GRE Vocabulary Workbook

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The Ultimate Guide to SAT® Grammar & Workbook

The Critical Reader: The Complete Guide to SAT® Reading

The Complete Guide to ACT® English

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The Complete GMAT® Sentence Correction Guide

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Introduction to GRE Vocabulary Questions

GRE vocabulary questions come in two major forms: text completions and sentence equivalences.

1) Text completions

Text completions range from single sentences to short paragraphs and can contain one, two, or three blanks, and can be filled in with either a word or a short phrase.

When a sentence contains only one blank, you will be given five answer choices. When a sentence contains two or three blanks, you will be given six or nine answer choices respectively – three options for each blank, divided into columns.

While all of the answers must work together to produce a logical sentence or paragraph, each individual answer can be selected independently.

The city of Genoa (i) _____ rapidly after its defeat at the battle of Chioggia in 1380, eventually losing its (ii) _____ and falling under foreign rule.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) thrived	(D) autonomy
(B) declined	(E) uniqueness
(C) persevered	(F) urbanity

In the sentence, above the word *defeat* indicates that the first blank requires a negative word, making (B) the only logical answer for Blank (i). The selection of (B) does not, however, influence the letter of the correct answer for Blank (ii). (D), (E), and (F) must be considered on the their own terms.

For Blank (ii), the phrase *falling under foreign rule* indicates that Genoa was no longer independent, so the correct answer must mean independence. That is the definition of *autonomy*, so (D) is correct.

2) Sentence Equivalences

Sentence equivalences present you with six answer choices and ask you to identify two words that logically complete the blank and that produce the same meaning. Although the correct words are usually synonyms, that is not always the case.

Although the cheetah's extinction no longer seems imminent, the number of cheetahs living in the wild has _____ from roughly 100,000 in 1900 to barely 10,000 today.

(A) migrated
(B) declined
(C) capitulated
(D) dwindled
(E) proliferated
(F) expounded

In this sentence, the phrase *from roughly 100,000 in 1900 to barely 10,000 today* indicates that the number of cheetahs has gone down. The synonyms *declined* and *dwindled* both convey that idea, so (B) and (D) are correct.

Using Transition Words to Predict Meanings

Whenever you read a sentence, one of the first things you should look for is the presence of **transition words** – words that indicate logical relationships between parts of the sentence.

Transitions fall into three basic categories: continuers, cause-and-effect, and contradictors. (For a complete list, see the chart on the following page).

Continuers are words that indicate an idea is continuing in the direction it began.

> **Key words:**   and, also, in addition, as well as, furthermore, moreover, similarly, likewise, even, not only…but also, just as

When continuers appear, the correct answer will most likely express the **same idea** as another key word or phrase in the sentence/paragraph. In some cases, it may be a **direct synonym** for the key word or phrase, and in others it may be a **more extreme form** of that word/phrase.

For example:

> One of the (i) _____ types of grain, sorghum can withstand harsh conditions and is especially important in regions where soil is poor **and** resources are (ii) _____.

Let's just focus on the second blank. The fact that the continuer *and* links the blank to the phrase *soil is poor* tells us that the word we're looking for goes along with the idea of poor soil and must be negative. If we wanted to plug in our own word, we might say *scarce*.

Cause, effect, and **explanation** words indicate that someone or something is causing a particular result, or explain why an action is occurring.

> **Key words:**   so, because, for, in that, therefore, consequently, as a result
>
> **Punctuation:** colons, dashes

The presence of one of these words or punctuation marks also indicates that the correct word must be similar to other key words in a sentence.

For example:

> The first astronauts were required to undergo <u>mental</u> evaluation before their flight **because** the _____ danger inherent in space travel was judged to be as important as the physiological one.

The transition *because* indicates that the blank must be filled with a word related to the idea of mental evaluation – it must mean something like psychological.

Contradictors are words that indicate that a sentence is shifting directions, or that contrasting information is being introduced.

> **Key words:** but, however, while, whereas, despite/in spite of, nevertheless, for all, in contrast, unlike, belies

When these words appear, you need to look for **antonyms** for other key words in the sentence, or for words that **contrast** with other key words in the sentence.

For example:

> **Although** the southern part of Tunisia is covered by the <u>Sahara Desert</u>, the remaining areas of the country contain exceptionally _____ soil and hundreds of miles of coastline.

The contradictor *although* indicates that the two parts of the sentence contain opposite ideas, and *Sahara Desert* tells us that the word in the blank must mean the opposite of dry or barren. We might plug in *healthy* or *good*.

Continuers	Cause and Effect	Contradictors
Add Information And Also Furthermore In addition Moreover Not only…but also **Give Example** For example For instance **Define** That is **Emphasize** In fact Indeed Even **Compare** Likewise Similarly	Accordingly As a result As such Because Consequently Since So Thus Therefore	(Al)though But Despite Even so Even though However In spite of Instead Meanwhile Nevertheless Otherwise Rather Still Whereas While Yet **Contrast** Alternately Alternatively In contrast On the contrary On the other hand

Important: two phrases that often cause confusion are *for all*, which means despite, and *all but*, which means essentially, NOT everything but. If you encounter one of these phrases and do not have an accurate idea of its meaning, you can easily misinterpret an entire sentence.

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure involves the repetition of a particular grammatical structure within a sentence or series of sentences, and typically used to indicate that particular elements are of equal importance. When vocabulary questions involve parallelism, the structure of the sentence indicates the definitions of the words in the blanks.

For example:

The new translation is both (i) _____ and (ii) _____: it captures the clarity of the original without sacrificing any of its subtlety or complexity.

The colon indicates that the second half of the sentence explains the first half. The two blanks linked by *and* in the first half must mirror the two ideas in the second half. Blank (i) = clarity, Blank (ii) = subtlety and complexity.

Alternately, the sentence could be phrased in this way:

Because it captures the clarity of the original without sacrificing any of its subtlety or complexity, the new translation has been praised not only for its (i) _____ but also for its (ii) _____.

In this case, the structure is reversed, but the logic is the same. Because the first half of the sentence presents the ideas of clarity and subtlety, in that order, the two blanks in the second half must follow the same structure.

How to Work Through Vocabulary Questions

Although text completions and sentence equivalences do require slightly different approaches, there are nevertheless some basic strategies that apply equally to both question types, and that can you can use to reduce your chances of overlooking crucial information or making careless errors.

Note that these steps are useful even if you are a champion reader with a stellar vocabulary. GRE vocabulary questions, particularly two- and three-blank text completions, are also essentially miniature logic puzzles, and the sentences/passages in which words are tested can be quite confusing – it is not uncommon to encounter questions in which you understand every single word but cannot seem to wrap your head around what the sentence or passage is actually *saying*. If you do not work very carefully, sooner or later you are likely to miss key information, especially as the questions become more difficult and you become more fatigued. Working systematically ensures you do not inadvertently lose easy points. It also ensure you do not become overly dependent on the answer choices, which can often mislead you.

You will not always need to follow these steps strictly, especially in cases in which you are able to identify correct answers immediately and securely. But that said, it is advisable to practice working through the steps even on easier questions, simply to get yourself into the habit of doing so. If you are accustomed to working by instinct and are suddenly confronted with a question you cannot answer that way, you are likely to freeze, or guess, or read the question repeatedly without really grasping what it's saying or how to begin answering it. If, on the other hand, you have already internalized a clear process for working through dense material, you are much less likely to fall into these sorts of traps on the actual exam.

1) Read the entire question, from start to finish

This may sound like a very obvious piece of advice, but it's not nearly as obvious as you might imagine. It is very tempting to jump to plug in words as you read through the sentence, and in many cases, you will indeed be given sufficient information to perform that step accurately.

In some instances, however, you may simply not have enough information to judge the definition of a particular word. If you make an assumption based on incomplete information, there is often a good chance that assumption will not pan out.

In other instances, a particular interpretation may seem reasonable based on the beginning of a sentence or paragraph, but will be contradicted by information later on. If you've already started thinking in a particular direction, it is very hard to stop and reconsider your original assumption. In the meantime, you are likely to overlook correct answers because you are trying to ascribe a meaning to the sentence that is not actually present. When you take the time to get the full context, these errors tend to decrease.

2) Identify and mark key words or phrases

Sentences will always contain built-in clues to either the definition of the blank(s), or to the relationship between them. Circle/underline key relationship words, and if an actual definition is provided, draw an arrow between the definition and the blank.

Note that as questions become more challenging, key phrases tend to become less obvious. While easy questions often contain common transitions such as *because* and *although*, which clearly indicate relationships between parts of the sentence, hard questions may contain virtually no transition words. Instead, you will need to infer meanings based on a variety of subtler clues.

3) Plug in your own words, and jot them down

If one of the words you plugged in, or a very close synonym, appears as an answer choice, you can pick that option with a high degree of certainty. Remember to pay attention to your notes! You do not want to get tripped up by an answer that is close in meaning but that does not truly fit; looking at the word you've written will keep you focused.

Note that when a text completion contains multiple blanks, it may be easier to start with the second or third blank and work backwards. In some cases, you may not have enough information to answer the first blank upfront and will have no choice but to work from one or both of the later blanks.

Ideally, you should spend **no more than a couple of seconds** on this step. It doesn't matter if you scribble down an approximate definition or a word that is much simpler than the words that are likely to appear in the answer choices. The point is to save time by getting a general of what belongs in the blanks, not to think of the perfect word (although if you can do that in two seconds, great). If nothing comes to mind, jump to step 4.

4) Play positive/negative

If you can't think up your own word, or don't want to waste time trying, use the clues in the sentence determine whether the word(s) in the blank(s) are positive or negative. It won't always be clear, but when it is, playing positive/negative can be a highly effective strategy.

If one of the blanks is positive, draw a (+); if it's negative, draw a (–). Do <u>not</u> rely on your memory. If you are taking the computer-based test, jot notes on your scratch paper, e.g. B1 +, B2 –.

Working this way simplifies the process and prevents you from getting tangled up in nuances and connotations before it is necessary to do so. You shouldn't waste time and energy worrying about the details until you've eliminated everything that can be eliminated easily.

Important: If you are unsure whether an answer could fit, keep it. Correct answer may involve words that sound odd to you, or that you would not think to use on your own. You should never discard an option solely on those grounds.

Likewise, you should never choose a word only because you know what it means, or eliminate a word because you do not know what it means (or sort of have a vague idea of what it maybe might kind of mean). Your knowledge of a word and your liking of how it sounds in context have zero bearing on whether that word is right or wrong. Zero.

5) Check the answers, in order

Unless you spot the correct answer immediately, in which case you can simply choose it and move on, you should initially consider the choices in order. Working this way keeps you thinking logically and systematically, whereas skipping around increases the chances that you'll miss important information.

If you are unsure of the meaning of a word, try to use roots to determine its meaning, or whether it is positive or negative. (For a discussion of roots, see p. 15.)

Note: if you are taking the paper-based test, you should put a line through incorrect answers (the whole answer, not just the letter) in order to ensure that they do not distract you.

6) Reread the question with the words plugged in

Even if you're certain about your answers, you should take the time to confirm that the words you chose truly do make sense in context of the entire sentence or paragraph. In complicated questions, it is all too easy to become confused and select a word that does not really fit. Plugging your choices back into the sentence or paragraph allows to you to notice problems you didn't notice the first time around. In addition, you should double-check that your answers to sentence equivalences are synonyms for other another.

Double Negatives

One common point of confusion in determining the "charge" (positive/negative) of the words to be plugged in involves double negatives. When a negative word, e.g. *impossible*, is paired with an additional negation, e.g. *not*, a **positive idea** is created: not impossible = possible.

In such cases you must be able to keep track of the distinction between the charge of the words themselves and the idea that they convey.

Let's look at how that could play out in a GRE-style sentence.

> Although the logistical challenges and colossal amounts of capital involved in introducing cleaner forms of energy can make such transitions slow and difficult to implement, these factors are **unlikely to preclude** next-generation technologies from playing a _____ role in the United States economy before 2050.

The contradictor *although* indicates that the two halves of the sentence will have opposite meanings. The first half of the sentence indicates that using clean energy is very difficult and expensive. That's a negative idea.

The second half of the sentence must therefore contain a positive idea. That is extremely important to keep in mind because the information immediately before the blank contains a double negative: un̲likely to preclude.

Preclude means prevent, so unlikely to preclude = unlikely to prevent.

In other words, the sentence is talking about a situation that IS likely to occur – that is, clean energy is likely to play an in important role in the US economy by the year 2050.

As a result, Blank (i) must be positive and mean something like major or important. Even though the words used to indicate the meaning of Blank (i) are negative, the idea itself is positive.

Second Meanings

One other factor you should keep in mind as you look at answer choices is that you are likely to encounter a variety of common words used in their second or third meaning, e.g. *bent* used to mean inclination, or *execute* to mean carry out.

While these words may or may not be correct when they appear as answer choices, you should not be too quick to discount them. If a word seems too simple to appear in a vocabulary question, chances are it's not being used the way you're most accustomed to encountering it.

Remember that the goal of the GRE is not primarily to test complicated and obscure vocabulary. On the contrary, ETS deliberately aims to test a variety of types of words. Not all of those words conform to the stereotype of what constitutes a "GRE word," and some of them are unlikely to be found on any traditional GRE vocabulary list.

Using Roots to Make Educated Guesses

As we've seen in passing, a familiarity with roots can sometimes allow you to make educated guesses about the meanings of words and to quickly identify answers likely to be correct. In fact, learning how to take words apart in order to make reasonable assumptions about their meanings is just as important as memorizing lots of vocabulary words. If you've simply memorized a lot of definitions, you'll have no way of figuring out whether an unfamiliar word works or not and will be much less certain about the answer you choose. Knowing how the components of a word can reveal its meaning, however, gives you much more flexibility as well as more control, which in turn can boost your confidence.

If you've studied a classical or Romance language to a high level, you will be at a significant advantage because many of the words on the GRE have Latin and Greek roots. English words that would be considered fairly esoteric by most Americans are frequently similar to extremely common French and Spanish and Italian words. (Everyday words in English tend to have Germanic, or Anglo-Saxon, roots).

For example, most people don't go around saying *arboreal* in English, but if you know that *arbre*, *arbòl*, or *albero* means tree, you can probably figure it out without too much trouble.

Likewise, the definition of a word like *concatenation* is more or less the sum of its parts: the prefix CON- means with, and *catena* means chain in Italian. So *concatenation* literally means with a chain. And indeed, a concatenation is a series of linked things or events.

The charts beginning on p. 50 provide an extensive list of common roots that you are likely to encounter on the GRE.

Let's look at a question:

> Because he has authored numerous books that draw upon a wide range of fields, including many that he has never formally studied, Jared Diamond has earned a reputation as _____.

(A) an autodidact
(B) a pedant
(C) a polymath
(D) an iconoclast
(E) a pioneer

It's relatively easy to figure out that the word in the blank goes along with the idea of doing a lot of different things: Diamond has written books in a *wide range of fields*, including *many that he has never formally studied*.

If you know that the root POLY- means many, you can make a very educated guess that (C) is correct based on that information alone.

Note that it doesn't matter whether you know the exact definition of *polymath*, or the definitions of the other answer choices. The question is essentially testing your ability to make a reasonable assumption based on an understanding of how words are constructed.

One more:

In his paintings, Edvard Munch (i) _____ outside influences with his own original visions, blurring the line between originality and (ii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) synthesized	(D) verisimilitude
(B) defiled	(E) iconoclasm
(C) acclimated	(F) mimesis

The key phrase *blurring the line* indicates that Munch's work integrated or blended outside works with his own original visions, so Blank (i) must be a synonym for one of those terms. That points directly to (A).

For Blank (ii), however, things are less straightforward. The correct word must mean the opposite of originality, something like copying, but the answers are more challenging. This is where roots are useful.

VER- means truth, which is exactly the opposite of what you want. *Iconoclasm* (attacking accepted norms) may be associated with artists, but it does not fit logically. This answer plays on **associative interference**, a phenomenon in which the mind creates an unsupported connection between two loosely related ideas. *Mimesis*, however, contains the root MIM-, which is like *mimic* or *mime*. That fits, so (F) is correct.

Using Roots to Play Positive/Negative

One potential difficulty that can arise when working with roots involves linguistic "drift" – that is, words may have evolved to mean something somewhat different from what their components would suggest.

For every straightforward relationship between a word and its subparts, e.g. *implacable* (unforgiving, unappeasable: IM-, not + PLAC-, peace), there is a word that is more than the components, e.g. *obdurate* (stubborn: OB-, against + DUR-, hard). Furthermore, two roots may be written identically but have different meanings, e.g. PED- can mean either child or foot.

Roots thus tend to be more reliable for playing positive/negative than for determining actual meanings. For example, the jump from *obdurate* to *stubborn* might be too large, but the prefix OB- clearly points to a negative word. Sometimes, just knowing a word's charge may be enough to get you to the answer.

For example, consider this question. Instead of full words, only prefixes are available in the answers.

Vita Sackville-West's youthful literary output was _____: by the age of eighteen, she had completed eight historical novels, five plays, and a large number of poems.

(A) ob-
(B) ambi-
(C) re-
(D) pro-
(E) de-

The sentence indicates that Sackville-West's output was extensive, so a positive word is required. Based only on the roots provided, you can make an educated guess that (D) is correct because PRO- = positive.

Prefixes Can Also Be Misleading

Even in terms of positive/negative, however, roots – and in particular prefixes – can occasionally be deceptive. Words that would logically seem to be negative can sometimes be positive (e.g. *discretion*), and words that would logically seem to be positive can be negative (e.g. *profligate*).

For example:

> Though seemingly _____ and even attractive in appearance, nightshade has long been recognized as one of the most poisonous plants grown in the western hemisphere.
>
> [A] innocuous
> [B] ephemeral
> [C] toxic
> [D] disquieting
> [E] harmless
> [F] duplicitous

The phrase *and even attractive in appearance*, tells us that the word we're looking for must be positive. *Toxic* is pretty obviously wrong, but after that you might be a little bit stuck.

Here's where playing roots can get you into trouble: if you just go by the fact that IN- and DIS- are negative, you'll end up crossing out the right answer.

Although words that begin with those prefixes *are* generally negative, in this case, *innocuous* is actually negating a negative: IN-, not + NOC-, harm = **not** harmful, which is positive and makes perfect sense in the sentence.

Unfortunately, aside from actually knowing what the words mean, there's no guaranteed strategy for recognizing these exceptions; you simply need to be aware that they exist. In general, your best bet is to simply use the rules you know: the exceptions are relatively few, and roots are important tools. Worrying about the exceptions can hurt you a lot more than it can help.

Putting it Together: Text Completions

While the steps detailed in the previous pages may seem like a lot of information to keep in mind, it is important to stress that they need not be time-consuming. Most of them can – indeed, should – be completed in no more than a few seconds. (Many people who are naturally adept at vocabulary questions perform them automatically, even if they would be hard-pressed to break down the process the way we've just done.)

Ultimately, these steps should not feel like an unnecessary imposition but rather an intuitive and helpful set of strategies that ultimately allow you to work through questions more quickly and confidently. In the initial stages, however, it is likely that you will need to proceed more slowly and deliberately than you are accustomed to doing – and likely more slowly than will feel comfortable.

But to reiterate: when you are confronted with the most challenging text completions, which can be long and quite complex, this type of systematic approach represents your best chance of avoiding the many pitfalls you could encounter.

Let's look at how these steps apply to some sample questions. We're going to start with something straightforward and then work through progressively more challenging material.

Text Completion #1

Some butterfly species are regarded as **pests** <u>because</u> in their larval stages they can (i) _____ crops or trees; <u>however</u>, other species play a more (ii) _____ role because their caterpillars consume harmful insects.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) damage	(D) conspicuous
(B) fertilize	(E) nefarious
(C) relinquish	(F) beneficial

The key words *pest* and *because* indicate that Blank (i) is negative and means something like harm.

The key word *however* indicates that Blank (ii) is positive and means something like helpful.

Because Blank (i) is negative, we can eliminate (B) immediately. *Damage* and *relinquish* are both negative, but *relinquish* (give something up) doesn't make sense in context. Only (A) fits with the context of crops and insects.

For Blank (ii), *beneficial* perfectly fits the criteria that the correct answer must fulfill. Although *conspicuous* (standing out) can be positive in some instances, it does not make sense in context.

Don't get distracted by *nefarious* (cruel). Even if you don't know what that word means, *beneficial* works so well that *nefarious* is irrelevant. But if you feel compelled to consider that word, the prefix NE- (not) strongly suggests that *nefarious* is negative.

Important: As a rule, you should **work from what you do know to what you don't know**. If a word you know makes perfect sense in context, you should choose it and move on. Worrying about unfamiliar vocabulary will only slow you down and cause you to second-guess yourself.

As text completions increase in difficulty, challenges can manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Most obviously, the overall level of the vocabulary and syntax in the sentences/passages and the answer choices becomes more sophisticated. While the easiest text completions are written at a level appropriate for a general college-level audience, the hardest ones are written at the level of an academic article or advanced textbook, and may make substantial use of academic jargon.

As the questions progress, you may also find that you need to read further into a sentence or paragraph for key information. A blank that appears at the beginning of a sentence, for example, may not be defined until several lines later. You may also need to determine the meaning of Blank (ii) or Blank (iii) in order to determine the meaning of Blank (i).

Finally, vocabulary words other than those in the answer choices may be indirectly tested – that is, you may need to know the definitions of other challenging words in the sentence in order to determine the meaning of one or more of the blanks.

Let's look at a more challenging example.

Text Completion #2

Some countries fail spectacularly, with a total (i) _____ of all state institutions; others collapse by being utterly unable to (ii) _____ their societies' enormous potential for growth.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) abhorrence	(D) forestall
(B) disintegration	(E) venerate
(C) indulgence	(F) tap

This question still gives us a fair amount of information to work with. For Blank (i), the phrase *fail spectacularly* indicates that we're looking for extremely negative word meaning breakdown. For Blank (ii), *collapse* and *utterly unable* indicate that the correct word is similarly negative and must mean fulfill.

Blank (i) is reasonably straightforward, but there is a slight twist. *Disintegration* corresponds clearly to the idea of failing spectacularly, and if you stay focused on that fact, you should be fine. The danger is that you'll get distracted by (A). *Abhorrence* is also an extremely negative word, but it means loathing, which doesn't fit here. Logically, countries fail because they collapse, not because they loathe state institutions.

Now for Blank (ii), which is where things might start to get a little hairy.

If you are not well-versed in the ways of ETS, your first instinct might to wonder what a ridiculous answer like *tap* is doing in a sentence about failing countries. If you know something about how the test works, however, the presence of such a word should be a signal that you need to pay extra-close attention to that option. In fact, *tap* means not only knock lightly but also gain access to – i.e. *tap into*.

That makes sense: countries fail because their resources can't be gotten ahold of or used effectively. *Forestall* (prevent) makes no sense, and *venerate* (greatly respect) does not fit, even though it is positive. Note that it is very difficult to answer this question correctly without either knowing *forestall* and *venerate*, or recognizing the alternate meaning of *tap*.

Now let's try something even harder.

Example #3: Long Text Completion

According to Virgnia Woolf, the works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë were _____ by their authors' social and economic disadvantages. This view, however, is disputed by some critics, who argue that the Brontës _____ their position with remarkable deftness. Forced into the marketplace of female labor, they returned home as quickly as they could, and in their retreat from society found the autonomy to _____ their most original work.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
(A) constrained	(D) undermined	(G) implicate
(B) mitigated	(E) incentivized	(H) ratify
(C) enthralled	(F) exploited	(J) cultivate

The word *disadvantages* strongly suggests that Blank (i) is negative, but you have no way of knowing for sure until you read to the end of the second sentence and consider Blank (ii).

The phrase *remarkable deftness* indicates that Blank (ii) is positive; even if you don't know what *deft* (skillful) means, you can still use the word *remarkable* to make an educated guess that a positive word is required.

The word *however* at the beginning of the second sentence indicates a contrast between that sentence and the previous sentence, telling you that Blank (i) is indeed negative and must mean something like held back or disadvantaged. (When you're plugging in, it's fine to use words that already appear in the sentence). The only word that fully fits that definition is *constrained*, so the answer to Blank (i) is (A). *Mitigated* means lessened, but it's used in the context of lessening something bad, e.g. pain. It doesn't quite work here. *Enthralled* means fascinated, which doesn't make sense at all.

To plug in your own word for Blank (ii), think about what the two sentences must logically be saying: basically, Woolf thought that the Brontë sisters' works were hurt by the fact that the Brontës were poor, but other people think that the Brontës used their position to their advantage. As a result, Blank (ii) must mean something like took advantage of. That is the definition of *exploited*, so (F) is correct. *Undermined* (subverted) is negative, and *incentivized* makes no sense whatsoever. Note that *exploit* often has a negative connotation but that the word can be used in a positive/neutral sense as well, as is the case here.

Now for Blank (iii). The phrase *most original work* indicates that this blank must be positive as well, and that it should mean something like produce. The word that most closely captures that meaning is *cultivate*, making (J) the answer. *Implicate* has a slightly negative connotation – for example, a person can be implicated in a crime. *Ratify* (formally approve) is positive, but it's something a person does to a document or an agreement; authors cannot ratify their work.

While questions based on longer texts with multiple blanks tend to be more challenging, hard text completions are not necessarily long. They may, for example, consist of only one blank but with multiple answer choices consisting of very challenging words or uncommon alternate meanings. Alternately, they might include answer choices that are not particularly challenging, but in the context of sentences that require a substantial amount of deciphering.

If the sentence itself is straightforward and the answer choices difficult, there is nothing you can do other than study vocabulary and roots; the particular set of words you get is a matter of chance. If the sentence is hard and the answers easy, however, you are must work very carefully to ensure you understand just what the sentence or passage is actually saying. If you jump to plug in the answer choices without doing the groundwork first, you are very likely to become confused.

Text Completion #4

The field of tap dance has seldom _____ astonishing solo dancers; it is exceptional tap choreographers that are rare.

| (A) scoffed at |
| (B) wavered about |
| (C) inquired about |
| (D) tended toward |
| (E) wanted for |

This question may be short, but it is not exactly straightforward. Let's start by unpacking the sentence. There's no transition to indicate the relationship between the two parts of the sentence, so this question requires a bit more thought upfront than might otherwise be the case.

The information before the semicolon doesn't provide any real clues about the meaning of the blank, and you can't make any assumptions. (If you made a quick assumption and plugged in something like *produced*, you'd get nowhere fast.) Instead, you need to work from the information after the semicolon.

What do we learn from the second half of the sentence? Exceptional tap *choreographers* are rare.

The first half of the sentence discusses astonishing solo *tap dancers*, however, so we can infer that the two sides are presenting contrasting information (dancers vs. choreographers).

Logically, if the second half of the sentence is saying that exceptional tap choreographers are rare, then the first half must be saying that astonishing tap dancers are *not* rare, i.e. they are common.

Now we need to be careful again. The first half of the sentence contains a negation, *seldom*. Because that part of the sentence indicates that astonishing tap dancers are common, then the word in the blank must mean something like *lacked*. If something is common, then it is seldom not present, or lacking.

The correct word must therefore be a synonym for *lacking*.

Scoffed at (looked down on), *wavered* (went back and forth between), *inquired about*, and *tended toward* all do not fit. And if you're only thinking in terms of first definitions, neither does *wanted for*. Used in its second meaning, however, *wanted for* can indeed mean lacked, so the answer is (E).

1. In the past, maps often reflected the diverse perspectives of their creators, but the use of computers and satellites to ensure accuracy has in recent years rendered them increasingly _____.

(A) complex
(B) sleek
(C) uniform
(D) colorful
(E) eclectic

2. In spite of his role as the head of an international fashion empire, Christian Fabré leads _____ existence, subsisting on only the most basic necessities.

(A) a serene
(B) an eccentric
(C) a staid
(D) an ostentatious
(E) an ascetic

3. The scientist's work, once widely praised for its precision and attention to detail, is now being (i) _____ in some quarters as the (ii) _____ of shoddiness.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) ransacked	(D) bane
(B) pilloried	(E) epitome
(C) extolled	(F) antithesis

4. Accused of (i) _____ by members of the opposing party, the candidate refused to admit to any form of wrongdoing and in fact protested that she had always been entirely (ii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
(A) punctiliousness	(D) terse
(B) waffling	(E) thorough
(C) obfuscation	(F) frank

5. To be accepted as a (i) _____, a theory must seem superior to its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, (ii) _____ all the facts with which it could possibly be (iii) _____.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
(A) conviction	(D) abide by	(G) subsumed
(B) paradigm	(E) account for	(H) confronted
(C) consequence	(F) relate to	(J) entertained

6. Economists say years of economic mismanagement have (i) _____ the nation's food supply. Sugar fields in the country's agricultural center remain (ii) _____ for lack of fertilizers, and unused machinery decays in shuttered factories. Staples including corn and rice, once exported, must now be imported, arriving in quantities that persistently (iii) _____ what is needed.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
(A) confounded	(D) overrun	(G) measure up to
(B) girded	(E) unwieldy	(H) double down on
(C) devastated	(F) fallow	(J) fall short of

7. The association between meditation and mindfulness naturally leads the two terms to be frequently _____ when in fact they are distinct.

[A] conflated
[B] divulged
[C] explained
[D] defined
[E] confused
[F] qualified

8. Recent studies suggest that many cases of cancer are preventable, but this revelation has inflamed as much as it has _____ people's fears.

[A] stoked
[B] assuaged
[C] revealed
[D] alleviated
[E] compelled
[F] aggravated

9. Because antibiotics are only used for a short time, there is little market incentive for pharmaceutical companies to develop new ones; the market value of a brand-new antibiotic is just $50 million, _____ sum for a company, considering the research and development costs incurred by the creation of such treatments. **update answer, drug → pharma, etc.**

[A] a staggering
[B] an unfathomable
[C] a manageable
[D] an impressive
[E] a meager
[F] a paltry

10. Citrus greening, thought to be caused by the bacterium *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus*, is capable of _____ entire groves in only a few months and has become a scourge for orange growers throughout much of southeastern United States.

[A] obliterating
[B] anchoring
[C] fortifying
[D] decimating
[E] penetrating
[F] surrounding

11. Saul Bellow's early novels were perspicacious if rarely _____: they reflected his keen sense of observation but were entirely lacking in economy of expression.

[A] lucid
[B] prolix
[C] succinct
[D] inane
[E] facetious
[F] laconic

Explanations: Set #1

1. C

The sentence sets up a contrast between the *diverse perspectives* represented by maps in the past, and the increasingly _____ quality of maps today. Logically, the blank must be filled with a word meaning the opposite of diverse. Only *uniform* (alike, standardized) fits that requirement exactly. *Eclectic* is a synonym for *diverse*, and none of the other choices makes sense in context.

2. E

The key phrase is *subsisting on only the most basic necessities*, which indicates that Fabré leads an extraordinarily plain lifestyle, despite his position. The blank must therefore be filled with a word meaning something similar to plain or basic. *Staid* (conventional) clearly does not fit, and *ostentatious* (showy) means exactly the opposite of the required word. Although a lifestyle that does not include many possessions could be very *serene*, it would not necessarily have this quality. While *eccentric* could justifiably be used to describe the head of an international fashion empire who spurns all luxuries, the most direct match for the clue is *ascetic*, which means practicing extreme self-denial.

3. B, E

The statement that the scientist's work was *once widely praised for its attention to detail* implies that this is no longer the case, and that the work is now characterized by its *shoddiness* (poor quality). Blank (i) should therefore be filled with a negative word meaning attacked or criticized. *Ransacked* (plundered) is negative but can only refer to a physical action and cannot refer to criticism. *Extolled* (praised) is positive and clearly does not fit. That leaves *pilloried* (ridiculed, derided), which logically describes the reaction against a scientist accused of doing shoddy work. (B) is thus the answer to Blank (i).

The meaning of Blank (ii) is less obvious from the sentence, but it must be a work indicating an association between the scientist's work and shoddiness. *Bane* (something that ruins or spoils) does not make sense; the sentence is saying that that the work *is* shoddy, not that it ruins shoddiness. *Antithesis* (opposite) makes no sense, implying that the scientist's work is not shoddy. In contrast, work that was the *epitome* (essence) of shoddiness would obviously draw criticism. (E) is thus the answer to Blank (ii).

4. C, E

The fact that the politician was *accused* of something, and that she would not *admit to any form of wrongdoing* indicates that Blank (i) must be filled with a negative word. *Punctiliousness* (meticulousness) is not a notably negative quality in a politician, so this answer can be eliminated. *Waffling* (wavering, being indecisive) is a plausible answer, but there is no option for Blank (ii) that means decisive or consistent. *Obfuscation* (covering things up) makes sense and is the only option that has a direct opposite for Blank (ii): someone who is accused of presenting the issues in an unclear or confusing way would logically protest by claiming that she had in fact been clear and direct, i.e. *frank*. (C) is thus the answer to Blank (i), and (E) is the answer to Blank (ii).

5. B, E, H

The fact that *a theory must seem superior to its competitors* is presented as a condition for Blank (i), indicating that that the blank must be filled with a positive word meaning something like fact. It would not make sense to say that a theory must outdo its competitors in order to be accepted as a *conviction* or a *consequence*; however, a theory that was clearly superior to rival theories would logically be accepted as a *paradigm* (model). (B) is thus the answer to Blank (i).

The sentence does not provide any direct information about the definitions of Blanks (ii) and (iii), although the contradictor *but* does indicate that the second half of the sentence will convey an idea that contrasts with the idea in the first half of the sentence. Since the first half of the sentence focuses on what a theory must do right to be accepted (be better than other theories), the second half must discuss what it does not need to do nearly as well. Given that context *account for* and *confronted* create the most logical meaning when plugged into the sentence: although a theory must providing the most convincing explanation for a phenomenon, but it does not need to be perfect or cover everything – that is, it does not and cannot need to take into consideration (*account for*) every fact related to it, i.e. that could *confront* it. (E) is thus the answer to Blank (ii), and (H) is the answer to Blank (iii).

6. C, F, J

If the country has been mismanaged economically for years, then presumably the nation's food supply has declined. *Confounded* (confused) makes no sense, and *girded* (supported) means exactly the opposite of the required word. *Devastated* (utterly ruined) describes a result that years of economic mismanagement would logically have on the food supply, making (C) the answer to Blank (i).

For Blank (ii), if the country's food supplies have been destroyed, then the sugar fields must be empty or unproductive. A lack of fertilizers would not make the fields *overrun* or *unwieldy* (cumbersome, difficult to manage), but it would make them *fallow* (neglected).
Blank (iii) must be filled with a word reinforcing the idea that the country's food supply is lacking. Imports of staple items that *measure up to* or *double down on* (become more persistent in) what is needed would not lead to a food shortage, but ones that *persistently fall short* would indeed have that effect. (J) is thus the answer to Blank (iii).

7. A, E

The key phrase *when in fact they are distinct* sets up a contrast between that statement and the blank, implying that the terms *meditation* and *mindfulness* are frequently believed to mean the same thing. In other words, the terms are *confused* for one another, or *conflated* (combined into one). Although these two words are not exact synonyms, both convey the idea that the two words are considered interchangeable. None of the other answers creates a logical meaning that corresponds to the clues in the sentence. [A] and [E] are thus correct.

8. B, E

The construction *inflamed as much as it has* _____ implies that the blank must be filled with words meaning the opposite of inflamed – something like calmed or soothed. *Assuaged* and *alleviated* both fit that definition, making [B] and [E] correct. *Stoked* (incited) and *aggravated* have similar meanings in this context, but both convey the opposite of the required definition. The remaining answers all do not make sense.

9. E, F

To say that there is *little market incentive for drug companies to develop new [drugs]* is another way of saying that new drugs don't make drug companies much money. Even though a $50 million market value might seem large, the key word *just* implies that this figure is actually quite small. The blank must therefore be filled with words similar to small. *Staggering, unfathomable*, and *impressive* would all more logically be used to describe a very large sum, so these words can be eliminated. *Manageable* does not fit because a sum that is *manageable* is one that can be afforded, and here the focus is on how much new antibiotics are worth to drug companies, not how much they can afford pay. This word also has a more positive connotation than what is required here. In contrast, an antibiotic whose worth was *meager* or *paltry* (scanty, insignificant) would not be of very much value to a drug company at all. [E] and [F] are thus correct.

10. A, D

The fact citrus greening is caused a *bacterium* and has become a *scourge* (pest, affliction) suggests that is a very bad for orange growers indeed. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the blank should be filled with negative words. *Anchoring* makes no sense, and the definition of *fortifying* (strengthening) is the opposite of what is required. *Penetrating* and *surrounding* could both plausibly fit, but neither of these words has a close synonym among the other choices. The correct answers, *obliterating* and *decimating*, refer to the act of destroying something thoroughly. Logically, citrus greening would be considered a scourge if it thoroughly destroyed citrus groves, making [A] and [D] correct.

11. C, F

Watch out for the negative – the blank must be filled with words describing a quality that Bellow's novels *rarely* possessed. The key information comes after the colon, with the two pieces of information running parallel to the two descriptors before the colon. *Perspicacious* (perceptive) = keen sense of observation, and the blank = *entirely lacking in economy of expression*. *Economy of expression* means not using a lot of words (*economy* = thrift), so to say that a book lacks economy of expression is a fancy way of saying that it is wordy. The sentence, however, asks for words indicating what Bellow's works are NOT – that is, the opposite of wordy. The opposite of wordy is concise, i.e. *succinct* or *laconic. Prolix* means wordy, and the other answers do not make sense in context.