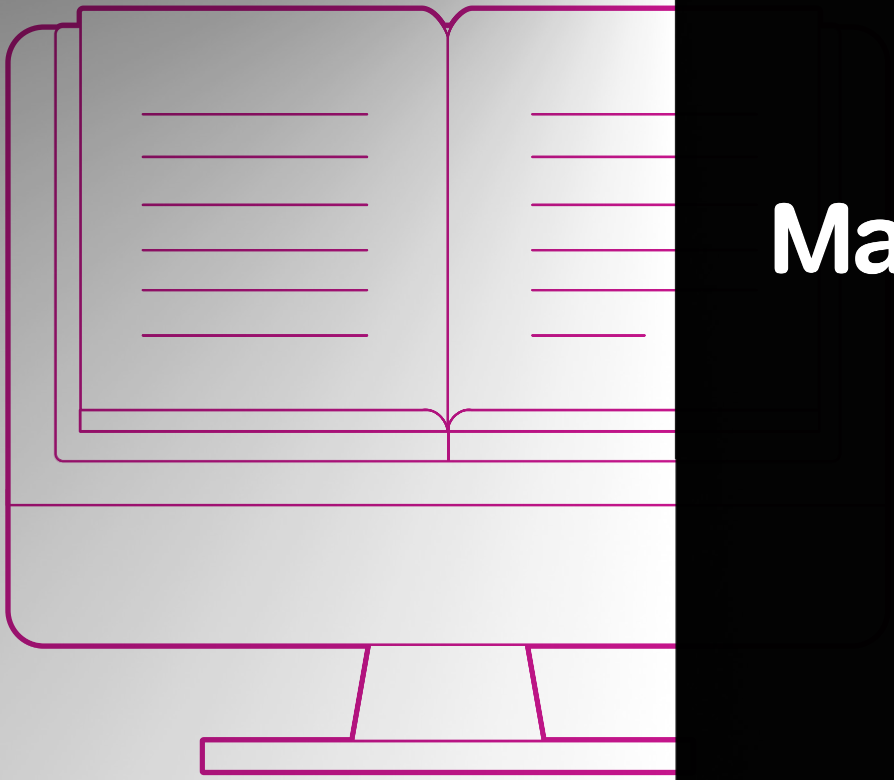

Magoosh

Complete Guide to GRE Vocabulary

Assorted words and definitions
from a GRE expert compiled for
your entertainment and edification.

updated 9/1/15

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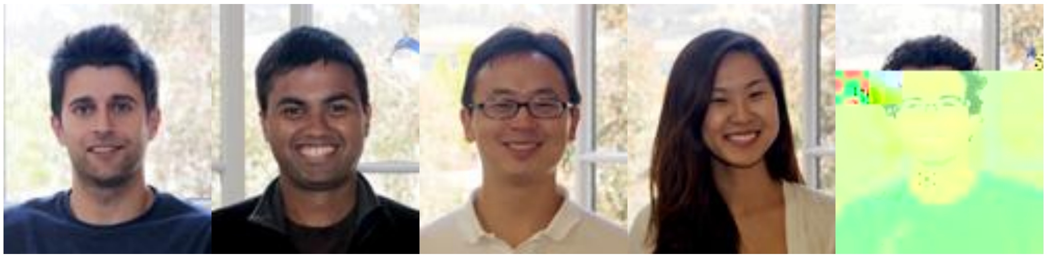
Introduction

This eBook is a compilation of the most popular Revised GRE vocabulary word list posts from the Magoosh GRE blog. We've found that students learn vocabulary best when the words are presented in a fun, creative, and intelligent way: we've done our best to assemble interesting lists to help you absorb the words in a way that will stick with you so that you're as prepared as possible on the day of your exam.

You'll see that these lists definitely don't look like your typical, dry GRE word lists, and it's because we want you to learn vocabulary words in context—the new GRE's Sentence Equivalence questions, Text Completions, and even the Reading Comprehension passages are testing knowledge of words in context and proper usage, so rote memorization of words and definitions won't be of much help!

If you're new to the Revised GRE and want to know more about the exam in general, check out "A Complete Guide to the Revised GRE": http://magoosh.com/gre/gre-ebook for more information.

We have some general tips and strategies about how to best use the lists in this eBook (as well as some warnings about types of studying methods to avoid!) so be sure to read our "How to Use GRE Vocabulary Lists" and "Making Words Stick: Memorizing GRE Vocabulary" sections before you begin. At the end, we also have some recommendations for other great reading material that will help you pick up vocabulary words in a fun way to have productive "study breaks".



We hope you find the material helpful! If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, leave us a comment at http://magoosh.com/gre/2012/gre-vocabulary-ebook!

About Us

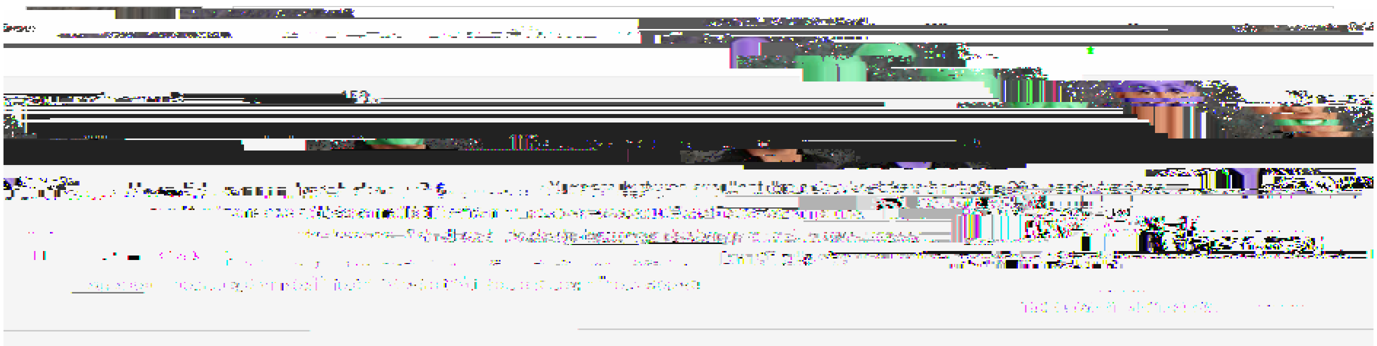
What is Magoosh?

Magoosh is online GRE prep tool that offers:

- Over 200 Math, Verbal, and AWA lesson videos, that’s over 20 hours of video!

Why Our Students Love Us

These are survey responses sent to us by students after they took the GRE. All of these students and thousands



How to Use Vocabulary Lists

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Making Words Stick: Memorizing GRE Vocabulary

Come up with Clever (and Wacky) Associations

Another way of saying this: use mnemonics. A mnemonic is a creative way of remembering a word.

Let's ta

Most Common GRE Words

Top 10 GRE Words of 2012

Alacrity (n.)

Top 5 Basic GRE Words

Tricky “Easy” GRE Words with Multiple Meanings

Stem (v.)

To *stem*

She was not so base as to begrudge the beggar the unwanted

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French Words

Sangfroid (n.)

Sangfroid literally means cold-blooded. It is defined as calmness and poise, especially in trying situations.

The hostage negotiator exhibited a sangfroid that oftentimes was more menacing than the sword a4.002(h)100

Let’s see if I can weave all the French-related words into one coherent sen8 Tm[(a)4(l)3(l)3(th)3(e)3(F)-6(r)4(

The end result was a city that was split up into the oddest arrangement of districts. And can you guess what a map of the city, gerrymandered, looked like? Yep, a salamander.

Today the use of *gerrymander*

Words with Strange Origins

Supercilious (adj.)

Cilia are small, thick hairs. One area on our bodies that contains

Themed Lists

Vocab from Within

Jaundice (adj./n.)

Jaundice is a condition of the liver that has the side effect of turning the skin yellow. The second definition—and the one you have to know for the GRE—may seem completely unrelated: to be biased against as a result of envy or prejudice. In the 17th Century, being yellow, apparently, was associated with having prejudice. Hence, we have the second definition of the word *jaundice*. It is important to note that yellow now, at least colloquially, means to be cowardly. This definition does not relate to *jaundice*.

Shelly was jaundiced towards Olivia; though the two had once been best friends, Olivia had become class president, prom queen, and, to make matters worse, the girlfriend of the one boy Shelly liked.

Jejune (adj.)

Many people like this word for the simple reason that it's fun to say. After all, how often do we get to see the summery month of June in a word? All this niftiness aside, the definition of *jejune* (sadly) is a letdown. To be *jejune* is to be dull, insipid and lacking flavor. No, it can't be, you think. But yes, *jejune*, our delightful word, means something that literally means lackluster.

But it gets even worse for poor jejune: it is derived from the second part of the small intestine, the jejunum, where the inside walls absorb the food's nutrients. Now *jejune* does not only mean boring, it also conjures up images we'd rather leave in the dark.

Finally, *jejune* has a second definition. *Jejune*, though, is yet again a victim of bad PR. To be jejune (secondary definition) means to be childish and immature.

Now that I'm done lamenting jejune's debased status, I'm going to have a jejune fit.

Bilious (adj.)

Speaking of nasty stuff in the body, bilious comes from bile—you know, that yellow stuff in your liver that every once in a while makes a very unwelcome gustatory appearance.

To be filled with bile, however, doesn't mean to have a bad taste in your mouth.

According to Hippocrates, he of the bodily humors, if we are filled with too much bile, we are angry. Therefore, to be *bilious* is to be constantly irritable and ready to bite somebody's head off.

Rex was bilious all morning, and his face would only take on a look of contentedness when he'd had his morning cup of coffee.

Choleric (adj.)

Hippocrates, along with the Roman physician Galen, believed that the body was filled with humors, or fluids. The balance of these humors led to certain moods. If a person had too much yellow bile he (usually not she) would be said to be *choleric*, or highly irascible (*choleric* was more Galen's nomenclature, as Hippocrates stuck to bilious, a synonym for *choleric*).

While a brilliant lecturer, Mr. Dawson came across as choleric and unapproachable—very rarely did students come to his office hours.

Sanguine (adj.)

But not all is bad in the world of bodily humors. Meet *sanguine*, from the Latin *sanguineus,* which comes from blood. Not that most of us would consider blood a humor, but according to Galen, blood, along with bile/choler, was one of the four bodily humors. And while this bloody association doesn't bode well for the definition of *sanguine*, surprisingly, sanguine means to be cheerful, optimistic.

How did this ever come to be? Well, when we are happy the blood rushes to our cheeks turning them red (yes, this seems to me about as valid as yellow meaning prejudice—not that green with envy makes any sense).

While *sanguine* has a positive definition, the word *sanguinary*—note the *sang*- root—means a carnage or bloodbath. Yes, I know English can be a confusing language. But, if you learn these high-frequency GRE words, you will have something to be *sanguine* about!

With the prospect of having to learn 3,000 words during the course of the summer, Paul was anything but sanguine.

Religious Words

Cardinal (adj.)

Jasmine was sad to admit it,

Apostasy (n.)

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Prevaricate (v.)

Money Matters: Can’t Spend it Fast Enough

Profligate (adj./n.)

The so-called magical diet cure simply ended up mulcting Maria out of hundreds of dollars, but not hundreds of pounds.

Fleece (v.)

Don’t feel sheepish if you thought this word only pertained to

In the days leading up to war, a nation typically breaks up into the two opposing camps: doves, who do their best to avoid war, and jingoists, who are only too eager to wave national flags from their

Harangue can be either a noun or a verb. It is a synonym of *tirade* and *diatribe*. Lest someone *harangue*

Mercurial (adj.)

For those who have since forgotten this slippery word, to be *mercurial* means to change constantly in terms of personality or mood. Typically, we say a *mercurial*

Compound Words

Slapdash (adj.)

As a thoroughgoing bibliophile, one who had turned his house into a

Halloween Vocabulary

Cadaverous (adj.)

If someone is so skinny or emaciated that they look like a dead p4(e)-6(a(y)-62□BDC BT≠F1 11.52)-6th 70

Phantasmagorical (adj.)

This is a terrifying word, just from the standpoint of pronunciation: [

Mettlesome (adj.)

When you poke your nose in somebody else’s business, you are being meddlesome. If you are *mettlesome*, on the other hand, you are filled with *mettle* (no, not the hard stuff). *Mettle* means courage or valor. A soldier on the battlefield is *mettlesome* when he runs into enemy fire to save a comrade.

For its raid on the Bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Seal Team Six has become, for many Americans, the embodiment of mettle.

By the Letter

A-Words

Amiable (adj.)

Amiable means friendly. It is very similar to *amicable*, another common GRE word. *Amicable*, however, does not refer to a person the way that *amiable* does, but rather refers to relationships between people. You'll notice that *amicable* is, therefore, the opposite of *acrimonious* (see below).

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

Affable (adj.)

Likeable, easy to talk to: *affable* is similar to *amiable*. The differences are subtle, and as far as the GRE is concerned, you can treat them as the same word. Like *amiable*, this word is great to use to describe people we know. After all, everyone knows an affable person.

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

Amenable (adj.)

Amenable means easily persuaded. If someone is cooperative and goes along with the program, so to speak, that person is amenable. *Amenable* can also be used in the medical sense: if a disease is amenable to treatment, that disease can be treated.

Even though she did not like bad weather, Shirley was generally amenable and decided to accompany her brother to the picinc.

Attenuate (v.)

Attenuate means to weaken (in terms of intensity), to taper off/become thinner. *Attenuate* can refer to both abstract and tangible things.

Her animosity towards Bob attenuated over the years, and she even went so far as to invite him to her party.

The stick is attenuated at one end to allow the villagers to forage for ants.

Animosity (n.)

Meaning Intense hostility, *animosity* should be reserved for extreme cases. That is, if you really loathe someone, and that person feels the same way, then you can say animosity exists between the two of you.

A related word, and a synonym, is *animus* (though *animus* can also mean motivation, as in impetus).

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

Anomalous (adj.)

Anomalous means not normal, out of the ordinary, and is simply the adjective—and scarier looking—form of *anomaly*, which is a noun. *Anomalous* can be used in cases to describe something that is not typical, like an unusually cold California spring.

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

Acrimony (n.)

*Acrimon*y means bitterness and ill will. Don't forget the adjective form, *acrimonious*, which describes relationships filled with bitterness and ill will.

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

Aberration (n.)

A deviation from what is normal or expected: this word is tinged with a negative connotation. For instance, in psychology there is a subset of behavior known as *aberrant* behavior. So, basically, if you're narcissistic, psychotic, or just plain old cuckoo, you are demonstrating *aberrant* behavior.

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

Ambiguous (adj.)

Ambiguous means open to more than one interpretation. Let's say I have two friends, Bob and Paul. If I tell you that he is coming to my house today, then that is ambiguous. Who do I mean? Paul or Bob?

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

Amorphous (adj.)

Amorphous means shapeless. *Morph-* comes from the Latin for shape. The root *a-*, as in atypical, means not or without. Therefore, if something is *amorphous*, it lacks shape.

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

C-Words

Conciliate (v.)

To *conciliate* is to make peace with.

His opponents believed his gesture to be conciliatory, yet as soon as they put down their weapons, he unsheathed a hidden sword.

Corroborate (v.)

To *corroborate* something is to confirm or lend support to (usually an idea or claim).

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

Calumny (n.)

Calumny is the making of a false statement meant to injure a person's reputation.

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

Commensurate (adj.)

To be *commensurate* to is to be in proportion or corresponding in degree or amount

The definition of this word tends to be a little unwieldy, regardless of the source. Therefore, it is a word that screams to be understood in context (for this very reason, the GRE loves commensurate, because they know that those who just devour flashcards will not understand how the word works in a sentences). Speaking of a sentence…

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

Churlish (adj.)

Someone who is *churlish* lacks manners or refinement. A *churlish* person lacks tact and civility is often outright rude.

The manager was unnecessarily churlish to his subordinates, rarely deigning to say hello, but always quick with a sartorial jab if someone happened to be wearing anything even slightly unbecoming.

Castigate (v.)

To *castigate* someone is to reprimand harshly.

This word is very similar to *chastise*. They even have the same etymology (word history).

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

Chastise (v.)

Very similar to *castigate*, it also means to reprimand harshly.

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

Cogent (adj.)

Something that's *cogent* is clear and persuasive.

His essay writing, while full of clever turns of phrases, lacks cogency: the examples he uses to support his points are at times irrelevant and, in one instance, downright ludicrous.

Contentious (adj.)

Contentious has two meanings: controversial (in terms of an issue); inclined to arguing (in terms of a person).

This word does not mean *content*. It comes from *contend*, which means to argue. Be chary (see below) of this word.

As soon as the discussion turns to politics, Uncle Hank becomes highly contentious, vehemently disagreeing with those who endorse the same positions.

Chary (adj.)

Chary rhymes with wary, and it also means to be cautious. They are also synonyms.

Jack was wary of GRE words that looked similar, because they usually had different definitions; not so with chary, a word that he began to use interchangeably with wary.

Easily Confusable F-Words

Fractious (adj.)

If someone is *fractious*, he/she is irritable and is likely to cause disruption.

We rarely invite my fractious Uncle over for dinner; he always complains about the food, and usually launches into a tirade on some touchy subject.

Factious (adj.)

Factions result when a large group splinters into smaller ones. Anything that causes factions is *factious*. *Factious* is typically not used to describe people.

The controversial bill proved factious, as dissension even within parties resulted.

Factitious (adj.)

A tricky word, to say the least. When I preface a word by saying it's tricky, you can bet that the word's definition is not what you would expect. *Factitious* is no exception, in that it does not relate to fact. Indeed, *factitious* is almost the opposite of fact. *Factitious* means artificial, not natural. A laugh can be *factitious*. A gesture. Your alacrity on the first day of a new job.

F*actitious* can also be used literally to refer to something artificial. The houseplant that never needs watering, for instance. A good synonym for *factitiou*s—and a word people use frequently—is phony.

The defendant's story was largely factitious and did not accord with eyewitness testimonies.

Vicious Pairs of V's

Vindictive (adj.) vs. Vindicate (v.)

These words look very similar, so their definitions must be somewhat related. Right? Actually, the two words are very different. To be *vindictive* means to have a very strong desire for revenge.

As for *vindicate*, it means to prove oneself right. What, exactly, does this mean? Say you claim to your friends that you will score at the 95th percentile on the verbal. They doubt your claim, and lightly tease you on your lofty and seemingly unattainable goal. Now, it's up to you to prove that you can do it. If you score at the 95th percentile on test day, then you've *vindicated* yourself: you've proven that your original claim was correct. If you score way below that…well, then you may want to avoid your friends for some time.

Vicarious (adj.) vs. Vicissitude (n.)

Isn't travel great? You get to experience other cultures, and see the world. Well, actually, sometimes traveling can be more stressful than a rush-hour commute—lost luggage, stolen items, and inclement weather are just a few of the many woes that can beset the traveler.

So, why not stay at home and watch the travel channel? With just one flick of the wrist, you can journey to the distant lands of Machu Picchu or Angkor Wat. Such travel, in which you enjoy something through another person's experiences—in this case the host of the travel show—is to live *vicariously*. The contexts, of course, can vary widely. Maybe your best friend has told you all about his or her graduate school experiences via weekly blog posts. Now you, too, feel that you've gone through grad school. That's living *vicariously*.

A *vicissitude* is any change in one's circumstances, usually for the worse. That is, life is full of ups and down that are beyond our control. Those are *vicissitudes*. Speaking of, traveling—especially any of those quit-your-job six-week jaunts through Europe—is full of *vicissitudes*, so again, sometimes it's better to stay at home and tune into the travel station (as long as the remote control doesn't go traveling off somewhere).

Venal (adj.) vs. Venial (adj.)

You definitely do not want to confuse these two. To call someone *venal* is to say they are corrupt, and likely to accept bribes. To be *venial* actually doesn't refer to a person but rather a sin or an offense. A *venial* offense is one that is minor and pardonable.

His traffic violations ran the gamut from the venial to the egregious—on one occasion he simply did not come to a complete stop; another time he tried to escape across state lines at speeds in excess of 140 mph.

Veracious (adj.) vs. Voracious (adj.)

These words not only deviate by only one letter, but they also sound very similar. As for their definitions, you definitely do not want to confuse them. *Veracious* means truthful; *voracious* means hungry, either literally or figuratively.

Steven was a voracious reader, sometimes finishing two novels in the same day.

Venerate (v.) vs. Enervate (v.)

Okay, fine, this one is deviating from the agenda a little. Still, despite not starting with a 'v', *enervate* actually contains all the letters found in *venerate*, only scrambled. As for their meanings, these two words are anything but similar. To *venerate* someone is to respect that person deeply. To *enervate*, on the other hand, is to sap that person of energy.

Dave found the professor's lecture so enervating that not even a potent cup of joe could keep his eyes from drooping.

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

“X” words

Excoriate (v.)

To yell at someone is one thing; to *excoriate* them is a whole other. A martinet of a boss whom you’ve once again upset; a drill sergeant berating a feckless, smirking recruit; now we are closer.

So to criticize really, really harshly is to *excoriate*. Interestingly, the second definition of the word is to tear one’s skin from his/her body. To verbally *excoriate*, figuratively speaking, is to rip off a person’s skin.

Entrusted with the prototype to his company’s latest smartphone, Larry, during a late night karaoke bout, let the prototype slip into the hands of a rival company—the next day Larry was excoriated, and then fired.

Extenuating (adj.)

Extenuating means making less guilty or more forgivable. The phrase “extenuating circumstances” is common courtroom lingo. Say somebody broke into a drugstore to steal some expensive medication. Later we learn that medication was for that person’s wife, who was dying of some disease that only the medication could cure. Most of us, presumably, would be more likely to forgive the man. Why? Because of the *extenuating* factor of his wife’s disease.

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

Execrate (v.)

This word just sounds awful. The good news is the meaning of *execrate* is consistent with the way it sounds. To *execrate* somebody is to curse and hiss at them. For instance a certain American basketball player left his team of many years so he could make more money with another team. Fans of the original team *execrated* the player for his perfidy and, what they claim, were his mercenary motives.

Interestingly, the adjective form of *execrate* is the relatively common GRE word *execrable*. If something is *execrable*, it is so awful that it is worthy of our hissing.

Though the new sitcom did decently in the ratings, Nelson railed against the show, saying that it was nothing more than execrable pastiche of tired cliché’s and canned laughter.

Exegesis (n.)

This word refers to a critical interpretation of a scholarly work. If you think that definition is intimidating, the adjective form is *exegetical*.

The Bible is fertile ground for exegesis—over the past five centuries there have been as many interpretations as there are pages in a Gideon.

Exhort (v.)

To *exhort* means to strongly urge on, encourage. The encouragement is for a positive action. So a mentor figure will *exhort* you to make the most of your life, whereas the miscreant will cajole you into doing something you'll regret.

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

High-Difficulty Words

Negation Words: Misleading Roots

Insufferable (adj.)

Think of somebody, or something, that you simply can't tolerate. That thing is *insufferable*. A person bleating into their cell phones on a crowded bus is *insufferable*. So is a person who only talks about him or herself, and usually in the most flattering vein possible. Depending on the person, certain television shows or genres can be *insufferable*. This word is derived from the second definition of *suffer*, which means to put up with, or tolerate.

Chester always tried to find some area in which he excelled above others; unsurprisingly, his co-workers found him insufferable and chose to exclude him from daily luncheons out.

Impertinent (adj.)

Impertinent can actually be the opposite of pertinent, but this definition is seldom used. Most of the time, *impertinent* means not showing the proper respect. You can think of it this way – if somebody's behavior is not pertinent to the given social context, e.g. an occasion calling for formality, then you can think of that person as being *impertinent*. The definition usually only applies if a person is being rude where respect is expected, and not staid where frivolity is apt.

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

Unconscionable (adj.)

If you are thinking of being knocked over the head and lying in a pool of blood on the sidewalk, you have the wrong word (not to mention a vivid imagination). In this case, the correct word is unconscious. If an act is so horrible and deplorable that it makes everyone around aghast, then that action is *unconscionable*. *Unconscionable* can also mean something that is in excess of what is deemed tolerable. This second definition doesn't have the unethical smear of the first definition.

The lawyer's demands were unconscionable, and rather than pay an exorbitant sum or submit himself to any other inconveniences, the man decided to find a new lawyer.

Immaterial (adj.)

While *immaterial* can describe a ghost, phantom, or run-of-the mill ectoplasm, *immaterial* primarily means not relevant.

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

Inflammable (adj.)

Depending on the circumstances, this can be a very important word. That is, if you read that something is inflammable, that means it can easily light on fire. The opposite would be *nonflammable*. Strangely enough, *inflammable* is the same as *flammable* in the sense that it describes anything that can light on fire. *Inflammable*—but not *flammable*—can mean extremely controversial, incendiary.

It only takes one person to leave an inflammable comment on an Internet thread for that thread to blow up into pages upon pages of reader indignation.

Unnerve (v.)

This word does not mean to make less nervous, but its opposite. If you unnerve a person, you disconcert him or her to the point he or she is likely to fail.

At one time unnerved by math problems, she began avidly "Magoosh-ing", and soon became adept at even combinations and permutations questions.

Difficult Words that the GRE Loves to Use

Belie (v.)

This is ETS's number one favorite word for harder questions. Period. If ETS needs to make a Text Completion or Sentence Equivalence questions difficult, all it needs to do is throw in *belie*.

The key to answering a text completion question that uses *belie* is to know how the word functions in context. Let's take a look below:

Her surface calm belied her roiling emotions.

The effortless fluidity with which the pianist's fingers moved belied the countless hours he had practiced.

Her upbeat attitude during the group project belied her inherent pessimism towards any collective endeavor.

In each case, note how the outward appearance does not match up with the reality. That contradiction is the essence of belie.

Disinterested (adj.)

Much as the addition of belie is a difficult vocabulary word that tends to make a question harder, the addition of *disinterested* into a text completion can make it a difficult question. Why? Everybody assumes that *disinterested* means not interested. While this is acceptable colloquially, the GRE, as you've probably come to learn by now, is anything but colloquial. The definition of *disinterested* is unbiased, neutral.

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

Equivocal (adj.)

Equivocal does not mean equal. It means vague, undecided.

Equivocal, especially in its more common form *equivocate*, has a negative connotation. If a politician is equivocating, he/she is not answering a question directly, but is beating around the bush.

In the academic GRE sense, if a phenomenon is open to multiple interpretations it is *equivocal*.

Whether we can glean an artist's unconscious urges through his or her art remains equivocal – that we can ever even really tap into another person's hidden motives remains in doubt.

Undermine (v.)

Undermine is common in all sections of the GRE, not just difficult sections. It can pop up in reading comprehension answer choices just as commonly as text completion questions.

Undermine means to weaken and is usually paired with an abstract term, such as authority. It can also have the connotation of slowly or insidiously eroding (insidious mean subtly harmful).

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

Sententious (adj.)

This word looks like it would relate to a sentence. If you know the GRE, you will know this is probably not the case, as the GRE is likely to subvert people's gut reactions. *Sententious* means to be moralizing, usually in a pompous sense.

The old man, casting his nose up in the air at the group of adolescents, intoned sententiously, "Youth is wasted on the young."

Propitiate (v.)

Want to make an angry person less angry? Well, then you attempt to placate or appease. Or, if you like really big GRE words, you *propitiate* them.

The two sons, plying their angry father with cheesy neckties for Christmas, were hardly able to propitiate him – the father already had a drawer full of ones he had never worn before or ever planned to.

Feckless (adj.)

Feck, probably for its phonetic similarity to another word, has been dropped from the language. That or the lexicographers have become *feckless*, which means that they lacked the drive or initiative to include *feck* in the dictionary. *Feckless* means lazy and irresponsible. So, don't get *feckless* and drop the –less, lest somebody totally misinterprets you. In which case, you'll have to do a fair amount of propitiating.

By the way, I'm feckless—I won't include an example sentence (oops, I just walked into a contradiction).

Tendentious (adj.)

If you are likely to espouse a controversial view, you are being *tendentious*. A good synonym for *tendentious* is *biased*, though if you are biased you aren't necessarily leaning towards a view that is controversial.

Because political mudslinging has become a staple of the 24-hour media cycle, most of us, despite proclamations to the contrary, are tendentious on many of today's pressing issues.

Limpid (adj.)

This word does not relate to *limp*, it relates to clarity in terms of expression. *Limpid* is typically used to describe writing or music.

Her limpid prose made even the most recondite subjects accessible to all.

Betray (v.)

To betray means to go against one's country or friends. Right? Well, yes, but not always. Especially on the GRE. *To betray* means to reveal or make known something, usually unintentionally.

Let's try a Text Completion question:

> As we age, our political leanings tend to become less _______; the once dyed-in-wool conservative can betray liberal leanings, and the staunch progressive may suddenly embrace conservative policies.
>
> (A) pronounced
> (B) obscured
> (C) contrived
> (D) earnest
> (E) diplomatic

In this case *betray* means reveal. As we age our political biases become less obvious/extreme (my own words). Which word is the closest? *(A) pronounced.*

Re- Doesn't Always Mean Again

Remiss (adj.)

Remiss does not mean to miss again. It means to be negligent in one's duty. For some reason, students of mine have always had difficulty remembering this word. Sometimes I chide them, "Don't be remiss as vocabulary scholars by forgetting the word remiss." While arguably clever, this admonishment isn't usually as efficacious as I'd hope it would be. (So don't be *remiss*!).

Remiss in his duty to keep the school functioning efficiently, the principle was relieved of his position after only three months.

Restive (adj.)

Restive sounds like *rest*. It's actually the opposite, and means restless. Though most of the 're-' words are common, *restive* is definitely the *re-* word you are most likely to see test day. It can be used to describe both people and groups of people.

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

Repine (v.)

The verb *pine* means to yearn for. Like *remiss*, however, the addition of the prefix *re-* does not signify again. To *repine* means to complain or fret over something. Note: the verb *pine* can also mean to waste away.

Standing forlornly by the window, she repined for her lost love.

Remonstrate (v.)

You've probably guessed already that this does not mean to demonstrate again. To *remonstrate* means to make objections while pleading.

The mothers of the kidnapped victims remonstrated to the rogue government to release their children, claiming that the detention violated human rights.

GRE Vocabulary Books: Recommended Fiction and Non-Fiction

For those of you who live near a bookstore (and my heartfelt condolences to those who live near what is now the carcass of an erstwhile Border’s store), to simply walk in and pick up a book that is captivating, and charged with GRE-style language, is tantamount to finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

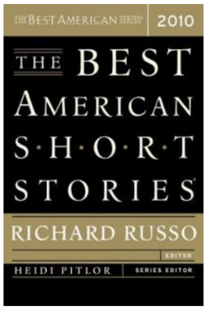
To save you the futility of such a search, I will recommend books that I feel are topical, engaging, and filled with enough GRE vocabulary that you will be underlining words as you go along, and, of course, entering them as you go.

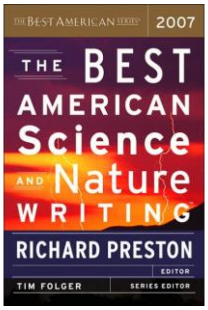
At the same time, make sure your reading is not so laden with vocabulary as to be inscrutable—you want to be reading, not underlining. To avoid this, simply choose a book or article that is less dense with challenging words. Work your way up to challenging writing.

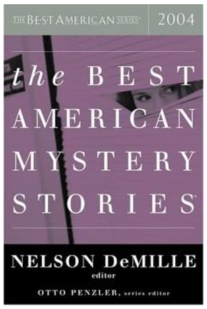
For those with e-books, you can avail yourself of the latest Internet tools to make your own flashcards. And with the mega-store a moribund feature of the consumer landscape, we may soon be doing most of our reading—GRE prep or otherwise—under the futuristic glow of an e-reader.

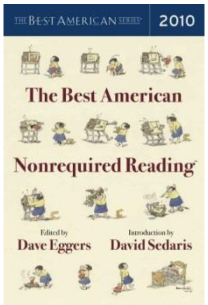
Whether on an e-reader or in paper-based form, the books below offer an alternative to sifting through magazines looking for engaging stories. And now, you need not wander through a cavernous bookstore, or click through the endless forest that is Amazon.com.

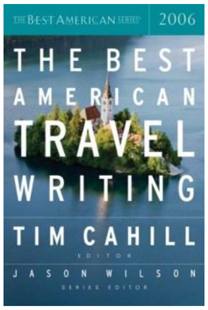
The Best American Series











This annual series selects the best writing from hundreds of journals and magazines. Not only are you provided with engaging and informative articles, but you also can choose from many different genres. That’s right – the Best American Series is not one book, but many books, broken down into different genres.

I recommend the Best American Science and Nature Series. For those who are a little more intrepid, and up for the challenging stuff, then the Best American Essays is for you. The thoughtful, eloquent prose here will help prime your brain for the more difficult verbal section of the Revised GRE.

There is also a Best American Sports Writing (yes, sports writers use GRE vocab as well), a Best American Travel Writing (travel writers love descriptive GRE words) and a Best Short Stories (if fiction is more your thing).

So, whatever your predilections, the Best American Series has something to tickle your fancy. Or, for a potpourri of genres, styles, and voices, you can order the whole bunch. Your reading brain will grow exponentially.

The Classics

MODERN LIBRARY

In order to learn vocabulary, and become accustomed to an elevated prose style, I do not recommend fiction as highly as I do non-fiction. At the same, we all love a good story. And, staying hooked over the course of 200-300 pages of a protagonist's vicissitudes is far easier than doing the same for science writing.

A great place to start for fiction is the Classics. Pick them up—they are classics for a reason. I lean towards 20th Century literature. Especially from a GRE prep angle, the language, and the way words are used, is more consonant with the language found on the Revised GRE. That doesn't mean that if Jane Austin or Charles Dickens, two prominent 19thCentury authors, make for highly enjoyable reading you should pass them up. Indeed, they use GRE words such as supercilious, peremptory and impetuous, as though those words were colloquial (I presume back then they were).

Otherwise, you can try Modern Library's Top 100 Fiction Works of All Time (they also have a non-fiction list) if you need some guidance on where to start reading. Besides the odd take on language, namely James Joyce's later works, most of these novels will have many vocabulary words.

BTW, a fun little tidbit – if you want to read the first few pages of any of these books – to see if the story is for you, and if GRE words abound – go to Amazon.com. Click on the image of any novel and you will be able to read the first ten pages of any book (depending on the book, you can read much more than that).

Takeaway

Reading is an excellent way to supplement vocab lists and flashcards. Be a word detective, and significantly augment your vocabulary.

Vocabulary in Context: Articles from Magazines and Newspapers

Over the last few months, I've declaimed on many occasions that the days of studying only from a deck of flashcards are long over. Instead, The Revised GRE requires us to have a far greater sense of how words function in context. The flashcard, however, strips the word of its context so it is dead and entombed in the stilted wording of a formal definition.

Instead I've recommend learning vocabulary by reading voraciously from prescribed sources. These sources include The New York Times, The Economist, The Atlantic Monthly, and The New Yorker. Most of the writing found within the pages of these august publications is not only replete with GRE-level vocabulary but is also similar in tone and style to that found on the Revised GRE.

Here, I am going to take actual articles from the aforementioned sources. I will highlight important vocabulary and also discuss ways you should approach learning words when you encounter them in context.

Finally, the articles come from a wide variety of fields, e.g. business, science, literature, etc. I've done my best to select pieces that I think a majority will find interesting, a criteria that I recommend you employ when you embark on your own reading quest.

In each case, I've specifically taken excerpts that contain not only GRE words (though these are sprinkled throughout each article) but also engage in analysis of some issue.

Let's start with an article taken from the business section of The Atlantic Monthly.

The Atlantic Monthly

> *Outsider, non-founder CEOs are often overvalued because many corporate boards think the answer to their problems is a superstar CEO with an outsized reputation. This leads them to overpay for people who are good at creating outsized reputations through networking, interviewing, and taking credit for other peoples' achievements–all bad indicators of future success.*
>
> *Rakesh Khurana has* ***amply*** *shown how this* ***delusion*** *of the* ***charismatic*** *savior creates a* ***dysfunctional*** *market for CEOs, allowing the small number of existing public-company CEOs to demand and receive extravagant* ***compensation****. The myth of the generalist CEO is* ***bolstered*** *by the many* ***fawning*** media portrayals where CEOs say that their key jobs are understanding, hiring, and motivating people–leading board members to believe that you can run a technology company without knowing anything about technology.

This passage is great because it is full of relatively difficult words, many of which are high-frequency GRE vocabulary (fawning, bolstered, ample/amply). This excerpt is also filled with analysis, which will help sync your synapses for the Revised GRE.

The article also scores big points on topics of interest. After all, it's Steve Jobs—revere him or fear him, most of us have an opinion of the company and its ubiquitous products (and now that this tech titan has just stepped down this article is more timely than ever).

Perhaps you find business blah or maybe you like to vary your reading. A great field to draw from is science. Part of the reason is the Revised GRE will typically have one science passage. While it may be drier than the typical fare found in the magazines cited above, often the science writing on the GRE is similar in tone and style to what you'll encounter in these magazines.

So let's take the article Bird Brain, which appeared in the New Yorker last year. It explores the development of language in human beings and whether language is the province only of humans. To do so, it tells the story of an African gray parrot, Alex, and his owner, Irene Pepperberg—namely how she trained Alex to say hundreds of words (though none, I believe, were GRE vocab) so that Alex, by the time he was an adult, was able to form relatively coherent sentences.

Below is an excerpt from the article, which is about 15-pages long. In general I would recommend the entire piece, especially if the above sounds intriguing. The excerpt includes a few vocab words (but of course) and some reflection and analysis.

The New Yorker

> *All children grow up in a world of talking animals. If they don't come to know them through fairy tales, Disney movies, or the Narnia books, they discover them some other way. A child will grant the gift of speech to the family dog, or to the stray cat that shows up at the door. At first, it's a* ***solipsistic*** *fantasy—the secret sharer you can tell your troubles to, or that only you understand. Later, it's rooted in a more philosophical curiosity, the longing to experience the* ***ineffable*** *interiority of some very different being. My eight-year-old daughter says that she wishes the horses she rides could talk, just so she could ask them what it feels like to be a horse. Such a desire* ***presumes****—as Thomas Nagel put it in his 1974 essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"—that animals have some kind of* ***subjectivity****, and that it might somehow be* ***plumbed****.*
>
> *In any case, Nagel explained, humans are "restricted to the resources" of our own minds, and since "those resources are inadequate to the task," we cannot really imagine what it is like to be a bat, only, at best, what it is like to behave like one—to fly around in the dark, gobble up insects, and so on. That inability, however, should not lead us to dismiss the idea that animals "have experiences fully comparable in richness of detail to our own." We simply can't know. Yet many of us would be glad for even a few glimpses inside an animal's mind. And some people, like Irene Pepperberg, have dedicated their lives to documenting those glimpses.*

Though you may already know a few of these words, you should definitely look them up, especially if you are inferring the meaning based on the context. Always validate your hunch, don't assume you can always glean the exact definition of the word simply by looking at context.

After looking up these words, you'll notice a word with a secondary meaning, plumbed, and a couple of words from philosophy—subjectivity and solipsistic. After consulting Word Smart, Barron's Words You Need to Know, or other vocabulary lists I've recommend you'll notice that subjectivity (or subjective) is a very important word; solipsistic, on the other hand, is not as likely to pop up on the test. But if you already have a strong vocabulary, and are looking to score in the top 10%, then definitely learn solipsistic.

You will notice that the definition of interiority isn't very surprising, as it is directly related to interior. You may also notice that it is similar to subjective. Finally, you learn the word ineffable, which say you've never seen before, and you also find it on a few lists. Write it down on a flashcard along with an example sentence (oh, the irony of ineffable – for to say something is ineffable is undermining the very essence of the word).

Following a process similar to the one above is important. You don't want to simply underline the words and look them up. You want to digest them, so that, much like Alex the parrot, you will be able to use them in a coherent sentence.

Of course reading the entire article is also a good idea. Essentially you are training your brain to read through a long, relatively challenging piece, a skill that is indispensable for the much longer Revised GRE.

Let's say that you read Bird Brain and enjoy it. You are already familiar with a number of words and want something more challenging, maybe something couched in academic jargon or that oozes literary style. (I'm assuming that if you fall into this category, you are also looking to get the difficult verbal section).

A good resource is the New York Times Book Review. Here you will find the truly erudite waxing literary on a recently published novel/book that is just as scholarly (Are these the very writers who craft byzantine Text Completions for ETS?).

Below are two excerpts from the same book review of a biography of Joseph Heller, the reclusive, and frequently irascible, author of Catch-22, one of the great novels of the 20thcentury.

New York Times Book Review

> *But again, Daugherty is often perceptive about Heller's place in the larger culture, even if the novelist himself rarely comes into focus. For the human aspect, one turns to Erica Heller's frank but loving memoir of her father, "Yossarian Slept Here," which comes as close as*

> *possible, I dare say, to deciphering the enigma behind the obsessive, pitch-black fiction. Joseph Heller, the opposite of* ***demonstrative****, was given to* ***oblique*** *ways of showing affection…*
>
> *That was the year Heller published his second novel, "Something Happened," which Daugherty* ***commends*** *as follows: "Joe stepped beyond Wilson's* ***sentimentality*** *and Yates's bitterness to* ***eviscerate*** *modern America's success ethic." Such a* ***pat*** *comparison to Sloan Wilson, the author of "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," and Richard Yates, the author of "Revolutionary Road," is the sort of thing Daugherty might have* ***emended*** *given a bit more time to think about it; at any rate, "Something Happened" is perhaps the one work of postwar American fiction that makes Yates seem positively* ***Panglossian****. Erica Heller, for her part, describes the novel (probably her father's best) as "569 pages of hilarious but* ***mordant****,* ***caustically*** *wrapped,* ***smoldering*** *rage" — though of course it's personal in her case. Primary among the targets of the protagonist Bob Slocum's paranoid,* ***solipsistic*** *rant is his family…*

This article is clearly the most challenging of all the ones printed in this post. There are many difficult words, some that may give even the literate amongst us pause (Panglossian is derived from a character in Voltaire's Candide, Dr. Pangloss. The doctor was always optimistic, regardless of the circumstances).

Interestingly, solipsistic makes another appearance. Maybe it's not such an arcane word after all. Higher-frequency words—GRE-wise—include mordant, caustic, emend, enigma, and oblique.

Also, you want to be careful not to rely too much on assumptions. Demonstrative does not simply mean to demonstrate (it means tend to expression one's emotions outwardly). And pat, such a diminutive word, so folksy-sounding and innocuous, has many meanings. The adjective form, which is employed in the book review, could easily pop up on the GRE, and cause you to answer a text completion incorrectly. So be sure to look up such word (if an explanation is pat it is superficial/cursory and unconvincing).

Surprisingly, difficult vocabulary words and highfalutin prose aren't only found in the esoteric niche of the book review. Let's take an opinion piece we are far more likely to read: the movie review.

The New York Times

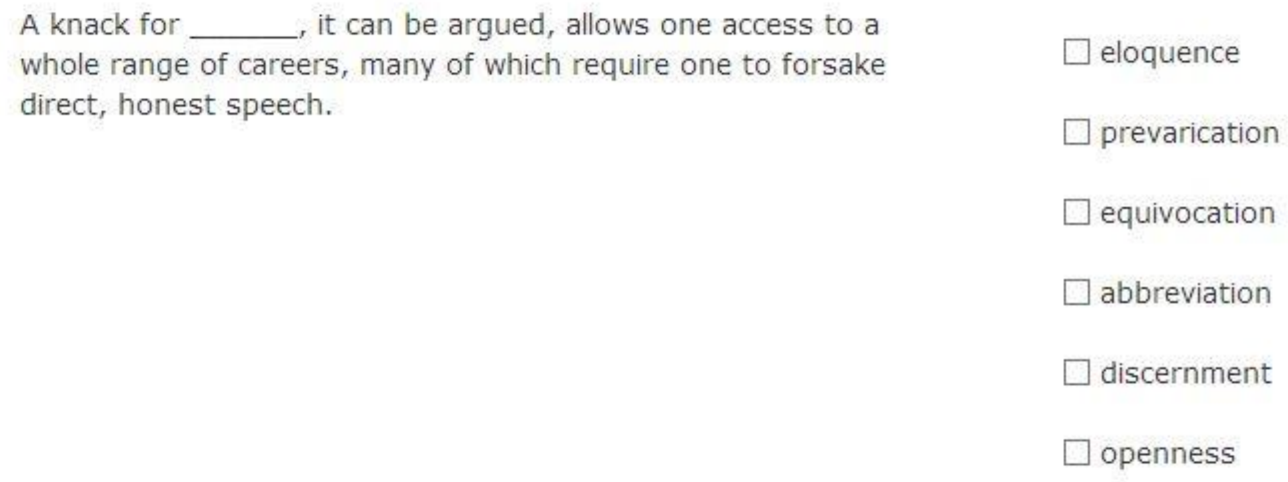
> *At a certain point, though — to say exactly when would ruin a fairly stunning surprise — the cat-and-mouse psychology is* ***jettisoned*** *in favor of something more* ***procedural****. The two halves of "Love Crime" divide according to the words of the title: the first explores the* ***knotty****,* ***feverish****,* ***ambiguous*** *bond between Christine and Isabelle, while the second is all about guilt, innocence, evidence and motive. It is interesting and* ***ingenious****, even if some of the kinky,* ***queasy*** *fascination that had been so intoxicating in the earlier scenes* ***ebbs*** *away.*

While the words here aren't as recondite as Panglossian, the prose style is relatively challenging and has echoes of the GRE Text Completion.

Practice Questions

Sentence Equivalence

Select exactly two words that best complete the sentence and produce sentences that are alike in meaning



A knack for _______, it can be argued, allows one access to a whole range of careers, many of which require one to forsake direct, honest speech.

☐ eloquence

☐ prevarication

☐ equivocation

☐ abbreviation

☐ discernment

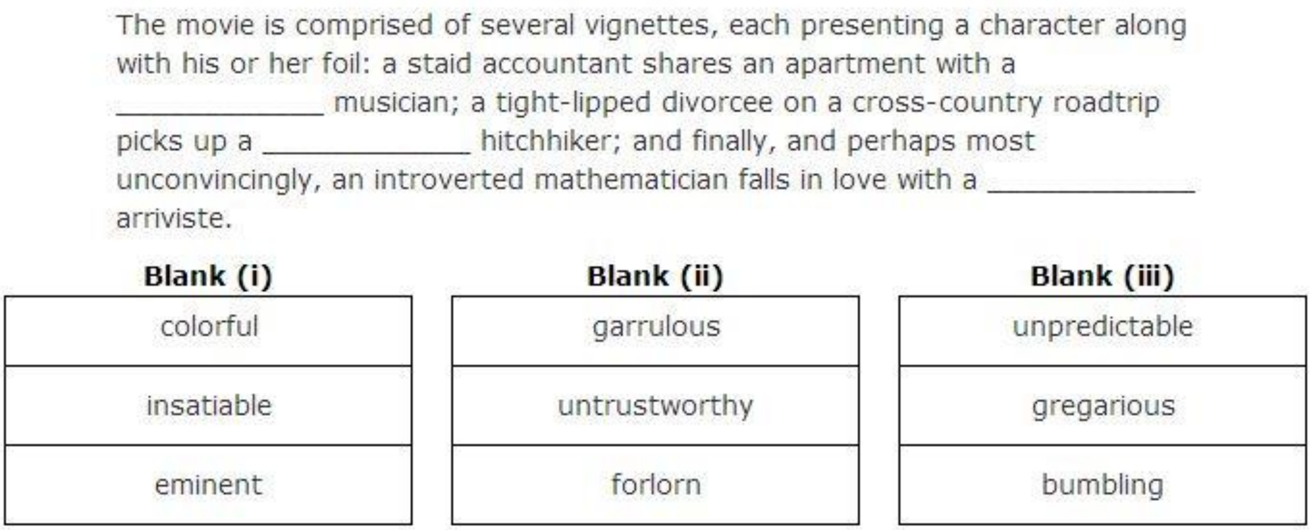
☐ openness

The answers are “prevarication” and “equivocation”.

Try the question online and watch the video explanation: https://gre.magoosh.com/questions/2369

Text Completion

For each blank select one word from each column that best completes each sentence.



The movie is comprised of several vignettes, each presenting a character along with his or her foil: a staid accountant shares an apartment with a _____________ musician; a tight-lipped divorcee on a cross-country roadtrip picks up a _____________ hitchhiker; and finally, and perhaps most unconvincingly, an introverted mathematician falls in love with a _____________ arriviste.

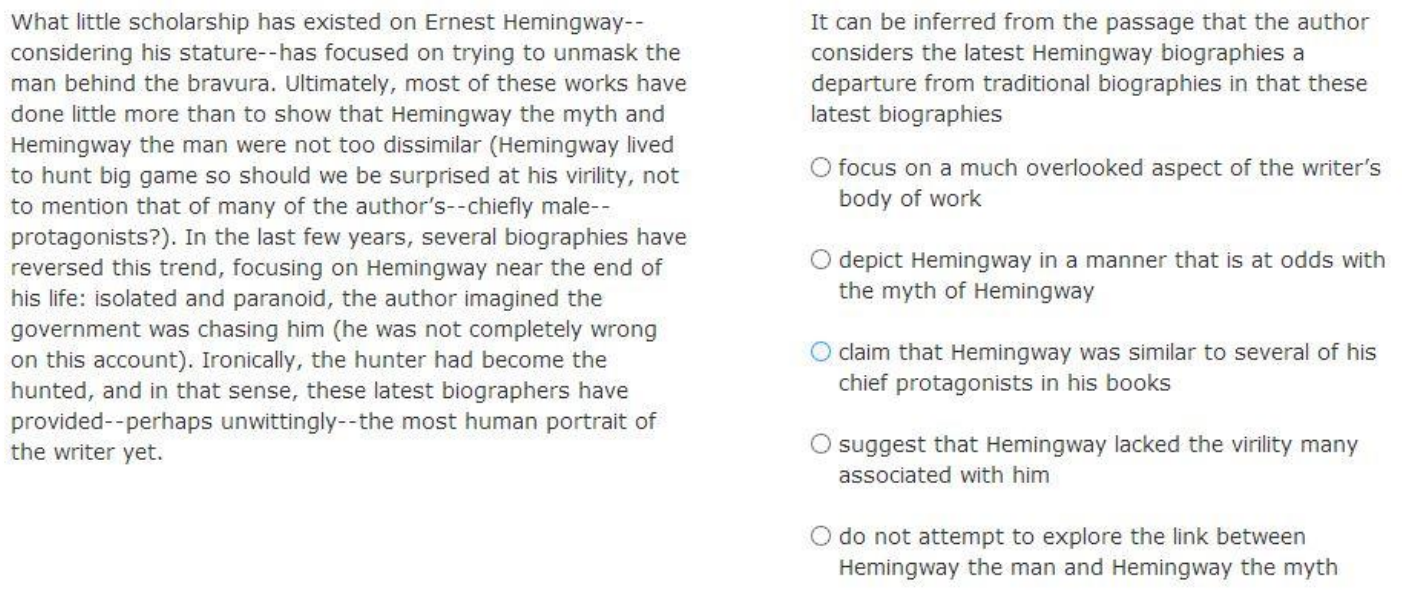
Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
colorful	garrulous	unpredictable
insatiable	untrustworthy	gregarious
eminent	forlorn	bumbling

The answers are “colorful”, “garrulous”, and “gregarious”.

Try the question online and watch the video explanation: https://gre.magoosh.com/questions/2574

Reading Comprehension

Choose the option that best answers the question.



What little scholarship has existed on Ernest Hemingway--considering his stature--has focused on trying to unmask the man behind the bravura. Ultimately, most of these works have done little more than to show that Hemingway the myth and Hemingway the man were not too dissimilar (Hemingway lived to hunt big game so should we be surprised at his virility, not to mention that of many of the author's--chiefly male--protagonists?). In the last few years, several biographies have reversed this trend, focusing on Hemingway near the end of his life: isolated and paranoid, the author imagined the government was chasing him (he was not completely wrong on this account). Ironically, the hunter had become the hunted, and in that sense, these latest biographers have provided--perhaps unwittingly--the most human portrait of the writer yet.

It can be inferred from the passage that the author considers the latest Hemingway biographies a departure from traditional biographies in that these latest biographies

○ focus on a much overlooked aspect of the writer's body of work

○ depict Hemingway in a manner that is at odds with the myth of Hemingway

○ claim that Hemingway was similar to several of his chief protagonists in his books

○ suggest that Hemingway lacked the virility many associated with him

○ do not attempt to explore the link between Hemingway the man and Hemingway the myth

The answer is B.

Try the question online and watch the video explanation: https://gre.magoosh.com/questions/2662

GRE Vocabulary: Free Resources on the Internet

The Internet is a great resource for vocabulary. And, I'm not just talking about those *New York Times* articles with challenging words – many sites offer a word of the day, or, better yet, an entire write-up on a word (the latter is courtesy of The New York Times).

By immersing yourself in a world of words, you will allow your brain to pick up more words than when you simply subject it to a deck of flashcards. That is, varying backdrops keep your brain alert, so that it is more likely to hold a vocabulary word in long-term memory.

So, check out these links, and they should help you develop a stronger vocabulary that will definitely come in handy on the day of your exam:

http://magoosh.com/gre

We have Vocabulary Wednesday videos and word lists every week, in the style of the word lists above, so be sure to check in for blog posts about everything on the GRE—not just vocab, but Math and Writing and the rest of the Verbal section as well, and leave us comments with suggestions for themes of word lists or any other GRE study tips you'd like to see!

http://gre.magoosh.com/flashcards

This is our free 1000+ word vocabulary flashcard site. It's pretty awesome— it includes all of the words in this eBook, and many more. It utilizes adaptive learning to make sure the words really stick! It's also available as an iPhone or Android app, so you can flip through flashcards and review no matter where you are ☺.

http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/category/word-of-the-day/

This helpful word-of-the-day does more than just define a word. It cites the word as used in context from *The New York Times* galaxy of articles. These articles generally tend to be a trove of other useful words, so your word-of-the-day can become words-of-the-day…make sure, though, to have wordnik.com open, so as to get even more context on a word. Wordnik, you ask?

http://www.wordnik.com/

I've already trumpeted the wonders of wordnik.com elsewhere on this site. But, if you didn't catch those posts, here is the quick rundown: any word (and by any, I mean any) you can think of is defined, along with a plethora of examples taken from a gamut of sources (from Shakespeare to the last Yahoo article). If you want context on a word, this is the place to get it.

http://www.dictionary.com/

Their word-of-the-day feature is great—a dictionary.com definition right below the word, along with popular uses of the word in media (this last part is great for getting the sense of context). And, the best part is the word-of-the- day has been archived; so, now you can go all the way back to 2000 or so, and learn words (okay, that may be a tad ambitious – but at least you won't run out anytime soon).

With any word-of-the-day, always use common sense as to whether a word is a GRE word. So, if the word of the day is nares – another name for the nostrils – then you probably don't need to learn it. Likewise, really obscure words – say, words that are from Old English (ferly is a recent one on dictionary.com), then don't learn these words.

http://www.merriam-webster.com

This is a dynamic, robust site for vocabulary. Word-of-the-day is just the beginning. There are word games (I like the synonym finder – though it may not be challenging enough for high verbal scorers), and Trend Watch, a feature that shows which words have gained a sudden ascendancy (pariah, meaning outcast, shot up in the ensuing days of Gaddafi's death).

You can also see what other people have been looking up over the last 24 hours. As I look now, GRE words you have to know, such as pragmatic, didactic, and facetious, are all on the top 10 list (hmm, it seems a lot of SAT and GRE students – and maybe even some Magooshers! – have been visiting this site of late).

Finally – or perhaps not quite finally, as this site offers so much for the vocab hound – a seen and heard column features words people looked up and their respective motivations for doing so (hagiography, apparently, does not describe Steve Job's top-selling biography).

So, avail yourself of the Internet and fill yourself with word-of-the-days. And, don't forget to always check context.

Sign up for Magoosh GRE!

We give you everything you need to start studying today.

http://gre.magoosh.com/