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VERBAL REASONING

Single-Blank Text Completion

I will begin the study of text completion with single-blank questions (i.e., questions that require you to select the best choice to fill in one blank space in given sentences). Typically, you'll see a few single-blank questions per exam. Single-blank questions serve as a nice introduction to thinking about how to approach text completion questions in general.

Problem-Solving Strategies

You can split up your problem-solving process for text completion questions into two phases: (1) evaluating the statement and (2) choosing from the answer choices.

Evaluating the Statement

Keep in mind that the missing word or phrase is never random or accidental; the whole sentence has been created to lead you to this word or phrase. Put another way, all questions are carefully designed to enable you to anticipate the characteristics of the words or phrases needed to fill in the blank spaces.

Embedded clues about the missing word can appear anywhere in the statement—they may appear right next to the relevant blank space or (especially in longer sentences or paragraphs) in a completely different part of the text.

When you first read a statement, don't rush to the blank space—nor should you ignore it to focus exclusively on the adjacent wording. Rather, take in the statement as a whole and use every possible clue to anticipate the type of word or phrase that will fit into the blank.

Evaluating Answer Choices

Next, when you arrive at the answer choices, evaluate each one carefully and then decide to eliminate, leave, or select each one. You want to eliminate it if you are certain it's not the right answer; you want to leave it if you are unsure; and you want to select it if you feel confident it is correct. Even if you select an answer early in the process, I recommend that you carefully evaluate all of the remaining answer choices.

After that first round, review all the answer choices you didn't eliminate and choose the single best one. Even if you have an answer that you feel fairly certain about, use this second round to confirm that it is indeed better than the other options available.

Common Positive Paths

Path 1:

Able to eliminate four wrong answers and see why one answer is right.

Path 2:

Able to eliminate two wrong answers and see why one answer is right.

Path 3:

Able to eliminate two wrong answers. Down to three choices, able to see why one answer makes better sense than the other two.

Path 4:

Able to eliminate three answer choices. Down to two, able to see that one of them is clearly wrong.

Three Types of Clues

Let's take a look at how you can find the words in the sentence that provide the most useful clues about what needs to go in the blanks.

There are three key types of contextual clues to find within the sentence that tip off which word or phrase will fit best in the blank space. We can categorize these clues as **definitions**, **inferences**, and **contrasts**. Of course, during the exam, you don't have to spend time categorizing the type of clues that you are given in each sentence. However, practicing identifying and utilizing such clues before the exam is helpful, so let's get started.

Definitions

The most basic type of clue is the **definition**. The test writer will provide a definition for the missing word (or phrase) somewhere else in the text. Note that this clue can be located anywhere, and the writer will often get creative with the sentence structure to distance it from the blank space.

Here is a super-simple example to illustrate:

Imagine that the missing word is **elusive**, which means challenging to find, catch, or achieve.

You may see the definition right next to the blank:

The thief was so ____, or **difficult to find and catch**, that the police had to bring in special forces.

Or the definition may be separated from the blank:

____ thieves often require local police to bring in special forces, for such criminals are particularly **difficult to find and catch**.

Regardless of where in the sentence the hints occur, be on the lookout for words and phrases in the text that help define the missing term. Let's look at two full sample questions for which definitions play a central role in determining the correct answer.

Sample Question 1

The Great Exhibition of 1851 put innovations and ideas from all over the world on display in London's Hyde Park, celebrating the many _____ of technology and human progress that marked the Industrial Revolution.

- Ⓐ manipulation
- Ⓑ surrenders
- Ⓒ advances
- Ⓓ disclosures
- Ⓔ gatherings

Solution

The key clues here are *innovations*, *ideas*, *technology*, and *progress*—these words define the subject of the exhibition and, therefore, the word in the blank. You also know the word in the blank is positive because the exhibition is *celebrating* it. Therefore, you need a word that fits the definition of progress and innovation in ideas and technology. *Innovations* can be defined as *advances* in technology, and *advances* are also virtually synonymous with *progress*, so it makes sense that **(C) is the correct answer**.

Looking at the other answer choices:

(A) No words in the text refer to *manipulations*, or controlled adjustments of technology, so you can eliminate that answer choice.

(B) Nothing in the text indicates a *surrender*, and in this context, *surrender* is too negative a word to work with *celebrating*. You can eliminate this choice as well.

(D) To disclose is to reveal, so *disclosures* could be a somewhat tempting answer because the sentence is about an exhibition. However, as depicted in the sentence, the Industrial Revolution was marked not by disclosures of progress but by progress itself—and this progress is what the exhibition is celebrating. Therefore, you can eliminate (D).

(E) Finally, though the exhibition and celebration could be defined as a gathering, *gatherings* did not mark the Industrial Revolution. You can eliminate choice (E).

Sample Question 2

British humorist P. G. Wodehouse was an enormously _____ writer, churning out 71 novels, 24 story collections, 42 plays, and 15 movie scripts in his nearly 75-year career.

- Ⓐ lugubrious
- Ⓑ prolific
- Ⓒ controversial
- Ⓓ partisan
- Ⓔ languorous

Solution

All of the information you are given about Wodehouse, in describing what sort of *enormously* _____ *writer* he was, deals with the vast amount of material that he produced over his long career.

In keeping with this definition, you can expect a modifier such as productive. Let's take a look at the answer choices.

(A) *Lugubrious* is a synonym for sad or mournful. Nothing in the sentence suggests sadness, so you can eliminate this answer choice.

(B) *Prolific* is a synonym for highly productive and is exactly the type of answer you are looking for. **(B) is correct.**

(C) No language in the sentence indicates that Wodehouse was *controversial*, so you can eliminate this answer choice. (Note: Wodehouse may indeed have been a controversial author; however, because this text does not contain any references to controversy, (C) will not be the correct answer choice. You must be careful not to bring outside information to the passage, even if you know such information to be true.)

(D) To be *partisan* is to be strongly supportive of a particular party or cause. Although Wodehouse may have been partisan, nothing in the sentence refers to partisanship or taking sides. You can confidently eliminate this answer choice as well.

(E) Finally, to be *languorous* is to lack energy, which is quite the opposite of the characteristics of Wodehouse that the sentence describes. You can eliminate answer choice (E).

Inferences

In some sentences, you'll be given clues that do not provide direct definitions but that allow you to infer the missing term. Going back to the simple example term **elusive**, meaning difficult to find or catch, let's look at the following:

The thief was so _____ that the police had to hire extra forces and purchase special equipment to apprehend her.

You aren't specifically told that the thief is difficult to find and catch, but you can infer this quality based on the information provided in the sentence—specifically that the police had to expend extra effort to capture her.

Here are a couple more examples of sentence completion questions that provide clues that allow you to infer the meaning of the missing term.

Sample Question 1

One crucial difference between real-world and online discourse is that the inherent anonymity of social media can afford us a feeling of _____ that may encourage us to give free rein to our worst impulses.

- Ⓐ congeniality
- Ⓑ perspicacity
- Ⓒ endangerment
- Ⓓ impunity
- Ⓔ self-possession

Solution

You know from the clues in the text that online discourse is *anonymous*—no one knows who we are—and that this quality may encourage us to feel *free* to do bad things we would otherwise hold ourselves back from (reins are restraints, so *to give free rein* is to choose not to use restraints). You need to infer what sort of feeling resulting from anonymity might provide such encouragement.

(A) *Congeniality* is friendliness. Nothing in the sentence refers to friendliness, and this feeling wouldn't encourage us to give in to our worst impulses, so you can eliminate this answer.

(B) *Perspicacity* is the characteristic of perceptiveness and having keen insight. No words in the sentence suggest sharp perception, and there is no inherent reason perspicacity would encourage us to give in to our worst impulses. You can eliminate this answer as well.

(C) Although the word *endangerment* has negative connotations, hence superficially fitting with the overall tone of the sentence, no words in the text refer to danger—so this choice is very unlikely to be correct. You could leave it in out of an abundance of caution, but it's not a great fit for the sentence.

(D) *Impunity*—the freedom to act without suffering the consequences of our actions (it literally means a lack of punishment)—is the exact type of word you are looking for. If online anonymity makes us feel confident that no one can identify us, feeling freedom from the risk of punishment could indeed encourage us to give free rein to our worst impulses. **You can infer that (D) is correct.**

(E) There is no reason to infer that a feeling of *self-possession*, or control of one's emotions and behavior, would encourage us to give free rein to the worst of our impulses; indeed, quite the opposite because *free rein* is a lack of control. Furthermore, self-possession is a positive quality, hence not in keeping with the tone of the sentence. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

Sample Question 2

Sarah Hale, longtime editor of the 19th-century American women's magazine *Godey's Lady's Book*, wrote passionately about Thanksgiving, _____ national leaders to add it to the calendar of national celebrations until Lincoln finally acquiesced in 1863.

- Ⓐ discharging
- Ⓑ defraying
- Ⓒ badgering
- Ⓓ restraining
- Ⓔ promising

Solution

You can infer from *passionately* that Hale invested energy and emotion in her advocacy of Thanksgiving to national leaders. Looking at the fact that Lincoln *finally acquiesced* to Hale—or gave in to her requests after a lengthy period—we can infer that Hale petitioned for an official Thanksgiving celebration repeatedly over a long time. Therefore, you can infer that Sarah Hale perhaps pleaded for Thanksgiving to be made an official national holiday.

Let's take a look at the answer choices.

(A) To *discharge* a person is to dismiss them, which doesn't make sense in this context. No words in the sentence have anything to do with dismissal. You can eliminate this answer choice.

(B) *Defraying* means to help to pay the cost, which also doesn't make sense in this context. No language in the text refers to cost or payment. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

(C) *Badgering* is to repeatedly ask, which is exactly the type of answer you anticipated.

Answer choice (C) is correct.

(D) *Restraining* means holding back, the opposite of what Hale is described in this sentence as doing. You can eliminate this answer choice.

(E) Sarah Hale is not *promising* national leaders to add it to the calendar. Although this answer choice is in keeping with Hale's passionate advocacy, her *promising* could not lead Lincoln to *finally acquiesce*. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

Contrasts

The final type of clue that you may find in a sentence completion question is a **contrast**. The missing word stands in contrast or opposition to other specific language in the text.

Be on the lookout for words that will tip off that a contrast is coming, such as the following:

unlike
despite
although
while
however
contrary
but
rather
instead
nonetheless
nevertheless
still
on the other hand

Note: On the GRE, sometimes milder words such as “unexpected,” “surprising,” or “incongruous” can indicate that a contrast or opposition exists in the sentence.

Going back to the simple example using the word elusive, you can see how you might set up the answer with a contrast:

Unlike her accomplice, who was fairly easy for the police to catch, Janice proved to be quite _____.

You know directly from the sentence that Janice was the opposite of *easy...to catch*, so it would make sense that she would be elusive.

Let’s look at some sample questions in which contrast clues play a key role.

Sample Question 1

In stark contrast to the current _____, a disharmony exacerbated by sharp disagreements with coworkers and struggles to abide by company policies marked the beginning of Smith’s time as an employee at the research laboratory.

- Ⓐ competence
- Ⓑ effortlessness
- Ⓒ intelligence
- Ⓓ intractability
- Ⓔ collegiality

Solution

From the language of the text, you can infer that the word in the blank shows a stark contrast to *disharmony* in the workplace. You should be looking for a word that suggests harmony—people getting along and working well together, particularly in a professional context.

Let's look at the answer choices.

(A) *Competence* shows no contrast with *disharmony* and is very unlikely to be the correct answer. Although it does imply positive contributions to the workplace and is therefore not completely off-topic for the general meaning of the text, competence does not directly oppose the meaning of disharmony.

(B) *Effortlessness* does not contrast directly with *disharmony*, so it is unlikely to be correct. However, it is a good antonym for *struggles*, so it is worth keeping in mind if no other answer choice works better.

(C) Nothing in the text states that a lack of *intelligence* contributed to Smith's early *disharmony* or that an increase in intelligence characterizes the difference between the *disharmony* and her contrasting current situation. You can eliminate this answer choice.

(D) *Intractability* is stubbornness. Stubbornness does not contrast with *disharmony*; in fact, stubbornness would fit well with the list of things the sentence states show a contrast to the word you are looking for. You can eliminate this answer choice.

(E) *Collegiality*, which is cooperative and harmonious interaction among a group of co-workers, provides a stark contrast with *disharmony*, *disagreements*, and *struggles* in the office. This word is exactly what you are looking for; it fits the sentence far better than effortlessness, the only other choice that was still in the running. Furthermore, *collegiality* relates directly to workplace culture. **(E) is the correct answer choice.**

Sample Question 2

Although they can lead us to make grave errors, cognitive biases also help us more efficiently _____ the overwhelming flood of information we encounter each day.

- Ⓐ acknowledge
- Ⓑ process
- Ⓒ dismiss
- Ⓓ retrain
- Ⓔ disregard

Solution

You have a clear opposition here: *grave errors* contrast with *help* and *efficiently*.

You can expect the word in the blank to be positive, a verb that would describe how to *efficiently* deal with an *overwhelming flood*. A verb that means manage, understand, or sort out would fit into this blank.

(A) *Acknowledge* may be a somewhat tempting answer choice because it is positive and has to do with understanding. However, cognitive biases could help us efficiently *acknowledge* a flood of information, and acknowledging this flood of information would do nothing to help us deal with its overwhelming nature.

(B) Because they would impose a structure on the flood of information, cognitive biases could indeed help us efficiently *process* that information. **(B) is the correct answer.**

(C) Although it is possible (though not likely) that one would need help to *dismiss* an overwhelming flood of information, we would not seek to do so efficiently. This answer choice does not work.

(D) This answer choice is very similar to (C), and *disregard* has the same disqualifications. You can eliminate (D) as well.

(E) To *retrain* is to reteach. It would not be possible to retrain a flood of information. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

Prediction Drill

For each of the following sentences, underline the key clues that tip off what you can expect from the missing term before then making a prediction about what the missing term might be.

1. Certain that she would soon be laid off because of her company's restructuring, Allison _____ her upcoming termination by leaving for a secure position with an industry competitor.

2. All types of houseplants can provide us with aesthetic pleasure and stress relief; however, some, including English ivy, Boston fern, peace lily, and aloe vera, also act as _____ natural filters that can significantly improve air quality in our living spaces.

3. Though modern parents generally accept rebellion as an inevitable part of adolescence, they often end up in _____ relationships with their teenage children because they abhor the ways in which this necessary process plays out.

4. In the process of _____ about the triumphs and tribulations of the past, history students become better prepared to meet the challenges of a constantly changing and increasingly complex modern world.

5. It is remarkable how much parenting norms can change from generation to generation: although the ultimate crime 50 years ago was to _____ one's children, neglecting to indulge their whims is now considered a parental sin.

6. Cats whiskers, or vibrissae, owe their incredible sensitivity to the sensory organs called proprioceptors at their tips. Although whisker sensitivity helps cats successfully _____ their environments, overstimulated proprioceptors may occasionally cause them discomfort.

7. Justin was a _____ opponent, his superficial indifference cleverly masking a calculating mind.

8. O. W. Gurley, a wealthy Black businessman, moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1905 to create economic opportunities for those _____ "the harsh oppression of Mississippi."

9. Although cars have long been _____ in our area, our great-grandmother could remember a time when a jalopy coming down the road would draw fascinated children from every nearby home.

Prediction Drill Solutions

1. Certain that she would soon be laid off because of her company's restructuring, Allison _____ her upcoming termination by leaving for a secure position with an industry competitor.

Notes: Allison knows she is about to get *laid off*, and she acts ahead of time to avoid this fate by *leaving for a secure position* elsewhere.

Anticipate: Allison preempted her upcoming termination.

2. All types of houseplants can provide us with aesthetic pleasure and stress relief; however, some, including English ivy, Boston fern, peace lily, and aloe vera, also act as _____ natural filters that can significantly improve air quality in our living spaces.

Notes: You are looking for a benefit of houseplants that is different from (*however*), but does not counteract, aesthetic pleasure and stress relief. Because they *significantly improve air quality*, you can infer that they are good/powerful/strong natural filters.

Anticipate: Some houseplants act as effective natural filters that can significantly improve air quality.

3. Though modern parents generally accept rebellion as an inevitable part of adolescence, they often end up in _____ relationships with their teenage children because they abhor the ways in which this necessary process plays out.

Notes: You have a couple of clues here. The part of the sentence where the blank occurs is set up to contrast (*though*) with the earlier statement that parents *accept* their children's rebellion. Further, you learn that the parents *abhor*, or hate, the way the process plays out. Therefore, you are looking for a word that conveys conflict and unpleasantness.

Anticipate: Modern parents often end up in argumentative relationships with their teenage children.

4. In the process of _____ about the triumphs and tribulations of the past, history students may become better prepared to meet the challenges of a constantly changing and increasingly complex modern world.

Notes: What *process* do *history* students take part in relation to *the past*? They study it and learn about its good times and bad times.

Anticipate: History students undertake the process of studying and learning about the triumphs and tribulations of the past.

5. It is remarkable how much parenting norms can change from generation to generation: although the ultimate crime 50 years ago was to _____ one's children, neglecting to indulge their whims is now considered a parental sin.

Notes: The words *change* and *although* tell you to look for a contrast in this sentence between norms *50 years ago* and norms *now*. Today, *neglecting to indulge* children is a *sin*; in contrast, 50 years ago, it would have been a *crime* to indulge them.

Anticipate: The ultimate crime 50 years ago was to indulge or spoil one's children.

6. Cat whiskers, or vibrissae, owe their incredible sensitivity to the sensory organs called proprioceptors at their tips. Although whisker sensitivity helps cats successfully _____ their environments, overstimulated proprioceptors may occasionally cause them discomfort.

Notes: Because the word in the blank is associated with *successfully* and is placed in contrast (*Although*) with *cause them discomfort*, you can infer that it is a positive/beneficial word for something cats would want or need to do in relation to their *environment*. Because the whiskers are external *sensory organs*, the verb should have something to do with what accurate perception of their surroundings would help the cats do.

Anticipate: Whisker sensitivity helps cats successfully navigate their environments.

7. Justin was a _____ opponent, his superficial indifference cleverly masking a calculating mind.

Notes: The underlined words in the sentence create a clear sense of the meaning of the adjective that goes in the blank. The word *opponent* shows that Justin is seeking victory in a competition. The word *superficial* (meaning only on the surface) and the phrase *cleverly masking* indicate that Justin is intentionally and skillfully creating a deceptive appearance of not working hard to win. The fact that he has a *calculating mind* shows that Justin is carefully planning his path to victory.

You are looking for a word that describes Justin as a shrewdly strategic opponent.

Anticipate: Justin was a cunning opponent.

8. O. W. Gurley, a wealthy Black businessman, moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1905 to create economic opportunities for those _____ “the harsh oppression of Mississippi.”

Notes: You are told that Gurley *moved to Oklahoma* to help people who were affected by adverse conditions in *Mississippi*. If those people were in Tulsa, they too must have left Mississippi to get away from its *harsh oppression*.

Anticipate: O. W. Gurley sought to create economic opportunities for those escaping from the *harsh oppression of Mississippi*.

9. Although cars have long been _____ in our area, our great-grandmother could remember a time when a jalopy coming down the road would draw fascinated children from every nearby home.

Notes: The sentence establishes a contrast to a period when cars made people *fascinated*, so you can infer that, now, cars are fairly unexciting and ordinary.

Anticipate: Cars have long been common in our area.

Practice Questions

Select from amongst the answer choices one that best completes the given statement.

1. O. W. Gurley, a wealthy Black businessman, moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1905 to create economic opportunities for those _____ “the harsh oppression of Mississippi.”

- Ⓐ yearning for
- Ⓑ refuting
- Ⓒ fleeing
- Ⓓ attesting to
- Ⓔ yielding to

2. Cat whiskers, or vibrissae, owe their incredible sensitivity to sensory organs called proprioceptors at their tips. Although whisker sensitivity helps cats successfully _____ their environments, overstimulated proprioceptors may occasionally cause them discomfort.

- Ⓐ naturalize
- Ⓑ negotiate
- Ⓒ predominate
- Ⓓ forfeit
- Ⓔ relish

3. All types of houseplants can provide us with aesthetic pleasure and stress relief; however, some, including English ivy, Boston fern, peace lily, and aloe vera, also act as _____ natural filters that can significantly improve air quality in our living spaces.

- Ⓐ effortful
- Ⓑ efficacious
- Ⓒ effluent
- Ⓓ effusive
- Ⓔ effete

4. Justin was _____ opponent, his superficial indifference cleverly masking a calculating mind.

- Ⓐ an insidious
- Ⓑ a callow
- Ⓒ a prosaic
- Ⓓ a capricious
- Ⓔ a malicious

5. Though modern parents generally accept rebellion as an inevitable part of adolescence, they often end up in _____ relationships with their teenage children because they abhor the ways in which this necessary process plays out.

- Ⓐ salubrious
- Ⓑ uncanny
- Ⓒ rancorous
- Ⓓ austere
- Ⓔ unstinting

6. In the process of _____ the triumphs and tribulations of the past, history students become better prepared to meet the challenges of a constantly changing and increasingly complex modern world.

- Ⓐ preparing
- Ⓑ improving
- Ⓒ replacing
- Ⓓ transmuting
- Ⓔ scrutinizing

7. Although cars have long been _____ in our area, our great-grandmother could remember a time when a jalopy coming down the road would draw fascinated children from every nearby home.

- Ⓐ ubiquitous
- Ⓑ cherished
- Ⓒ propitious
- Ⓓ unorthodox
- Ⓔ compelling

8. Certain that she would soon be laid off because of her company's restructuring, Allison _____ her upcoming termination by leaving for a secure position with an industry competitor.

- Ⓐ predetermined
- Ⓑ predisposed
- Ⓒ prevaricated
- Ⓓ predominated
- Ⓔ preempted

9. It is remarkable how much parenting norms can change from generation to generation: although the ultimate crime 50 years ago was to _____ one's children, neglecting to indulge their whims is now considered a parental sin.

- Ⓐ rebuff
- Ⓑ bemuse
- Ⓒ cosset
- Ⓓ undermine
- Ⓔ upbraid

Practice Question Solutions

1. O. W. Gurley, a wealthy Black businessman, moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1905 to create economic opportunities for those _____ “the harsh oppression of Mississippi.”

- (A) yearning for
- (B) refuting
- (C) fleeing**
- (D) attesting to
- (E) yielding to

Solution

You can infer that Gurley wanted to create opportunities for those escaping the harsh oppression of Mississippi to create a better life for themselves in Oklahoma. Let’s evaluate the answer choices.

(A) These individuals would not be *yearning for*, or desiring, the harsh oppression of Mississippi, so you can eliminate this answer choice.

(B) These individuals are also not *refuting*, or proving to be false, the harsh oppression of Mississippi, so you can eliminate this answer choice as well.

(C) These individuals are *fleeing*, or escaping from, the harsh oppression of Mississippi, so **this is the correct answer**.

(D) Nothing in the sentence indicates that the people Gurley sought to help were *attesting to*, or providing evidence of, the harsh oppression of Mississippi. You can eliminate (D) as well.

(E) *Yielding to*, or giving in to, fits reasonably well with the harsh oppression of Mississippi, so it may be a tempting answer choice. However, it does not account for what these people are doing in Oklahoma, so it doesn’t fulfill the function of the word in the blank. It does not fit the sentence as well as answer choice (C). You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

2. Cat whiskers, or vibrissae, owe their incredible sensitivity to sensory organs called proprioceptors at their tips. Although whisker sensitivity helps cats successfully _____ their environments, overstimulated proprioceptors may occasionally cause them discomfort.

- (A) naturalize
- (B) negotiate**
- (C) predominate
- (D) forfeit
- (E) relish

Solution

You can infer that the sensitivity of cats’ whiskers helps them navigate their environment. Let’s evaluate the answer choices.

(A) *Naturalize* is both awkward yet tempting—to naturalize is to cause to adapt or to adapt to a new area. This word is at least on topic for the context. However, if you plug it into the blank, the sentence tells you that the cats’ whisker sensitivity helps them cause their environments to adapt. This meaning is not correct. So you can eliminate naturalize.

(B) *Negotiate* is a synonym for navigate, and **it is the correct answer**.

(C) To *predominate* means to be the primary or main element. No words in the sentence refer to relative significance or dominance of cats. You can eliminate this answer choice.

(D) Similarly, to *forfeit* means to give up, and you have no hints of this either, so you can eliminate it as well.

(E) And finally, to *relish* is to feel great enjoyment. Nothing in the sentence tells you that cats enjoy their environments (and it also doesn’t go well with *successfully*), so you can eliminate this answer choice as well.

3. All types of houseplants can provide us with aesthetic pleasure and stress relief; however, some, including English ivy, Boston fern, peace lily, and aloe vera, also act as _____ natural filters that can significantly improve air quality in our living spaces.

- (A) effortful
- (B) efficacious**
- (C) effluent
- (D) effusive
- (E) effete

Solution

The *however* indicates that, although all plants offer aesthetic pleasure and stress relief, a select few have an additional characteristic: some also act as _____ natural filters. Because they can significantly improve air quality, you can infer that they must be effective air filters.

(A) *Effortful* isn't a great match. Nothing in the sentence indicates effort. You can eliminate (A).

(B) *Efficacious* is a synonym for effective and **is, thus, the correct answer**.

(C) *Effluent* means flowing out; nothing in the sentence suggests flowing, and filters don't flow. You can eliminate this answer choice.

(D) *Effusive* means overflowing; like (C) above, this word has nothing to do with the sentence (or with filters in general). You can eliminate it.

(E) *Effete* means lacking strength or force; it is the opposite of what you are looking for. Effete filters would not significantly improve air quality. You can eliminate (E).

4. Justin was _____ opponent, his superficial indifference cleverly masking a calculating mind.

- (A) an insidious**
- (B) a callow
- (C) a prosaic
- (D) a capricious
- (E) a malicious

Solution

You know that Justin's *superficial indifference* cleverly masks a calculating mind, so you want an answer that gives you a sense that he's deceptive, scheming, or something of that nature.

(A) *An insidious* opponent is one who is dangerous in a way that is difficult to see, crafty, and deceptive. This is a great match and **is the correct answer**.

(B) *A callow* person is one who is inexperienced or immature. This doesn't fit the description given of Justin. You can eliminate it.

(C) *A prosaic* person is one who is unimaginative or dull. This doesn't fit the description given of Justin. You can eliminate it.

(D) *A capricious* person is one who is fickle, inconstant, and always changing their mind. This also doesn't fit anything in the description given of Justin.

(E) *A malicious* person is one who wants to do harm. Though Justin does intend to deceive and is scheming to win, the text contains no indication that Justin wants to or means to do harm. You can eliminate this answer as well.

Solutions Continued

5. Though modern parents generally accept rebellion as an inevitable part of adolescence, they often end up in _____ relationships with their teenage children because they abhor the ways in which this necessary process plays out.

- (A) salubrious
- (B) uncanny
- (C) **rancorous**
- (D) austere
- (E) unstinting

Solution

The missing word describes the type of relationships that modern parents have with their teenage children, and you have some key clues as to what to expect.

You start with a contrast, *though modern parents generally accept*, which indicates you are looking to fill in the blank with a word that indicates the opposite of acceptance. Then, you are told that the parents *abhor* the ways in which this necessary process plays out, another indication that the blank contains a negative word that implies conflict and unpleasantness.

Let's take a look at the answer choices.

(A) *Salubrious* means healthful, which is not the description the clues are pointing you to. You can eliminate it.

(B) *Uncanny* means strange or inexplicable—no words in the sentence tell you that the relationship is strange or can't be explained, so you can eliminate this answer choice as well.

(C) A *rancorous* relationship is one characterized by anger or resentment. This matches the clues—it contrasts with acceptance and matches abhorrence. **Rancorous is correct.**

(D) *Austere* means very strict and without comforts. It isn't a good match for the clues in the sentence. You can eliminate austere as well.

(E) Although *unstinting* may sound like a negative word, it actually means generous. It doesn't match up with the meaning required by the clues. (E) can be eliminated as well.

6. In the process of _____ the triumphs and tribulations of the past, history students become better prepared to meet the challenges of a constantly changing and increasingly complex modern world.

- (A) preparing
- (B) improving
- (C) replacing
- (D) transmuting
- (E) **scrutinizing**

Solution

You are looking for something that *history students* do in relation to the *triumphs and tribulations* of the past. They study or analyze them.

Let's evaluate the answer choices.

(A) *Preparing* does not work in this context and can be eliminated.

(B) *Improving* does not work in this context and can be eliminated.

(C) *Replacing* does not work in this context and can be eliminated.

(D) To *transmute* is to change—the sentence does mention the changing world, but it does not indicate that the students are changing anything about the past, so you can eliminate transmuting.

(E) *Scrutinizing* means studying very carefully. This fits the context well, for this is what history students do. **(E) is the correct answer.**

7. Although cars have long been _____ in our area, our great-grandmother could remember a time when a jalopy coming down the road would draw fascinated children from every nearby home.

- Ⓐ **ubiquitous**
- Ⓑ cherished
- Ⓒ propitious
- Ⓓ unorthodox
- Ⓔ compelling

Solution

You expect a word synonymous with unsurprising or ordinary to contrast with the fact that cars were so unusual and interesting as to inspire fascination in the past. Let's take a look at the answer choices.

(A) *Ubiquitous* means present everywhere. **This is the correct answer.**

(B) *Cherished* doesn't provide the contrast that this sentence requires—cherishing cars would not prevent them from attracting fascination or attention. You can eliminate this answer choice.

(C) *Propitious* means favorable or promising; in context, it's tough to see what this could be contrasted against, so you can eliminate this answer choice as well.

(D) *Unorthodox* means going against the norm; this is the opposite of the answer you are looking for, so you can eliminate this answer choice, too.

(E) To be *compelling* is to be irresistible or to command respect. This is the opposite of what you are looking for; you are seeking a word that implies the car would NOT attract fascinated attention. You can eliminate answer choice (E).

8. Certain that she would soon be laid off because of her company's restructuring, Allison _____ her upcoming termination by leaving for a secure position with an industry competitor.

- Ⓐ predetermined
- Ⓑ predisposed
- Ⓒ prevaricated
- Ⓓ predominated
- Ⓔ **preempted**

Solution

By *leaving* her company for a *secure position* elsewhere, Allison would preempt, or act in advance to prevent, her being laid off.

Fortunately for us, *preempted* is among the answer choices, and **(E) is the correct answer.**

Let's take a quick look at the other answer choices.

(A) To *predetermine* is to decide something in advance: that does not fit the context. Allison isn't deciding her termination.

(B) To *predispose* is to make someone more likely or susceptible. It's unorthodox or incorrect phrasing to say one predisposes an action. Also, this meaning is the opposite of what you are looking for. You can safely eliminate this answer choice as well.

(C) To *prevaricate* is to lie, which doesn't make sense in this context. You can eliminate prevaricated.

(D) To *predominate* something is to be the main element in it; this meaning does not fit the context of this sentence. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

Solutions Continued

9. It is remarkable how much parenting norms can change from generation to generation: although the ultimate crime 50 years ago was to _____ one's children, neglecting to indulge their whims is now considered a parental sin.

- Ⓐ rebuff
- Ⓑ bemuse
- Ⓒ **cosset**
- Ⓓ undermine
- Ⓔ upbraid

Solution

You know you have a contrast between the generations and that, now, it is considered a parental sin to neglect to *indulge* the whims of one's child. So, in contrast, you can infer that, 50 years ago, it was a crime to indulge or spoil one's children. With that in mind, let's evaluate the answer choices.

(A) To *rebuff* is to reject, which is the reverse of what you are looking for. You can eliminate this answer.

(B) To *bemuse* is to confuse or to puzzle, which doesn't fit in this context—no language in the sentence refers to confusing one's children. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

(C) *Cosset* is a synonym for pamper or coddle. It's the exact type of word you are looking for: the opposite of *neglecting to indulge*. **(C) is correct.**

(D) *Undermining*, or trying to weaken, is not relevant to the context. It is not the opposite of neglecting to indulge and does not imply spoiling. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.

(E) To *upbraid* is to scold. To scold doesn't fit the context; it does not mean spoil or indulge. You can eliminate this answer choice as well.