

The Verbal Section

Introduction

What are tested in the verbal sections?

Vocabulary:

Text Completion: pick the best word

Sentence Equivalence: pick two words that both fit equally well

Critical Reasoning & Reading Comprehension: answer questions about a passage

Vocabulary Mini-Quiz

Fill in the blank(s) with
the given word(s) that
make the most sense.

Introductory Mini-Test Question #1

Although it appeared to be
_____ after its stagnation and
eventual cancellation in 1989, Doctor
Who returned to BBC in 2005 to
become the longest-running
science-fiction show in history.

moribund
ascendant
unflagging
defunct

Introductory Mini-Test Question #2

The professor is a noteworthy intellect, and as a teacher she shows more (i) _____ than her colleagues, whose teaching skills are (ii) _____ procedure.

- (i) prowess
profligacy
orthodoxies
- (ii) spurious
maladroit
eclectic

Introductory Mini-Test Question #3

It would be (i)_____for our
leaders, given their responsibilities as
democratically elected officials, to
neglect to do everything they could to
(ii)_____an entirely
(iii)_____problem.

- (i) irresponsible
necessary
frivolous
- (ii) forestall
sustain
cultivate
- (iii) benign
unimportant
avoidable

Introductory Mini-Test Question #4

Despite her mentor's advice that she attempt to sound consistently _____, the graduate student often resorted to using slang when presenting significant parts of her thesis, her habitual speech patterns overriding her years of learning.

lucid
didactic
panegyric
erudite
rational

Introductory Mini-Test Question #5

Although she felt Steve (i) _____ the subtlety of the delicious stew recipe with his addition of the sweet potato, she thought the pungent onion (ii) _____ the otherwise (iii) _____ taste combination.

- (i) depleted
- permeated
- augmented
- (ii) exaggerated
- overwhelmed
- satiated
- (iii) delicate
- zesty
- detestable

Introductory Mini-Test Question #6

At first, a still-life painting can appear quiet (i) _____, its focus on such everyday objects as flowers or fruits apparently uninspired. In the hands of (ii) _____ painter, however, careful attention to slight shifts of color and texture can lead to a truly (iii) _____ and exemplary painting.

- (i) vital
luxuriant
banal
- (ii) a gauche
an adept
an ascetic
- (iii) unstinting
sublime
prosaic

Introductory Mini-Test Question #7

O'Neill's Irish _____ so disconcerted the Royal visitors that they found themselves struggling in vain to continue negotiations in their normal eloquent Queen's English.

fortitude

patois

equanimity

diffidence

consternation

Fill in the blank(s) with
TWO of the given
word(s) that both
make equivalent
sense.

Introductory Mini-Test Question #8

The children's story - seemingly a simple tale of animals gathering for a picnic in the forest - took a _____ turn at the end, admonishing readers to always be honest.

magnanimous
beneficent
didactic
garrulous
moralistic
futile

Introductory Mini-Test Question #9

While many individual religions insist on the primacy of their particular deity, syncretism advocates the _____ of multiple religious beliefs.

exclusion

marriage

commingling

division

commutation

partitioning

Introductory Mini-Test Question #10

As _____ from Japan, he was called upon to answer questions about the Japanese government's position on various issues.

a plenipotentiary

a tyro

a legate

an anchorite

an ascetic

a sybarite

Answers

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #1

Although it appeared to be
_____ after its stagnation and
eventual cancellation in 1989, Doctor
Who returned to BBC in 2005 to
become the longest-running
science-fiction show in history.

moribund
ascendant
unflagging
defunct

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #2

The professor is a noteworthy intellect, and as a teacher she shows more (i) _____ than her colleagues, whose teaching skills are (ii) _____ procedure.

- (i) **prowess**
profligacy
orthodoxies
- (ii) spurious
maladroit
eclectic

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #3

It would be (i)_____for our
leaders, given their responsibilities as
democratically elected officials, to
neglect to do everything they could to
(ii)_____an entirely
(iii)_____problem.

- (i) **irresponsible**
necessary
frivolous
- (ii) **forestall**
sustain
cultivate
- (iii) benign
unimportant
avoidable

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #4

Despite her mentor's advice that she attempt to sound consistently _____, the graduate student often resorted to using slang when presenting significant parts of her thesis, her habitual speech patterns overriding her years of learning.

lucid
didactic
panegyrical
erudite
rational

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #5

Although she felt Steve (i) _____ the subtlety of the delicious stew recipe with his addition of the sweet potato, she thought the pungent onion (ii) _____ the otherwise (iii) _____ taste combination.

- (i) depleted
permeated
augmented
- (ii) exaggerated
overwhelmed
satiated
- (iii) **delicate**
zesty
detestable

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #6

At first, a still-life painting can appear quiet (i) _____, its focus on such everyday objects as flowers or fruits apparently uninspired. In the hands of (ii) _____ painter, however, careful attention to slight shifts of color and texture can lead to a truly (iii) _____ and exemplary painting.

- (i) vital
luxuriant
banal
- (ii) a gauche
an adept
an ascetic
- (iii) unstinting
sublime
prosaic

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #7

O'Neill's Irish _____ so disconcerted the Royal visitors that they found themselves struggling in vain to continue negotiations in their normal eloquent Queen's English.

fortitude

patois

equanimity

diffidence

consternation

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #8

The children's story - seemingly a simple tale of animals gathering for a picnic in the forest - took a _____ turn at the end, admonishing readers to always be honest.

magnanimous

beneficent

didactic

garrulous

moralistic

futile

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #9

While many individual religions insist on the primacy of their particular deity, syncretism advocates the _____ of multiple religious beliefs.

exclusion

marriage

commingling

division

commutation

partitioning

Introductory Mini-Test Answer #10

As _____ from Japan, he was called upon to answer questions about the Japanese government's position on various issues.

a plenipotentiary

a tyro

a legate

an anchorite

an ascetic

a sybarite

Verbal Reasoning Introduction

ETS Goals for the Verbal Section of the GRE

- places a greater emphasis on analytical skills and on understanding vocabulary in context rather than in isolation
- uses more text-based materials
- contains a broader range of reading selections
- tests skills that are more closely aligned with those used in graduate school
- expands the range of computer-enabled tasks

What does this mean for you?

- There won't be questions that involve analogies or antonyms on this test, as there were on the older versions of the GRE.
- You'll see some wacky-looking question formats that you've probably never seen before.
- Though they say the new version of the test de-emphasizes vocabulary, there's no getting around the fact that the more vocabulary you know when you sit down to take the test, the better off you'll be. So vocabulary remains as important as it ever was.

Three types of questions on the Verbal section:

- Text Completions
- Sentence Equivalence
- Reading Comprehension

Text Completions

Text Completion questions consist of short sections of text with one or more blanks; you are asked to choose the best word to place in each blank.

Text Completions

You may see one blank in the text, in which case you will be offered five answer choices, or you may see two or three blanks, each of which will have three answer choices.

Text Completions

No partial credit is given for getting some but not all blanks correct on a question, so be sure to read carefully.

Text Completion Question Example

Though Adam was incredulous upon hearing Madam Sofia's psychic reading, after a few weeks had passed, he was

(i) _____ by how remarkably
(ii) _____ she had turned out to be.

- (i) dubious
stupefied
blasé
- (ii) prescient
exhaustive
mundane

Sentence Equivalence

This is another vocabulary-oriented question type. Each question will consist of one sentence with six answer choices.

Sentence Equivalence

Your job is to choose the **two** answer choices that logically complete the sentence. As with Text Completions, there is no partial credit, so you must select both correct answer choices to receive points.

Sentence Equivalence Question Example

When Selena brought home the irascible puppy, her more quiescent dogs were rattled by their new _____housemate.

pugnacious

languid

bellicose

juvenile

diminutive

phlegmatic

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension counts for about half of the Verbal questions you will see. Passages range from one to five paragraphs, and each passage can consist of one to five questions. No matter the length, the passages offer some type of argument that the author is trying to defend, even if it's just the author's opinion.

Reading Comprehension

Some of the questions in this section will ask you to identify an author's point of view or the assumptions and premises upon which that point of view rests. Other Reading Comprehension questions will ask about details of specific information in the passage or provable from the passage, the structure or tone of the text, how a word is used in context, or the main idea. Fortunately, these questions rarely test you on your prior vocabulary knowledge.

Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension questions are like an open-book test - everything you need is right there in the passage!

Reading Comprehension Questions

There are three types of Reading Comprehension Questions:

- Multiple Choice
- Select All That Apply
- Select a Sentence

Reading Comprehension Example: Multiple Choice

Read the following passage:

After examining the bodies of a dozen beached whales and finding evidence of bleeding around the animals' eyes and brains as well as lesions on their kidneys and livers, environmental groups fear that the Navy's use of sonar is causing serious harm to marine mammals. A leading marine biologist reports that sonar induces whales to panic and surface too quickly, which causes nitrogen bubbles to form in their blood.

Reading Comprehension Example: Multiple Choice

The previous argument relies on which of the following assumptions?

- A. Marine biologists have documented that other marine animals, including dolphins and sea turtles, have exhibited kidney and liver lesions.
- B. No studies have been conducted on the possible detrimental effects of sonar on marine animals.
- C. Whales in captivity panic only when exposed to man-made, rather than natural, sound waves.
- D. The presence of nitrogen bubbles in the blood has been demonstrated to cause damage to various internal organs.
- E. It is unlikely that the symptoms found in the beached whales could be caused by any known disease.

How is the GRE Verbal Section Structured?

The GRE has **two** scored multiple-choice verbal sections. Each will be **30 minutes** long with **20 questions** per section. The way you perform on one Verbal section **will affect the difficulty of the next Verbal section** you are given.

How is the GRE Verbal Section Structured?

Verbal sections tend to follow the same order:

1. Roughly the first **six questions will be Text Completion**
2. The next **five or six will be Reading Comprehension**
3. Then about **four Sentence Equivalence questions**
4. Finally, another **four or five Reading Comprehension questions**

General GRE Strategies and Rules

- Take the Easy Test First
- Make and Move
- Use the Review Screen to Navigate
- There's No Penalty for Guessing
- Use Process of Elimination
- Use Your Scratch Paper
- Double-Check
- Let It Go
- Don't Make Any Last-Minute Lifestyle Changes

Verbal GRE Strategies

- Efficiency: Accuracy vs. Speed
- POE for Verbal: Trap Answers and Stacking the Odds
- POOD
- Vocabulary

POE: Stacking the Odds Example

There may be cases on the GRE when you are running out of time and you are going to have a guess on a question. POE can turn these questions into potential points. Before you guess on a question, quickly consider if some of the answer choices are clearly wrong. If you can eliminate a couple choices, you've increased your chances of getting a free point!

When studying human history, one must be aware that the _____ between historical periods are arbitrary; certainly none of the people alive at the time were aware of a shift from one era to another.

judgments
ideologies
innovations
demarcations
episodes

POE: Stacking the Odds Example Explanation

If you encountered this question on the GRE, you might not know what the best answer is (we will go more in depth how to approach questions like this in our next meeting). However, you might see that some of the answer choices simply don't make sense.

Choices (A), (B), and (C) don't seem to fit the sentence at all. By eliminating these wrong answers, you've suddenly given yourself a great chance of choosing the correct answer just by guessing, since only (D) and (E) are left. And if you realize that (E) doesn't make sense either, then you know the correct answer is (D).

Summary

- The GRE Verbal section consists of two 30-minute sections, each containing 20 questions.
- The Verbal section is made up of Text Completion, Sentence Equivalence, and Reading Comprehension questions.
- Remember to utilize Process of Elimination (POE) to attack the wrong answers.
- Use your Personal Order of Difficulty (POOD) to ensure that you take the easy test first. Skip questions that seem difficult, and Mark and Move when questions get tough.
- Vocabulary is important. Prioritize the words from the Key Terms List into Words I Know, Words I Sort of Know, and Words I Do Not Know.

Homework

- Handout #1: This should include some vocabulary-related questions. We will go over this next time.
- Academic Reading & Vocabulary Supplement: This is a collection of reading assignments to help prepare you for higher-level American education. This is mainly intended to assist in reading skills and vocabulary acquisition.

Questions?