

Lesson 6

51. avarice — 60. bland

51. **av-a-ric** *noun* ăv'-ə-rĭs
[avarus (Latin), "greedy," from avere (Latin), "desire"]

Definition: An excessive desire to acquire and possess wealth; a combination of greed and stinginess.

Few novels portray the dehumanizing effects of avarice as vividly and forcefully as George Eliot's *Silas Marner*.

Related Forms: (*adjective*) avaricious; (*noun*) avariciousness

Synonyms: (*nouns*) acquisitiveness, cupidity, covetousness, rapacity; miserliness, parsimony, niggardliness; (*adjectives*) acquisitive, greedy, covetous, rapacious, grasping; stingy, miserly, niggardly, tightfisted

Antonyms: (for the miserly side of *avarice*): (*nouns*) generosity, liberality, openhandedness; (*adjectives*) generous, liberal, openhanded

52. **av-id** *adjective* ăv'-ĭd
[avidus (Latin), "craving; greedy," from avere (Latin), "desire"]

Definition: Extremely eager, anxious, or enthusiastic.

Your mom and dad may be **avid** readers of spy novels.

Your little brother may be an **avid** baseball fan.

Related Forms: (*noun*) avidity; (*adverb*) avidly

Phrases: an avid sportsman, an avid moviegoer, avid for adventure

Synonyms: (*adjectives*) zealous, ardent, keen, fervent, fervid, voracious, insatiable, rabid, fanatical, passionate, gung ho

Antonyms: (*adjectives*) indifferent, apathetic, unresponsive; (*nouns*) apathy (Word 32), indifference

53. **bad-ger** *verb* bāj'-ēr
[Origin uncertain, possibly from the name of the animal]

Definition: To tease; to annoy with a constant string of petty torments.

A curious child may **badger** his or her parents with an endless string of almost unanswerable questions.

A judge may reprimand an overly aggressive attorney for **badgering** a witness.

Synonyms: (*verbs*) harass, torment, pester, plague, vex, irritate, hassle, bait, harry

Antonyms: (*verbs*) leave in peace; soothe, calm, pacify

54. **baf-file** *verb* bǎf'-əl
[Origin uncertain]

Definition:

- a. To puzzle completely.

"How you manage to do well on tests when you never seem to crack a book completely **baffles** me," Jerry remarked.

- b. To prevent from achieving a goal.

Despite several clues that at first seemed promising, the police were eventually **baffled** in their attempt to solve the murder.

Related Forms: (*adjective*) baffling; (*noun*) bafflement

Synonyms: (*verbs*) perplex, mystify, bewilder, nonplus, confound; thwart (Word 376), foil, balk, frustrate, stymie, stump; (*adjectives*) mystifying, bewildering, enigmatic; perplexed, mystified, quizzical

Antonyms: (*verbs*) understand, comprehend, fathom (Word 185); help, aid, assist

55. **ba-nal** *adjective* bə-nāl' or bā'-nəl
[*banal* (French), "commonplace," from *ban* (Old French), "summons to military service"]

Definition: Made stale by constant use or repetition.

I expected dialogue by such a well-known writer to sparkle with wit. Unfortunately, it proved to be **banal** and flat.

Related Forms: (*noun*) banality; (*adverb*) banally

Synonyms: (*adjectives*) trite, hackneyed, stereotyped, prosaic, commonplace, pedestrian, insipid, vapid, fatuous (Word 186), jejune, corny; (*nouns*) triteness, insipidity; cliché, platitude, bromide

Antonyms: (*adjectives*) novel, fresh, original, innovative, provocative, striking, sparkling, scintillating, piquant; (*nouns*) novelty, originality

Usage Note:

- a. *Trite* and *hackneyed* indicate staleness or dullness due to overuse. *Stereotyped* suggests a lack of originality and an overheavy reliance on conventional ideas, images, or forms. *Pedestrian* and *prosaic* simply indicate that something is quite ordinary. *Vapid* and *fatuous* suggest a lack of substance or perceptivity. *Jejune* adds to this the idea of childishness. *Corny* is a slang expression that can designate anything from triteness to oversentimentality.
- b. Do not confuse *banal* with *baneful*, which means "harmful" or "destructive."

56. **bel-lig-er-ent** *adjective and noun* bə-lij'-ər-ĕnt
[bellum (Latin), "war" + gerens (Latin), "waging," from gerere (Latin), "wage"]

Definition:

- a. (*adjective*) Warring, actually engaged in a war; warlike or hostile.

Between 1915 and 1917, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Turkey, and the U.S.A. all entered World War I. This increased the total number of **belligerent** nations to a dozen, though that many were never involved in the conflict simultaneously.

How can we hope to arrive at a fair settlement or even discuss the situation calmly when your attitude is so **belligerent**?

- b. (*noun*) A party (for example, a nation or organization) engaged in a war.

The Security Council called upon the **belligerents** to halt all military operations and send representatives to an emergency peace conference.

Related Forms: (*nouns*) belligerence, belligerency; (*adverb*) belligerently

Synonyms: (*adjectives*) martial, combative, bellicose, quarrelsome, contentious, militant, pugnacious, hawkish

Antonyms: (*adjectives*) pacific, peaceable, conciliatory, dovish

Usage Note:

Though *belligerent* and *bellicose* are often used interchangeably, they are really quite different. Both words of course mean "warlike or hostile," but only *belligerent* also means "warring" or "actually engaged in a war." In addition, *bellicose* tends to be used of a natural or inborn inclination toward aggressiveness, whereas *belligerent* tends to be reserved for a hostile attitude that is not innate but, rather, the result of some quite specific external cause.



Mars and Martial

Mars was the Roman god of war. His name is the source of our word *martial*, meaning "warlike" or "military," and also of the name of the month of March, during which the chief festivals of Mars occurred. The planet Mars is also named after this deity.

57. **be-nign** *adjective* bĭ-nĭn'
[bene (Latin), "well" + genus (Latin), "birth; race"]

Definition:

- a. Gentle and kindly.

Though a bear cub may look friendly and **benign**, it is still dangerous.

- b. Wholesome or favorable.

On the whole, the years she spent abroad had a **benign** effect on the development of her personality.

Related Forms: (*noun*) benignity (pronounced bĭ-nĭg'-nə-tē); (*adjective*) benignant (pronounced bĭ-nĭg'-nĕnt); (*adverb*) benignly

Usage Note:

In medicine, *benign* means "not a threat to a person's health or life" —for example, in the phrase "a benign tumor." Its opposite is *malignant*.

Synonyms: (*adjectives*) benevolent; favorable, auspicious, beneficial, salutary, salubrious

Antonyms: (*adjectives*) malevolent; pernicious (Word 299), deleterious, injurious, inimical, noxious, detrimental

58. **bick-er** *verb* bĭk'-ĕr
[bikeren (Middle English), "thrust; attack"]

Definition: To engage in petty quarreling.

The conference soon degenerated into an ugly dispute as the participants began to **bicker** over minor details of procedure.

Related Form: (*noun*) bickering

Synonyms: (*verbs*) squabble, wrangle, haggle, dicker

Antonyms: (*verbs*) agree, concur

59. **bi-zarre** *adjective* bĭ-zār'
[bizarre (French), "strange," originally "gallant": from bizarro (Spanish), "handsome, manly"; from bizar (Basque), "beard"]

Definition: Weird or fantastic.

Wearing **bizarre** masks and costumes on Halloween is a tradition that goes back many centuries.

The emperor Caligula's behavior was so **bizarre** that many Romans doubted his sanity.

Related Form: (*noun*) bizarreness

Synonyms: (*adjectives*) grotesque, outlandish, freakish, odd, queer, singular, far-out, unconventional, eccentric

Antonyms: (*adjectives*) normal, conventional, orthodox, straight, square; sedate, conservative, sober, staid

60. **bland** adjective bländ
[blandus (Latin), "smooth; soft-spoken"]

Definition:

- a. Mild or gentle. (When used in this sense, the word is usually neutral in tone.)

The doctor prescribed a **bland** diet for the patient suffering from ulcers.

- b. Lacking interest or liveliness; flat. (When used in this sense, the word is distinctly pejorative.)

He expressed his opinion in language so ordinary and **bland** that he made little or no impression on his audience.

Related Forms: (noun) blandness; (adverb) blandly

Phrases: bland food, a bland personality, a bland smile, a bland style

Synonyms: (adjectives) calming, soothing, nonirritating; dull, boring, unexciting, insipid, vapid, lifeless; nondescript, mediocre, run-of-the-mill

Antonyms: (adjectives) irritating, harsh; spicy, pungent, piquant, racy, colorful, florid, scintillating, lively, sprightly

Using the Words

Exercise I. Parts of Speech

Indicate the part of speech of each of the following words. In one case, two answers are correct.

- | | | |
|-----------|----------------|------------|
| 1. benign | 3. avid | 5. avarice |
| 2. bicker | 4. belligerent | 6. bizarre |

Exercise II. Words in Phrases

In each of the following groups, select the item that best expresses the meaning of the *italicized* word in the introductory phrase.

- a *benign* countenance
a. beautiful b. scarred c. kindly d. surly
- motivated by *avarice*
a. vengeance b. fear c. greed d. ambition
- bizarre* behavior
a. weird b. aggressive c. laudable d. ordinary
- a *bland* writing style
a. curious b. nondescript c. florid d. original
- badgered* me with questions
a. thrilled b. puzzled c. flattered d. pestered

Exercise III. Completing Sentences

Complete each of the following sentences by selecting the most appropriate word from the group of words given below.

banal avarice belligerent
baffle bicker avid

1. Though Queen Victoria sympathized deeply with the Southern cause, she had no intention of allowing Great Britain to become a(n) _____ in the American Civil War.
2. "We will never be able to present a united front in the upcoming election if we continue to _____ among ourselves about matters of no importance," the politician warned.
3. Ordinary detectives are often unable to solve the crimes they're investigating, but no mystery—no matter how complicated or puzzling—ever seems to _____ the great Sherlock Holmes.
4. "I've been a(n) _____ sportsman all my life," the movie star told the reporter, "and I rarely miss a day on the golf links or the tennis court."
5. Some of the incidental ideas expressed in the film are novel and interesting, but the overall handling of the theme is terribly _____ and flat.

Exercise IV. Synonyms and Antonyms

A. Match each of the words in Column A with its synonym in Column B.

Column A

1. mediocre
2. beneficial
3. pester
4. foil
5. outlandish

Column B

- a. harass
- b. fantastic
- c. run-of-the-mill
- d. salutary
- e. frustrate

Now indicate which of the basic words in this lesson (Words 51–60) is **synonymous** with each of the words in Column A.

B. In each of the following groups, select the two words that are most nearly **antonyms**.

1. a. terminate b. squabble c. concur d. atrophy
2. a. triteness b. bafflement c. miserliness d. generosity
3. a. piquant b. freakish c. swift d. vapid
4. a. quarrelsome b. conciliatory c. typical d. inane
5. a. fervent b. peaceful c. orderly d. apathetic

Exercise V. Word Roundup

1. Explain the difference in meaning and usage between *bellicose* and *belligerent*. Use each in an original sentence that clearly shows its meaning.
2. By means of illustrative sentences, show how *bizarre* may be applied to each of the following.
 - a. human behavior
 - b. physical objects
 - c. ideas or points of view
3. What is a *benign* tumor? Give an antonym for *benign* in the medical sense.
4. A number of the expressions mentioned in the Synonyms and Antonyms sections of the word entries in this lesson are *slang*. Make a list of these items.

Exercise VI. Framing Sentences

Use each of the following words in an original sentence that clearly illustrates its meaning.

1. avaricious
2. avidity
3. badger
4. baffling
5. banality
6. belligerence
7. benignly
8. bickering
9. bizarre
10. blandness

Completing Verbal Analogies

"A Means the Opposite of B." Analogy questions involving opposites (antonyms) occur frequently on standardized vocabulary tests. This type of analogy can be expressed in abstract terms as "A means the opposite of B; C means the opposite of D." Look at the following example of such an analogy question, and try to figure out the answer.

A B C D

affluent : indigent = equitable : (*florid, destitute, arbitrary, opulent, bland*)

The answer is *arbitrary*. Here's why: The words in the key relationship (A, B) are *affluent* and *indigent*. They are opposites or antonyms. So, an antonym for C, *equitable*, is needed to complete the analogy correctly. The only word available for this purpose from among the five choices given is *arbitrary*. Hence, *arbitrary* is the correct answer.

Note, however, that *destitute* is both an antonym of *affluent* and a synonym of *indigent*. Similarly, *opulent* is both an antonym of *indigent* and a synonym of *affluent*. In addition, *florid* is something of an antonym of *bland*. All these words were included among the five choices in order to confuse the student and make selecting the right answer more difficult.

Note also that in analogy questions involving opposites (antonyms), the positive or desirable quality often comes first.

Whoopi Goldberg (born 1949) has been performing since the age of eight. Her many Hollywood roles have highlighted her skill as both an accomplished dramatic actress and a talented comedian. She has also appeared on the Broadway stage, in nightclubs, and on television. Her one-woman stand-up comedy act has become legendary.

An ability to use words well, combined with a well-developed sense of humor, has catapulted many an American into fame and fortune in this country's ever-growing entertainment industry.



Whoopi Goldberg

Exercise I

Complete each of the following analogies.

1. **augment : decrease** = wax : (*polish, wane, declare, frustrate, accelerate*)
2. **piquant : bland** = generous : (*ardent, dull, amiable, miserly, liberal*)
3. **absolve : incriminate** = acquit : (*liberate, mystify, convict, resolve, exclude*)
4. **conciliatory : belligerent** = astute : (*passionate, sagacious, indifferent, bellicose, obtuse*)
5. **authentic : spurious** = austere : (*flamboyant, bogus, puritanical, reliable, wily*)
6. **relish : abhor** = agile : (*lithe, contradictory, clumsy, zealous, commonplace*)

Exercise II

Write **three** original analogies involving opposites (antonyms). In your analogies use at least **three** of the basic words presented in Lessons 1-6 (Words 1-60).

Exercise III

The following items review what you have so far learned about analogy questions. Complete each.

1. **anarchy** : **chaos** = avarice : (*indulgence, mannerism, provocation, cupidity, encouragement*)
2. **hackneyed** : **innovative** = pedestrian : (*original, quarrelsome, auspicious, prosaic, grisly*)
3. **badger** : **harass** = abstain : (*pester, indulge, pacify, champion, forbear*)
4. **haven** : **sanctuary** = aggregate : (*anomaly, pretense, cluster, refuge, misdemeanor*)
5. **malevolent** : **benign** = adverse : (*noxious, weird, mediocre, favorable, covetous*)
6. **assiduous** : **indolent** = diligent : (*inconsolable, lethargic, abstemious, charitable, rapacious*)

Enriching the Lesson

Exercise I. Fighting Words

With or without the aid of an unabridged dictionary, complete the following exercises.

1. Define the following expressions.

a. war of nerves	i. mobilization
b. amphibious operation	j. guerrilla
c. blitzkrieg	k. armistice
d. pacification	l. skirmish
e. preemptive strike	m. hostage
f. pacifist	n. ordnance
g. hostilities	o. broadside
h. maneuvers	p. hold out the olive branch
2. What is an *Armageddon*? Explain the story behind this word, and indicate where it comes from.
3. What is a *Pyrrhic victory*? Explain the story behind this phrase.
4. What is *martial law*? When is it usually imposed? What are *martial arts*? Name a movie star or other celebrity who is a noted *martial artist*.
5. The Latin word *bellum* means "war." What does *antebellum* mean? In what connection is this Latin phrase used in American history?

Exercise II. Clichés

A **cliché** is simply an expression that has grown stale and flat as a result of overuse. Some good examples of clichés are *enjoy the fruits of one's labor*, *wolf down one's food*, *go like a house afire*, and similar hand-me-down metaphors and similes. Every cliché was presumably once fresh and original, but such expressions have been so overworked that today they strike us as being trite and corny.

This, however, is not to say that clichés should be avoided altogether. Countless clichés, such as *bend over backwards*, *cut corners*, and *turn a new leaf*, are still serviceable, even if they are overly familiar. In fact, it would be hard, if not impossible, to carry on a conversation or otherwise communicate without calling on clichés.

For that reason, a sound principle to follow in regard to clichés is this: Don't be a fanatic about avoiding them, but don't overuse them either. Also, bear in mind the literal meaning of the cliché, and try to use it only where it will be appropriate and effective. For example, a 12th grader who has just mailed out a batch of college applications might sum up his or her hopes for them by using a familiar cliché in this novel way: "Well, I've cast my bread upon the waters," the student might observe. "Now all I can do is pray that some of it comes back sandwiches!"

Now complete the following group of exercises involving clichés.

1. Some of the sentences below contain clichés; others have a measure of freshness and originality in them. Write the identifying letter of each sentence containing a cliché. Then replace the cliché with language that is more distinctive and effective.
 - a. On that hot summer afternoon, the garden sizzled with bees.
 - b. When we arrived back at camp, we were as hungry as bears.
 - c. Her mere presence on the platform turned a routine gathering into a once-in-a-lifetime event.
 - d. She left no stone unturned in her search for the missing papers.
 - e. The news we received this morning was like a bolt from the blue.
 - f. The fullback drove through the line like a knife going through soft cheese.
2. Substitute a fresher, more original expression for each of the clichés listed below.

a. worked like a Trojan	d. prostrate with grief
b. a sumptuous repast	e. lost his shirt at the track
c. slept like a log	f. paint the town red

3. Draw up a list of **twenty** clichés that you have heard or seen in the last week.
4. Complete each of the following comparisons with a word or phrase that is not a cliché.

c. as fat as _____	d. as pretty as _____
b. as mad as _____	e. as quiet as _____
c. as old as _____	f. as big as _____

Exercise III. A Verbal Diversion

Modern English is rich in colloquial expressions involving the names of members of the animal kingdom. Two such expressions are *chicken feed* (meaning “a woefully insufficient sum of money”) and *to smell a rat* (meaning “to suspect that something is not quite as it should be”). A number of similar items, all of them widely used today in informal speech and writing, are listed below. With or without the aid of a dictionary or other reference book, define each. Then choose any **five**, and use each in a short sentence that clearly illustrates the expression’s meaning.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. a red herring | 13. a bookworm |
| 2. a round-robin | 14. to let the cat out of the bag |
| 3. a stool pigeon | 15. to go to the dogs |
| 4. a loan shark | 16. a harebrained scheme |
| 5. an eager beaver | 17. to throw to the wolves |
| 6. to dovetail | 18. a paper tiger |
| 7. to play possum | 19. to take the bull by the horns |
| 8. a white elephant | 20. a sacred cow |
| 9. to handle with kid gloves | 21. to get one’s goat |
| 10. a dark-horse candidate | 22. a wild-goose chase |
| 11. a kangaroo court | 23. a sheepish grin |
| 12. a lame-duck session of Congress | 24. to have a frog in one’s throat |

Can you add to this list from your own knowledge?

Exercise IV. Expanding Your Word Power

The following words are not on the Basic Word List, but they were mentioned in passing in Lesson 6. All of them would make useful additions to your working vocabulary. Define each, give its etymology, list **two** synonyms and **two** antonyms (where possible), and use in a short sentence that clearly illustrates the word’s meaning.

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. niggardly | 5. platitude | 9. haggle |
| 2. voracious | 6. insipid | 10. militant |
| 3. bait | 7. grotesque | 11. sedate |
| 4. quizzical | 8. foil | 12. eccentric |

Academic Vocabulary

The following vocabulary words and phrases are often used in the fields of biology, medicine, and environmental science. Like **atrophy**, introduced in Lesson 5, they are useful when discussing biological processes, animal behavior, and the environment.

congenital *adjective* kən-je'-nət^{əl}

Definition: Describing a condition existing at birth; inherent.

Although many diseases are not **congenital**, studies now suggest that a specific genetic makeup can cause some individuals to be more prone than others to certain disorders.

etiology *noun* ē-tē-ä'-lə-jē

Definition: The assignment of a cause, especially of a disease; the science of causes or origins.

It was only in the early 20th century that the **etiology** of yellow fever was fully understood; a team headed by Walter Reed proved that the disease was caused by a virus transmitted by mosquitoes.

metastasis *noun* mə-tas'-tə-səs

Definition: The spread of disease from one part of the body to another, unrelated part.

One of the fears that terminally ill patients face is the possibility of a rapid **metastasis** of the disease.

pandemic *adjective* pan-de'-mik

Definition: Universal; spread over a large region, as with an epidemic disease.

After the earthquake, the lack of fresh water caused health workers to worry that a **pandemic** outbreak of diseases such as cholera might occur in the area.

placebo *noun* plə-sē'-bō

Definition: A harmless, unmedicated preparation given to someone for psychological rather than physical benefit; something said or done to win another person's favor.

In double-blind medical studies, neither the patient nor the physician knows whether a **placebo** or an actual drug has been administered.

prognosis *noun* präg-nō'-səs

Definition: A prediction of the probable course of a disease and of the patient's chances for recovery; a forecast.

After the successful surgery, the patient's medical team reassured her that the **prognosis** for a full recovery was excellent.

taxonomy *noun* tak-sä'-nə-mē

Definition: The science of classification; a system for arranging animals and plants into related groups.

The 18th-century scientist Carl Linnaeus founded modern scientific **taxonomy** when he designed a system of classification for the genus and species of organisms.

triage *noun* trē-āzh'

Definition: The system of prioritizing medical treatment on the basis of urgency or chances for survival of the injured, especially when the number of injured exceeds the capacity of available resources.

A natural disaster such as the tsunami in 2004 often means that **triage** must be employed to treat the most severely injured people first.

Exercise. Completing Sentences

Complete each of the following sentences by selecting the most appropriate academic word or phrase.

1. The doctor was reluctant to declare a firm _____, since she knew that the future course of the disease could take any number of unexpected turns.
a. placebo b. triage c. prognosis d. etiology
2. The outbreak of influenza in 1918 was _____ in nature, killing millions of people all over the world.
a. pandemic b. metastasis c. congenital d. triage
3. More than anything else, the patient feared a(n) _____ of her cancer from the lungs to her kidneys.
a. metastasis b. taxonomy c. triage d. etiology
4. Psychosomatic claims in medicine seem to be supported by the results of numerous studies in which patients improved after taking a(n) _____.
a. taxonomy b. prognosis c. placebo d. triage
5. Cerebral palsy and spina bifida are both examples of _____ conditions that have serious, long-term effects.
a. congenital b. metastasis c. taxonomy d. pandemic
6. The emergency medicine practice of _____ is inevitably controversial, generating many debates about the criteria for prioritizing the treatment of accident or disaster victims.
a. taxonomy b. triage c. etiology d. metastasis
7. In mythology, _____ is a common source of ancient beliefs. Long ago, the Greeks created myths that identified causes or origins for natural phenomenon, such as thunder being the plaything of Zeus.
a. taxonomy b. prognosis c. etiology d. placebo
8. Recent DNA studies have resulted in wholesale revisions in the _____ of the thirty-seven species of wild cats.
a. taxonomy b. etiology c. prognosis d. metastasis