



● Sentence Completion 19 *(low-advanced SAT level)*

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

1. _____ to getting early parole is for the prisoner to appear _____; many parole boards will not even hear a case if the prisoner does not appear to show at least a little remorse.
A. superficial ... besmirched
B. crucial ... bereft
C. tantamount ... demur
D. paramount ... penitent
E. ancillary ... contrite
2. John Wayne always played characters who exhibited a great deal of _____, but in real life, his confidence could easily be shaken, especially by the legendary director John Ford, who knew exactly how to manipulate Wayne's emotions.
A. blasphemy
B. benediction
C. bravado
D. bluntness
E. narcissism
3. After refusing to fight Dennis, Jack was accused of being _____ and earned a reputation as a coward.
A. dauntless
B. pusillanimous
C. punctilious
D. defiant
E. rapacious
4. I didn't mean to _____ at the waitress, but I had to voice a complaint: my soup was so _____ as to be practically inedible.
A. diverge ... grotesque
B. extol ... gauche
C. cavil ... dissolute
D. grouse ... abominable
E. grovel ... superb
5. While no one person can be blamed for World War I, certainly the _____ in each country who riled up fervent nationalism and practically clamored for war are among the most culpable.
A. malingerers
B. jingoists
C. hucksters
D. pundits
E. charlatans
6. Horatio Alger's books show characters living the American Dream: in most of his books a poor but _____ protagonist would work hard and become rich.
A. sedulous
B. lackadaisical
C. sinuous
D. idealistic
E. simplistic

Answers and Explanations

1) D

To figure out what the missing words are, try to predict their definitions by using key words from the prompt. Here, each missing word has its own set of key words. The first missing word is explained by the second clause, since a semicolon is used to separate two complete yet related sentences. Therefore, the first missing word must be one that is explained by the idea that “many parole boards will not even hear a case if the prisoner does not appear to show at least a little remorse.” This implies that showing remorse is extremely important, so the first word must mean extremely important. The second missing word’s key word is “remorse,” so the second missing word must mean remorseful. Then, the entire sentence would be paraphrased to say that it is extremely important to show remorse, because parole boards will not hear a case if remorse is not shown. Choice **(D)** is the best answer, as *paramount* means foremost in importance, while *penitent* means repentant.

(A) is incorrect because neither word works in context. *Superficial* means trivial and would imply that showing remorse is not important. This is the opposite of what we are looking for to fill in this blank. *Besmirched* means soiled and in no way relates to the idea of showing remorse.

(B) is incorrect because only the first word works in context. *Crucial* means extremely important and would, as such, be an excellent word to use in place of the first missing word, but *bereft* means lacking. This word in no way relates to the theme of the prompt.

(C) is incorrect because neither word works in context. *Tantamount* means equivalent in value, while *demur* means grave or serious. Neither word implies the import of showing remorse. *Tantamount* and the correct answer, *paramount*, look similar, but they have very different meanings.

(E) is incorrect because only the second word works in context. *Contrite* means repentant, so it would work in place of the second missing word, but *ancillary* means subordinate or of secondary importance. It is, thus, the exact opposite of a word that could be used for the first missing word in the prompt.

2) C

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 “confidence could easily be shaken,” a phrase that comes after the coordinating conjunction “but” which separates the missing word from the clause that contains the key words. “But” is used to separate contrasting clauses, so the missing word must be one that means the opposite of having “confidence easily shaken.” Thus, the missing word must be one that means confidence. Choice **(C)** provides such a word: *bravado* means swagger or self-assuredness.

(A) is incorrect because *blasphemy* means irreverence, and nothing in the prompt implies that Wayne was not respectful or reverent. We only know from the question that Wayne was not very confident in real life.

(B) is incorrect because *benediction* means blessing, though nothing in the prompt implies Wayne was blessed or able to bless.

(D) is incorrect because *bluntness* means frankness or candor, sometimes with a negative connotation. It is possible that Wayne could have been both blunt and lacking in confidence. Nothing in the prompt implies that Wayne was not blunt.

(E) is incorrect because *narcissism* is an obsession with oneself. It is possible, though not likely, that Wayne could have been both narcissistic and lacking in confidence. Nothing in the prompt implies that Wayne was not narcissistic.

3) **B**

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 “coward,” a reputation Jack earned after he refused to fight. The missing word likewise describes the effects of not fighting, and so Jack must have been accused of being cowardly before he earned a reputation as a coward. Thus, the missing word is one that means cowardly or lacking in courage. Choice (B) provides such a word: *pusillanimous* means fainthearted or cowardly.

(A) is incorrect because *dauntless* means extremely brave and is not, as such, a word that would be used to describe someone who had “a reputation as a coward.” Rather, *dauntless* would be used to describe the very opposite of a coward.

(C) is incorrect because *punctilious* means attentive to details and, as such, has nothing to do with Jack’s inability to fight or his subsequent “reputation as a coward.” This answer choice looks like the correct answer choice, *pusillanimous*, but the two have very different meanings.

(D) is incorrect because *defiant* means refuses to yield, which, if anything, would be used to describe the opposite of a coward, not someone who had “a reputation as a coward.”

(E) is incorrect because *rapacious* means extremely greedy and, as such, has nothing to do with Jack’s inability to fight or his subsequent “reputation as a coward.”

4) **D**

To figure out what the missing words are, try to predict their definitions by using key words from the prompt. Here, each missing word has its own key words. The

first missing word's key words are "voice a complaint," a phrase that is separated from the missing word's clause by the coordinating conjunction "but." But is used to separate contrasting elements within a sentence, so the two clauses here are contradictory. Thus, the narrator had to make a complaint though he or she did not mean to, but the "didn't mean to" comes before the missing word. Therefore, the missing word is one that means complain. The second missing word's key words are "practically inedible," and the clause implies that the second missing word is a more subdued version of that sentiment, as the construction of "so [...] as to be" something else requires a pair of words similar in meaning but with the second one being a more extreme version of the first word. Thus, the second missing word must be one that means that the soup was not good. Choice **(D)** is the correct answer, as *grouse* means complain and *abominable* means detestable.

(A) is incorrect because neither word really works in context. *Diverge* means go in different directions, while *grotesque* means comically hideous. While the second word could maybe be twisted into working for the second missing word, *diverge* makes no sense.

(B) is incorrect because neither word works in context. *Extol* means to praise, though the prompt implies the narrator did the opposite of that, and *gauche* means uncouth and typically refers to behavior. As soup cannot behave or misbehave, *gauche* does not make any sense in this context.

(C) is incorrect because only the first word works in context. *Cavil* means to raise trivial objections, which could work for describing that the narrator did, but *dissolute* means loose in morals, and soup cannot be criticized for its morality or lack thereof.

(E) is incorrect because neither word works in context. *Grovel* means to beg from or bow to someone, while *superb* means excellent. The prompt wishes to make it clear the soup was far from excellent, as it was "practically inedible."

5) **B**

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 phrase "who riled up such fervent nationalism and practically clamored for war," an adjectival phrase that describes the people defined by the missing word. Thus, the missing word must be one akin to extreme nationalists. Choice **(B)** is the correct answer, as *jingoists* are militant patriots.

(A) is incorrect because *malingers* are people who fake an illness to escape duty, not people who "rile up fervent nationalism." The word stem *mal* means bad, and most people believe that war is bad. However, using this stem will not lead to the correct answer.

(C) is incorrect because *hucksters* are people who use showy methods to make a sale, not necessarily people who “rile up fervent nationalism.”

(D) is incorrect because *pundits* are experts, not people who “rile up fervent nationalism.” Some pundits may, in fact, be pro-war, but this is not necessarily part of the definition of what a pundit is.

(E) is incorrect because *charlatans* are liars or people who pretend to have knowledge they do not really possess, not people who “rile up fervent nationalism.”

6) **A**

To figure out what the missing word is, try to predict its definition by using key words from the prompt. Here, the missing word is an adjective describing the protagonist, and so the key words must likewise be descriptive of the protagonist. The prompt says the protagonist is “poor” but also that the protagonist “would work hard.” Thus, the key words are “poor” and “work hard,” and the missing word must be one that means hard working, as “poor” is used before the conjunction “but” which implies that the character is also something contradictory to poor. Therefore, choice (A) is the best answer, as *sedulous* means hard working or diligent.

(B) is incorrect because *lackadaisical* means lazy or easy-going and is, as such, a word that does not contrast with “poor” or imply that the protagonist “would work hard.”

(C) is incorrect because *sinuous* means curvy or winding, and is, as such, a word that does not relate to this prompt in any way.

(D) is incorrect because *idealistic* means sees the world in an optimistic or dreaming light. The characters in Alger’s books might be optimists, but the prompt does not make it clear that they are, as the prompt states only that they are “poor” and “work hard” before becoming rich.

(E) is incorrect because *simplistic* means not complicated and is, as such, a word that does not contrast with “poor” or imply that the protagonist “would work hard.”