

Vocabulary Test

PREPARATION KIT

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High-Stakes Test Terms To Know

1 Choose: To select from a number of possibilities. Similar words: select, pick, determine, identify

2 Compare: Common characteristics, identify how things are alike or similar

3 Contrast: Characteristics that are not alike. Identify how things are different

4 Summarize: Give a brief overview of the main points

5 Explain: Think of the five (5) W's and one (1) H. Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How

10 Author's Purpose: What was the reason the author wrote the passage (basic: inform, persuade, entertain) (complex: persuade readers to do what? OR explain to readers the nature of what?)

6 Conclude/Conclusion: To arrive at a decision, to close or bring to an end

7 Infer: "Read between the lines"; the answer is not clearly stated in the passage. Use knowledge and experience to draw conclusions

8 Analyze: Look at how each aspect of the reading works together to explain the overall meaning. Similar words: assess, evaluate, investigate, inspect

9 Persuade: Pick a side of an issue and use evidence and ideas to support that side (complex: address the other side's viewpoint first, then argue why your side is better)

Ten Quick Writing Prompts

FOR VOCABULARY

- 1** Do you enjoy coming to school every day? If so, why? If not, what made you stop enjoying school?
- 2** What are three great books or movies that you would recommend to a friend? Give detailed reasons why each book or movie is worthy of reading or watching.
- 3** When were you faced with a choice that you didn't want to make? How did you decide to make it and what was the outcome?
- 4** How would our lives be different if no one had a cell phone? Would you like to live this way or not? Explain why and include details.
- 5** Sitting down all day is not considered very healthy, but yet students sit at desks almost all day to learn. Would you prefer to stand at a desk and learn? Why or why not? Provide at least three reasons.
- 6** What time of day do you enjoy most and what time do you enjoy least? Explain why and include examples.
- 7** Do you have a favorite meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack, etc.)? Explain what type of meal is your favorite and why.
- 8** What kind of art do you enjoy creating the most? Explain what you do and why you love to do it.
- 9** Who has been your favorite teacher so far in your school career and why? Give details in your answer.
- 10** What is your favorite cartoon character or type of animal? Explain why you love your choice.

TOP 3 Test Tips for the ACT[®]

With Examples & BONUS TIP

TIP 1 If the question asks you to define a word, replace the original word with each of the answer choices. Pick the one that sounds best when read in the sentence.

“Two situations came before my mind of two cousins, both of them young men. One commenced early in life with the **ignoble** goal of getting along ‘easy,’ shunning work, and casting for the easy way.”

1. As it is used in line 9, *ignoble* most nearly means:

- A. difficult.
- B. lofty.
- C. low.
- D. realistic.

It is much easier to hear the right answer when replacing the vocabulary word with each of the answers, especially as only one fits with the context clues “shunning work” and “casting for the easy way.”

TIP 2 Whenever possible, justify your answer by underlining the section in the test passage that supports your reasoning.

“Will the young men who are to be the leaders spend their hours in riotous living? Will they be false to their obligations and **dilatory** and **torpid** toward their work? Will they be disloyal to self, to home, and to country? No, never!”

2. The author feels that “the young men who are to be the leaders” (line 70) should:

- F. spend their hours learning to be leaders.
- G. go into debt to fulfill their obligations.
- H. be good at creating jobs.
- J. never waste time or money.

Underlining the key phrases of what leaders are NOT to do will provide the answer to what the author feels like they should actually do.

TIP 3 If the question asks about themes or an overall idea about the passage, look at each topic sentence and conclusion sentence. Use the ideas presented in these areas to come to a conclusion.

The Passage’s Topic & Conclusion Sentences for each paragraph

“A man’s life is contingent upon his emotions, his aspirations, and his determinations. A young man starts out with the **supposition** that the world owes him pleasure and he says to himself, ‘Dollars were made to spend. I am young, and every man must sow his wild oats and then settle down.’”

“Two situations came before my mind of two cousins, both of them young men ... It was not long before no one would employ this man. Is the game worth the candle?”

Tip 3 continued

"The other cousin started out with a determination altogether dissimilar ... Thus step by step, he progressed, with each day bringing new duties and exertions but each day also bringing new vigor and determination to master them, and today that cousin is a man of wealth and an honored citizen, blessed, too, with a joyful home."

"Some young men commence life with the supposition that every dollar made necessitates that one dollar and a half shall be spent ... The young men marry, but their debts begin to accumulate and to press them, their countenances are always woe-begone, and where once were smiles, now are frowns, and the homes are portraits of despondency and shadows ..."

"Debt is the greatest burden that can be put upon man because it makes him afraid to look honest men in the face ... If there is any intemperate young man whose expenditures outstrip his income, let him contemplate the question, is the game worth the candle?"

"I know another young man who considered he could be content by spending one-third of what he made and saving the other portion ... "Ah, his indeed was a happy home."

Humanities: This passage is adapted from a speech given by James E. Shephard to a graduating class, "Is the Game Worth the Candle?" the title is an adage that questions if one's enjoyment of a card game is worth the cost of the candle that burned while the game was played. (Published 1914.)

A man's life is contingent upon his emotions, his aspirations, and his determinations. A young man starts out with the **supposition** that the world owes him pleasure and he says to himself, "Dollars were made to spend. I am young, and every man must sow his wild oats and then settle down."

Two situations came before my mind of two cousins, both of them young men. One commenced early in life with the **ignoble** goal of getting along "easy," shunning work, and casting for the easy way. His motto was, "The world owes me a living, and I am going to get mine." He was employed first by one firm and then by another, and if anything that he considered demanding presented itself, he would engage another fellow to undertake the task while he "took things easy." It was not long before no one would employ this man. Is the game worth the candle?

"Will the young men who are to be the leaders spend their hours in riotous living? Will they be false to their obligations and **dilatory** and **torpid** toward their work? Will they be disloyal to self, to home, and to country? No, never!"

"Croesus was a rich man, and a **redoubtable** king... 'Solon, Solon, thou said truly that life is well and happy that ends well.'"

3. Which of the following most fully lists ways in which the author believes young men can be successful?
- A. Sow your wild oats early, and then settle down to hard work.
 - B. Save money, do every job to your best ability, and be trustworthy.
 - C. Do not go into debt or buy a large house, and keep your family happy.
 - D. Be a good citizen, and do not take on more work than you can handle.

BONUS TIP: Being asked to infer an idea from a passage means being asked to make a reasonable guess about what could or might happen based on the information provided.

Cross out answers that have no information from the passage that could lead you to that conclusion.

4. It can be reasonably inferred from lines 7–18 that the young man described is:
- F. paying too high a price to the pleasures he gets.
 - G. getting a lot of experience with different employers.
 - H. not capable of doing the work required of him.
 - J. going to have to settle down to work one day.

There is nothing that implies that he will have to settle down or cannot do the work so those can easily be crossed off.

TOP 3 Test Tips for the NEW SAT[®]

With Examples & BONUS Thought

TIP 1 If the question asks you to define a word, replace the original word with each of the answer choices. Pick the one that sounds best when read in the sentence.

“One is sometimes asked about the ‘obstacles’ that confront **novice** writers who want to start their careers doing good work.”

1. As it is used in line 2, “novice” most nearly means
 - A) talented.
 - B) beginning.
 - C) hard-working.
 - D) experienced.

It is easy to hear the right answer when replacing the vocabulary word with each of the answers, especially as only one truly fits with the context clue “start.”

Questions 1–10 are based on the following passage.

This passage is adapted from Willa Cather, “On the Art of Fiction.” Originally published 1920.

One is sometimes asked about the “obstacles” that confront **novice** writers who want to start their careers doing good work. I should say the greatest obstacles that writers today have to get over, are the **grandiose** journalistic successes of
5 twenty years ago, stories that surprised and delighted by their sharp photographic detail and that were really nothing more than lively pieces of reporting. The whole aim of that school of writing
10 was novelty—never a very important thing in art. They gave us, altogether, **ignoble** standards—taught us to multiply our ideas instead of to condense them. They tried to **concoct** a story out
15 of every theme that occurred to them and to get returns on every situation that suggested itself. They got returns, of a kind. But their work, when one looks back on it, now that the novelty upon
20 which they counted so much is gone, is journalistic and **inconsequential**. The especial merit of a good reportorial story is that it shall be intensely interesting and pertinent today and shall have **dissipated** by tomorrow.

TIP 2 Whenever possible, justify your answer by underlining the section in the test passage that supports your reasoning.

2. Cather characterizes the “writing of twenty years ago” as
 - A) interesting but insubstantial.
 - B) worthy of success.
 - C) highly influential.
 - D) condensed and grandiose.

When underlining, look at phrases that describe the “successes of twenty years ago.”

This strategy also helps you answer follow-up SAT questions!

3. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?
 - A) Lines 1–9 (“One is...reporting”)
 - B) Lines 9–13 (“The whole...them”)
 - C) Lines 13–16 (“They...kind”)
 - D) Lines 16–22 (“But...tomorrow”)

TIP
3 If the question asks about an overall idea about the passage, look at each topic sentence and conclusion sentence. Use the ideas presented in these areas to come to a conclusion.

The Passage’s Topic & Conclusion Sentences for each paragraph

“One is sometimes asked about the “obstacles that confront **novice** writers who want to start their careers doing good work ... The especial merit of a good reportorial story is that it shall be intensely interesting and pertinent today and shall have **dissipated** by tomorrow.”

“Art, it seems to me, should simplify... All the discarded sketches that went before made the picture what it finally became, and the process was all the time one of simplifying, of sacrificing many conceptions good in themselves for one that was better and more universal.”

“Any first-rate novel or story must have in it the strength of a dozen fairly good stories that it has **pillaged** ... In the beginning the artist, like his public, is wedded to old forms, old ideal, and his vision is blurred by the memory of old delights he would like to **resuscitate**.”

4. The central claim of the passage is that
- A) one good story is the product of many stories.
 - B) writing for market demand is never good writing.
 - C) good writing is simple and uncompromised.
 - D) journalistic writing loses its relevance quickly.

By looking at all the topic and conclusion sentences of the passage TOGETHER, the ideas of individual paragraphs (that are two of the answers) can be eliminated and the overall idea of the passage regarding what makes a good piece of writing shines through.

BONUS THOUGHT: Think about a passage’s theme or purpose in regards to idea and attitude. What is the main idea of the passage and what is the speaker’s attitude toward that idea? Again, go back to the topic & conclusion sentence of each paragraph for help.

5. The main purpose of the passage is to
- A) criticize the work of recent writers.
 - B) advise writers on what is good writing.
 - C) compare good writing to a work of art.
 - D) persuade writers not to write for profit.

After looking back at the topic and conclusion sentences of each paragraph, the topic is clearly writing and the attitude toward writing as a whole, not in individual paragraphs, is overall one of mentor to mentee.

Answers: 1B, 2A, 3D, 4C, 5B

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TOP 5 Tips for Preparing for the SAT[®] & ACT[®] Tests

1 Make complicated words mundane.

When I was young, my father would often explain that he was being **facetious** and that many of his colleagues were quite **astute**. Those words became commonplace in my elementary school vocabulary, much to the surprise of my teachers. Now as a teacher, I try to use as many vocabulary words I can in everyday directions, discussions and conversations with my students. By the end of the year, all of my students understand that they will be given **approbation** for being **meritorious** and that Ms. Ressler becomes **belligerent** when they are **truculent**. These words come up so often that when they appear on SAT tests, students get excited because the test questions are so **facile**.

2 Match tough words with easy synonyms.

When I review two vocabulary words a day with my students, I always try to find a synonym students understand so they can think of that word as an easy definition. The word **sanguine** is paired with the synonym **jolly**, the word **inveigh** is paired with the phrase **urge strongly**. A quick word or phrase allows students to recognize the basic definition and understand how it is used in a sentence.

3 Recite, repeat, reiterate.

My favorite technique is simply to have student use the words *all the time*. Students have to include at least 2-3 vocabulary words in every assignment they turn in to me, regardless of the focus of the task. Students are also given stickers every time they say a vocabulary word aloud or share when they heard/saw/read a word outside of class. I encourage students to confuse their friends and family by using their *lexicons* to the fullest extent, and I often have teachers laugh over the answers students give in discussions that include vocabulary. The more students use new words, the more they internalize them so that they can recognize and understand their use on the SAT and beyond!

4 Read the sentence aloud with each vocab option.

So much of what we do is auditory learning of words; students start to hear what sounds right and wrong. I tell students when they come across questions that ask them to pick the best word to complete the sentence, they should say (quietly) the full sentence, inserting each possible answer. Even if they do not know the meanings of each word, they have practiced speaking and listening to tough vocabulary in context all year and should trust their instincts.

5 Break down word parts.

This strategy is used often, but bears repeating. When I go over new vocabulary words, I often break down their word parts. We talk about several vocabulary words that start with **bene** or **mal** and what those roots mean. I then remind students to continue to practice this strategy of breaking down words into roots, prefixes and suffixes whenever they encounter new words.

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Why Vocabulary Instruction is Crucial for Success on High-Stakes Tests

The new SAT and other high-stakes tests ask students to determine the meaning of an unknown word based on its use in a passage. The more **students study words and how context clues support word meaning**, the more comfortable they will feel identifying the meaning of unfamiliar words in a passage.

Students are also asked to support their answers with evidence from the passage. Again, as students study vocabulary, they understand how **context clues support a word's meaning, just as they recognize how key ideas from a passage support a specific answer.**

Standardized test **reading passages have complex vocabulary.** The more students understand the reading passage, the better they will do on the test.

Students are asked to write an **essay** that analyzes a passage. The more eloquent they sound in their response through the **use of vocabulary and supportive evidence**, the higher they will score.

Ultimately, students can often be intimidated by high-stakes tests. By helping students feel comfortable with complex vocabulary and using context clues, students **gain confidence** that they can understand complicated words and ideas. This confidence is a key component to success on high-stakes testing and, more importantly, in life!

Why Learning Vocabulary is Important for Me to Succeed on Tests & in Life

Tests ask me to determine the meaning of an unknown word based on its use in a passage. The more **I study words and learn how context clues support word meaning**, the more comfortable I will feel identifying the meaning of unfamiliar words in a passage.

I will also be asked to support my answers with evidence from the passage. As I study vocabulary, I will know how **context clues** support a word's meaning, just as I can learn to recognize how **key ideas from a passage support a specific answer**.

On standardized tests, the **reading passages have complex vocabulary**. The more I understand the reading passage, the better I will do on the test.

I will be asked to write an **essay** that analyzes a passage. The more eloquent I sound in my response through the **use of vocabulary and supportive evidence**, the higher I will score.

High-stakes tests are scary. However, I feel comfortable with complex vocabulary and using context clues, because I've been studying them all year long.

Therefore, I am confident that I can understand complicated words and ideas.

Because I know vocabulary words and how to learn the meanings of new words, I will do well on tests and in life!