

Chapter 3 Defining Your Vocabulary Skills

In This Chapter

Discovering the best way to study vocabulary Recognizing the meaning of vocab words with roots, prefixes, and suffixes Memorizing common words for testing success

either the SSAT nor ISEE gives you a vocabulary test. You won't see a section that **asks** you to choose a definition for a particular word — at least not directly. However, both the SSAT and ISEE ask you the meaning of words within the context of a reading passage (see Chapters 6 and 7). The SSAT may require you to understand some complicated words in analogy questions, and both exams require you to choose synonyms of difficult words.

So even though the exams don't provide a vocabulary test, having a good knowledge of a vast number of vocabulary words is certainly necessary. The good news: You already know a lot of vocabulary. After all, you use words every day when you speak, read, write, and even think. Instead of telling you to crack open your dictionary and start studying, we help you target your vocabulary with some specific word skills as well as review common words you may see on the exam. In this chapter, we help you build the skills you need to answer verbal questions and give you plenty of word lists to expand your vocabulary.

Studying Vocabulary

Here's a secret: You really can't study vocabulary. Sure, a teacher can give you a list of ten words and say, "Know these words for the quiz tomorrow." That's easy enough (although not much fun!). However, when you tackle an exam like the SSAT or ISEE, you don't get a list of words beforehand to memorize for the test. Instead, the test writers can ask you about any word they choose. Naturally, you can't memorize the entire dictionary, so you want to target your vocabulary study in a way that can help you decipher words you may not know, using prefixes and suffixes and even building your vocabulary skill a bit as well.

MEMBER

We all learn in different ways, so figure out how you most easily memorize information and take advantage of it. After all, you'll save time this way, and most importantly, you'll learn the words.

In the following sections, we outline a few different ways you can study and learn vocab words for the exam. Pick the method that works best for you and start studying!

Flipping through flashcards

The old tried-and-true method of flashcards is a great way to study and review vocabulary words. In this chapter, we provide several lists of words you should know because they have a tendency to show up on the exams. You can study the words in the chapter as they are, but you'll probably learn them faster if you grab some plain note cards, write the

Part II: Ramping Up for **the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections**

vocabulary word on one side, and write the definition on the other. Then, review the words and definitions until you can simply look at the word and know the definition without peeking.

Although traditional flashcards work well for many people, you may find that you learn vocabulary words more quickly by hearing the word and the definition several times, rather than looking at it in a book or on a card. If this method works for you, create an audio set of flashcards, using the voice recording feature on a phone, iPod, or your computer. Then, you can listen to yourself state the word and definition as many times as you want.

Memorizing mnemonic devices

A *mnemonic device* is something you use to help you remember something else. As you review vocabulary, you want all the help you can get, and for many people, mnemonic devices do the job with tricky concepts and vocabulary. Although a mnemonic can be virtually anything, most people use some kind of verbal cue to help remember something, such as a song, a poem, or words that rhyme with other words. For example, piano students are often taught the lines on the staff of the treble clef (EGBDF) by using the mnemonic *Every Good Boy Does Fine*. The reason is simple: You can remember this sentence much more easily than a string of letters that otherwise makes no sense.

With vocabulary, you may find that using a mnemonic device can help you remember particularly troublesome words that you just can't seem to memorize any other way. You can use any mnemonic you like, but in most cases, a defining word that rhymes with the vocabulary word or some kind of catchy phrase is often best,

For example, say you're struggling with the vocab word *suffice*, which means enough of something. A mnemonic can be something like *suffice is stuffed*. Of course, stuffed isn't the exact definition, but this little catchphrase is enough to remind you of what the word *suffice* actually means.

EMBER
REMEMB

Mnemonics are great for troublesome words or concepts, but don't spend your time coming up with them for words you can memorize easily. A mnemonic helps you remember, so only use one when a particular vocab word, prefix, or suffix keeps leaving you stumped.

Interpreting words in context

Both the SSAT and ISEE ask you to define vocab words within context. You see a word in a sentence, and the question says something like, "What does the author most likely mean by ...?" Sounds easy enough, but these kinds of questions can be difficult because the English language **isn't** exact. In other words, the meaning of **a** word can change, depending on how the author uses it. -

Consider this sentence: *The cruel man was arrested for mistreating the animals.*

In this sentence, what does the word *cruel* mean? By the dictionary definition, *cruel* means to cause pain or suffering. In this sentence, the man caused pain and suffering to animals, so the author means the dictionary definition of the word.

Now, consider this sentence: *The cruel waves crashed over us,*

What does the word *cruel* mean in this sentence? Waves don't experience emotion or choose to cause harm or suffering. A wave is simply water under force, so in the context of this sentence, the author is saying the waves are big, dangerous, difficult, or something like that. See how it works? A writer can alter the meaning of a word by its context, so when the exam asks you what a writer means by a certain word, it may not necessarily want the actual dictionary definition.

Chapter 3: Defining Your Vocabulary Skills

29

TIP

To answer these kinds of questions correctly, you have to read carefully and try to decipher what the author means by the word. See Chapters 6 and 7 for more information about vocabulary in context and to practice answering questions like these.

Using repetition Think about a favorite **song**. You can probably sing the song in your head without any music or lyric sheet in front of you. How

did you learn it? You learned the song because you listened to it over and over, and after a few times, you started singing along. Maybe you didn't know the entire song when you started singing, but because you liked the song, you kept singing it and eventually memorized it.

Vocabulary is much the same way. Using repetition to memorize is what we call *rote* memorization because you have to do it over and over to get the words and their meaning. So scanning vocabulary words doesn't help much. You need to study them over and over; you need to invest time to learn the words, prefixes, and suffixes in this chapter. So study the words, repeat, and repeat again.

Some people learn vocabulary more quickly by writing the word and definition over and over. If this applies to you, grab some scratch paper and start writing.

As you study vocabulary, try to use the words in various ways. Include them when you speak or try to write a short paragraph where you use several vocabulary words correctly. Studies show time and time again that if you can learn something and then use it in a practical way, the odds of you remembering what you learn go drastically up.

Breaking Down Vocabulary Words

Many words in the English language aren't individual units. They're made up of pieces of other words that together create their meaning. That doesn't mean that every word has various parts you can break down in order to garner the meaning of the word. However, most often, you're able to understand a part of the word that can give you at least a clue to its meaning. Being able to break down a difficult word is a powerful test tool. After all, you don't have to write the definition of a word on the test — you just need to choose the right answer from a list of choices. If you can at least get a clue as to the meaning of a word, you're more likely to answer the question correctly.

Words often contain three distinct parts - a root, a prefix, and a suffix. A word may contain a root word, a prefix, a suffix, or any combination of these parts that can help you define the word. When you know common root words, prefixes, and suffixes, which we introduce in the following sections, you can use these tools to help break down difficult vocab words you face on the exam.

Digging up roots

MEMBER

A *root* is the most basic form of a word that's often used within different words to convey similar meanings. For example, the root word *aqua* means water. This root is used in a number of words, such as *aquarium* and *aquifer*. Even though you may not know what both of these words technically mean, if you know they have to do with water, you have a good chance of answering the question correctly. Table 3-1 lists the most common English roots, their definition, and an

example for each. Be sure to memorize this list of roots.

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections

Table 3-1

Vocabulary: Roots *Definition*

Root

Example aquarium

aqua
water

arch
ruler
anarchy

astro
star

bene
good

take color
cap chrom chron circum
time

cred
around believe round
cycl dict dom

say home to lead
duc

fact

fer

flex
to make carry bend break birth
fract

gen

geo

earth

gram

write

move

gress ject mal

astronaut benevolent capture monochromatic **chronology** circumference

credible unicycle diction domicile introduce manufacture transfer flexible fracture

generation **geography** telegram progress eject malware manicure medium

miniature transmit mortuary natural nomenclature pathologist pedicure

philosophy phonology metropolitan transport telescope prescription

inspection

-

man

medi min

throw **bad hand** middle tiny to send death

mit

mort

nat

born

nomen

name

path

ped

phi/

pain

foot love sound city carry

phon poli port

see

scope script

write look

spec

Chapter 3: Defining Your Vocabulary Skills

Definition

Root tact tend
touch stretch

Example contact extend

evacuate verify vocal

vac

ver

empty true voice

VOc

Starting with prefixes

WEMBER

A *prefix* is a letter or grouping of letters placed at the beginning of a word that modifies its meaning. If you encounter words you don't know on the exam, you can look for prefixes that can give you clues about the word's meaning. In Table 3-2, we give you the prefix or collection of related prefixes, the definition, and an example word or two that uses the prefix. Memorize these prefixes.

Table 3-2

Prefix

a-, an

ab-, abs

ad

ante anti be

co **CON**tra

vocabulary: Prefixes Definition

Example to, toward, in process of, not, aback, attract, adhere without away, from abstract to move or change

advance before
antecedent against
antibiotic all around or completely
bemuse to be with
confidante, confide against
contraband down or to take away
depend, descend across
diagonal to remove or negate
disavow, disadvantage to bring into
entangle, embrace out
exit, extol beyond
extracurricular more than normal
hyperactive under
hypothermia not, without, or into
inaccurate, incapable, influence
de
dia
dis en-, em ex extra hyper hypo
in

infra
below
infrastructure
inter
intra
among inside to negate or be absent to block
interact intravenous non-smoker obstruct
non
ob

continued

32

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections

Table 3-2 (continued)

Prefix

peri post pre

pro

Definition around after before supporting or moving forward again half to replace or a lower position to act together

re

Example perimeter postpone preamble propulsion, prologue remove, review
semicircle subway, subterfuge synchronize transcontinental, translate ultraviolet
unacceptable

semi sub syn trans ultra-

un UN

across

.

extreme

not

Ending with suffixes

MBER
REMEMA

A *suffix* is like a prefix — it's a letter or grouping of letters — but suffixes appear at the end of words instead of at the beginning. Suffixes aren't as helpful as roots and prefixes, but they can still give you clues about the word's meaning. Table 3-3 lists the most common suffixes; be sure to memorize them as well.

Table 3-3

Suffix -able, -ible -acy

-ance, -ence

-ate -dom

-en

vocabulary: Suffixes *Definition*

Example capable

invincible state or quality

adequacy act or process

denial state

maintenance to do or become

eviscerate

place or state

kingdom to become

brighten someone who is or does

trainer something to resemble

picturesque noted or having much of plentiful pertaining to

musical characteristic

nutritious an inexact quality

sweetish belief

anarchism someone who is or does psychiatrist something

-er, -or

-esque -ful -ic, -ical -ious, -ous -ish . -ism -ist

36

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections

Word adhere affable aloof boisterous candor

destitute

entourage fickle inert e infuse obtuse

Vocabulary Practice: Block 6

Definition to stick to something agreeable uninterested or cold in behavior noisy

behavior open honesty poor or lacking basic needs a group inconsistent inactive or not

harmful to inject slow intelligence to satisfy spite or malice to harm or injure

lukewarm or indifferent all in agreement, such as in a vote or decision large

quench

rancor

scathe tepid unanimous voluminous

Vocabulary Practice: Upper Level SSAT and ISEE

All right, upper-level students, here are 100 vocabulary words, divided into blocks. Study these words a block at a time and master them before test day. Also, be sure to study the words for the lower-level exams earlier in this chapter. These words or similar words have appeared on past SSATs or ISEEs, but understand that we can't guarantee you'll see them when you take the test. However, you'll see words of similar difficulty, so this group of words is a good way to test your current vocabulary knowledge.

Word cringe epicure flout luminary
vocabulary Practice: Block 1

Definition to recoil someone who appreciates good food or drink to scorn a person who is an exceptional expert in a given field a rebel excessive love of one's self a novice to confuse insignificant
maverick

narcissism neophyte obfuscate paltry

Chapter 3: Defining Your Vocabulary Skills

Word quixotic

raze

sacrosanct truculent unilateral

Definition foolishly idealistic to completely destroy sacred savagely brutal involving one side only lacking of ideas or substance one's work or profession to decrease in strength

vacuous

Vocation

wane

Word abrogate accede bevy bilious bilk blatant bucolic burnish cadaver callous

candor

vocabulary Practice: Block 2

Definition to cancel to agree a large group bad-tempered to cheat obvious or noticeable a rural area to polish a dead body insensitive open honesty a smooth and easy pace puzzling relating to winter unaware

calm or peaceful to shun or reject

canter

cryptic niernal

oblivious

placid repudiate

Vocabulary Practice: Block 3

Definition

to hate

Word abhor apparition bogus bombastic caliber

credulous engender kindle maudlin

a ghost false or fake impressive but meaningless language a degree of worth gullible

to cause

to start a fire silly or overly sentimental

continued

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections

Vocabulary Practice: Block 3 (continued) *Word*

Definition mirth

amusement

nuance

a subtle difference perfunctory

unenthusiastic plummet

to fall suddenly replete

full **resignation**

accepting a certain fate specious

misleading

Word

absolution

bastion besiege blithe bona fide

canvass

covert diaphanous panache peccadillo recapitulate rhetoric sardonic serendipity

vocabulary Practice: Block 4

Definition forgiveness a strong defense to close in carefree genuine or real to survey

undercover transparent with much elegance

a minor offense to review **the** art of language usage, or over exaggeration mocking

unexpected goodness or happiness **a large** book lending money at a high rate of

interest inexperienced

tome

usury verdant

Word

abasement abstemious baroque bedlam bestial brusque

vocabulary Practice: Block 5

Definition humiliation self-denying overly decorated a noisy uproar

savage abrupt in manner

Chapter 3: Defining Your Vocabulary Skills

—

Word cogent ensconce harangue lackluster obdurate obliterate plaudit rescind tenable vestige

Definition convincing to place or settle comfortably attacking speech dull stubborn to destroy strong praise to repeal a position or point that can be defended a remaining bit of something

Word abscond espy evanescent fastidious

gaunt hapless illicit loquacious risqué scrupulous symbiosis

Vocabulary Practice: Block 6

Definition to leave in secret to catch a glimpse of momentary critical or demanding attention to detail; not easy to please overly thin having bad luck improper talkative 'near indecent or vulgar

careful or precise working together or a mutually beneficial relationship not speaking much being everywhere at the same time word for word unexpected changes in one's life ironic or slyly amusing the highest point or summit

—

taciturn ubiquitous verbatim vicissitudes

wry zenith

Chapter 4 Talking Up Verbal Reasoning

In This Chapter

Understanding verbal reasoning

Tackling SSAT analogies > Scoping out synonyms for both the SSAT and ISEE

Looking at the ISEE sentence completion questions

ew things in life exist in a vacuum. In fact, most everything has a relationship with something else. Think about it: People have relationships with one another, cats prefer cats, dogs prefer other dogs, and even a pen isn't much good on its own — it needs paper to fulfill its purpose. All these relationships lead to one simple truth: Words in the English language don't stand alone. They connect and relate to other words because, in a nutshell, language helps us describe the world around us - a world full of relationships.

The SSAT and ISEE use this simple reality to test your ability to understand words and their relationships to other words. This kind of verbal reasoning tests your ability not only to understand the meaning of a word but also to understand how that meaning relates to the meaning of another word or words in a sentence. The good news is you can use some simple testing strategies to help you find the right answer quickly. This chapter shows you what to expect on the Verbal sections of the SSAT and ISEE, how the test presents verbal reasoning questions, and how to master those questions — even the tricky ones.

What Verbal Reasoning Looks Like

Knowing exactly what verbal reasoning means on the SSAT and ISEE can be a little tricky, because the tests handle this area differently. Here's a basic primer:

|

SSAT: This exam tests your verbal reasoning skill with two types of questions: analogies

and synonyms. ISEE: This exam tests your verbal reasoning skill by focusing on vocabulary and sentence usage, using synonyms and sentence completion questions only — no analogy questions.

On both the upper and lower level SSAT, you'll find 30 analogy questions and 30 synonym questions, for a total of 60 questions. You have 30 minutes to take the entire Verbal section of the test, which means you have only 30 seconds to answer each question. On the lower level

ISEE, you'll find 34 questions with a time limit of 20 minutes. Both the middle and upper level ISEE exams have 40 questions with a 20-minute time limit. Don't let that stress you out, though. After all, you don't have to answer every question, and the odds are you probably won't. So like every other section of the SSAT or ISEE, your goal is to get as many questions right as possible. Keep the following overriding test tactics in mind and be sure to check out Chapter 2 for more global testing strategies):

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections

Answer as many questions as you can. The SSAT deducts points for missing questions; however, guessing can be an important strategy to get more verbal questions correct. The ISEE doesn't count off or deduct points for guessing; you're not penalized for questions left blank or answered incorrectly. The ISEE gives points for the number of questions you answer correctly, so go ahead and guess at verbal questions you don't know. Be sure to check out Chapter 2, where we explore SSAT and ISEE guessing strategies. **Use the process of elimination.** Remember that the test is all about finding the right answer in a list of choices where all but one are wrong. As you search for the right answer, be sure to rule out answers you know are incorrect. That way, even if you're not sure of the right answer, you increase the odds that you'll guess the correct one. For example, if a question has four answer choices and you know that two of them are wrong, you have a 50 percent chance of guessing the right one. **Don't get bogged down.** You won't be able to solve all the questions. If you read a verbal question and just don't understand it (or know the words), move on (either skip it or guess, depending on which test you're taking). One of the worst things you can do is spend too much time on one question that you're unsure of when you may be able to answer other questions quickly and correctly. **pa Keep calm and cool.** If you start getting frustrated or anxious, your mental reasoning goes out the window. You'll start missing questions you actually know. Stay calm and cool and don't get frustrated. Take a breath and focus on doing your best.

Making Sense of Analogies

If you're taking either the upper or lower level SSAT, study this section carefully because you'll face analogy questions on your test, and many students consider analogies the toughest part of the exam. Analogy questions test your ability to understand the relationship between two words and then copy that same relationship to another set of words.

Keep the following in mind when dealing with analogy questions on the SSAT:

The two words **in the** question have a relationship. Your job is to find that relationship. Choose the two **words that** have **the most similar** relationship.

Here's the good news: **Analogy questions** all follow the exact same pattern. In other words, all the test questions are structured the same way and look the same, too. This means that you need only a couple of important strategies to tackle the analogy questions because you'll simply see the same kinds of questions over and over. We provide those important strategies and a few practice questions in the following sections.

TIP

Even though the ISEE doesn't test you with analogy questions, go ahead and read this section for vocabulary practice. You don't need to worry about testing strategies for analogies because you won't see these kinds of questions on the ISEE, but you'll benefit from the vocab review.

Mapping out your strategy for analogies

When you tackle the analogy questions on the SSAT, you'll find that **some analogies are** simple and straightforward, some are complex in terms of the relationship between the two words, and some may seem nearly impossible if you don't know what all the **words mean**. So how do you attack these problems? You need a simple strategy.

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections -

Photos After all, a camera can't work without a lens. In the same way, a motor *uses* oil in order to run and a motor can't function without oil. So the correct answer is Choice **(A)** because it has a similar relationship.

EXAMPLE

EXAM

Scorpion is to arachnid as (A) Shoe is to pod (B) Hereford is to bovine (C) Foot is to leg (D) Dog is to feline

This example is even more complicated. *Arachnid* is a family of animals that **wioldudes** spiders, ticks, and scorpions, so you need an answer that shows how one thing is a part of a family of things. The correct answer is Choice (B) because Hereford is a kind of cow, and all cows belong to the bovine family.

Getting the Scoop on Synonyms

Both the SSAT and ISEE use synonym questions on the Verbal sections of the exams. (A *synonym* is a word that means the same thing as another word.) Synonym questions are simple in terms of the question, but of course, they may not be so simple to answer.

Synonym questions give you a capitalized word for the question, followed by several answer choices. Because these words are synonym questions, your job is to find a word that means the same thing. Some answer choices may be similar, some may be the opposite, and some you may not know well, but the goal is to simply find the closest match. We provide some strategies and practice questions in the following sections to help you ace the synonym questions.

Planning your synonym attack strategy

Because synonym questions are straightforward, your attack plan is really pretty simple. When you face synonyms, just keep this advice in mind:

Start with your own definition. When you look at the word given to you, first quickly create your own definition of the word. Doing so keeps the answer choices from confusing or distracting you. For example, if you're given the word *annoy*, think, "Annoy means to irritate someone else." **Scan the answer choices for something similar to your definition.** Although the words provided for the synonym may not exactly match your definition of the word, look for something similar. **Rule out wrong answers.** Often, you'll quickly realize that several answer choices are completely wrong. Rule those words out quickly so you can focus on only the few that may be correct.

Choose the answer that most closely matches the word. You may see two or more answer choices that are similar, but you want to choose the word that most closely means the same thing. You'll need to make some quick decisions because you don't have a lot of time, but always keep this simple goal in mind.

Chapter 4: Talking Up Verbal Reasoning

49

Consider the part of speech of the word(s). On the ISEE, the word **and** all the answer choices stick to the same part of speech. So if the word is a verb, think in terms of action as you explore the answer choices. Sometimes, thinking about the word's part of speech

can help you discover the answer. The SSAT may or may not use the same part of speech in the answer choices. In fact, some answer choices may use more than one word that basically defines the question word. Don't let this throw you off; any of the answers can be correct, so don't rule out an answer choice because it has multiple words or isn't the same part of speech as the question word. **If the word and the answer choices are too hard (or you don't know them), make a fast decision.** If you're taking the ISEE, you're not penalized for guessing, so go ahead and guess. If you're taking the SSAT, use the guessing strategies we explore in Chapter 2 or skip the question and move on.

Checking out a few sample synonym questions

For the synonym questions in this section, look at the question and then choose the best answer choice. Remember that you want to choose the word that's closest in meaning to the capitalized word. Then, check out the paragraph following the question for the correct answer and an explanation.

CXAMPLE

TEXAM

COMPLETE: (A) Undone (B) Finish (C) Partial (D) Judicious (E) Founder

In this example, *complete* means to finish something, so Choice (B), *finish*, is the best answer. Choices (A) and (C) are actually *antonyms* — they mean the opposite of complete. Choices (D) and (E) are just fancy-looking words that don't have anything to do with the word *complete*.

Okay, so that seems easy enough, but as you may guess, not all synonym questions are this simple. Try another one:

CXAMPLE

EXAM

BLISS: (A) Peaceful (B) Stressful (C) Joy (D) Relaxed (E) Free

In this example, you need to find a synonym for the word *bliss*. You can rule out Choice (B) quickly because *stressful* is really the opposite of *bliss*. However, Choices (A), (C), (D), and (E) are a bit more difficult because the words are similar, at least on the surface. The word ***bliss*** means joy, so Choice (C) is the correct answer. The other choices, *peaceful*, *relaxed*,

50

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and

Essay Sections

and *free*, may all be characteristics of joy, but they don't directly mean the same thing as bliss. In the end, the issue here is precision. You're looking for the best answer that means virtually the same thing as the word given.

CHAMPLE

EXAM

INIQUITOUS: (A) Saboteur (B) Intrinsic (C) Acumen (D) Benign (E) Criminal

The problem with this question is the word you're given is difficult, and all the answer choices are difficult, too. You may not know what the word or many of the answer choices mean. This question is basically a test of your vocabulary, so if you don't know the word or many of the answer choices, you have to make a quick decision. If you're taking the SSAT and have a hunch, you can guess. If not, skip it and don't waste your time. If you're taking the ISEE, guess because you're not penalized for guessing. By the way, *iniquitous* is a synonym for *criminal*. Both words simply mean lawless.

Filling in Sentence Completion Questions

Instead of analogy questions, the Verbal section of the ISEE uses sentence completion questions. Sentence completion questions are pretty self-explanatory: Your job is to fill in the blank(s) with the best word(s) from the answer choices given. These questions test your ability to understand the context of a sentence and then choose a word that completes the intended meaning in a sentence.

In the following sections, we provide a few basic strategies for answering the sentence completion questions as well as some sample questions to give you a chance to practice those strategies.

If you're taking the SSAT, you won't see these kinds of questions in the Verbal section on the test, but we recommend that you still review this section for the extra vocabulary practice.

Building a strategy for sentence completion

WEMBER

REMEM

Sentence completion questions may not be easy, but many students find them less challenging than synonyms. Like with synonym questions, your attack plan for sentence completion questions is rather straightforward. Here are some tips to remember:

Pay attention to the context. When you look at the sentence, try to insert your own word(s) into the blank(s). This way, you at least start with something to consider before you let the answer choices confuse you. In fact, some answer choices may be there to try to trick you, so start with your own word to help you escape these traps. The context of the sentence always gives you clues about what words will likely work, so make sure you read the sentence carefully and understand what the sentence is **trying** to communicate.

Chapter 4: Talking Up Verbal Reasoning

51

Look for positive or negative relationships. As you consider the sentence, ask yourself whether the word you need has some kind of positive or negative meaning. Although watching for this relationship doesn't always work, sometimes it can help rule out answer choices that don't communicate in a positive or negative way. **Watch out for vocabulary.** The test may throw **difficult** or complex vocabulary words your way, and you may not know what all the words mean. But just because a word is complicated doesn't mean it's the right word. Sometimes a more simple word completes the meaning in the sentence, so don't fall into the trap of thinking "complex must be right." **Check out the root, prefix, and suffix of the word(s).** You may find answer choices that are difficult to decipher. Remember to look at the root, prefix, and suffix of the word, which can give you a clue about the meaning of the word and help you break down difficult vocabulary words. (See Chapter 3 for more about these vocab tricks.)

Working through a few sentence completion questions

Now that **you have** the scoop on answering sentence completion questions, **try** your hand at a few sample questions. Using the strategies we discuss in the previous section, choose an answer choice that best fits the context of the sentence, and then take a look at the answer and explanation we provide.

EXAMPLE

TEXAM

by the student who kept interrupting the **lesson**.

The teacher was very ___ (A) sublime (B) overjoyed (C) frustrated (D) destroyed (E) relaxed

Think about the context of the sentence: The student is interrupting the lesson. Because the student is posing a problem for the teacher, you're looking for a word that helps convey that meaning. Choices (A), (B), and (E) are all calm descriptive words, so you can rule those out, leaving only Choices (C) and (D). The teacher probably wasn't *destroyed by* the incident, so

Choice (C), *frustrated*, is the best answer here to make the context of the sentence come together.

EXAMPLE

TEXAM

approach to the problem would never work.

Everyone knew that Sam's __ (A) pragmatic (B) thoughtful (C) exact (D) calibrated (E) quixotic

52

Part II: Ramping Up for the Verbal, Reading, and Essay Sections -

In this example, you need to find a word that communicates within the context. Sam's idea is **somehow unrealistic or impractical**, so as you look at the answer choices, you can rule out Choices (A), (B), and (C) because those words all communicate a practical, logical solution. The word *calibrated* seems like an odd choice for this sentence because it means to **compare something with a standard. However, the word *quixotic* means wildly romantic or impractical.** Given the answer choices provided, Choice (E) is the best choice and the correct answer because Sam's idea is impractical in some way. This question is more difficult because you need to know the meaning of the words *calibrated* and *quixotic* to find the right choice.

EXAMPLE

TEXAM

all came together in the end.

Although it was a(n) __ decision, the __ (A) unknown ... chances (B) troubling ... buoyancy (C) rash... details (D) smart ... development (E) trivial . . . difficulty

In some cases, you may see two blanks with answer choices containing two words. In this case, you really have to consider the context of the sentence and pick the best match that completes the sentence's intended meaning. One of the key words here is *although*. The sentence is saying that although a certain decision was made, something worked out in the end. You're looking for contrasting word choices that help communicate this meaning. If you look at the list of choices, the best answer is Choice (C). The decision **was rash, or** quickly made, but the *details* all worked out. In the **other answer** choices, either one of the words doesn't make sense in the sentence or the context keeps them from working.