



VOCABULARY

WORD LIST



WORD MEANINGS

Alacrity (n.)

Aptitude Tests have a predilection for words that don't really sound like what they mean. Alacrity is no exception. Many think the word has a negative connotation. Alacrity, however, means an eager willingness to do something.

So imagine the first day at a job that you've worked really hard to get. How are you going to complete the tasks assigned to you? With alacrity, of course.

An interesting correlation: the more alacritous (adjective form) you are when you're learning vocabulary, the better you will do.

The first three weeks at his new job, Mark worked with such alacrity that upper management knew they would be giving him a promotion.

Prosaic (adj.)

Prosaic conjures up a beautiful mosaic for some. So if somebody or something is prosaic, it must surely be good.

Once again the test confounds expectations. Prosaic means dull and lacking imagination. It can be used to describe plans, life, language, or just about anything inanimate that has become dull (it is not used to describe people).

A good mnemonic: prose is the opposite of poetry. And where poetry, ideally, bursts forth with imagination, prose (think of text-book writing), lacks imagination. Hence, prosaic.

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.

Veracity (n.)

Veracity sounds a lot like voracity. Whereas many know voracity means full of hunger, whether for food or knowledge (the adjective form voracious is more common), few know veracity. Unfortunately, many confuse the two on the test.

Veracity means truthful. Veracious, the adjective form of veracity, sounds a lot like voracious. So be careful. After years of political scandals, the congressman was hardly known for his veracity; yet despite this distrust, he was voted into yet another term.

Paucity (n.)

Paucity is a lack of something. In honor of paucity, this entry will have a paucity of words.

There is a paucity of jobs hiring today that require menial skills since most jobs have either been automated or outsourced.

Maintain (v.)

The second definition of this word—is to assert. One can maintain their innocence. A scientist can maintain that a recent finding supports her theory. The latter context is the one you'll encounter on the test.

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

Contrite (adj.)

Word roots are often misleading. This word does not mean with triteness (con- meaning with). To be contrite is 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.

Laconic (adj.)

Another word that sounds different from what it means. A person is described as laconic when he/she says very few words.

I'm usually reminded of John Wayne, the quintessential cowboy, who, with a grave intonation, muttered few words at a time. As this allusion betrays my age more than anything else, think of Christian Bale in Batman—the laconic caped crusader.

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

Pugnacious (adj.)

Much like a pug dog, which aggressively yaps at anything near it, a person who is pugnacious likes to aggressively argue about everything. Verbally combative is another good way to describe pugnaciously. The comedian told one flat joke after another, and when the audience started booing, he pugnaciously spat back at them, “Hey, you think this is easy – why don’t you buffoons give it a shot?”

Disparate (adj.)

If two things are fundamentally different, they are disparate. For instance, verbal skills and math skills are disparate, and as such are usually tested separately—the test being no exception.

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

Egregious (adj.)

'Greg' is the Latin root for flock. At one point, egregious meant standing out of the flock in a positive way. This definition went out of vogue sometime in the 16th century, after which time egregious was used ironically.

Thus for the last five hundred years, 'egregious' meant standing out in a bad way. In sports, an egregious foul would be called on a player who slugged another player (not including hockey, of course).

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.

Innocuous (adj.)

Something innocuous is harmless and doesn't produce any ill effects. Many germs are innocuous. As are most bug bites. Even television, in small doses, is typically innocuous. Innocuous can also mean inoffensive. An innocuous question is unlikely to upset anyone.

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

Candid (adj.)

A straightforward and honest look at something is a candid one. Many great photographers have created enduring work because they turned their respective lens on what is real. Whether these photos are from the Dust Bowl, the Vietnam War, or the Arab Winter, they move us because they reveal how people felt at a certain moment.

A person can also be candid if they are being honest and straightforward with you.

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

Bleak (adj.)

If one has a very depressing take on life, we say that person has a bleak outlook. Landscapes can be bleak (Siberia in April, the Texas of No Country for Old Men), and writers, too (Dostoevsky, Orwell).

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.

Profuse (adj.)

If something literally pours out in abundance we say it is profuse. This pouring out is usually figurative. A person who apologizes ceaselessly does so profusely. Perhaps a little more vividly, certain men who fail to button up their shirts completely let the world – perhaps not unwittingly – know of their profuse chest hairs (which, on their part, should necessitate a profuse apology).

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 clad in nothing more than skimpy shorts.

Extant (adj.)

Many think this word means extinct. Extant is actually the opposite of extinct.

A great mnemonic is to put the word 'is' between the 'x' and the 't' in extant. This gives you existant (don't mind the misspelling).

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

Contentious (adj.)

This word does not mean content, as in feeling happy. It comes from the word contend, which means to argue. If you are contentious, you like 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.

Enervate (v.)

Most people think enervate means to energize. It actually means to sap the energy from.

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

Equivocate (v.)

People tend to think that equivocate has to do with equal. It actually means to speak vaguely, usually with the intention to mislead or deceive. More generally, equivocal can mean ambiguous. The related word unequivocal can also be confusing. To state something unequivocally is to state it in such a way that there is no room for doubt.

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

Ambivalent (adj.)

Students often believe that to be ambivalent towards something is to be indifferent. The truth is almost the opposite. See, when you are ambivalent you have mixed or conflicting emotions about something.

Sam was ambivalent about studying for the exam because it ate up a lot of her time, yet he learned many words and improved at reading comprehension.

Sedulous (adj.)

I am not quite sure why students can never seem to remember the definition of this word. Perhaps the sed- reminds them of sitting and being idle (like in sedentary). To be sedulous, however, is to be anything but idle. If you are sedulously studying for the exam, you are studying 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.

Stem(v.)

To stem means to hold back or limit the flow or growth of something. You can stem bleeding, and you can stem the tide—or at least attempt to do so. However, do not stem the flow of vocabulary coursing through your brains.

Blinkered (adj.)

If you blink a lot you are likely to miss something. Indeed, your view would be very limited. Extending this meaning, we get the definition of blinkered: means to have a limited outlook or understanding. The true etymology of the word actually comes from the blinkers that are put on racing horses to prevent them from becoming distracted.

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.

Unchecked (adj.) Describing something undesirable that has grown out of control.

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

Checkered (adj.)

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

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

Raft (n.)

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

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

Involved (adj.)

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

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

Retiring (adj.)

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

Expansive (adj.)

The common definition of expansive is extensive, wide-ranging. The lesser-known definition is communicative and prone to talking in a sociable manner.

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

Moment (n.)

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

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

Base (adj.)

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

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

Imbibe (v.)

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

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

Inundate (v.)

To inundate is a synonym for to deluge, which means to flood. Figuratively, to be inundated means to be overwhelmed by too many people or things.

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

Scintillating (adj.)

If something gives off sparks, such as when photons collide, it is said to scintillate. Figuratively, scintillating describes someone who is brilliant and lively (imagine Einstein's brain giving off sparks).

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

Benighted (adj.)

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

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

Galvanize (v.)

Need to strengthen steel by giving it a final coat? Or, perhaps you need to motivate somebody? Well, in both cases, you would literally be galvanizing. Figuratively, to galvanize is to excite to action or spur on.

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

Hedge (n./v.)

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

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.

Flush (adj.)

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

The Reading Comprehension passage is flush with difficult words, words that you may have learned only yesterday.

Fell (adj.)

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

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.

Arch (adj.)

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

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.

Beg (v.)

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

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

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.

Tender (v.)

Tender is a verb, and it does not mean to behave tenderly. When you tender something, you offer it up. For instance, when you tender your resignation, you hand in a piece of paper saying that you are resigning. The government was loath to tender more money in the fear that it might set off inflation.

Intimate (adj./v.)

Just as tender doesn't relate to two people in love, neither does intimate. The secondary meaning for intimate is 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.

Wanting (adj.)

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

She did not find her vocabulary wanting, yet there were so many vocabulary words that inevitably she did not know a few.

Becoming (adj.)

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

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

Start (v.)

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

All alone in the mansion, Henrietta started when she heard a sound.

Fleece (v.)

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

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

Telling (adj.)

If something is telling, it is significant and revealing of another factor. If a person's alibi has a telling detail, often that one little detail can support—or unravel!—the person's alibi.

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

Wax (n./v.)

Melting wax will only lead you astray. The secondary meaning for wax is to increase. The opposite of wax is to wane. Both words are used to describe the moon: a waxing moon becomes larger and larger each night until it becomes a full moon, at which point it becomes small and smaller each night and becomes a waning moon. 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.

Check (v.)

To check is to limit, and it is a word usually used to modify the growth of something. When government abuses are not kept in check, that government is likely to become autocratic.

Qualify (v.)

To qualify is to limit, and is usually used in the context of a statement or an opinion.

I love San Francisco.

I love San Francisco, but it is always windy.

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

Erratic (adj.)

Unpredictable, often wildly so, erratic is reserved for pretty extreme cases. An athlete who scores the winning point one game, and then botches numerous opportunities is known for his or her erratic play. The stock market is notoriously erratic, as is sleep, especially if your stocks aren't doing well.

Erratic can also mean strange and unconventional. Someone may be known for their erratic behavior.

Regardless of which meaning you are employing, you should not be erratic in your GRE prep.

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.