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Text Completion & Sentence Equivalence

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This book is dedicated to Veritas Prep's instructors, whose enthusiasm and experience have contributed mightily to our educational philosophy and our students' success.

It is also dedicated to the teachers who inspired Veritas Prep's instructors. The lesson that follows was only made possible by a lifelong love of learning and of undertaking educational challenges; we have teachers all around the world to thank for that.

Finally and most importantly, this book is dedicated to our thousands of students, who have taught us more about teaching and learning than they will ever know. And to you, the reader, thank you for adding yourself to that group.

Personal Dedications

Thousands of teachers have inspired the Veritas Prep instructors who created this lesson. It is not possible to thank everyone by name, but the authors would like to specifically thank some of their favorite teachers:

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CREATING *Think Like the Testmaker*

Creating is the top of the pyramid in Bloom's Taxonomy. When you have completely mastered the GRE, you are able to *Think Like the Testmaker*. You are on top of the pyramid looking down! You don't just have good content knowledge and lots of practice with GRE problems; you understand how a problem has been made, what makes it hard, and how to break it down. This is what sets apart the Veritas Prep curriculum from others: To break into the 80th percentile you not only need mastery of skills (remembering) and lots of practice (applying), but also a deep understanding of how the test is made (creating).

APPLYING *Skills Meet Strategy*

Another hallmark of the Veritas Prep curriculum is an emphasis on *Learning by Doing*. What makes the GRE difficult is not just the underlying skills and concepts, but rather the way those skills and concepts are tested. Rote lecturing in the classroom and rote memorization of skills have limited utility in preparation for a reasoning test such as the GRE. To be successful, you must learn how to marry skill proficiency with strategic thinking into what we call "guiding principles." Our curriculum emphasizes learning through challenging problems to help you:

1. Learn how to combine skills and strategies to effectively solve any GRE problem.

2. Stay focused and engaged, even after a long day in the office.

3. Most effectively utilize the classroom time you spend with a true GRE expert.

REMEMBERING *Skillbuilder*

The stated goal of the GRE is to test verbal and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and problem solving skills. In order to achieve that goal, testmakers must have some underlying content from which to create questions. On the GRE, this content is mostly math curriculum through early high school and basic grammar skills through the elementary school level. To succeed on the GRE, you must have a thorough mastery of this content, but many students already have a relatively strong command of this material. In order to maximize the value added from instruction in the classroom, we have taken out all core skills that simply require refreshing and/or memorizing and put them first in a Skillbuilder section. By doing this:

1. Students who need to thoroughly review or relearn these skills can do so at their own pace and then focus on strategic thinking and problem solving during in-class time.

2. Students who have a solid command of the underlying content will not become disengaged because of tedious review of material they've already mastered.

LESSON PREVIEW

As you learned in the Foundations of GRE Logic lesson, the educational philosophy at Veritas Prep is based on the multi-tiered Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, which classifies different orders of thinking in terms of understanding and complexity. To achieve a high score on the GRE, it is essential that you understand the test from the top of the pyramid. On the pages that follow, you will learn specifically how to achieve that goal and how this lesson in particular relates to the **Veritas Prep Pyramid**.
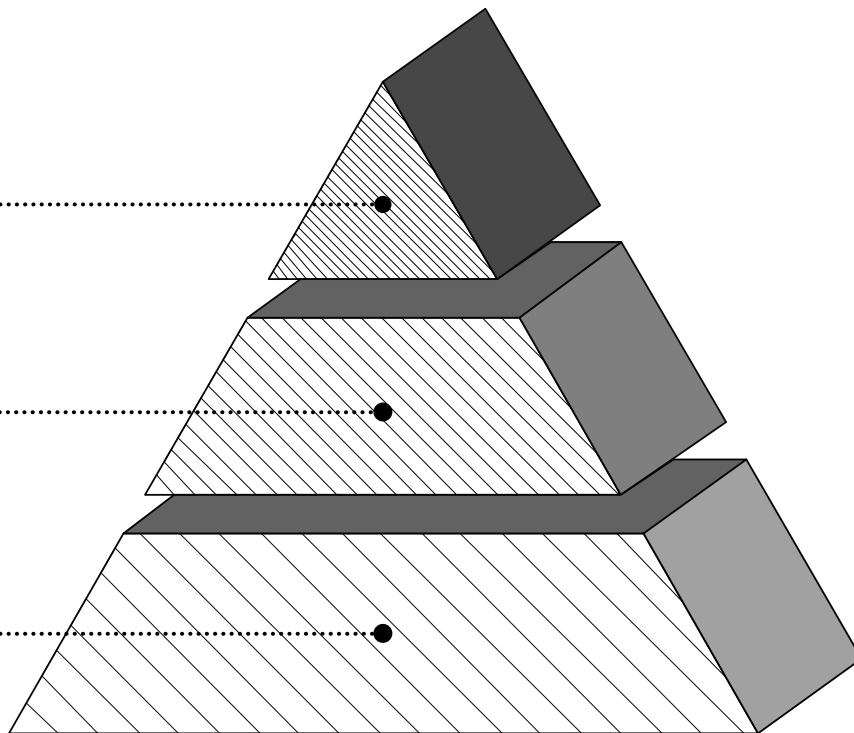
Recurring Themes in the Veritas Prep Pyramid

Embrace Pattern Thinking

As you learned in the Foundations of GRE Logic lesson, there are important recurring themes that you will see in most GRE problems. Those individual themes are highlighted below:

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER RECURRING THEMES

- Abstraction
- Reverse Engineering
- Using Large and/or Awkward Numbers
- Exploiting Common Mistakes
- Selling the Wrong Answer and Hiding the Correct Answer
- Misdirection
- Content Specific Themes

SKILLS MEET STRATEGY RECURRING THEMES

- Guiding Principles
- Problem Solving Strategies
- Leveraging Assets
- Learning By Doing

SKILLBUILDER—RELEVANT CONTENT AREAS

How This Book Is Structured

Curriculum Designed to Maximize the Value of Your Time

Each book in the Veritas Prep curriculum contains four distinct sections:

1. **Skillbuilder**. The Skillbuilder section will allow you to review and/or relearn the skills, facts, formulas, and content of the GRE. It will cover the underlying content in which there is less value added from an instructor but is still very important for the test. Some of the lessons have more underlying content than others, so the Skillbuilders will vary in length for each book. (For instance, the Quantitative Strategy lesson does not have a Skillbuilder because you are already building on three previous lessons.) Each student will have his own set of skills that are "rusty" or even brand new, and will find other items that come back quickly (or never left in the first place).

    For that reason, we suggest that you complete each Skillbuilder lesson before class at your own pace, and return to the Skillbuilders when you recognize a content deficiency through practice tests and GRE homework sets.

2. **Lesson**. The lessons are designed to provide students with maximum value added from an instructor by doing in class problems together (Learning by Doing) and analyzing those problems for the recurring takeaways (Guiding Principles and Think Like the Testmaker). With each problem, there will be a detailed explanation that will emphasize the concept of Learning by Doing from the middle of the Veritas Prep Pyramid. That will help you understand how the problem is testing a particular concept or series of concepts, what makes the problem hard, and what underlying skills are required to solve it. When relevant, there will be particular boxes for Think Like the Testmaker, Guiding Principles, and/or Core Skills when you should be focused on particular aspects of the how the question is made or how the underlying content is being tested.

    NOTE: When doing in-class and homework problems, you should do your work below the problem and you should not circle the answer on the actual question (just note it on the bottom of the page). That way if you want to redo problems, you can simply cover up your work and proceed as if you have never done it.

3. **You Oughta Know.** The "You Oughta Know" sections will follow the lesson and cover either more obscure or, occasionally, more advanced topics that are not common on the GRE but that do get tested. While these content areas do not warrant in-class time, they are still important for the test, and you should complete these sections before moving to the homework problems. As with the Skillbuilders, the length of these will vary, depending on their importance.

4. **Homework Problems.** The entire Veritas curriculum is designed for success on ACTUAL GRE questions and to this end, we have supplied you with both the verbal and quantitative supplement guides. Specific assignments will be noted out of these books during the course.

SKILLBUILDER

Text Completion & Sentence Equivalence

The GRE officially lists three Verbal question types: Text Completion, Sentence Equivalence, and Reading Comprehension. But for your study purposes, it's best to look at them from strategic perspectives: Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence test the same skill set and require the same strategies, while Reading Comprehension is a bit more varied. For that reason, you'll study Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence together in this lesson.

And while the GRE does not test "history" as a concept, here's a quick history lesson about the GRE. In 2011 the GRE underwent significant changes - the scoring system changed from a 200-800 scale to today's 130-170 scale, the adaptivity reverted to section-by-section and not question-by-question, and most importantly for this lesson ETS blanketed the word "reasoning" all over everything. Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence phased out the "vocabulary" questions that centered on analogies and antonyms. So when you see lengthy "GRE Vocabulary" lists and flashcard decks, you're mostly seeing relics from the earlier generations of the GRE, which explicitly tested "vocabulary" as a core skill. For the GRE that you will take, reasoning and reading comprehension are much more central skills than vocabulary, and this lesson will show you how to leverage your critical reading ability to succeed on these problems.

All of that said, the answer choices to the Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence questions will all be words or phrases, not descriptions or sentences. So a robust vocabulary is certainly an asset if not a focal point. In this Skillbuilder you'll learn how to develop and augment your vocabulary specific to the current generation of the GRE.

Root Words & Related Words

The GRE's emphasis on "reasoning" (as opposed to knowledge/memorization) means that the difficult vocabulary you see will typically be of the type you can figure out through analysis, not the type that you either know or you don't. And to figure out what a long or complex word means, the most effective strategy is breaking it down into roots. Consider one of the longest and most-complex terms you've likely studied to date:

Deoxyribonucleic acid (better known as DNA)

While intimidating to read, pronounce, or spell, the adjective deoxyribonucleic is a very logical word when you break it down:

De- is a prefix meaning "without"

Oxy- refers to "oxygen"

Ribo- refers to the sugar "ribose"

Note: While you won't need to know ribose for the GRE, it's important to note that –ose is a suffix that means "full of" and is used in the naming of carbohydrates, specifically sugars like glucose or fructose.

Nucleic- the *nucle* portion refers to the nucleus of a cell, and the suffix *-ic* is used to turn the term into an adjective (like "Icelandic" or "formulaic")

So once you've deconstructed this term, you know that it's without *(de)* oxygen *(oxy)* on the ribose *(ribo)* sugar structure, found in the nucleus *(nucleic)*. That's what kind of acid we're dealing with!

Naturally, the purpose here isn't to discuss genetics but rather to show you that, like DNA forms the building blocks of life, root words form the building blocks of language.

Prefix Pre-Quiz

What do the following words mean?

1. Unqualified

2. Hydroelectric

3. Misappropriation

4. Antiestablishment

5. Suboptimal

6. Transcontinental

7. Dissimilar

8. Dysfunctional

9. Inconsequential

10. Overexposed

While none of the words in this list should be far outside your vocabulary, the organization of each word is something you can apply to more-challenging words that could come up in GRE Verbal answer choices. The lesson here is that each word includes a prefix that tells you what to do with the rest of the word. Those words mean:

1. *Un* means *not*, so *unqualified* really just means *not qualified*

2. *Hydro* means water, so *hydroelectric* really just means *electricity from water*

3. *Mis* means *wrong* or *bad*, so a *misappropriation* is a bad or wrong appropriation

4. *Anti* means *against*, so *antiestablishment* refers to someone who goes against the establishment

5. *Sub* means *below*, so s*uboptimal* is something that's *less than optimal*

6. *Trans* means *across*, so *transcontinental* goes across the continent

7. *Dis* means *not* or *opposite of*, so *dissimilar* means *not similar*

8. *Dys* means *bad* or *unfavorable*, so *dysfunctional* means *not functional*

9. *In* means *not*, so *inconsequential* is *not consequential*

10. *Over* means *too much* or *above*, so overexposed means that something had too much exposure

If that drill didn't seem altogether difficult, that's a good thing; you KNOW most of these root words even if you wouldn't be excited about having to define them. If you've ever studied a Romance language (Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian), you have an added advantage as many English words are derived from these languages (or in many cases lifted directly from the original language). You may love French *cuisine*, spend time in a Spanish *plaza*, or order your daily coffee from your favorite *barista*. Many common words from our lexicon come from Romance languages which were derived from Latin. Coupled with other languages such as Greek and German, they have all strongly influenced English. In short, consider yourself a step ahead if you've spent any time studying a language that wasn't English.

Since you'll encounter thousands of words between now and the time you take the GRE – from reading, listening to podcasts or the radio, and other recreational pursuits in addition to practicing GRE problems – it's a good idea to pay closer attention to the prefixes you encounter so that you can spot and use them on test day.

English prefixes and suffixes can help define a word or change its grammatical function. While suffixes are less likely to yield clues to meaning, they're still important to recognize in context.

Common English prefixes and suffixes include:

From English

Prefix	Definition	Examples
anti	against	anticlimactic, antidote
dis	not, opposite of	discontinue, disingenuous
en/em	cause to	empower, engender
inter	between, among	interruption, intersperse
mis	wrongly	misspell, mistake
pre	before	preview, premature
semi	half, partly	semicircle, semicolon
sub	under	submersion, subcontractor
super	above, beyond	supervisor, superfluous
trans	across	transcontinental, transplant

Suffix	Definition	Examples
able/ible	is, can be	malleable, fallible, audible
al/ial	having characteristics of	global, thermal, colonial
en	made of	golden, molten
er/or	one who	professor, collaborator
ity/ty	state of	activity, brevity
less	without	penniless, motiveless
ly	how something is	quickly, fluently
ous/eous/ious	having qualities of	amorphous, pious
y	characterized by	balmy, jealousy, dainty

Root	Meaning	Examples
acu	sharp/precise	accurate, acute
ami/amo	love/like	amicable, enamored
brev	short	brevity, abbreviate
chrom	color	polychromatic, chrome
chron	time	chronic, chronicle
cred	believe	incredible, credit
cogn/gnos	to Know	cognizant, agnostic
mand	command	mandatory, remand
nomen/nomin	name	nomenclature, ignominious
plac/plais	please	placebo, complacent
viv/vita/vivi	life	vivacious, revitalize

Roots

Just as prefixes and suffixes (collectively known as affixes) can help you to break down and define unfamiliar words, so can Greek and Latin roots. Some common roots include:

From Greek:

Root	Definition	Examples
bio	life	autobiography, biology
dys	bad, hard, unlucky	dyslexia, dystrophy
hydr	water	dehydration, hydrographic
hyper	over, above, beyond	hyperbole, hyperglycemia
hypo	below, beneath	hypoallergenic, hypothermic
phil	love	philanthropy, anglophile
photo/phos	light	phosphorescent, photogenic
therm	heat	thermal, thermodynamic

From Latin:

Root	Definition	Examples
aud	to hear	auditorium, audiology
bene	good	benevolent, beneficiary
cent	one hundred	percent, centipede
circum	around	circumnavigate, circumference
mal	bad	malicious, malignant
port	to carry	portable, portfolio
sect/sec	to cut	section
vid/vis	to see	vista, video

Please note: Your goal shouldn't be to memorize these lists or languages-of-origin (although as you'll see later there can be small advantages to knowing which roots come from which family), but rather to begin noticing common roots and training yourself to dissect larger words and break them into smaller chunks of meaning. The preceding tables are by no means an exhaustive list, but you don't need an exhaustive list either. As you'll see throughout this Skillbuilder and the lesson to follow, GRE "vocabulary" is a skillset best learned by doing.

Prefixes In Action

Prefixes can be quite helpful in choosing or eliminating answers to GRE Verbal problems. Consider the examples:

Text Completion – choose one answer

1. The family was relieved to learn that the tumor, feared to be deadly, was diagnosed to be _____.

    (A) malignant

    (B) hyperactive

    (C) benign

    (D) perilous

    (E) circumspect

2. Despite his best efforts, the student's bibliography contained a _____ that forced the professor to question the diligence of his research.

    (A) miskenning

    (B) benevolence

    (C) thermoplasticity

    (D) hydrofracture

    (E) fortification

3. Unlike most animals, which are _____ and therefore stay in the bodies they're born with, many insects – most notably butterflies and moths – go through changes in which they change body forms entirely.

    (A) polychromatic

    (B) monomorphic

    (C) thermonuclear

    (D) biodynamic

    (E) malicious

Sentence Equivalence Drill

Choose the two words with the same meaning as the given term or phrase.

4. Intuition or concern about the future

    (A) Presentiment

    (B) Postscript

    (C) Foreboding

    (D) Sublimation

    (E) Interstitial

    (F) Antithetical

5. Additional, unnecessary, spare

    (A) Malevolent

    (B) Superfluous

    (C) Extraneous

    (D) Vociferous

    (E) Fundamental

    (F) Erroneous

Solutions & Strategic Implications

1. As with any of these problems, you may simply know the vocabulary and be on your way. But in this case if you don't, you know from the context of the sentence that the outcome for the family was "better than expected" or "good." The prefix *ben-* then should be your clue, since that (benevolent, benefit) signifies something good (and the prefix *mal* in "malignant" signifies something bad). The answer, then, is *benign*.

    For the other answer choices, the prefixes can help you eliminate or further scrutinize them. *Hyper* means above or beyond and doesn't seem to help here. *Perilous* brings up "peril" or danger, and therefore isn't applicable. And *circum-* means around, which also doesn't really apply.

2. While *miskenning* isn't a common word in most vocabularies, you're looking for something wrong or in error here, and *mis* should have you strongly considering choice A. Since *bene* in choice B is a good thing, that's not applicable. The problem has nothing to do with heat or water so *thermo* and *hydro* are out of scope. And *forti* means to strengthen, so that isn't applicable here either. Regardless of whether you'd use *miskenning* (which refers to an incorrect citation) in a sentence, its prefix shows that it's the only applicable answer here.

3. Since the main thing we know about most animals is that they don't change body forms, we can infer that they each have exactly one body form. The prefix *mono* means "one," so that should be a leading candidate. For the other choices, *poly* means "multiple" (polychromatic means more than one color), so that doesn't fit here. *Thermo* connotes heat, so that's not applicable. And *mal* again means "bad" so that doesn't fit. The prefix *bio* doesn't have any problem for choice D (it means "life") but since "dynamic" means "changing" that choice doesn't fit either. So *monomorphic* (meaning "exists in one form") is correct.

4. Because we're talking about the future, prefixes like *pre* and *fore* should stand out as particularly relevant. Each of *presentiment* and *foreboding* connotes concern about the future, so A and C are correct. *Post* means "after" so *postscript* does not fit. *Sub* means "under" so *sublimation* isn't relevant. *Inter* means "between" and therefore that doesn't work. And *anti* means "against" so that doesn't work either.

5. Because you know that *super* means "above/beyond," *superfluous* should stand out (meaning "above what's necessary" in this context). And *extraneous* includes the root *extra*, a word you know. (And think about this; "extraordinary" really just means "beyond ordinary." Actually most terms that you know as defining greatness are Orwellianly bland when you really break them down. "Unbelievable" is something you can't believe, just as "incredible" is *in-*, or not, credible or believable. "Remarkable" uses the suffix *–able* to say "it's something you might be compelled to talk about." And "outstanding" just means that it stands out.)

A Note About Suffixes

It's much less likely that you'll be able to use suffixes to help you identify a word's true meaning, but you should be accustomed to seeing them because they often serve to make words seem just a bit longer and therefore "more challenging" on the GRE. For the sheer reason that suffixes add more letters and syllables to words, they can make your job seem more daunting than it is. Consider the Text Completion example:

Having purchased and renovated a beautiful retail space in the heart of the city, the owners of the video rental store expected it to thrive; however, in the digital-download environment that awaited them, the location proved not to be as _____ as originally thought.

    (A) reliable

    (B) amorphous

    (C) detrimental

    (D) advantageous

    (E) unmanageable

Here you should know that you want a term that means "good," but "advantageous" with its four syllables may not be the word you had in mind. The –*eous* just turns the noun "advantage" into an adjective, but as it changes the pronunciation and adds letters and syllables, that may be just enough to turn some test-takers off. If you recognize, though, that –*eous* is just a suffix, that can help you better focus on the "advantage" core of the word and see it for what it really means: the location isn't as good as they thought it would be.

For another example, try:

While few gave the old man's mutterings much credence, when the project did bankrupt the town they had to admit that his warnings had been quite _____.

    (A) indiscernible

    (B) prophetic

    (C) amiable

    (D) fortuitous

    (E) inconsequential

When you look at the blank you should see that you want something that essentially means "his warnings came true." The word *prophetic* uses the suffix *–ic* to mean "like a prophet," so since a prophet says things that come true that's the answer. Note that the other terms are all made longer by suffixes, as well. *Indiscernible* uses both a prefix *(in-)* and a suffix *(-ible)* but just means "not able to be understood" (you can't discern it). *Fortuitous* takes the root "fortune" and turns it into an adjective, but clearly this isn't good fortune! And *inconsequential* uses a prefix *(in-)* and suffix *(-ial)* to show that these warnings were not of consequence; the meaning you want, though, is that they did come true, so this is incorrect. As you'll see later in the lesson, *amible* uses the root *ami-* to mean "lovable" or "likable" and that doesn't work here either.

Roots and Related Words

Breaking down words by prefixes and suffixes can be quite helpful to make long words more manageable and to deconstruct and decipher meanings. But the real payoff is recognizing that in almost every word you don't know on the GRE you have a foothold with something you do know. Sometimes you accomplish that by breaking apart prefixes and suffixes; other times you may recognize a root in the middle of the word; and still other times it's a matter of seeing a word's general similarity to a word you've used or seen before.

For example, what do these pairs of words have in common?

1. Bankruptcy and Interruption

2. Bisect and Intersection

3. Percent and Centipede

4. Synchronize and Chronology

5. Microphone and Symphony

6. Synchronize and Symphony

7. Exothermic and Thermodynamic

8. Breviary and Abbreviate

9. Reclamation and Clamor

10. Agnostic and Cognizant

Solutions:

1. The root *rupt* means to break. *Bankruptcy* is when a bank (or other financial entity) is broken, and *interruption* is when something comes in to break up a continuity.

2. The root *sect* means to cut. *Bisect* is to cut something in two and an *intersection* is when two entities cut into each other.

3. The root *cent* means one hundred. *Percent* means "divided by one hundred" and a *centipede* has 100 legs (well, give or take a few).

4. The root *chron* means time. *Synchronize* means to occur at the same time or rate, and *chronology* is a log of how things occurred in time.

5. The root *phon* means sound. So *microphone* is a small way of amplifying sound, and a *symphony* is a musical composition.

6. You've seen both these words already on this list, but they each involve another root. S*yn-* and *sym-* are roots for "together," so *synchronizing* gets time together and a *symphony* blends sounds together.

7. The root *therm* means heat so *exothermic* refers to an action that releases heat, and *thermodynamic* is a branch of science that deals with temperature and its relation to energy.

8. The root *brev* means short. *Breviary* is an abridgment or brief summary, and *abbreviate* means to shorten or make briefer.

9. The root *clam (or claim)* means to cry out against. *Reclamation* is the act of taking back desert or wasteland for recultivation. *Clamor* is a loud uproar or popular outcry.

10. The root *cogn or gnos* means to know. *Agnostic* refers to someone who does not claim any certainty to any knowledge, belief or doctrine (the prefix *a* means "not, without"). *Cognizant* means having awareness of something.

Using Roots Drill

What do the following lists of words have in common?

1. eloquent, loquacious, colloquial

2. fidelity, confident, infidel

3. principle, primary, primitive

4. sequel, second, consecutive

5. spectator, retrospective, spectacle

6. impede, pedestrian, podium

7. direct, rectify, rectangle

8. extemporaneous, contemporary, tempo

9. untenable, tenacious, tenure

10. equivalent, valiant, valuable

Using Roots Solutions

You should be familiar with all these words already, but it's helpful to see the similarities in them particularly if you haven't before. Each of these groups involves a common root.

1. The root *loq* means "talk." Someone who is *eloquent* is an elegant speaker/writer. Someone who is *loquacious* is extremely talkative. And *colloquial* refers to the way that something is commonly said in conversation, although not formal (also notice that root *co-* at the beginning, meaning "together").

2. The root *fid* means "faith" or "trust." *Fidelity* is loyalty and trust. Someone who is *confident* has faith/trust usually in themselves. And an *infidel* is someone who does not believe or have faith.

3. The root *prim* or *prin* means "first." A *principle* is a moral or academic truth or priority. *Primary* means first. And *primitive* refers to an early stage of the world (and particularly human history).

4. The root *sec/seq* means "follow." *Sequel* is an event that follows another. *Second* is the position that follows first. And *consecutive* refers to items that follow in order.

5. The root *spec* means "see" or "look." A *spectator* is someone who watches or observes. A *retrospective* is something looking back in time. And a *spectacle* is something to be seen.

6. The root *ped/pod* means "foot." To *impede* is to stand in someone's way. A *pedestrian* is someone walking on foot. And a *podium* is something you stand on.

7. The root *rect* means "straighten." *Direct* is straight (a straight line is the direct route). To *rectify* something is to straighten it out. And a *rectangle* has four straight lines meeting at direct angles.

8. The root *tempo* means "time." *Extemporaneous* speaking is when you talk and think it out at the same time (no preparation). *Contemporary* refers to the common time. And *tempo* deals with rate or cadence.

9. The root *ten* means "hold." *Untenable* is a situation that can't be held for very long. *Tenacious* refers to keeping a tight grip or hold on something. And *tenure* refers to how long someone has held a position.

10. The root *val* means "worth" or "strength." *Equivalent* means equal value or worth. *Valiant* means strong or full of value. And *valuable* means carrying a lot of value or worth.

Exceptions to the Rules

Same root, Different meanings

Like anything in life, there are going to be some words that may appear to have similar roots, but different meanings, so it's important to look at the context in which a word is used.

For example, *anima* and *animus* are both Latin roots and have similar meanings, related to soul or spirit. However, *anima (*the feminine form) has the root meaning of air or breath while *animus* (the masculine form) has the root meaning of intellect. *Animus* also has a secondary meaning of passion or wrath, which is where words like "animosity" come from. *Anima* leads to words like animate, inanimate and animism.

Appearances can be deceiving

Pacing is critical on the GRE, but it's important to also be diligent and careful to identify the proper root and not a prefix next to a distinct and different root.

For example, *amorous* and *amorphous* both appear to contain the root *amor* which means "love." However, upon further examination, amorphous is actually comprised of the prefix *a* which means "no" or "lacking" and *morph* which means "shape or form." Therefore, someone who is *amorous* shows desire or love towards something or someone. Something that is *amorphous* has no shape.

Anth and *Anthrop* are another two Greek roots that might be easily confused. *Anth* means "flower," and *anthrop* means "human." Therefore, *amaranth* and *chrysanthemum* are types of flowers, and *anthropology* is the study of humans.

Sometimes Greek & Latin roots overlap, but mean different things. For example, in Greek, *di* means two," but in Latin, *di* means "apart or opposite." Something that is *dichromatic* contains two colors, and a *digression* is something that departs from the primary topic or subject. How do you know which is which? In the case of *dichromatic*, *chrom* is another Greek root that refers to color. You wouldn't see a Greek and Latin root used in conjunction so default to the Greek definition.

Double meanings

Sometimes words will share a Latin root, but be found in words with different meanings. For example, *egregious* and *gregarious* both come from *gregis/grex* which means herd or group. *Egregious* refers to something that is shockingly bad, while *gregarious* people or animals are fond of groups or company.

Another example is *salary* and *saline*. Both come from *sal* which means salt, but *salary* refers to money and *saline* refers to a liquid that contains salt.

Contronyms

Finally, there's an interesting family of words that, depending on context and usage, can have opposite meanings. In these cases, it's even more important to rely on context clues to identify which meaning is intended.

Some examples include:

Discursive: Moving in order from topic to topic or wandering aimlessly through a conversation

Quantum: A large quantity or a tiny part

Refrain: To hold back or stop doing something or a repetition

Splice: To join or separate

Weather: To endure or to wear away

What does this mean for you?

Of the ways to "teach yourself" words on the fly during your GRE, using root words is one of the most powerful (along with process of elimination). But it's not foolproof, so remember that it's a tool but not a magic wand. The more reading you've done to recognize words in context and the more GRE practice you do to augment the list of words you know without having to deconstruct them, the better you'll do on the exam. Truly knowing the words you see will be significantly more powerful than having techniques to figure them out will be.

Roots Post-Test: Challenge!

What do the following words mean? You likely won't be familiar with many of them, so put your deconstructive roots tools to use!

1. Anthropology

2. Antivivisectionist

3. Cutisector

4. Endothermic

5. Hypertrophy

6. Hypodermic

7. Indivisibility

8. Morphology

9. Philogyny

10. Thermophile

Roots Post-Test Solutions

1. *Anthropology* is the study of humans. *Anthro-* as a prefix means "human" and *-ology* as a suffix means a branch of knowledge or subject of study.

2. An *antivivisectionist* is someone who is opposed to the action of dissecting a living body. *Anti-* means "against," *vivi* means "life," *sect* means "cut," and *-ist* means "person who"

3. A *cutisector* is an instrument used for cutting small pieces of skin for grafting or microscopic examination. *Cuti-* means "skin" (think "cuticles") and *sect* means "cut."

4. *Endothermic* refers to a chemical reaction that takes in or absorbs heat. *Endo-* means "inside" or "within," and *therm* means "heat."

5. *Hypertrophy* refers to abnormal enlargement or growth. *Hyper-* means "over" or "above" and *trophy* means "condition of nutrition or growth."

6. *Hypodermic* refers to the introduction of medicine or drugs under the skin. *Hypo-* means "beneath" or "below," and *derm* means "skin."

7. *Indivisibility* is something that is not able to be divided or separated into parts. *In-* means "not," and *divis* means "separated" or "divided."

8. *Morphology* is the branch of biology that studies the form and structure of organisms (or in linguistics, the study of word patterns and formations in a particular language). *Morph-* means "shape" or "form" and *-ology* means "field of study."

9. *Philogyny* is the love of women. *Phil-* means "love" and *-gyn* means "female."

10. A *thermophile* is an organism that can survive in excessive heat. *Thermo-* means "heat" and *phile* means "one who loves or craves."

Related Words

If you haven't studied linguistics or invested a lot of time devouring root word lessons, on the GRE you'll probably end up looking at complicated words and going a little bit more "freestyle" on them, scanning your memory for words that you know that seem similar. That's a good strategy!

For example, take the following words that have appeared on recent GRE exams:

Erroneous

Rectitude

Exculpate

Bridling

Some of them you may know; others you may not. But you almost certainly know some words that are quite similar to these, and those words you do know are keys to unlocking the meaning of these that you might not.

Erroneous: you know the noun error, and you may very well know the verb err (but if you don't that's okay; after all "to err is human…"). So *erroneous* must have something to do with an error; it means "wrong."

Rectitude: you know that "rectify" means "to make right/straight," and that can help you get to the meaning here, "moral virtue or correctness."

Exculpate: you know that "culpable" means "worthy of blame," so since *ex* signals a change of direction, you can intuit that *exculpate* means "show freedom from blame."

Bridling: you know "unbridled enthusiasm" as "enthusiasm that can't be constrained" so if something is bridled, that's the opposite of unbridled. It means constrained.

When you're faced with words that you don't know, think of words that you do know that look similar and then apply the context of the sentence to see if your related word would potentially have some relevance (in which case it could be correct) or no relevance (in which case you'll be able to eliminate it). Consider these examples:

1. The actor took deliberate care to dress smartly and to affect his speech to seem cultured; nevertheless, his comments about world affairs came off not merely transparent but also quite _____.

    (A) vacuous

    (B) poignant

    (C) perceptive

    (D) soporific

    (E) optimistic

2. Despite the jokes and snickers about the small car's size and appearance, the automaker is confident that the new vehicle will nicely _____ the company's fuel-efficient vehicle lineup.

    (A) feature

    (B) mollify

    (C) augment

    (D) obviate

    (E) ascertain

For the following example, select the two answers that provide the sentence with the same, logical meaning.

3. Having been let on to the surprise party when he fielded a phone call from the caterer, he was nonetheless able to _____ shock and disbelief so that he could honor his wife's efforts in planning such an elaborate event.

    (A) feign

    (B) resurrect

    (C) betray

    (D) dissemble

    (E) portend

    (F) divulge

Solutions:

1. If you see the common word "vacuum" similar to *vacuous* you may be able to associate vacuum with "empty" or "nothing in there" and realize that *vacuous* means "showing a lack of intelligence." For the other answers, *poignant* comments would be cutting or piercing to the feelings or emotions. *Perceptive* comments would indicate knowledge of the subject. *Soporific* means boring. And *optimistic* shows a positive view. The only one that fits here is *vacuous*, choice A.

2. Here is where you can thank yourself for reading things that aren't entirely academic or GRE-focused: billboards, ads in the subway, the taglines on TV commercials. If you've seen ads for plastic surgery "augmentation" before, you know that it means to enhance or make larger. So for this new vehicle to add to or enhance the company's lineup, the choice here is *augment*. For the other answers, to *feature* the lineup would be to showcase it or advertise it. To *mollify* something is to appease it or calm it down. To *obviate* is to hinder or prevent. And to *ascertain* is to determine or figure out.

3. You might notice that *dissemble* looks a lot like "resemble" with *dis* as a prefix (meaning that it goes the other way) and see that *dissemble* means "to hide under a false appearance." That makes dissembling surprise essentially the same thing as feigning surprise, and so A and D are the answers.

Create Your Own Related Words

As you've seen thus far, many big words derive quite logically (or at least somewhat logically) from smaller, readily-accessible words. But there are times when either you don't see the logic or that logic just doesn't exist. The good news? You can still employ these same strategies, just by creating those relationships themselves. Your brain works best when it's forming connections, so even if your connections aren't "the right" connections, if they help you remember meanings they're quite powerful. Nearly everyone remembers a silly rhyme or mnemonic device from childhood that helped them pass a test long, long ago – those connections are powerful! So when you encounter unknown words:

- If you can find a similar-looking word that helps you lock in the meaning, use it and cement it in a phrase.

    - For example, "soporific" is a word that has appeared on the GRE. It means boring. And "sopor" looks a fair amount like "sophomore," so just tell yourself "sophomore year was boring…it was soporific" and that can help you cement that meaning.

- If a phrase doesn't jump out at you, try a mental picture.

    - For example, "rustic," "bucolic," and "pastoral" all essentially mean rural. Perhaps you could remember them all together by picturing broccoli (bucolic) growing near a rusty (rustic) fence with someone milking a cow to make pasteurized (pastoral) milk. And if that's a silly picture…all the better – you tend to remember the absurd.

- Don't worry about exact perfection in meaning; meaning is much more important than "the definition" for these words. Remember, it's a multiple choice test so you're not on the hook for choosing the exact correct usage out of the blue; if you know a word is relevant to the proper meaning, the only time you'll ever have to get more specific is if you have multiple candidates for that blank. And the harder the words, the less likely the GRE is to have to add additional difficulty by including several candidates that are all inches away from correctness.

To practice, take a look at this list of words that you might see on the GRE. See if you can create those relationships to help yourself remember them.

Word	Meaning	Relationship
Garrulous	Talkative	
Loquacious	Talkative	
Verbose	Wordy/talkative	
Ephemeral	Short-lasting	
Capricious	Impulsive	
Arbitrary	Impulsive/capricious	
Assuage	To relieve or make less severe	
Mollify	To pacify or appease	
Sedulous	Diligent, persevering	
Mendacious	Prone to lying	
Spurious	Invalid, fake	

These relationships are most powerful when they're personal, but below is a list of some ways the Veritas Prep curriculum authors might remember these words:

Word	Meaning	Possible Relationship
Garrulous	Talkative	Garrolous Gary and Loquacious Larry won't stop talking.
Loquacious	Talkative	
Verbose	Wordy/talkative	Verb is a type of word → wordy
Ephemeral	Short-lasting	I hope these eph-emmheroids are short lasting!
Capricious	Impulsive	Sometimes you want a Capri-sun (or Capri pants), sometimes you don't
Arbitrary	Impulsive/capricious	"Arbitrary and capricious" the legal ruling
Assuage	To relieve or make less severe	Molly gave me a "massuage" to calm me down and relieve my stress
Mollify	To pacify or appease	
Sedulous	Diligent, persevering	*sed* means "thirst" in Spanish, and all that hard work and perseverance makes you thirsty
Mendacious	Prone to lying	You have to mend a lot of relationships when you're mendacious enough to lie all the time
Spurious	Invalid, fake	Football coach Steve Spurrier is a phony!

So those are ten words that you can feel more comfortable with, but the real payoff to this kind of activity comes over time as you encounter words in this lesson and the homework. When you don't know those words, look them up and use root words, related words, and mental pictures to help you build that lasting memory of how they're used.

Skillbuilder Conclusion: Skillbuilding is Ongoing

From this Skillbuilder, you should have become more familiar with:

- Recognizing common roots

- Deconstructing "big" words through prefixes, suffixes, and roots

- Using related words and context to find similar meanings

- Creating your own relationships – however quirky – to remember meanings of unknown words

- Several words that you encountered during the Skillbuilder drills and explanations

And for that last part, becoming more familiar with new words, no single Skillbuilder section will be as effective for you as the process of encountering new words "in the wild" will be. As you continue to prepare for the GRE, you will encounter new words not only in your Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence homework but also in your Reading Comprehension homework. And those words in particular give you two huge advantages: for one, you're seeing those words in context, so you're learning how they're used and not just what they mean; and secondly, when those words appear in the Official GRE Guide you know that they're words that the GRE uses. So devour those words that you see in your homework but don't yet know. Learn them in context, relate them to other words, and put the powers of the Internet to good use. Whenever you Google a vocabulary word, the results will include definitions and synonyms; those synonyms are among your best friends as you prep for the GRE, since they'll help you build your related words lists and they'll help you be prepared for Sentence Equivalence where the correct answers come in pairs.

Do It Yourself: Skillbuilder Homework

To systemize your ongoing vocabulary development, follow the following steps when you encounter a word you're unsure of in your GRE preparation:

1. Pay attention to the context and try to reason out its meaning from that context and from any root or related words you know. You're much more apt to remember words that you've had to think about than those that you've looked up on flash cards!

2. Google the word and pay attention to its definitions and synonyms. Notice that definitions is plural here! As you'll see in the in-class lesson the GRE likes to include answer choices that are correct based on the second or third meaning of a word, not the most obvious one.

3. Once you've Googled the word, click on "News" at the top of the Google results page. This way you'll get to see that word used in context in news stories. Since you're tested on vocabulary *usage* and not vocabulary *definitions*, seeing that word used in a handful of sentences will significantly help prepare you for the way you'll need to use it on the exam.

LESSON

Text Completion & Sentence Equivalence Lesson

These two GRE Verbal question types can – but probably should not – be categorized under the umbrella of "Vocabulary." In each question type, your job will be to fill in one or more blanks with answer choices that consist of words or phrases. As you saw in the Foundations of GRE Logic lesson, having a wider vocabulary will certainly assist you, but you'll likely see your greatest proficiency and score gains from understanding the prompts themselves. GRE Verbal is less a vocabulary test than a strategy and reading comprehension test. In this lesson you will learn:

- How to use root words, related words, and process-of-elimination to handle the appearance of obscure vocabulary

- How the GRE uses convoluted sentences to obscure the meaning that each blank requires

- How the GRE uses less-common meanings of common words to make problems challenging

- How the GRE forces you to complete the blanks out of order to find meanings that match

- How to avoid trap answers with wrong-meaning synonyms in Sentence Equivalence problems

Strong reading comprehension skills and a broad vocabulary will serve you well on these problems, but learning to Think Like the Testmaker will likely provide the most important tools in your GRE Verbal toolkit.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Mission 170

With several of the strategies in this lesson you will see a "Mission 170" designation applied to a more challenging application of the strategy. The GRE Testmaker is adept at creating difficult problems that seem to not fit what students have studied and prepared for. The Mission 170 strategies will show you how to see through these devices on your way to a truly elite GRE Verbal score.

Anatomy of Text Completion Problems

Directions: For each blank select one entry from the corresponding column of choices. Fill all blanks in the way that best completes the text.

1. Despite the warnings of environmental scientists, the waterfront building project has not yet had _____ effect on the riverbed ecosystem.

    (A) an altruistic

    (B) an adverse

    (C) a divergent

    (D) an inconsequential

    (E) an assiduous

2. For most of North American history, eating lobster was considered a sign of (i)_____, but in the mid-1800s wealthy Bostonians developed a taste for the crustacean, earning it a reputation as a (ii)_____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) affluence	(D) rarity
(B) penury	(E) staple
(C) salinity	(F) luxury

Note a few things about these problems. Your job is to fill in each blank with the word or words that express the proper meaning of the sentence or paragraph.

If the prompt has only one blank, you'll see five answer choices.

If the prompt has more than one blank, you'll see three answer choices per blank, and the answer choices will appear in columns corresponding to each blank. Choices A, B, and C apply to blank (i) and choices D, E, and F apply to blank (ii).

Answer choices can take the form of one word or a handful of words.

Text Completion Strategy Outline

1. Focus On Transition Language

    • Beware of subtle meaning changes and negation

    • Working with complex negation

2. The Whole Sentence Matters

    • The Whole Paragraph Matters

3. Fill In the Blanks Yourself

4. Fill In the Easiest Blank First

    • Fill in a blank and see what matches

5. Use Process of Elimination

Over the next several pages and examples, you will learn to attack Text Completion problems strategically. Knowing the vocabulary in the answer choices will certainly help, but you will also learn how to use the structure of problems to your advantage and how to avoid the testmaker's traps.

Throughout these examples, recognize the common GRE theme that the meaning of the sentence (or entire prompt) is often where the problem's difficulty lies, as opposed to the meaning of any particular vocabulary words.

SECTION 1: TEXT COMPLETION

Strategy #1: Focus on Transition Language

The GRE notes that among the primary aims of the GRE Verbal section are to assess your ability to:

- understand relationships among words and among concepts
- understand the meanings of words, sentences, and entire texts
- reason from incomplete data

Central to all of that is your ability to notice and interpret transition signals in writing to infer how one portion of a sentence or paragraph relates to the rest. For example, consider the following setup:

_____
_____. However _____
_____. Therefore, _____.

Although you may not know many of the words within it, you should know the general flow. Whatever precedes the word "however" is not the author's point of the passage. It's used to introduce an idea; then the portion after "however" goes the opposite way, and then the third sentence states the main point.

GRE Text Completion (and Sentence Equivalence) often hinges on your recognition of those transitions, as you'll need to determine how the blank fits in with the meaning of the sentence. Consider this example:

3. For years the _____ of governmental influence enabled businesses to thrive, but recent history shows that the forward-thinking course of action would have been to allow the federal government to maintain regulatory standards in most industries.

    (A) centralization

    (B) elimination

    (C) utilization

    (D) exacerbation

    (E) prescience

LEARNING BY DOING

Structural Language

Up to the comma in this sentence, several answer choices would seem to fit; would businesses have thrived because of the **elimination** of governmental influence? That's certainly possible as less red tape and more blue ocean often signal more opportunity for businesses. Could they have benefited from the **utilization** of government influence? Sure, if they were taking advantage of subsidies, tax abatements, etc. Could they have benefitted from the **prescience** of government influence? Perhaps, if the government had seen far into the future to set up productive new-age business climates.

But that word "but" after the comma shows the importance of the second half of the sentence. The "but" says that the first half disagrees with maintaining regulatory standards, leading directly to the opposite of "maintaining": "elimination." The transition "but" also helps in process of elimination (no pun intended). For example, because the second half of the sentence prescribes centralized government and the first half must disagree with the second, "centralization" can't be correct.

SKILLS MEET STRATEGY

(All) Answers Are Assets

Like you saw in this question, often times several answer choices are plausible fits if you're only looking at a fragment of a sentence. For that reason, you should at least consider how each answer choice might fit before you fall in love with the first choice that seems like it would work. The presence of a second "wait that might work too..." answer is a helpful hint that you haven't found the word or phrase that limits the exact parameters for the correct answer, so before you lock in your choice you should give each answer a chance.

Mission 170: Beware of subtle meaning changes and negation

As Text Completion problems get more difficult, they often do so by shifting from hard, clear transitions ("however" to change direction; "because" to show cause/effect) to more subtle indications of a meaning change. Consider this problem:

4. As parents spend considerably more time and money on travel teams and high-end equipment, many are beginning to _____ the supposed innocence of youth sports.

    (A) appreciate

    (B) ameliorate

    (C) question

    (D) abhor

    (E) subsidize

LESSON

LEARNING BY DOING

Adjectives Matter!

The key word in this sentence is one that you might overlook if you were reading the sentence in a larger article or book. "Supposed" is used to call into question whether youth sports really are innocent. Without that word one might be able to make a strong case for "subsidize" given the first half of the sentence's emphasis on parents' supporting youth sports with time and money. Similarly one could make a good case for "appreciate" as many activities are easier to appreciate when more time is spent upon them. But the word "supposed" shows a shift in meaning; the author doesn't think that youth sports deserve the word "innocent," and so the only logical answer is "question."

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Misdirection

The GRE testmakers know that you're in a hurry when completing each GRE Verbal section. And how do we all speed-read? We cut to the chase, flying past adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases to get to the Who/What/When of each sentence. When you're reading longer Reading Comprehension passages on the GRE or dense books and articles for school, you need to do that. But on Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence, the devil is in the details. Pay particular attention to:

- Adjectives that suggest an author's tone or opinion.
- Answer choices that have opposite meanings, suggesting that a close read is necessary to determine the author's direction.
- Adverbs that take an editorial stance (e.g. "deservedly" and "deliberately").

Every word matters when it comes to the meaning of difficult sentences, so prepare for at least a few sentences on test day to hinge on a carefully-placed word that signals a subtle but substantial meaning shift.

Mission 170: Working with Complex Negation

Another technique that obscures meaning is the use of negation. Some of the most challenging problems involve several back-and-forth volleys of meaning. Following the intent of the sentence and necessary meaning of the correct answer choice requires close concentration. This problem serves as an example:

5. Not unlike most regions of the earth, which undergo periodic shifts in weather and temperature, but contrary to most people's vision of a (i)_____ and invariable star, the sun is not (ii)_____ to seasonal changes affecting its winds and flares.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) static	(D) immune
(B) colossal	(E) susceptible
(C) dynamic	(F) accustomed

LEARNING BY DOING

Don't Underestimate Negation!

This sentence begins with two negatives: "not unlike." And look at the other negations and direction changes in the sentence: *but, contrary to, not…* This sentence is designed to make it difficult to follow the direction of the argument. How can you counteract the negativity of negation? Break it into smaller pieces, using commas and subject-verb combinations to help you do so. For example, in this problem, you might break apart:

Not unlike most regions of the earth (comma)

What does that describe? Since "which undergo…" and "but contrary…" are modifiers, the logical noun for "not unlike the earth" to describe is "the sun." Which really means that the sun is somewhat similar to the earth. So for that second blank, you're looking for a way to show that the sun is similar to the earth. And since you're told that the earth sees changes in weather for the seasons, the sun must have that too, making it "not immune" (choice D) to seasonal changes.

You might also break apart that last section after the comma – the sun is not _____ - because you see that that's the first subject-verb ("the sun is") to appear outside a modifier. That tells you that you need to determine what the sentence is saying about the sun, and that takes you back to the modifiers describing the sun: it's not unlike the earth BUT it goes contrary to the vision of an invariable/unchanging star. Which means it changes and has seasons, much like the earth, again leading you to choice D.

For the first column, look at the word "and" between the blank and "unchanging." Since those two terms need to agree, you want the word "static," which also aligns with the overall juxtaposition in the sentence. The sun is more like the earth than you'd think because it, too, changes.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Negated Blanks

So you've broken down the sentence and realize what you need to say about the sun: it, like the earth, changes with the seasons. When you're looking for the answers to the second blank, you may very well be looking for a similarity to the earth and pick either "accustomed" or "susceptible" to weather changes, because that's like the earth. But wait! The Testmaker put the word "not" right before that blank, meaning that you're really looking for a word in that blank that, when *negated*, is similar to the earth. Beware of that Testmaker technique; a negation right next to the blank can often catch test-takers off guard, so it's important for you to read your answer choice in context of the whole sentence to make sure that it means what you want it to mean.

Strategy #2: The Whole Sentence Matters

Another way the GRE Testmaker makes Text Completion difficult involves a lengthy sentence with the blank very near either the beginning or the end. These sentences allow the author to place pertinent information far enough away from blank that examinees skim past it. Consider this example:

6. Michelangelo was as _____ as he was brilliant: in painting the Sistine Chapel, he meticulously labored for fifteen hours per day for more than six years, although he did so standing up, not laying on his back as legend suggests.

    (A) artistic

    (B) talented

    (C) dogmatic

    (D) assiduous

    (E) intellectual

LEARNING BY DOING

The Whole Sentence Matters

If you try to simply fill in the blank with the complete thought before the colon, nearly all answer choices are in play. You know that Michelangelo was an artist so "artistic" fits. You know that he was talented. You know that he was part of the Renaissance so he was intellectual. It's the portion after the colon that gives away the author's intent with this sentence, which is written to highlight Michelangelo's work ethic (toiled) and attention to detail (meticulously). At that point, only a word that connotes a hard, meticulous worker – in this case, "assiduous" – can be the correct answer.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Selling the Wrong Answer(s)

The authors of the GRE want to reward those who exhibit patience and attention to detail. One way to do that is to include answer choices that fit very well "locally" in a sentence; if you only read the handful of words on either side of the blank, at least one wrong answer choice will look mighty tempting. In this case, for example, seeing "Michelangelo" close to a blank with options like "artistic" (yes, he was an artist) and "talented" (and arguably the most talented of all time) can get you to fixate on those choices without reading further.

Knowing this, you can be strategically patient, which means

- Read the entire sentence, knowing that often the controlling word or phrase for a blank is far away from the blank itself.

- If an answer choice jumps out at you before you've read the entire prompt, be sure to read the entire sentence, including your word choice, to ensure that it makes sense in the larger context.

- If you're debating between two answer choices that seem to have similar meanings, search the area far from the blank to see if you can find clues (changes of direction, etc.) to help you with that decision.

- If you have time at the end of the section, go back to double-check your choices in context.

Mission 170: The Whole Paragraph Matters

On some questions, the prompt includes more than one sentence. In those cases, the same logic applies: the GRE Testmaker likes to hide pertinent information far away from the blank. This problem serves as an example:

7. The candidate's staunch position reflects something more nefarious than strong ideological beliefs. In brazenly criticizing opponents of organized labor and steadfastly championing the causes of workers and unions, she can only be described as unabashedly _____ with regard to labor rights.

    (A) idealistic

    (B) sympathetic

    (C) agnostic

    (D) opportunistic

    (E) didactic

LESSON

LEARNING BY DOING

Far From The Blank = Close To The Meaning

Reading the second sentence alone, you can use several answer choices to fill in the blank. "Idealistic" certainly seems in play; "sympathetic" might also work, since the candidate is showing favoritism toward labor. But the first sentence shows that the candidate's position goes beyond ideological beliefs (eliminating A). Which answer choice takes that idealism out of it and shows something "more nefarious" (evil, immoral)? "Opportunistic" demonstrates that the candidate might simply be using the cause for political gain, and therefore is correct.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Why Even Have A Second Sentence?

Look closely at this example: there is only one blank but there are two sentences. Why would the author of this problem spend her time writing more than she needs to? Sure, it could be that she's paid by the word or by the hour, but in almost all cases in which a Text Completion problem includes more sentences than blanks, the extra sentence matters. Knowing that many examinees will find their eyes drawn immediately to the blank and work outward from there, the Testmaker can "hide" important information in a seemingly-innocent sentence. So when you see a sentence without a blank, pay attention to its meaning, because it is almost certainly important.

Strategy #3: Fill in the Blanks Yourself

One central theme on Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence problems is that the GRE seldom uses the word that you would. Sometimes the words used in correct answers are obscure, and other times their difficulty comes from a less-common usage of a familiar word. It can often be difficult to immediately match the test's word with the blank, but it's markedly easier to do so when you already have a meaning in mind.

For example, a sentence might read:

In order to continue appealing to the whims of a changing electorate, some candidates realize that they need to back away from strong beliefs in favor of those that are more _____.

But the correct answer choice might not jump off the screen at you:

    (A) **plastic**

    (B) **unorthodox**

    (C) **didactic**

    (D) **intransigent**

    (E) **illiberal**

As such, it's helpful to go into each blank with an idea of what you want the word to mean. Then you can hold up each answer choice to that light; does it mean approximately what you want it to? In this case, you know that candidates need to move away from strong beliefs toward something else. What words may come to mind? Perhaps:

- Flexible
- Pliable
- Malleable

Those words are nowhere to be found in the answer choices, but when you ask yourself, "Can any of the answer choices mean something like flexible/pliable/malleable?" you may consider the lesser-used meaning of "plastic": adapting easily, able to be molded. Therefore, the answer is A, even if upon first glance that was never going to be a word you would have picked.

So your strategy? Fill in the blank with your own meaning so that you have a good idea of what kind of word you're looking for. That will ensure that you're paying attention to the meaning of the sentence, and that you have a standard against which to grade the answer choices that do appear. As practice, consider this example:

LESSON

8. Well known as one of the world's wealthiest people and most-celebrated financiers, Warren Buffet is just as renowned for being _____, paying himself a modest salary from his Berkshire Hathaway empire and living in the same central Omaha home he purchased over 50 years ago.

   (A) loyal

   (B) provident

   (C) honorable

   (D) prosperous

   (E) philanthropic

LESSON

LEARNING BY DOING

Matching Words To Meanings

In this problem, you should have a good sense of the kind of word you need in that blank, particularly if you've been using good strategy from earlier in the lesson. When you read the entire sentence, you know that the point is to juxtapose Buffett's incredible wealth with his modest salary and home. So you want something in that blank that suggests frugality or caution.

But you might not find exactly that word that you want. What's your strategy? Stick to your meaning. Loyal doesn't mean "frugal." Honorable is certainly a word that people could use to describe Buffet, but it doesn't connect directly to the examples given after: owning the same home for 50 years and paying himself a modest salary. Prosperous isn't necessarily the opposite of "frugal" but it certainly connotes an abundance of money and doesn't fit with the juxtaposition you're looking for. As you examine the answer choices, you should find that although "provident" may not scream "cheap!" at you, it's the only one that shares that meaning. B is the correct answer.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Look Beyond The First Definition

A common way for people to study for the GRE or SAT "vocab" is to make flashcards with each word and definition and drill into their minds "X means Y" over and over. The limitation? When you look at a dictionary, you'll see that many words have several definitions, mostly related but some just tangential enough to not jump to mind if you've only memorized one definition. For example, the correct answer to this problem "provident" carries several definitions, including:

- Cautious
- Showing foresight
- Providing for the future
- Frugal/thrifty
- (plus the archaic/outdated meaning related to religion, which might come to mind because of phrases like "divine providence")

And while you might want to memorize provident as "cautious" or "practical" based on earlier definitions, by the time you get to the 4th definition it lines up perfectly with the target word "frugal" you had in mind. As you examine words as answer choices, don't forget to consider related meanings; and as you study, don't limit your understanding of a word simply to a one-word word association. Think of context and related words to have a better understanding of its potential usage.

Strategy #4: Fill In The Easiest Blank First

On problems with more than one blank, some common themes include:

- The last blank is often easier to fill in than the first

- The meaning of the only possible answer to one blank dictates the answers to the other blanks

Because you read left to right, if the first blank is the easiest or the lynchpin to the rest of the sentence, you'll naturally do that first. But to make problems slightly more difficult, the GRE Testmaker will often set up a sentence so that the second or third blank is the best one to complete first. So recognize that, especially if the first blank doesn't jump off the screen at you, you can always (and should often) scan for an easier blank to fill and do that first.

Consider this example:

9. Zebra mussels are widely considered a (i)_____ throughout the Great Lakes; while they feed (ii)_____ on algae, helping to clean water streams, they frequently clog the intake pipes of nuclear plants, creating (iii)_____ situations.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
(A) benefit	(D) obsequiously	(G) favorable
(B) nuisance	(E) deliberately	(H) benign
(C) convenience	(F) voraciously	(I) hazardous

LEARNING BY DOING

Some Blanks Are Easier Than Others

In this problem, the last blank should be convenient to fill in. The word "but" in the middle of the sentence shows the transition from "helping to clean water streams" to the more notable overall meaning of the sentence. If the transition is to the opposite of a benefit/help, it must mean that these mussels create hazardous situations. That would then mean that the first blank needs to be "nuisance," and then you can fill in the second as "voraciously."

SKILLS MEET STRATEGY
Be Patient

Throughout the GRE, the concept of "leaving something blank" may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable to you. Whether you're flagging a challenging Quantitative Reasoning problem to return to if/when you have time or you're unable to fill in Blank (i) of a Text Completion problem without first dealing with Blank (ii) or Blank (iii), good GRE strategy often requires you to be patient. Frequently on Text Completion problems, the first blank will seem to have multiple potential meanings until you get to the next (or last) blank and start filling in words and meaning there. Don't let that bother you: if you cannot get a handle on Blank (i), there's a very high likelihood that it's just not possible…yet. Find the blank with the clearest decision and then retry the rest of the problem with that extra information at your disposal.

Mission 170: Fill In a Blank and See What Matches

Some multi-blank problems are constructed so that no one blank is particularly easy and so that each might seem to have multiple correct answers. In these cases you need to look for three answers that fit together to form a logical meaning. When that happens, or when you just can't seem to get started, it's helpful to fill in one of the blanks with one of the answer choices and see how well you can fit the other answers to it. Think of it as "trying an answer on for size."

When doing this, your process should be to:

1. Eliminate any answers that you know to be incorrect.

2. Choose a plausible answer choice from a blank that only has two answers remaining.

3. See if you can find answers in the other blanks that would fit well with that answer. If you can, that's your set of answers; if you cannot, you can eliminate that answer you chose in step 2 and focus on the other answer from that blank.

To practice, consider this example:

10. Because of the author's (i)_____, many readers consider his latest work (ii)_____ but, in reality, as many knowledgeable critics point out, the piece(iii)_____.

Blank (i)	*Blank (ii)*	*Blank (iii)*
(A) eloquence	(D) inaccessible	(G) lacks coherence and lucidity
(B) prejudice	(E) poignant	(H) has no discernible conclusion
(C) verbosity	(F) polarizing	(I) is the most succinct on the subject

LESSON

LEARNING BY DOING

When Each Blank Has Multiple Answers, Find The Only Combination

Looking at only one blank at a time here, each blank has multiple plausible answers. The author could write with eloquence, verbosity, or (sadly) prejudice. Readers could find an author's work inaccessible, poignant, or polarizing. And an author's piece could lack coherence, lack a conclusion, or be quite succinct. On a problem like this, there isn't any one "easy" blank to work with. So what can you do? Just put a word in one of the blanks and see if you can find companion words in the other blanks.

For the first two blanks, "pairs" emerge that seem to go together. "Because of the author's *eloquence*, many readers consider his latest work *poignant*…" (the author writes beautifully, so people think he has a great point). "Because of the author's *prejudice*, many readers consider his latest work *polarizing*…" (the author is biased, so people will either vehemently agree or vehemently disagree) "Because of the author's *verbosity*, many readers consider his latest work *inaccessible*…" (He uses so many words that it's hard to follow and understand)

But if you tried "eloquence" and "poignant," there is no entry for Blank (iii) that would say that the work was the opposite of poignant. Similarly if you tried "prejudice" and "polarizing," there's no option that says "not polarizing." The only option for Blank (iii) that works with an existing pair is "is the most succinct…" which goes the opposite of "verbose" and "inaccessible." Sure, it seems wordy and therefore hard to follow, but it's the most concise option if you want to understand the subject.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
When each option is several words long...

One clue that you may have to fill in a blank and see what matches is the appearance of 4+ words in each answer choice for a particular column. While many problems feature just one word per choice, it's not uncommon for the GRE to include 6 or 7 words in answer choices. Why would they do that? Generally because they're offering you several different interpretations of that sentence. And they do that so that you have to try out multiple combinations to see what a logical meaning of the sentence would be when each blank is full. So if you see several words in each choice for a blank, be prepared to use some trial-and-error to determine the group of choices that forms a logical meaning.

Because this strategy is so critical on the most challenging Text Completion problems, try this problem for additional practice:

11. (i)_____ within Capitol circles for her shrewd navigation of the political landscape, the congresswoman is nonetheless (ii)_____ in her district's local media coverage because she (iii)_____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
(A) Revered	(D) overlooked	(G) affords the small community a large voice
(B) Despised	(E) lionized	(H) has limited authority over foreign affairs
(C) Known	(F) famous	(I) was accused of embezzling campaign funds

LEARNING BY DOING

Finding The Correct Combination

This problem contains multiple possible pairs for the first two blanks. The congresswoman certainly could be *revered* within Capitol circles, *despised* within them, or obviously *known* within them. And she could be *revered* or *known* in Capitol circles but *overlooked* at home. Or she could be *despised* in Capitol circles but *lionized* at home. But when you hold those pairs up to the third blank, you should see that there really isn't an option for why she would be overlooked at home. Affording the small community a large voice isn't a reason she would be overlooked. And having limited authority over foreign affairs isn't a reason that she would be overlooked specifically in her local media. And of course if she embezzled campaign funds, that's a reason that would get her more media exposure, not less. "was accused…" and "famous" then work together, but those don't have a pair in Blank (i).

The only combination that works here is that she is despised in the Capitol but lionized back home because she gives the community a large voice. And you can get there by using trial-and-error, playing with different combinations of two blanks until you find one that fits with a third. The correct answers are B, E, and G.

SKILLS MEET STRATEGY
Subtlety In Meaning

Because of the word "nonetheless" here, you should be looking for a juxtaposition between how the candidate is perceived in the Capitol and how she is perceived in her local media. One combination that seems to work is that she's revered in Capitol circles because she navigates the political landscape so well, but that she's famous back home not for that navigation but because of a local scandal, that she embezzled campaign funds.

This is where those little words matter: the word "because" before that third blank is critical to the meaning. The sentence doesn't say that "group X knows her for shrewd navigation but group Y knows her for something else" the way it could if that word "because" were changed to "for." The way it is written, it cannot say that she's famous/known for two different things, but rather that blanks (i) and (ii) need to have opposing meanings, and blank (iii) is the reason for that.

Strategy #5: Use Process of Elimination

While the GRE Verbal isn't designed to **test** obscure vocabulary, it is a test that on some questions will **include** obscure vocabulary. And while you can certainly improve your vocabulary over time, on those handful of problems with 1-2 words that you currently do not know, it's more likely that you will be able to arrive at the correct answer by process of elimination. If the words you do know do not meet the meaning, then eliminate them and narrow down your choices.

For example, if a problem were to include the answer choices:

    (A) irrelevant

    (B) obscure

    (C) sartorial

    (D) frivolous

    (E) unnecessary

You have a head start already. Even if you don't know that "sartorial" means "pertaining to tailoring, clothes, or style of dress," (and, yes, the GRE has included "sartorial" in a correct answer before), you can look at the fact that "irrelevant," "frivolous" and "unnecessary" mean essentially the same thing in context, so you have a leg up toward eliminating those. And you should know quite well what "obscure" means, so your down-to-two decision doesn't have to hinge on your knowledge of an obscure word like "sartorial" – it really comes down to your knowledge of "obscure."

Problems with difficult vocabulary are best solved by a combination of process-of-elimination and vocabulary knowledge. And since there are hundreds (if not thousands) of obscure words that the GRE could include, process-of-elimination will be your most reliable skill on those problems. So as you study:

1.   Practice process-of-elimination when you see challenging words in the answer choices.

2.   Look up the words you don't know once you've gone through process-of-elimination so that you add to your bank of vocabulary knowledge.

LESSON

You can practice with the following:

12. That the (i) _____ speaker had a penchant for rhetoric at the podium was understandable: he grew up the son of a pastor and spent many Sundays as a young adult preaching the gospel himself. But in his new career as an oncology lecturer he should also have adopted a more (ii)_____ use of words to fit his new role. With subject matter requiring more concentration and attention to detail, his (iii) _____ had a tendency to leave his conference audiences confused and exhausted.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
(A) succinct	(D) ardent	(G) loquaciousness
(B) garrulous	(E) diffident	(H) concision
(C) monotonous	(F) economical	(I) derisiveness

LEARNING BY DOING

Process of Elimination

Two of the three correct words – "garrulous" and "loquaciousness" – may not be common parts of your own vocabulary. But with a good understanding of the other options for each blank you may not need to know them. With the overall meaning of the passage suggesting that a too-talkative speaker is confusing audiences when he could get by with fewer words, you should see that "succinct" is incorrect for blank (i). And with the phrase "penchant for rhetoric" in that initial sentence, "monotonous" doesn't fit either. So "garrulous" (which means verbose/talkative) has to be correct in that first blank. And for the third, "concision" would also mean that he used few words, cannot be correct under the same logic. And "derisiveness" is also out of scope of the sentence; that may offend audiences, but not necessarily confuse them.

Economical is a word you should know, and although this passage doesn't talk about money per se, "economical" can also be used to mean "efficient" with non-monetary items. So that's the correct answer to the middle blank.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER

Hiding the Right Answer

One reason that people miss this problem is that they're intent on answering the blanks in 1-2-3 order. In that case, they may be at a 1/2 or 1/3 choice on the first blank. But those who defer that decision until the second blank have an advantage. Ardent (passionate) and diffident (timid) simply don't work for that blank, so with economical as the only plausible choice you now have an even better understanding of the meaning of the passage: the speaker should have used fewer words. If you've seen that, that directly contradicts "succinct" in blank one and "concision" in blank three, helping you to proceed even more quickly with process of elimination.

SKILLBUILDER

Learning Vocabulary By Doing

This problem highlights two useful strategies for learning vocabulary as you study.

1. Look up words (or just refer to the written solutions) as you come across them in practice problems. If you didn't recognize garrulous, ardent, diffident, or loquaciousness when you first saw this problem, you now have a real-time opportunity to find out more about them. And since "garrulous" and "loquaciousness" were correct answers, you have also now seen them used properly in a sentence so you have a better way to assign them meaning.

2. Learn words in groups. In this problem, garrulous and loquaciousness had to have a similar meaning. Since you now know that they both relate closely to "talkative" you can link those words together and have a leg up particularly if you see them in a Sentence Equivalence problem where you need to identify synonyms.

LESSON

SECTION 2: SENTENCE EQUIVALENCE

Anatomy of a Sentence Equivalence Problem

Directions: Select the two answer choices that, when used to complete the sentence, fit the meaning of the sentence as a whole and produce completed sentences that are alike in meaning.

13. The nebular hypothesis, however well it explains the formation of the sun, is _____ in its ability to account for the formation of several planets with differing chemical and physical properties, and thus needs to be seriously qualified.

   (A) imperative

   (B) deficient

   (C) negligent

   (D) innovative

   (E) lacking

   (F) revolutionary

With Sentence Equivalence problems, you will always find one blank and six answer choices. Your job is to select the two choices that provide:

   • The same meaning

   • A logical meaning

So watch out for choices that provide the same meaning, but an illogical one, or a single choice that provides the meaning that you want but that doesn't have a proper match. While you do so, pay particular attention to these themes, which will be covered during this lesson:

   1. Focus on transition language, and be careful with subtle shifts in meaning

   2. Fill in the blank yourself

   3. Synonymous words don't always guarantee synonymous sentences

   4. Use process of elimination

Notice that these strategies have lots of overlap with the strategies you should use on Text Completion problems. The question types are different and will appear in distinct groupings on the test, but the "game" is largely the same and you will find value in using the same type of strategic thinking on each type of problem.

Strategy #1: Focus on Transitional language

14. While the cost of migrating to more automated piloting and air traffic control systems is substantial, the eventual cost savings are large enough that the up-front expenditures are not as _____ as opponents claim.

    (A) fiscal

    (B) imprudent

    (C) reasonable

    (D) excessive

    (E) massive

    (F) paltry

LEARNING BY DOING

Follow the Transitions and Negations

Because this sentence starts with the word "While…" in a modifier, you should immediately start looking for the portion after the comma to contradict the first half of the sentence. The first half talks about the substantial cost of the project, so in the second half you want two words that show that the cost is justified, or that in context it's not as high as it seems.

That should lead you to choices B, D, and E, where the real work begins. Because "imprudent" connotes "too much money" and "excessive" suggests the same, those are the correct answers, B and D. Both of them show that while the price is high, it's not too high given the large costs savings that will result from them.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Meaning Differences Can Be Subtle

If you chose E in this problem, you're not alone. "Massive" seems to work: the first half of the sentence says "the cost is high!" so with the transition you want to show something different, such as "but it's not really that high." But pay attention to what the portion after the comma is saying: it's conceding that the costs are high, but saying that in context of the even-larger cost savings to come the investment is a wise one. That's not the same as "see, the costs aren't that massive" (the cost still is a very large one). Choices B and D hit that subtle meaning well: the cost is indeed big, but it's not excessive/imprudent/unreasonable if you look at the big picture.

Strategy #2: Fill In The Blanks Yourself

With many Sentence Equivalence sentences, you'd prefer to not have answer choices at all; if you could simply fill in the blank with two words of your own that supply the same, logical meaning, it would be a fairly simple task. The answer choices can be what make things difficult, particularly if:

- More than two answer choices seem to fit

- The answer choices contain vocabulary that you don't know or don't know well

To combat these problems, it's helpful to think of what type of word or meaning you'd want the sentence to have. That way you can look for words that match or seem related to your word, and you can eliminate choices that you know are nowhere near your meaning. Consider the example:

15. Moving slowly and typically covered in algae, sloths are perceived to be so lethargic that they have become synonymous with laziness. In truth, their perceived _____ is a defense mechanism, their slow movements imperceptible to the eyes of predators.

    (A) indolence

    (B) dynamism

    (C) languor

    (D) dissent

    (E) vivacity

    (F) neutrality

LESSON

LEARNING BY DOING

Four Wrongs Make a Right

In this problem, you should see somewhat quickly that you're looking for two synonyms for "laziness." The prompt tells you that sloths "are perceived to be" (meaning that the author probably thinks otherwise) lethargic/lazy, but follows that with the phrase "in truth." That phrase tells you that the main point is going to go in the other direction; the purpose of the sentence is to show that sloths' perceived laziness has a real purpose. So the word that you want in that blank is something that means "laziness." And here's where there are multiple ways to get to your goal: anywhere you see a synonym for "laziness" you should pick it, and anywhere you see a word that doesn't mean "laziness" you can eliminate it.

Many won't recognize at least one of "indolence" and "languor" as synonyms for laziness. If that's you, then you should still be able to get rid of some words that you do know and that definitely don't mean "laziness." Dynamism is the opposite of laziness. Vivacity as the prefix *viva* which ought to signify "full of life" (think of the related word "vivid" or the root *viv-* in "Viva Las Vegas" or the Q-Tip song *Vivrant Thing*). Dissent deals with disagreement. And while "neutral" may mean "not moving," neutrality isn't the same thing as laziness. Which should bring you to the correct answers, indolence and languor, A and C.

SKILLS MEETS STRATEGY
Learning Vocabulary As You Go

Even if you didn't know languor or indolence before, from the context of this question you've now seen what they mean and you have synonyms and related words to link them to: laziness, sloth, and lethargic, all from the prompt itself. This is a helpful device – because you had to think about these words to complete the problem and because you can now remember those words as a set, you now have a real-world, contextual way to organize that family of words for use in future problems. Vocabulary is best learned by doing, not by simply memorizing.

Strategy #3: Use Process of Elimination

While your parents and teachers likely taught you over and over again that "two wrongs don't make a right," in GRE Sentence Equivalence four wrongs do! Particularly when a few vocabulary words are challenging for you, it can be quite helpful to realize that you *may not know* one of the correct words, but you can always *eliminate the words that you do know* that don't fit. Consider the example:

16. Knowing that his political rivals had enough embarrassing evidence to end his career, the senator had a choice to make: the _____ of publicly resigning from his post or the anguish of acquiescing to his rivals' newfound leverage.

    (A) ignominy

    (B) prospect

    (C) misfortune

    (D) indignity

    (E) immodesty

    (F) indecency

LEARNING BY DOING

Eliminate Words You Know To End Up With Correct Answers You Don't

When the GRE uses a challenging vocabulary word in an answer choice, it often does so in ways that allow you to either ignore it because you've found two correct answers without it or to arrive at it as the correct answer because you've eliminated four others. Here you should know that you need something negative (the senator is choosing between two negative fates) and you should be able to intuit that it's something embarrassing or shameful. And so you can scan for words that won't fit that. "Prospect" is a word to be careful of; it's certainly not the word you'd pick and doesn't pair wonderfully with "anguish" but it's not inherently wrong. It's just an innocuous placeholder of a word in this context. But since there's no logical pair for it (notice that the other words all include negative prefixes) you can eliminate it not because it doesn't fit, but because it won't match with another answer. "Misfortune" is incorrect, again, because it doesn't have a direct pair but also because it doesn't quite fit the meaning. Look at the next word, "indignity." That carries a strong meaning – the senator would be humiliated to have to resign, and that's on par with the anguish of having to stick around as the puppet of his rivals. "Misfortune" doesn't carry that same type of meaning, so you can eliminate C and choose D as one of your two answers.

From there you may need to break apart meanings. "Immodest" would mean "not modest" and that's not what's going on here; the senator would be humiliated, not boastful, so you can eliminate E. And "indecency" has related words you may know ("indecent exposure" as one related term). Indecency is less about embarrassment pointing inward and more about disrespect pointing outward, so F doesn't fit and you can then hold up your knowledge (or lack) on choice A, "ignominy." Ignominy actually does mean "public shame or disgrace" so it's correct when paired with "indignity" but even if you didn't know that definition outright, you can use process of elimination to help you arrive there. Choices A and D are correct.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Rewarding Good Strategy

As you walk away from this problem, don't let "ignominy means public shame or embarrassment" be your primary takeaway! While augmenting your vocabulary can only help your GRE Verbal score, keep in mind that the GRE has been careful to call it the *Verbal Reasoning* section for a reason: the GRE Testmakers want to reward critical thinking skills and not just mere memorization. When challenging vocabulary appears on Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence problems, way more often than not the question lends itself to being "hacked" with a combination of an above-average (but not elite) vocabulary and good strategy. When vocabulary is daunting, the Testmaker is usually assessing your ability to use root and related words and to employ Process of Elimination.

Strategy #4: Beware – Synonymous Words Don't Guarantee Synonymous Sentences!

Nearly always the two correct answer choices will be synonyms. However, not all synonyms will be correct answer choices! Context is ever-important, another reason that this isn't a "vocabulary" section of the GRE and is instead a verbal reasoning section. Knowing that many students will try to save time by skimming the answer choices for synonyms, the authors of the GRE will frequently:

- Include multiple sets of synonyms in the answer choices

- Include words that are synonyms in many uses but would not be synonyms in the context of the given sentence

- Structure the two correct answers so that they're synonymous in the context of the prompt even if they don't appear at first to be synonyms

For example, consider the answer choices:

(A) solution

(B) mixture

(C) explanation

(D) extension

(E) settlement

(F) attenuation

If you're grouping the words, which appear closest to being synonyms?

In chemistry, a solution and a mixture seem fairly synonymous. In the context of GRE practice problems, a solution and an explanation are the same thing. So if you're just looking for synonyms out of context, you have your work cut out for you. The context is critical, so look at the prompt:

17. As the city's activities ground to a halt because of an impasse in the union's negotiations with management, all eyes turned to the president in the hopes that he would create an equitable _____ to the weeks-old transit strike.

    (A) solution

    (B) mixture

    (C) explanation

    (D) extension

    (E) settlement

    (F) attenuation

Here you should see that the word you really want is something akin to "resolution" or "outcome." In this case, "settlement" provides the equivalent meaning to "solution" making A and E the correct answers, even if at a first glance you had different synonyms for A.

For practice with this concept, try the following problem:

18. In economic theory, "rational decision makers" do not always behave rationally: even though they are supposed to strictly follow cost-benefit analysis, they often let emotions or social pressures influence their purchases for essential items, such as when a father chooses a flashy and impractical sports car as the primary family vehicle instead of a similarly priced, but _____ minivan.

(A) economical

(B) utilitarian

(C) austere

(D) thrifty

(E) functional

(F) spartan

LEARNING BY DOING

Pairs Are Sometimes Only Half The Battle

On this problem, just scanning the answer choices should show you some related words that could go nicely together. Economical and thrifty go together (as they often do with brand names designed to show an inexpensive option). Spartan and austere are similarly associated with cost-cutting (and Greece, home to the Spartans and undergoing austerity measures). And utilitarian and functional mean the same thing. So you'll need to dig deeper on the sentence's true meaning to ensure that you select appropriate answers.

As is common with Sentence Equivalence and Text Completion, a few small words that are easy to read past will make all the difference here. Look at the phrase "similarly priced" – by saying "similarly priced" the sentence takes cost-cutting out of the meaning here. The minivan is no longer thrifty or economical in comparison with the sports car if they both cost the same. But the opposites, at least in the automotive world, of "flashy and impractical" are utilitarian and functional, so B and E must be the correct answers.

THINK LIKE THE TESTMAKER
Mental Inertia

One element that makes this problem just a bit more difficult than it might otherwise be is the subject matter itself. You know that sports cars tend to be expensive (in addition to flashy and perhaps "impractical," the words actually provided) and that minivans are generally more affordable. And you may also – particularly as you consider graduate school – think about the costs associated with this father's children (how will you ever afford college if you blow your money on a Corvette?). So money might be on your mind just given the topic. Make sure that you pay close attention to subtle pieces of language that might slightly shift the meaning of the sentence away from a meaning that might come to mind as you attack a problem like this. By defining the sports car as "impractical" and "flashy" and by noting that the minivan is "similarly priced," the problem carefully takes frugality off the table, but the Testmaker knows that it's likely to stay on your mind.

Mission 170: Your Preferred Meaning May Not Have a Match

Sentence Equivalence problems require the two correct answer choices to provide the same meaning to the overall sentence. One Testmaker technique this allows for is the inclusion of a single, perfect choice that has no match. For example, Bronx-based baseball fans might encounter a problem like:

The New York Yankees _____.

And enthusiastically scan the answer choices for synonyms that mean "rule!". But even if one of those choices is there, if you cannot find a match you may have to consider an alternate meaning:

(A) rule

(B) lost

(C) triumphed

(D) overpay aging sluggers

(E) were defeated

(F) stink

Here New Yorkers and Bostonians could spend all day debating the merits of several incorrect answer choices, but the only two that provide the same meaning are B and E. The lesson? Your search for the perfect meaning is secondary to the search for two identical and logical meanings. (So, baseball fans, on Sentence Equivalence problems you're rooting for the "victorious Twins.")

Consider a more GRE-relevant example:

19. Motivated chiefly by a need for _____, the CEO announced a charitable program through which the company would donate an equal item to charity for each item purchased at full price.

(A) altruism

(B) redemption

(C) exposure

(D) gratitude

(E) faith

(F) publicity

LESSON

LEARNING BY DOING

It Takes Two To Make A Sentence Equivalence Problem Right

Largely because this sentence doesn't include a hard transition or context clue, it can allow for multiple meanings as to the intent of the CEO. The program itself is charitable, so "altruism" could easily fit. But there isn't a direct synonym for altruism. Perhaps you could make a case for "redemption" particularly if the CEO or the company had been maligned previously and wanted to redeem its image. But there's no direct complement for that. So even if you're not cynical about the intentions of this business, you have to pick the only two that provide the same (cynical) meaning; "exposure" and "publicity" mean the same thing, and since they're both logical motivations for a CEO, they're the correct answers.

SKILLS MEET STRATEGY
Be Flexible (or Pliable, or Plastic)

Of all the skills necessary for success on Sentence Equivalence and Text Completion, the one that surprises examinees the most is that of flexibility. Whether it's "fill in a blank and see what matches" on Text Completion or "you won't find a match for your perfect word" on Sentence Equivalence or that third or fourth meaning of a common word on either type, the GRE is designed to reward those who are able to remain calm and flexible when they don't immediately see what they're looking for. If/when things look grim on these problems on test day, heed the advice of the Rolling Stones: you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes (and remain calm and flexible) you might just find that you get the answer choices you need.

Text Completion & Sentence Equivalence Summary

As you've noticed throughout this lesson, there is a lot of overlap between these two question types. Strategically, you'll always:

- Pay attention to transition language
- Consider the meaning of the entire sentence
- Use process of elimination
- Create your own word/mantra to fill in the blank

And as you've also noticed throughout this lesson, after each problem, these are question types that are best mastered through "Learning By Doing." While you complete practice problems in the Official GRE Verbal Reasoning book, you'll:

- Practice strategies from this lesson
- Develop a feel for the GRE's style of problems and prompts
- Encounter vocabulary words that you need to learn or master

Remember, while GRE Verbal is colloquially considered a "vocab test" in reality it is primarily testing your reading comprehension skills pertaining to meaning and usage of words in context. Your most valuable study habits will include practice (over memorization), reading with attention to word usage, and the repetition of these core strategies.

LESSON

SOLUTIONS TO LESSON PROBLEMS

1. B
2. B, F
3. B
4. C
5. A, D
6. D
7. D
8. B
9. B, F, I
10. C, D, I
11. B, E, G
12. B, F, G
13. B, E
14. B, D
15. A, C
16. A, D
17. A, E
18. B, E
19. C, F