

Common (High-frequency) Words

aberrant (adjective): markedly different from an accepted norm

When the financial director started screaming and throwing food at his co-workers, the police had to come in to deal with his aberrant behavior.

aberration (noun): a deviation from what is normal or expected

Aberrations in climate have become the norm: rarely a week goes by without some meteorological phenomenon making headlines.

abstain (verb): choose not to consume or take part in (particularly something enjoyable)

Considered a health nut, Jessica abstained from anything containing sugar--even chocolate.

abstruse (adjective): difficult to understand; incomprehensible

Physics textbooks can seem so abstruse to the uninitiated that readers feel as though they are looking at hieroglyphics.

accolade (noun): an award or praise granted as a special honor

Jean Paul-Sartre was not a fan of accolades, and as such, he refused to accept the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964.

acerbic (adjective): harsh in tone

Most movie critics are acerbic towards summer blockbusters, often referring to them as garbage.

acrimony (noun): bitterness and ill will

The acrimonious dispute between the president and vice-president sent a clear signal to voters: the health of the current administration was imperiled.

adamant (adjective): refusing to change one's mind

Civil rights icon Rosa Parks will forever be remembered for adamantly refusing to give up her seat on a public bus--even after the bus driver insisted, she remained rooted in place.

admonish (verb): to warn strongly, even to the point of reprimanding

Before the concert began, security personnel admonished the crowd not to come up on stage during the performance.

admonitory (adjective): serving to warn; expressing reproof or reproach especially as a corrective

At the assembly, the high school vice-principal gave the students an admonitory speech, warning them of the many risks and dangers of prom night.

aesthete (noun): one who professes great sensitivity to the beauty of art and nature

A true aesthete, Marty would spend hours at the Guggenheim Museum, staring at the same Picasso.

aesthetic (adjective): concerned with the appreciation of beauty

The director, not known for his aesthetic sensibilities, decided not to use costumes at all, and put on the play in everyday clothing.

aesthetic (noun): a set of principles underlying and guiding the work of a particular artist or artistic movement.

The artist operated according to a peculiar aesthetic, not considering any photograph to be worth publishing unless it contained a marine mammal.

amalgam (noun): a mixture of multiple things

The band's music was an amalgam of hip-hop, flamenco and jazz, blending the three styles with surprising results.

ambiguous (adjective): open to more than one interpretation

The coach told his team, "Move towards that side of the field"; because he did not point, his directions were ambiguous, and the team had no idea to which side he was referring.

ambivalent (adjective): mixed or conflicting emotions about something

Sam was ambivalent about studying for the exam because doing so ate up a lot of his time, yet he was able to improve his analytical skills.

ameliorate (verb): make something bad better

Three Cups of Tea tells the story of western man who hopes to ameliorate poverty and the lack of education in Afghanistan.

amenable (adjective): easily persuaded

Even though she did not like the outdoors, Shirley was generally amenable and so her brother was able to persuade her to go camping.

amorphous (adjective): shapeless

His study plan for the GRE was at best amorphous; he would do questions from random pages in any one of seven test prep books.

anomalous (adjective): not normal

According to those who do not believe in climate change, the extreme weather over the last five years is simply anomalous--average temps should return to average, they believe.

anomaly (noun): something that is not normal, standard, or expected

After finding an anomaly in the data, she knew that she would have to conduct her experiment again.

antipathy (noun): an intense feeling of dislike or aversion

Maria had an antipathy for tour groups, often bolting to the other side of the museum as soon as she saw a chaperone leading a group of wide-eyed tourists.

antithetical (adjective): sharply contrasted in character or purpose

His deep emotional involvement with these ideas is, in fact, antithetical to the disattachment Buddhism preaches.

apathetic (adjective): marked by a lack of interest

Mr. Thompson was so talented at teaching math that even normally apathetic students took interest.

apathy (noun): an absence of emotion or enthusiasm

Widespread apathy among voters led to a very small turnout on election day.

apocryphal (adjective): being of questionable authenticity

The web is notorious for sandwiching apocryphal stories between actual news.

appease (verb): pacify by acceding to the demands of

Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister during WWII, tried to appease Hitler and in doing so sent a clear message: you can walk all over us.

arbitrary (adjective): based on a random, groundless decision

One of the arbitrary decrees in place during the emperor's rule is that all citizens pay him weekly homage at his palace.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

arcane (adjective): requiring secret or mysterious knowledge

Most college fraternities are known for arcane rituals that those hoping to join the fraternity must learn.

arduous (adjective): demanding considerable mental effort and skill; testing powers of endurance

In order to deal with the arduous cross-country journey, truck drivers often survive on a string of caffeinated drinks, staying awake for up to 30 hours at a time.

artful (adjective): exhibiting artistic skill

Picasso is generally considered the most artful member of the Cubist movement.

artful (adjective): clever in a cunning way

Bernie Madoff's artful Ponzi scheme stole billions of dollars from investors and is considered the largest financial fraud in U.S. history.

ascetic (adjective): practicing self-denial

His ascetic life is the main reason he inspired so many followers, especially since he gave up wealth and power to live in poverty.

ascetic (noun): one who practices great self-denial

Historically, ascetics like Ghandi are often considered wise men partially because of their restraint.

askance (adverb): with a look of suspicion or disapproval

The old couple looked askance on the teenagers seated next to them, whispering to each other, "They've got rings through their noses and purple hair!"

audacious (adjective): willing to be bold in social situations or to take risks

As all of the other campers cowered in their tents, Bill, armed only with a flashlight, audaciously tracked down the bear that had raided their food.

audacity (noun): aggressive boldness in social situations

She surprised her colleagues by having the audacity to publically criticize the findings of an distinguished scientist.

auspicious (adjective): favorable, the opposite of sinister

Despite an auspicious beginning, Mike's road trip became a series of mishaps, and he was soon stranded and penniless, leaning against his wrecked automobile.

austere (adjective): practicing self-denial

His lifestyle of revelry and luxurious excess could hardly be called austere.

austere (adjective): unadorned in style or appearance

Late Soviet architecture, although remaining largely austere, moved into experimental territory that employed previously unused shapes and structures.

austere (adjective): harsh in manner of temperament

The principal of my elementary school was a cold, austere woman; I could never understand why she chose to work with children.

avaricious (adjective): excessively greedy

Since avaricious desire is similar to gluttony or lust--sins of excess--it was listed as one of the seven deadly sins by the Catholic church.

banal (adjective): repeated too often; overfamiliar through overuse

The professor used such banal expression that many students in the class either fell asleep from boredom or stayed awake to complete his sentences and humor friends.

banality (noun): a trite or obvious remark

Herbert regarded the minister's remark as a mere banality until Sharon pointed out profound implications to the seemingly obvious words.

belie (verb): to give a false representation to; misrepresent

The smile on her face belies the pain she must feel after the death of her husband.

belligerent (adjective): characteristic of one eager to fight

Tom said that he was arguing the matter purely for philosophical reasons, but his belligerent tone indicated an underlying anger about the issue.

betray (verb): to reveal or make known something, usually unintentionally

With the gold medal at stake, the gymnast awaited his turn, his quivering lip betraying his intense emotions.

blatant (adjective): without any attempt at concealment; completely obvious

Allen was often punished in school for blatantly disrespecting teachers.

bolster (verb): support and strengthen

The case for the suspect's innocence was bolstered considerably by the fact that neither fingerprints nor DNA were found at the scene.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

brazen (adjective): unrestrained by convention or propriety

Their large "donations" to the local police department gave the drug cartel the brazen confidence to do their business out in the open.

bucolic (adjective): relating to the pleasant aspects of the country

The noble families of England once owned vast expanses of beautiful, bucolic land.

bumbling (adjective): lacking physical movement skills, especially with the hands

Within a week of starting, the bumbling new waiter was unceremoniously fired.

burgeon (verb): grow and flourish

China's housing market is burgeoning, but some predict that the growth is merely a bubble and will burst much like the U.S. real estate bubble of 2008.

calumny (noun): making of a false statement meant to injure a person's reputation

With the presidential primaries well under way, the air is thick with calumny, and the mud already waist-high.

capricious (adjective): determined by chance or impulse or whim rather than by necessity or reason

Nearly every month our capricious CEO had a new plan to turn the company around, and none of them worked because we never gave them the time they needed to succeed.

castigate (verb): to reprimand harshly

Drill sergeants are known to castigate new recruits so mercilessly that the latter often break down during their first week in training.

censure (verb): to express strong disapproval

After being caught in bed with a mistress, the mayor was quickly censured by the city council.

chastise (verb): to reprimand harshly

Though chastised for his wanton abuse of the pantry, Lawrence shrugged off his mother's harsh words, and continued to plow through jars of cookies and boxes of donuts.

chortle (verb): to chuckle, laugh merrily

Walking past the bar, I could hear happy, chortling people and the blast of horns from a jazz band.

circumscribe (verb): restrict or confine

Their tour of South America was circumscribed so that they saw only popular destinations and avoided the dangerous parts of cities.

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circumvent (verb): cleverly find a way out of one's duties or obligations

One way of circumventing the GRE is to apply to a grad school that does not require GRE scores.

commensurate (adjective): to be in proportion or corresponding in degree or amount

The convicted felon's life sentence was commensurate to the heinousness of his crime.

concede (verb): acknowledge defeat

I concede. You win!

concede (verb): admit (to a wrongdoing)

After a long, stern lecture from her father, Olivia conceded to having broken the window.

concede (verb): give over; surrender or relinquish to the physical control of another

The Spanish were forced to concede much of the territory they had previously conquered.

confound (verb): be confusing or perplexing to

Though Harry loved numbers, he found calculus confounding.

confound (verb): mistake one thing for another

Americans often confound sweet potatoes with yams, and refer to both vegetables by the same name.

conspicuous (adjective): without any attempt at concealment; completely obvious

American basketball players are always conspicuous when they go abroad--not only are they American, but some are over seven feet tall.

constituent (noun): a citizen who is represented in a government by officials for whom he or she votes

The mayor's constituents are no longer happy with her performance and plan to vote for another candidate in the upcoming election.

constituent (noun): an abstract part of something

The constituents of the metal alloy are nickel, copper, and tin.

construe (verb): interpreted in a particular way

The author's inability to take a side on the issue was construed by both his opponents and supporters as a sign of weakness.

contingent (noun): a gathering of persons representative of some larger group

A small contingent of those loyal to the king have gathered around the castle to defend it.

contingent (adjective): possible but not certain to occur

Whether the former world champions can win again this year is contingent upon none of its star players getting injured.

contrition (noun): the feeling of remorse or guilt that comes from doing something bad

Those who show contrition during their prison terms--especially when under review by a parole board--often get shortened sentences.

contrive (verb): to pull off a plan or scheme, usually through skill or trickery

Despite a low GPA, he contrived to get into college, going so far as to write his own glowing letters of recommendation.

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copious (adjective): in abundant supply

In midsummer, there are copious popiscle stands at the beach; in the winter, there are none.

craven (adjective): pathetically cowardly

Though the man could have at least alerted the police, he crouched cravenly in the corner as the old woman was mugged.

cryptic (adjective): mysterious or vague, usually intentionally

Since Sarah did not want her husband to guess the Christmas present she had bought him, she only answered cryptically when he would ask her questions about it.

culminate (verb): reach the highest or most decisive point

Beethoven's musical genius culminated in the 9th Symphony, which many consider his greatest work.

culpability (noun): a state of guilt

Since John had left his banana peel at the top of the stairwell, he accepted culpability for Martha's broken leg.

decorous (adjective): characterized by good taste in manners and conduct

Sally's parties are decorous affairs, and instead of the usual beer and music, there is tea and intellectual conversation.

decorum (noun): propriety in manners and conduct

You will obey the rules of decorum for this courtroom or spend the night in a jail cell, said the judge to the prosecutor.

deferential (adjective): showing respect

If you ever have the chance to meet the president, stand up straight and be deferential.

deleterious (adjective): harmful to living things

The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was deleterious to the fishing industry in the southern states.

delineate (verb): describe in detail

After a brief summary of proper swimming technique, the coach delineated the specifics of each stroke, spending 30 minutes alone on the backstroke.

demur (verb): to object or show reluctance

Wallace disliked the cold, so he demurred when his friends suggested they going skiing in the Alps.

denigrate (verb): charge falsely or with malicious intent; attack the good name and reputation of someone

Count Rumford denigrated the new theory of heat, demonstrating that it was wholly inadequate to explain the observations.

denote (verb): be a sign or indication of; have as a meaning

Even if the text is not visible, the red octagon denotes "stop" to all motorists in America.

derivative (adjective): (or a creative product, e.g. music, writing, etc.) not original but drawing on the work of another person

Because the movies were utterly derivative of other popular movies, they did well at the box office.

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derive (verb): come from; be connected by a relationship of blood, for example

Many words in the English language are derived from Latin, including the word "derive."

derive (verb): reason by deduction; establish by deduction

From the multiple set of footprints in the living room, the investigator derived an important clue: Sheila was not alone in the room at the time of the murder.

dictatorial (adjective): expecting unquestioning obedience; characteristic of an absolute ruler

The coach was dictatorial in his approach: no players could ever argue or question his approach.

didactic (adjective): instructive (especially excessively)

Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Illyich is a didactic novel, instructing the reader on how to live a good life.

diffident (adjective): showing modest reserve; lacking self-confidence

As a young girl she was diffident and reserved, but now as an adult, she is confident and assertive.

dilatory (adjective): wasting time

Lawyers use dilatory tactics so that it takes years before the case is actually decided.

dilettante (noun): an amateur who engages in an activity without serious intentions and who pretends to have knowledge

Fred has no formal medical training; while he likes to claim authority on medical issues, he is little more than a dilettante

disaffected (adjective): discontented as toward authority

After watching his superior take rations from the soldiers, he quickly became disaffected and rebelled.

discrete (adjective): constituting a separate entity or part

What was once known as Czechoslovakia has since split into two discrete, independent nations.

disinterested (adjective): unbiased; neutral

The potential juror knew the defendant, and therefore could not serve on the jury, which must consist only of disinterested members.

dispassionate (adjective): unaffected by strong emotion or prejudice

A good scientist should be dispassionate, focusing purely on what the evidence says, without personal attachment.

disseminate (verb): cause to become widely known

Before the effects of anaesthesia were disseminated, patients had to experience the full pain of a surgery.

dogmatic (adjective): highly opinionated, not accepting that your belief may not be correct

Bryan is dogmatic in his belief that the earth is flat, claiming that all pictures of a spherical earth are computer generated.

duress (noun): compulsory force or threat

The witness said he signed the contract under duress and argued that the court should cancel the agreement.

eclectic (adjective): comprised of a variety of styles

Joey was known for his eclectic tastes in music, one moment dancing to disco the next "air conducting" along to Beethoven's 9th symphony.

economical (adjective): avoiding waste, efficient

Journalists favor an economical style of writing, in which no unnecessary words are used and every sentence is as short as possible.

edifying (adjective): enlightening or uplifting so as to encourage intellectual or moral improvement

I recently read an article in the Times about whether good literature is edifying or not; specifically, does reading more make a person more moral.

efficacious (adjective): producing the intended result

Since Maggie's cough syrup, which had expired five years back, was no longer efficacious, she coughed through the night.

egregious (adjective): standing out in negative way; shockingly bad

The dictator's abuse of human rights was so egregious that many world leaders asked that he be tried in an international court for genocide.

elicit (verb): call forth (emotions, feelings, and responses)

Just smiling--even if you are depressed--can elicit feelings of pleasure and happiness.

elucidate (verb): make clearer and easier to understand

Youtube is great place to learn just about anything--an expert elucidates finer points so that even a complete novice can learn.

eminent (adjective): standing above others in quality or position

Shakespeare is an eminent author in the English language, but I find his writing uninteresting and melodramatic.

enervate (verb): to sap energy from

John preferred to avoid equatorial countries; the intense sun would always leave him enervated after he'd spent the day sightseeing.

engender (verb): give rise to

The restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles were so severe that they engendered deep hatred and resentment in the German people.

entrenched (adjective): fixed firmly or securely

By the time we reach 60-years old, most of our habits are so entrenched that it is difficult for us to change.

ephemeral (adjective): lasting a very short time

The lifespan of a mayfly is ephemeral, lasting from a few hours to a couple of days.

equivocal (adjective): confusing or ambiguous

The findings of the study were equivocal--the two researchers had different opinions on what the results signified.

eradicate (verb): to completely destroy

I tried eradicating the mosquitos in my apartment with a rolled up newspaper, but there were too many

of them.

erudite (adjective): having or showing profound knowledge

Before the Internet, the library was typically where you would find erudite readers.

eschew (verb): avoid and stay away from deliberately; stay clear of

Politicians are the masters of eschewing morals; academics are the masters of eschewing clarity.

esoteric (adjective): confined to and understandable by only an enlightened inner circle

Map collecting is an esoteric hobby to most, but to geography geeks it is a highly enjoyable pastime.

espouse (verb): to adopt or support an idea or cause

As a college student, Charlie espoused Marxism, growing his beard out and railing against the evils of the free-market.

exacerbate (verb): make worse

Her sleeplessness exacerbated her cold--when she woke up the next day, her sinuses were completely blocked.

exacting (adjective): requiring and demanding accuracy

Though his childhood piano teacher was so exacting, Max is thankful now, as a professional pianist.

exalt (verb): praise or glorify

The teenagers exalted the rock star, covering their bedrooms with posters of him.

exonerate (verb): pronounce not guilty of criminal charges

The document clearly indicated that Nick was out of the state at the time of the crime, and so served to exonerate him of any charges.

expound (verb): add details or explanation; clarify the meaning; state in depth

The CEO refused to expound on the decision to merge our department with another one, and so I quit.

extant (adjective): the opposite of extinct

Despite many bookstores closing, experts predict that some form of book dealing will still be extant generations from now.

fallacious (adjective): of a belief that is based on faulty reasoning

The widespread belief that Eskimos have forty different words for snow is fallacious, based on one false report.

fastidious (adjective): overly concerned with details; fussy

Whitney is fastidious about her shoes, arranging them on a shelf in a specific order, each pair evenly spaced.

flux (noun): a state of uncertainty about what should be done (usually following some important event)
Ever since Elvira resigned as the head of marketing, everything about our sales strategy has been in a state of flux.

foment (verb): try to stir up public opinion
After having his pay cut, Phil spread vicious rumors about his boss, hoping to foment a general feeling of discontent.

forlorn (adjective): marked by or showing hopelessness
After her third pet dog died, Marcia was simply forlorn: this time even the possibility of buying a new dog no longer held any joy.

forthcoming (adjective): available when required or as promised
The President announced that the senators were about to reach a compromise, and that he was eager to read the forthcoming details of the bill.

forthcoming (adjective): at ease in talking to others
As a husband, Larry was not forthcoming: if Jill didn't demand to know details, Larry would never share them with her.

fortuitous (adjective): occurring by happy chance; having no cause or apparent cause
While the real objects are vastly different sizes in space, the sun and the moon seem to have the same fortuitous size in the sky.

frivolous (adjective): not serious in content or attitude or behavior
Compared to Juliet's passionate concern for human rights, Jake's non-stop concern about football seems somewhat frivolous.

frugal (adjective): not spending much money (but spending wisely)
Monte was no miser, but was simply frugal, wisely spending the little that he earned.

frustrate (verb): hinder or prevent (the efforts, plans, or desires) of
I thought I would finish writing the paper by lunchtime, but a number of urgent interruptions served to frustrate my plan.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

furtive (adjective): marked by quiet and caution and secrecy; taking pains to avoid being observed
While at work, George and his boss Regina felt the need to be as furtive as possible about their romantic relationship.

gainsay (verb): deny or contradict; speak against or oppose
I can't gainsay a single piece of evidence James has presented, but I still don't trust his conclusion.

gall (noun): the trait of being rude and impertinent

Even though Carly was only recently hired, she had the gall to question her boss's judgment in front of the office.

gall (noun): feeling of deep and bitter anger and ill-will

In an act of gall, Leah sent compromising photos of her ex-boyfriend to all his co-workers and professional contacts.

galvanize (verb): to excite or inspire (someone) to action

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.

garrulous (adjective): full of trivial conversation

Lynne was garrulous: once, she had a fifteen minute conversation with a stranger before she realized the woman didn't speak English.

gauche (adjective): lacking social polish

Sylvester says the most gauche things, such as telling a girl he liked that she was much prettier when she wore makeup.

germane (adjective): relevant and appropriate

The professor wanted to tell the jury in detail about his new book, but the lawyer said it wasn't germane to the charges in the cases.

glut (noun): an excessive supply

The Internet offers such a glut of news related stories that many find it difficult to know which story to read first.

glut (verb): supply with an excess of

In the middle of economic crises, hiring managers find their inboxes glutted with resumes.

gossamer (adjective): characterized by unusual lightness and delicacy

The gossamer wings of a butterfly, which allow it to fly, are also a curse, so delicate that they are often damaged.

gregarious (adjective): to be likely to socialize with others

Often we think that great leaders are those who are gregarious, always in the middle of a large group of people; yet, as Mahatma Gandhi and many others have shown us, leaders can also be introverted.

guileless (adjective): free of deceit

At first I thought my niece was guileless, but I then found myself buying her ice cream every time we passed a shop.

hackneyed (adjective): lacking significance through having been overused

Cheryl rolled her eyes when she heard the lecturer's hackneyed advice to "be true to yourself."

haphazard (adjective): marked by great carelessness; dependent upon or characterized by chance

Many golf courses are designed with great care, but the greens on the county golf course seem entirely haphazard.

harangue (noun): a long pompous speech; a tirade

Dinner at Billy's was more a punishment than a reward, since anyone who sat at the dinner table would have to listen to Billy's father's interminable harangues against the government.

harangue (verb): to deliver a long pompous speech or tirade

Tired of his parents haranguing him about his laziness and lack of initiative, Tyler finally moved out of home at the age of thirty-five.

harried (adjective): troubled persistently especially with petty annoyances

With a team of new hires to train, Martha was constantly harried with little questions and could not focus on her projects.

haughty (adjective): having or showing arrogant superiority to and disdain of those one views as unworthy

The haughty manager didn't believe that any of his subordinates could ever have an insight as brilliant his own.

hegemony (adjective): dominance over a certain area

Until the Spanish Armada was defeated in 1587, Spain had hegemony over the seas, controlling waters stretching as far as the Americas.

heretic (noun): a person who holds unorthodox opinions in any field (not merely religion)

Though everybody at the gym told Mikey to do cardio before weights, Mikey was a heretic and always did the reverse.

iconoclast (noun): somebody who attacks cherished beliefs or institutions

Lady Gaga, in challenging what it means to be clothed, is an iconoclast for wearing a "meat dress" to a prominent awards show.

iconoclastic (adjective): defying tradition or convention

Jackson Pollack was an iconoclastic artist, totally breaking with tradition by splashing paint on a blank canvas.

idiosyncrasy (noun): a behavioral attribute that is distinctive and peculiar to an individual

Peggy's numerous idiosyncrasies include wearing mismatched shoes, laughing loudly to herself, and

owning a pet aardvark.

ignoble (adjective): dishonorable

In the 1920s, the World Series was rigged--an ignoble act which baseball took decades to recover from.

ignominious (adjective): (used of conduct or character) deserving or bringing disgrace or shame

Since the politician preached ethics and morality, his texting of revealing photographs was ignominious, bringing shame on both himself and his party.

immutable (adjective): not able to be changed

Taxes are one of the immutable laws of the land, so there is no use arguing about paying them.

impartial (adjective): free from undue bias or preconceived opinions

The judge was not impartial since he had been bribed by the witness's family.

impertinent (adjective): being disrespectful; improperly forward or bold

Dexter, distraught over losing his pet dachshund, Madeline, found the police officer's questions impertinent--after all, he thought, did she have to pry into such details as to what Madeline's favorite snack was?

implacable (adjective): incapable of making less angry or hostile

Win or lose, the coach was always implacable, never giving the athletes an easy practice or a break.

implausible (adjective): describing a statement that is not believable

The teacher found it implausible that the student was late to school because he had been kidnapped by outlaws on horseback.

imprudent (adjective): not wise

Hitler, like Napoleon, made the imprudent move of invading Russia in winter, suffering even more casualties than Napoleon had.

impudent (adjective): improperly forward or bold

In an impudent move, the defendant spoke out of order to say terribly insulting things to the judge.

incisive (adjective): having or demonstrating ability to recognize or draw fine distinctions

The lawyer had an incisive mind, able in a flash to dissect a hopelessly tangled issue and isolate the essential laws at play.

incongruous (adjective): lacking in harmony or compatibility or appropriateness

The vast economic inequality of modern society is incongruous with America's ideals.

incorrigible (adjective): impervious to correction by punishment

Tom Sawyer seems like an incorrigible youth until Huck Finn enters the novel; even Sawyer can't match

his fierce individual spirit.

indecorous (adjective): not in keeping with accepted standards of what is right or proper in polite society

Eating with elbows on the table is considered indecorous in refined circles.

indifference (noun): the trait of seeming not to care

In an effort to fight indifference, the president of the college introduced a new, stricter grading system.

inexorable (adjective): impossible to stop or prevent

The rise of the computer was an inexorable shift in technology and culture.

ingenuous (adjective): to be naïve and innocent

Two-years in Manhattan had changed Jenna from an ingenuous girl from the suburbs to a jaded urbanite, unlikely to fall for any ruse, regardless of how elaborate.

ingratiate (verb): gain favor with somebody by deliberate efforts

Even though Tom didn't like his new boss, he decided to ingratiate himself to her in order to advance his career.

inimical (adjective): hostile (usually describes conditions or environments)

Venus, with a surface temperature that would turn rubber to liquid, is inimical to any form of life.

innocuous (adjective): harmless and doesn't produce any ill effects

Everyone found Nancy's banter innocuous--except for Mike, who felt like she was intentionally picking on him.

inscrutable (adjective): not easily understood; unfathomable

His speech was so dense and confusing that many in the audience found it inscrutable.

insidious (adjective): working in a subtle but destructive way

Plaque is insidious: we cannot see it, but each day it eats away at our enamel, causing cavities and other dental problems.

insolent (adjective): rude and arrogant

Lilian could not help herself from being insolent, commenting that the Queen's shoes were showing too much toe.

intimate (verb): to suggest something subtly

At first Manfred's teachers intimated to his parents that he was not suited to skip a grade; when his parents protested, teachers explicitly told them that, notwithstanding the boy's precocity, he was simply too immature to jump to the 6th grade.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

intransigent (adjective): unwilling to change one's beliefs or course of action

Despite many calls for mercy, the judge remained intransigent, citing strict legal precedence.

intrepid (adjective): fearless

Captain Ahab was an intrepid captain whose reckless and fearless style ultimate leads to his downfall.

inveterate (adjective): habitual

He is an inveterate smoker and has told his family and friends that there is no way he will ever quit.

involved (adjective): complicated, and difficult to comprehend

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

irrevocable (adjective): incapable of being retracted or revoked

Once you enter your plea to the court, it is irrevocable so think carefully about what you will say.

itinerant (adjective): traveling from place to place to work

Doctors used to be itinerant, traveling between patients' homes.

jingoism (noun): fanatical patriotism

North Korea maintains intense control over its population through a combination of jingoism and cult of personality.

jovial (adjective): full of or showing high-spirited merriment

The political candidate and his supporters were jovial once it was clear that she had won.

jubilant (adjective): full of high-spirited delight because of triumph or success

My hardwork paid off, and I was jubilant to receive a perfect score on the GRE.

juxtapose (verb): place side by side

The meaning of her paintings comes from a classical style which juxtaposes modern themes.

laconic (adjective): one who says very few words

While Martha always swooned over the hunky, laconic types in romantic comedies, her boyfriends inevitably were very talkative--and not very hunky.

lambast (verb): criticize severely or angrily

Showing no patience, the manager utterly lambasted the sales team that lost the big account.

languid (adjective): not inclined towards physical exertion or effort; slow and relaxed

As the sun beat down and the temperature climbed higher, we spent a languid week lying around the house.

largess (noun): extreme generosity and giving

Uncle Frank was known for his largess, so his nephew was sad when he did not receive a present for his birthday.

laudable (adjective): worthy of high praise

To say that Gandhi's actions were laudable is the greatest understatement; he overthrew an empire without violence.

lionize (verb): assign great social importance to

Students in the U.S. learn to lionize Jefferson, Franklin, and Washington because they are the founding fathers of the nation.

magnanimous (adjective): noble and generous in spirit, especially towards a rival or someone less powerful

He was a great sportsman: in defeat he was complementary and in victory he was magnanimous.

maintain (verb): to assert

The scientist maintained that the extinction of dinosaurs was most likely brought about by a drastic change in climate.

maladroit (adjective): clumsy

As a child she was quite maladroit, but as an adult, she has become an adept dancer.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

maverick (noun): someone who exhibits great independence in thought and action

Officer Kelly was a maverick, rarely following police protocols or adopting the conventions for speech common among his fellow officers.

mawkish (adjective): overly sentimental to the point that it is disgusting

The film was incredibly mawkish, introducing highly likeable characters only to have them succumb to a devastating illnesses by the end of the movie.

mendacity (noun): the tendency to be untruthful

I can forgive her for her mendacity but only because she is a child and is seeing what she can get away with.

mercurial (adjective): (of a person) prone to unexpected and unpredictable changes in mood

The fact that Ella's moods were as mercurial as the weather was problematic for her relationships--it didn't help that she lived in Chicago.

meticulous (adjective): marked by extreme care in treatment of details

The Japanese noodle maker was meticulous in making his noodles and would never let another person take over the task.

misconstrue (verb): interpret in the wrong way

The politician never trusted journalists because he thought that they misconstrue his words and misrepresent his positions.

mitigate (verb): make less severe or harsh

I can only spend so much time mitigating your disagreements with your wife, and at certain point, you need to do it on your own.

mitigate (verb): lessen the severity of an offense

If it weren't for the mitigating circumstances, he would have certainly lost his job.

mollify (verb): to make someone angry less angry; placate

In the morning, Harriet was unable to mollify Harry, if he happened to become angry, unless he had his cup of coffee.

mundane (adjective): repetitive and boring; not spiritual

Nancy found doing dishes a thoroughly mundane task, although Peter found a kind of Zen pleasure in the chore.

mundane (adjective): relating to the ordinary world

Though we think of the pope as someone always dealing in holy matters, he is also concerned with mundane events, such as deciding when to set his alarm each morning.

munificent (adjective): very generous

Uncle Charley was known for his munificence, giving all seven of his nephews lavish Christmas presents each year.

myopic (adjective): lacking foresight or imagination

The company ultimately went out of business because the myopic managers couldn't predict the changes in their industry.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

myriad (noun): a large indefinite number

There are a myriad of internet sites hawking pills that claim to boost energy for hours on end.

negligible (adjective): so small as to be meaningless; insignificant

The GRE tests cumulative knowledge, so if you cram the night before it is, at best, likely to only have a negligible impact on your score.

nonplussed (verb): unsure how to act or respond

Shirley was totally nonplussed when the angry motorist cut her off and then stuck his finger out the window.

nuance (noun): a subtle difference in meaning or opinion or attitude

Because of the nuances involved in this case, I hired an outside consultant to advise us and help.

obscure (verb): make unclear

On the Smith's drive through the Grand Canyon, Mr. Smith's big head obscured much of Mrs. Robinson's view, so that she only saw momentary patches of red rock.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

obscure (adjective): known by only a few

Many of the biggest movie stars were once obscure actors who got only bit roles in long forgotten films.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

obsequious (adjective): attentive in an ingratiating or servile manner; attempting to win favor from influential people by flattery

The obsequious waiter did not give the couple a moment's peace all through the meal, constantly returning to their table to refill their water glasses and to tell them what a handsome pair they made.

opaque (adjective): not clearly understood or expressed

The meaning of the professor's new research was opaque to most people, so no one asked any questions.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

opulence (noun): wealth as evidenced by sumptuous living

Russian oligarchs are famous for their opulence, living in fancy homes and dining on expensive caviar.

ostentatious (adjective): intended to attract notice and impress others; tawdry or vulgar

Matt wanted to buy stone lions for front of the house, but Cynthia convinced him that such a display would be too ostentatious for a modest house in an unassuming neighborhood.

ostracize (verb): exclude from a community or group

Later in his life, Leo Tolstoy was ostracized from the Russian Orthodox Church for his writings that contradicted church doctrine.

panache (noun): distinctive and stylish elegance

Jim, with his typical panache, came to the wedding reception with a top hat, a cane, and a long cape covered in sequins.

parochial (adjective): narrowly restricted in scope or outlook

Jasmine was sad to admit it, but her fledgling relationship with Jacob did not work out because his culinary tastes were simply too parochial; "After all," she quipped on her blog, "he considered Chef Boyardee ethnic food."

parsimonious (adjective): extremely frugal; miserly

Katie is so parsimonious that she only buys a pair of socks if all of her other socks have holes in them.

pedantic (adjective): marked by a narrow focus on or display of learning especially its trivial aspects

Professor Thompson was regarded as an expert in his field, but his lectures were utterly pedantic, focused on rigorous details of the most trivial conventions in the field.

pedestrian (adjective): lacking imagination

While Nan was always engaged in philosophical speculation, her brother was occupied with far more pedestrian concerns: how to earn a salary and run a household.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

pejorative (adjective): expressing disapproval (usu. refers to a term)

Most psychologists object to the pejorative term "shrink", believing that they expand the human mind, not limit it.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

perfidy (noun): an act of deliberate betrayal; a breach of a trust

The lowest circles in Dante's Inferno were for those who had practiced perfidy, and among these, the very lowest was for those, such as Judas, who had been treacherous to one of their benefactors.

pernicious (adjective): exceedingly harmful; working or spreading in a hidden and injurious way

The most successful viruses are pernicious: an infected person may feel perfectly healthy for several months while incubating and spreading the virus.

petulant (adjective): easily irritated or annoyed

When Ed first met Ruth, he didn't realize she was so petulant, but now that they are three months into their relationship, Ed feels a day doesn't go by in which she isn't whining about some minor issue.

placate (verb): cause to be more favorably inclined; gain the good will of

I was able to placate the angry mob of students by promising to bring cookies on Monday.

platitude (noun): a trite or obvious remark

The professor argued that many statements regarded as wise in previous times, such as the Golden Rule, are now regarded as mere platitudes.

poignant (adjective): emotionally touching

After the Montagues and Capulets discover the dead bodies of Romeo and Juliet, in the play's most poignant moment, the two griefstricken families agree to end their feud once and for all.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

polemic (noun): a strong verbal or written attack on someone or something.

The professor launched into a polemic, claiming that Freudian theory was a pack of lies that absolutely destroyed European literary theory.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

posit (verb): assume as fact

Initially, Einstein posited a repulsive force to balance Gravity, but then rejected that idea as a blunder.

pragmatic (adjective): guided by practical experience and observation rather than theory

Rather than make a philosophical appeal to the Congressmen, the Speaker decided to take a far more pragmatic approach, making small side-deals that would add votes to his bill.

precipitous (adjective): done with very great haste and without due deliberation

He was expecting a precipitous rise in the value of a "hot" tech stock, so he was disappointed when it only inched up a dollar or two each day.

preclude (verb): keep from happening or arising; make impossible

The manager specified that all other gates be locked, to preclude the possibility of persons without tickets entering the arena undetected.

precocious (adjective): characterized by or characteristic of exceptionally early development or maturity (especially in mental aptitude)

Though only seven years old, she was a precocious chess prodigy, able to beat players twice her age.

predilection (noun): a strong liking

Monte had a predilection for the fine things in life: Cuban cigars, 200 dollar bottles of wine, and trips to the French Riviera.

prescience (noun): the power to foresee the future

Baxter's warnings about investing in technology stocks seemed like an act of prescience after the whole market declined significantly.

prevaricate (verb): to speak in an evasive way

The cynic quipped, "There is not much variance in politicians; they all seem to prevaricate".

prodigal (adjective): rashly or wastefully extravagant

Successful professional athletes who do not fall prey to prodigality seem to be the exception--most live decadent lives.

prodigious (adjective): so great in size or force or extent as to elicit awe

After the relatively small homerun totals in the "dead ball" era, Babe Ruth's homerun totals were truly prodigious: every year, he set a new all-time record.

profligate (adjective): spending money recklessly or wastefully

profligate (noun): someone who spends money recklessly or wastefully

Most lottery winners go from being conservative, frugal types to outright profligates who blow millions on fast cars, lavish homes, and giant yachts.

prolific (adjective): intellectually productive

Schubert was the most prolific composer, producing hundreds of hours of music before he died at the age of 31.

propitious (adjective): presenting favorable circumstances; likely to result in or show signs of success

The child's heartbeat is still weak, but I am seeing many propitious signs and I think that she may be healing.

provincial (adjective): characteristic of the a limited perspective; not fashionable or sophisticated
Maggie's enthusiasm about her high school teams seemed provincial to her college classmates, all of whom were following a nationally ranked college team.

pundit (noun): someone who has been admitted to membership in a scholarly field
Steven Pinker's credentials are unquestioned as a pundit; he has taught at MIT and Stanford, teaches at Harvard, and has published a number of influential books on cognition, language, and psychology.

qualify (adjective): to be legally competent or capable
If James had made more than \$50,000 last year, then he wouldn't have qualified for the low-income scholarship.

qualify (verb): to make less severe; to limit (a statement)
Chris qualified his love for San Francisco, adding that he didn't like the weather as much as the weather in Los Angeles.

querulous (adjective): habitually complaining
The querulous old woman was begining to wear down even the happier members of the staff with her ceaseless complaining.

quotidian (adjective): found in the ordinary course of events
Phil gets so involved thinking about Aristotle's arguments that he totally forgets quotidian concerns, such as exercising and eating regularly.

ravenous (adjective): extremely hungry; devouring or craving food in great quantities
John didn't eat much at all during the week he had the flu, so now that he is regaining his health, it's not surpring that he has a ravenous appetite.

rebuke (verb): criticize severely or angrily; censure
The police chief rebuked the two officers whose irresponsible decisions almost led to the deaths of seven innocent by-standers.

reconcile (verb): make (one thing) compatible with (another)
Peggy was unable to reconcile her kind friend Jane with the cruel and merciless character Jane played on television.

recondite (adjective): difficult to penetrate; incomprehensible to one of ordinary understanding or knowledge
I found Ulysses recondite and never finished the book, waiting instead to read it with someone else so we could penetrate its meaning together.

refractory (adjective): stubbornly resistant to authority or control

Used to studious high school students, Martha was unprepared for the refractory Kindergarteners who neither sat still nor listened to a single word she said.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

refute (verb): prove to be false or incorrect

No one could refute his theories or propositions, and that is why he was esteemed by all his colleagues in the philosophy department.

reproach (verb): to express criticism towards

At first, Sarah was going to yell at the boy, but she didn't want to reproach him for telling the truth about the situation.

repudiate (verb): reject as untrue or unfounded

Many in the public believed the rumors of a UFO crash outside town, so the chief of police did everything he could to repudiate the rumors.

rescind (verb): cancel officially

The man's driver's license was rescinded after his tenth car accident, which meant he would never be allowed to legally drive again.

restive (adjective): restless

The crowd grew restive as the comedian's opening jokes fell flat.

resurgent (adjective): rising again as to new life and vigor

The team sank to fourth place in June, but is now resurgent and about to win the division.

reticent (adjective): reluctant to draw attention to yourself; temperamentally disinclined to talk

When asked about her father, Helen lost her outward enthusiasm and became rather reticent.

reverent (adjective): feeling or showing profound respect or veneration

The professor could speak objectively about the other composers, but he always lectured about Brahms with a particularly reverent air, unable to offer a single criticism of his compositions.

rudimentary (adjective): being in the earliest stages of development; being or involving basic facts or principles

I would love to be able to present a fully polished proposal to the board, but right now, our plans for the product are still in the most rudimentary stages.

rustic (adjective): characteristic of rural life; awkwardly simple and provincial

The vacation cabin had no electricity and no indoor plumbing, but despite these inconveniences, Nigel adored its rustic charm.

sanction (verb): give authority or permission to

The authorities have sanctioned the use of the wilderness reserve for public use; many expect to see

hikers and campers enjoying the park in the coming months.

sanction (noun): a legal penalty for a forbidden action

International sanctions have been placed on certain shipping lanes that were thought to be involved in human trafficking.

scrupulous (adjective): characterized by extreme care and great effort

Because of his scrupulous nature, Mary put him in charge of numbering and cataloging the entire collection of rare stamps.

scrupulous (adjective): having a sense of right and wrong; principled

Everyone trusted what he said and followed his example because he was scrupulous and honest.

soporific (adjective): inducing mental lethargy; sleep inducing

Although the professor is brilliant, his bland monotone gives his lectures a soporific effect.

specious (adjective): based on pretense; deceptively pleasing

Almost every image on TV is specious and not to be trusted.

specious (adjective): plausible but false

He made a career out of specious arguments and fictional lab results, but lost his job and reputation when his lies were exposed by an article in The New York Times.

sporadic (adjective): recurring in scattered and irregular or unpredictable instances

The signals were at first sporadic, but now we detect a clear, consistent pattern of electromagnetic radiation emanating from deep space.

spurious (adjective): plausible but false

When listening to a politician speak, it is hard to distinguish the spurious claims from the authentic ones.

staunch (adjective): firm and dependable especially in loyalty

No longer a staunch supporter of the movement, Todd now will openly question whether its goals are worthwhile.

stringent (adjective): demanding strict attention to rules and procedures

Most of the students disliked the teacher because of his stringent homework policy, but many students would later thank him for demanding so much from them.

subsume (verb): contain or include

The rogue wave quickly subsumed the pier and boardwalk, destroying everything in its path.

subsume (verb): consider (an instance of something) as part of a general rule or principle

Don Quixote of La Mancha subsumes all other modern novels, demonstrating modern literary devices

and predating even the idea of a postmodern, metanarrative.

subversive (adjective): in opposition to a civil authority or government

The ruling political party has begun a campaign to shut down subversive websites that it deems as a threat to "national safety."

sullen (adjective): showing a brooding ill humor

Herbert took board games too seriously, often appearing sullen after losing.

superfluous (adjective): serving no useful purpose

How can we hope to stay open if we don't eliminate all superfluous spending, like catered meetings and free acupuncture Tuesday?

superfluous (adjective): more than is needed, desired, or required

Everything in this closet is superfluous and can be given to charity.

supplant (verb): take the place or move into the position of

For many, a cell phone has supplanted a traditional phone; in fact, most 20-somethings don't even have a traditional phone anymore.

sycophant (noun): a person who tries to please someone in order to gain a personal advantage

The CEO was unaware of the damaging consequences of his choices, largely because he surrounded himself with sycophants who would never dare criticize him.

taciturn (adjective): habitually reserved and uncommunicative

While the CEO enthusiastically shares his plans and agenda with all who will listen, the CFO is far more taciturn, rarely revealing his perspective.

tantamount (adjective): being essentially equal to something

In many situations, remaining silent is tantamount to admitting guilt, so speak to prove your innocence.

temperance (noun): the trait of avoiding excesses

Welles wasn't known for his temperance--he usually ate enough for two and drank enough for three.

tempered (adjective): moderated in effect

The wide-eyed optimism of her youth was now tempered after she had worked many years in the criminal justice system.

tenacious (adjective): stubbornly unyielding

Even the most tenacious advocates for gun ownership must admit some of the dangers that firearms present.

timorous (adjective): timid by nature or revealing fear and nervousness

Since this was her first time debating on stage and before an audience, Di's voice was timorous and quiet for the first 10 minutes.

torpor (noun): inactivity resulting from lethargy and lack of vigor or energy

After work, I was expecting my colleagues to be enthusiastic about the outing, but I found them in a state of complete torpor.

tortuous (adjective): marked by repeated turns and bends; not straightforward

Because the logic behind McMahon's side of the debate was so tortuous, his audience came out either completely confused or, worse, feeling they'd been tricked.

tractable (adjective): readily reacting to suggestions and influences; easily managed (controlled or taught or molded)

Compared to middle school students, who have an untamed wildness about them, high school students are somewhat more tractable.

transient (adjective): lasting a very short time

The unpredictable and transient nature of deja vu makes it a very difficult phenomenon to study properly.

travesty (noun): an absurd presentation of something; a mockery

What I expected to be an intelligent, nuanced historical documentary turned out to be a poorly-produced travesty of the form.

treacherous (adjective): tending to betray

Even though Jesse James was an outlaw, his killer, Robert Ford, is remembered more for his treacherous actions than for eliminating a criminal and murder.

treacherous (adjective): dangerously unstable and unpredictable

The bridge built from twine and vine is treacherous to walk across, and so I think I will stay put right here.

trite (adjective): repeated too often; overfamiliar through overuse

Many style guides recommend not using idioms in writing because these trite expressions are uninteresting and show a lack of imagination on the part of the writer.

truncate (verb): reduce the length of something

The soccer game was truncated when the monsoon rain began to fall.

undermine (adjective): to weaken (usually paired with an abstract term)

The student undermined the teacher's authority by questioning the teacher's judgment on numerous occasions.

underscore (verb): give extra weight to (a communication)

While the hiking instructor agreed that carrying a first aid kit could be a good idea under certain circumstances, he underscored the importance of carrying enough water.

unequivocal (adjective): admitting of no doubt or misunderstanding; having only one meaning or interpretation and leading to only one conclusion

The President's first statement on the subject was vague and open to competing interpretations, so when he spoke to Congress about the same subject later, he was careful to make his position completely unequivocal.

unscrupulous (adjective): without scruples or principles

In the courtroom, the lawyer was unscrupulous, using every manner of deceit and manipulation to secure a victory for himself.

upbraid (verb): to reproach; to scold

Bob took a risk walking into the "Students Barbershop"--in the end he had to upbraid the apparently drunk barber for giving him an uneven bowl cut.

vacillate (verb): be undecided about something; waver between conflicting positions or courses of action

Some students vacillate between schools when deciding which to attend, while others focus only on one school.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

vehement (adjective): marked by extreme intensity of emotions or convictions

While the other employees responded to the bad news in a measured way, Andrew responded in a vehement manner, tipping over his desk and shouting at the top of his lungs.

venality (noun): the condition of being susceptible to bribes or corruption

Even some of the most sacrosanct sporting events are not immune to venality, as many of the officials have received substantial bribes to make biased calls.

venerate (verb): to respect deeply

The professor, despite his soporific lectures, was venerated amongst his colleagues, publishing more papers yearly than all of his peers combined.

veracious (adjective): truthful

While we elect our leaders in the hope that every word they speak will be veracious, history has shown that such a hope is naive.

vilify (verb): spread negative information about

Todd was noble after the divorce, choosing to say only complimentary things about Barbara, but Barbara did not hesitate to vilify Todd.

vindicate (verb): to clear of accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt with supporting arguments or proof
Even seven Tour de France wins cannot vindicate Lance Armstrong in the eyes of the public--that the athlete used performance enhancing drugs invalidates all those wins.

vociferous (adjective): conspicuously and offensively loud; given to vehement outcry
In giving Marcia a particular vociferous response, Paul caused people at every other table in the restaurant to turn around and look at them angrily.

volubility (noun): the quality of talking or writing easily and continuously
The professor's volubility knows no bounds; he could talk through a hurricane and elaborate a point from one St. Patrick's Day to the next.

wanting (adjective): lacking
She did not think her vocabulary was wanting, yet there were so many words that inevitably she found a few she didn't know.

winsome (adjective): charming in a childlike or naive way
She was winsome by nature, and many people were drawn to this free and playful spirit.

Basic Words

aboveboard (adjective): open and honest

The mayor, despite his avuncular face plastered about the city, was hardly aboveboard -- some concluded that it was his ingratiating smile that allowed him to engage in corrupt behavior and get away with it.

abysmal (adjective): extremely bad

Coach Ramsey took his newest player off the field after watching a few painful minutes of her abysmal performance.

acme (noun): the highest point of achievement

The new Cessna airplanes will be the acme of comfort, offering reclining seats and ample legroom.

advocate (verb): speak, plead, or argue in favor of

While the senator privately approved of gay marriage, he was unwilling to advocate for the cause in a public venue.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

advocate (noun): a person who pleads for a cause or propounds an idea

Martin Luther King Jr. was a tireless advocate for the rights of African-Americans in the United States.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

affable (adjective): likeable; easy to talk to

For all his surface affability, Marco was remarkably glum when he wasn't around other people.

affluent (adjective): wealthy

The center of the city had sadly become a pit of penury, while, only five miles away, multi-million dollar homes spoke of affluence.

altruism (noun): the quality of unselfish concern for the welfare of others

Albert Schweitzer spent most of his life doing missionary work as a doctor in Africa, seeking no reward, apparently motivated only by altruism.

amiable (adjective): friendly

Amy's name was very apt: she was so amiable that she was twice voted class president.

amply (adverb): more than is adequate

The boat was amply supplied for its year at sea--no man would go hungry or thirst.

amuck (adverb): in a frenzied or uncontrolled state

Wherever the bowl haircut teen-idol went, his legions of screaming fans ran through the streets amuck, hoping for a glance at his boyish face.

analogous (adjective): similar in some respects but otherwise different

In many ways, the Internet's transformative effect on society has been analogous to that of the printing press.

animosity (noun): intense hostility

The governor's animosity toward his rival was only inflamed when the latter spread false lies regarding the governor's first term.

antedated (verb): precede in time

Harry was so unknowledgable that he was unaware the Egyptian pharaohs antedated the American Revolution.

antiquated (adjective): old-fashioned; belonging to an earlier period in time

Aunt Betty had antiquated notions about marriage, believing that a man should court a woman for at least a year before receiving a kiss.

apex (noun): the highest point

The Ivy League is considered the apex of the secondary education system.

aphorism (noun): a short instructive saying about a general truth

Nietzsche was known for using aphorisms, sometimes encapsulating a complex philosophical thought in a mere sentence.

aphoristic (adjective): something that is a concise and instructive of a general truth or principle

Sometimes I can't stand Nathan because he tries to impress everyone by being aphoristic, but he just states the obvious.

appreciable (adjective): large enough to be noticed (usu. refers to an amount)

There is an appreciable difference between those who say they can get the job done and those who actually get the job done.

apprehension (noun): fearful expectation

Test day can be one of pure apprehension, as many students worry about their test scores.

archaic (adjective): so old as to appear to belong to a different period

*Hoping to sound intelligent, Mary spoke in archaic English that was right out of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*--needless to say, she didn't have many friends.*

ascendancy (noun): the state that exists when one person or group has power over another

The ascendancy of the Carlsbad water polo team is clear--they have a decade of championships behind them.

ascribe (verb): attribute or credit to

*History ascribes *The Odyssey* and *The Illiad* to Homer, but scholars now debate whether he was a*

historical figure or a fictitious name.

assail (verb): attack in speech or writing

In the weekly paper, the editor assailed the governor for wasting hundreds of thousands of dollars in public projects that quickly failed.

assuage (verb): make something intense less severe

Her fear that the new college would be filled with unknown faces was assuaged when she recognized her childhood friend standing in line.

augment (verb): enlarge or increase; improve

Ideally, the restaurant's augmented menu will expand its clientele and increase its profits.

autonomously (adverb): In an autonomous or self-governing manner.

Many of the factory workers are worried about being replaced by machines and computers that will work completely autonomously.

avarice (noun): greed (one of the seven deadly sins)

The Spanish conquistadors were known for their avarice, plundering Incan land and stealing Incan gold.

avert (verb): turn away

Afraid to see the aftermath of the car crash, I averted my eyes as we drove by.

avert (verb): ward off or prevent

The struggling videogame company put all of its finances into one final, desperate project to avert bankruptcy.

avid (adjective): marked by active interest and enthusiasm

Martin is an avid birdwatcher, often taking long hikes into remote mountains to see some rare eagle.

badger (verb): to pester

Badgered by his parents to find a job, the 30-year-old loafer instead joined a gang of itinerant musicians.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

balk (verb): refuse to comply

The students were willing to clean up the broken glass, but when the teacher asked them to mop the entire floor, they balked, citing reasons why they needed to leave.

banish (verb): expel from a community, residence, or location; drive away

The most difficult part of the fast was banishing thoughts of food.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

beatific (adjective): blissfully happy

Often we imagine all monks to wear the beatific smile of the Buddha, but, like any of us, a monk can have a bad day and not look very happy.

becoming (adjective): appropriate, and matches nicely

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

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

begrudge (verb): to envy someone for possessing or enjoying something

Sitting all alone in his room, Harvey begrudged the happiness of the other children playing outside his window.

begrudge (verb): to give reluctantly

We never begrudge money spent on ourselves.

behooves (verb): to be one's duty or obligation

The teacher looked down at the student and said, "It would behoove you to be in class on time and complete your homework, so that you don't repeat freshman English for a third straight year."

belittle (verb): lessen the importance, dignity, or reputation of

A good teacher will never belittle his students, but will instead empower them.

bellicose (adjective): warlike; inclined to quarrel

Known for their bellicose ways, the Spartans were once the most feared people from Peloponnesus to Persia.

benign (adjective): kind

I remember my grandfather's face was wrinkled, benign, and calm.

benign (adjective): (medicine) not dangerous to health; not recurrent or progressive

The tumor located in your ear lobe seems to be benign and should not cause you any trouble.

besiege (verb): harass, as with questions or requests; cause to feel distressed or worried

After discovering a priceless artifact in her backyard, Jane was besieged by phone calls, emails, and reporters all trying to buy, hold or see the rare piece of history.

besmirch (verb): damage the good name and reputation of someone

The prince's distasteful choice of words besmirched not only his own name, but the reputation of the entire royal family.

bleak (adjective): having a depressing or gloomy outlook

Unremitting overcast skies tend to lead people to create bleak literature and lugubrious music -- compare England's band Radiohead to any band from Southern California.

boon (noun): a desirable state

Modern technology has been a boon to the travel industry.

boon (adjective): very close and convivial

He was a boon companion to many, and will be sadly missed.

boorish (adjective): ill-mannered and coarse or contemptible in behavior or appearance

Bukowski was known for being a boorish drunk and alienating close friends and family.

brusquely (adverb): in a blunt, direct manner

Not one for social pleasantries, the Chief of Staff would brusquely ask his subordinates anything he wanted, even coffee.

buck (verb): resist

The profits at our firm bucked the general downturn that effected the real estate industry.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

buttress (verb): make stronger or defensible

China's economy has been buttressed by a global demand for the electronic parts the country manufactures.

cadaverous (adjective): emaciated; gaunt

Some actors take challenging roles in which they have to lose so much weight that they appear cadaverous.

candid (adjective): a straightforward and honest look at something

Even with a perfect stranger, Charles was always candid and would rarely hold anything back.

candidness (noun): the quality of being honest and straightforward in attitude and speech

Although I was unhappy that the relationship ended, I appreciated her candidness about why she was ready to move on from the relationship.

cardinal (adjective): of primary importance; fundamental

Most cultures consider gambling a cardinal sin and thus have outlawed its practice.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

carping (adjective): persistently petty and unjustified criticism

What seemed like incessant nagging and carping about my behavior from my mother turned out to be wise and useful advice that has served me well.

catalyst (noun): something that speeds up an event

Rosa Park's refusal to give up her bus seat acted as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement, setting into motion historic changes for African-Americans.

cavalier (adjective): given to haughty disregard of others

Percy dismissed the issue with a cavalier wave of his hand.

censor (verb): to examine and remove objectionable material

Every fall, high school English teachers are inundated by requests to censor their curriculum by removing The Catcher in the Rye and Scarlet Letter from their reading lists.

cerebral (adjective): involving intelligence rather than emotions or instinct

A cerebral analysis of most pop music finds it to be simple and childish, but that ignores the point--the music's effect on the listener.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

champion (verb): protect or fight for as a champion

Martin Luther King Jr. championed civil rights fiercely throughout his short life.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

chauvinist (noun): a person who believes in the superiority of their group

The chauvinist lives on both sides of the political spectrum, outright shunning anybody whose ideas are not consistent with his own.

check (verb): to limit (usually modifying the growth of something)

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

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

check (noun): the condition of being held back or limited

When government abuses are not kept in check, that government is likely to become autocratic.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

checkered (adjective): 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.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

chivalrous (adjective): being attentive to women like an ideal knight

Marco's chivalrous ways, like opening doors and pulling out chairs, was much appreciated by his date.

clemency (noun): leniency and compassion shown toward offenders by a person or agency charged with administering justice

In the final moments of the trial, during his closing speech, Phillips was nearly begging the judge for clemency.

coalesce (verb): fuse or cause to grow together

Over time, the various tribes coalesced into a single common culture with one universal language.

cogent (adjective): clear and persuasive

A cogent argument will change the minds of even the most skeptical audience.

cohesive (adjective): well integrated, forming a united whole

A well-written, cohesive essay will keep on topic at all times, never losing sight of the main argument.

collusion (noun): agreement on a secret plot

Many have argued that Lee Harvey Oswald, JFK's assassin, was in collusion with other criminals; others maintain that Oswald was a lone gunman.

colossal (adjective): so great in size or force or extent as to elicit awe

Few appreciate the colossal scale of the sun: if hollow, it could contain a million Earths.

commendable (adjective): worthy of high praise

The efforts of the firefighters running into the burning building were commendable.

complacent (adjective): contented to a fault with oneself or one's actions

After the water polo team won their sixth championship, they became complacent and didn't even make it to the playoffs the next year.

complementary (adjective): enhancing each other's qualities (for two things or more).

The head waiter was careful to tell the amateur diners that red wine was complementary with beef, each bringing out subtle taste notes in the other.

compound (verb): make more intense, stronger, or more marked

Her headache was compounded by the construction crew outside, which had six jackhammers going at the same time.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

conducive (adjective): making a situation or outcome more likely to happen

Studying in a quiet room is conducive to learning; studying in a noisy environment makes learning more difficult.

conniving (verb): taking part in immoral and unethical plots

The queen was so conniving that, with the help of the prince, she tried to overthrow the king.

consecrate (verb): to make holy or set apart for a high purpose

At the church of Notre Dame in France, the new High Altar was consecrated in 1182.

constraint (noun): something that limits or restricts

He found pop music a constraint on his ability to learn and preferred to listen to classical musical while studying.

consummate (adjective): having or revealing supreme mastery or skill

Tyler was the consummate musician: he was able to play the guitar, harmonica, and the drum at the same time.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

consummate (verb): to make perfect and complete in every respect

The restoration of the ancient church was only consummated after a twenty years of labor.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

contemptuous (adjective): scornful, looking down at others with a sneering attitude

Always on the forefront of fashion, Vanessa looked contemptuously at anyone wearing dated clothing.

contrite (adjective): to be remorseful

Though he stole his little sister's licorice stick with malevolent glee, Chucky soon became contrite when his sister wouldn't stop crying.

conundrum (noun): a difficult problem

Computers have helped solve some of the mathematical conundrums which have puzzled man for many centuries.

convivial (adjective): describing a lively atmosphere

The wedding reception was convivial; friends who hadn't seen each other for ages drank and ate together before heading to the dance floor.

convoluted (adjective): highly complex or intricate

Instead of solving the math problem in three simple steps, Kumar used a convoluted solution requiring fifteen steps.

cornucopia (noun): an abundant supply of something good

The International Food Expo was a cornucopia of culinary delights: gourmet foods from every continent were under one roof.

corroborate (verb): to confirm or lend support to (usually an idea or claim)

Her claim that frog populations were falling precipitously in Central America was corroborated by locals, who reported that many species of frogs had seemingly vanished overnight.

cosmopolitan (adjective): comprising many cultures; global in reach and outlook

There are few cities in the world as diverse and cosmopolitan as New York.

credence (noun): belief in something

He placed no credence in psychics, claiming that they offered no special powers beyond the ability to make people part with their money.

creditable (adjective): deserving of praise but not that amazing

Critics agreed the movie was creditable, but few gave it more than three out of five stars.

credulity (noun): tendency to believe readily

Virginia's wide-eyed credulity as a five-year old was replaced by suspicion after she learned that Santa Claus didn't really exist.

cumbersome (adjective): difficult to handle or use especially because of size or weight

Only ten years ago, being an avid reader and a traveler meant carrying a cumbersome backpack stuffed with books--these days we need only an e-reader.

dearth (noun): a lack or shortage

I am surprised by the dearth of fast food chains; this is America and I assumed they were on every street.

debase (verb): reduce the quality or value of something

The third-rate script so debased the film that not even the flawless acting could save it from being a flop.

debunk (verb): expose as false ideas and claims, especially while ridiculing

Richard Dawkins tries to debunk religious belief, but his ridicule tends to push people away from his points rather than convince them.

decimation (noun): destroying or killing a large part of the population

The decimation after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is incomprehensible.

degrade (verb): reduce in worth or character, usually verbally

Jesse had mockingly pointed out all of Nancy's faults in front of their friends, publicly degrading the poor girl.

delegate (verb): give an assignment to (a person)

Since the senior manager had to go on many international business trips, she was forced to delegate many of her responsibilities to two lower-level managers.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

deliberate (verb): think about carefully; weigh the pros and cons of an issue

Emergency situations such as this call for immediate action and leave no room to deliberate over options.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

demean (verb): to insult; to cause someone to lose dignity or respect

At first the soccer players bantered back and forth, but as soon as one of the players became demeaning, calling the other's mother a water buffalo, the ref whipped out a red card.

demure (adjective): to be modest and shy

The portrait of her in a simple white blouse was sweet and demure.

deride (verb): treat or speak of with contempt

The nun derided the students for trying to sneak insects and worms into the classroom.

derisive (adjective): abusing vocally; expressing contempt or ridicule

I was surprised by her derisive tone; usually, she is sweet, soft spoken, and congenial.

derogative (adjective): expressed as worthless or in negative terms

Never before have we seen a debate between two political candidates that was so derogative and filthy.

desecrate (verb): to willfully violate or destroy a sacred place

After desecrating the pharaoh's tomb, the archaeologist soon fell victim to a horrible illness.

destitute (adjective): poor enough to need help from others

Jean Valjean, is at first destitute, but through the grace of a priest, he makes something of his life.

destitute (adjective): completely wanting or lacking (usually "destitute of")

Now that the mine is closed, the town is destitute of any economic activity.

deter (verb): turn away from by persuasion

His mother tried to deter him from joining the army, but he was too intoxicated with the idea of war to listen.

deter (verb): try to prevent; show opposition to

The government's primary job should involve deterring paths to war, not finding ways to start them.

detrimental (adjective): (sometimes followed by "to") causing harm or injury

Many know that smoking is detrimental to your health, but processed sugar in large quantities is equally bad.

devolve (verb): pass on or delegate to another

The company was full of managers known for devolving tasks to lower management, but never doing much work themselves.

devolve (verb): grow worse (usually "devolve into")

The dialogue between the two academics devolved into a downright bitter argument.

diabolical (adjective): to be extremely wicked like the devil

The conspirators, willing to dispatch anyone who stood in their way, hatched a diabolical plan to take over the city.

differentiate (verb): be a distinctive feature, attribute, or trait (sometimes in positive sense)

Mozart's long melodic lines differentiate his compositions from other works of late 18th century music.

differentiate (verb): evolve so as to lead to a new species or develop in a way most suited to the environment

Animals on Madagascar differentiated from other similar animal species due to many years of isolation on the island.

dilapidated (adjective): in terrible condition

The main house has been restored but the gazebo is still dilapidated and unuseable.

diligent (adjective): characterized by care and perseverance in carrying out tasks

Michael was a diligent gardener, never leaving a leaf on the ground and regularly watering each plant.

discord (noun): lack of agreement or harmony

Despite all their talented players, the team was filled with discord--some players refused to talk to others--and lost most of their games.

discreet (adjective): careful to protect one's speech or actions in order to avoid offense or gain an advantage

The professor thought that he was discreet, subtly wiping the stain off of his shirt, but as soon as he stepped off the podium a member of the audience pointed out the large ketchup stain.

discriminate (verb): recognize or perceive the difference

Sarah couldn't discriminate between a good wine and a bad wine, so she avoided wine tastings.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

disenfranchise (verb): deprive of voting rights

The U.S. Constitution disenfranchised women until 1920 when they were given the right to vote.

disheartened (adjective): made less hopeful or enthusiastic

After the visiting team scored nine times, the home team's fans were disheartened, some leaving the game early.

disparate (adjective): two things are fundamentally different

With the advent of machines capable of looking inside the brain, fields as disparate as religion and biology have been brought together by scientists trying to understand what happens in the brain when people have a religious experience.

dispatch (noun): dispose of rapidly and without delay and efficiently

She finished her thesis with dispatch, amazing her advisors who couldn't believe she hadn't written 60 scholarly pages so quickly.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

dispatch (verb): the property of being prompt and efficient

As soon as the angry peasants stormed the castle, they caught the king and swiftly dispatched him.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

docile (adjective): easily handled or managed; willing to be taught or led or supervised or directed

Barnyard animals are considerably more docile than the wild animals.

dog (verb): to pursue relentlessly; to hound

Throughout his life, he was dogged by insecurities that inhibited personal growth.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

dupe (verb): to trick or swindle

Once again a get-rich-fast Internet scheme had duped Harold into submitting a \$5,000 check to a sham operation.

dupe (noun): a person who is easily tricked or swindled

The charlatan mistook the crowd for a bunch of dupes, but the crowd was quickly on to him and decried his bald-faced attempt to bilk them.

eccentric (adjective): highly unconventional or usual (usually describes a person)

Mozart was well-known for his eccentricities, often speaking words backward to confuse those around him.

egotist (noun): a conceited and self-centered person

An egotist, Natasha had few friends because of her inability to talk about anything except her dream of becoming the next American Idol.

eke (verb): To live off meager resources, to scrape by

Stranded in a cabin over the winter, Terry was able to eke out an existence on canned food.

elaborate (adjective): marked by complexity and richness of detail

Thomas, on returning from Morocco, replaced his dirty gray carpet with an elaborate one he'd brought back with him.

elaborate (verb): explain in more detail

Most high school physics teachers find themselves elaborating the same point over and over again, since many concepts confuse students.

elude (verb): escape understanding

Even a basic understanding of physics can elude most high schools students.

elusive (adjective): difficult to capture or difficult to remember

Many first time skydivers say that describing the act of falling from the sky is elusive.

embellish (verb): make more attractive by adding ornament, colour, etc.; make more beautiful

McCartney would write relatively straightforward lyrics, and Lennon would embellish them with puns and poetic images.

embroiled (adjective): involved in argument or contention

These days we are never short of a D.C. politician embroiled in scandal--a welcome phenomenon for those who, having barely finished feasting on the sordid details of one imbroglio, can sink their teeth into a fresh one.

empathetic (adjective): showing understanding and ready comprehension of other peoples' states and emotions

Most discrimination and hatred is based on a lack of empathetic awareness of people that have the same aspirations and fears.

emulate (verb): strive to equal or match, especially by imitating; compete with successfully

To really become fluent in a new language, emulate the speech patterns and intonation of people who speak the language.

endemic (adjective): native; originating where it is found

Irish cuisine makes great use of potatoes, but ironically, the potato is not endemic to Ireland.

enmity (noun): a state of deep-seated ill-will

Charles' rude remark toward Sarah yesterday was due to his illness, not due to any real enmity toward Sarah.

entice (verb): get someone to do something through (often false or exaggerated) promises

Harold enticed his wife, Maude, to go on a vacation to Hawaii, with promises of luaus on the beach and all-you-can-eat seafood buffets.

enumerate (verb): determine the number or amount of

The survey enumerates the number of happy workers and the number of unhappy workers.

enumerate (verb): specify individually, one by one

I sat and listened as she enumerated all of the things she did not like about the past three months.

err (verb): to make an error

He erred in thinking that "indigent" and "indignant" were synonyms.

errant (adjective): to be wandering; not sticking to a circumscribed path

Unlike his peers, who spent their hours studying in the library, Matthew preferred errant walks through the university campus.

erratic (adjective): unpredictable; strange and unconventional

It came as no surprise to pundits that the President's attempt at re-election floundered; even during his term, support for his policies was erratic, with an approval rating jumping anywhere from 30 to 60 percent.

euphoria (noun): a feeling of great (usually exaggerated) elation

The euphoria of winning her first gold medal in the 100 meter dash overwhelmed Shelly-Ann Fraser and she wept tears of immense joy.

evasive (adjective): avoiding or escaping from difficulty or danger or commitment

His responses were clearly evasive; he obviously did not want to take on any responsibility or any new work.

evasive (adjective): deliberately vague or ambiguous

Every time I call the bank, I receive the same evasive answers about our mortgage and never get a clear response.

evenhanded (adjective): without partiality

Teachers often have trouble being evenhanded to all of their varied students.

exasperate (verb): to irritate intensely

As a child, I exasperated my mother with strings of never-ending questions.

excruciating (adjective): extremely painful

After the boulder rolled a couple of feet, pinning my friend's arm, he experienced excruciating pain.

exemplify (verb): be characteristic of

Lincoln exemplified the best of not only America, but also the potential greatness that exists within each person.

exemplify (verb): clarify by giving an example of

Please present some case studies that exemplify the results that you claim in your paper.

exhort (verb): to strongly urge on; encourage

Nelson's parents exhorted him to study medicine, urging him to choose a respectable profession; intransigent, Nelson left home to become a graffiti artist.

extenuating (adjective): making less guilty or more forgivable

The jury was hardly moved by the man's plea that his loneliness was an extenuating factor in his crime of dognapping a prized pooch.

facetious (adjective): cleverly amusing in tone

Facetious behavior will not be tolerated during sex education class; it's time for all of you to treat these matters like mature adults.

fawn (verb): try to gain favor by extreme flattery

The media fawned over the handsome new CEO, praising his impeccable sense of style instead of asking more pointed questions.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

ferret (verb): to search for something persistently

Ever the resourceful lexicographer, Fenton was able to ferret out the word origin of highly obscure words.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

fete (verb): to celebrate a person

After World War II, war heroes were feted at first but quickly forgotten.

fickle (adjective): liable to sudden unpredictable change, esp. in affections or attachments

She was so fickle in her politics, it was hard to pinpoint her beliefs; one week she would embrace a side, and the next week she would denounce it.

finagle (verb): achieve something by means of trickery or devious methods

Steven was able to finagle one of the last seats on the train by convincing the conductor that his torn stub was actually a valid ticket.

fledgling (adjective): young and inexperienced; describing any new participant in some activity

Murray has years of experience in family practice, but he is just a fledgling in surgery.

fleece (verb): to deceive

Many people have been fleeced by Internet scams and never received their money back.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

flounder (verb): behave awkwardly; have difficulties

Sylvia has excelled at advanced calculus, but ironically, when she has deal with taxes, she flounders.

flush (adjective): to be in abundance

The exam's passage is flush with difficult words, words that you may have learned only yesterday.

foible (noun): a behavioral attribute that is distinctive and peculiar to an individual

When their new roommate sat staring at an oak tree for an hour, Marcia thought it indicated a mental problem, but Jeff assured her it was a harmless foible.

foolhardy (adjective): marked by defiant disregard for danger or consequences

The police regularly face dangerous situations, so for a police officer not to wear his bullet-proof vest is foolhardy.

forthright (adjective): characterized by directness in manner or speech; without subtlety or evasion

I did not expect the insurance agent to give us any straight answers, but I was pleasantly surprised by how forthright he was.

futile (adjective): producing no result or effect; unproductive of success

I thought I could repair the car myself, but after two days of work with no success, I have to admit that my efforts were futile.

genial (adjective): agreeable, conducive to comfort

Betty is a genial young woman: everyone she meets is put at ease by her elegance and grace.

genteel (adjective): marked by refinement in taste and manners

A live string quartet would provide a more genteel air to the wedding than would a folk singer.

glean (verb): collect information bit by bit

Herb has given us no formal statement about his background, but from various hints, I have gleaned that he grew up in difficult circumstances.

glib (adjective): (of a person) speaking with ease but without sincerity

I have found that the more glib the salesman, the worse the product.

goad (verb): urge on with unpleasant comments

Doug did not want to enter the race, but Jim, through a steady stream of taunts, goaded him into signing up for it.

grovel (verb): show submission or fear

Every time Susan comes to the office, Frank grovels as if she were about to fire.

guffaw (verb): laugh boisterously

Whenever the jester fell to the ground in mock pain, the king guffawed, exposing his yellow, fang-like teeth.

hamper (verb): prevent the progress or free movement of

As the rain water began to collect in pools on the highway, it began to hamper the flow of traffic.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

hamstrung (verb): made ineffective or powerless

The FBI has made so many restriction on the local police that they are absolutely hamstrung, unable to accomplish anything.

heyday (noun): the pinnacle or top of a time period or career

During the heyday of Prohibition, bootlegging had become such a lucrative business that many who had been opposed to the 18th Amendment began to fear it would be repealed.

hodgepodge (noun): a confusing mixture or jumble

Those in attendance represented a hodgepodge of the city's denizens: chimney sweepers could be seen sitting elbow to elbow with stockbrokers.

hound (verb): to pursue relentlessly

An implacable foe of corruption, Eliot Ness hounded out graft in all forms--he even helped nab Al Capone.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

humdrum (adjective): dull and lacking excitement

Having grown up in a humdrum suburb, Jacob relished life in New York City after moving.

illicit (adjective): contrary to or forbidden by law

Though Al Capone was engaged in many illicit activities, he was finally arrested for income tax evasion, a relatively minor offense.

immaterial (adjective): not relevant

The judge found the defendant's comments immaterial to the trial, and summarily dismissed him from the witness stand.

impeccable (adjective): without fault or error

He was impeccably dressed in the latest fashion without a single crease or stain.

impede (verb): be a hindrance or obstacle to

Since the police sergeant had to train the pair of new hires, progress in his own case was impeded.

impending (adjective): close in time; about to occur

The impending doom of our world has been discussed and debated for 2000 years--maybe even longer.

impermeable (adjective): does not allow fluids to pass through

The sand bags placed on the river formed an impermeable barrier, protecting the town from flooding.

implicate (verb): convey a meaning; imply

By saying that some of the guests were uncomfortable, the manager implicated to the hotel staff that it needed to be more diligent.

implicate (verb): to indicate in wrongdoing, usually a crime

The crime boss was implicated for a long list of crimes, ranging from murder to disturbing the peace.

imponderable (adjective): impossible to estimate or figure out

According to many lawmakers, the huge variety of factors affecting society make devising an efficient healthcare system an imponderable task.

impregnable (adjective): immune to attack; incapable of being tampered with

As a child, Amy would build pillow castles and pretend they were impregnable fortresses.

inadvertent (adjective): happening by chance or unexpectedly or unintentionally

Although Prohibition was rooted in noble ideals, the inadvertent and costly consequences of making alcohol illegal in the U.S. led to the repeal.

inarticulate (adjective): without or deprived of the use of speech or words

Although a brilliant economist, Professor Black was completely inarticulate, a terrible lecturer.

incense (verb): make furious

When Herb bought football tickets for a game on the day of their wedding anniversary, Jill was incensed.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

incessant (adjective): uninterrupted in time and indefinitely long continuing

I don't mind small children in brief doses, but I think the incessant exposure that their parents have to them would quickly wear me down.

inclement (adjective): (of weather) unpleasant, stormy

After a week of inclement weather, we finally are able to go outside and enjoy the sun.

inclement (adjective): used of persons or behavior; showing no mercy

Marcus Aurelius, though a fair man, was inclement to Christians during his reign, persecuting them violently.

incumbent (adjective): necessary (for someone) as a duty or responsibility

Middle managers at times make important decisions, but real responsibility for the financial well-being of the corporation is ultimately incumbent on the CEO.

indict (verb): to formally charge or accuse of wrong-doing

The bankrobber was indicted on several major charges, including possession of a firearm.

indigenous (adjective): originating in a certain area

The plants and animals indigenous to Australia are notably different from those indigenous to the U.S-- one look at a duckbill platypus and you know you're not dealing with an opossum.

indignant (adjective): feeling anger over a perceived injustice

When the cyclist swerved into traffic, it forced the driver to brake and elicited an indignant shout of "Hey, punk, watch where you're going!"

industrious (adjective): characterized by hard work and perseverance

Pete was an industrious student, completing every assignment thoroughly and on time.

inflammable (adjective): extremely controversial, incendiary

It only takes one person to leave an inflammable comment on an Internet thread for that thread to blow up into pages upon pages of reader indignation.

ingenuity (noun): the power of creative imagination

Daedalus was famous for his ingenuity; he was able to fashion his son Icarus with a pair of wings, using wax to hold them together.

inkling (noun): a slight suggestion or vague understanding

Lynne speaks four Romance languages, but she doesn't have an inkling about how East Asian languages are structured.

insipid (adjective): dull and uninteresting

The movie director was known for hiring beautiful actors in order to deflect attention away from the insipid scripts he would typically use.

insolvent (adjective): unable to pay one's bills; bankrupt

With credit card bills skyrocketing, a shockingly large number of Americans are truly insolvent.

intermittent (adjective): stopping and starting at irregular intervals

The intermittent thunder continued and the night was punctuated by cracks of lightning--a surreal sleepless night.

inundate (verb): to flood or overwhelm

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.

irascible (adjective): quickly aroused to anger

If Arthur's dog is not fed adequately, he becomes highly irascible, even growling at his own shadow.

irk (verb): irritate or vex

My little sister has a way of irking and annoying me like no other person.

irresolute (adjective): uncertain how to act or proceed

He stood irresolute at the split in the trail, not sure which route would lead back to the camp.

jargon (noun): a characteristic language of a particular group

To those with little training in medicine, the jargon of doctors can be very difficult to understand.

jocular (adjective): characterized by jokes and good humor

My uncle was always in a jocular mood at family gatherings, messing up people's hair and telling knock-knock jokes to anyone who would listen.

junta (noun): an aggressive takeover by a group (usually military)

As dangerous of a threat as North Korea is, some analysts believe that were a junta suddenly to gain power, it could be even more unpredictable and bellicose than the current leadership

laborious (adjective): characterized by effort to the point of exhaustion; especially physical effort

The most laborious job I've had was working 20 hours a day as a fisherman in King Salmon, Alaska.

leery (adjective): openly distrustful and unwilling to confide

Without checking his references and talking to previous employers, I am leery of hiring the candidate.

lethargic (adjective): lacking energy

Nothing can make a person more lethargic than a big turkey dinner.

lucid (adjective): (of language) transparently clear; easily understandable

Though Walters writes about physics and time travel, his writing is always lucid, so readers with little scientific training can understand difficult concepts.

macabre (adjective): suggesting the horror of death and decay; gruesome

Edgar Allen Poe was considered the master of the macabre; his stories vividly describe the moment leading up to--and often those moments after--a grisly death.

malady (noun): a disease or sickness

The town was struck by a malady throughout the winter that left most people sick in bed for two weeks.

malevolent (adjective): wishing or appearing to wish evil to others; arising from intense ill will or hatred

Villians are known for their malevolent nature, oftentimes inflicting cruelty on others just for enjoyment.

malleable (adjective): capable of being shaped or bent or drawn out

The clay became malleable and easy to work with after a little water was added.

malleable (adjective): easily influenced

My little brother is so malleable that I can convince him to sneak cookies from the cupboard for me.

malodorous (adjective): having an unpleasant smell

Some thermally active fountains spew sulfur fumes--the air around them is sometimes so malodorous that many have to plug their noses.

martial (adjective): suggesting war or military life

Americans tend to remember Abraham Lincoln as kindly and wise, not at all martial, despite the fact that he was involved in the fiercest war America has even fought.

maxim (noun): a short saying expressing a general truth

Johnson initially suggests that the secret to business can be summarized in a single maxim but then requires a 300-page book to explain exactly what he means.

meander (verb): to wander aimlessly

A casual observer might have thought that Peter was meandering through the city, but that day he was actually seeking out those places where he and his long lost love had once visited.

melancholy (noun): a deep, long-lasting sadness

Hamlet is a figure of tremendous melancholy: he doesn't have a truly cheerful scene throughout the entire play.

melee (noun): a wild, confusing fight or struggle

After enduring daily taunts about my name, I became enraged and pummeled the schoolyard bully and his sycophantic friends in a brutal melee.

mesmerize (verb): to spellbind or enthrall

The plot and the characters were so well developed that many viewers were mesmerized, unable to move their eyes from the screen for even a single second.

misanthrope (noun): a hater of mankind

Hamilton had been deceived so many times in his life that he hid behind the gruff exterior of a

misanthrope, lambasting perfect strangers for no apparent reason.

miscreant (noun): a person who breaks the law

Come back you miscreant! yelled the woman who just had her purse stolen.

miser (noun): a person who doesn't like to spend money (because they are greedy)

Monte was no miser, but was simply frugal, wisely spending the little that he earned.

misogynist (noun): a person who dislikes women in particular

Many have accused Hemingway of being a quiet misogynist, but recently unearthed letters argue against this belief.

moment (noun): significant and important value

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.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

moot (adjective): open to argument or debate; undecidable in a meaningless or irrelevant way

Since the Board just terminated Steve as the CEO, what the finance committee might have thought of his proposed marketing plan for next year is now a moot point.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

morose (adjective): ill-tempered and not inclined to talk; gloomy

After Stanley found out he was no longer able to go on vacation with his friends, he sat in his room morosely.

morph (verb): To undergo dramatic change in a seamless and barely noticeable fashion.

The earnestness of the daytime talk shows of the 1970's has morphed into something far more sensational and vulgar: today guests actually standup and threaten to take swings at one another.

muted (adjective): softened, subdued

Helen preferred muted earth colors, such as green and brown, to the bright pinks and red her sister liked.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

obdurate (adjective): stubbornly persistent in changing an opinion or action

No number of pleas and bribes would get him to change his obdurate attitude.

obliging (adjective): showing a cheerful willingness to do favors for others

Even after all his success, I found him to be accommodating and obliging, sharing with me his "secret tips" on how to gain wealth and make friends.

obstinate (adjective): resistant to guidance or discipline; stubbornly persistent

The coach suggested improvements Sarah might make on the balance beam, but she remained obstinate, unwilling to modify any of the habits that made her successful in the past.

ornate (adjective): marked by elaborate rhetoric and elaborated with decorative details

The ornate Victorian and Edwardian homes spread throughout San Francisco are my favorite part of the city.

paradoxical (adjective): seemingly contradictory but nonetheless possibly true

That light could be both a particle and a wave seems paradoxical, but nonetheless, it is true.

pastoral (adjective): relating to the countryside in a pleasant sense

Those who imagine America's countryside as a pastoral region are often disappointed to learn that much of rural U.S. is filled with cornfields extending as far as the eye can see.

patronize (verb): treat condescendingly

She says she genuinely wanted to help me, but instead she patronized me, constantly pointing out how I was inferior to her.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

paucity (noun): a lack of something

There is a paucity of jobs hiring today that require menial skills, since most jobs have either been automated or outsourced.

peevish (adjective): easily irritated or annoyed

Our office manager is peevish, so the rest of us tip-toe around him, hoping not to set off another one of his fits.

perennial (adjective): lasting an indefinitely long time; eternal; everlasting

Even at the old-timers games, Stan Musial would get the loudest cheer: he was a perennial favorite of the fans there.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

perpetuate (verb): cause to continue

If you do not let him do things for himself, you are merely perpetuating bad habits that will be even harder to break in the future.

perquisite (noun): a right reserved exclusively by a particular person or group (especially a hereditary or official right)

Even as the dishwasher at the French restaurant, Josh quickly learned that he had the perquisite of being able to eat terrific food for half the price diners would pay.

pertinent (adjective): having precise or logical relevance to the matter at hand

While the salaries of the players might draw attention in the media, such monetary figures are not pertinent to the question of who plays the best on the field.

perturb (verb): disturb in mind or cause to be worried or alarmed

Now that Henry is recovering from a major illnesses, he no longer lets the little trivialities, such as late mail, perturb him.

peruse (verb): to read very carefully

Instead of perusing important documents, people all too often rush to the bottom of the page and plaster their signatures at the bottom.

pine (verb): to yearn for

Standing forlornly by the window, she pined for her lost love.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

pinnacle (noun): the highest point

At its pinnacle, the Roman Empire extended across most of the landmass of Eurasia, a feat not paralleled to the rise of the British Empire in the 18th and 19th century.

piquant (adjective): having an agreeably pungent taste

The chef, with a mere flick of the salt shaker, turned the bland tomato soup into a piquant meal.

pithy (adjective): concise and full of meaning

I enjoy reading the Daodejing for its pithy and insightful prose; it always gives me something to think about.

pittance (noun): a small amount (of money)

Vinny's uncle beamed smugly about how he'd offered his nephew fifty dollars for his Harvard tuition; even twice the amount would have been a mere pittance.

placid (adjective): not easily irritated

Doug is normally placid, so we were all shocked to see him yelling at the television when the Mets lost the game.

plodding (adjective): (of movement) slow and laborious

Charlie may seem to run at a plodding pace, but he is an ultramarathoner, meaning he runs distances of up to 100 miles, and can run for ten hours at a stretch.

ploy (noun): a clever plan to turn a situation to one's advantage

Dennis arranged an elaborate ploy, involving 14 different people lying for him in different situations, so that it could appear that he was meeting Mary completely by chance at the wedding reception.

powwow (noun): an informal meeting or discussion

Before the team takes the field, the coach always calls for a powwow so that he can make sure all the players are mentally in the right place.

precarious (adjective): fraught with danger

People smoke to relax and forget their cares, but ironically, in terms of health risks, smoking is far more precarious than either mountain-climbing or skydiving.

precedent (noun): an example that is used to justify similar occurrences at a later time

The principal explained that even though one student had done modelling work outside of school, the outfits that student wore in those photographs in no way established a precedent for what could be worn at school dances.

preempt (verb): take the place of or have precedence over

A governmental warning about an imminent terrorist attack would preempt ordinary network programming on television.

preemptive (adjective): done before someone else can do it

Just as Martha was about to take the only cookie left on the table, Noah preemptively swiped it.

presumption (noun): an assumption that is taken for granted

When Mr. Baker found out the family car was gone, he acted under the presumption that his rebellious son had taken the car, calling his son's phone and yelling at him; only later did Mr. Baker realize that Mrs. Baker had simply gone out to get her nails d

presumption (noun): audacious (even arrogant) behavior that you have no right to

The new neighbor quickly gained a reputation for her presumption; she had invited herself to several of the neighbors homes, often stopping over at inopportune times and asking for a drink.

presumptuous (adjective): excessively forward

Many felt that Barney was presumptuous in moving into the large office before the management even made any official announcement of his promotion.

prevail (verb): be widespread in a particular area at a particular time; be current:

During the labor negotiations, an air of hostility prevailed in the office.

prevail (verb): prove superior

Before the cricket match, Australia was heavily favored, but India prevailed.

pristine (adjective): Unspoiled, untouched (usu. of nature)

The glacial lake was pristine and we filled our canteens to drink deeply.

pristine (adjective): Immaculately clean and unused

Drill sergeants are known for demanding pristine cabinets, uniforms, and beds, and often make new recruits clean and clean and clean until they meet the expected high standards.

profuse (adjective): plentiful; pouring out in abundance

During mile 20 of the Hawaii Marathon, Dwayne was sweating so profusely that he stopped to take off his shirt, and ran the remaining six miles wearing nothing more than skimpy shorts.

Note:

profusion (noun): the property of being extremely abundant

When Maria reported that she had been visited by Jesus Christ and had proof, a profusion of reporters

and journalists descended on the town.

proponent (noun): a person who pleads for a cause or propounds an idea

Ironically, the leading proponent of Flat-Earth Theory flies all over the world in an effort to win more adherents.

provisional (adjective): under terms not final or fully worked out or agreed upon

Until the corporate office hands down a definitive decision on use of the extra offices, we will share their use in a provisional arrangement.

pugnacious (adjective): eager to fight or argue; verbally combative

The comedian told one flat joke after another, and when the audience started booing, he pugnaciously back at them, "Hey, you think this is easy -- why don't you buffoons give it a shot?"

qualm (noun): uneasiness about the fitness of an action

While he could articulate no clear reason why Harkner's plan would fail, he nevertheless felt qualms about committing any resources to it.

quandary (noun): state of uncertainty or perplexity especially as requiring a choice between equally unfavorable options

Steve certainly is in a quandary: if he doesn't call Elaine, she will blame him for everything, but if he does call her, the evidence of where he currently is could cost him his job.

quip (noun): a witty saying or remark

In one of the most famous quips about classical music, Mark Twain said: "Wagner's music is better than it sounds."

raffish (adjective): marked by a carefree unconventionality or disreputableness

The men found him raffish, but the women adored his smart clothes and casual attitude.

raft (noun): a large number of something

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

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

rakish (adjective): marked by a carefree unconventionality or disreputableness

As soon as he arrived in the city, the rakish young man bought some drugs and headed straight for the seedy parts of town.

rankle (verb): gnaw into; make resentful or angry

His constant whistling would rankle her, sometimes causing her to leave in a huff.

rash (adjective): marked by defiant disregard for danger or consequences; imprudently incurring risk

Although Bruce was able to make the delivery in time with a nighttime motorcycle ride in the rain, Susan

criticized his actions as rash.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

redress (noun): an act of making something right

Barry forgot his wife's birthday two years in a row, and was only able to redress his oversight by surprising his wife with a trip to Tahiti.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

relegate (verb): assign to a lower position

When Dexter was unable to fulfill his basic duties, instead of firing him, the boss relegated him to kitchen cleanup.

remiss (adjective): to be negligent in one's duty

Remiss in his duty to keep the school functioning efficiently, the principle was relieved of his position after only three months.

renege (verb): fail to fulfill a promise or obligation

We will no longer work with that vendor since it has reneged on nearly every agreement.

replete (adjective): completely stocked or furnished with something

Only weeks after the hurricane made landfall, the local supermarket shelves were replete with goods, so quick was the disaster relief response.

reprobate (noun): a person who is disapproved of

Those old reprobates drinking all day down by the river--they are not going to amount to much.

reservation (noun): an unstated doubt that prevents you from accepting something wholeheartedly

I was initially excited by the idea of a trip to Washington, D.C. but now that I have read about the high crime statistics there, I have some reservations.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

resignation (noun): the acceptance of something unpleasant that can't be avoided

Since Jack could not think of a convincing reason why he had to miss the seminar, he attended it with a sense of resignation.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

resolve (verb): reach a conclusion after a discussion or deliberation

After much thought, Ted resolved not to travel abroad this summer because he didn't have much money in his bank account.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

respite (noun): a pause from doing something (as work)

Every afternoon, the small company has a respite in which workers play foosball or board games.

retiring (adjective): to be shy, and to be inclined to retract from company

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

retract (verb): pull inward or towards a center; formally reject or disavow a formerly held belief, usually under pressure

Email is wonderfully efficient, but once something awkward or damaging has been sent, there is no way to retract it.

rile (verb): cause annoyance in; disturb, especially by minor irritations

Dan is usually calm and balanced, but it takes only one intense glare from Sabrina to rile him.

robust (adjective): sturdy and strong in form, constitution, or construction

Chris preferred bland and mild beers, but Bhavin preferred a beer with more robust flavor.

sanctimonious (adjective): making a show of being pious; holier-than-thou

Even during the quiet sanctity of evening prayer, she held her chin high, a sanctimonious sneer forming on her face as she eyed those who were attending church for the first time.

sanguine (adjective): cheerful; optimistic

With the prospect of having to learn 3,000 words during the course of the summer, Paul was anything but sanguine.

savvy (noun): a perceptive understanding

Although a great CEO, he did not have the political savvy to win the election.

savvy (verb): get the meaning of something

The student savvies the meaning of astrophysics with little effort.

savvy (adjective): well-informed or perceptive

With his savvy business partner, the company was able to turn a profit within a year.

scintillating (adjective): 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.

screed (noun): an abusive rant (often tedious)

Joey had difficulty hanging out with his former best friend Perry, who, during his entire cup of coffee, enumerated all of the government's deficiencies--only to break ranks and launch into some screed against big business.

sentimental (adjective): effusively or insincerely emotional, especially in art, music, and literature

I don't like romanticism for the same reason I don't like melodramatic acting and soap operas--overly sentimental.

serendipity (noun): the instance in which an accidental, fortunate discovery is made

The invention of the 3M Post It Note was serendipitous, because the scientist who had come up with the

idea was looking for a strong adhesive; the weak adhesive he came up with was perfect for holding a piece of paper in place but made it very easy for so

serene (adjective): calm and peaceful

I'd never seen him so serene; usually, he was a knot of stress and anxiety from hours of trading on the stock exchange.

slapdash (adjective): carelessly and hastily put together

The office building had been constructed in a slapdash manner, so it did not surprise officials when, during a small earthquake, a large crack emerged on the façade of the building.

smattering (noun): a slight or superficial understanding of a subject; a small amount of something

I know only a smattering of German, but Helen is able to read German newspapers and converse with natives.

smug (adjective): marked by excessive complacency or self-satisfaction

When Phil was dating the model, he had a smug attitude that annoyed his buddies.

snide (adjective): expressive of contempt; derogatory or mocking in an indirect way

The chairman interpreted Taylor's question about promotions as a snide remark, but in all innocence Taylor was trying to figure out the company's process.

snub (verb): refuse to acknowledge; reject outright and bluntly

Wheeler was completely qualified for the committee, but the board snubbed him, choosing an obviously lesser qualified candidate instead.

sordid (adjective): involving ignoble actions and motives; arousing moral distaste and contempt; foul and run-down and repulsive

The nightly news simply announced that the senator had had an affair, but the tabloid published all the sordid details of the interaction.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

spendthrift (noun): one who spends money extravagantly

Taking weekly trips to Vegas, Megan was a spendthrift whose excesses eventually caught up to her.

spurn (verb): reject with contempt

She spurned all his flattery and proposals, and so he walked off embarrassed and sad.

squander (verb): spend thoughtlessly; waste time, money, or an opportunity

Fearing his money would be squandered by his family, he gave all of it to charity when he died.

staid (adjective): characterized by dignity and propriety

Frank came from a staid environment, so he was shocked that his college roommate sold narcotics.

start (verb): to suddenly move in a particular direction

All alone in the mansion, Henrietta started when she heard a sound.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

steadfast (adjective): marked by firm determination or resolution; not shakable

A good captain needs to be steadfast, continuing to hold the wheel and stay the course even during the most violent storm.

stem (verb): to hold back or limit the flow or growth of something

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

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

stipend (noun): a regular allowance (of money)

He was hoping for a monthly allowance loan from the government, but after no such stipend was forthcoming he realized he would have to seek other means of paying for his college tuition.

stolid (adjective): having or revealing little emotion or sensibility; not easily aroused or excited

Elephants may appear stolid to casual observers, but they actually have passionate emotional lives.

stymie (verb): hinder or prevent the progress or accomplishment of

The engineers found their plans stymied at every turn and were ultimately able to make almost no progress on the project.

summit (noun): the peak or highest point

After hiking for two days, the climbers finally reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro.

summit (noun): a meeting of high-level leaders

Since climate change policy has been mired in congressional fighting, this summit should help set the goals for president's next term.

surly (adjective): inclined to anger or bad feelings with overtones of menace

Every morning, Bhavin was a surly unhappy person, but once he ate breakfast, he became loving, laughing, and a joy to be around.

tact (noun): consideration in dealing with others and avoiding giving offense

In a tremendous display of tact, Shelly was able to maintain a strong friendship with Marcia, even though Marcia's husband, Frank, confessed to finding Shelley more attractive than Marcia.

tarnish (verb): make dirty or spotty, as by exposure to air; also used metaphorically

Pete Rose was one of the best baseball players of his generation, but his involvement with gambling on baseball games has tarnished his image in the eyes of many.

tawdry (adjective): tastelessly showy; cheap and shoddy

Carol expected to find New York City magical, the way so many movies had portrayed it, but she was

surprised how often tawdry displays took the place of genuine elegance.

taxing (adjective): use to the limit; exhaust

The hike to the summit of Mt. Whitney was so taxing that I could barely speak or stand up.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

telling (adjective): significant and revealing of another factor

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

telltale (adjective): revealing

The many telltale signs of chronic smoking include yellow teeth, and a persistent, hacking cough.

tender (verb): offer up something formally

The government was loath to tender more money in the fear that it might set off inflation.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

thoroughgoing (adjective): very thorough; complete

As a thoroughgoing bibliophile, one who had turned his house into a veritable library, he shocked his friends when he bought a Kindle.

thrifty (adjective): spending money wisely

He was economical, spending his money thriftily and on items considered essential.

thwart (verb): hinder or prevent (the efforts, plans, or desires) of

I wanted to spend a week in New York this autumn, but the high costs of travel and lodging thwarted my plans.

tirade (noun): an angry speech

In terms of political change, a tirade oftentimes does little more than make the person speaking red in the face.

tout (verb): advertize in strongly positive terms; show off

At the conference, the CEO touted the extraordinary success of his company's Research & Development division.

transitory (adjective): lasting a very short time

If we lived forever and life was not transitory, do you think we would appreciate life less or more?

travail (noun): use of physical or mental energy; hard work; agony or anguish

While they experienced nothing but travails in refinishing the kitchen, they completed the master bedroom in less than a weekend.

tribulation (noun): something, especially an event, that causes difficulty and suffering

As of 2013, nearly 1.5 million Syrians have fled their country hoping to escape the tribulations of a civil war tearing their country to pieces.

tumult (noun): a state of chaos, noise and confusion

Riots broke out just in front of our apartment building, and the tumult continued late into the night.

uncanny (adjective): suggesting the operation of supernatural influences; surpassing the ordinary or normal

Reggie has an uncanny ability to connect with animals: feral cats will readily approach him, and sometimes even wild birds will land on his finger.

uncompromising (adjective): not making concessions

The relationship between Bart and Hilda ultimately failed because they were both so uncompromising, never wanting to change their opinions.

unconscionable (adjective): unreasonable; unscrupulous; excessive

The lawyer's demands were so unconscionable that rather than pay an exorbitant sum or submit himself to any other inconveniences, the defendant decided to find a new lawyer.

underwrite (verb): to support financially

The latest symphony broadcast was made possible with underwriting from the Carnegie Endowment.

unnerve (verb): to make nervous or upset

At one time unnerved by math problems, she began avidly "Magoosh-ing", and soon became adept at even combinations and permutations questions.

unprecedented (adjective): having never been done or known before; novel

When America first created its national parks, the idea of setting aside the most beautiful land in a country was unprecedented in the history of mankind.

unruly (adjective): (of persons) noisy and lacking in restraint or discipline; unwilling to submit to authority

Walk in to any preschool and I am sure that you will find an unruly and chaotic scene--unless it's nap time.

unseemly (adjective): not in keeping with accepted standards of what is right or proper in polite society

He acted in an unseemly manner, insulting the hostess and then speaking ill of her deceased husband.

urbane (adjective): showing a high degree of refinement and the assurance that comes from wide social experience

Because of his service as an intelligence officer and his refined tastes, W. Somerset Maugham became the inspiration for the urbane and sophisticate spy James Bond.

vacuous (adjective): devoid of intelligence, matter, or significance

To the journalist's pointed question, the senator gave a vacuous response, mixing a few of his overall

campaign slogans with platitudes and completely avoiding the controversial subject of the question.

vanquish (verb): come out better in a competition, race, or conflict

For years, Argentina would dominate in World Cup qualifying matches, only to be vanquished by one of the European countries during the late stages of the tournament.

variance (noun): the quality of varying

The cynic quipped, "There is not much variance in politicians; they all seem to prevaricate".

veneer (noun): covering consisting of a thin superficial layer that hides the underlying substance

Mark Twain referred to the Victorian Period in America as the "Gilded Age", implying the ample moral corruption that lay beneath a mere veneer of respectability.

vicarious (adjective): felt or undergone as if one were taking part in the experience or feelings of another

The advent of twitter is a celebrity stalker's dream, as he or she can--through hundreds of intimate "tweets"--vicariously live the life of a famous person.

vie (verb): compete for something

While the other teams in the division actively vie for the championship, this team seems content simply to go through the motions of playing.

vindictive (adjective): to have a very strong desire for revenge

Though the other girl had only lightly poked fun of Vanessa's choice in attire, Vanessa was so vindictive that she waited for an entire semester to get the perfect revenge.

virago (noun): an ill-tempered or violent woman

Poor Billy was the victim of the virago's invective--she railed at him for a good 30-minutes about how he is the scum of the earth for speaking loudly on his cellphone in public.

voracious (adjective): very hungry; approaching an activity with gusto

Steven was a voracious reader, sometimes finishing two novels in the same day.

wanton (adjective): without check or limitation; showing no moral restraints to one's anger, desire, or appetites

Due to wanton behavior and crude language, the drunk man was thrown out of the bar and asked to never return.

wax (verb): to gradually increase in size or intensity

Her enthusiasm for the diva's new album only waxed with each song; by the end of the album, it was her favorite CD yet.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

whimsical (adjective): determined by impulse or whim rather than by necessity or reason

Adults look to kids and envy their whimsical nature at times, wishing that they could act without reason and play without limitation.

zenith (noun): the highest point; culmination

At the zenith of his artistic career, Elvis was outselling any other artist on the charts.

Advanced Words

abjure (verb): formally reject or give up (as a belief)

While the church believed that Galileo abjured the heliocentric theory under threat of torture, he later wrote a book clearly supporting the theory.

abrogate (verb): revoke formally

As part of the agreement between the labor union and the company, the workers abrogated their right to strike for four years in exchange for better health insurance.

adjudicate (verb): to serve as a judge in a competition; to arrive at a judgment or conclusion

Only those with the most refined palates were able to adjudicate during the barbeque competition.

afford (verb): provide with an opportunity

The summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro affords a panoramic view that encompasses both Tanzania and Kenya.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

alacrity (noun): an eager willingness to do something

The first three weeks at his new job, Mark worked with such alacrity that upper management knew it would be giving him a promotion.

anachronism (noun): something that is inappropriate for the given time period (usually something old).

Dressed in 15th century clothing each day, Edward was a walking anachronism.

anathema (noun): a detested person; the source of somebody's hate

Hundreds of years ago, Galileo was anathema to the church; today the church is anathema to some on the left side of the political spectrum.

anemic (adjective): lacking energy and vigor

After three straight shows, the lead actress gave an anemic performance the fourth night, barely speaking loudly enough for those in the back rows to hear.

anodyne (noun): something that soothes or relieves pain

Muzak, which is played in department stores, is intended to be an anodyne, but is often so cheesy and over-the-top that customers become irritated.

anodyne (adjective): inoffensive

Wilbur enjoyed a spicy Mexican breakfast, but Jill preferred a far more anodyne meal in the mornings.

antic (adjective): ludicrously odd

The clown's antic act was too extreme for the youngest children, who left the room in tears.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

aplomb (noun): great coolness and composure under strain

Nancy acted with aplomb during dangerous situations--she once calmly climbed up an oak tree to save a

cat.

apogee (noun): the highest point

The apogee of the Viennese style of music, Mozart's music continues to mesmerize audiences well into the 21st century.

apostate (noun): a person who has abandoned a religious faith or cause

An apostate of the Republican Party, Sheldon has yet to become affiliated with any party and dubs himself an independent.

apothegm (noun): a short, pithy instructive saying

Winston Churchill is famous for many apothegms, but this might be his most famous: "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried."

apotheosis (noun): exaltation to divine status; the highest point of development

As difficult as it is to imagine, the apotheosis of Mark Zuckerberg's career, many believe, is yet to come.

approbatory (adjective): expressing praise or approval

Although it might not be her best work, Hunter's new novel has received generally approbatory reviews.

appropriate (verb): to give or take something by force

The government appropriated land that was occupied by squatters, sending them scurrying for another place to live.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

appropriate (verb): to allocate

The committee appropriated the funds to its various members.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

appurtenant (adjective): supply added support

In hiking Mt. Everest, sherpas are appurtenant, helping climbers both carry gear and navigate treacherous paths.

arch (adjective): to be deliberately teasing

The baroness was arch, making playful asides to the townspeople; yet because they couldn't pick up on her dry humor, they thought her supercilious.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

arrant (adjective): complete and wholly (usually modifying a noun with negative connotation)

An arrant fool, Lawrence surprised nobody when he lost all his money in a pyramid scheme that was every bit as transparent as it was corrupt.

arriviste (noun): a person who has recently reached a position of power; a social climber

The city center was aflutter with arrivistes who each tried to outdo one another with their ostentatious sports cars and chic evening dress.

arrogate (verb): seize and control without authority

Arriving at the small town, the outlaw arrogated the privileges of a lord, asking the frightened citizens to provide food, drink, and entertainment.

artifice (noun): cunning tricks used to deceive others

The mayoral candidates both spent much of the campaign accusing each other of artifices designed to mislead the voting public.

artless (adjective): without cunning or deceit

Despite the president's seemingly artless speeches, he was a skilled and ruthless negotiator.

artlessness (noun): the quality of innocence

I, personally, found the artlessness of her speech charming.

asperity (noun): harshness of manner

The editor was known for his asperity, often sending severe letters of rejection to amateur writers.

assiduously (adverb): with care and persistence

The top college football program recruits new talent assiduously, only choosing those who were the top in their county.

atavism (noun): a reappearance of an earlier characteristic; throwback

Much of the modern art movement was an atavism to a style of art found only in small villages through Africa and South America.

attenuate (verb): to weaken (in terms of intensity); to taper off/become thinner.

Her animosity towards Bob attenuated over the years, and she even went so far as to invite him to her party.

autocratic (adjective): characteristic of an absolute ruler or absolute rule; having absolute sovereignty

The last true autocratic country is certainly North Korea; nowhere does a leader exercise the absolute control over all aspects of a people the way that Kim Jong-un does.

autocratic (adjective): offensively self-assured or given to exercising usually unwarranted power

The manager was finally fired for his autocratic leadership, which often bordered on rude and offensive.

baleful (adjective): threatening or foreshadowing evil or tragic developments

Movies often use storms or rain clouds as a baleful omen of evil events that will soon befall the main character.

base (adjective): the lowest, class were without any moral principles

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

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

bastardization (noun): an act that debases or corrupts

The movie World War Z is a complete bastardization of the book with little more in common than zombies and a title.

beg (verb): to evade or dodge (a question)

By assuming that Charlie was headed to college--which he was not--Maggie begged the question when she asked him to which school he was headed in the Fall.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

bemoan (verb): express discontent or a stong regret

While the CFO carefully explained all the reasons for the cuts in benefits, after the meeting employees bemoaned the cuts as further evidence that management was against them.

benighted (adjective): fallen into a state of ignorance

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

bereft (adjective): unhappy in love; suffering from unrequited love

After 64 years of marriage, William was bereft after the death of his wife.

bereft (adjective): sorrowful through loss or deprivation

You are not bereft if you haven't played on your Xbox in the past week, his mother said.

besotted (adjective): strongly affectionate towards

Even though her father did not approve, Juliet became besotted with the young Romeo.

besotted (adjective): very drunk

Never before have I seen my mom so besotted, and honestly, I hope it's the last time she drinks so much.

bilious (adjective): irritable; always angry

Rex was bilious all morning, and his face would only take on a look of contentedness when he'd had his morning cup of coffee.

blinkered (adjective): 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.

bowdlerize (verb): edit by omitting or modifying parts considered indelicate

To recieve an R rating, the entire movie was bowdlerized because it contained so much violence and grotesque subject matter.

bridle (verb): the act of restraining power or action or limiting excess

New curfew laws have bridled people's tendency to go out at night.

bridle (verb): anger or take offense

The hostess bridled at the tactless dinner guests who insisted on eating before everybody had gotten their food.

bristle (verb): react in an offended or angry manner

As we discussed the painting, I noticed the artist's wife bristling at our criticisms, ready to defend her husband's work.

broadside (noun): a strong verbal attack

Political broadsides are usually strongest in the weeks leading up to a national election.

bromide (noun): a trite or obvious remark

Instead of sharing his umbrella, the cheeky stranger offered Martha the following bromide: "Looks like it's raining."

brook (verb): put up with something or somebody unpleasant

While she was at the chalkboard, the teacher did not brook any form of talking--even a tiny peep resulted in afternoon detention.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

browbeat (verb): be bossy towards; discourage or frighten with threats or a domineering manner

During the interrogation, the suspect was browbeaten into signing a false confession.

byzantine (adjective): intricate and complex

Getting a driver's license is not simply a matter of taking a test; the regulations and procedures are so byzantine that many have found themselves at the mercy of the Department of Motor Vehicles.

callow (adjective): young and inexperienced

Both Los Angeles and New York are known for callow out-of-towners hoping to make it big.

canard (noun): a deliberately misleading fabrication

The public will always be fooled by the media's canards.

capitulate (noun): to surrender (usually under agreed conditions)

Paul, losing 19-0 in a ping-pong match against his nimble friend, basically capitulated when he played the last two points with his eyes closed.

cataclysm (noun): an event resulting in great loss and misfortune

The introduction of smallpox was a cataclysm for Native Americans, killing off more than half of their population.

catholic (adjective): of broad scope; universal

Jonah's friends said that Jonah's taste in music was eclectic; Jonah was quick to point out that not only was his taste eclectic but it was also catholic: he enjoyed music from countries as far-flung as Mali and

Mongolia.

cede (verb): relinquish possession or control over

Eventually, all parents must cede control of their growing childrens' educations and allow their offspring some autonomy.

celerity (noun): speed, rapidity

We aim to respond to customers' questions with celerity and accuracy, with no longer than a 24 hour wait time.

chagrin (noun): strong feelings of embarrassment

Much to the the timid writer's chagrin, the audience chanted his name until he came back on the stage.

chagrin (verb): cause to feel shame; hurt the pride of

She never cared what others said about her appearance but was chagrined by the smallest comment from her mother.

charlatan (noun): a flamboyant deceiver; one who attracts customers with tricks or jokes

You may call him a "motivational speaker," but I call him a charlatan--he doesn't have any idea what he's really talking about.

chary (adjective): cautious

Jack was wary of GRE words that looked similar, because they usually had different definitions; not so with chary, a word that he began to use interchangeably with wary.

chauvinism (noun): fanatical patriotism; belief that one's group/cause is superior to all other groups/causes

Vegetarians argue that man is chauvinistic in his belief that animals do not consciously feel the pain we humans do.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

chimera (noun): something desired or wished for but is only an illusion and impossible to achieve

Many believe that a world free of war is a chimera--a dream that ignores humanity's violent tendencies.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

choleric (adjective): prone to outbursts of temper; easily angered

While a brilliant lecturer, Mr. Dawson came across as choleric and unapproachable--very rarely did students come to his office hours.

churlish (adjective): lacking manners or refinement

The manager was unnecessarily churlish to his subordinates, rarely deigning to say hello, but always quick with a sartorial jab if someone happened to be wearing anything even slightly mismatching.

complaisant (adjective): showing a cheerful willingness to do favors for others

On her first day at the job, Annie was complaisant, fulfilling every request of her new employee and

anticipating future requests.

complicit (adjective): Associated with or participating in an activity, especially one of a questionable nature.

While the grand jury cleared the senator of all criminal charges, in the public mind he was still complicit in the corruption.

conciliate (verb): to make peace with

His opponents believed his gesture to be conciliatory, yet as soon as they put down their weapons, he unsheathed a hidden sword.

concomitant (adjective): describing an event or situation that happens at the same time as or in connection with another

Concomitant with his desire for nature was a desire for the culture and energy of a big city.

conflagration (noun): a very intense and uncontrolled fire

In the summer months, conflagrations are not uncommon in the southwest, do to the heat and lack of rain.

conflate (verb): mix together different elements or concepts

In her recent book, the author conflates several genres--the detective story, the teen thriller, and the vampire romance--to create a memorable read.

contentious (adjective): likely to argue

Since old grandpa Harry became very contentious during the summer when only reruns were on T.V., the grandkids learned to hide from him at every opportunity.

corollary (noun): a practical consequence that follows naturally

A corollary of Hurricane Sandy, which ravaged the east coast of the U.S., is a push to build higher sea walls to protect against future hurricanes.

cosseted (verb): treat with excessive indulgence

The king and queen cosseted the young prince, giving him a prized miniature pony for his fifth birthday.

coterminous (adjective): being of equal extent or scope or duration

The border of the state is coterminous with geographic limits on travel; the east and north are surrounded by a nearly uncrossable river and the south by a desert.

countermand (verb): a contrary command cancelling or reversing a previous command

By the time the colonel countermanded his soldiers not to land in enemy territory, a few helicopters had already touched down amid heavy gunfire.

cow (verb): to intimidate

Do not be cowed by a 3,000-word vocabulary list: turn that list into a deck of flashcards!

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

crestfallen (adjective): brought low in spirit

I asked Maria on a date and she refused without a moment's thought; I was crestfallen.

crystallize (verb): cause to take on a definite and clear shape

Only after fifteen minutes of brainstorming did Samantha's ideas for the essay crystallize.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

cupidity (noun): greed for money

Some believe people that amassing as much wealth as possible is the meaning to life--yet they often realize that cupidity brings anything but happiness.

curmudgeon (noun): a grouchy, surly person

Since Uncle Mike was the family curmudgeon, each Thanksgiving he was plied with copious amounts of wine, in the hope that she would become less grouchy.

debonair (adjective): having a sophisticated charm

James Bond is known for his good looks, high tech gadgets, and debonair manner.

decry (verb): express strong disapproval of

The entire audience erupted in shouts and curses, decrying the penalty card issued by the referee.

defray (verb): to help pay the cost of, either in part or full

In order for Sean to attend the prestigious college, his generous uncle helped defray the excessive tuition with a monthly donation.

deign (verb): do something that one considers to be below one's dignity

The master of the house never deigned to answer questions from the servants.

demonstrative (adjective): given to or marked by the open expression of emotion

When Sally told James that she wanted to break up with him, she expected he would react demonstratively, but he quietly nodded his head and left without saying a word.

denouement (noun): the final resolution of the many strands of a literary or dramatic work; the outcome of a complex sequence of events

At the denouement of the movie, all questions were answered, and the true identity of the robber was revealed.

derelict (adjective): (of a person) not doing one's duties

The teacher was derelict in her duties because she hadn't graded a single student paper in three weeks.

derelict (noun): (of a building) abandoned

At one time the waterfront factories were busy and productive, but now they stand derelict and will be

torn down.

desiccated (adjective): uninteresting, lacking vitality

Few novelists over 80 are able to produce anything more than desiccated works--boring shadows of former books.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

desideratum (noun): something desired as a necessity

The desideratum of the environmental group is that motorists should rely on carpooling.

despot (noun): a cruel and oppressive dictator

The Emperor Claudius was regarded as a fair-minded leader; his successor, Nero, was an absolute despot.

diatribe (noun): a strong verbal attack against a person or institution

Steve's mom launched into a diatribe during the PTA meeting, contending that the school was little more than a daycare in which students stare at the wall and teachers stare at the chalkboard.

diminutive (noun): to indicate smallness

He prefers to be called a diminutive of his name: "Bill" instead of "John William."

diminutive (adjective): very small

When he put on his father's suit and shoes, his appearance was that of a diminutive youth.

disabuse (verb): to persuade somebody that his/her belief is not valid

As a child, I was quickly disabused of the notion that Santa Claus was a rotund benefactor of infinite largess--one night I saw my mother diligently wrapping presents and storing them under our Christmas tree.

discursive (adjective): (of e.g. speech and writing) tending to depart from the main point

Many readers find it tough to read Moby Dick since the author is discursive, often cutting the action short to spend 20 pages on the history of a whale.

disingenuous (adjective): not straightforward; giving a false appearance of frankness

Many adults think that they can lie to children, but kids are smart and know when people are disingenuous.

dispensation (noun): an exemption from a rule or obligation

Since her father is a billionaire, she is given dispensation from many of the school's policies.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

dissemble (verb): conceal one's true motives, usually through deceit

To get close to the senator, the assassin dissembled his intentions, convincing many people that he was a reporter for a well-known newspaper.

dissipate (verb): squander or spend money frivolously

The recent graduates dissipated their earnings on trips to Las Vegas and cruises in Mexico.

dissipate (verb): to disperse or scatter

Kathleen's perfume was overwhelming in the cramped apartment, but once we stepped outside the smell dissipated and we could breathe once again.

dissolution (noun): a living full of debauchery and indulgence in sensual pleasure

Many Roman emperors were known for their dissolution, indulging in unspeakable desires of the flesh.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

doleful (adjective): filled with or evoking sadness

No event is more doleful than the passing of my mother; she was a shining star in my life, and it brings me great sadness to think that she is now gone.

dolorous (adjective): showing sorrow

Chopin's ballades are filled with sharp changes in moods--a dolorous melody can give way to a lighthearted tempo.

doughty (adjective): brave; bold; courageous

I enjoy films in which a doughty group comes together to battle a force of evil.

dovetail (verb): fit together tightly, as if by means of a interlocking joint

Although Darwin's evolution and Mendel's genetics were developed in isolation from one another, they dovetail each other very well.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

duplicity (noun): deceitfulness, pretending to want one thing but interested in something else

A life of espionage is one of duplicity: an agent must pretend to be a totally different person than who she or he actually is.

ebullient (adjective): joyously unrestrained

Can you blame him for his ebullient mood? He just graduated from medical school.

effervescent (adjective): marked by high spirits or excitement

After the sales result, the manager was in an effervescent mood, letting several employees leave work early that day.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

effrontery (noun): audacious (even arrogant) behavior that you have no right to

The skateboarders acted with effrontery, skating through the church grounds and spray-painting signs warning trespassers.

elegiac (adjective): expressing sorrow

Few can listen to the elegiac opening bars of the Moonlight sonata without feeling the urge to cry.

embryonic (adjective): in an early stage of development

The Board of Directors is hoping to launch a new product soon, but planning for the Z7 is in an embryonic stages.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

empiricism (noun): any method that derives knowledge from experience, used in experimental science as a way to gain insight and knowledge

Empiricism does not always lead to knowledge; an experience or experiment may raise more questions than it answers.

enamor (verb): attraction or feeling of love

She is completely enamored with Justin Bieber, and goes to all his concerts on the East coast.

encumber (verb): hold back

The costume encumbered all my movements and caused me to sweat profusely.

enjoin (verb): give instructions to or direct somebody to do something with authority

The government agency enjoined the chemical company to clean up the hazardous dump it had created over the years.

enormity (noun): an act of extreme wickedness

The enormity of Pol Pot's regime is hard to capture in words--within months hundreds of thousands of Cambodians lost their lives.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

enthrall (verb): hold spellbound

She was so enthralled by the movie that she never heard people screaming, "Fire! Fire!" in the neighboring theater.

epigram (noun): a witty saying

My favorite epigram from Mark Twain is "A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn no other way."

epiphany (noun): a sudden revelation or moment of insight

Gary one day had an epiphany that he was a people person; he promptly quit his factory job and began working as a salesman.

eponym (noun): the name derived from a person (real or imaginary); the person for whom something is named

Alexandria, Egypt is an eponym because it is named after Alexander the Great.

equitable (adjective): fair to all parties as dictated by reason and conscience

The equitable distribution of ice cream to a group of 5 year olds will ensure little to no fighting--at least until the ice cream is gone.

equivocate (verb): to speak vaguely, usually with the intention to mislead or deceive

After Sharon brought the car home an hour after her curfew, she equivocated when her parents pointedly asked her where she had been.

ersatz (adjective): not real or genuine; phony

The car dealer's ersatz laughter was immediately followed by a price quote, one that Shelley found highly inflated.

estimable (adjective): deserving of esteem and respect

After serving thirty years, in which he selflessly served the community, Judge Harper was one of the more estimable people in town.

ethereal (adjective): characterized by lightness and insubstantiality

Because she dances with an ethereal style, ballet critics have called her Madame Butterfly.

evanescent (adjective): tending to vanish like vapor

The storm flashed into existence above us and lasted only a short time--an evanescent turbulence of wind and cloud.

excoriate (verb): to criticize very harshly

Entrusted with the prototype to his company's latest smartphone, Larry, during a late night karaoke bout, let the prototype slip into the hands of a rival company--the next day Larry was excoriated, and then fired.

execrate (verb): to curse and hiss at

Though the new sitcom did decently in the ratings, Nelson railed against the show, saying that it was nothing more than an execrable pastiche of tired clichés and canned laughter.

exegesis (noun): critical explanation or analysis, especially of a text

The Bible is fertile ground for exegesis--over the past five centuries there have been as many interpretations as there are pages in the Old Testament.

exemplar (noun): something to be imitated

Lena's homework is on the wall because it is an exemplar of clean, neat, and thoughtful work.

exiguity (noun): the quality of being meager

After two months at sea, the exiguity of the ship's supplies forced them to search for fresh water and food.

exorbitant (adjective): greatly exceeding bounds of reason or moderation

Shelley made one exorbitant purchase after another, buying new clothes and taking vacations even though she earned a limited salary.

expansive (adjective): 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".

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

expunge (verb): to eliminate completely

When I turned 18, all of the shoplifting and jaywalking charges were expunged from my criminal record.

expurgate (verb): to remove objectionable material

The censor expurgated every reference to sex and drugs, converting the rapper's raunchy flow into a series of bleeps.

extrapolate (verb): draw from specific cases for more general cases

By extrapolating from the data on the past three months, we can predict a 5% increase in traffic to our website.

facile (adjective): arrived at without due care or effort; lacking depth

Many news shows provide facile explanations to complex politics, so I prefer to read the in-depth reporting of The New York Times.

factionous (adjective): produced by, or characterized by internal dissension

The controversial bill proved factionous, as dissension even within parties resulted

factitious (adjective): artificial; not natural

The defendant's story was largely factitious and did not accord with eyewitness testimonies

feckless (adjective): lazy and irresponsible

Two years after graduation, Charlie still lived with his parents and had no job, becoming more feckless with each passing day.

fecund (adjective): intellectually productive

The artist had entered a fecund period, producing three masterpieces in the span of two months.

fell (adjective): terribly evil

For fans of the Harry Potter series, the fell Lord Voldemort, who terrorized poor Harry for seven lengthy installments, has finally been vanquished by the forces of good--unless, that is, JK Rowling decides to come out of retirement.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

firebrand (noun): someone who deliberately creates trouble

Freddie is a firebrand: every time he walks into the office, he winds up at the center of heated argument.

flag (verb): droop, sink, or settle from or as if from pressure or loss of tautness; become less intense

After the three crushing defeats in the last three games, the team's enthusiasm began to flag.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

flippant (adjective): showing inappropriate levity

Although Sam was trying to honor Mark's sense of humor, many found it quite flippant that he wore a comic nose and glasses mask to Mark's funeral.

flummox (verb): be a mystery or bewildering to

Mary's behavior completely flummoxes me: I never have any idea what her motivations might be.

fractious (adjective): irritable and is likely to cause disruption

We rarely invite my fractious Uncle over for dinner; he always complains about the food, and usually launches into a tirade on some touchy subject.

gaffe (noun): a socially awkward or tactless act

In a famous gaffe, Vice President Quayle attempted to correct the spelling of a grade school student, only to find that the child was correct.

gambit (noun): a maneuver or risk in a game or conversation, designed to secure an advantage

Randy played a gambit, telling his boss that he would leave at the end of the week if he didn't get a raise.

gerrymander (verb): to manipulate voting districts in order to favor a particular political party

Years ago, savvy politicians had gerrymandered the city center to ensure their re-election.

graft (noun): corruption, usually through bribery

In countries with rampant graft, getting a driver's license can require no more than paying an official.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

grandiloquent (adjective): puffed up with vanity

The dictator was known for his grandiloquent speeches, puffing his chest out and using big, important-sounding words.

gumption (noun): resourcefulness and determination

Wallace Stegner lamented the lack of gumption in the U.S. during the sixties, claiming that no young person knew the value of work.

hagiographic (adjective): excessively flattering toward someone's life or work

Most accounts of Tiger Woods life were hagiographic, until, that is, his affairs made headlines.

hail (verb): enthusiastically acclaim or celebrate something

Many college superstar athletes are hailed as the next big thing, but then flop at the professional level.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

halcyon (adjective): idyllically calm and peaceful; suggesting happy tranquillity; marked by peace and prosperity

The first decade after WWI was a halcyon period in America with new-found wealth and rapidly improving technology.

hauteur (noun): overbearing pride evidenced by a superior manner toward inferiors

As soon as she won the lottery, Alice began displaying a hauteur to her friends, calling them dirty-clothed peasants behind their backs.

hector (verb): to bully or intimidate

The boss's hectoring manner put off many employees, some of whom quit as soon as they found new jobs.

hedge (verb): to limit or qualify a statement; to avoid making a direct statement

When asked why he had decided to buy millions of shares at the very moment the tech companies stock soared, the CEO hedged, mentioning something vague about gut instinct.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

histrionic (adjective): to be overly theatrical

Though she received a B- on the test, she had such a histrionic outburst that one would have thought that she'd been handed a death sentence.

hoary (adjective): ancient

Most workout gurus are young, fit people, whereas most yoga gurus are hoary men with long white beards.

hobble (verb): to hold back the progress of something

Bad weather has hobbled rescue efforts, making it difficult for crews to find bodies in the wreckage.

hoodwink (verb): to deceive or trick someone

Someone tried to hoodwink Marty with an email telling him that his uncle had just passed away, and to collect the inheritance he should send his credit card information.

hubris (noun): overbearing pride or presumption

Bill Clinton was criticized for his hubris, since he believed he could get away with anything once in the White House.

illustrious (adjective): widely known and esteemed; having or conferring glory

Einstein was possibly the most illustrious scientist in recent history.

imbibe (verb): to drink or absorb as if drinking

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.

imbroglio (noun): a confusing and potentially embarrassing situation

The chef cook-off featured one gourmand who had the unfortunate distinction of mixing the wrong broths, creating an imbroglio that diners would not soon forget.

immure (verb): to enclose, usually in walls

The modern supermarket experience makes many feel claustrophobic, as they are immured in walls upon walls of products.

impecunious (adjective): lacking money; poor

In extremely trying times, even the moderately wealthy, after a few turns of ill-fortune, can become impecunious.

imperious (adjective): having or showing arrogant superiority to and disdain of those one views as unworthy

Children are imperious with each other before they learn that earning someone's respect is better than demanding.

impervious (adjective): not admitting of passage or capable of being affected

I am not impervious to your insults; they cause me great pain.

impetuous (adjective): characterized by undue haste and lack of thought or deliberation

Herbert is rarely impetuous, but on the spur of the moment, he spent thousands of dollars on a motorcycle today.

importuned (verb): beg persistently and urgently

After weeks of importuning the star to meet for a five-minute interview, the journalist finally got what she wanted.

improvident (adjective): not given careful consideration

Marty was improvident, never putting money aside for the future but spending it on decorating the interior of his home.

impugn (verb): attack as false or wrong

Though many initially tried to impugn Darwin's theory, in scientific circles today, the idea is taken as truth.

impute (verb): attribute (responsibility or fault) to something

He imputed his subpar performance on the test to a combination of stress and poor sleep.

inanity (noun): total lack of meaning or ideas

Bill's poem was nothing more than a list of impressive sounding words, so there was no point in trying to take meaning from the inanity.

inchoate (adjective): only partly in existence; imperfectly formed

Inchoate ideas about the relation of humans to other animals had been discussed since the Middle Ages but the modern theory really began with Darwin.

incontrovertible (adjective): necessarily or demonstrably true; impossible to deny or disprove

Unless you can provide incontrovertible evidence, I will remain skeptical.

indigent (adjective): poor; having very little

In the so-called Third World, many are indigent and only a privileged few have the resources to enjoy material luxuries.

indigent (noun): a poor or needy person

The indigents, huddled under the overpass, tried to start a small bonfire in the hope of staying warm.

ineffable (adjective): too sacred to be uttered; defying expression or description

While art critics can occasionally pinpoint a work's greatness, much of why a piece captures our imaginations is completely ineffable.

ineluctable (adjective): impossible to avoid or evade:

For those who smoke cigarettes for years, a major health crisis brought on by smoking is ineluctable.

inequity (noun): injustice by virtue of not conforming with rules or standards

After decades of racial inequity, the "separate but equal" doctrine was successfully overturned.

infelicitous (adjective): inappropriate

During the executive meeting, the marketing director continued to make infelicitous comments about the CEO's gambling habit.

inimitable (adjective): defying imitation; matchless

Mozart's music follows a clear pattern that, anyone could imitate, but his music gives an overall sense of effortlessness that is inimitable.

insouciance (noun): lack of concern

Surprisingly, Hank had become a high-powered CEO; his high school friends remembered him as "Hanky Panky", who shrugged off each failed class with insouciance.

insufferable (adjective): intolerable, difficult to endure

Chester always tried to find some area in which he excelled above others; unsurprisingly, his co-workers found him insufferable and chose to exclude him from daily luncheons out.

internecine (adjective): (of conflict) within a group or organization

The guerilla group, which had become so powerful as to own the state police, was finally destroyed by an internecine conflict.

intimation (noun): an indirect suggestion

At first the hostess tried intimation, praising the benefits of cutlery; when Cecil continued eating with his hands, the hostess told him to use a fork at dinner.

inure (verb): to make accustomed to something unpleasant

Three years of Manhattan living has inured her to the sound of wailing sirens; she could probably sleep through the apocalypse.

invective (noun): abusive or denunciatory language

The Internet has unleashed the invectives in many of us; many people post stinging criticism on the comments section underneath newspaper articles or YouTube videos.

invidious (adjective): likely to cause resentment

At a time when many others in the office were about to be laid off, many considered Cheryl's fine clothes that day an invidious display.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

inviolable (adjective): never to be broken, infringed, or dishonored

Too many the grass at Wimbledon is inviolable and only greater tennis players are able to enjoy a game there.

inviolable (adjective): must be kept sacred

While the literary critic subjected most of the classics to the harshest reviews, he regarded Cervantes as inviolable, and had nothing but praise for him.

irrefutable (adjective): impossible to deny or disprove

The existence of life on earth is irrefutable; the existence of intelligent life on earth is still hotly debated.

jaundice (adjective): to be biased against due to envy or prejudice

Shelly was jaundiced towards Olivia; though the two had once been best friends, Olivia had become class president, prom queen, and, to make matters worse, the girlfriend of the one boy Shelly liked.

jeune (adjective): dull; lacking flavor

Although many top chefs have secured culinary foam's popularity in haute cuisine, Waters criticizes it for being jeune and unfilling.

jeune (adjective): immature; childish

Her boss further cemented his reputation for being jeune after throwing a fit when the water cooler wasn't refilled.

jingoist (noun): a person who thinks that their country should be at war

In the days leading up to war, a nation typically breaks up into the two opposing camps: doves, who do their best to avoid war, and jingoists, who are only too eager to wave national flags from their vehicles and vehemently denounce those who do not do th

juggernaut (noun): a force that cannot be stopped

Napoleon was considered a juggernaut until he decided to invade Russia in winter; after which, his once indomitable army was decimated by cold and famine.

kowtow (verb): to bow or act in a subservient manner

Paul kowtowed to his boss so often the boss herself became nauseated by his sycophancy.

lacerate (verb): deeply hurt the feelings of; distress

The teacher was fired for lacerating a student who wrote a poor essay.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

lachrymose (adjective): showing sorrow

Lachrymose and depressed, Alexei Alexandrovich walked two miles home in the rain after learning that his wife was having an affair.

lampoon (verb): ridicule with satire

Mark Twain understood that lampooning a bad idea with humor was the most effective criticism.

languish (verb): become feeble

Stranded in the wilderness for four days, the hiker languished, eating protein bars and nuts.

lascivious (adjective): lecherous; sexually perverted

Lolita is a challenging novel for many, not necessarily because of the elevated prose style but because of the depravity of the main character, Humbert Humbert, who, as an old, lascivious man, falls in love with a girl.

limpid (adjective): clarity in terms of expression

Her limpid prose made even the most recondite subjects accessible to all.

litany (noun): any long and tedious account of something

Mr. Rogers spoke to a Senate committee and did not give a litany of reasons to keep funding the program, but instead, appealed to the basic human decency of all present.

loath (adjective): unwillingness to do something contrary to your custom (usually followed by 'to')

I was loath to leave the concert before my favorite band finished playing.

lugubrious (adjective): excessively mournful

At the funeral, lugubrious songs filled the small church.

machinate (verb): engage in plotting or enter into a conspiracy, swear together

The rebels met at night in an abandoned barn to machinate.

magisterial (adjective): offensively self-assured or given to exercising unwarranted power

Though she was only a third grade teacher, Ms. Martinet was magisterial in dealing with her class, lording over them like a queen.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

malapropism (noun): the confusion of a word with another word that sounds similar

Whenever I looked glum, my mother would offer to share "an amusing antidote" with me--an endearing malapropism of "anecdote" that never failed to cheer me up.

malfeasance (adjective): misconduct or wrongdoing (especially by a public official)

Not even the mayor's trademark pearly-toothed grin could save him from charges of malfeasance: while in power, he'd been running an illegal gambling rink in the room behind his office.

malingerer (noun): someone shirking their duty by pretending to be sick or incapacitated

At one time, our country was full of hardworking respectful people, but now it seems that everyone is a malingerer with little inclination to work.

martinet (noun): a strict disciplinarian

The job seemed perfect to Rebecca, until she found out that her boss was a total martinet; after each project the boss would come by to scrutinize--and inevitably criticize--every little detail of the work Rebecca had done.

maudlin (adjective): overly emotional and sad

Just as those who were alive during the 70's are mortified that they once cavorted about in bellbottoms, many who lived during the 80's are now aghast at the maudlin pop songs they used to enjoy--really, just what exactly is a total eclipse of the heart?

maunder (verb): wander aimlessly

Max liked to maunder down by the seaside and pick up whatever sea shells he would stumble upon.

maunder (verb): speak (about unimportant matters) rapidly and incessantly

After drinking two espressos each, the animated couple would maunder loudly, annoying the other patrons in the coffee shop.

mellifluous (adjective): smooth and sweet-sounding

Chelsea's grandmother thought Franz Schubert's music to be the most mellifluous ever written; Chelsea demurred, and to her grandmother's chagrin, would blast Rihanna on the home stereo speakers.

mendicant (noun): a pauper who lives by begging

Tolstoy was an aristocrat, but he strove to understand the Christianity of the Russian peasants by wandering among them as a mendicant.

meteoric (adjective): like a meteor in speed or brilliance or transience

The early spectacular successes propelled the pitcher to meteoric stardom, but a terribly injury tragically cut short his career.

mettlesome (adjective): filled with courage or valor

For its raid on the Bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Seal Team Six has become, for many Americans, the embodiment of mettle.

misattribute (verb): To erroneously attribute; to falsely ascribe; used especially of authorship.

I made a mistake; I misattributed "Crime and Punishment" to Leo Tolstoy when it was actually written by Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

modicum (noun): a small or moderate or token amount

If my sister had even a modicum of sense, she wouldn't be engaged to that barbarian.

mordant (adjective): biting and caustic in thought, manner, or style

While Phil frequently made mordant remarks about company policy overall, he always was considerably gentler in discussing any person in particular.

moribund (adjective): being on the point of death; declining rapidly losing all momentum in progress

Whether you like it or not, jazz as a genre is moribund at best, possibly already dead.

mulct (verb): to defraud or swindle

The so-called magical diet cure simply ended up mulcting Maria out of hundreds of dollars, but did nothing for her weight.

nadir (noun): the lowest point

For many pop music fans, the rap and alternative-rock dominated 90s were the nadir of musical expression.

nettlesome (adjective): causing irritation or annoyance

Maria found her coworkers cell phone nettlesome, because every few minutes it would buzz to life with another text message.

noisome (adjective): having an extremely bad smell

Each August, when the winds moved in a south easterly direction, the garbage dump would spread noisome vapors through the small town.

nonchalant (adjective): coming across as coolly uninterested

The twenty-somethings at the coffee shop always irked Sheldon, especially the way in which they acted nonchalantly towards everything, not even caring when Sheldon once spilled his mocha on them.

objurgate (verb): express strong disapproval of

The manager spent an hour objurgating the employee in the hopes that he would not make these mistakes again.

oblique (adjective): not straightforward; indirect

Herbert never explicitly revealed anything negative about Tom's past, but at times he would obliquely suggest that Tom was not as innocent as he seemed.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

obstreperous (adjective): noisily and stubbornly defiant; willfully difficult to control

When the teacher asked the obstreperous student simply to bus his tray, the student threw the entire tray on the floor, shouted an epithet, and walked out.

obtain (adjective): be valid, applicable, or true

The custom of waiting your turn in line does not obtain in some countries, in which many people try to rush to front of the line at the same time.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

obtuse (adjective): slow to learn or understand; lacking intellectual acuity; lacking in insight or discernment

Jackson was the most obtuse member of the team: the manager's subtle ironies were always lost on him.

officious (adjective): intrusive in a meddling or offensive manner

The professor had trouble concentrating on her new theorem, because her officious secretary would barge in frequently reminding her of some trivial detail involving departmental paperwork.

ossify (verb): make rigid and set into a conventional pattern

Even as a young man, Bob had some bias against poor people, but during his years in social services, his bad opinions ossified into unshiftable views.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

overweening (adjective): arrogant; presumptuous

Mark was so convinced of his basketball skills that in his overweening pride he could not fathom that his name was not on the varsity list; he walked up to the basketball coach and told her she had forgotten to add his name.

palatable (adjective): acceptable to the taste or mind

Miley didn't partake much in his friends' conversations, but found their presence palatable.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

palaver (verb): speak (about unimportant matters) rapidly and incessantly

During the rain delay, many who had come to see the game palavered, probably hoping that idle chatter would make the time go by faster.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

palimpsest (noun): something that has been changed numerous times but on which traces of former iterations can still be seen

The downtown was a palimpsest of the city's checkered past: a new Starbucks had opened up next to an abandoned, shuttered building, and a freshly asphalted road was inches away from a pothole large enough to swallow a small dog.

panacea (noun): hypothetical remedy for all ills or diseases; a universal solution

While the company credit card has made most large purchases easier, it is no panacea: some smaller basic transactions still must be conducted in cash.

panegyric (noun): a formal expression of praise

Dave asked Andrew to do just a simple toast, but Andrew launched into a full panegyric, enumerating a complete list of Dave's achievements and admirable qualities.

paragon (noun): model of excellence or perfection of a kind; one having no equal

Even with the rise of Kobe Bryant, many still believe that Michael Jordan is the paragon for basketball players.

paragon (noun): an ideal instance; a perfect embodiment of a concept

Some say that Athens was the paragon of democracy, but these people often forget that slaves and women were still not allowed to vote.

pariah (noun): an outcast

The once eminent scientist, upon being found guilty of faking his data, has become a pariah in the research community.

parvenu (noun): a person who has suddenly become wealthy, but not socially accepted as part of a higher class

The theater was full of parvenus who each thought that they were surrounded by true aristocrats.

patent (adjective): glaringly obvious

Since the book had been through no fewer than six proof runs, the staff was shocked to see such a patent spelling mistake remaining, right in the middle of the front cover!

pecuniary (adjective): relating to or involving money

The defendant was found guilty and had to serve a period of community service as well as pay pecuniary damages to the client.

pellucid (adjective): transparently clear; easily understandable

The professor had a remarkable ability make even the most difficult concepts seem pellucid.

penurious (adjective): lacking money; poor

Truly penurious, Mary had nothing more than a jar full of pennies.

penurious (adjective): miserly

Warren Buffett, famous multi-billionaire, still drives a cheap sedan, not because he is penurious, but because luxury cars are gaudy and impractical.

percipient (adjective): highly perceptive

Even the most percipient editor will make an occasional error when proofreading.

peremptory (adjective): bossy and domineering

My sister used to peremptorily tell me to do the dishes, a chore I would either do perfunctorily or avoid doing altogether.

perfunctory (adjective): done routinely and with little interest or care

The short film examines modern perfunctory cleaning rituals such as washing dishes, doing laundry and tooth-brushing.

peripatetic (adjective): traveling by foot

Jim always preferred a peripatetic approach to discovering a city: he felt that he could see so many more details while walking.

perspicacious (adjective): acutely insightful and wise

Many modern observers regard Eisenhower as perspicacious, particularly in his accurate prediction of the growth of the military.

phantasmagorical (adjective): illusive; unreal

Those suffering from malaria fall into a feverish sleep, their world a whirligig of phantasmagoria; if they recover, they are unsure of what actually took place and what was simply a product of their febrile imaginations.

philistine (adjective): smug and ignorant towards artistic and cultural values

Jane considered Al completely philistine, because he talked almost exclusively about video games; she was entirely unaware of how well read he really was.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

phlegmatic (adjective): showing little emotion

Arnold is truly noble, remaining reserved until an issue of significance arises, but Walter is simply phlegmatic: he doesn't have the energy or inclination to care about anything.

picayune (adjective): trifling or petty (a person)

English teachers are notorious for being picayune; however, the English language is so nuanced and sophisticated that often such teachers are not being contrary but are only adhering to the rules.

pillory (verb): ridicule or expose to public scorn

After the candidate confessed, the press of the opposing party took the opportunity to pillory him, printing editorials with the most blatantly exaggerated accusations.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

pith (noun): the most essential part of something

When Cynthia hears a speaker presenting a complex argument, she is always able to discard the irrelevant details and extract the pith of what the speaker is trying to convey.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

plucky (adjective): marked by courage and determination

Some scouts initially doubted Pedroia because of his short stature, but he is a plucky player, surprising everyone with his boundless energy and fierce determination.

Pollyannaish (adjective): extremely optimistic

Even in the midst of a lousy sales quarter, Debbie remained Pollyannaish, never losing her shrill voice and wide smile, even when prospective customers hung up on her.

ponderous (adjective): weighed-down; moving slowly

Laden with 20 kilograms of college text books, the freshman moved ponderously across the campus.

pontificate (verb): talk in a dogmatic and pompous manner

The vice-president would often pontificate about economic theory, as if no one else in the room were qualified to speak on the topic.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

portentous (adjective): ominously prophetic

When the captain and more than half the officers were sick on the very first night of the voyage, many of the passengers felt this was portentous, but the rest of the voyage continued without any problems.

precipitate (adjective): hasty or rash

Instead of conducting a thorough investigation after the city hall break-in, the governor acted precipitately, accusing his staff of aiding and abetting the criminals.

precipitate (verb): to cause to happen

The government's mishandling the hurricane's aftermath precipitated a widespread outbreak of looting and other criminal activity.

presentiment (noun): a feeling of evil to come

On the night that Lincoln would be fatally shot, his wife had a presentiment about going to Ford's Theater, but Lincoln persuaded her that everything would be fine.

primacy (noun): the state of being first in importance

The primacy of Apple Computers is not guaranteed, as seen in the recent lawsuits and weak growth.

probity (noun): integrity, strong moral principles

The ideal politician would have the probity to lead, but reality gravely falls short of the ideal of morally upright leaders.

prognostication (noun): a statement made about the future

When the Senator was asked about where the negotiations would lead, he said that any guess he could make would be an unreliable prognostication.

prolixity (noun): boring verbosity

I loved my grandfather dearly, but his prolixity would put me to sleep, regardless of the topic.

promulgate (verb): state or announce

The President wanted to promulgate the success of the treaty negotiations, but he had to wait until Congress formally approved the agreement.

propitiate (verb): to placate or appease

The two sons, plying their angry father with cheesy neckties for Christmas, were hardly able to propitiate him -- the father already had a drawer full of ones he had never worn before or ever planned to.

prosaic (adjective): dull and lacking imagination

Unlike the talented artists in his workshop, Paul had no such bent for the visual medium, so when it was time for him to make a stained glass painting, he ended up with a prosaic mosaic.

proscribe (verb): command against

My doctor proscribes that I not eat donuts with chocolate sauce and hamburger patties for breakfast.

proselytize (verb): convert to another religion, philosophy, or perspective

Lisa loves her Mac but says little about it; by contrast, Jake will proselytize, interrogating anyone with an Android about why she didn't purchase an iPhone.

protean (adjective): readily taking on different roles; versatile

Peter Sellers was truly a protean actor--in Doctor Strangelove he played three very different roles: a jingoist general, a sedate President and a deranged scientist.

provident (adjective): careful in regard to your own interests; providing carefully for the future

In a move that hardly could be described as provident, Bert spend his entire savings on a luxurious cruise, knowing that other bills would come due a couple months later.

puerile (adjective): of or characteristic of a child; displaying or suggesting a lack of maturity

Helen enjoyed blowing soap bubbles, but Jim regarded this as puerile, totally unworthy of a woman with a Ph.D.

puissant (adjective): powerful

Over the years of service, and quite to his surprise, he became a puissant advisor to the community.

punctilious (adjective): marked by precise accordance with details

The colonel was so punctilious about enforcing regulations that men felt compelled to polish even the soles of their shoes.

pyrrhic (adjective): describing a victory that comes at such a great cost that the victory is not worthwhile

George W. Bush's win in the 2000 election was in many ways a pyrrhic victory: the circumstances of his win alienated half of the U.S. population.

quail (verb): draw back, as with fear or pain

Craig always claimed to be a fearless outdoorsman, but when the thunderstorm engulfed the valley, he quailed at the thought of leaving the safety of his cabin.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

quisling (noun): a traitor

History looks unfavorably upon quislings; indeed they are accorded about the same fondness as Nero--he who watched his city burn down while playing the violin.

quixotic (adjective): wildly idealistic; impractical

For every thousand startups with quixotic plans to be the next big name in e-commerce, only a handful ever become profitable.

raconteur (noun): a person skilled in telling anecdotes

Jude is entertaining, but he is no raconteur: beyond the handful of amusing stories he has memorized, he has absolutely no spontaneous story-telling ability.

raillery (noun): light teasing

The new recruit was not bothered by the raillery, finding most of it light-hearted and good-natured.

rapprochement (noun): the reestablishing of cordial relations

Although Ann hoped that her mother and her aunt would have a rapprochement, each one's bitter accusations against the other made any reconciliation unlikely.

rarefied (verb): make more subtle or refined

Jack's vulgar jokes were not so successful in the rarefied environment of college professors.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

recapitulation (noun): a summary (think of recap)

Every point of the professors lesson was so clear that the students felt his concluding recapitulation was not necessary.

recrimination (noun): mutual accusations

The two brothers sat and cried, pointing fingers and making elaborate recriminations of the other's guilt

recrudescence (verb): to break out or happen again

After years of gamblers anonymous, Tony thought he'd broken his compulsive slot machine playing, but it took only one trip to the Atlantic City for a full recrudescence--he lost \$5k on the one armed bandit.

redoubtable (adjective): inspiring fear or awe

On television basketball players don't look that tall, but when you stand in front of a seven-foot tall NBA player, he is truly redoubtable.

remonstrate (verb): to make objections while pleading

The mothers of the kidnapped victims remonstrated to the rogue government to release their children, claiming that the detention violated human rights.

reprisal (noun): a retaliatory action against an enemy in wartime

The Old Testament doctrine of an eye for an eye is not the kind of retaliation practiced in war; rather, an

arm, a leg, and both ears are the reprisal for the smallest scratch.

ribald (adjective): humorously vulgar

The speaker was famous for his ribald humor, but the high school principal asked him to keep the talk G-rated when he spoke to the student body.

row (noun): an angry dispute

The Prime Minister looked very foolish after his row with the foreign dignitary was caught on video and posted on youtube.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

sagacious (adjective): having good judgement and acute insight

Steve Jobs is surely one of the most sagacious CEOs, making Apple the most recognizable and valuable companies in the world.

sangfroid (noun): calmness or poise in difficult situations

The hostage negotiator exhibited a sangfroid that oftentimes was more menacing than the sword at his throat, or the gun at his head.

sardonic (adjective): disdainfully or ironically humorous; scornful and mocking

A stand-up comedian walks a fine line when making jokes about members of the audience; such fun and joking can quickly become sardonic and cutting.

sartorial (adjective): related to fashion or clothes

Monte was astute at navigating the world of finance; sartorially, however, he was found wanting--he typically would attempt to complement his beige tie with a gray suit and white pants.

saturnine (adjective): morose or gloomy

Deprived of sunlight, humans become saturnine; that's why in very northerly territories people are encouraged to sit under an extremely powerful lamp, lest they become morose.

schadenfreude (noun): joy from watching the suffering of others

From his warm apartment window, Stanley reveled in schadenfreude as he laughed at the figures below, huddled together in the arctic chill.

sedulous (adjective): done diligently and carefully

An avid numismatist, Harold sedulously amassed a collection of coins from over 100 countries--an endeavor that took over fifteen years, and to five continents.

self-effacing (adjective): reluctant to draw attention to yourself

The most admirable teachers and respected leaders are those who are self-effacing, directing attention and praise to their students and workers.

semblance (noun): an outward or token appearance or form that is deliberately misleading

While the banker maintained a semblance of respectability in public, those who knew him well were familiar with his many crimes.

sententious (adjective): to be moralizing, usually in a pompous sense

The old man, casting his nose up in the air at the group of adolescents, intoned sententiously, "Youth is wasted on the young."

simulacrum (noun): a representation of a person (especially in the form of sculpture)

The Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Center showcases a simulacrum of all the present and approved buildings in the city of Shanghai.

simulacrum (noun): a bad imitation

The early days of computer graphics made real people into a simulacrum that now seems comical.

sinecure (noun): an office that involves minimal duties

The position of Research Director is a sinecure: the job entails almost no responsibilities, nor does the person in that position have to answer to anyone.

solecism (noun): a socially awkward or tactless act

Mother Anna was always on guard against any solecism from her children and scolded them immediately if any of them talked out of place in public.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

solicitous (adjective): showing hovering attentiveness

Our neighbors are constantly knocking on our door to make sure we are ok, and I don't know how to ask them to stop being so solicitous about our health.

This word has other definitions but this is the most important one for the GRE

solicitude (noun): a feeling of excessive concern

I walked to his house in the rain to make sure he had enough to eat while he was sick, but he seemed not to appreciate my solicitude.

spartan (adjective): unsparing and uncompromising in discipline or judgment; practicing great self-denial

After losing everything in a fire, Tim decided to live in spartan conditions, sleeping on the floor and owning as little furniture as a possible.

splenetic (adjective): very irritable

Ever since the car accident, Frank has been unable to walk without a cane, and so he has become splenetic and unpleasant to be around.

squelch (verb): suppress or crush completely

After the dictator consolidated his power, he took steps to squelch all criticism, often arresting any journalist who said anything that could be interpreted as negative about his regime.

stalwart (adjective): dependable; inured to fatigue or hardships

Despite all the criticism directed at the President during this scandal, Lisa has remained his stalwart supporter.

stultify (verb): cause one, through routine, to lose energy and enthusiasm

As an undergraduate Mark felt stultified by classes outside his area of study; only in grad school, in which he could focus solely on literary analysis, did he regain his scholarly edge.

subterfuge (noun): something intended to misrepresent the true nature of an activity

Finally deciding to abandon all subterfuge, Arthur revealed to Cindy everything about his secret affair over the past two years.

supercilious (adjective): haughty and disdainful; looking down on others

Nelly felt the Quiz Bowl director acted superciliously towards the underclassmen; really, she fumed, must he act so preternaturally omniscient each time he intones some obscure fact--as though everybody knows that Mt. Aconcagua is the highest peak in Sout

surfeit (noun): an excessive amount of something

There was no such thing as a surfeit of shopping for Nancy--she could stay at the outlet stores from opening to closing time.

surreptitious (adjective): stealthy, taking pains not to be caught or detected

Since his mom was a light sleeper, Timmy had to tiptoe surreptitiously through the entire house, careful to not make the floors creak, until he at last was able to enjoy his plunder: a box of chocolate chip cookies.

sybarite (noun): a person who indulges in luxury

Despite the fact that he'd maxed out fifteen credit cards, Max was still a sybarite at heart: when the police found him, he was at a \$1,000 an hour spa in Manhattan, getting a facial treatment.

temerity (noun): fearless daring

No child has the temerity to go in the rundown house at the end of the street and see if it is haunted.

tempestuous (adjective): as if driven by turbulent or conflicting emotions; highly energetic and wildly changing or fluctuating

Chuck and Kathy had always been stable and agreeable people on their own, but when they got involved, it was a tempestuous relationship.

tendentious (adjective): likely to lean towards a controversial view

Because political mudslinging has become a staple of the 24-hour media cycle, most of us, despite protestations to the contrary, are tendentious on many of today's pressing issues.

transmute (verb): change or alter in form, appearance, or nature

One of the goals of alchemy was to find the substance or process that would transmute lead into gold.

trenchant (adjective): characterized by or full of force and vigor; having keenness and forcefulness and penetration in thought, expression, or intellect

Jill presented a rather superficial treatment of sales in Asia, but her trenchant analysis of sales in Europe inspired a number of insights into how to proceed in that market.

truculence (noun): defiant aggressiveness

When the boss confronted Aaron about his earlier remarks, Aaron responded with utter truculence, simply throwing a glass of water in the boss' face and walking away.

truculent (adjective): having a fierce, savage nature

Standing in line for six hours, she became progressively truculent, yelling at DMV employees and elbowing other people waiting in line.

turgid (adjective): (of language) pompous and tedious

The amount of GRE vocabulary he used increased with his years--by the time he was 60, his novels were so turgid that even his diehard fans refused to read them.

turpitude (noun): depravity; a depraved act

During his reign, Caligula indulged in unspeakable sexual practices, so it not surprising that he will forever be remembered for his turpitude.

tyro (noun): someone new to a field or activity

All great writers, athletes, and artists were tyros at one time--unknown, clumsy, and unskilled with much to learn.

umbrage (noun): a feeling of anger caused by being offended

Since he was so in love with her, he took umbrage at her comments, even though she had only meant to gently tease him.

unassailable (adjective): immune to attack; without flaws

Professor Williams is so self-assured as to seem arrogant, presenting each and every opinion as an unassailable fact.

unflappable (adjective): not easily perturbed or excited or upset; marked by extreme calm and composure

The house shook and the ground quaked, but my dad was unflappable and comforted the family.

unforthcoming (adjective): uncooperative, not willing to give up information

The teacher demanded to know who broke the window while he was out of the room, but the students understandably were unforthcoming.

unimpeachable (adjective): free of guilt; not subject to blame; beyond doubt or reproach

After his long and unimpeachable service to the company, Sharat felt that a gold watch was a slap in the face rather than an honor.

unprepossessing (adjective): creating an unfavorable or neutral first impression

World leaders coming to meet Gandhi would expect a towering sage, and often would be surprised by the unprepossessing little man dressed only in a loincloth and shawl.

unpropitious (adjective): (of a circumstance) with little chance of success

With only a bottle of water and a sandwich, the hikers faced an unpropitious task: ascending a huge mountain that took most two days to climb.

unstinting (adjective): very generous

Helen is unstinting with her time, often spending hours at the house of a sick friend.

untenable (adjective): (of theories etc) incapable of being defended or justified

With the combination of Kepler's brilliant theories and Galileo's telescopic observations, the old geocentric theory became untenable to most of the educated people in Europe.

untoward (adjective): unfavorable; inconvenient

Some professors find teaching untoward as having to prepare for lectures and conduct office hours prevents them from focusing on their research.

untrammelled (adjective): not confined or limited

The whole notion of living untrammelled inspired the American Revolution and was enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

unviable (adjective): not able to work, survive, or succeed (also spelled inviable).

The plan was obviously unviable considering that it lead to complete environmental destruction in the river valley.

vaunted (adjective): highly or widely praised or boasted about

For years, they had heard of New York City's vaunted skyline, and when they finally saw it, the spectacular cityscape did not disappoint them in the least.

venial (adjective): easily excused or forgiven; pardonable

His traffic violations ran the gamut from the venial to the egregious--on one occasion he simply did not come to a complete stop; another time he tried to escape across state lines at speeds in excess of 140 mph.

verisimilitude (noun): the appearance of truth

All bad novels are bad for numerous reasons; all good novels are good for their verisimilitude of reality, placing the readers in a world that resembles the one they know.

veritable (adjective): truthfully, without a doubt

Frank is a veritable life-saver -- last year, on two different occasions, he revived people using CPR.

vicissitude (noun): change in one's circumstances, usually for the worse

Even great rulers have their vicissitudes--massive kingdoms have diminished overnight, and once beloved kings have faced the scorn of angry masses.

vitriol (noun): abusive or venomous language used to express blame or bitter deep-seated ill will

His vitriol spewed forth from a deep-seated racism that consumed his whole life.

vitriolic (adjective): harsh or corrosive in tone

While the teacher was more moderate in her criticism of the other student's papers, she was vitriolic toward Peter's paper, casting every flaw in the harshest light.

vituperate (adjective): to criticize harshly; to berate

Jason had dealt with disciplinarians before, but nothing prepared him for the first week of boot camp, as drill sergeants vituperated him for petty oversights such as forgetting to double knot the laces on his boots.

zeitgeist (noun): spirit of the times

Each decade has its own zeitgeist--the 1990's was a prosperous time in which the promise of the American Dream never seemed more palpable.