



● Sentence Completion 18 *(low-advanced SAT level)*

Directions: Choose the best word(s) to complete each sentence.

1. The doctor prescribed _____ that contained aloe vera, a natural emollient, and told the patient to administer it to the wound three times a day until the bottle was empty.
 - A. a balm
 - B. a placebo
 - C. a surrogate
 - D. an enervator
 - E. a paroxysm
2. In her cross-examination, the defense attorney accused the witness of being too _____ in his testimony and asserted that the witness should be removed from the stand unless he could provide _____ evidence concerning the culpability of her client.
 - A. tenebrous ... didactic
 - B. abstract ... ambivalent
 - C. vague ... concrete
 - D. specific ... ambiguous
 - E. explicit ... parochial
3. The speaker immediately realized he had misjudged his audience when his bawdy joke offended everyone at the convention; he wished he'd opted for something more _____.
 - A. barbarous
 - B. decorous
 - C. vulgar
 - D. trite
 - E. iridescent
4. The joys of winning the election were rather _____, as the governor-elect quickly realized he now had an extremely important and difficult job to do.
 - A. stalwart
 - B. evanescent
 - C. trenchant
 - D. obstinate
 - E. immutable
5. Among the most memorable pieces of dialogue in all of *Hamlet* are Polonius's pithy pieces of advice he bestows upon his children, including the _____, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be."
 - A. maxim
 - B. epiphany
 - C. microcosm
 - D. missive
 - E. epitaph
6. The ascetic lifestyle of the monks required a commitment to being _____ and forgoing the _____ of modern society.
 - A. menial ... hermitages
 - B. austere ... chastity
 - C. ostentatious ... gluttony
 - D. abstemious ... excesses
 - E. regal ... providence

Answers and Explanations

1) **A**

To figure out what the missing word is, try to predict its definition by using key words from the prompt. Here the key word is “emollient,” and the prompt makes it clear that whatever the doctor prescribed contains an emollient. An emollient is something that soothes the skin, so whatever the doctor prescribed must likewise soothe the skin, meaning the missing word is one that means something soothing. Therefore, choice **(A)** is correct, as a *balm* is something that relieves pain or soothes.

(B) is incorrect because a *placebo* is a substance that has no effect but is given to a patient who is told it is a drug. Nothing in the prompt implies that the doctor in question attempted to fool the patient, as his drug (the missing word) contained active ingredients such as “aloe vera.”

(C) is incorrect because a *surrogate* is a substitute, not a substance that soothes the skin.

(D) is incorrect because an *enervator* is something that saps one’s energy or in some way weakens someone. There is no reason for a doctor to prescribe a patient something that would harm the patient, so this choice does not make sense.

(E) is incorrect because a *paroxysm* is an attack of pain. There is no reason for a doctor to prescribe a patient something that would harm the patient, so this choice does not make sense.

2) **C**

To figure out what the missing words are, try to predict their definitions by using key words from the prompt. Here, the key words are “accused,” “unless,” and “prove the culpability.” Of these, only the third one mentioned helps predict the meaning of a missing word, as the second missing word modifies “evidence” that is used to prove the culpability, or guilt, of the defendant. Thus, the second missing word must be one that implies the evidence is good evidence. The other key words imply the relationship between the missing words, suggesting that they are opposites, since the attorney accused the witness of being one way then stated that the witness “should be removed unless” he could be another way. Thus, the first missing word must be one that implies the witness did not provide good testimony, while the second missing one must be one that implies strong evidence. Choice **(C)** is the best choice, then, as *vague* means unspecific or unclear and *concrete* means solid or strong. Together, they would imply that the witness was unspecific in his testimony and should be removed from the stand unless he is able to provide strong evidence.

(A) is incorrect because neither word works in context. *Tenebrous* means gloomy or dark, while *didactic* means teaching. The words are not a pair of opposites relating to the strength of evidence.

(B) is incorrect because only the first word works in context. *Abstract* means not concrete, while *ambivalent* means having conflicting feelings. Thus, the first word could correctly be used to describe the witness's testimony, but the second word could not describe the kind of evidence the attorney would have liked to see.

(D) is incorrect because the two words have the right relationship but are in the wrong order. *Specific* means definite, while *ambiguous* means unclear. While *ambiguous* could work for the first missing word and *specific* for the second, this choice does not work for the order in which the blanks are provided.

(E) is incorrect because neither word works in context. *Explicit* means definite and could, as such, work for the second missing word but not the first. *Parochial* means narrow-minded or provincial and in no way relates to good or bad evidence.

3) **B**

To figure out what the missing word is, try to predict its definition by using key words from the prompt. In this prompt, the key word is "bawdy," and the prompt states that rather than the "bawdy joke" that "offended" the audience, the speaker wished he'd made a joke described by the missing word. Thus, the missing word must be one that means the opposite of "bawdy," which means vulgar. Choice (B) provides such a word: *decorous* means proper in conduct.

(A) is incorrect because *barbarous* means crude or vicious, though the prompt implies that the speaker has already made a crude joke and wished he'd made one that was not crude.

(C) is incorrect because *vulgar* means crude or inappropriate, though the prompt implies that the speaker has already made a crude joke and wished he'd made one that was not crude.

(D) is incorrect because *trite* means commonplace. The prompt only implies that the speaker has made an offensive joke and wished he had made a joke that was not offensive, not that he wished his joke was hackneyed, clichéd, or commonplace.

(E) is incorrect because *iridescent* means showing rainbow-like colors. As a joke cannot be multi-colored, iridescent makes absolutely no sense in context.

4) **B**

To figure out what the missing word is, try to predict its definition by using key words from the prompt. The key words here are "quickly realized," and the

prompt hinges on a cause-and-effect relationship, as what he “quickly realized” is the cause of the action described by the missing word. Since the job is described as “difficult,” presumably the effect of this realization was that his joy dissipated. Thus, the missing word must be one that means something akin to short-lived, as the governor-elect’s joys did not survive for long once he “quickly realized” the import of the job in front of him. Choice **(B)** is the best choice, then, as *evanescent* means brief or fleeting.

(A) is incorrect because *stalwart* means vigorous and unwavering, though the prompt implies that the joy was hardly long lasting or loyal.

(C) is incorrect because *trenchant* means cutting or forceful. “Joys” cannot be described as forceful, so this choice makes no sense in context.

(D) is incorrect because *obstinate* means stubborn. “Joys” cannot be described as stubborn, so this choice makes no sense in context.

(E) is incorrect because *immutable* means unchangeable, though the prompt implies that the governor’s joys changed quickly and were, thus, not unchangeable.

5) **A**

To figure out what the missing word is, try to predict its definition by using key words from the prompt. Here, the key words are in the noun clause “pithy pieces of advice.” The missing word introduces an example of such a piece of advice, and so the missing word must be one that also means a “pithy piece of advice.” Of the answer choices, only choice **(A)** provides a word similar in meaning, as a *maxim* is a proverb or a tersely stated truth.

(B) is incorrect because an *epiphany* is a brief or sudden moment of insight. Nothing in the prompt implies that Polonius’s advice appeared to him all of a sudden.

(C) is incorrect because a *microcosm* is a small or miniaturized world, not a piece of advice.

(D) is incorrect because a *missive* is a letter, though the prompt states that the missing word describes Polonius’s dialogue, not a written statement or note.

(E) is incorrect because an *epitaph* is an inscription to memorialize a dead person. This choice is completely out of left field, as nothing in the prompt implies that anyone is dead or that Polonius is saying (or inscribing) anything about the dead.

6) **D**

To figure out what the missing words are, try to predict their definitions by using key words from the prompt. Here, the key words are “commitment” and “forgoing,” though these words do not actually help one predict the meanings of the missing words. Rather, at most, these key words provide the relationship between the missing words, words that must be opposites, as one thing is being committed to and the other foregone. Of the answer choices, only choice **(D)** provides a set of opposites that works in context, as *abstemious* means temperate or sparing and *excesses* means immoderate indulgences, meaning one word implies doing without something while the other implies an amount above and beyond what is needed.

(A) is incorrect because the two words are not opposites of each other. *Menial* means suitable for servants, while *hermitages* are homes for hermits. They don't have any relationship between them, but though the prompt requires a pair of opposites.

(B) is incorrect because the two words are not opposites of each other. *Austere* means strict, while *chastity* is purity. If anything, these words are more synonymous with each other than they are opposites, though the prompt requires a pair of opposites.

(C) is incorrect because the two words are not opposites of each other. *Ostentatious* means showy or extravagant, while *gluttony* is an over-indulgence of food and drink. If anything, these words are more synonymous with each other than they are opposites, though the prompt requires a pair of opposites.

(E) is incorrect because the two words are not opposites of each other. *Regal* means royal, while *providence* means prudence or divine guidance. They don't have any relationship between them, though the prompt requires a pair of opposites.