Vocabulary in context: high-frequency GRE words

A vocabulary-in-context question is answered by the sentence, not by a memorized...



Lesson `grev.vocab.V1`

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The idea

A vocabulary-in-context question is answered by the sentence, not by a memorized gloss. The sentence almost always plants a clue — a defining phrase, an example, a contrast, or a consequence — that pins down which meaning the writer intends.

What clue in the sentence fixes the intended meaning of the word, and what plain paraphrase does that clue predict?

Predict a paraphrase from the clue before reading the options. Then match, discarding opposites, wrong-nuance near-synonyms, wrong dictionary senses, and sound-alikes.

Watch every step

The columnist castigated the mayor in print, calling his budget a betrayal of every promise he had made.

As used in the sentence, 'castigated' most nearly means

A. castrated or gelded ✗ *sound-alike-or-association*

B. praised warmly; commended ✗ *opposite-meaning*

C. teased good-naturedly ✗ *near-synonym-wrong-nuance*

D. criticized or rebuked severely

E. revised a text by purging its errors ✗ *wrong-dictionary-sense*

Why D — "criticized or rebuked severely." Choose the option closest to your predicted paraphrase.

Now a harder one

The perfidious lieutenant, trusted with the battle plans, sold them to the enemy the very night before the attack.

As used in the sentence, 'perfidious' most nearly means

A. sweet-smelling; fragrant ✗ *sound-alike-or-association*

B. steadfastly loyal and faithful ✗ *opposite-meaning*

C. careless and unreliable ✗ *near-synonym-wrong-nuance*

D. treacherous; deliberately disloyal

E. half-hearted and done with little care ✗ *sound-alike-or-association*

Why D — "treacherous; deliberately disloyal." Choose the option closest to your predicted paraphrase.

The method, in one line

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Predict a paraphrase from the clue before reading the options. Then match, discarding opposites, wrong-nuance near-synonyms, wrong dictionary senses, and sound-alikes.

Could my choice replace the word and preserve the sentence's logic? Have I resisted the opposite, the almost-right synonym, and the alternate sense the context rules out?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

⚠ opposite-meaning
Selects a meaning roughly opposite to the one the clue requires.

⚠ near-synonym-wrong-nuance
Selects a meaning in the right general family but with the wrong precise nuance for this sentence.

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

Try it, then watch the walk-through

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