

Sharon Serrago, Inc.

SAT/PSAT Study Materials

Examples from the Critical Reading Section



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Vocabulary Study 1

Definitions



- abstruse** (ab STRUSE) **Definition:** difficult to understand, recondite, concealed
Synonyms: complex, complicated, intricate, knotty
Derivatives: abstrusely, abstruseness
The preacher struggled to explain a particularly abstruse passage of text.
- archaic** (are KAY ik) **Definition:** antiquated, old, out of use
Synonyms: ancient, antique, obsolete, venerable
Derivatives: archaically, archaism, archaize, archaized, archaizing, archaizer
Shakespeare uses the archaic word "wherefore" where modern English speakers would use "why."
- assuage** (uh SWAYJ) **Definition:** to ease, to mitigate, to make less painful or burdensome, to calm
Synonyms: allay, alleviate, lighten, soothe
Derivatives: assuaged, assuaging, assuagement, assuager
During the Civil War, surgeons used morphine to assuage the pain of battle wounds.
- contentious** (kun TEN shus) **Definition:** quarrelsome, stirring controversy
Synonyms: bellicose, belligerent, pugnacious
Derivatives: contentiously, contentiousness, contention
The contentious customer insisted on arguing with the manager, even after his money had been refunded.
- depravity** (deh PRAV eh tee) **Definition:** moral corruption, a wicked or perverse act
Synonyms: abasement, corruption, debasement, debauchery, perversion, vitiation
Derivatives: deprave, depraver, depravement, depraved
Stealing from helpless elderly people requires unimaginable depravity.
- disdain** (dis DANE) **Definition:** intense dislike; to treat with scorn or contempt, to reject as unworthy
Synonyms: (to be) arrogant, haughty, high-handed, insolent, lordly, supercilious
Derivatives: disdained, disdainful, disdainful, disdainfully, disdainfulness
She treats liars and gossips with disdain.
- dormant** (DOR munt) **Definition:** inactive, sleeping
Synonyms: abeyant, latent, quiescent
Derivatives: dormancy
Maybe if I take a painting class, I'll awaken some dormant talent I didn't even know I had!
- enigmatic** (en ig MAT ik) **Definition:** mysterious, inexplicable, puzzling
Synonyms: abstruse, ambiguous, cryptic, equivocal, obscure, recondite
Derivatives: enigma, enigmatical, enigmatically, enigmatize
He said, "We'll see," but I don't know what that enigmatic comment is supposed to mean.
- furtive** (FUR tiv) **Definition:** secret in an underhanded way, stealthy
Synonyms: clandestine, covert, stealthy, surreptitious, underhanded
Derivatives: furtively, furtiveness
He glanced furtively at his neighbor's test paper, hoping the teacher wouldn't notice.
- fuse** (FYOOZ) **Definition:** to mix or to join (usually by melting)
Synonyms: amalgamate, blend, coalesce, commingle, merge, mingle
Derivatives: fused, fusing, fuses, fusibility, fusible
To make steel, the manufacturer fuses iron with other metals.

Vocabulary Study 1

Definitions



11. **insipid** (in SIP id) **Definition:** boring and stupid
Synonyms: banal, flat, inane, jejune, vapid
Derivatives: insipidity, insipidly, insipidness
If you want people to think you are smart, don't make insipid statements that make you sound stupid.
12. **loathe** (LOETH) **Definition:** to detest
Synonyms: abhor, abominate
Derivatives: loathful, loathing, loathingly, loathness, loathsome
I loathe tapioca pudding; I can't think of any food I detest more.
13. **mitigate** (MIT uh gate) **Definition:** to cause to become less harsh or hostile; to make less severe
Synonyms: allay, alleviate, assuage, lighten
Derivatives: mitigation, mitigatedly, mitigative, mitigator, mitigatory
The gentle sun mitigated the chill in the December air.
14. **nullify** (NUL eh fie) **Definition:** to cause not to be in effect, to negate
Synonyms: abrogate, annul, invalidate
Derivatives: nullified, nullifying, nullification, nullificationist, nullificator, nullifier
If anyone cheats on a state test, the state may nullify the scores of everyone in the room!
15. **obscure** (ub SKYOOR) **Definition:** difficult to see, vague
Synonyms: abstruse, ambiguous, cryptic, enigmatic, equivocal, recondite
Derivatives: obscuration, obscurative, obscuredly, obscurely, obscurement, obscureness, obscurity
The street sign was obscure, so we missed our turn and got lost.
16. **recant** (reh KANT) **Definition:** to withdraw or to repudiate a statement or belief, revoke
Synonyms: abjure, forswear, renounce, retract
Derivatives: recantation, recanter
When threatened by the Nazis, many Jews were forced to recant their religious beliefs.
17. **reprove** (reh PROOV) **Definition:** to scold or to rebuke for a misdeed usually with kindly intent
Synonyms: admonish, castigate, chastise, chide, rebuke, reproach
Derivatives: reprovably, reprovably, reprovably, reprovably, reprovably, reprovably
"No, no," she reprovably, taking the shoe away from the puppy and giving him a toy instead.
18. **slothful** (SLOTH ful) **Definition:** lazy, indolent
Synonyms: bovine
Derivatives: slothfully, slothfulness, sloth
She's too slothful to get up and even pick up her clothes, much less clean the house.
19. **taciturn** (TAS eh turn) **Definition:** quiet, not verbose
Synonyms: reserved, reticent
Derivatives: tacit, tacitly, tacitness, taciturnity, taciturnly
Because he is generally a taciturn man, when he finally says a few words, we listen.
20. **vilify** (VIL eh fie) **Definition:** to malign, to defame, to utter abusive statements against
Synonyms: asperse, calumniate, denigrate, traduce
Derivatives: vilification, vilifier, vilifying, vilifyingly
When the scandal broke, the mayor was vilified by his enemies in every newspaper in town.

Vocabulary Study 1

Matching Test



Directions: Match the vocabulary word to its definition.

Practice 1

- | | | | |
|-----------|-------------|----|--|
| _____ 1. | abstruse | a. | to ease, to mitigate, to calm |
| _____ 2. | archaic | b. | inactive, sleeping |
| _____ 3. | assuage | c. | antiquated, old, out of use |
| _____ 4. | contentious | d. | mysterious, inexplicable, puzzling |
| _____ 5. | depravity | e. | secret in an underhanded way, stealthy |
| _____ 6. | disdain | f. | quarrelsome, stirring controversy |
| _____ 7. | dormant | g. | to mix or to join (usually by melting) |
| _____ 8. | enigmatic | h. | moral corruption, a wicked or perverse act |
| _____ 9. | furtive | i. | difficult to understand, recondite, concealed |
| _____ 10. | fuse | j. | intense dislike; to treat with scorn or contempt |

Practice 2

- | | | | |
|-----------|----------|----|--|
| _____ 11. | insipid | k. | to cause not to be in effect, to negate |
| _____ 12. | loathe | l. | to defame, to utter abusive statements against |
| _____ 13. | mitigate | m. | to detest |
| _____ 14. | nullify | n. | difficult to see, vague |
| _____ 15. | obscure | o. | quiet, not verbose |
| _____ 16. | recant | p. | lazy, indolent |
| _____ 17. | reprove | q. | boring and stupid |
| _____ 18. | slothful | r. | to scold or to rebuke |
| _____ 19. | taciturn | s. | to make less severe |
| _____ 20. | vilify | t. | to withdraw a statement or belief, revoke |

Vocabulary Study 1

Multiple Choice Test



Directions: Find the correct vocabulary word that fits the definition.

- _____ 1. quarrelsome, stirring controversy
a. insipid b. obscure c. furtive d. assuage e. contentious
- _____ 2. boring and stupid
a. enigmatic b. taciturn c. dormant d. mitigate e. insipid
- _____ 3. to withdraw a statement or belief, revoke
a. reprove b. recant c. obscure d. assuage e. disdain
- _____ 4. moral corruption, a wicked or perverse act
a. slothful b. taciturn c. vilify d. depravity e. enigmatic
- _____ 5. to detest
a. loathe b. abstruse c. contentious d. nullify e. assuage
- _____ 6. inactive, sleeping
a. dormant b. furtive c. depravity d. reprove e. taciturn
- _____ 7. to make less severe
a. fuse b. mitigate c. loathe d. vilify e. archaic
- _____ 8. to scold or to rebuke
a. vilify b. reprove c. taciturn d. disdain e. assuage
- _____ 9. difficult to understand, recondite, concealed
a. dormant b. insipid c. obscure d. depravity e. slothful
- _____ 10. to defame, to utter abusive statements against
a. recant b. reprove c. nullify d. vilify e. fuse
- _____ 11. secret in an underhanded way, stealthy
a. furtive b. abstruse c. assuage d. slothful e. taciturn
- _____ 12. mysterious, inexplicable, puzzling
a. taciturn b. slothful c. dormant d. enigmatic e. contentious
- _____ 13. to cause not to be in effect, to negate
a. assuage b. loathe c. reprove d. nullify e. recant
- _____ 14. to cause to become less harsh or hostile; to make less severe
a. abstruse b. fuse c. assuage d. nullify e. disdain
- _____ 15. antiquated, old, out of use
a. abstruse b. slothful c. archaic d. taciturn e. enigmatic

Vocabulary Study 1

Sentence Completion Test



Directions: Find the correct word from the box below to complete the sentences that follow.

Exercise A

abstruse	archaic	assuage	contentious	depravity
disdain	dormant	enigmatic	furtive	fuse

- _____ 1. To _____ his terrible feelings of guilt so that he could feel better, the young boy returned the wallet to its owner.
- _____ 2. That actor scorns his fans and treats them with _____; he won't even sign autographs.
- _____ 3. The man's _____ answer left all of us puzzled by his mysterious statement.
- _____ 4. Shakespeare's language is sometimes _____ and hard to understand.
- _____ 5. Welders _____ the separate metal parts to make one solid piece.
- _____ 6. One hundred years in the future, maybe computers will seem like an _____ technology that's not worth using anymore.
- _____ 7. Some people are so _____ that they'll look for any excuse to pick a fight.
- _____ 8. She was trying to be quiet, but her _____ attempts to sneak out of the house awoke her family.
- _____ 9. Toads lie _____ in the mud until the spring thaws, and then they wake up.
- _____ 10. The corruption of some governments can reach shocking levels of _____.

Exercise B

insipid	loathe	mitigate	nullify	obscure
recant	reprove	slothful	taciturn	vilify

- _____ 11. This treatment should _____ your symptoms so that you don't feel so ill.
- _____ 12. When a child makes a bad decision, the parent generally will _____ him and explain his mistake.
- _____ 13. His _____ habit was to snooze until lunch time every day; such laziness cost him his job.
- _____ 14. Calvin Coolidge was known as "Silent Cal" because he was so _____.
- _____ 15. Frankly, I _____ this movie; I hate the violence and the crude language.
- _____ 16. If you publicly _____ an enemy, you can expect him to aim similar insults at you.
- _____ 17. The teacher had us hunt for an _____ fact in the encyclopedia, but it was hard to find.
- _____ 18. I've changed my mind and would like to _____ my former statement of support.
- _____ 19. This _____ television show is boring and stupid.
- _____ 20. The lawyer argued to _____ the terms of the contract; his client wanted it totally voided.

Vocabulary Study 1

Words at Work



Line Have you ever found your imagination
running wild, placing you in some strange
setting with even stranger characters
playing out the fanciful plots of your mind?
5 It happens to all of us, but for some, the
imaginings of the mind become the stuff of
wonderful stories. A story writer has the
uncanny ability to take the everyday affairs
of life and fuse them with wild ideas and
10 thereby produce fiction.

15 For some, the ability to write lies
dormant for many years. Often the untested
story teller looks at the works of other
writers with disdain, finding fault with
many things, secretly feeling inside that he
could do a better job. Eventually, the urge
to tell his own story is overwhelming, and
the writer will write. At this point he
cannot remain taciturn; he must speak. He
20 cannot be slothful with his time
management; he must produce. Only
getting the words on the paper can mitigate
the feeling of urgency that grips him. Only
25 being productive can assuage his feelings
of desperation.

30 Family and friends often don't
understand the passion that has a tenacious
grip on the writer. They may see him as a
contentious egotist as he demands his
"private" time. They sometimes come to
loathe the endless days and nights of his
absence from day-to-day activities. Some
35 may even try to reprove him for his self-
imposed isolation, but even though he may
feel vilified by his own closest friends and
family members, he can't recant. He works
on into the night, desperate to keep his
40 characters from the pit of insipid speech,
anxious lest his narrative becomes obscure,

and fretful that his public may see his
"child" as enigmatic of some depravity of
his mind. Yet, once begun, he cannot turn
back. He cannot nullify the obsession that
grips him. He has become a writer. He has
a story to tell.

1. In line 23 "mitigate" most nearly means
A) strengthen
B) combine
C) ease
D) answer
2. The primary purpose of the passage is to
A) inspire young writers to write
B) explain the pitfalls of writing as a profession
C) support the idea that anyone can write
D) describe the inner urgings of a writer
3. The passage suggests in lines 34-36 that
A) the writer suffers some amount of verbal abuse
B) the writer thinks he is a villain
C) the writer's friends and family honor him
D) his friends force the writer away while he writes
4. The phrase "...the pit of insipid speech...." (line 40) refers to the
A) vapid dialogue between characters
B) trap of verbal abuse
C) depravity that characters fall into
D) speech that is hurtful and mean