

Sentence Completion Strategy

Sentence completion questions consist of a sample sentence in which one or two words have been replaced by blanks. Below the sentence, you will find five answer choices, each of which consists of a word or words. Your job is to pick the choice with the word or words that best fill the blank(s) in the sentence.

Two things you will need to rely on to answer these questions:

1. Your ability to figure out what kind of word should go in the blank
2. Your vocabulary

First and foremost: KNOW THE INSTRUCTIONS. There are not many things that you can count on showing up on the exam, but the instructions will be the same every time you take the exam.

Instructions:

Each sentence below has one or two blanks, each blank indicating that something has been omitted. Beneath the sentence are five words or sets of words labeled A through E. Choose the word or set of words that, when inserted in the sentence, best fits the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

Once you understand the directions and know what the instructions are indicating you to do, you can easily move on.

Once you begin to attack the sentence completion section of the test, you may feel the need to read the question and then plug in each answer choice. Then you choose the correct answer based on the way the sentence sounds. Do not do this. Why?

1. It is a waste of precious time.
2. The correct answer on the test is not based on how the sentence sounds, but what it means.

Instead, try this method:

1. Cover the answer choices with your hand.
2. Read the sentence, and write your own answer in the blank.
3. Only after you've come up with your own word for the blank should you look down at the answer choices and pick the word that comes closest to the word you that you chose.

If you are still having trouble or none of the answers choices match up with the word you chose:

1. Look for **clue** and **triggers**:
 - a. A clue is a word or words in a sentence that tells you what the blank is supposed to mean

- i. Example: Susan was _____ when the formula, which had worked just yesterday, failed to produce the expected result. The underlined clue tells us how Susan must feel.
 - b. Trigger Words are words in a sentence that tell you how the word in the blank relates to the clue
 - i. Same direction trigger words are words that indicate the blank has the same meaning as the clue. Examples of commonly used trigger words are *and, because, so, therefore, since,* and *in fact.*
 - ii. Opposite direction trigger words are words that indicate the blank has a different meaning as the clue. Examples of commonly used trigger words are *but, however, yet, although, though, in contrast, rather* and *despite.*
 - c. Punctuation Triggers are punctuation marks that tell you the clue may have the same meaning as the blank. These are colons and semicolons.
 - d. Time Triggers draw a contrast between what used to be true and what is true today.
2. If you cannot think of a precise word for the blank, at least think of what *kind* of word should go there. Is it a positive word? A negative word? An active or passive word? What part of speech belongs in the sentence?

Two Blanks, One Question

For questions that have a sentence with two blanks, use the same method to attack the question. Simply address one blank at a time.

1. Usually the second blank is easier to figure out.
2. Using POE, cross off all the answer choices that do not work with the blank you have already determined.
3. Then using POE a second time, determine which answer fits in the remaining blank from the remaining answers.
4. If you are still having difficulty, remember there is a relationship between the two blanks. You simply need to determine what that relationship is.