

VOCABULARY SECTION: TIPS FOR “TESTWISENESS”

Be aware of the time

Before the day of the exam, study the test information and available practice manuals to learn how many vocabulary items you'll have to do. Take a watch and don't let yourself get behind. If you know you're a whiz on synonyms, don't spend so much time on a more difficult section that you can't finish the synonym section. It makes sense to do all the items you're sure off first, then go back over the whole section and work on the others.

Know secondary definitions

Tests often make use of secondary definitions. A vocabulary test is a way of measuring how precisely you can use your language, and the more words and meanings you have, the more comprehensively you can describe your world. Suppose you know the word “pristine” and readily recognize that it means “fresh and clean” in the following context:

The new fallen snow left the valley pristine and beautiful

But what happens on a synonym test when you see this item?

Pristine: a) primeval b) inveterate c) jocose d) ephemeral e) desultory

If you know that another meaning of pristine is “belonging to the earliest period or state,” you can probably pick the correct answer—primeval.

Check answer choices carefully

Some answer choices are meant to distract you and further distinguish between “guessers” and those who can use the language more exactly. Watch for answer choices in the following three categories from antonym tests:

1. Words that sound like the stem item

Factious: a) lying b) full of facts c) harmonious d) visible e) direct
(Correct answer: *harmonious*; distracting answer: *full of facts*.)

2. Choices that are synonymous with the stem item (but you asked to supply an antonym—or vice versa)

Sequester: a) act curious b) request c) jail to find d) retire e) include
(Correct answer: *include*; distracting synonym: *retire*.)

3. Words you might associate and confuse with the stem item by mistake.

Venial: a) innocent b) ethical c) unpardonable d) prohibited e) culpable
(Correct answer: *unpardonable*. You may think of a similar word, *venal*, which means “corrupt.” In this case the answer would be *innocent*.)