards to “their views.” Clearly, they like to *proclaim* or *announce* those views.

*Invoke* and *adduce* are an incorrect pair. *Parrot* and *exclaim* have no relationship.

4. **Colloquium, Symposium.** The sentence tells us that the organization has somehow acquired a “chaotic set of bylaws and regulations.” Thus it is likely that they will want to get everyone together in order to reconcile all these rules. A good fill-in would be *meeting*.

*Intervention* and *mediation* are an incorrect pair. *Introduction* and *conferment* have no relationship.

5. **Cloistered, Sheltered.** Our pivot word “though” tells us that we are going to contradict the first portion of this sentence, which says that writers ought to have “some experience of life.” Our blank should go against that notion, and because we already have “solitary,” a good fill-in word would be *protected*.

*Enigmatic* and *cryptic* are an incorrect pair. *Idiosyncratic* and *harbored* have no relationship.

6. **Insouciance, Indifference.** In this sentence, the key is the word “belie,” which functions as a kind of pivot. “Belie” means “to disguise or contradict,” suggesting a contrast to “his deep sense of responsibility.” A good fill in for our blank would be *not caring*.

*Mirth* and *jouissance* are an incorrect pair. *Concern* and *ambivalence* have no relationship. *Ambivalence* is wrong here because it means feeling equally strongly on both sides of an issue, as opposed to not caring either way.

7. **Xenophobic, Bigoted.** Our blank here is defined by the second half of the sentence. Patriotism represents the “apotheosizing (‘the elevation of something to divine status’) of one country. So our blank should be something that involves the “demonization of other people.” A good fill-in would be *prejudiced*.

*Minatory* and *truculent* are not quite a pair (the former means “threatening,” while the latter means “aggressively defiant”), and *unethical* and *nationalistic* have no relationship to each other. It is certainly true that excessive patriotism is *nationalistic*, but this word does not match the clue in the sentence.

8. **Continenence, Abstemiousness.** It's important to know the word "debauchery" (meaning "excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures") to solve this question. The sentence describes a husband who will *not* be engaging in debauchery at the bachelor party, so we need a word that describes someone who exhibits *self-control*.

*Fiat* and *autonomy* are an incorrect pair. *Sobriety* and *tenacity* have no relationship.

9. **Calumniating, Maligning.** The rally here is described as discussing politics "humorously but civilly," which is then contrasted with the next portion of the sentence. A good fill-in for the blank would be *abusing* or *badmouthing*.

*Lampooning* and *caricaturing* make an incorrect pair. Though they are close to the correct meaning for our blank, the sentence mentions that the rally was "humorous." This means that *lampooning* and *caricaturing*, both of which imply a kind of humorous teasing, would be plausible. *Bespeaking* and *eulogizing* have no relationship (and the latter is the opposite of what we want here).

10. **Sanctioned, Endorsed.** The second half of this sentence tells us that reports of corporal punishment receive an "overwhelmingly negative popular response." This means that the military would be unlikely to *authorize* these forms of abuse.

*Recognized*, *considered*, *rejected*, and *polarized* have no relationship.

11. **Quagmire, Morass.** The first part of the sentence, which describes how the budget debate "progressed well," is very important. If we didn't see that, we might be tempted to choose the wrong words here. However, because of the pivot "but," we want something that contrasts with something that progresses well. A good fill-in would be *mess* or *muddle*.

*Feud* and *quarrel* are an incorrect pair. While they correctly get across the negative spin we want for our blank, they don't address the idea of progressing badly, and we already learned that the debate was always prone to "squabbling." *Tragedy* and *conspiracy* have no relationship.

12. **Crucial, Climacteric.** This is a tough question, because the sentence gives us only "subtle" as a clue. Our blank should oppose it, but we don't want the opposite of "subtle" (which would be something like "obvious," which clearly doesn't make any sense here). Instead, we need to think about the exact meaning of the sentence. Most likely, the point is that the difference between similes and metaphors is *important*.

*Null* and *nominal* are an incorrect pair. *Synoptic* and *optional* have no relationship.

13. **Fallacious, Specious.** This sentence is thick with content, and it's important that you understand all of it. We are given two statements about economics. First, that Keynesian economics may or may not recommend a "perpetual raising of the debt ceiling." Then we are told definitively that Keynes says "deficit spending must be done responsibly." If the latter is true, then it is likely that he would *not* have recommended the former statement. So our blank should say something like *incorrect*.

*Fraudulent* and *deceitful* are a pair (or a near-pair), but the sentence does not imply that the argument about Keynesian economics is purposely misleading, only wrong. *Indigenous* and *corrupt* have no relationship.

14. **Patois, Jargon.** This sentence is describing rebellion as the effect of a communication gap, which we will need to make concrete with the blank. Something “protean” (meaning “tending to change frequently or easily”) is being compared to the “older generation’s calcified language.” Actually, the best fill-in for our blank is simply *language*.

*Defiance* and *insubordination* are an incorrect pair. *Despondence* and *volatility* have no relationship.

15. **Grousing, Protesting.** “Cantankerous” means “bad-tempered and argumentative.” Because there is no pivot here, we simply need a word that means those things. A good fill-in for the blank would be *arguing* or *complaining*.

*Imputing*, *assaulting*, *convulsing*, and *imbibing* have no relationship.

16. **Fracas, Altercation.** In this sentence, we need to figure out what kind of thing would result in the police being called—likely, some kind of *fight*.

*Discourse* and *colloquy* are an incorrect pair. *Battle* may be close to what we want, but relates to a larger event than a bar fight. *Mutiny* is not related to the others.

17. **Eclectic, Catholic.** In this sentence, the word “surprisingly” is functioning as a pivot, disagreeing with the portion before the comma. There, we learn that the woman in question had a “sheltered upbringing” and a “limited breadth of experience.” Our blank should be the opposite of that. A good fill-in would be *wide-ranging*.

*Shallow* and *facile* are an incorrect pair. *Profound* has the right spin, but it isn’t the opposite of “limited” or “sheltered.” It has no relationship with *callow*.

18. **Rail, Fulminate.** The word “but” acts as a pivot here, taking us in the opposite direction of the adjectives initially used to define documentary filmmakers: “dispassionate” and “objective.” A good fill-in would be *speak out*.

*Advertise*, *inveigle*, *strain*, and *aspire* have no relationship. Note that *inveigle* is NOT the same as *inveigh* (which does not appear as a choice but would have been a suitable correct answer—the GRE sometimes plays on commonly confused words).

19. **Piquant, Zesty.** There are two important portions of this sentence to focus on. First, the word “praised,” implying that the critic’s review will be positive. The second part is the way he’s described as using “the language of food to describe films.” So we want two words that are positive and that could also be used to describe food.

*Spectacular* and *stupefying* are an incorrect pair. They are both positive, but they aren’t generally used to describe food. *Insipid* and *brilliant* have no relationship.

20. **Bruises, Contusions.** In this sentence, a short list of possible injuries after a skydiving accident is described. Two of the items are “broken bones” and “a gash,” which means our blank should be an injury different than those two. A good fill-in would be *bruises*.

*Lacerations* and *scratches* are an incorrect pair. They’re wrong because both are synonyms of *gash*, which was already mentioned in our list. *Trauma* and *lesions* have no relationship (other than both being types of injuries).

## Answers: 20 Hard Questions

1. **Plenipotentiary, Legate.** The target is “he.” We know that he is “from Japan” and “called upon to answer questions about the Japanese government’s position.” A good fill-in would be something like *representative* or *ambassador*.

*Tyro*, *anchorite*, *sybarite*, and *ascetic* do not contain any pairs (*sybarite* and *ascetic* are actually antonyms).

2. **Palliate, Damp.** The target is both the leadership and the “stridency of their rhetoric”—we need the relationship between those two things. “While” is an opposite-side pivot. In the first part of the sentence, the protests are “uncompromising.” Thus, in the second part, they should be softer, more on the side of compromising. Since “stridency” means harshness and is on the same side as “uncompromising,” the group thus chose to *reduce* or *tone down* the stridency.

*Metamorphose*, *gild*, *wane*, and *succor* do not contain any pairs. *Wane* means “decrease” and is an attractive trap answer. However, *wane* is an intransitive verb—that is, something (such as the moon) *wanes* on its own; you can’t *wane* an object. Therefore, the word does not fit in this sentence.

3. **Quiescent, Abeyant.** The clue here is that activists will “be newly galvanized.” Because of the pivot “but,” this means we need a blank that means the opposite of “galvanized.” A good fill-in word would be *dormant* (implying that the movement is quiet but could rise again).

*Bootless* and *feckless* are an incorrect pair, both meaning “ineffective.” Though this has the correct kind of spin for our blank, it doesn’t correctly contrast with the idea of something being “galvanized.” *Subverted* and *interminable* have no relationship.

4. **Meet, Condign.** The first half of this sentence sets up the topic, but the important information is in the second half. There, we’re told about the “most rabid supporter [of corporal punishment].” Typically, we would expect this to be a pro-corporal punishment argument. However, the pivot “though” sets up that we’re describing the more compromising aspects of that particular philosophy. A good fill-in for our blank would be *deserved* or *fair*.

*Clement* and *merciful* are an incorrect pair. They both go against the feel of what we want in the blank. *Delimited* and *tantamount* are not related.

5. **Chimerical, Notional.** The portion of this sentence after the blank tells us that “results tend to be colored by personal proclivities and suppositions.” This provides an explanation of the blank, which in turn is trying to tell us something about “impartiality.” That last portion describes something the exact opposite of “impartial,” so a good fill-in for our blank would be *wrong* or *nonexistent*.

*Imbecilic* and *fatuous* are an incorrect pair, both meaning “stupid.” While the “premise of impartiality” may not in fact exist, that doesn’t make it stupid. *Prejudicial* and *vexing* have no relationship.

6. **Edacious, Gustatory.** Everything in this sentence relates to food, whether it’s the “texture and taste” or the “notion of what constitutes a meal.” This means we need a word that relates to food. A good fill-in would be *culinary*.

*Carnal* and *voluptuous* are an incorrect pair, relating to sensual delights rather than those merely relating to food. *Salubrious* and *terrestrial* have no relationship.

7. **Gist, Pith.** The verb “drone” has a very specific meaning, implying that someone is going on at length in a dull or boring way. The implication is that the point could be made more efficiently. This sentence then tells us that a *précis* (summary) can be found in the tome’s first few pages. This *précis* is really the book’s *essence* or *thrust*, which is the kind of word we want for the blank.

*Pip, stub, nimbus*, and *nut* have no relationship.

8. **Collate, Juxtapose.** The final portion of this sentence describes “studying the differences and similarities” between two different things. This implies we’ll be doing some sort of comparison, so a good fill-in word would be *compare*.

*Aggregate* and *agglomerate* are an incorrect pair. While putting all the data together is required in order to make a comparison, the sentence already said “not only to collect...” Both words in this pair are just fancy versions of “collect,” which we don’t need to repeat. *Ratiocinate* and *interpose* have no relationship.

9. **Enfilades, Salvos.** The second half of this sentence doesn’t tell us anything interesting. In fact, everything we need to know comes from the few words before the blank: “trenches were dug so that soldiers could avoid...” What would you avoid in a trench? *Bullets*, more or less (or *barrages*, if you wanted to get a little fancier).

*Provocations* and *goadings* are an incorrect pair. *Fervency* and *imprecations* have no relationship.

10. **Genteel, Couth.** Near the beginning of the sentence, Cary Grant is described as *suave*, meaning “confident and elegant.” Our blank should not mean the exact same thing, or it would be redundant. Instead, we want a word that is best exemplified by someone who always pulls out a woman’s chair, such as *well-mannered*.

*Cosmopolitan* and *debonair* are an incorrect pair. These words mean “stylish” and “confident,” but they don’t necessarily imply good manners. *Consummate* and *waggish* have no relationship.

11. **Subjective, Personal.** The sentence states that the attempt to find *parity*, or fairness, is *fallacious*, or logically incorrect. How could fairness be illogical? Only if it isn’t real or objectively determinable. A good fill-in would be *prejudiced* or *based on feelings*.

*Pragmatic* and *utilitarian* are a near-pair. *Introverted* and *illicit* are not related.

12. **Erudition, Cerebrality.** This sentence compares the blank with speeches that feature “ignorance” and “stupidity.” We also want something that relates to “education.” A good fill-in would be *knowledge*, which is the result of education.

*Condescension* and *bloviation* are an incorrect pair. While they’re close to the correct meaning, they carry too much negativity. *Gnosticism* and *patrimony* have no relationship.

13. **Trappings, Appurtenances.** In this sentence, we’re told about a man who has been fired and doesn’t tell his wife and kids. This somehow relates to “plenitude,” which is “the condition of being full or complete.” Clearly, if you get fired and don’t tell your family, it’s because you want to pretend that you’re still okay. A good fill-in word would be *appearance*.

*Corollaries* and *consequences* are an incorrect pair. *Paradigms* and *prepossessions* have no relationship.

14. **Indiscriminate, Aleatory.** The sentence tells us that Don Juan had “an astronomical number of amatory adventures,” but that it was not because he had a “surfeit of charisma or skillfulness.” What might explain this discrepancy? Perhaps if Don Juan weren’t particularly choosy. A good fill-in for the blank would be *not choosy*.

*Sumptuous* and *sybaritic* are an incorrect pair. While they both describe someone like Don Juan, they don’t explain how he had so many lovers. *Pollarded* and *covert* have no relationship.

15. **Graft, Payola.** This sentence describes something that buys “speedboats and golf weekends” and “relates to a politician’s capacity to run for office.” It sounds like we’re looking for a word like *money*, but with the implication that the money is not earned or deserved.

*Lobbying*, *venality*, *tit-for-tat*, and *lucre* have no relationship. While *lucre* also means money, it has no negative connotations, unlike our correct choices here.

16. **Interrogate, Limn.** There are no pivots in this sentence, so we simply need a word that fits the description of a book that explores the “many ways in which 19<sup>th</sup> century women writers...” In other words, we can just fill in the blank with *explore*. Note that *interrogate* is being used in an unusual manner here (to explore deeply, just as an *interrogation* of a suspect is an attempt to pry deeply into the truth of a crime).

*Debunk* and *explode* are an incorrect pair. *Interpolate* and *castigate* have no relationship. *Castigate* almost fits into a triple with the incorrect pair, but it’s more of a criticism than an attempt to disprove something.

17. **Languor, Lethargy.** This sentence creates a contrast with the pivot “while” between a positive and negative view of the same fact. The positive view is that certain cultures prioritize “relaxation” and “moderation between work and play.” The negative view of this would be something akin to *laziness*.

*Enfeeblement* and *enervation* are an incorrect pair. Though they are close to what we want, they imply a forceful taking away of energy, which is not the same as simply being lazy or tired. *Obtundity* and *effeteness* have no relationship.

18. **Extraneous, Unnecessary.** Autodidacts (“those who teach themselves”) would argue against “enforced” lucubration (study) and “standard” education. A good fill-in might simply be *unnecessary*.

*Slack* and *lax* are an incorrect pair. *Prudent* and *sagacious* are an incorrect pair.

19. **Caliginous, Crepuscular.** The only clue in this sentence comes in the second half, a “twilit avenue in a long since abandoned city.” So we want a word that implies “twilit” and “abandoned,” such as *dark*.

*Urban* and *municipal* are something of a pair here. Though they both reflect the sentence’s reference to a “city,” they fail to correctly reference either “twilit” or “abandoned,” which are really the most descriptive terms in the original sentence. *Precipitous* and *avuncular* have no relationship.

20. **Ineluctable, Inexorable.** The key phrase here is “the inertia of history.” *Inertia* is “resistance to change,” so this phrase must mean that history is on track and can’t deviate from that track. So our blank here should be something like *unchangeable*.

*Incontrovertible*, *interminable*, *infallible*, and *unspeakable* have no relationship.