In the first sentence, the word *ironic* indicates opposition between two things in the sentence, *the striking nurses* and their *chief grievance* or complaint. This complaint has to do with the kind of *health care* they are receiving. Since nurses work in the healthcare field, it would be ironic for them to have "poor" or "inadequate" health care, so that should be their complaint. The second and third sentences are the same except for two very different transitional clauses: the clause in the second sentence implying that the nurses are happy with their *salaries and vacation packages*, the clause in the third sentence implying that they are not. Even though these transitional clauses have opposite meanings, they have no impact on the word in the blank. In all three sentences, the word in the blank is driven by the *ironic* opposition of *striking nurses* and their complaint of "inadequate" *health care*. In the fourth sentence, we replace the word *grievance* in sentence 2 with *objective*. While the irony of the nurses and their inadequate health care remains the same, changing *grievance* to *objective* means that the word in the blank must change from the kind of health care the nurses are complaining about ("inadequate") to the kind of health care they are aiming for ("better").

Including multiple transitions in a passage is a predictable trick that ETS uses to complicate Text Completion questions. So get used to recognizing and deciphering them! It's impossible to establish set rules for how these compound transitions add up. You must pay close attention to how they are related logically.

Text Completions Practice Set

Click here to download a PDF of Text Completions Practice Set.

Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 10

With global interconnectedness on the rise, the conviction of the United States to remain neutral in World War I seemed ever more _____ .

presumptuous
futile
contemptuous
pragmatic
admirable

2 of 10

Upon visiting the Middle East in 1850, Gustave Flaubert was so _____ belly dancing that he wrote, in a letter to his mother, that the dancers alone made his trip worthwhile.

overwhelmed by
enamored of
taken aback by
beseeched by
flustered by

3 of 10

The human race is a very (i)_____ species, as the facade of calm that covers our anxiety and (ii)_____ is flimsy and effortlessly ruptured.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
fragile	terror
purposeful	vulnerability
daring	humor

4 of 10

The practice of purchasing books was primarily a (i)_____ of the well-to-do until the late 1800s, when the increased popularity of dime novels, the expansion in the number of bookstores, and the introduction of the paperback made books (ii)_____ the average man.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
conduit	dislikable to
prerogative	excitable to
plight	attainable by

5 of 10

Increasingly, the boundaries of congressional seats are drawn in order to protect incumbents, as legislators engineer the demographics of each district such that those already in office can coast to (i)_____ victory. Of course, there is always the possibility that the incumbent will face a challenge from within his or her own party. Nevertheless, once the primary is over, the general election is (ii)_____ .

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)

an ineluctable	seldom nugatory
an invidious	remarkably contentious
a plangent	merely denouement

6 of 10

While more (i)_____ professors continue to insist that video games will never be a proper object of study, the rising generation of more heterodox academics is inclined to view such talk as positively (ii)_____ .

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
pedantic	antediluvian
progressive	pusillanimous
erudite	jejune

7 of 10

Political predictions generally prove fairly accurate when the presumption that the future will be similar to the past is (i)_____ . In periods with substantial (ii)_____ in the political world, however, predictions can be (iii)_____ wrong.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
disproved	upswings	thoughtfully
stipulated	insurgencies	perilously
fulfilled	changes	carelessly

8 of 10

Water is one of the few molecules that is less (i)_____ as a solid than as a (ii)_____ ;

if you need (iii)_____ , just look at the floating ice in your water glass.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
intriguing	vapor	an illustration
dense	plasma	an imbibement
aqueous	liquid	a discordance

9 of 10

As Molly was (i)_____ Spanish with her friends before their trip to Chile, she discovered that although she could comprehend her friends, she could not (ii)_____ her thoughts in the (iii)_____ language.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
mastering	acknowledge	inherent
disregarding	articulate	objective
practicing	disencumber	unfamiliar

10 of 10

People accustomed to thinking that the human lifespan (i)_____ the outer bounds of animal longevity tend to dismiss tales of musket balls being found in the shells of living turtles. Samantha Romney, however, argues that while such stories may be (ii)_____ , some turtles do indeed exhibit a phenomenon known as “negligible (iii)_____ ,” showing no signs of aging even as they pass the two-century mark.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)

belies	apocryphal	rejuvenation
demarcates	authentic	superannuation
antedates	heresy	senescence

Summary

- In Text Completion questions, ignore the answer choices and come up with your own word for the blank(s), using the clues and transition words in the passage.
- To find the clue, ask these questions: "*Who or what* is the blank describing" and "*What else* in the passage gives insight into that?"
- Transition words tell you whether the word in the blank should have the same sense as the clue or the opposite sense. Transitions are often marked by obvious words like *and*, *but, so, however, because, despite, since, although*, *instead*, etc.
- When coming up with your own word for the blank, be as literal as possible. It's okay to use simple words, a descriptive phrase, or language recycled from the clue.
- After coming up with your own word for the blank, use POE to eliminate words that aren't matches for your word. Focus on the words you know. Never eliminate a word that you don't know.
- If the clue is hard to decipher, you can simplify POE by determining if the word to go in the blank should be positive or negative. Then narrow down the answer choices by eliminating those that don't match.
- If the sentence has two or three blanks, do the blanks one at a time. Pick the easiest blank to start with, ask the questions, find the clue, come up with a word, and use POE. Then repeat for the remaining blanks. When done, plug in all answer choices to double-check the meaning of the passage.
- Harder questions may have less obvious transitions or more than one transition. Look out for anything that sets up a

similarity or difference between two elements of the sentence—things, ideas, actions, etc. Pay attention to how transitions are related and the overall logic of the passage.

- Use Mark and Move if you need a fresh start on a question. Answer a few other questions and then come back to the marked question.

- Keep working on vocabulary every day! Learn prefixes, suffixes, and other word roots. Learn not just the main definition of a new word but the secondary and figurative meanings.

Chapter 5
Sentence Equivalence

This chapter details a variation on the Text Completions you learned about in the prior chapter. Sentence Equivalence questions require you to find the best word to complete a sentence. For these questions, however, you'll have to pick the two answers that best complete the sentence; this means the two correct answers will be synonyms. Because both words create sentences that are equivalent—both have the same meaning—we refer to these types of questions as Sentence Equivalence questions. This chapter shows you how to apply the strategies you learned last chapter and use Process of Elimination to answer these questions.

WHAT'S A SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE?

Sentence Equivalence questions make up approximately 20% of the questions in any individual Verbal section. There are usually four Sentence Equivalence questions in each Verbal section. These questions are similar to Text Completion questions, as both require test takers to select the answer choices that best complete the intended meaning of the given sentence. However, unlike Text Completion questions, Sentence Equivalence questions always have only one blank and six answer choices, and you must correctly select two answer choices to get credit for the question.

Sentence Equivalence questions look like this:

> Anthropologists contend that the ancient Mesopotamians switched from grain production to barley after excessive irrigation and salt accumulation made the soil _____ grains.
>
> ☐ indifferent to
>
> ☐ inhospitable to
>
> ☐ unsuitable for
>
> ☐ acrimonious to
>
> ☐ benignant to
>
> ☐ inured to

The goal of a Sentence Equivalence question is to choose the two answer choices that complete the sentence, fit the meaning of the sentence as a whole, and produce completed sentences that are alike in meaning.

A CAUTIONARY TALE ON SYNONYMS

A common mistake that test takers make is expecting answer choices that produce completed sentences that are alike in meaning to be synonyms. The test taker making this mistake believes when two synonyms are present in the answer choices, they must be the correct answer. The test writers know this is a commonly made assumption, so they use this information to trick test takers into selecting the wrong answer choices. But this question type is called Sentence Equivalence, not Word Equivalence!

The first way they trick test takers is by including a pair of synonyms in the answer choices that do not fit the meaning of the sentence as a whole. They are expecting a certain number of test takers to scan the answer choices, find two answer choices that are synonyms, and select them as their answer. These test takers will be sad to find that they have just been tricked by the test writers.

The second way the GRE writers trick test takers is by ensuring that the two correct answer choices are not synonyms at all. The correct choices for Sentence Equivalence questions do not need to be exact synonyms, as long as both words correspond to the clues and the meaning of the sentence remains consistent with both words.

Sometimes, the test writers combine these two tricks and include as answer choices synonyms that are incorrect and correct answer choices that are not synonyms.

Let's look at an example:

> Unconventional political ideology is considered _____ existing main stream political ideology until the new ideas gather enough evidence and support to be adopted by or replace existing ideologies.
>
> ☐ in juxtaposition to
>
> ☐ inconsequential to
>
> ☐ deviant from

☐ a threat to

☐ in light of

☐ foreboding to

The correct answer is (B) and (C), even though *inconsequential to* and *deviant from* are not even near-synonyms. Don't worry too much yet about the best strategy to answer a question like this—we'll go over that later on. For now, let's just look at the correct and incorrect answer choices. In this example, each of the two correct answer choices is supported by a different clue in the sentence. *Inconsequential to* is supported by the fact that that the *unconventional political ideology* has yet to *gather enough support to…replace existing ideologies*. *Deviant from* is supported by the fact that the new ideology has yet to be *adopted by…existing ideologies*. In this context, however, both words give the same general meaning to the completed sentence. Notice also the two synonyms, *a threat to* and *foreboding to*, lying in wait for the unwary test taker. These words may sound perfectly fine when plugged into the sentence, but they do not correspond to the clues in the sentence.

Of course, this doesn't mean that synonym pairs are always the wrong answer on Sentence Equivalence questions. In fact, the correct answers are often synonyms. But, answering a Sentence Equivalence question by picking any pair of synonyms is an unreliable strategy for conquering this portion of the GRE. At best, focusing on synonyms can be a last-resort approach for questions that you find difficult.

So, you ask, what is a good strategy?

Great question! We're glad you asked.

THE BASIC APPROACH FOR SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE QUESTIONS

The basic approach for Sentence Equivalence questions looks very similar to the basic approach for Text Completion questions. Much like Text Completion questions, Sentence Equivalence questions have clues and transition words built in, and you should come up with your own word or phrase for the blank before approaching the answer choices.

STEPS FOR SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE QUESTIONS

1. **Find the Clues and Transition words.**
2. **Come up with your own word or phrase for the blank.** Write that word or phrase down on your scratch paper.
3. **Check each answer choice and use your scratch paper.**
   - ✓ an answer that sort of matches your word
   - ✘ an answer that does not at all match your word
   - ? any word you don't know

CLUES AND TRANSITION WORDS

The first step in answering Sentence Equivalence questions is the same as that for Text Completions. You must find the clues and transition words in the sentence. *Do not move on to Step 2 or look at the answer choices until you've identified the clues and transition words in the sentence!* Consequently, as with Text Completion questions, much of your work for Sentence Equivalence

questions happens by examining the sentence itself before considering the answer choices.

The clue is the words or phrases in the sentence that provide insight into the word or phrase that goes in the blank. When reading a Sentence Equivalence question and looking for the clue, ask yourself two questions:

- *Who or what* is the blank describing?
- *What else* in the sentence provides *insight* into that person or thing?

Transition words are words such as *and*, *but, so, however, because, despite, since, although*, *instead*, etc., that indicate how ideas in the sentence relate to each other. Thus, transition words convey important information about the intended meaning of a sentence. Some transition words, such as *but* and *however*, indicate that the portion of the sentence immediately following the transition word represents the opposite meaning to the other idea or action in the sentence. Here are some examples of sentences employing this sort of contrast transition words. The transition words are bolded.

> I love coffee, **but** I cannot tolerate the caffeine.
>
> **Although** I love coffee, I cannot tolerate the caffeine.

Other transition words, such as *and, because*, and *since*, indicate that the portion of the sentence immediately following the transition word represents the same meaning as some other idea or action in the sentence. Here are some examples of sentences employing this sort of same direction transition words. The transition words are bolded.

> I cannot tolerate caffeine, **so** I take my coffee decaffeinated.
>
> **Because** I cannot tolerate caffeine, I take my coffee decaffeinated.

Try out the basic approach to Sentence Equivalence questions on the question we just saw:

Anthropologists contend that the ancient Mesopotamians switched from grain production to barley after excessive irrigation and salt accumulation made the soil _____ grains.

- ☐ indifferent to
- ☐ inhospitable to
- ☐ unsuitable for
- ☐ acrimonious to
- ☐ benignant to
- ☐ inured to

Here's How to Crack It

Begin working on this question by first looking for clues and transition words in the sentence. Ask yourself, "*Who or what is the blank describing?*" The blank describes what *the soil* was to *grains*—the relationship between the two. Now, ask yourself "*What else in the sentence provides insight into that person or thing?*", or in this case, what else in the sentence provides insight into the relationship of *the soil* to *grains*? The sentence states that *ancient Mesopotamians switched from grain production to barley* and that *excessive irrigation and salt accumulation* did something to *the soil*. These are the clues for the sentence.

Now that you've identified the clue, look for any transition words. In this sentence, the word *after* suggests that the switch from *grain production to barley* is the consequence of *irrigation and salt accumulation*'s impact on *the soil*. In other words, our two clues are in agreement and reflect the same meaning.

With all this in mind, now move on to Step 2. Come up with your own word or phrase for the blank that describes the effect on *the soil*'s relationship to *grains* brought about by *excessive irrigation and salt accumulation*—an effect that in turn would have caused *ancient Mesopotamians* to switch *from grain production to barley*. If ancient Mesopotamians had to switch from grain production to barley production, then excessive irrigation and salt accumulation must have made the soil bad for grains in some way. So, use the phrase "bad for" and move on to Step 3, checking the answer choices for any choice that indicates something "bad for."

Choice (A), *indifferent to*, does not mean something "bad for" so eliminate (A). Choice (B), *inhospitable to*, is a good match for "bad for" because if the soil was inhospitable to grain, it would explain why ancient Mesopotamians switched from grain production to barley production. Put a checkmark next to (B). Choice (C), *unsuitable for*, is also a good match for "bad for" as it would also explain why ancient Mesopotamians switched from grain production to barley production, so put another checkmark next to (C).

Don't stop evaluating the answer choices just because you found two that matched your word. Look at the remaining answer choices just in case another answer choice also matches. If that is the case, then you will need to reevaluate your interpretation of the sentence, or determine which words produce sentences that are closest in meaning. Choice (D), *acrimonious to*, may be a word you are unsure about, so put a question mark next to it. If you happen to know that *acrimonious* means angry or bitter, then you can eliminate this choice as not quite matching "bad for." Choice (E), *benignant to*, may also be a word you are unsure about, so put a question mark next to it as well. Choice (F), *inured to*, is not a good match for "bad" as inured means to grow accustomed to something, so eliminate (F).

You have two answer choices with checkmarks next to them, two choices with question marks next to them, and two choices that are eliminated. Select the two answer choices with checkmarks next to them, which is the correct answer.

Nice work.

Sentence Equivalence Drill

Click here to download a PDF of Sentence Equivalence Drill.

Work the following questions, using the same approach outlined in this chapter. Check your answers in Part V when you're done.

1 of 5

To any observer, ancient or _____ , the night sky appears as a hemisphere resting on the horizon.

- ☐ antiquated
- ☐ perceptive
- ☐ modern
- ☐ astute
- ☐ contemporary
- ☐ archaic

2 of 5

Researchers interested in the nature versus nurture debate use identical twins who were separated at birth to explore which personality characteristics are _____ and which arise through experience.

- ☐ intractable
- ☐ nascent
- ☐ erudite
- ☐ innate
- ☐ predilection
- ☐ inborn

3 of 5

The eccentric Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, often used séances to contact his dead pet dog for advice; despite this _____ behavior, the public had so much confidence in his ability as a leader that he was in power for 22 years.

- [ ] capricious
- [ ] lackluster
- [ ] poised
- [ ] unconventional
- [ ] repulsive
- [ ] decorous

4 of 5

The circulation of the blood makes human adaptability to the _____ conditions of life, such as fluctuating atmospheric pressure, level of physical activity, and diet, possible.

- [ ] inveterate
- [ ] dynamic
- [ ] timorous
- [ ] cowed
- [ ] turgid
- [ ] oscillating

5 of 5

Arriving in New Orleans days after Hurricane Zelda had passed and without an adequate number of vehicles of its own, the armed forces began to _____ any working form of transportation they could find, including a bus that had been chartered at great expense by a group of tourists.

- [ ] repatriate

- ☐ commandeer
- ☐ extradite
- ☐ interdict
- ☐ expurgate
- ☐ appropriate

LET'S TALK ABOUT VOCABULARY

The basic approach for Sentence Equivalence questions is going to be useful for each Sentence Equivalence question on the GRE. You're going to need to know how to proceed once you encounter a question. Knowing and believing in the basic approach is extremely valuable.

But, the basic approach can get you only so far. The truth is, for some Sentence Equivalence questions, if you do not know the meanings of the words in the answer choices, you'll likely end up guessing. There is only one, surefire defense against the possibility of guessing. That defense is having a robust vocabulary.

At the end of this section, we discuss in more detail vocabulary on the GRE. We have included the Key Terms List, which is a list of the words most commonly seen on the GRE. You should learn these words to stand the best chance of knowing many of the words you'll see on the GRE.

One of the best ways to help learn vocabulary, and to shed some light on unfamiliar words, is by understanding the roots of words.

Word Roots

Word roots are linguistic units that have distinct meanings. They're building blocks for words in modern English. Mastery of word roots can accelerate your vocabulary improvement. A knowledge of word roots can also sometimes help you infer enough about a mystery word to decide whether to keep or discard it as an answer choice. Here's a smattering of common word roots:

- *ben* or *bene*—good: *benefit*, *benefactor*, *benediction*
- *mal* or *male*—bad: *malign*, *malfeasance*, *maledict*ion
- *anthropo*—having to do with humankind: *anthropology, philanthropy*, *anthropocentric*
- *cise* or *cide*—strike, cut, or kill: *incisive*, *circumcise*, *homicide*
- *gen* or *gene*—origin, kind, or type: *genesis*, *generate*, *genus*, *homogenous*
- *morph* or *morpho*—form or shape: *morphology*, *amorphous*, *metamorphosis*
- *vol* or *voli*—will or intention: *volunteer*, *voluntary*, *volition*

Word roots are often combined. From the roots listed above you can now decipher several GRE-level words: *benevolence* (good intention), *malevolence* (bad intention), *anthropogenic* (caused by human activity), *anthropomorphic* (taking human form), *morphogenesis* (how something takes form), *genocide* (killing an entire group of people).

Prefixes and suffixes are especially common word roots. Just a handful of the prefixes you're sure to encounter: *ante* (before), *anti* (against), *circum* (around), *hyper* (over, above), *trans* (across). And here are some common suffixes: *able* (for adjectives indicating capability), *ism* (for nouns denoting a doctrine or belief), *less* (for adjectives indicating absence of something), *ly* (used to form adverbs from adjectives).

One good way to learn word roots is by noting the etymology (origin) of words that you look up in the dictionary. Look for word roots in your Key Terms List (in Chapter 8) and any other new words you learn.

But, learning the entirety of the Key Terms List or memorizing a couple of word roots, is in no way comprehensive. The GRE can test any word it wants, so unless you have a full working knowledge of the dictionary, its likely you'll come across some words on test day that you are unfamiliar with. That's okay.

In the following section we're going to outline some strategies for you to fall back on in case you are unsure how to proceed with a particular question, and you don't know what the words mean.

It's worth repeating here that the top strategy for all Sentence Equivalence questions is first to determine whether you know the words. Test takers too often make the mistake of believing that the strategies suggested below are a cure-all (or, to use the GRE vocabulary, a nepenthe) for their Sentence Equivalence problems. We want to be very clear about this: there is no substitute for a killer vocabulary.

These strategies may not result in eliminating all the incorrect answer choices. But, if you can eliminate some, your chances of

guessing correctly are certainly improved.

A PIECE OF ADVICE

When you come across a Sentence Equivalence question on test day, follow the basic approach. But, when you begin to evaluate the words in the answer choices, the best thing you can do is be honest with yourself. If you don't know any of the words, then start thinking about some of the Process of Elimination strategies below. When confronted with a word they do not know, many test takers will make the mistake of stubbornly staring at the word, convinced that if they continue to stare, the word's meaning will appear. This behavior wastes valuable time that could be spent dealing with other questions and words that they do know.

So, on test day, if you don't know a word, just admit it and move on to Process of Elimination strategies. Or, if you don't know the meanings of most or all of the words in the answer choices, make a guess and move on to the next question.

PROCESS OF ELIMINATION STRATEGIES

Ideally, when you encounter a Sentence Equivalence question, you are able to discern the clues in the sentence clearly and come up with a spot-on word for the blank. Ideally, too, you will know the meaning of every answer choice.

Needless to say, this ideal scenario isn't the only situation you will come up against when working through the Sentence Equivalence questions in the verbal sections of the GRE. The precise nuance of the clues may elude you, making it hard to come up with a word for the blank. Or you may find yourself fuzzy, or even downright

clueless, about the definition of some of the answer choices. Fret not. This happens to everyone!

Luckily, with two correct answer choices and four wrong ones, there are many opportunities for effective use of Process of Elimination. Let's look at a few of the POE strategies and considerations available to you.

Positive and Negative Words

One way to slice quickly through the lineup of answer choices is to decide whether the word in the blank should have a positive or negative connotation and then separate the answer choices into positive ones and negative ones. You don't need to know the exact dictionary definition of every answer choice if you can somewhat confidently identify it as positive or negative. However, note that with the exception of words such as "sizzle" words do NOT have meanings that relate to their sounds. So, don't fall for the trap of saying something like "Oh, that word sounds ugly so it must be a negative word." After all, pulchritude isn't a particularly nice sounding word, but it means beauty. So, you can't separate words that you've never encountered before into positive or negative. But, you may remember that a word you've studied has a negative meaning even though you can't remember the precise meaning of that word.

Let's practice using this approach on the following question:

Despite the implications of their noble status, many aristocrats were virtually penniless and lived in a state of

_____ .

- ☐ indigence
- ☐ opulence
- ☐ eminence

☐ penury

☐ depravity

☐ complacency

Can you identify any of the words as positive or negative?

Here's How to Crack It

The transition word that begins this sentence, *Despite*, tells us that the *state* in which *many aristocrats…lived* is the opposite of *their noble status*. Because noble status is a positive idea, the word in the blank should be negative. This is reinforced by the additional clue that *many aristocrats were virtually penniless*. Evaluate the answer choices one at a time, eliminating positive words and holding onto negative words.

Choice (A), *indigence*, is an uncommon word. Instead of spending time trying to decipher whether it's positive or negative, just mark it with a question mark and move on. Choice (B) is another uncommon word, *opulence*, so give that one a question mark as well. Choice (C), *eminence*, is a positive word—think of someone described as *an eminent doctor* or as *an eminent author*. Therefore, eliminate (C) because the word in the blank has to be negative. Choice (D), *penury*, is another uncommon word, so mark it with a question mark. Choice (E), *depravity*, means moral corruption. This is certainly a negative word, but would you describe a penniless person as depraved? Not likely, so eliminate (E) as well. The final word, (F), is *complacency*, which means a feeling of self-satisfaction, so eliminate (F).

After all that, you have three answer choices remaining—(A) *indigence*, (B) *opulence*, and (D) *penury*. This is a much better situation than guessing from among all six. And if you happen to

know that the word *opulence* is a positive word suggesting luxury, you've got the answer—it has to be (A) and (D).

Let's move on to another strategy.

Synonym / No Synonym

One strategy is to look over the answer choices for synonym pairs and choose one of these pairs for the answer. However, the warning given earlier in the chapter still holds: it is sometimes the case that the correct answer choices will not be strict synonyms while synonym pairs can be found among the incorrect answer choices! Therefore, this strategy must be used with caution and considered a last resort. It's best reserved for times when you are pretty familiar with the words in the answer choices but having difficulty with the clue.

Consider this example:

Because mercury has a variety of innocuous uses, including in thermometers and dental fillings, few people realize that it is one of the most _____ substances on the planet.

- ☐ acidic
- ☐ irritating
- ☐ mundane
- ☐ deleterious
- ☐ disagreeable

☐ pernicious

Here's How to Crack It

The clue here may be confusing, making it hard to come up with a word for the blank. So work with the answer choices to pair those that are synonyms and eliminate those with no synonyms. Evaluate the answer choices one at a time.

Start by eliminating (A), which has no synonyms among the other answer choices. Choice (B) is *irritating*. Scanning the other answer choices for a synonym, you'll find (E), *disagreeable*. If one of these is correct, the other is likely to be as well, so make them a pair. Choice (C) is *mundane*, which can mean either worldly or unexciting. This has no synonym among the other answer choices, so eliminate (C). Choice (D) is *deleterious*, a word similar in meaning to (F), *pernicious*, the only word remaining. Make these another pair.

This process eliminates two choices and leaves you with two pairs of synonyms. Guessing at this point will give you a 50/50 chance of getting the correct answer. If you've searched for the clue and come up empty-handed, those are not bad odds.

Here's how to choose between the answer choices. The blank should describe what kind of substance mercury is. The sentence gives the insight that *mercury has a variety of innocuous* or harmless *uses*. The transition word *because* suggests agreement between this clue and the blank. However, the sentence contains another transition in the phrase *few people*, which indicates that the word in the blank should actually be the opposite of *innocuous*. This insight makes the correct answer (D) and (F).

ADVANCED SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE QUESTIONS AND HOW TO CONQUER THEM

With Text Completion questions, we saw that GRE ups the difficulty by creating questions with multiple blanks. Some of these questions might even have two or more sentences! Neither of these complications occurs in Sentence Equivalence questions—they are always a single sentence containing a single blank. For Sentence Equivalence questions, the writers have some other tools to make questions difficult.

Difficult Transitions. When we introduced the topic of transitions, we focused on words such as *and*, *but, so, however, because, despite, since, although*, *instead*, etc. But not all transitions are marked by the obvious words that typically serve this function. Be on the lookout for less-than-obvious transitions. A transition can be any language indicating that two parts, ideas, or actions in the sentence are the same or opposite in sense. Let's consider these examples:

> Being a confirmed coffee snob, Boris reluctantly _____ the foul gas-station brew.
>
> Being a confirmed coffee snob, Boris surprised me by _____ the foul gas-station brew.

The clue in both sentences is that Boris is a coffee snob. In the first sentence, the adverb *reluctantly* implies that whatever he did with the gas-station brew was the opposite of his inclination. In the second sentence, the fact that Boris's actions were surprising again implies an action that is the opposite of the clue. In both cases, Boris has acted against his nature as a coffee snob. Therefore, the word in the blank should suggest that Boris was willing to drink the *foul gas-station brew.*

For another example, consider the use of *few people* in the mercury example used in the previous section, on this page. There are many

ways for a sentence to present things as the same or opposite, as agreeing or contrasting, as similar or different. Read carefully and critically!

Secondary Definitions. Sometimes the folks at ETS will make a question harder the old-fashioned way: with harder vocabulary.

There's no getting around it—your best defense against a lineup of scary answer choices is a formidable vocabulary. But it's not just about learning those polysyllabic, arcane, and unusual words. Many common words have less-common meanings or nuances that may be exploited on the test. The verb *apprehend*, for example, usually means to catch or arrest a wrongdoer. But it may also simply mean to perceive or to understand. While the verb *realize* commonly means to become fully aware of something, it can also mean to make something a reality. The adjective *fast* may describe something speedy or something fixed securely in place. And, as a verb, *flag* can mean to mark with a flag or to become droopy or tired. Here's the moral of the story: when you learn a new word, take the time to learn the secondary and tertiary definitions as well.

Tips for Advanced Sentence Equivalence. Our tips for conquering the most difficult Sentence Equivalence questions fit within the three steps of the basic approach:

1. **Find the clues and transition words**.
    - Begin by asking "Who or what is the blank describing?" and "What else in the sentence gives insight into that person or thing?"
    - For Sentence Equivalence questions it may be difficult to identify the clue using the questions above. If that is the case, then start by determining the part of speech needed in the blank. This helps you to more concretely and efficiently answer the question "Who or what is the blank describing?"

- Transitions are not always clearly marked with words such as *and*, *but, so, however, because, despite, since, although*, *instead*, etc. Be alert to other ways that a sentence can make two parts the same or opposite, agreeing or contrasting.

2. **Come up with your own word or phrase for the blank.**
    - The more thoroughly you've done Step 1, the easier it will be to come up with a word for Step 2, and the better that word will predict the correct answer choices.
    - Do not be preoccupied with coming up with the perfect, most GRE-worthy word. Feel free to recycle from the clues in the sentence. Use a phrase instead of a single word. You do want a word or phrase that accurately reflects the clues. But your goal is not to have a scratch pad full of elegant words; it's to answer the questions quickly and correctly.
3. **Check each answer choice and use your scratch paper.**
    - Stick with the clues and the word you come up with. In reviewing the answer choices, if you have to choose between words you know that don't match and words you don't know, pick from the words you don't know! For example, if you have eliminated three answer choices and put question marks next to the other three, pick two from the ones that you've marked with question marks.
    - What makes a Sentence Equivalence question harder is often just the difficulty of the words in the answer choices. Your best defense is to build a strong vocabulary. Learn your word lists, and learn the range of meanings for each word.
    - The correct answer will not always be a pair of synonyms, and synonym pairs in the answer choices are not necessarily the correct answer. See the Cautionary Tale on Synonyms at the beginning of this chapter (this page).

Let's put these advanced skills together in working through some more difficult questions.

Despite their outward negativity, many a cynic harbors an inner faith in the _____ of humankind.

- ☐ benevolence
- ☐ precocity
- ☐ parsimony
- ☐ ignobility
- ☐ antipathy
- ☐ probity

Here's How to Crack It

Find the clue for this Sentence Equivalence question by asking, "Who or what is the blank describing?" If the answer to that question is unclear, then determine the part of speech to more easily answer the question. In this case, the blank is a noun describing some aspect *of humankind* that *cynics* have *faith in*. Now ask, "What else in the sentence gives insight into that person or thing?" This clue comes from the introductory phrase, *[d]espite their outward negativity*. *Despite* is a transition word suggesting that *their outward negativity* is the opposite of their *inner faith in* some aspect *of humankind*. Therefore, the blank must refer to some positive aspect of humankind. Pick an appropriate word such as the "good" of humankind for the blank, or focus on positive words in the answer choices. Evaluate the answer choices individually.

Choice (A), *benevolence*, is a positive word so keep (A). Choice (B), *precocity*, is an uncommon word, so put a question mark next to this one. The same can be done for (C), *parsimony*. Choice (D) has the root word *noble* in it, which is certainly positive, but the prefix *ig-* makes it a bad thing—think of the word *ignorant*. Eliminate this choice. Choice (E) has the prefix *anti-*, meaning against. This

generally implies something negative, so eliminate (E). Choice (F), *probity*, is another tough word, so put a question mark next to it.

At this point, select (A), as it is the only choice with a checkmark next to it. Choices (B), (C), and (F) all have question marks, so if there is no way to further parse out what those words mean, pick one of them to go with (A) and move on. At the worst, you have a 1-in-3 chance of guessing correctly. Taking the POE a little further, you should also be able to eliminate (B). The word *precocity* is related to *precocious*. It also begins with the prefix *pre-*, meaning before—an idea that's neither positive nor negative. Choice (C), *parsimony*, means frugality, and (F), *probity*, means honesty and integrity. Thus, the correct answer is (A) and (F).

Let's try one more:

Formerly seen only on sailors and bikers, tattoos in the United States have become so _____ in urban culture as to lose any rebel cachet.

- ☐ prepossessing
- ☐ fascinating
- ☐ pedestrian
- ☐ peripheral
- ☐ marginal
- ☐ pervasive

Here's How to Crack It

Find the clue by asking first, "Who or what is the blank describing?" If the answer to that question is unclear, then determine the part of speech to more easily answer the question. In this case, the blank is

an adjective describing what *tattoos have become…in urban culture*. Now ask, "What else in the sentence gives insight into that person or thing?" Clues here are that they were *[f]ormerly seen only on sailors and bikers* and that, as a consequence of what they've become, they have lost *any rebel cachet*. The word *formerly* is a transition word suggesting that tattoos—or specifically their cultural significance—have changed in some way. Therefore, the blank should suggest the opposite of being *seen only on sailors and bikers*. A good word might simply be "common," so use that for evaluating the answer choices. Evaluate the answer choices individually, looking for reasons to eliminate each.

Choice (A), *prepossessing*, might be unfamiliar. Trying to determine the meaning from its parts, you'd come up with something like "owning before." It's hard to see how this matches "common," so eliminate (A). Choice (B) is *fascinating*. While modern culture may be fascinated with tattoos, it doesn't match the word "common," so eliminate (B). Choice (C) is *pedestrian*. As an adjective, *pedestrian* can mean either walking on foot or ordinary. In the sense of ordinary, this is a good match for "common," so put a checkmark next to (C). Choice (D), *peripheral*, means at the edge of something —not a match for "common." Eliminate (D). Choice (E), *marginal*, means the same thing as *peripheral*, so eliminate it as well. The final choice is (F), *pervasive*, which describes something that is found everywhere. This could be another way of saying "common," so (F) earns a checkmark. The answer is (C) and (F).

Notice some pitfalls that we've avoided in this question. Two of the answer choices, *peripheral* and *marginal*, are synonyms but don't match "common." They'd be tempting if you missed the time transition implying that tattoos have changed from being something unusual. The words *prepossessing*, meaning impressive or pleasing, and *fascinating* are another decoy synonym pair. The correct answer choices, *pedestrian* and *pervasive*, aren't strict synonyms. Furthermore, recognizing *pedestrian* as a correct choice depends on

knowing its secondary definition. These are all traps that might have tripped you up before, so you've learned a lot!

Sentence Equivalence Practice Set

Click here to download a PDF of Sentence Equivalence Practice Set.

Work the following questions, using all the techniques you've learned for Sentence Equivalence. Check your answers in Part V when you're done.

1 of 5

Possessed of an insatiable sweet tooth, Jim enjoyed all kinds of candy, but he had a special _____ for gumdrops, his absolute favorite.

- ☐ container
- ☐ affinity
- ☐ odium
- ☐ nature
- ☐ disregard
- ☐ predilection

2 of 5

Although the Wright brothers' first attempted flight in 1901 was a _____ and subsequent efforts similarly ended in failure, they persisted and ultimately made the first successful airplane flight in 1903.

- ☐ fiasco
- ☐ debacle
- ☐ hindrance
- ☐ feat
- ☐ triumph
- ☐ precedent

3 of 5

The fuel efficiency of most vehicles traveling at speeds greater than 50 miles per hour _____ as the vehicle's speed increases, due to the increased aerodynamic drag placed on the vehicle.

- [ ] equalizes
- [ ] adapts
- [ ] stabilizes
- [ ] diminishes
- [ ] increases
- [ ] wanes

4 of 5

Despite the vast amount of time Francis dedicated to learning six different languages, he was _____ communicator; his mastery of vocabulary and grammar failed to redress his inability to construct cogent prose.

- [ ] a florid
- [ ] an inept
- [ ] a prolific
- [ ] an astute
- [ ] a morose
- [ ] a maladroit

5 of 5

The twins' heredity and upbringing were identical in nearly every respect, yet one child remained unfailingly sanguine even in times of stress while her sister was prone to angry outbursts that indicated an exceptionally choleric _____ .

- [ ] genotype
- [ ] environment
- [ ] physiognomy
- [ ] incarnation
- [ ] temperament
- [ ] humor

Summary

- The approach for Sentence Equivalence questions is the same as that for Text Completions. Ignore the answer choices, ask who or what the blank is describing, look for clues and transition words, fill in your own word for the blank, and check the answer choices against your word using POE. You must pick two answer choices.

- Identifying the part of speech that should go in the blank will help answer who or what the blank is describing.

- Pay close attention to transitions. Transitions indicate two parts of the sentence are the same or opposite in meaning. They are often marked by obvious words like *and*, *but, so, however, because, despite, since, although*, *instead*, etc. Other transitions are not as obvious but still important.

- If the clue is hard to decipher, you can simplify POE by determining if the word to go in the blank should be positive or negative. Then narrow down the answer choices by eliminating those that don't match.

- The two correct answer choices may not be strict synonyms.

Chapter 6
Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension questions on the GRE can be quite deceptive. On the one hand, the answer to each question is somewhere in the passage. On the other hand, ETS is really good at crafting answers that seem right but are, in fact, wrong. This chapter will teach you the best way to approach the reading passages on the test and how to attack the questions. Furthermore, you'll learn how to use Process of Elimination to eliminate wrong answers and maximize your score.

READING COMPREHENSION OVERVIEW

Reading Comprehension questions make up approximately one-half of the questions in the Verbal section. Recall that the reading passages will appear after the Text Completion questions, and then again at the end of the section after the Sentence Equivalence questions. All questions related to the passages will be presented together.

The passages you will see will vary in length from one paragraph for the shortest passages to five paragraphs for the longest passages. For short passages, you will be asked to answer 3 questions. For long passages, you will be asked to answer 4 questions.

Reading Comprehension passages can be intimidating to test takers, as there is a sudden influx of information on the screen and the test taker prepares for the task of reading and answering questions about a passage that is often dense, wordy, and boring. During Reading Comprehension passages, it is not uncommon for test takers to feel rushed, which makes it hard to pay attention to a passage that covers a topic area that most find dry. However, contrary to popular belief, everything you need to know to crack Reading Comprehension questions can be found in the text. This chapter is going to teach you how to crack the passages and questions, leading you to the correct answers.

More Information on Reading Comprehension Passages

GRE passages cover a variety of topics, but will typically come from the physical sciences, biological sciences, social sciences, business, arts and humanities, as well as everyday topics and are based on material found in books and periodicals, both academic and nonacademic.

Reading Comprehension questions are presented on a split screen. The passage is on the left-hand side and stays there while you work on the questions; you may have to use the scroll bar to read the whole passage. The questions appear one at a time on the right-hand side. After you answer the first question, another appears in its place. The passage remains unchanged and in place so you can always refer to it. As with any other type of question on the GRE, Reading Comprehension questions can be answered in any order you wish by using the skip function on the test. Just make sure you answer all the questions!

Since the passage will appear only on the screen, it's very important to practice reading comprehension without underlining words or bracketing text directly in the passage. Every time you practice reading comprehension on paper, anything you write must be written on scratch paper. In your preparation for the GRE, never give yourself a crutch you won't have when you take the real test.

THE PRINCETON REVIEW APPROACH

The Basic Approach to Cracking GRE Reading Comprehension

Before we begin to crack the Reading Comprehension passages and questions, it is important to establish The Basic Approach. The Basic Approach allows you to:

- actively read the passages and seek out the most important information
- understand the different types of questions and what they require you to do
- quickly find the credited response by eliminating incorrect answers

Don't Be Predictable

The typical test taker is predictable and approaches questions on the test in a certain way. The people who write the GRE create questions and passages that are designed with those people in mind. They will make questions that trick and confuse test takers who follow the typical approach. However, if you approach the test in a better way, you improve your chances of getting a better score. One hard-and-fast rule of test-taking is that whenever you do what the test writers expect, you don't get the best score possible. When you do things in a different way, you increase your chances of getting a better score. So, our approach to reading needs to be that "different way." The different ways you are going to learn are the Basics of Cracking the Passage, The Basics of Cracking the Questions, and The Basics of Cracking the Answer Choices. These combine to form the foundation that is used for The Basic Approach to Cracking Reading Comprehension.

The Basics of Cracking the Passage

The typical test taker reads the passage without a plan. So, to crack the passage, you need to have a plan for reading the passage. The typical test taker concentrates on the facts in the passage rather than why those facts are there. So, to crack the passage, you also need to focus on how facts relate to the main idea of the passage.

The Basics of Cracking the Questions

The typical test taker reads the question but doesn't identify the question task. To crack the questions, you must learn to locate both the subject and the task of the question. The **subject** of the question is what you need to find in the passage. The **question task** tells you what type of information you need to find about the subject of the question. For example, do you need to locate what the author said about the subject or do you need to find out why the author mentioned the subject?

The Basics of Cracking the Answer Choices

The typical test taker is focused on simply finding the correct answer. While that may seem like a reasonable goal, it's more effective to utilize Process of Elimination (POE) and eliminate wrong answers. Cracking the Answer Choices is all about understanding how ETS constructs incorrect answer choices. If you can learn to identify common trap answer choices, you can often eliminate them with confidence.

Additionally, the typical test taker relies a lot on memory and reads only those parts of sentences that are referenced by the question or answer choices. Reading only parts of sentences makes it easy to misconstrue the context of the sentence. Flipping this behavior around by not only reading full sentences but also reading sentences before and after it is crucial to cracking both the question and the answer choices. Remember, the correct answer is always found in the text. Always refer to the passage and always read full sentences when you do so.

THE STEPS OF THE BASIC APPROACH TO CRACKING GRE READING COMPREHENSION

Here are the steps of the Basic Approach:

1. Work the Passage

This is where you apply **The Basics of Cracking the Passage.** You must have a plan for reading the passage and you must learn to read actively. As you read, always be on the lookout for how each element of the passage relates to the main idea of the passage. To find the main idea, ask yourself questions such as: What does the author want me to remember or

believe about the topic under discussion? What's the author's conclusion? How is that conclusion supported?

2. Understand the Question

This is where you apply **The Basics of Cracking the Questions.** Try to break the question down. First, look for the subject of the question. Then, find the words that indicate the task.

3. Find the Information in the Passage that Addresses the Task of the Question

Refer back to the passage. ETS needs to be able to justify its credited responses by referring to specific information mentioned in the passage. When you understand the task of the question, it becomes easier to find this information. Once you locate the information in the passage that addresses the question task, you're ready to look at the answer choices.

4. Use Process of Elimination

This is where you use **The Basics of Cracking the Answer Choices.** Approach each answer choice with a healthy level of suspicion. Since there are more incorrect answers than correct answers for most questions, you are more likely to be reading a wrong answer than a right answer. Look for signs that are more likely to make an answer wrong, the most common of which are the signs outlined later in this chapter as tools for POE. Don't be afraid to just pick the answer that remains if you can find good reasons to eliminate the other answer choices. An overview of

common trap answer choices can be found later in this chapter.

Now, let's dive in deeper.

THE BASIC APPROACH TO CRACKING THE GRE READING COMPREHENSION

Step 1: Work the Passage

Overview

Working the passage is the first step of **The Basic Approach to Cracking GRE Reading Comprehension Passages**. By following the recommendations here on how to Work the Passage, you will be able to follow a strategic plan for reading the passage, avoid wasting time by actively reading the passage, and map the passage to glean all the relevant information from the passage, which enables you to answer the questions later on. All in all, you will know what it takes to Crack the Passage. From there, it's time to practice!

How Do You Plan to Read?

Before we talk about how to Crack the Passage, let's explore how the typical test taker handles the passage. The typical test taker approaches Reading Comprehension passages in the same way they would approach any reading assignment. They read as quickly as

possible while barely scratching the surface of the major points of the passage that the author was trying to express. Often about halfway through the passage, the typical test taker realizes they have not retained a single major point of the passage. The test taker is now forced to either re-read the entire passage or move on to the answer choices without a full comprehension of the material. This strategy is ineffective and worse, wastes a lot of time!

A better way to approach the passage is to have a plan before you read! Central to the plan is the test taker's ability to comprehend the passage through Active Reading. Active Reading keeps you engaged with the passage, fights off the tendency to let your mind wander away from the task at hand, and leaves you with a better understanding of the author's main point once you are finished. But what is Active Reading and how do you do it?

The Basics of Cracking the Passage

Active Reading

The easiest way to define "Active Reading" is to define the opposite, or "Passive Reading." During passive reading, you look at the words, but the content just isn't registering. You may remember some of the details from the passage, but you probably missed *why* the author told you about those details. This is common on GRE passages, as the content is often dense and boring.

Active Reading, on the other hand, means that you follow the author's argument. Put another way, you try to separate the author's claims from the facts and other evidence used to back up those claims. This is an essential ingredient for Cracking the Passage.

Effective Active Reading involves the following elements:

- *Asking questions as you read:* Asking questions helps to engage your mind. For example, ask yourself key questions about the

passage and its author. Why did the author provide the information in the sentence I just read? What is the author's purpose for writing the passage? What kind of tone is the author adopting (scholarly, friendly, critical, objective, biased)? At the end of a paragraph, try to predict where the author takes the argument next. Applying this kind of thinking will help you develop a full understanding of the passage.

- *Claims versus evidence*: As you ask questions about what you are reading, your overall objective is to understand why the author included the information you read. While GRE Reading Comprehension passages can cover myriad topics, what they have in common is that they typically involve the author attempting to convince you of his/her point of view regarding the topic of the passage. To construct a convincing argument, the author must present his/her opinion and then provide evidence to back it up. So, as you read GRE Reading Comprehension passages, ask yourself if what you just read could be considered a claim or evidence. Claims are opinions expressed by the author or by a third-party cited by the author. Evidence is information used to support a claim. A good way to distinguish between claims and evidence is to apply the "Why" Test. If the information you read can be used to answer *why* the author believes his/her claim, then that information is evidence. If the information you read tells you *what* the author believes, then the information is a claim. By asking yourself what the function is of each sentence you read, you'll become more effective at determining the main point of the passage.
- *Identifying the structure of the passage*: The structure of a passage is an undervalued hint to deciphering the intentions of the author and the main point of the passage. Passages written in a conventional manner usually proceed from the general to the specific and then return to the general. Individual paragraphs are also usually written that way. Be on the lookout for pivotal words or phrases in the middle of a paragraph (*however*, *on the contrary*, *on the other hand*). These words are

indicators of the author's perspective on the topic of the passage. Often, the author follows up one of these pivotal words with the perspective he/she is trying to convince you to adopt.

The Main Idea

One of the central goals of Active Reading is to determine the main idea. The main idea of the passage is what the author wants you to believe about the issue being presented in the passage.

Note how the main idea is distinct from the topic of the passage. The topic of the passage is what the passage is about. The main idea is what the author wants YOU to believe about the topic. So, if you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with the author, or noticing the author pushing an opinion or arguing a point, chances are that is the main idea of the passage.

By identifying the main idea of the passage, you can quickly and easily determine the purpose of the passage, which is one of the key components of successfully Cracking the Passage.

Mapping the Passage

Mapping the Passage is the final tool in learning how to Crack the Passage. By Mapping the Passage, you can easily identify the main idea of the passage, the structure of the passage, and the author's side on the various claims presented in the passage. But, to successfully map the passage, you must do something that a typical test taker never does. You must write things down. Just because you reach a Reading Comprehension passage does not give you an excuse to stop writing things down. In fact, as a time-saving tactic alone, writing things down while working on a Reading Comprehension passage is worth the effort. Writing things down also helps you get a better understanding on the topic being presented, which yields a more complete appreciation for the passage and makes answering the questions a lot more manageable!

The idea behind Mapping the Passage is to separate each sentence into one of three categories: claim, evidence/objection, and background. Recall that a *claim* is an opinion expressed in the passage, either the author's or a third-party's. *Evidence* is information presented to support a claim, while an *objection* is information presented to call a claim into question. *Background* is any information that is generally accepted as fact. Read the passage one sentence at a time. At the end of each sentence, stop and try to identify the function of the sentence as either a claim, evidence/objection, or background. Also, write a short summary of that sentence down. You don't need to write the entire sentence, but you do want to write more than one or two words. If the sentence provides any insight into what the author believes about a claim stated in the passage, note that on your scratch paper, as well.

The idea behind mapping the passage is to uncover the author's original outline for the passage. When you are finished mapping the passage, you should be able to see how the sentences link together to construct the author's argument.

For longer passages (which can run up to 100 lines), scrutinizing each sentence in detail is far less practical. Instead, think of each paragraph as a series of short passages that make up a long passage. For each paragraph, determine the function of each sentence to then determine the overall function of the paragraph itself. Your approach to Cracking the Passage for long passages shouldn't change in any significant way. Because long passages are simply longer, there is more space for the author to include background information.

Step 2: Understand the Question

Overview

Understanding the question task is important to Cracking GRE Reading Comprehension and it is largely overlooked by the average test taker. The Basics of Cracking the Questions can be broken down into two parts: identifying the subject and understanding the task.

The Basics of Cracking the Questions

Part 1: Identifying the Subject

When cracking GRE Reading Comprehension questions, it's crucial to identify the subject of the question. For example, in the question "The author mentions land management policy in order to," the subject of the question is *land management policy*. The subject helps you locate what you need to read *about* to answer the question.

By identifying the subject, you will know what the question writer is testing you on. This is important for two reasons. First, by knowing the content that the question writer is testing you on, you will be able to locate that information in the passage more easily. This is outlined in Step 3 of The Basic Approach. Secondly, without identifying the subject, you may struggle to eventually answer the question and will be susceptible to some of the common trap incorrect answer choices. Identifying the subject is critical to Cracking the Questions, but equally as important is understanding the task of the question.

Part 2: Understanding the Task

If you have been actively reading this chapter thus far, you may have been able to predict that the second part of Cracking the Questions is understanding the task of the question. The task of the question is what you need to find out about the subject. For example, is the question asking for a detail from the passage, or is it

asking why that detail is in the passage? Are you required merely to describe something, or does the question expect you to analyze it? Meanwhile, you should also be on the lookout for words such as EXCEPT, LEAST, and NOT.

In the example question given earlier, "The author mentions land management policy in order to," the task words are *in order to*. The tasks that questions can ask about are diverse and can be categorized as *general*, *specific*, or *complex* tasks.

General tasks ask about the passage as a whole. General questions can take a few different forms: primary purpose, main idea, structure, and tone.

- **Primary Purpose** questions ask *why* the author wrote the passage. The answers to these are tied closely to the main idea of the passage. The subject of primary purpose questions is usually the whole passage. These questions can be identified by the phrase *"primary purpose,"* and *"primarily concerned with."* Not to be confused with purpose questions, primary purpose questions test very broad ideas. If you have carefully Cracked the Passage, you should be able to answer these questions easily.
- The task of **Main Idea** questions is to figure out what the author wants you to believe. The main idea is the overall claim, supported by the evidence contained in the rest of the text; in other words, what does the author want you to accept as true? Main idea questions differ from primary purpose questions in that the former deal with *what* the passage is about rather than *why* the author wrote it. However, much like primary purpose questions, these questions are easily answerable if you have successfully Cracked the Passage.
- **Structure** questions ask about the overall sequence of the passage, while others ask about a smaller piece of it, such as a single paragraph. Either way, these questions test the general

flow of the passage. If you can describe the flow of ideas—a task made easier by Mapping the Passage on your scratch paper—you'll be able to narrow down the answer choices, crossing off answers that describe things that didn't happen in the passage.

- **Tone** questions ask you to evaluate how strongly or negatively the author feels about the subject of the question. Find the subject in the passage and look for words that reveal the author's feelings. Examples of such words and phrases include *misrepresenting*, *unlikely*, *considerable importance*, *unfortunately*, and *a poor grasp*, among many others. Questions that ask about the author's tone generally use the words *"tone"* or *"attitude."*

Specific tasks reference a small part of the passage. There are four different specific question tasks: Vocabulary-in-Context, Retrieval, Inference, and Specific Purpose.

- **Vocabulary-in-Context** questions ask you to state what the author means by a certain word or phrase. These questions will typically contain the task words *most nearly means*. The correct answer must fit the context of the sentence that contains the word or phrase as well as the paragraph containing that sentence.
- **Retrieval** questions ask you to find information in the passage and may make reference to a detail or fact (a person's name, a theory, a time period, etc.). The answer is typically just a paraphrase of this information in the passage. Retrieval questions do not contain standard wording that will help you identify this question type. If the task words in the question require you to find a detail in the passage, then you are dealing with a Retrieval question.
- **Inference** questions make test takers nervous because they appear to suggest that the answer has to be figured out using knowledge about the author. However, it is important to remember that, on the GRE, the word *infer* means only one

thing: “what must be true.” In other words, you do not need to draw a conclusion based on information in the passage, nor do you need to read between the lines. The answer to an Inference question will just be a paraphrase of information in the passage. Thus, Inference questions are essentially the same as retrieval tasks. There is no need for interpretation. Inference questions can be identified by phrases such as *infer*, *imply*, *suggest*, or ask with what *the author would most likely agree/disagree.*

- **Specific Purpose** questions ask *why* the author included the subject or a particular piece of information. In general, the subject of a Specific Purpose question is evidence used by the author to support or object to a claim in the passage. Therefore, the task of the question is to find the claim that the author supports or objects to. In many cases, this claim is in the sentence just before where the subject appears in the passage. These questions can be identified by phrases such as *purpose*, *in order to*, *role*, or *function*.

Complex tasks require a good understanding of the main idea, so Cracking the Passage is essential. Complex questions usually appear as Weaken or Strengthen questions. With either type of complex question, it is crucial to take an extra second and consider the author’s point carefully.

- **Weaken** questions ask the test taker to *weaken* a claim presented in the passage. The task is to identify the answer choice that makes the claim *less believable*. When claims are introduced in GRE passages, they are usually followed by evidence that supports the claim. So, typical correct answers to Weaken questions will call the evidence used to support the claim into question.
- **Strengthen** questions ask the test taker to *strengthen* a claim in the passage. In other words, you must find the answer choice that makes the claim *more believable*. In contrast with Weaken questions, correct answers to Strengthen questions will tend to

further support the evidence associated with the claim referenced in the question stem.

Step 3: Find the Information in the Passage that Addresses the Task of the Question

Overview

Step 3 of the Basic Approach to Cracking the GRE Reading Comprehension is finding the information in the passage that addresses the question task. After you have Cracked the Question by identifying the subject and the task, look for the subject in the passage. Once you locate the subject, find the information about the subject that addresses the task of the question. You will always be able to prove the correct answer with something in the passage. If you cannot put your finger on a specific word, phrase, or sentence that proves your answer choice, don't pick it.

This is when Cracking the Passage from Step 1 of the Basic Approach is invaluable. Use your map of the passage to find the appropriate place in the text that addresses the subject and start reading. Try to read a few lines before and after where the subject appears. Then, make sure you understand what you have read. Your goal is to find the information from the passage that addresses the task of the question. And, as always, the answers to the questions can always be found in the passage. You may need to state how ideas in the passage are connected, as authors do not always explicitly make these connections. However, it is important for you not to add your own ideas or assumptions into the passage, so as

you spell out what the correct answer needs to do, stick closely to the content of the passage.

Remember to use the **Active Reading** strategies from Step 1. After you have found the appropriate place to begin reading, keep the task of the question in the back of your mind and be on constant lookout for any information that addresses the task of the question. After you have found this information, and have taken measures to ensure you truly understand the information, you are ready to move on to Step 4 of the Basic Approach to Cracking GRE Reading Comprehension—examining and eliminating answer choices.

Step 4: Use Process of Elimination

Overview

The final step of The Basic Approach to Cracking GRE Reading Comprehension is using Process of Elimination (POE) to find the answer. If you have followed all the steps up to this point, then you have worked the passage and have a thorough understanding of it through Active Reading, analyzed and achieved understanding of the question subject and task, and located and read the information about the question subject and task in the passage. Now, it's time to look at the answer choices and find the correct answer by using POE.

As discussed throughout this entire book thus far, POE is one of the most powerful tools at your disposal on test day. This holds true for Reading Comprehension as well, as POE is the best tool to help you find the correct answer by eliminating the incorrect ones. Once you

understand the task of the question and have been able to locate its information in the passage, eliminating wrong answer choices is the most effective way to answer the question correctly.

Many test takers do exactly what the writers of the test want them to do—they answer questions based on memory or what sounds correct. However, if you learn how ETS creates incorrect answer choices, you can eliminate answers quickly and give yourself the best chance at achieving the highest score possible for you.

In light of that, the final step to Cracking the GRE Reading Comprehension is learning about the different ways that the test writers create wrong answer choices, learning how to spot wrong answers, and then confidently eliminating the offending answer choices. A savvy test taker learns to stop considering which choice is "better." The incorrect answers are wrong, not just "worse," so when multiple choices remain, the key is to identify why all but the correct answer are 100% wrong for some reason.

The Basics of Cracking the Answer Choices

Knowing the types of answer choices that test writers use to create wrong answers is the key to applying POE effectively on test day. Test writers use certain kinds of answer choices to make an answer choice look attractive. The problem is, even if you have read the passage and followed the steps, a lot of times the incorrect answer choices still look correct! The test writers have to write hard answer choices like this or else the questions would be too easy. Your job is to become familiar with the ways in which they create these wrong answers so that when you read an answer choice constructed in a certain way, it raises suspicion. The more suspicious you are of the answer choices, the more likely you are to be able to eliminate them.

The following are the ways in which test writers create wrong answers:

- *Recycled Language*
- *Extreme Language*
- *No Such Comparison*
- *Reversals*
- *Outside Knowledge*
- *Emotional Appeals*

Become familiar with these and you are one step closer to Cracking GRE Reading Comprehension.

Recycled Language

One of the easiest and most common ways that test writers create wrong answer choices is by repeating memorable words or phrases from the passage. The correct answers for GRE Reading Comprehension questions are generally paraphrases of the passage. So, the presence of words or phrases that are very reminiscent of the passage is a reason to be skeptical of the answer choice.

Recycled language in an answer choice is easily identified because recycled language is words or phrases that are direct quotes from the text. There's a really good chance that the recycled language comes from the wrong part of the passage or that the answer says something a little different from what the passage says. If you see words or phrases that fit the description of recycled language, you should be very suspicious of the answer choice. Did the passage say exactly what the answer choice says regarding the recycled language? If it doesn't, the answer choice is incorrect.

Extreme Language

Another common way to create wrong answer choices is by using language that is too strong or too broad. Common ways to do that are by using words such as *must*, *always*, *never*, *only*, *best*, and other very strong words, or by answers that use verbs that are overly strong, such as *prove* or *fail*. These types of answers will make claims that are much stronger than can be reasonably drawn from the information in the passage.

For instance, a primary purpose question may have answer choices that use a powerful verb such as *defend* or *criticize*. If the passage does not explicitly defend or criticize the main idea, this answer choice is incorrect because it contains extreme language. Below is a chart of common words that should raise suspicion as extreme language.

Common Extreme Words			
Never	Not	Defend	Contradict
Always	No	Attack	Failure
Only	Must	Denounce	
None	Prove	Counter	

Once you identify extreme language in an answer choice, consider what the author stated about that topic and compare it to the extreme language. If the author's claim is not as strong as the extreme language, eliminate the answer choice.

No Such Comparison

Comparison words such as *better*, *more than*, or *less than* are used by test writers to make answer choices more appealing by drawing a comparison between two items referenced in the passage. If you see comparison words in an answer choice, you should be suspicious of that answer choice. As with every answer choice, make sure to reference the information in the answer choice against the information in the passage. Often, the ideas being compared in the

answer choices were discussed in the passage but not explicitly compared.

Reversals

Reversal answer choices seek to confuse the test taker by stating a contradiction of the main idea or a fact from the passage. These answer choices are more difficult to spot because there isn't a list of common words. However, if you have successfully Cracked the Passage and found the information in the passage that references the task of the question, then identifying reversal answer choices becomes a lot more manageable. These choices can be tricky to spot because they often sound appealing, and then include a contradictory detail. Analyze every word of the answer choices. If a choice is perfect, except for a contradictory detail, eliminate it as a reversal.

Outside Knowledge

This answer choice type is fairly rare on the GRE. However, it is still worth mentioning. Correct answer choices on the GRE contain information that is found only in the passage. However, an outside knowledge answer choice can be very tempting because you may know a piece of information that is not mentioned in the passage but is reflected in an answer choice. Remember, you must rely only on the information in the passage to answer questions on the GRE. An outside knowledge answer choice is likely to include a commonly known detail about a topic, but that detail will not be present in the passage.

Emotional Appeals

Much like outside knowledge answer choices, emotional appeals are also fairly rare on the GRE. These types of answer choices state positions that you believe, but are not discussed in the passage. For instance, a political passage may contain an answer choice that values one political stance over another even if the passage made no such claim. If you have successfully followed the steps to Crack the

Passage and identified the main idea and the task of the question, these answer choices are easily eliminated.

Down to 2?

Let's suppose you've used POE to Crack the Answer Choices. You were able to eliminate answers using the POE tools mentioned above, but two answer choices remain and you're having trouble eliminating that last answer choice. This is a pretty common situation that can occur in the GRE Reading Comprehension. So how do you choose between the two? First, remember that this situation means you are probably missing why one of the answer choices is wrong, and should look carefully at each word in the remaining choices. At some point, however, you may need to simply make a decision. Well, the same POE tools can be used to play the odds when guessing by asking yourself the following questions:

1. ***Which answer uses more words or phrases from the passage?*** If one answer uses recycled language and the other doesn't, choose the one that doesn't, as answers with recycled language often turn out to be wrong.
2. ***Which answer uses stronger language or makes a stronger claim?*** Eliminate the answer that uses more extreme language and choose the other.
3. ***Which answer makes a comparison?*** Always be on the lookout for answers that make comparisons, as they are often incorrect.

If you're still struggling, don't linger on the question. Just mark it, move on, and come back to it later.

Reading Comprehension Practice Set

Click here to download a PDF of Reading Comprehension Practice Set.

Answers can be found in Part V.

Questions 1 through 4 are based on the following reading passage.

Called by some the "island that time forgot," Madagascar is home to a vast array of unique, exotic creatures. One such animal is the aye-aye. First described by western science in 1782, it was initially categorized as a member of the order Rodentia. Further research then revealed that it was more closely related to the lemur, a member of the primate order. Since the aye-aye is so different from its fellow primates, however, it was given its own family: *Daubentoniidae*. The aye-aye has been listed as an endangered species and, as a result, the government of Madagascar has designated an island off the northeastern coast of Madagascar as a protected reserve for aye-ayes and other wildlife.

Long before Western science became enthralled with this nocturnal denizen of Madagascar's jungles, the aye-aye had its own reputation with the local people. The aye-aye is perhaps best known for its large, round eyes and long, extremely thin middle finger. These adaptations are quite sensible, allowing the aye-aye to see well at night and retrieve grubs, which are one of its primary food sources, from deep within hollow branches. However, the aye-aye's striking appearance may end up causing its extinction. The people of Madagascar believe that the aye-aye is a type of spirit animal, and that its appearance is an omen of death. Whenever one is sighted, it is immediately killed. When combined with the loss of

large swaths of jungle habitat, this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life's variety.

1 of 10

Based on the information given in the passage, the intended audience would most likely be

- ◯ visitors to a natural science museum
- ◯ professors of evolutionary science
- ◯ a third-grade science class
- ◯ students of comparative religions
- ◯ attendees at a world culture symposium

2 of 10

The author's attitude toward the aye-aye, as represented in the highlighted text, could best be described as

- ◯ admiring
- ◯ mystified
- ◯ reverent
- ◯ appalled
- ◯ lachrymose

3 of 10

Select the sentence in the first paragraph that suggests the author's claim that "this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life's variety" is unlikely to happen.

4 of 10

For the following question, consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

Which of the following statements can be logically inferred from the passage about the aye-aye?

☐ The aye-aye currently lives only on a protected reserve off the northeastern coast of Madagascar.

☐ The aye-aye is a nocturnal animal.

☐ The aye-aye is a prominent part of the religion practiced by the people of Madagascar.

Questions 5 through 6 are based on the following reading passage.

A novel that is a bestseller is often, because of its popularity, not taken seriously as literature. Critics seem to presuppose that great literature must be somehow burdensome to the reader; it must be difficult for the uninitiated to understand. It is precisely this inverted snobbery that has hindered Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* from gaining the critical attention it deserves.

Published in 1982, the novel draws deeply on the author's own family history. Allende is the first cousin once removed of former Chilean president Salvador Allende, who was murdered during a right-wing military coup in 1973. Yet rather than the to-be-expected socialist harangue, Allende subtly works her political message within the fabric of the compelling narrative she weaves. While Allende borrows a bit too freely from Gabriel García Márquez's work, she nevertheless has a powerful and original voice within the construct of magical realism.

5 of 10

The author of the passage would probably consider which of the following situations to be most analogous to the critics' viewpoint as it is described in the highlighted sentence?

◯ Avant-garde movies with complicated storylines are deemed cinematically superior works to Hollywood blockbusters with straightforward narratives.

◯ Scientific journals are thought of as providing coverage of natural events that is inferior to that provided by nature documentaries.

◯ Poetry is considered superior literature to prose because it is shorter, and therefore the message it conveys is more easily understood.

◯ Political diatribes are viewed as falling outside the accepted literary canon because they are too controversial.

◯ A movie version of a popular novel is considered artistically superior to the original.

6 of 10

It can be inferred from the passage that

◯ Allende's novel is a retelling of her family's political struggles

◯ Allende's novel would have received more favorable reviews if critics had believed it to be great literature

◯ Allende learned about magical realism from Gabriel García Márquez

◯ Allende's novel could have been more compelling if she had included a stronger political message

◯ readers might have expected Allende's work to be more political than it actually was

Questions 7 through 8 are based on the following reading passage.

Bronson Alcott is perhaps best known not for who he was, but for whom he knew. Indeed, Alcott's connections were impressive by any standards: He was a close confidante of such luminaries as Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. Yet, to remember the man solely by his associations is to miss

his importance to nineteenth-century American philosophy as a whole and to the Transcendental Movement in particular. Admittedly, Alcott's gift was not as a writer. His philosophical treatises have rightly been criticized by many as being ponderous, esoteric, and lacking focus.

However, Alcott was an erudite orator, and it is in the text of his orations that one begins to appreciate him as a visionary. Most notably, Alcott advocated what were at the time polemical ideas on education. He believed that good teaching should be Socratic in nature and that a student's intellectual growth was concomitant with his or her spiritual growth.

7 of 10

It can be inferred from the passage that the author would agree with all of the following statements EXCEPT

- ◯ Alcott should be remembered for his contributions to Transcendentalism
- ◯ Alcott's ideas were ahead of those of many of his contemporaries
- ◯ Alcott believed that learning should not neglect a student's spiritual education
- ◯ Alcott's ideas about education were not always accepted by his compatriots
- ◯ Alcott should not be regarded as a particularly gifted orator

8 of 10

It can be inferred that the author would agree with which of the following statements?

- ◯ Transcendentalism was an esoteric field of inquiry promulgated by a select group of visionaries.

◯ Alcott's prose style is not always easily understood.

◯ A Socratic pedagogical style is difficult to align with spiritual teaching.

◯ Alcott should be chiefly appreciated for the strengths of his association.

◯ The text of Alcott's orations were widely accepted by his peers.

Questions 9 through 10 are based on the following reading passage.

Echinosorex gymnura, known colloquially as the moonrat or gymnure, is one of the many fascinating creatures that inhabit the jungles of Southeast Asia. A close relative of the hedgehog, the moonrat likewise belongs to the order *Insectivora* and the family *Erinaceidae*. However, the family then splits into the sub-family *Hylomyinae*, which contains three separate genera and eight distinct species. The appearance and habitat of the moonrat are actually far more similar to those of various members of the order *Rodentia*, though its eating habits are more in line with its fellow insectivores. Ultimately, the taxonomic classification of this animal is useful only when considered along with other information regarding the animal's ecological niche.

9 of 10

Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

Which of the following scenarios demonstrates the idea put forth by the author of this passage regarding animal classification?

☐ While studying a population of bears, scientists rely solely on the traditional taxonomic designations to identify likely

hunting grounds.

- [ ] A team of medical researchers closely monitors the actions of the animals involved in a study and compares its findings with prevailing beliefs about those animals.
- [ ] A zookeeper designs a habitat for a new acquisition, disregards taxonomic classifications and instead focuses on observational data.

10 of 10

The author's tone could best be described as

- ◯ exasperated
- ◯ didactic
- ◯ ambivalent
- ◯ morose
- ◯ laudatory

Summary

- Before answering the questions, attack the passage. Read the passages looking for the main idea, structure, and tone. Remember to read actively.
- Make sure you identify the question subject and task.
- Return to the passage to find the answer to the question. Don’t answer from memory! Go back to the text and find the answer.
- Use POE aggressively, being on the lookout for common trap answers left by the test writers.

Chapter 7
Critical Reasoning

While ETS considers Critical Reasoning questions to fall within the category of Reading Comprehension questions, the questions are different enough to merit a separate discussion. Let's jump in!

CRITICAL REASONING

Critical Reasoning questions are composed of short reading passages, typically just one paragraph long, followed by a series of questions about the author's argument. You should expect to see anywhere from two to four Critical Reasoning questions within the two GRE Verbal sections.

Each Critical Reasoning question contains a passage, the question, and 5 answer choices.

The Passage

Critical Reasoning passages tend to be short (usually 20–100 words) and often take the form of an argument. The subjects they consider rarely fall into neat categories, and generally reference hypothetical scenarios. Read your passages carefully, pay attention to the language employed, and interpret that language literally. It is important to be precise when reading the passage for Critical Reasoning questions. As you'll see in the pages to come, the difference between getting a Critical Reasoning question correct and falling for a trap answer often lies in the particulars of the passage's wording.

The Question

There are eight types of Critical Reasoning question, each of which involves a different task with respect to the passage. Most questions test your ability to evaluate the reasoning employed in an argument, but some test your ability to reason on the basis of information. This chapter will outline the different types of questions you will see, how to identify them, and what to look for in the passage based on the type of question. So much of your evaluation of the passage depends on what the question is asking you to identify in the passage. Because of this, you should read the question first, and then read the passage.

Know the Questions

We'll go into these in more detail later on in this chapter, but the main question types are *assumption, weaken, strengthen*, and *inference*, and the secondary ones are *resolve/explain, evaluate, identify the reasoning*, and *flaw*.

The Answer Choices

All things verbal come down to Process of Elimination, and Critical Reasoning is no exception. Each question type for Critical Reasoning questions has its own set of POE tools. These tools are based off the common trap answers constructed by the test makers. Because the question types all vary, the common trap answers and POE tools to employ also vary based on question type. After mastering the different types of questions, you'll learn how answer choices for those question types are constructed and, with enough practice, you'll be able to spot a bad answer choice with confidence.

HOW GRE ARGUMENTS ARE CONSTRUCTED

Most Critical Reasoning passages take the form of *arguments* in which the writer tries to convince the reader of something. GRE arguments consist of three connected parts:

- Conclusion: what the author tries to persuade the reader to accept.
- Premise: evidence provided in support of a conclusion.
- Assumption: unstated ideas upon which an argument's validity rests.

Conclusions

A conclusion is the primary claim made in an argument. The easiest way to identify the conclusion is to ask yourself what its author wants you to believe. Here's an example:

> During the past 10 years, advertising revenues for the magazine *True Investor* have fallen by thirty-percent. The magazine has failed to attract new subscribers, and newsstand sales are at an all-time low. Thus, sweeping changes to the editorial board will be necessary for the magazine to survive.

In the argument above, the conclusion is found in the last sentence, where the author attempts to persuade the reader that *sweeping changes to the editorial board will be necessary for the magazine to survive.*

> Remember: The conclusion is often the author's opinion about what *might* happen.

In some cases, indicator words can help you to find the conclusion. These include:

- Therefore
- Clearly
- Thus
- Hence
- Consequently
- So

Indicator words can help you to identify the parts of an argument, but not every argument uses them. However, almost every argument has a conclusion of some kind. A conclusion can be a plan or course of action, an argument, a statement of supposed truth, or any number of resolutions to the contents of the passage.

Learning to identify the conclusion is the first important step in evaluating the passage. Once you've identified the conclusion, the remaining information in the passage should reveal evidence that is used in support of the conclusion.

Practice: Identifying Conclusions

Click here to download a PDF of Practice: Identifying Conclusions.

Underline the conclusions of the arguments in the following Critical Reasoning passages. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 5

Despite the support of the president, it is unlikely that the new defense bill will pass. A bipartisan group of 15 senators has announced that it does not support the legislation.

2 of 5

The earliest known grass fossils date from approximately 55 million years ago. Dinosaurs most likely disappeared from the earth around 60 million years ago. Based on this evidence, as well as fossilized remains of dinosaur teeth that indicate the creatures were more suited to eating ferns and palms, scientists have concluded that grass was not a significant part of the dinosaur diet.

3 of 5

Automaker *X* has lost over 2 billion dollars this year due to rising costs, declining automobile sales, and new governmental regulations. Because of the company's poor financial situation, it has asked its employees to pay more for health care and to accept a pay cut. However, the workers at automaker *X* are threatening to go on strike. If that happens, automaker *X* will have no choice but to file for bankruptcy.

4 of 5

The rise of obesity among citizens of country *Y* has been linked to a variety of health problems. In response to this situation, the country's largest health organization has called for food manufacturers to help combat the problem. Since the leading

members of the nation's food industry have agreed to provide healthier alternatives, reduce sugar and fat content, and reduce advertisements for unhealthy foods, it is likely that country *Y* will experience a decrease in obesity-related health problems.

5 of 5

Recent advances in technology have led to a new wave of "smart" appliances, including refrigerators that note when food supplies are low and place an order at the grocery store, washing machines that automatically adjust the wash cycle and temperature based upon the clothes in the machine, and doorknobs that can identify the house owner and automatically open the door. A technology expert predicts that, due to these new innovations, machines will soon outnumber humans as the number-one users of the Internet.

Premises

The premises of an argument include any reasons, statistics, or other evidence provided in support of the conclusion. In the case of GRE arguments, you must accept the truth of the premises, whether you agree with them or not. The easiest way to identify the premises is to ask what information the author has provided to justify the truth of the conclusion.

> During the past 10 years, advertising revenues for the magazine *True Investor* have fallen by thirty-percent. The magazine has failed to attract new subscribers, and newsstand sales are at an all-time low. Thus, sweeping changes to the editorial board will be necessary for the magazine to survive.

In the argument above, the premises can be found in the first two sentences, where the author provides three pieces of evidence in support of the conclusion: *advertising revenues for the magazine* True Investor *have fallen by thirty-percent*, *the magazine has failed*

to attract new subscribers, and *newsstand sales are at an all-time low.*

Sometimes you'll see indicator words that can help you to find the premises. These include:

- Because
- Given that
- As a result of
- In view of
- Since
- Supposing that

Practice: Finding the Premise

Click here to download a PDF of Practice: Finding the Premise.

For each of the following arguments, identify the premise or premises that support the conclusion. (Remember, you already found the conclusions in the exercise on this page.) Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 5

Despite the support of the president, it is unlikely that the new defense bill will pass. A bipartisan group of 15 senators has announced that it does not support the legislation.

Conclusion:

Why?

Premise:

2 of 5

The earliest known grass fossils date from approximately 55 million years ago. Dinosaurs most likely disappeared from the Earth around 60 million years ago. Based on this evidence, as well as fossilized remains of dinosaur teeth that indicate the creatures were more suited to eating ferns and palms, scientists have concluded that grass was not a significant part of the dinosaur diet.

Conclusion:

Why?

Premise:

3 of 5

Automaker *X* has lost over 2 billion dollars this year due to rising costs, declining automobile sales, and new governmental regulations. Because of the company's poor financial situation, it has asked its employees to pay more for health care and to accept a pay cut. However, the workers at automaker *X* are threatening to go on strike. If that happens, automaker *X* will have no choice but to file for bankruptcy.

Conclusion:

Why?

Premise:

4 of 5

The rise of obesity among citizens of country *Y* has been linked to a variety of health problems. In response to this situation, the country's largest health organization has called for food manufacturers to help combat the problem. Since the leading members of the nation's food industry have agreed to provide healthier alternatives, reduce sugar and fat content, and reduce advertisements for unhealthy foods, it is likely that country *Y* will experience a decrease in obesity-related health problems.

Conclusion:

Why?

Premise:

5 of 5

Recent advances in technology have led to a new wave of "smart" appliances, including refrigerators that note when food supplies are low and place an order at the grocery store, washing machines that automatically adjust the wash cycle and temperature based upon the clothes in the machine, and doorknobs that can identify the house owner and automatically

open the door. A technology expert predicts that, due to these new innovations, machines will soon outnumber humans as the number-one users of the Internet.

Conclusion:

Why?

Premise:

Assumptions

Assumptions are unstated premises on which the author relies to prove his or her conclusion. Even well-reasoned arguments rest on assumptions; because it's impossible to say everything, some things must go unsaid. Therefore, assumptions play a crucial role in the structure of an argument, bridging gaps in reasoning from the premises to the conclusion.

> During the past 10 years, advertising revenues for the magazine *True Investor* have fallen by thirty-percent. The magazine has failed to attract new subscribers, and newsstand sales are at an all-time low. Thus, sweeping changes to the editorial board will be necessary for the magazine to survive.

The argument above assumes that the editorial board *caused* the problems now attributed to the magazine. If something other than the editorial board were responsible—had the local population declined by thirty percent, for example—then sweeping changes to the board might do little to improve the magazine's financial situation. In that case, the connection between the premises (the magazine's problems) and the conclusion (changes to the editorial board) would fall apart. The reader would no longer be persuaded that *changes to the editorial board will be necessary for the magazine to survive*. The argument would collapse.

The easiest way to identify an assumption is to distinguish an argument's conclusion from its premises. Then, ask what additional information is required to link the conclusion to the premises.

Practice: Locating Assumptions

Click here to download a PDF of Practice: Locating Assumptions.

For each of the following Critical Reasoning questions, identify the conclusion and the premise. Then note what assumption is required to make the argument work. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 4

City University recently announced the retirement of Professor Jones. Professor Jones is a leading biologist and widely published author and her presence was a major factor in many students' decisions to attend City University. The University predicts no decline in enrollment, however, because it plans to hire two highly credentialed biology professors to replace Professor Jones.

Conclusion:

Premise:

Assumption:

2 of 4

It is unjust to charge customers under the age of 25 more to rent a car than those over the age of 25. After all, most states allow people as young as 16 to have a driver's license and all states allow 18-year-olds the right to vote.

Conclusion:

Premise:

Assumption:

3 of 4

It is easy to demonstrate that extraterrestrial life exists by simply looking at our own solar system. In our solar system, there are eight planets and at least one of them obviously has life on it. Thus, roughly 12.5% of planets in the universe should have life on them.

Conclusion:

Premise:

Assumption:

4 of 4

State A is facing a serious budget shortfall for the upcoming year. Recent polls indicate that 58% of voters in Township B approve of a proposed 2-cent gasoline tax in order to make up the deficit. It is clear, therefore, that the leaders of State A should institute the gas tax.

Conclusion:

Premise:

Assumption:

Gaps

One common way to identify assumptions is to look for gaps in the reasoning. In many cases, gaps in reasoning are indicated by gaps in language. Look for words or phrases in the conclusion that do not come from the premises. Identify an assumption in the following example:

> Cream cheese contains half as many calories per tablespoon as does butter or margarine. Therefore, a bagel with cream cheese is more healthful than is a bagel with butter.

First, find the conclusion. The word "therefore" gives the conclusion away: *a bagel with cream cheese is more healthful than is a bagel with butter*.

Second, find the premises. What information does the author provide to support the conclusion? The premise states that *cream cheese contains half as many calories per tablespoon*.

Third, look for shifts in language between the premise and conclusion. The premise compares the calorie content of a tablespoon of cream cheese to that of a tablespoon of butter or margarine. The conclusion introduces the word "healthful," which does not appear in the premise. This shift in the argument's language is indicative of a gap in reasoning—the argument leaps from a thing that *has fewer calories per tablespoon* to a thing that *is more healthful*. Therefore, this argument rests on the assumption that a food with *fewer calories* is a food that is *more healthful*.

Although most Critical Reasoning passages consist of three basic parts—conclusions, premises, and assumptions—some passages also include extraneous ideas, background information, or opposing points of view. The efficiency with which you identify assumptions depends in large part on the accuracy with which you identify conclusions and premises, so don't be distracted by non-essential information.

COMMON REASONING PATTERNS

Like the other question formats on the GRE, Critical Reasoning questions tend to be predictable. While you'll never see the same question twice, many Critical Reasoning passages employ similar patterns of reasoning. Learning to recognize these patterns provides you with another means of identifying assumptions.

Not every GRE argument models one of the common reasoning patterns, so you'll sometimes still need to look for shifts in language. However, when one of the common reasoning patterns is

present, it can help you to locate information needed to strengthen or weaken an argument. Each of the five common patterns involves its own standard assumption or assumptions. Learning to recognize these patterns, and the assumptions they incorporate, will help you to identify unstated presuppositions and pinpoint an argument's flaws.

Know the Test

On the Verbal section, the best way to save time is to know exactly what you're looking for, and familiarizing yourself with the types of questions and patterns can help you more quickly pinpoint this.

Causal Reasoning Patterns

Causal reasoning is the most common type of reasoning you'll encounter in GRE arguments. Test writers are fond of causal arguments, and you're likely to see several of them on the GRE. In a causal argument, the premises usually state that two things happened, from which the author concludes that one thing caused the other. Consider the following simple example:

> A study indicated that adults who listen to classical music regularly are less likely to have anxiety disorders. Clearly, classical music calms the nerves and reduces anxiety.

The author of this argument concludes that *classical music calms the nerves and reduces anxiety*. This conclusion is based on a study indicating that *adults who listen to classical music regularly are less likely to have anxiety disorders*. Thus, the premise posits a correlation between two things—exposure to classical music and

reduced likelihood of anxiety disorders—and the conclusion makes a leap from correlation to causation.

Every causal argument involves two standard assumptions:

- **There's no other cause.**
- **It's not a coincidence.**

The argument assumes that there is nothing other than classical music that caused study participants to experience fewer anxiety disorders and that it is not a coincidence that adults who listened to classical music were less likely to have anxiety disorders.

The first standard assumption suggests that classical music, and only classical music, caused participants in the study to experience fewer anxiety disorders. But what if something else was responsible? The passage doesn't rule out the possibility that study participants used anxiety reducing medication, or that they simply happened to be calm people to begin with. In neither of these cases would it follow that *classical music calms the nerves and reduces anxiety*. Thus, the argument must assume that a causal relationship exists.

The second standard assumption denies that the correlation between classical music and anxiety is a coincidence. But what if a different study indicated that adults who listen to classical music regularly were more likely to have anxiety disorders? In that case, it no longer follows that classical music calms the nerves and reduces anxiety—on the contrary, the counter-example suggests that the first study's results were coincidental. Thus, the argument must assume that the correlation between classical music and lower anxiety is not a coincidence.

When you spot an argument that employs a causal reasoning pattern, remember that the argument relies on two assumptions: first, there's no other cause; and second, it's not a coincidence.

Don't Assume Assumptions Are the Same

This causal argument should remind you of the earlier example we used when discussing assumptions. Pay close attention to the approach for this example—which specifically follows a causal reasoning pattern—and the remaining patterns. You have to note the difference!

Planning Patterns

Many GRE arguments introduce plans that are designed to solve problems: a municipal government's plan to improve water quality, a transit authority's plan to reduce traffic congestion, or a town board's plan to increase voter turnout. The premises of planning arguments describe what the plan is supposed to accomplish and how it is supposed to work. For example:

> During the past 5 years, Meridian Township has seen a dramatic rise in crime. As a result, Meridian's police force plans to install video surveillance cameras at major intersections in neighborhoods that suffer the worst crime rates. Clearly, the crime rate in Meridian Township will drop.

Consider this argument in terms of its parts. Meridian Township has a problem: *a dramatic rise in crime*. To address this problem, the police force plans to *install video surveillance cameras*. These are the premises of the argument because they outline the plan for addressing the problem. The argument concludes that, as a result of instituting the plan, the crime rate will drop. In general, the conclusion of an argument that employs the planning pattern can simply be expressed: *do the plan*.

Every planning argument involves one standard assumption:

- **There's no problem with the plan.**

Evaluating an argument with a planning reasoning pattern will revolve around the plan itself. For instance, what if there *is* a problem with the plan to reduce crime by installing video cameras at major intersections? After all, crime is not limited to major intersections. Perhaps the cameras will malfunction or produce poor quality images. Perhaps criminals will simply relocate to neighborhoods without cameras. In these cases, our confidence in the conclusion is shaken. On the basis of the premises alone, it no longer seems to follow that *the crime rate will drop*. Thus, in order for the argument to "work," its author must assume that installing the cameras reduces crime. In other words, there's no problem with the plan. A question could ask to identify a potential problem with the plan, or to strengthen the plan with the addition of some other fact.

No matter what the question asks, when you encounter an argument that employs a planning pattern, remember the standard assumption at play: there's no problem with the plan.

Sampling Patterns

Arguments that exhibit a sampling pattern are less common than causal or planning arguments. In a sampling argument, the author reaches a general conclusion about a population based on evidence about some members of the population. Sampling arguments assume that a smaller group is typical of a larger group and accurately reflects the relevant characteristics or feelings of the larger group.

Here is an example:

> Contrary to popular belief, football fans overwhelmingly approve of the decisions made by the administrative

> staffs of their local teams. We know this to be true because a large group of fans leaving a stadium expressed admiration for their teams' coaches and coordinators in an interview last week.

The author of this argument concludes that *football fans overwhelmingly approve of the decisions made by the administrative staffs of their local teams*. This conclusion is based on the premise that *a large group of fans leaving a stadium expressed admiration for their teams' coaches and coordinators in an interview last week*. Thus, the conclusion makes a leap from the opinion of one group of fans at a particular moment to the opinion of football fans in general.

Every sampling argument involves one standard assumption:

- **The sample is representative.**

When you encounter a sampling reasoning pattern, look for reasons why the sample itself is either representative or not. What if the opinion of the interviewed group of football fans isn't representative of the opinions of football fans in general? Perhaps the interviewed fans attended a game their team won, and perhaps their local team has long enjoyed a winning record. It does not follow from this that fans of every team approve of the decisions made by their team's administrative staff. To properly link the argument's conclusion to its premise, the author must assume that the opinions of interviewed fans accurately reflect those of football fans in general.

When you run into an argument that employs a sampling pattern, remember that the argument relies on the assumption that a sample is representative of a larger population.

Interpretation of Evidence Patterns

In some GRE arguments, the author understands the conclusion to be synonymous with one or more of the premises. In other words,

information in the premises is interpreted to mean information in the conclusion. These arguments exhibit the interpretation of evidence pattern.

One particularly common instance of this pattern involves the misinterpretation of statistical data. Not every argument that incorporates statistics is an interpretation of evidence argument, but arguments that exhibit this pattern frequently involve statistics. Most often, the argument confuses percentages with actual values.

Consider the following example:

> Local grocer: Ninety percent of customers bought store brand soup last winter, but only eighty percent bought store brand soup this winter. Obviously, more customers bought store brand soup last winter.

The author concludes that *more customers bought store brand soup last winter*. This conclusion is based on the premise that *ninety percent of customers bought store brand soup last winter, but only eighty percent bought store brand soup this winter*. The premise describes a change in the percentage of customers who bought store brand soup, and the conclusion leaps from percentages to actual numbers.

Every interpretation of evidence argument involves one standard assumption:

- **There's no other way to interpret the evidence.**

What if there's another way to interpret the data? If 100 customers visited the grocer last winter, and ninety percent bought soup, then 90 bought soup last winter. But if 200 customers visited the grocer this winter, and eighty percent bought soup, then 160 bought soup this winter. In this case, it no longer follows that more people bought soup last winter—the author misinterprets the statistical data.

When you come across an interpretation of evidence pattern, the argument most likely relies on the standard assumption that there's no other way to interpret the evidence.

Analogy Patterns

Reasoning by analogy is relatively rare on the GRE, but that doesn't mean you won't see arguments by analogy. These arguments characteristically assume that what is appropriate in one case is also appropriate in another. They typically rely on the assumption that two things are similar enough to sustain a comparison. Here is a simple example:

> Using this line of products has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals. Therefore, you should stop using this line of products.

The author concludes that *you should stop using this line of products*. This conclusion is based on the premise that *this line of products has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals*. The premise concerns lab animals, and the conclusion leaps to humans. Thus, the argument relies on the assumption that humans and lab animals are similar: what causes cancer in laboratory animals also causes cancer in humans.

Arguments by analogy involve one standard assumption:

- **One thing is similar to another.**

What if humans are significantly different from laboratory animals? For example, if a feature of human physiology not shared by lab animals prevented the growth of cancers in humans who used the products, it no longer follows that you should stop using the products.

When you encounter an argument that employs an analogy pattern, it probably relies on the assumption that one thing is similar to

another in some relevant way.

THE BASIC APPROACH TO CRITICAL REASONING QUESTIONS

Critical Reasoning questions come in eight flavors. The majority of the questions are *assumption*, *weaken*, *strengthen*, or *inference* questions. However, there are some minor question types, such as *resolve/explain*, *evaluate*, *ID the reasoning*, or *flaw* questions, of which you should be aware. Each of these question types has its own unique task and common trap answers.

Most Critical Reasoning questions present you with an argument, but not all questions involve arguments. In fact, some Critical Reasoning passages don't look like arguments at all. In order to master the Critical Reasoning format, you need a basic approach that can be applied to any Critical Reasoning question you encounter, no matter what kind of question it is.

The Basic Approach: Critical Reasoning Questions

Step 1: Identify the Question

Look for words or phrases in the question stem that can be used to identify the question type. Your knowledge of the question type informs your approach to the passage, so always read the question stem before you read the passage.

Step 2: Work the Argument

For most question types, begin working an argument by distinguishing its conclusion from its premises. Then, look for shifts in language or reasoning patterns

that can help you to identify the argument's assumption.

Step 3: Predict What the Answer Should Do

It can be difficult to outright predict the answer, but you may be able to predict what the answer should do. Before turning to the answer choices, use your knowledge of the question and the information in the passage to determine what the correct answer needs to accomplish.

Step 4: Use POE to Find the Answer

It's often easier to identify incorrect answers than it is to identify correct answers, so use POE aggressively. The POE tools changed based on the question type, which is why it is critically important for you to become familiar with the different types of questions and how answer choices are constructed for them.

Step 1: Identify the Question

The surest way to improve performance and boost confidence in your Critical Reasoning ability is to take control of your approach to Critical Reasoning questions. Every question includes a word or phrase that can help you to identify what kind of question it is, and each question type involves a unique task with respect to the passage. Not all tasks are created equally, so it's important to know what's required of you.

Your knowledge of the question type should inform your approach, suggesting what kind of information to look for in the passage and what kind of answers to avoid. For now, we'll introduce the different question types, saving a more detailed discussion for later in the chapter.

Assumption Questions

Assumptions are necessary but invisible parts of a passage that bridge gaps in reasoning between an argument's premises and conclusion. Here's where all that practice identifying the parts of an argument really begins to pay off. Simply put, assumption questions ask you to identify an unstated premise on which an argument depends.

Assumption questions typically ask:

- The argument above assumes which of the following?
- The author of the argument above presupposes which of the following to be true?
- Which of the following is an assumption on which the truth of the author's conclusion depends?

Forms of indicator words such as *presupposition*, *expectation*, and *assumption* can alert you to the fact that you've encountered an assumption question.

Warning Signs

Our book presents a wide range of typical questions and common indicator words and phrases—but it doesn't contain a comprehensive list of every possible usage. Train yourself with these examples, but don't be so rigid in your studying that you're unable to quickly categorize other words.

Weaken Questions

Weaken questions ask you to find a reason why the information in the passage could be wrong, or is incomplete. The vast majority of weaken questions require you to undermine the conclusion by attacking one of the argument's assumptions. Most commonly, the real job when answering weaken questions is not to attack the conclusion, but to attack *the way the conclusion follows from the premises*.

Weaken questions typically ask:

- Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens the argument above?
- Which of the following casts the most doubt on the author's conclusion?
- Which of the following calls into question the reasoning above?

Forms of indicator words and phrases such as *weaken*, *undermine*, and *cast doubt* can help you to spot a weaken question.

Strengthen Questions

Strengthen questions require you to reinforce an argument's conclusion. This is usually accomplished by strengthening one of the argument's assumptions. In order to answer a strengthen

question with confidence, therefore, you must first identify an assumption. Once the pivotal assumption has been found, your job is to strengthen it—support the conclusion by strengthening the assumption.

Strengthen questions typically ask:

- Which of the following provides the best support for the claims made above?
- Which of the following statements, if true, most strengthens the argument's conclusion?
- Which of the following, if true, increases the likelihood that the author's claim is true?

Forms of indicator words such as *strengthen*, *support*, and *justify* can help you to recognize a strengthen question.

Inference Questions

Inference questions are the most commonly confusing type of critical reasoning question. The question appears to be asking for you to determine what the author of the argument is thinking or, as the name of the question type suggests, what can be *inferred* from the information in the passage.

Remember that the GRE cannot ask you for information that is not provided. Therefore, inference questions are typically just a test of reasoning and reading comprehension. The correct answer must be definitively provable based on the information provided in the passage. When presented with an inference question, you need to determine what it is that you know, without ambiguity, based on the information in the passage.

Inference questions typically ask:

- Which of the following can be inferred from the information above?

- The passage suggests that which of the following must be true?
- The information in the passage implies that the author would be most likely to agree with which of the following?

Forms of indicator words such as *inference*, *suggest*, and *imply* can help you spot an inference question.

Just the Passage, and Nothing but the Passage

This is a critical concept worth reiterating. If you can't point to evidence for your answer in the passage, then you may have fallen for a trap answer. Always make sure you can prove the truth of the answer based on the evidence in the passage.

Resolve/Explain Questions

Some Critical Reasoning questions ask you to resolve an apparent discrepancy or explain a paradoxical situation. The passages that accompany these questions almost never resemble arguments. Like inference passages, they merely present you with information. Resolve/explain questions ask how two seemingly incongruous statements can be true at the same time. Clearly state the two ideas that seem to be opposed, and then select the answer that allows both ideas to be true.

Resolve/Explain questions typically ask:

- Which of the following, if true, resolves the paradox outlined above?
- Which of the following best explains the apparent contradiction?

- Which of the following statements goes farthest in explaining the situation above?

Resolve/Explain questions can be easier to recognize because they include forms of the word *resolve* or *explain*. Forms of indicator words such as *paradox* and *discrepancy* can also help you identify resolve/explain questions.

Evaluate Questions

Evaluate questions target your ability to spot a question (or test) that could be answered (or performed) to *evaluate* or *assess* an argument. Your job is to identify the question that, if answered, would allow you to test the argument's key assumption. Thus, evaluate questions are similar to strengthen and weaken questions in that they first require you to identify an unstated premise. However, once the key assumption has been found, your task is not to weaken or strengthen it, but to identify the test that could help determine whether the argument is weak or strong.

Evaluate questions typically ask:

- The answer to which of the following questions would most likely yield information that could be used to assess the author's claim?
- Which of the following experiments would be most useful in evaluating the argument above?
- Which of the following tests could be performed to determine the truth of the argument's conclusion?

Forms of indicator words such as *evaluate* and *assess* can help you to recognize an evaluate question.

Identify the Reasoning Questions

Occasionally, a Critical Reasoning question will ask you to identify the method, technique, or strategy used by the author of an argument, or to describe the roles played by bolded phrases in an

argument. ID the reasoning questions concern the relationships that exist between an argument's parts. Before you can answer a question about that relationship, you must first identify those parts. Distinguish the argument's conclusion from its premises, and then select the answer that accurately describes the structure of the argument.

Identify the reasoning questions typically state or ask:

- The author provides support for the argument above by
- Which of the following methods of reasoning does the argument above exhibit?
- The bolded phrases play which of the following roles in the argument above?

Forms of indicator words such as *technique*, *strategy*, *method*, and *by* can help you to spot an ID the reasoning question.

Flaw Questions

Flaw questions ask you to describe what went wrong in an argument. The question stem already acknowledges that you're dealing with a bad argument. Your job is to identify its vulnerability. Flaw questions tend to resemble a blend of the ID the reasoning and weaken question types. Select the answer that accurately describes a vulnerability in the argument's reasoning.

Flaw questions typically ask:

- Which of the following statements describes a flaw in the argument above?
- The argument above is vulnerable to criticism for which of the following reasons?
- Which of the following criticisms most directly addresses a flaw in the argument above?

To identify a flaw question, look for the words *vulnerable*, *criticism*, and *flaw*.

Step 2: Work the Argument

After you've read a Critical Reasoning question, read the accompanying passage. Allow your knowledge of the question type to guide you to relevant information.

- **Assumption:** The correct answer will bridge a gap in the argument's reasoning between its premise and conclusion, so begin by distinguishing the conclusion from the premises that support it. Use shifts in language and reasoning patterns to help you spot the assumption that links the conclusion to the premises.

- **Weaken:** Because the correct answer will likely attack one of the argument's key assumptions, approach this like an assumption question: by identifying the premises and the conclusion. Use these to identify the unstated information on which the argument depends.

- **Strengthen:** Because the correct answer will reinforce one of the argument's key assumptions, treat this like an assumption question: by identifying the argument's premises and conclusion, as well as any gaps in reasoning between them. Once you've found the pivotal assumption, choose the answer that suggests it's true.

- **Evaluate:** The correct answer is the one that would allow you to determine whether you're looking at a weak or strong argument. What differentiates this from those types of questions is that here, you need to select a test you could perform or a question you could answer to determine the truth or falsity of an assumption.

- **Identify the Reasoning:** If there are bolded phrases, begin by assessing those, as they pertain to the correct answer. If not, look to the argument itself. In either case, determine which part of the argument functions as its claim and which parts function as evidence, and then choose the answer that accurately describes this structure. (There's no need to worry about assumptions.)

- **Flaw:** Because the correct answer describes a weakness in the structure of the argument, use the techniques from ID the reasoning and weaken questions. Begin by distinguishing the argument's conclusion from its premises and use shifts in language or reasoning patterns to identify the faulty assumption.

- **Inference:** The correct answer is essentially the conclusion to the evidence given by the question, so begin by familiarizing yourself with the information provided. (If it helps, use your whiteboard to create a list of facts.) Then, choose the answer that must be true on the basis of the facts.

- **Resolve/Explain:** The correct answer isn't based on an argument, but rather on a resolution between two opposing ideas. Rather than looking for premises and conclusions, begin by using your whiteboard to clarify the apparent conflict: "On the one hand, *X*, but on the other, *Y*." Indicator words such as *but*, *yet*, and *however* can draw your attention to opposing ideas and help you to articulate the apparent conflict. Choose the