Sentence Equivalence: nuance and secondary meaning

Sentence Equivalence asks you to choose the option that best completes. . .



The idea

Sentence Equivalence asks you to choose the option that best completes a single-blank sentence, but each option is a PAIR of words, and a correct choice must pass two tests at once: both words must fit the sentence, and the two must be near-synonyms, so either alone would yield essentially the same sentence. The added difficulty here is nuance: the word the sentence wants often appears in a less common, secondary sense. . .

Each option is a pair, and the word the sentence wants may be in a secondary sense. What meaning does the blank actually need?

Predict the needed meaning from the sentence's logic. For each word, recover any secondary sense before judging. Then apply both SE tests — fit and synonymy — in that sense.

Watch every step

Signal: 'a defeat that rankled for years' — the blank means irritating or vexing. Recover the secondary sense: galling = irritating, from gall meaning to chafe or annoy, not bile.

It was especially ___ to lose to a rival who had trained half as hard, a defeat that rankled for years.

A. humbling and painful ✗ *fitting-but-not-synonymous*

B. galling and vexing

C. tiring and wearying ✗ *synonymous-but-ill-fitting*

D. vexing and gratifying ✗ *single-word-trap*

E. acrid and sour ✗ *primary-sense-trap*

Why B — "galling and vexing." Choose the pair whose two words share the needed (possibly secondary) meaning and both fit.

Now a harder one

Signal: 'giving the whole scene a sudden pulse of life' — the blank means to bring to life or animate. Recover the secondary sense: to quicken = to enliven, not merely to speed up.

A single vivid detail can ___ an otherwise lifeless paragraph, giving the whole scene a sudden pulse of life.

A. accelerate and hasten ✗ *primary-sense-trap*

B. lengthen and improve ✗ *fitting-but-not-synonymous*

✓ **C.** quicken and enliven

D. sharpen and hone ✗ *synonymous-but-ill-fitting*

E. enliven and deaden ✗ *single-word-trap*

Why C — "quicken and enliven." Choose the pair whose two words share the needed (possibly secondary) meaning and both fit.

The method, in one line

Sentence Equivalence: nuance and secondary meaning

Predict the needed meaning from the sentence's logic. For each word, recover any secondary sense before judging. Then apply both SE tests — fit and synonymy — in that sense.

Am I testing each word in its relevant sense, not just its everyday one? Are the two words truly interchangeable here?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

primary-sense-trap

Judges a word only by its common, primary meaning and so misreads its fit — either rejecting the correct secondary sense or selecting a pair that fits only the everyday meaning.

fitting-but-not-synonymous

Both words could plausibly complete the sentence, but they mean different things, so they are not interchangeable and the pair fails the synonym test.

Name the trap before you pick — most wrong answers are one of these two.

Try it, then watch the walk-through

Explore this live

Watch the walk-through