[**GRE Vocab List: Religious Words**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2012/gre-vocab-list-religious-words/)



It’s not Sunday – but it is church day, at least as far as vocabulary is concerned. Below are words relating to the church or religion. A few of the words – such a cardinal – have a secondary definition that, while derived from the original church-based definition, is different enough from the original to warrant attention.

It is of course the second definition that we are more concerned with on the GRE.

**Cardinal**

When it comes time to elect the pope who gets together? The cardinals, of course. And when you’re watching baseball in St. Louis, and the players all of red birds on their uniforms, which team are you seeing? The cardinals, of course. And when you are on the GRE and you see the word cardinal? Well it has nothing to do with birds, baseball or popes.

Cardinal means of primary importance, fundamental. That makes sense when you think of the cardinals in the church – after all they do elect the pope. The bird happens to be the same color as the cardinals’ robes and St. Louis…I have no clue.

As if you needed any more associations – the expression, “cardinal sin”, retains the GRE definition of the word, and means primary. It does not refer to naughty churchmen.

**Syncretic**

This is a difficult word, and not one that would go on any top 1000 words you have to know for the GRE. But for those with a robust vocabulary, pay heed: if a I concoct a new religion and decide to take bits and pieces from other religions (I don a cardinal’s robe, shave my head a la Buddha, and disseminate glossy pamphlets about the coming apocalypse) then I have created a syncretic religion: one that combines elements of different religions.

You can probably see where this is going with the GRE definition – which tends to offer a little more latitude. Syncretic – more generally speaking – can refer to any amalgam of different schools of thought.

*Jerry the shrink takes a syncretic approach to psychotherapy – he mixes the Gestalt school with some Jung and a healthy (or unhealthy) dose of Freud.*

**Ecclesiastical**

This one is easy. It means of or relating to the church. Out of all the words in the list, ecclesiastical is the only one that hasn’t taken on a more broad – or completely unexpected – definition. Speaking of unexpected, look at the word below…

**Parochial**

This word comes from parish, a small ecclesiastical district, usually located in the country. The word still has this meaning, i.e. relating to a church parish, but we are far more concerned with the negative connotation that has emerged from the rather sedate original version.

To be parochial is to be narrow-minded in one’s view. The idea is if you are hanging out in the country, you tend to be a little cut off from things. The pejorative form– at least to my knowledge – is not a knock at religion.

**Catholic**

We have many associations with Catholicism – from cardinals to mass, to nuns wielding crucifixes at frothing demons. Thus, it is somewhat surprising that a second definition of catholic – the GRE definition – is universal.

Or not, considering that Catholicism has a universal reach and, more importantly,the Catholic Church conducts mass in Latin. Catholic comes from the Late Latin *catholicus*, which means, as you can probably guess, universal.

**Anathema**

A few hundreds years ago, many ran afoul of the church, and excommunications (and worse) were typical reprisals. If such was the case, the Pope actually uttered a formal curse against a person. This curse was called the anathema.

Today this word, in addition to a broader scope, has taken a twist. If something is anathema (n.), he, she, or it is the source of somebody’s hate.

The verb form of the word, anathematize, still carries the old meaning of to curse.

Anathema through the ages: *Galileo was anathema to the church; Rush Limbaugh is anathema to those on the Left.*

**Desecrate**

If a person willfully violates or destroys any sacred place, he (or she) is said to desecrate it. Tombs, graves, churches, shrines and the like can all be victims of desecrations. One, however, cannot desecrate a person, regardless of how holy that person may be.

*The felon had desecrated the holy site, and was on the church’s Top 10 Anathema List.*

**Apostasy**

Some believers turn against their faith and renounce it. We call this act apostasy, and those who commit it, apostates. Today the word carries a slightly broader connotation in that it can apply to politics as well.

*An apostate of the Republican Party, Sheldon has yet to become affiliated with any part but dubs himself a “literal independent.”*

**Sanctimonious**

This is a tricky word, and thus you can bet its one of GRE’s favorite. Sanctimonious does not mean filled with sanctity or holiness. Instead it refers to that quality that can overcome someone who feels that they are holier (read: morally superior) to everybody else.

Colloquially, we hear the term holier-than-thou. That is a very apt way to describe the attitude of a sanctimonious person.

*Even during the quiet sanctity of evening prayer, she held her chin high, a sanctimonious sneer forming on her face.*

**Iconoclast**

This is an interesting word. The definition that relates to the church is clearly negative, i.e. an iconoclast is one who destroys religious images. Basically, this definition applies to the deranged drunk who goes around desecrating icons of the Virgin Mary.

The applicability of this definition to GRE is clearly suspect. The second definition however happens to be one of the GRE’s top 100 words. An iconoclast—more broadly speaking—is somebody who attacks cherished beliefs or institutions. This use of the word is not necessarily negative:

*According to some scholars, art during the 19th century had stagnated into works aimed to please fusty Art Academies – it took the iconoclasm of Vincent Van Gogh to inject fresh life into the effete world of painting.*

[**Tricky GRE Words**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2012/tricky-gre-words/)

The following [GRE vocabulary words](http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-vocabulary/) all have common definitions, but they’re tricky because they also have some not-so-common definitions. The Revised GRE cares about the latter, of course. Make sure you know the second definition of these words. Better yet, feel free to pepper (second definition) your conversation with these words.

**Stem**

To stem means to hold back or limit the flow or growth of something. You can stem bleeding, you stem the tide (or at least attempt to). Do not stem the flow of vocabulary coursing through your brains. Make sure to use these words whenever you can.

*To stem the tide of applications, the prestigious Ivy requires that each applicant score at least 330 on the revised GRE.*

**Blinkered**

If you blink a lot you are likely to miss something. Indeed your view would be very limited. Extending this meaning, we get the definition of blinkered: means to have a limited outlook or understanding.

*In gambling, the addict is easily blinkered by past successes and/or past failures, forgetting that the outcome of any one game is independent of the games that preceded it.*

**Check**

To check something is to stop its growth (similar to stem but with more of a focus on growth than flow). If something is left unchecked, then it grows freely.

*Deserted for six months, the property began to look more like a jungle and less like a residence –weeds grew unchecked in the front yard.*

**Checkered**

The meaning of checkered is completely unrelated to the meaning of check above– very tricky, so be sure to know the difference between the two. A checkered past is one that is marked by disreputable happenings.

*One by one, the presidential candidates dropped out of the race, their respective checkered pasts – from embezzlement to infidelity – sabotaging their campaigns.*

**Raft**

A raft is an inflatable boat. It can also mean a large number of something. I know – it doesn’t really make much sense. But a good mnemonic – imagine a large number of rafts and you have a raft of rafts.

*Despite a raft of city ordinances passed by an overzealous council, noise pollution continued unabated in the megalopolis.*

[**Vocabulary Double Meanings**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/vocabulary-double-meanings/)



As this past week was [vocabulary](http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-vocabulary-resources/), I would be remiss in not including a vocabulary word post. But, instead of a random list, I want to touch on a very important class of words – double meanings based on common words. While words like penurious and austere have double meanings, these words are already vocabulary words in themselves. Most of the time, when the GRE tests double meanings, it takes common words that have a secondary, or what I like to call hidden, definition.

**Involved**

We are involved in many things, from studying to socializing. For something to be involved, in terms of the GRE definition, means it is complicated, and difficult to comprehend.

*The physics lecture became so involved that the undergraduate’s eyes glazed over.*

**Retiring**

Sure, many dream of the day when they can be retiring (preferably to some palatial estate with a beachfront view). The second definition does not necessarily apply to most. To be retiring is to be shy, and have the inclination to retract from company.

*Nelson always was the first to leave soirees – rather than mill about with “fashionable” folk, he was retiring, and preferred the solitude of his garret.*

**Expansive**

Yes, expansive means expansive. It also means communicative, and prone to talking in a sociable manner.

*After a few sips of cognac, the octogenarian shed his irascible demeanor and became expansive, speaking fondly of the “good old days”.*

**Moment**

A moment is a point in time. We all know that definition. If something is of moment, it is significant and important (think of the word momentous).

*Despite the initial hullabaloo, the play was of no great moment in Hampton’s writing career, and, within a few years, the public quickly forgot his foray into theater arts.*

**Base**

When the definition of this word came into existence, there were some obvious biases against the lower classes (assuming that lexicographers were not lower class). It was assumed that those from the base, or the lowest, class were without any moral principles. They were contemptible and ignoble. Hence, we have this second definition of base (the word has since dropped any connotations of lower class).

*She was not so base as to begrudge the mendicant the unwanted crumbs from her dinner plate.*

***Takeaways***

***When reading, always be sure to look up common words if you think they are being employed differently. Many words have multiple definitions that are totally unrelated to the common meaning.***

[**GRE Vocabulary: Secondary Meanings**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/gre-vocabulary-secondary-meanings/)



Secondary meanings have long been the bête noire of anyone who has seriously prepped for the GRE. With the Revised GRE afoot, secondary meanings are still a part of the lexical landscape. Over the next month, I will be writing several posts dealing with these tricky words.

Today, I’m going to touch on a specific type of secondary meaning: the figurative. That is, some words have both literal and figurative meanings. For example, a deluge, literally, is a flood – something many of us experienced directly over the weekend. Used figuratively, deluge can imply anything that is in great numbers. For instance, Hurricane Irene caused a deluge of reports regarding her projected path.

For the Revised GRE, you should be more concerned with the figurative meaning of words.  Below are five such words – be sure to add them to your [vocabulary arsenal](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/gre-vocabulary-build-your-vocabulary-arsenal/).

**Imbibe**

Literally, to imbibe is to drink, usually copiously. Figuratively, imbibe can refer to an intake of knowledge or information.

*The professor was a font of erudition, and we imbibed his wisdom.*

*Plato imbibed Socrates’ teachings to such an extent that he was able to write volumes of work that he directly attributed, sometimes word for word, to Socrates.*

**Inundate**

Speaking of floods, inundate is a synonym for deluge. Figuratively, to be inundated means to be overwhelmed by too many people or things.

*Once inundated with 5,000 vocabulary words, GRE students now have to contend with somewhat fewer words.*

*The newsroom was inundated with false reports that only made it more difficult for the newscasters to provide an objective account of the bank robbery.*

**Scintillating**

If something gives off sparks, such as when photons collide, it is said to scintillate. Figuratively, scintillating describes someone who is brilliant and lively.

*Richard Feynman was renowned for his scintillating lectures—the arcana of quantum physics was made lucid as he wrote animatedly on the chalkboard.*

**Benighted**

If the sky darkens, and becomes night, it is, unsurprisingly, benighted. However, if a people are benighted (this word is usually reserved for the collective), that group falls in a state of ignorance.

*Far from being a period of utter benightedness, The Medieval Ages produced some inestimable works of theological speculation.*

**Galvanize**

Need to strengthen steel by giving it a final coat? Or, perhaps you want to get an an indolent rodent moving with an electric shock? Well, in both cases, you would literally be galvanizing. Figuratively, to galvanize is to excite to action or spur on.

*At mile 23 of his first marathon, Kyle had all but given up, until he noticed his friends and family holding a banner that read, “Go Kyle”; galvanized, he broke into a gallop, finishing the last three miles in less than 20 minutes.*

[**GRE Vocabulary List: Words with Multiple Meanings**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/gre-vocabulary-list-words-with-multiple-meanings/)



[GRE vocabulary](http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-vocabulary-resources/) can be tricky, because many words have double meanings. But, there are some words that have triple, or even quadruple, meanings.

In honor of the Greek god Proteus, known for his ability to change shape at will (and who bequeathed us the GRE word protean), I will call these multiple definition words Proteus words (technically, they are known as polysemous words).

**Hedge**

If you are really into horticulture—which is a fancy word for gardening—you’ll known hedges are shrubs, or small bushes that have been neatly trimmed. If you know your finance, then you’ve probably heard of hedge funds (where brokers make their money betting against the market). Hedge can also be used in a verb sense. If you hedge your bets, you play safely. If you hedge a statement, you limit or qualify that statement. Finally, hedge can also mean to avoid making a direct statement, as in equivocating.

**Flush**

What word means to turn red (especially in the face), to send down the toilet, to be in abundance, and to drive out of hiding? Yep, it’s flush, which has all four of these totally unrelated definitions.

**Fell**

Imagine an evil person who cuts down trees, and then falls himself. Well, that image is capturing three different definitions of fell—to cut down a tree, the past tense of fall (we all know that) and evil. Yes, I know, fell can’t possibly mean evil…but the English language is a wacky one. Fell indeed means terribly evil. Sort of like these Proteus words.

**Arch**

You have arches in architecture, or at a well-known fast-food restaurant. You can arch your back, or a bow. Arches are even a part of your foot. But, did you know that to be arch is to be deliberately teasing, as in, *he shrugged off her insults because he knew she was only being arch?* Finally, arch- as a root means chief or principal, as in archbishop.

**Beg**

Commonly, when we think of begging, we think of money, or a favor. But, one can also beg a question, and that’s where things start to get complicated. To beg a question can mean to evade a question, invite an obvious question, or, and this is where it starts to get really tricky, to ask a question that in itself makes unwarranted assumptions.

For instance, let’s say you are not really sure if you are going to take the GRE. If somebody asks you when you are going to take the GRE, thenthatperson is assuming you are going to take the GRE. That is, they are begging the question. If you avoid giving a direct answer, then you are also begging the question (albeit in a different sense). Which finally begs the question, how did this whole question begging business get so complicated in the first place?

At this point, you may very well not want to take the GRE. But be reassured—there won’t be too many Proteus words on the test. For the most part, you’ll mainly see secondary and primary definitions. And, if you end up seeing a string of polysemous words, you can exclaim to yourself archly, *what a fell test this is!* Just don’t flush your score report down the toilet.

[**Secondary Meanings Vocabulary List: 10 Words You Must Know for the GRE**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/secondary-meanings-vocabulary-list-10-words-you-must-know-for-the-gre/)



In a recent post, I mentioned the [importance of identifying part of speech](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/double-trouble-double-meanings/) on a verbal question. Doing so will help you determine whether the question is testing the secondary meaning of any of the words.

Now it’s time to talk about some of the most common secondary meanings in [GRE vocabulary](http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-vocabulary-resources/).

**1. Tender**

Tender is a verb, and it does not mean to behave tenderly. When you tender, something you offer it up. For instance, when you tender your resignation, you hand in a piece of paper saying that you are resigning.

**2. Intimate**

Just as tender doesn’t relate to two people in love, neither does intimate, at least on the GRE. The secondary meaning for intimate is to suggest something subtly.

**3. Wanting**

Wanting means lacking. So, if your knowledge of secondary meanings is wanting, this post is a perfect place to start learning.

**4. Becoming**

Another secondary meaning that changes parts of speech, becoming an adjective. If something is becoming, it matches nicely.

*Her dress was becoming and made her look even more beautiful.*

**5. Start**

The secondary meaning for start is somewhat similar to the common meaning. To start is to suddenly move or dart in a particular direction.

**6. Fleece**

If you are thinking Mary Had a Little Lamb (…*fleece as white as snow*), you have been fleeced by a secondary meaning. To fleece is to deceive.

**7. Telling**

If something is telling, it is significant and stands out.

*Her unbecoming dress was very telling when it came to her sense of fashion.*

**8. Wax**

Melting wax will only lead you astray. The secondary meaning for wax is to increase. The opposite of wax is to wane.

**9. Check**

To check is to limit, and is usually used to modify the growth of something.

*When government abuses are not kept in check, a ruling body is likely to become autocratic.*

**10. Qualify**

This is perhaps the most commonly confused secondary meaning and the one that is most important to learn for the GRE. To qualify is to limit, and is usually used in the context of a statement or an opinion.

*I love San Francisco.*

*I love San Francisco, but it is always windy.*

The first statement shows my unqualified love for San Francisco. In the second statement I qualify, or limit, my love for San Francisco.

In the context of the GRE, the concept of qualification is usually found in the reading comprehension passage. For example, an author usually expresses qualified approval or some qualified opinion in the passage. As you may have noticed, the authors of reading comprehension passages never feel 100% about something. They always think in a nuanced fashion. Therefore, they are unlikely to be gung-ho or downright contemptuous. That is, they qualify, or limit, their praise/approval/disapproval.

[**GRE Vocabulary List: Double Trouble Secondary Meanings**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/gre-vocabulary-list-double-trouble-double-meanings/)



What do the following words have in common?

Essay, Flag, List, Appropriate

The answer: they are verbs.

I should also add that each word has another meaning very different from the usual meaning. In this case, that secondary definition happens to be a verb.

**So, Uh, Which Definition Are They Testing…**

For each question, whether antonyms, analogies, or sentence completions, the answer choice will always have the same parts of speech, and that part of speech will match the word(s) in the question.

Take a look at the following example:

ESSAY

(A)  to not attempt

(B)  informally declare

(C)  to trifle with

(D) deceive unjustly

(E)  discuss openly

Notice that each of the answer choices is a verb. Therefore, essay must be a verb. Because we are dealing with the GRE, a notoriously tricky exam, you can bet that the verb form of essay will not mean to write an essay. The secondary definition of the word essay is to attempt. The opposite is (A). Note the trap answer (B). Often with double meanings, [GRE vocabulary](http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-vocabulary-resources/) will try to trap you by putting an opposite that reminds you have the common meaning of a word. For example, when we think of an essay, we think of a formal piece of writing.

As for the secondary meaning of the other words:

**Flag** – to lessen in intensity

This word usually modifies interest, attention, energy, etc.

*His attention flagged on the last section of the GRE.*

**List** – to tilt over. (e.g. The tree listed in the wind.)

**Appropriate** – 1. To take by force.  2. To allocate.

You’ll notice that appropriate not only has one secondary meaning that is a verb, but it also has another definition. If you are really observant you’ll notice that these two definitions are in opposite, i.e. to take something is the opposite of allocating it. A word that has these two definitions that are in opposite to each other is known as a contranym or a Janus word.

Like confusing words, secondary meanings are likely to pop up on the exam. So, the takeaway is, if you are going to ace the GRE make sure to know your secondary meanings.

**[Reprove – A Very Tricky GRE Vocabulary Word](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/reprove-%e2%80%93-a-very-tricky-gre-vocabulary-word/)**



Surely, reprove must mean to prove again?

You may, of course, remember that [adding re- as a prefix](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/beware-re-doesnt-always-mean-again/) doesn’t always mean to do again. Reprove, surprisingly, means to [censure](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/the-giant-synonym-tree-of-criticism/) or scold. That’s right: not only is the word not what you thought, it’s actual definition is not at all what you would have expected. Then there is reproof, which is the noun form of reprove.

For example:

*Used to her boss’s constant reproofs, she no longer quaked in fear when her boss would get angry.*

I see both of these tricky [vocabulary words](http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-vocabulary-resources/) all the time in the old [ETS GRE Big Book.](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/etss-old-gre-material-practicing-to-take-the-general-test-10th-edition-big-book-book-review/) Either (or both) could very likely show up on test day. So don’t forget them, because you’d hate to have to *reprove* yourself after the test.

[**Don’t Get Caught! Know Your Secondary Definitions**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/dont-be-caught-not-knowing-your-secondary-definitions/)



Take a crack at the following antonym:

PATENT

(A) inconspicuous

(B) stubborn

(C) consistent

(D) unheralded

(E) illegal

**Hey, What’s the Deal?!?**

The GRE has long been fond of testing words that have secondary meanings. Oftentimes, we encounter an antonym such as the one above, and we are stymied. None of the answer choices work, we may think. Perhaps we also wonder why the answers are all in a different part of speech.

Well, the good news is that the answer choices will always have the same part of speech. For instance, the answers above are all adjectives. And whatever part of speech the answer choices are, so too is the answer. Therefore, there will always be a consistency in parts of speech.

**They Wouldn’t Do That!**

A great way to determine if the material you are prepping with is second rate is to see if this consistency is lacking. Believe it or not, some test prep books (I won’t name any names) flub this fundamental rule of antonyms and analogies. Their error is patent, to say the least.

Speaking of patent—it does not relate to inventions. In the question above, patent is an adjective meaning glaringly obvious.

*Mike’s patent abuse of other’s kindness left him bereft of any companionship.*

Therefore, the answer to the antonym above is (A) inconspicuous. Inconspicuous means not obvious.

**Remember Analogies**

As alluded to a moment ago, consistent parts of speech also applies to analogies. Say you have the following:

PATENT : NOTICEABLE

In this case both words are adjectives. Therefore, every answer choice will also have two adjectives. By the way, the connection between these two word is PATENT is a greater degree of NOTICEABLE.

The bad news is the [GRE vocabulary](http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-vocabulary-resources/) loves to use words with second, even third definitions. The good news is I will be posting more of these definitions soon. And if I forget, doing so will be a patent omission on my part (don’t worry–I’ll do my best to remember)

[**Ever seen a double-faced word?**](http://magoosh.com/gre/2011/ever-seen-a-double-faced-word/)



Imagine there existed a word that had two definitions, and these two definitions were the opposite of each other. Hot could mean either hot or cold. A tall person could be either a giant or a midget. Sounds like something out of Lewis Carrol’s *Alice in Wonderland.* Yet such words exist in the English language. They are called Janus words, and the employs these vocabulary words frequently.

Perhaps the most common Janus word on the GRE is sanction. Sanction can mean to allow/encourage or to penalize/punish. Confusing? Let’s take a look:

*The committee sanctioned the CEO’s actions.*

As it stands, we cannot be sure how sanction is being used here. Is the committee happy or upset with the CEO’s actions? The good news is the GRE will mostly avoid this ambiguity.

*The committee sanctioned the CEO’s actions, suspending him for two weeks.*

The GRE is not going to make it that straightforward and may even retain some of the ambiguity as in the sentence-completion below.

Celebrities inhabit a rarefied realm, whereby we — actions that would otherwise be considered —- were our cohorts to behave the same way.

(A) dismiss…noble

(B) entreat…ignominious

(C) sanction…despicable

(D) condemn…unethical

(E) condone…tantalizing

Because answer choices (A), (B), (D), and (E) do not work, we know that answer choice (C) has to be using sanction to mean approve. More specifically, the first blank has to be a synonym for approve and the second blank has to be a negative word.

Look for more Janus words coming soon!