Magoosh

GRE Vocabulary Word List PDF

Assorted words and definitions compiled by a GRE expert for your entertainment and edification

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Introduction

This eBook is a compilation of the most popular GRE vocabulary word list posts from the Magoosh GRE blog. We've found that students learn vocabulary best when the words are presented in a fun, creative, and intelligent way: we've done our best to assemble interesting lists to help you absorb the words in a way that will stick with you so that you're as prepared as possible on the day of your exam.

You'll see that these lists definitely don't look like your typical, dry GRE word lists, and it's because we want you to learn vocabulary words in context—the new GRE's Sentence Equivalence questions, Text Completions, and even the Reading Comprehension passages are testing knowledge of words in context and proper usage, so rote memorization of words and definitions won't be of much help!

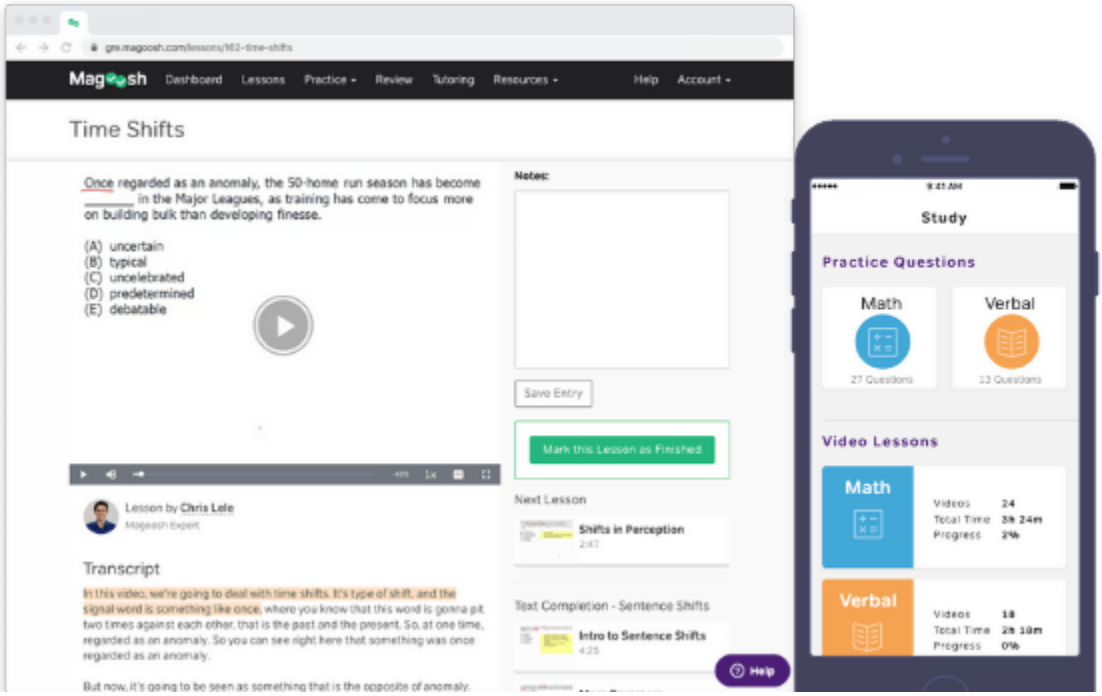
If you're new to the GRE and want to know more about the exam in general, check out our free "Complete Guide to the GRE" for more information.

We have some general tips and strategies about how to best use the lists in this PDF (as well as some warnings about types of studying methods to avoid!) so be sure to read our "How to Use GRE Vocabulary Lists" and "Making Words Stick: Memorizing GRE Vocabulary" sections before you begin. At the end, we also have some recommendations for other great reading material that will help you pick up vocabulary words in a fun way to have productive study breaks.

About Us

What is Magoosh?

Magoosh is an online test prep company that has served over 6 million students.



Our self-study GRE prep subscription includes:

- 8 full sections worth of licensed official GRE® questions
- 1600 Math and Verbal practice questions, with video explanations after every question
- Customizable practice sessions and 6 full length practice tests
- 290 video lessons created by expert tutors who have in-depth knowledge of the GRE
- E-mail support from our expert tutors
- Personalized statistics based on performance

- Access anytime, anywhere from an internet-connected device

Why our students love us

These are survey responses sent to us by students after they took the GRE. All of these students and many more have used the [Magoosh GRE prep course] to improve their scores:

	BEFORE MAGOOSH	AFTER MAGOOSH
MATH		164
VERBAL	I had not taken the GRE before	167
TOTAL		Scored 331

I purchased a couple Manhattan Prep books, ETS's Official Guide, different phone apps, etc. yet I ended up using Magoosh's online application almost exclusively. I work full time and was only able to study after work and weekends. I was exhausted most nights after work before I even sat down to study... without the structure that Magoosh provides I would not have been able to be nearly as effective. I did not want to take the test more than once and my target was a 330. I scored a 331; what else can I say? Magoosh was literally a fraction of the price of the other paid resources. It has everything you need, trust me.

	BEFORE MAGOOSH	AFTER MAGOOSH
MATH		167
VERBAL	I had not taken the GRE before	168
TOTAL		Scored 335

Magoosh helped keep me on track, at a much lower price point than other test prep systems. I followed the one-month plan, and was happy to do small pieces of prep each day. While I couldn't keep up the pace with a full-time job (as the guide warned me), I still believe Magoosh helped me a lot. I learned general strategies (number sense, not looking at the verbal answers without my own answer), a sense for timing, and most importantly, I always had a plan to follow so I couldn't second-guess myself.

How to Use Vocabulary Lists

Here, I'm going to answer the question, "What's the best way to use a vocabulary word list for the GRE?". Wait a second, you're probably thinking. Don't you just read the list? Actually, reading through a vocabulary list is the last thing you want to do.

In fact, I tell this to my GRE students with a menacing, authoritarian tone, because I know how easy it is to fall into the temptation of going up and down a list, covering the definition with your hand, and then coughing up the definition. Again (my brow is knitted)—do not do this.

So, what does this injunction mean then? Burn your vocab lists? Use telepathy, or worse, pay $200 dollars for that vocabulary software that promises instant recall after one listen? Actually, no. A vocab list can be useful, if used wisely.

To illustrate, let's take two of my former students (I'll obviously change the names) in a GRE class I taught. One was a vocab juggernaut, the other struggled and struggled...and then finally got it. Why? Because he changed the way he learned vocabulary.

Cramming vs. Contextual Learning

Tim's Vocabulary Lists - The Incorrect Approach

"I'm bad at learning words." This was Tim's common refrain. I would talk to him about the power of mnemonics and word grouping. He would look hopeful for a moment but then horrifically bomb the following vocab test. "I'm bad at learning words," he'd say inevitably following each 2/25 score (the class had to study 25 words a day and the daily quizzes were cumulative).

I pulled Tim aside after a week of his abysmal performance and asked him the simple question, "How are you studying vocabulary?" He shrugged his shoulders and gave the not very helpful response, "I just kind of study." I prodded him further, "Well, I read the list and cover it up." He went on to tell me he usually did this about fifteen minutes

before class. “It’s always worked for me before, I usually pass classes memorizing stuff like this.”

But my boot camp wasn’t just memorizing stuff – it was a grueling vocab experience that required students to retain thousands of words for when they take the actual exam—not for when they take a short in-class quiz. So, I worked with Tim to help him become more like Shirley.

Shirley’s Vocabulary Lists - The Correct Approach

Shirley aced every quiz, and could spout out a trio of synonyms for almost any word, sometimes throwing in a clever mnemonic. We’ve probably all had a Shirley in our classes at some point and assumed she (or he) is naturally gifted. While that may be the case, more often than not, it is the method, not the person.

Shirley would review words shortly after class. She said she would usually learn about five words at a time, consulting the list only so she could remember those words. Then, she would go about her day, intermittently, thinking back to those five words. Sometimes, she would totally draw a blank on a definition and would have to go back to list, “Oh yes, of course, ‘desultory’ means rambling.”

In this fashion she would work through the 25 daily words, moving on to another five words every few hours. When possible she would try to use these words to describe something in her everyday life. Basically, the words were always floating around in her head. Just as importantly, she would make sure to revisit the first half of the list throughout the day instead of simply trying to reach the 25th word.

Unlike Tim, she didn’t hover over the list, covering up the definition. Tim’s method never allowed him to turn a short-term memory into a long-term memory, much the way we can memorize a phone number only long enough to call that number. As soon as we’ve done so, the memory vanishes.

Finally, Shirley would turn to flashcards when she had to study for the 1,000-word vocabulary final (I told you my bootcamp was grueling!). Because the words were already in her long-term memory, the flashcards helped her maintain those neural connections. She wasn’t using the flashcards for the initial step of taking a short-term

memory and changing it into a long-term memory. She worked with a few words at a time getting them into long-term memory before moving on to new words.

Remember that the GRE is a test that requires a cumulative knowledge, not a crammer's last-minute effort.

Tim's Triumph - You Can Still Course Correct

For Tim it wasn't easy going at first. He wanted to revert back to his old method, but through hard work, on both our parts, he soon became more like Shirley. By the end of the bootcamp he was scoring close to 25 out of 25.

So next time you are tempted to cover up a list, remember Tim (and my menacing brow).

Takeway

Learning words from a laundry list of vocabulary by covering up the answer and "testing yourself" turns off your brain.

To move words from short-term memory to long-term memory, bite off a little at a time, and do your learning away from the list—meaning, think back on the words and definitions. Then if you forget them, consult the list. For the collection of lists in this eBook, be sure to learn from Tim's mistakes and apply Shirley's method from the start!

How to Actually Remember the GRE Vocabulary You Learn

Mnemonics: Come up with Clever (and Wacky) Associations

Another way of saying this: use mnemonics. A mnemonic is a creative way of remembering a word.

Let's take the words gregarious and amiable. Gregarious means sociable. Say I have a friend named Greg, and, indeed, he is outgoing. Now I have a way of remembering this word. As luck would have it, I also have a friend named Amy who, believe it or not, is friendly. So now, when I see amiable I think Amy-able and for gregarious I think Greg-arious.

"Wait a second", you may be thinking. "I don't know anybody who has those names!" But here's the beauty of mnemonics—they only need to make sense to you.

Granted, the words above didn't have very interesting mnemonics. And, if you notice in the caption, I mentioned the word wacky. The wackier and sillier a mnemonic, the more likely you are to remember it. And the mnemonics that make the most sense to you are usually the ones that you come up with your own.

So, give it a try with the following words:

Esoteric – known only to those with specialized knowledge

Dilatory – slow; delaying

Polemic – a written or verbal attack against someone

Use It or Lose It

Let's say you don't know the definitions of any of the words above. So, you look them up in a dictionary. Being the good word detective you are, you write down the definitions, as well as an example sentence on a flashcard.

However, tomorrow, your friend asks you what you learned on Magoosh. You tell them that you learned how to use mnemonics for three words. You remember the words, but you can't remember the definitions. Now, let's say that you decided after reading my posts to read an article from *The New Yorker*. While reading the article you think to yourself, "Hey this is some pretty....oh, oh...what's that word...esoteric stuff".

Now, what's happened? Well, you've recalled a word and used it in a relevant context. Calling forth a word in this fashion will embed it deeper into your memory. That way, when it comes time for the test, you will spend very little brain power processing the word.

So, whether you are walking down the street, or even watching a television show, see if you can apply the words you learnt that day (or even the previous days). If you think that GRE prep ends as soon as you put down your vocabulary books, then you will have a tougher time learning words. Use words (even if discreetly to yourself) whenever you can. Your verbal score will thank you.

Do Not Bite Off More Than You Can Chew

Learning hundreds of words while only having a tenuous grasp of them is not efficacious. There is basically a word for this method: cramming.

Instead, learn words, but at a rate where they are not falling out of your head. For some, this rate is five words a day. For others, it's twenty-five. My experience is that students fare best when they start with a few words per day, but then increase the number. Oftentimes, your brain simply needs to adapt to something it is not used to doing, i.e. learning vocabulary.

Read to Be Surprised

In the sections following the word lists, I'll discuss, ad nauseam, the importance of reading. I'll also reference magazines such as *The New Yorker*, which is filled with vocabulary words used in a stylistically advanced context. Beyond context, there is another reason why we should read in conjunction with learning vocabulary.

Imagine that you pick up the copy of *The Economist* (we'll give *The New Yorker* a rest for now). In there, you see the word dilatory. Look familiar? Well, your brain should have a sudden jolt of recognition: we just saw the word in the mnemonics exercise above. Now that you've encountered a word you learnt as part of your word list, but weren't necessarily expecting to see in *The Economist*, your brain is suddenly more likely to retain it.

As you continue to learn words, and as you continue to read, you will have more of these moments of epiphany. Sometimes, you won't remember the word immediately, but you can always look the word up to reinforce the definition.

Takeaways

- Use words and use them often
- Find creative and wacky ways to remember words
- Read, read, and read some more

Keep these key points in mind as you go through the lists below. Enjoy!

Most Common GRE Words

Top 10 General GRE Words

Alacrity (n.)

The GRE has a predilection for words that don't really sound like what they mean. *Alacrity* is no exception. Many think the word has a negative connotation. Alacrity, however, means an eager willingness to do something.

So imagine the first day at a job that you've worked really hard to get. How are you going to complete the tasks assigned to you? With *alacrity*, of course.

An interesting correlation: the more *alacritous* (adjective form) you are when you're learning GRE vocabulary, the better you will do.

The first three weeks at his new job, Mark worked with such alacrity that upper management knew they would be giving him a promotion.

Prosaic (adj.)

Prosaic conjures up a beautiful mosaic for some. So if somebody or something is *prosaic*, it must surely be good.

Once again the GRE confounds expectations. *Prosaic* means dull and lacking imagination. It can be used to describe plans, life, language, or just about anything inanimate that has become dull (it is not used to describe people).

A good mnemonic: prose is the opposite of poetry. And where poetry, ideally, bursts force with imagination, prose (think of text-book writing), lacks imagination. Hence, prose-aic

Unlike the talented artists in his workshop, Paul had no such bent for the visual medium, so when it was time for him to make a stained glass painting, he ended up with a prosaic mosaic.

Veracity (n.)

Veracity sounds a lot like *voracity*. Whereas many know *voracity* means full of hunger, whether for food or knowledge (the adjective form *voracious* is more common), few know *veracity*. Unfortunately, many confuse the two on the test.

Veracity means truthful. *Veracious*, the adjective form of *veracity*, sounds a lot like voracious. So be careful.

After years of political scandals, the congressman was hardly known for his veracity; yet despite this distrust, he was voted into yet another term.

Paucity (n.)

Paucity is a lack of something. In honor of *paucity*, this entry will have a paucity of words.

There is a paucity of jobs hiring today that require menial skills, since most jobs have either been automated or outsourced.

Maintain (v.)

The second definition of this word—and one the new GRE favors—is to assert. One can *maintain* their innocence. A scientist can *maintain* that a recent finding supports her theory. The latter context is the one you'll encounter on the GRE.

The scientist maintained that the extinction of dinosaurs was most likely brought about by a drastic change in climate.

Contrite (adj.)

Word roots are often misleading. This word does not mean with triteness (con- meaning with). To be *contrite* is to be remorseful.

Though he stole his little sister's licorice stick with malevolent glee, Chucky soon became contrite when his sister wouldn't stop crying.

Laconic (adj.)

Another word that sounds different from what it means. A person is described as *laconic* when he/she says very few words.

I'm usually reminded of John Wayne, the quintessential cowboy, who, with a gravely intonation, muttered a few words at a time. As this allusion betrays my age more than anything else, think of Christian Bale in Batman—the laconic caped crusader.

While Martha always swooned over the hunky, laconic types in romantic comedies, her boyfriends inevitably were very talkative—and not very hunky.

Pugnacious (adj.)

Much like a pug dog, which aggressively yaps at anything near it, a person who is *pugnacious* likes to aggressively argue about everything. Verbally combative is another good way to describe *pugnacious*.

The comedian told one flat joke after another, and when the audience started booing, he pugnaciously spat back at them, "Hey, you think this is easy – why don't you buffoons give it a shot?"

Disparate (adj.)

If two things are fundamentally different, they are *disparate*. For instance, verbal skills and math skills are *disparate*, and as such are usually tested separately—the GRE being no exception.

With the advent of machines capable of looking inside the brain, fields as disparate as religion and biology have been brought together, as scientists try to understand what happens in the brain when people have a religious experience.

Egregious (adj.)

'Greg' is the Latin root for flock. At one point, *egregious* meant standing out of the flock in a positive way. This definition went out of vogue sometime in the 16th century, after which time egregious was used ironically.

Thus for the last five hundred years, 'egregious' meant standing out in a bad way. In sports, an egregious foul would be called on a player who slugged another player (not including hockey, of course).

The dictator's abuse of human rights was so egregious that many world leaders asked that he be tried in an international court for genocide.

Top 5 Basic GRE Words

Innocuous (adj.)

Something *innocuous* is harmless and doesn't produce any ill effects. Many germs are *innocuous*. As are most bug bites. Even television, in small doses, is typically *innocuous*. *Innocuous* can also mean inoffensive. An *innocuous* question is unlikely to upset anyone.

Everyone found Nancy's banter innocuous—except for Mike, who felt like she was intentionally picking on him.

Candid (adj.)

A straightforward and honest look at something is a *candid* one. Many great photographers have created enduring work because they turned their respective lens on what is real. Whether these photos are from the Dust Bowl, the Vietnam War, or the Arab Winter, they move us because they reveal how people felt at a certain moment.

A person can also be *candid* if they are being honest and straightforward with you.

Even with a perfect stranger, Charles was always candid and would rarely hold anything back.

Erratic (adj.)

Unpredictable, often wildly so, *erratic* is reserved for pretty extreme cases. An athlete who scores the winning point one game, and then botches numerous opportunities is known for his or her *erratic* play. The stock market is notoriously erratic, as is sleep, especially if your stocks aren't doing well.

Erratic can also mean strange and unconventional. Someone may be known for their *erratic* behavior. Regardless of which meaning you are employing, you should not be erratic in your GRE prep.

It came as no surprise to pundits that the President's attempt at re-election floundered; even during his term, support for his policies was erratic, with an approval rating jumping anywhere from 30 to 60 percent.

Bleak (adj.)

If one has a very depressing take on life, we say that person has a *bleak* outlook. Landscapes can be bleak (Siberia in April, the Texas of *No Country for Old Men*), and writers, too (Dostoevsky, Orwell).

Unremitting overcast skies tend to lead people to create bleak literature and lugubrious music—compare England's band Radiohead to any band from Southern California.

Profuse (adj.)

If something literally pours out in abundance we say it is *profuse*. This pouring out is usually figurative. A person who apologies ceaselessly does so *profusely*. Perhaps a little more vividly, certain men who fail to button up their shirts completely let the world – perhaps not unwittingly – know of their *profuse* chest hairs (which, on their part, should necessitate a *profuse* apology).

During mile 20 of the Hawaii Marathon, Dwayne was sweating so profusely that he stopped to take off his shirt, and ran the remaining six miles clad in nothing more than skimpy shorts.

Common Words that Students Always Get Wrong

Extant (adj.)

Many think this word means extinct. *Extant* is actually the opposite of extinct.

A great mnemonic is to put the word 'is' between the 'x' and the 't' in *extant*. This gives you existant (don't mind the misspelling).

Despite many bookstores closing, experts predict that some form of book dealing will still be extant generations from now.

Contentious (adj.)

This GRE word does not mean content, as in feeling happy. It comes from the word contend, which means to argue. If you are *contentious*, you like to argue.

Contentious is a very common GRE word, so unless you want me to become contentious, memorize it now!

Since old grandpa Harry became very contentious during the summer when only reruns were on T.V., the grandkids learned to hide from him at every opportunity.

Auspicious (adj.)

This word sounds very sinister, but actually means the opposite of sinister. If an occasion is *auspicious*, it is favorable.

The opposite, inauspicious, is also common on the GRE. It means unfavorable.

Despite an auspicious beginning, Mike's road trip became a series of mishaps, and he was soon stranded and penniless, leaning against his wrecked automobile.

Enervate (v.)

Most people think *enervate* means to energize. It actually means to sap the energy from.

John preferred to avoid equatorial countries; the intense sun would always leave him enervated after he'd spent the day sightseeing.

Equivocate (v.)

People tend to think that *equivocate* has to do with equal. It actually means to speak vaguely, usually with the intention to mislead or deceive. More generally, equivocal can mean ambiguous. The related word *unequivocal* can also be confusing. To state something *unequivocally* is to state it in such a way that there is no room for doubt.

The findings of the study were equivocal—the two researchers had divergent opinions on what the results signified.

Ambivalent (adj.)

Students often believe that to be *ambivalent* towards something is to be indifferent. The truth is almost the opposite. See, when you are *ambivalent* you have mixed or conflicting emotions about something.

Imagine somebody asked you what it was like studying for the GRE.

Sam was ambivalent about studying for the GRE because it ate up a lot of her time, yet he learned many words and improved at reading comprehension.

Sedulous (adj.)

I am not quite sure why students can never seem to remember the definition of this word. Perhaps the *sed-* reminds them of sitting and being idle (like in sedentary). To be *sedulous*, however, is to be anything but idle. If you are *sedulously* studying for the GRE, you are studying diligently and carefully—making flashcards, writing down important words and formulas, and, of course, checking out the Magoosh blog every day.

An avid numismatist, Harold sedulously amassed a collection of coins from over 100 countries—an endeavor that took over fifteen years, and to five continents.

Tricky "Easy" GRE Words with Multiple Meanings

Stem (v.)

To *stem* means to hold back or limit the flow or growth of something. You can *stem* bleeding, and you can *stem* the tide—or at least attempt to do so. However, do not *stem* the flow of vocabulary coursing through your brains. Make sure to use GRE words whenever you can.

To stem the tide of applications, the prestigious Ivy requires that each applicant score at least 330 on the GRE.

Blinkered (adj.)

If you blink a lot you are likely to miss something. Indeed, your view would be very limited. Extending this meaning, we get the definition of *blinkered*: means to have a limited outlook or understanding. The true etymology of the word actually comes from the blinkers that are put on racing horses to prevent them from becoming distracted.

In gambling, the addict is easily blinkered by past successes and/or past failures, forgetting that the outcome of any one game is independent of the games that preceded it.

Unchecked (adj.)

Describing something undesirable that has grown out of control.

Deserted for six months, the property began to look more like a jungle and less like a residence—weeds grew unchecked in the front yard.

Checkered (adj.)

The meaning of *checkered* is completely unrelated to the meaning of check, so be sure to know the difference between the two. A *checkered* past is one that is marked by disreputable happenings.

One by one, the presidential candidates dropped out of the race, their respective checkered pasts—from embezzlement to infidelity—sabotaging their campaigns.

Raft (n.)

A raft is an inflatable boat. It can also mean a large number of something. I know—it doesn't really make much sense. But here's a good mnemonic: imagine a large number of rafts and you have a *raft* of rafts.

Despite a raft of city ordinances passed by an overzealous council, noise pollution continued unabated in the megalopolis.

Involved (adj.)

We are involved in many things, from studying to socializing. For something to be *involved*, as far as the GRE is concerned, means it is complicated, and difficult to comprehend.

The physics lecture became so involved that the undergraduate's eyes glazed over.

Retiring (adj.)

Sure, many dream of the day when they can retire (preferably to some palatial estate with a beachfront view). The second definition does not necessarily apply to most. To be *retiring* is to be shy, and to be inclined to retract from company.

Nelson was always the first to leave soirees—rather than mill about with "fashionable" folk, he was retiring, and preferred the solitude of his garret.

Expansive (adj.)

The common definition of *expansive* is extensive, wide-ranging. The lesser known definition is communicative, and prone to talking in a sociable manner.

After a few sips of cognac, the octogenarian shed his irascible demeanor and became expansive, speaking fondly of the "good old days".

Moment (n.)

A moment is a point in time. We all know that definition. If something is of the moment, it is significant and important (think of the word momentous).

Despite the initial hullabaloo, the play was of no great moment in Hampton's writing career, and, within a few years, the public quickly forgot his foray into theater arts.

Base (adj.)

When the definition of this word came into existence, there were some obvious biases against the lower classes (assuming that lexicographers were not lower class). It was assumed that those from the base, or the lowest, class were without any moral principles. They were contemptible and ignoble. Hence, we have this second definition of *base* (the word has since dropped any connotations of lower class).

She was not so base as to begrudge the beggar the unwanted crumbs from her dinner plate.

Imbibe (v.)

Literally, to *imbibe* is to drink, usually copiously. Figuratively, imbibe can refer to an intake of knowledge or information.

Plato imbibed Socrates' teachings to such an extent that he was able to write volumes of work that he directly attributed, sometimes word for word, to Socrates.

Inundate (v.)

To *inundate* is a synonym for to deluge, which means to flood. Figuratively, to be *inundated* means to be overwhelmed by too many people or things.

The newsroom was inundated with false reports that only made it more difficult for the newscasters to provide an objective account of the bank robbery.

Scintillating (adj.)

If something gives off sparks, such as when photons collide, it is said to *scintillate*. Figuratively, *scintillating* describes someone who is brilliant and lively (imagine Einstein's brain giving off sparks).

Richard Feynman was renowned for his scintillating lectures—the arcana of quantum physics was made lucid as he wrote animatedly on the chalkboard.

Benighted (adj.)

If the sky darkens, and becomes night, it is, unsurprisingly, *benighted*. However, if a people are *benighted* (this word is usually reserved for the collective), that group falls in a state of ignorance. This latter definition is more common.

Far from being a period of utter benightedness, The Medieval Ages produced some inestimable works of theological speculation.

Galvanize (v.)

Need to strengthen steel by giving it a final coat? Or, perhaps you need to motivate somebody? Well, in both cases, you would literally be *galvanizing*. Figuratively, to *galvanize* is to excite to action or spur on.

At mile 23 of his first marathon, Kyle had all but given up, until he noticed his friends and family holding a banner that read, "Go Kyle"; galvanized, he broke into a gallop, finishing the last three miles in less than 20 minutes.

Hedge (n./v.)

If you are really into horticulture—which is a fancy word for gardening—you'll know hedges are shrubs, or small bushes that have been neatly trimmed. If you know your finance, then you've probably heard of hedge funds (where brokers make their money betting against the market). *Hedge* can also be used in a verb sense. If you *hedge* your bets, you play safely. If you *hedge* a statement, you limit or qualify that statement. Finally, *hedge* can also mean to avoid making a direct statement, as in equivocating.

When asked why he had decided to buy millions of shares at the very moment the tech companies stock soared, the CEO hedged, mentioning something vague about gut instinct.

Flush (adj.)

What word means to turn red (especially in the face), to send down the toilet, to be in abundance, and to drive out of hiding? Yep, it's *flush*, which has all four of these totally unrelated definitions.

The GRE Reading Comprehension passage is flush with difficult words, words that you may have learned only yesterday.

Fell (adj.)

Imagine an evil person who cuts down trees, and then falls himself. Well, that image is capturing three different definitions of fell—to cut down a tree, the past tense of fall (we all know that) and evil. Yes, I know, *fell* can't possibly mean evil…but the English language is a wacky one. *Fell* indeed means terribly evil. Now watch out for that tree!

For fans of the Harry Potter series, the fell Lord Voldemort, who terrorized poor Harry for seven lengthy installments, has finally been vanquished by the forces of good—unless, that is, JK Rowling decides to come out of retirement.

Arch (adj.)

You have arches in architecture, or at a well-known fast-food restaurant. You can arch your back, or a bow. Arches are even a part of your foot. But, did you know that to be *arch* is to be deliberately teasing, as in, "he shrugged off her insults because he knew she was only being arch"? Finally, *arch-* as a root means chief or principal, as in archbishop.

The baroness was arch, making playful asides to the townspeople; yet because they couldn't pick up on her dry humor, they thought her supercilious.

Beg (v.)

Commonly, when we think of begging, we think of money, or a favor. But, one can also *beg* a question, and that's where things start to get complicated. To *beg* a question can mean to evade a question, invite an obvious question, or, and this is where it starts to get really tricky, to ask a question that in itself makes unwarranted assumptions.

For instance, let's say you are not really sure if you are going to take the GRE. If somebody asks you when you are going to take the GRE, then that person is assuming you are going to take the GRE. That is, they are *begging* the question. If you avoid giving a direct answer, then you are also *begging* the question (albeit in a different

sense). Which finally begs the question, how did this whole question *begging* business get so complicated in the first place?

By assuming that Charlie was headed to college—which he was not—Maggie begged the question when she asked him which school he was headed to in the Fall.

Tender (v.)

Tender is a verb, and it does not mean to behave tenderly. When you *tender* something, you offer it up. For instance, when you tender your resignation, you hand in a piece of paper saying that you are resigning.

The government was loath to tender more money in the fear that it might set off inflation.

Intimate (adj./v.)

Just as *tender* doesn't relate to two people in love, neither does *intimate*, at least in the GRE sense. The secondary meaning for *intimate* is to suggest something subtly.

At first Manfred's teachers intimated to his parents that he was not suited to skip a grade; when his parents protested, teachers explicitly told them that, notwithstanding the boy's precocity, he was simply too immature to jump to the 6th grade.

Wanting (adj.)

Wanting means lacking. So, if your knowledge of secondary meanings is *wanting*, this eBook is a perfect place to start learning.

She did not find her vocabulary wanting, yet there were so many GRE vocabulary words that inevitably she did not know a few.

Becoming (adj.)

Another secondary meaning that changes parts of speech, *becoming* an adjective. If something is *becoming*, it is appropriate, and matches nicely.

Her dress was becoming and made her look even more beautiful.

Start (v.)

The secondary meaning for *start* is somewhat similar to the common meaning. To *start* is to suddenly move or dart in a particular direction. Just think of the word startle.

All alone in the mansion, Henrietta started when she heard a sound.

Fleece (v.)

If you are thinking Mary Had a Little Lamb *(...fleece as white as snow),* you have been *fleeced* by a secondary meaning. To *fleece* is to deceive.

Many have been fleeced by Internet scams and have never received their money back.

Telling (adj.)

If something is *telling*, it is significant and revealing of another factor. If a person's alibi has a telling detail, often that one little detail can support—or unravel!—the person's alibi.

Her unbecoming dress was very telling when it came to her sense of fashion.

Wax (n./v.)

Melting wax will only lead you astray. The secondary meaning for wax is to increase. The opposite of wax is to wane. Both words are used to describe the moon: a waxing moon becomes larger and larger each night until it becomes a full moon, at which point it becomes small and smaller each night and becomes a waning moon.

Her enthusiasm for the diva's new album only waxed with each song; by the end of the album, it was her favorite CD yet.

Check (v.)

To *check* is to limit, and it is a word usually used to modify the growth of something.

When government abuses are not kept in check, that government is likely to become autocratic.

Qualify (v.)

This is perhaps the most commonly confused secondary meaning, and one that is very important to know for the GRE. To qualify is to limit, and is usually used in the context of a statement or an opinion.

I love San Francisco.

I love San Francisco, but it is always windy.

The first statement shows my *unqualified* love for San Francisco. In the second statement I *qualify*, or limit, my love for San Francisco.

In the context of the GRE, the concept of *qualification* is usually found in the Reading Comprehension passage. For example, an author usually expresses *qualified* approval or some *qualified* opinion in the passage. As you may have noticed, the authors of reading comprehension passages never feel 100% about something. They always think in a nuanced fashion. Therefore, they are unlikely to be gung-ho or downright contemptuous. That is, they *qualify*, or limit, their praise/approval/disapproval.

Commonly Confused Sets of Words

Miserly (adj.) vs. Frugal (adj.)

This is one of the most commonly confused pairs. These words, despite popular opinion, are not the same. *Frugal* has a positive connotation, i.e. you spend money wisely, and *miserly* has a negative connotation, i.e. you pinch every penny.

Monte was no miser, but was simply frugal, wisely spending the little that he earned.

Prevaricate (v.) vs. Variance (n.)

To *prevaricate* is to speak in an evasive way. *Prevaricate* does not mean to vary before; indeed, it is totally unrelated to variance, which simply means the quality of varying. A good synonym for *prevaricate* is *equivocate*. And that's no lie.

The cynic quipped, "There is not much variance in politicians; they all seem to prevaricate".

Histrionic (adj.) vs. History (n.)

Histrionic is totally unrelated to history. It comes from the Latin for actor. To be *histrionic* is not to have a penchant for bad Pacino or Brando imitations, but to be overly theatrical.

Though she received a B- on the test, she had such a histrionic outburst that one would have thought that she'd been handed a death sentence.

Demur (v.) vs. Demure (adj.)

To *demur* is a verb meaning to object or show reluctance.

Wallace disliked the cold, so he demurred when his friends suggested they go skiing in the Alps.

To be demure is to be modest and shy. This word is typically used to describe a woman, so don't call a man demure, as they will surely demur.

Beatific (adj.) vs. Beautiful (adj.)

A *beatific* person is one who radiates bliss. This person is so happy, they almost seem blessed and holy (think of a saint, or the Buddha). As for beautiful, well you may be *beatific* if you are beautiful, or you may be totally unhappy. The two words are totally unrelated.

Marred by the ravages of time, the idols were hardly beautiful, yet each seemed to emanate a beatific aura that not even 500 years could diminish.

Perfunctory (adj.) vs. Preemptive (adj.) vs. Peremptory (adj.)

Ever done dishes before? As far as daily experiences go, this one represents the nadir for most. As a result, when we do dishes, we do them in a routine way. We are hardly inspired.

To do something in such a manner is to be *perfunctory*. The word also carries with it the connotation of carelessness. That is, if you do something in which you are merely going through the motions, you are probably not doing your best (as far as my *perfunctory* dish-cleaning goes, my wife can attest to this).

To act before someone else does is to act *preemptively*.

Just as Martha was about to take the only cookie left on the table, Noah preemptively swiped it.

Preemptive is often heard in a political context. A country that strikes before another country can do so is launching a *preemptive* strike.

If you are peremptory you are bossy and domineering.

My sister used to peremptorily tell me to do the dishes, a chore I would either do perfunctorily or avoid doing altogether.

Indigent (adj.) vs. Indigenous (adj.) vs. Indignant (adj.)

Indigent means poor, having very little means.

In the so-called Third World, many are indigent and only a privileged few have the wherewithal to enjoy material luxuries.

Indigenous means relating to a certain area. Plants and animals are often *indigenous*, as are people.

The flora and fauna indigenous to Australia are notably different from those indigenous to the U.S—one look at a duckbill platypus and you know you're not dealing with an opossum.

Imagine you are waiting in line to order your morning coffee. Right as you are about to ask for a nice steaming cup, someone cuts in front of you and places an order for six people. How would you feel? *Indignant.*

Indignant means to feel anger over a perceived injustice. And you don't want to be *indignant* the day of the test, when ETS just happens to pick that one word you always end up confusing with another word.

Errant (adj.) vs. Arrant (adj.) vs. Errand (n.) vs. Err (v.)

To be *errant* is to be wandering, not sticking to a circumscribed path. It can also connote deviating from accepted behavior or standards.

Unlike his peers, who spent their hours studying in the library, Matthew preferred errant walks through the university campus to help his brain function.

Arrant means complete and utter. It usually modifies a noun with a negative connotation, e.g. liar, fool, etc.

An arrant fool, Lawrence surprised nobody when he lost all his money in a pyramid scheme that was every bit as transparent as it was corrupt.

An *errand* is a small chore.

Maria carried out her errands with dispatch, completing most before noon.

To *err* is (surprise!) to make an error.

He erred in thinking that errant and arrant were synonyms.

Artless (adj.) vs. Artful (adj.) vs. Artifice (n.)

Van Gogh, Picasso, Monet…surely they relate to the second word, and definitely not the first, which would be reserved for people like me who reached their artistic apotheosis with the drawing of stick-figures.

Well, as far as the GRE is concerned, neither word relates to art (both in the lower case and upper case sense). To be *artful* means to be cunning and wily. To have *artifice* is to be *artful*. Perhaps you've read Dickens, and remember The Artful Dodger. The titular *artful* dodger did not have a penchant for watercolors, but was instead a devious, wily lad. This trait, presumably, allowed him to dodge tricky situations.

If somebody is *artless*, on the other hand, that person is innocent, guileless. It should come as little surprise, then, that the literary canon is absent an *artless* dodger, as he would be too innocent and naive to dodge much of anything.

Finally, *artful* and artless can refer back to the original usage of art. Therefore, Picasso is *artful* and I am *artless*. However, the GRE rarely, if ever, tests these definitions.

Expurgate (v.) vs. Expunge (v.)

They both mean to remove, but in different ways. To *expurgate* means to remove objectionable material. If you've ever watched a rated-R film that has been adapted for prime time, you'll probably note that all those F-words—*factitious*, *facetious*, and *fatuous*—have been removed. That's *expurgation* (think of the "beep").

To *expunge* simply means to wipe out or remove any trace off. Many people who commit petty crimes have those crimes *expunged* from their records, given that person doesn't decide to start running every other red light. So, if you've been a good driver over the last 10 years, then that one incident when 85 became the new 65…well, that's probably been *expunged* from your record.

Censure (v.) vs. Censor (v.)

Speaking of beeping out the F-word, we have a synonym for *expurgate*: *censor*. *Censure*, the much more common GRE word, has nothing to do with removing objectionable words and/or material. However, if you decide to start dropping the

F-bomb in public—and I don't mean *facetious*—then you can easily expect someone to *censure* you. To *censure* someone is to express strong disapproval of that person.

Ponderous (adj.) vs. Imponderable (adj./n.)

Ponder means to think over. So, *ponderous* must mean *thinking*. However, this is not the case. *Ponderous* is derived from 'pondus', which means weight (think of a pound). So, to be *ponderous* means to be weighed-down, and to move slowly and in a labored fashion.

Imponderable is not the opposite of *ponderous*. It actually relates to thinking. An *imponderable* is something that is impossible to estimate, fathom or figure out. Say a child was to ask, "How long would it take driving in a car to go from one end of the universe to the other?" Unless you have a really big calculator—and a very fast car—the answer to this question would be *imponderable*.

Interesting (and International) Word Origins

Around the World

Kowtow (v.)

Nope, *kowtow* is not a giant truck for pulling bovines, but rather a word that comes from the imperial courts of China. When a person *kowtowed* to the emperor, or any eminent mandarin for that matter, he or she knelt and touched the ground with his or her forehead. Such a gesture was intended to show respect and submission.

Today, *kowtow* has a negative connotation and implies that a person is acting in a subservient or sycophantic manner.

Paul kowtowed to his boss so often the boss herself soon became nauseated by his sycophancy.

Powwow (n./v.)

No, it's not *kowtow's* cousin. This word sprung from American soil, namely the Algonquin tribe of North America. A *powwow* was quite a hootenanny of a time and involved a big party of dancing and dining between tribes.

Strangely, today's meaning is a lot more subdued, and far less fun. Any informal discussion or colloquy is regarded as a *powwow*. You and your co-worker can have a mid-afternoon *powwow* over coffee. A political leader can have a *powwow* with their cronies (I'm presuming they'd favor cigars over coffee).

Before the team takes the field, the coach always calls for a powwow so that he can make sure all the players are mentally in the right place.

Junta (n.)

Junta means to join and comes via Portugal and Spain. But this joining was in no way peaceful. Whenever military groups joined forces to usurp the existing regime, they would form a military *junta*. Today, *junta* can refer to the aggressive takeover by a group.

As dangerous of a threat as North Korea is, some analysts believe that were a junta suddenly to gain power, it could be even more unpredictable and bellicose than the current leadership.

Imbroglio (n.)

It may sound like an exotic vegetable or a pungent pasta dish, but it's neither. *Imbroglio* comes to us via mid-18th century Italian and has nothing to do with the kitchen. Instead it is related to the verb *embroil* and describes a confusing, and potentially embarrassing, situation.

The chef cook-off featured one gourmand who had the unfortunate distinction of mixing the wrong broths, creating an imbroglio that viewers will not soon forget.

Juggernaut (n.)

To many, this word was forever immortalized in X-Men 2, when one of the main characters, Juggernaut, ran through walls, pulverizing them. This power to knock over and destroy anything in one's path can also be traced to the original *juggernaut*, a word that comes to us via Hindi. A j*uggernaut* was a large temple vehicle—and when I mean large, I mean humongous—under which followers of Krishna would supposedly throw themselves.

Today, the word *juggernaut* doesn't necessarily include any grisly sacrifices, but refers to any large force that cannot be stopped.

Napoleon was considered a juggernaut, until he decided to invade Russia in winter; within weeks his once seemingly indomitable army was decimated by cold and famine.

Schadenfreude (n.)

Schadenfreude is one of those words that at first glance may seem gratuitous. After all, do we really need a word that literally translates from the German as harm-joy? Unfortunately, a twisted quirk of human nature is that we can sometimes take joy in the suffering of others. Luckily, German has provided us a word to use if we ever see someone cackling sardonically at the suffering of others.

From his warm apartment window, Stanley reveled in schadenfreude as he laughed at the figures below, huddled together in the arctic chill.

Amuck (adv.)

To run *amuck* (also spelled *amok*) is to run about frenzied. While this word comes to us via Malay, you don't have to live on the Malaysian peninsula to witness people running *amuck*.

Wherever the bowl-cut teen-idol went, his legions of screaming fans ran through the streets amuck, hoping for a glance of his boyish face.

Pariah (n.)

This word means an outcast. It comes from Tami, a language spoken in South India and Northeast Sri Lanka. While India is on the other side of the world (at least from where I'm sitting), it should come as no surprise that we have acquired words from Tamil. After all, the British (remember, the people who "invented" English) colonized India and greatly influenced her for more than a century. The influence went both ways, as we now have words like pundit, meaning an expert in a particular area. And any *pundit* on geography and linguistics can tell you that another common language spoken in India is English.

The once eminent scientist, upon being inculpated for fudging his data, has become a pariah in the research community.

Nabob (n.)

This word is fun to say. It definitely wouldn't be fun to see on the GRE, if you didn't know what it meant. So let's make sure that doesn't happen. A *nabob* is a wealthy, influential person. This word also comes from Hindi, and was originally used by Indians to describe a wealthy British person living in India. While it is not as common as *pundit* and *pariah*, *nabob* applies to many living here in the U.S., though I don't think it a good idea to call Donald Trump a nabob to his face.

The nabobs can be seen, heads a bobbing, driving by in their Italian sports cars, listening to techno.

Zeitgeist (n.)

Okay, German is by no means a distant tongue, or for that matter, an exotic one. *Zeitgeist*, however, doesn't look anything like your typical English word. Translated literally from German, *zeitgeist* means "time-ghost". In terms of an actual definition, *zeitgeist* means spirit of the times.

Each decade has its own zeitgeist—the 1990's was a prosperous time in which the promise of the American Dream never seemed more palpable. The zeitgeist of the 2000's was a curious admixture of fear and frivolity; when we were not anxious over the state of the economy and the world, we escaped into reality T.V. shows, either those on popular networks or the ones we would create ourselves on YouTube.

French Words

Sangfroid (n.)

Sangfroid literally means cold-blooded. It is defined as calmness and poise, especially in trying situations.

The hostage negotiator exhibited a sangfroid that oftentimes was more menacing than the sword at his throat or the gun at his head.

Parvenu (n.)

This is a person who has recently acquired wealth, and has therefore risen in class. *Parvenu* has a derogatory connotation, meaning that if you win the lottery and someone calls you a *parvenu* they are not trying to be flattering.

The theater was full of parvenus who each thought that they were flanked by aristocrats.

Demur (v.)

Demur means to object or express reluctance to do something. *Demur* should not be confused with *demure,* which is an adjective that means coy. They both come from around the time of the Norman Conquest (though the Anglophiles may have demurred to use either).

When asked if she wanted to visit the war torn region without a translator by his side, the journalist demurred.

Arriviste (n.)

This word is similar to *parvenu* (though arriviste connotes more ruthless ambition). It came into the language much more recently, circa 1900.

The city center was aflutter with arrivistes who each tried to outdo one another with their ostentatious sports cars and chic evening dress.

Melee (n.)

I learned *melee* early in my life, because I had the peculiar misfortune of having a surname that rhymes with it. While none of this schoolyard teasing resulted in any *melees*, *melee* is an important word and means a wild, confusing fight or struggle. Oh, and it comes from French (rhyming similarities aside, my last name is not derived from French).

Let's see if I can weave all the French-related words into one coherent sentence:

Despite the scornful stares from entrenched aristocrats, the parvenu walked blithely about the palace grounds, maintaining his sangfroid and demurring to enter into the melees that the snobbish were so fond of baiting arrivistes into.

Oui!

Lagniappe (n.)

This word looks like it got jumbled up while I was typing. Believe it or not, *lagniappe* is not the result of *errant* fingers on my part, but comes to us from Louisiana. In Cajun country, in the 19th Century, a *lagniappe* was an unexpected gift. By no means a common GRE word—indeed, I doubt you'll ever see it on the test—but if *lagniappe* happens to show up on the test, then consider it an unexpected gift.

The islanders thought that the seafarers had brought them a lagniappe when the latter presented them with gold coins; little did the islanders know that their days of bartering were numbered.

Picayune (adj.)

Picayune would make for a good 2,000-dollar jeopardy clue, one which would probably read something like this:

"Don't trifle with us—this word comes from Cajun country via France and refers to a 19th century coin of little value."

"What is picayune?" would be the correct answer (thanks, Alex!).

Derived from Cajun via Provencal France, picayune refers not only to a coin but also to an amount that is trifling or meager. It can also refer to a person who is petty. Therefore, if I'm being picayune, I'm fussing over some trivial point.

English teachers are notorious for being picayune; however, the English language is so nuanced and sophisticated that often such teachers are not being contrary but are only adhering to the rules.

Eponyms

An eponym is any word that is derived from a person's name.

English is one of the most promiscuous languages, absorbing languages as unrelated as Sanskrit and Finnish into its bulging lexicon. By extension, I'd also warn against relying on Latin/Greek roots to figure out what unfamiliar words mean. Thwarting a root-based approach even more is the fact that English not only takes from any language it stumbles across, but that it blithely appropriates a person's name, trimming a few letters here and there (adding the Latin –ian, or -esque for true mongrel effect), and then begets a Franken-word that would confound the most seasoned etymologist.

Adapting a name in such a fashion results in an eponym. What makes eponyms fascinating—and even more random—is that just about anyone can bequeath the world his or her name: a fictional anti-hero who thought windmills were dragons; a jingoistic veteran of Napoleon's army; an author with a penchant for absurdity, and an aversion to bureaucracy.

Of course, for GRE purposes we do not need to know that a jeroboam is a massive wine bottle named for an ancient Israeli king (who apparently was quite the wino). So I have culled from a list of eponyms those that may actually show up on test day.

Mesmerize (v.)

Franz Mesmer, an Austrian physician prominent the turn of the 19th century, was renowned for hypnotizing people. His method included kneeling near a patient, touching his/her knees and looking into the person's eyes (I'm curious if he ever proposed to one of his clients).

Today, we have the word *mesmerize*, which doesn't necessarily mean to hypnotize (though it could), but is used figuratively and means to hold spellbound.

The plot and the characters were so well developed that many viewers were mesmerized, unable to move their eyes from the screen for even a single second.

Gerrymander (v.)

No, this word does not pertain to a large salamander named Gerry – though I suppose it could. Gerrymander is actually far more interesting than that.

Elbridge Gerry was the vice president of James Madison, the 4th president of the United States. Elbridge had an interesting idea. To get elected a president had to win a certain number of districts. So Elbridge came up with the following plan: if he partitioned a city in a certain way he could ensure that the president would win the majority of the votes from that district.

The end result was a city that was split up into the oddest arrangement of districts. And can you guess what a map of the city, gerrymandered, looked like? Yep, a salamander.

Today the use of *gerrymander* hasn't changed too much, and refers to the manipulation of boundaries to favor a certain group.

Years ago, savvy politicians had gerrymandered the city center to ensure their re-election.

Hector (v.)

If you remember reading Homer's *Iliad*, you may remember Hector, a muscular, daunting force (some of you may more vividly recall Eric Bana from the movie Troy). As people were intimidated around Hector, it makes sense that the word *hector* means to bully or intimidate.

The boss's hectoring manner put off many employees, some of whom quit as soon as they found new jobs.

Pollyannaish (adj.)

Like Hector, *Pollyannaish* comes from fiction. However, in this case we are dealing with a relatively recent work, that of Eleanor Porter who came up with a character named Pollyanna. Pollyanna was extremely optimistic and so it is no surprise that *Pollyannaish* means extremely optimistic.

Even in the midst of a lousy sales quarter, Debbie remained Pollyannaish, never losing her shrill voice and wide smile, even when prospective customers hung up on her.

Chauvinist (n.)

Many have heard this word, and some may even have a visceral reaction to it. However, this word is actually misused. A *chauvinist is not a male who chugs beers, watches too much football, and demeans women*. That would be a *male chauvinist*. So what is a *chauvinist*, unadorned by any adjective?

Well, Nicolas Chauvin, a one-time recruit in Napoleon's army, used to go about town, thumping his chest about how great France was. In its modern day incantation, *chauvinism* can also mean *anyone who thinks that their group is better than anybody else's group*. You can have male *chauvinists*, political party *chauvinists*, and even female *chauvinists*.

The chauvinist lives on both sides of the political spectrum, outright shunning anybody whose ideas are not consistent with his own.

Pyrrhic (adj.)

King Pyrrhus had the unfortunate luck of going up against the Romans. Some would say that he was actually lucky in that he actually defeated the Romans in the Battle of Asculum. *Pyrrhic* was perhaps more ambivalent, quipping, “One more such victory will undo me.”

So *any win that comes at so great a cost that it is not even worth* it is a pyrrhic victory.

George W. Bush’s win in the 2000 election was in many ways a pyrrhic victory: the circumstances of his win alienated close to half of America.

Kafkaesque (adj.)

By day, Franz Kafka filed papers at an insurance office, and by night churned out dark novels, which suggested that the quotidian world of the office was actually far more sinister. Mainly, his novels were known for the absurd predicaments of their main characters (who often went by nothing more than a single initial).

Today, we have the word *Kafkaesque*, that refers to the *absurdity we have to deal with living in a world of faceless bureaucracies.* So next time you are put on hold for three hours and then volleyed back and forth between a dozen monotone-voice employees, think to yourself, hey this is *Kafkaesque*.

The process of applying for a passport was so Kafkaesque that Charles ultimately decided not to take a vacation.

Quixotic (adj.)

Don Quixote is perhaps one of the most well-known characters in all of literature. I suppose there is something heartbreaking yet comical at a man past his prime who believes he is on some great mission to save the world. In fact, Don Quixote was so far off his rocker that he thought windmills were dragons.

As a word that means somebody who mistakes windmills for dragons would have a severely limited application, *quixotic* has taken the broader meaning of someone who is wildly idealistic. It is one thing to want to help end world hunger; it is another to think you can do so on your own. The latter would be deemed *quixotic*.

For every thousand startups with quixotic plans to be the next big thing in e-commerce, only a handful ever become profitable.

Maudlin (adj.)

Mary Magdalene was the most important female disciple of Jesus. After Jesus had been crucified, she wept at his tomb.

From this outward outpouring of emotion, we today have the word *maudlin*. Whereas Mary's weeping was noble, *maudlin* has taken on a negative connotation. A person who is maudlin cries in public for no good reason, and is oftentimes times used to describe one who's tried to finish a jeroboam alone, and now must share with the stranger sitting next to them all of his deepest feelings.

Just as those who were alive during the 70's are mortified that they once cavorted about in bell-bottoms, many who lived during the 80's are now aghast at the maudlin pop songs they used to enjoy—really, just what exactly is a total eclipse of the heart?

Panglossian (adj.)

Interestingly, there is another eponym for literature that has a very similar meaning: *Panglossian*. Derived from Dr. Pangloss from Voltaire's Candide, Panglossian carries a negative connotation, implying blind optimism.

Despite the fact that his country had been marred by a protracted civil war, Victor remained ever Panglossian, claiming that his homeland was living through a Golden Age.

Malapropism (n.)

This is definitely one of my favorite eponyms. While the provenance is nowhere nearly as interesting as those of other eponyms, the word perfectly describes a lapse that any of us is capable of making, especially those studying for the GRE.

Ms. Malaprop was a character in a play called *The Rivals* by the largely forgotten Richard Brinsley Sheridan. She was known for mixing up similar sounding words, usually to comic effect. Indeed, she would utter the words with complete aplomb that those listening were unsure if she'd even mixed up words in the first place. Her favorite Spanish dance was the flamingo (note: the dance in question is the flamenco; a flamingo is a salmon-colored bird known both for its elegance and tackiness).

GRE malapropisms aren't quite so silly as Ms. Malaprop mixing up a bird and a Spanish dance, but I'll do my best. See if you can spot the GRE malapropisms below.

The graffiti artist was indicated for defecating the church with gang signs.

Picasso was a protein artist, able to mix elements of African art with the oven guard.

Quisling (n.)

We've all heard of the Nazis. Some of you may have even heard of the Vichy government, which was a puppet regime set up by the Nazis in France during WWII. Few of us, however, know that Germany also tried to turn Norway into a puppet regime. In order for Germany to take over Norway, it needed an inside man, a Norwegian who would sell his country out for the Nazis.

This man was Viktor Quisling. For arrant perfidy, he has been awarded the eponym quisling, which means traitor.

History looks unfavorably upon quislings; indeed they are accorded about the same fondness as Nero—he who watched his city burn down while playing the violin.

Byzantine (adj.)

Okay, I cheated a little on this one. Byzant was not a medieval philosopher (nor an industrious ant). The word *byzantine* is not derived from a person's name, but from Byzantium, an ancient city that was part of the Byzantine Empire (the word can also refer

to the empire itself). Specifically, Byzantium was known for the intricate patterns adorning its architecture. Bulbous domed turrets were emblazoned with ornate latticing (think of the towers on a Russia church).

The modern usage of *byzantine* refers not to architecture per se, but to anything that is extremely intricate and complex. It actually carries a negative connotation.

Getting a driver's license is not simply a matter of taking a test; the regulations and procedures are so byzantine that many have found themselves at the mercy of the DMV.

Galvanize (v.)

Like many late 18th Century scientists, Luigi Galvani was fascinated with electricity (you may recall a certain Ben Franklin who had a similar penchant). Galvani's breakthrough came a little more serendipitously than playing with metal in lightning storms—he noticed that an electric current passing through a dead frog's legs made those legs twitch. This observation sparked—pardon the pun—a series of connections: could it be that electric shock could cause muscles to twitch?

Today, *galvanize* can mean to shock but in a different sense than through raw electricity. To *galvanize* is to shock or urge somebody/something into action.

The colonel's speech galvanized the troops, who had all but given up.

Words with Strange Origins

Supercilious (adj.)

Cilia are small, thick hairs. One area on our bodies that contains cilia is our eyebrows. *Supercilious* is derived from the rising of these brows. Of course a word that means raising one's eyebrows would probably have limited use. It's what the raising of eyebrows connotes. Apparently, to be *supercilious* is to be haughty and disdainful. That

is, when we look down at someone in a demeaning way, we might be tempted to lift our brows.

Nelly felt the Quiz Bowl director acted superciliously towards the underclassmen; really, she fumed, must he act so preternaturally omniscient each time he intones some obscure fact—as though everybody knows that Mt. Aconcagua is the highest peak in South America.

Protean (adj.)

Nope, I have not spelled protein incorrectly (don't worry—carbohydrates will not show up next on the list!). *Protean* is an eponym derived from the Greek god Proteus, who could change into shape or forms at will. To be *protean*, however, does not mean you wow party guests by shifting into various kinds of lawn furniture. The consummate adaptability implied by the word is used to describe a person's ability. So an actor, musician, or writer who is very versatile is *protean*.

Peter Sellers was truly a protean actor—in Doctor Strangelove he played three very different roles: a jingoist general, a sedate President and a deranged scientist.

Sartorial (adj.)

The sartorius muscle is found on your legs and crosses from the back, near the hamstring, all the way to the base of the quadriceps, at the front of the leg. The name sartorius was derived from the Latin for tailor. You may ask what a leg muscle has to do with a person who stitches clothes? Well, whenever a tailor was at work, he/she would cross his or her legs. In order to do so, a tailor must employ a special leg muscle, the sartorius. Today, *sartorial* does not relate directly to the muscle or tailor, but rather to the way we dress (makes sense considering tailors work with clothes).

Monte was astute at navigating the world of finance; sartorially, however, he was found wanting—he typically would attempt to complement his beige tie with a gray suit and white pants.

Saturnine (adj.)

The etymology of this curious word can be traced to two sources: alchemy and astrology. For alchemists, Saturn was related to the chemical lead. When a person has severe lead poisoning, he or she takes on a very gloomy and morose disposition. Astrologists, on the other hand, believed that the planet Saturn was gloomy and morose. Usually, we would be loath to attribute human characteristics to large floating rocks, but remember—these were astrologists. Either way you look at it, to be *saturnine* is to be morose.

Deprived of sunlight, humans become saturnine; that's why in very northerly territories people are encouraged to sit under an extremely powerful lamp, lest they become morose.

Mercurial (adj.)

From the element mercury, which has no fixed form and constantly changes, we have the word *mercurial*. *Mercurial* refers to personality; anyone who unpredictably changes his or her mood is *mercurial*. This is a very common GRE word, so make sure you learn it.

Martha Argerich's mercurial nature is perfectly matched with playing Chopin: she'll toss off, with aplomb, effervescent passages, before moments later plumbing the depths of her soul to give voice to bars of music steeped in the utmost melancholy.

Money Matters: Word About Finances

How Much Can You Spend?

Thrifty (adj.)

If you are *thrifty* you spend money wisely. Be careful not to confuse *thrifty* with *spendthrift*, which is below.

He was economical, spending his money thriftily and on items considered essential.

Spendthrift (n.)

This word is the opposite of *thrifty*. If you are a *spendthrift*, you buy as though consumerism were going out of style. This one is perhaps easy to remember; it does, after all, have the word 'spend' in it.

Weekly trips to Vegas and five-star restaurants on Tuesday evenings, Megan was a spendthrift whose prodigality would inevitably catch up with her.

Parsimonious (adj.)

A synonym for miserly and stingy. *Parsimonious* is GRE-speak for extremely frugal. Like *miserly*, this word has a negative connotation.

Even with millions in his bank account, Fred was so parsimonious that he followed a diet consisting of nothing more than bread and canned soup.

Sybarite (n.)

This is a person who indulges in luxury. And though the word doesn't directly relate to wealth, most of the times a *sybarite* has to be wealthy (though even the relatively penurious amongst us can live the life of a *sybarite*, if he or she isn't loath to run up several credit cards.)

Despite the fact that he'd maxed out fifteen credit cards, Max was still a sybarite at heart: when the feds found him, he was at a $1,000 an hour spa in Manhattan, getting a facial.

Impecunious (adj.)

The word *pecuniary* means relating to money. *Impecunious*, on the other hand, means not having any money. *Pecunious*, now mainly obsolete, means—as you can probably guess—wealthy.

In extremely trying times, even the moderately wealthy, after a few turns of ill-fortune, can become impecunious.

Penurious (adj.)

This is a synonym for *impecunious*. *Penurious* also can be a synonym for miserly, so this word can be a little tricky. Whenever you have a word with two meanings, even if those meanings are closely related, make sure to come up with example sentences for both, so you don't forget one of the definitions. (I've done so below).

Truly penurious, Mary had nothing more than a jar full of pennies.

Sarah chose to be penurious and drive a beat-up VW, though with her wealth she could have easily afforded an Italian sports car.

Insolvent (adj.)

If you are *insolvent* you can't pay your bills. Oftentimes people use the term *bankrupt*. If you are solvent, on the other hand, you have paid off all your debts.

With credit card bills skyrocketing, surprisingly few are truly solvent.

Affluent (adj.)

To be *affluent* is to be wealthy. This word usually describes countries, neighborhoods, or groups of people.

The center of the city had sadly become a pit of penury, while, only five miles away, multi-million dollar homes spoke of affluence.

Can't Spend it Fast Enough

Profligate (adj./n.)

This word means spending recklessly almost to the point of immorality. This word often pops up in politics, when some charge that the government is spending wastefully. *Profligate* is also a person known for his or her *profligacy*.

Most lottery winners go from being conservative, frugal types to outright profligates who blow millions on fast cars, lavish homes, and giant yachts.

Prodigal (adj.)

The provenance of this word—like many GRE words—is the Bible. One of Jesus' most famous parables, the story is of a young man who squanders his father's wealth and returns home destitute. His father forgives him, but to posterity he will forever be remembered as the prodigal son. To be *prodigal* is to squander or waste wealth (it doesn't necessarily have to be familial wealth). This word should not be confused with *prodigious*, which means vast or immense.

Successful professional athletes who do not fall prey to prodigality seem to be the exception—most live decadent lives.

Avarice (n.)

One of the seven deadly sins, *avarice* means greed. Of note, this word doesn't necessarily mean greed for food but usually pertains to possessions or wealth.

The Spanish conquistadors were known for their avarice, plundering Incan land and stealing Incan gold.

Cupidity (n.)

This word is similar to avarice in that it means greedy. But the word is even more relevant to this post in that it means greed for money. Surprising, right? We think of Cupid the flying cherub, firing his arrow away and making Romeos and Juliets out of us. To avoid any confusion, imagine Cupid flying around shooting arrows into people's wallets/purses and then swooping in and taking the loot. Oh what *cupidity*!

Some people that amassing as much wealth as possible is the meaning to life—yet they often realize that cupidity brings anything but happiness.

A Helping (or Thieving!) Hand

Defray (v.)

Is to help pay the cost of, either in part or full. Oftentimes when students go off to college, they hope that tuition (which is always becoming steeper these days) will be *defrayed* by any of a number of means: scholarships, parents, burgeoning stock portfolio, or even generous relatives.

In order for Sean to attend the prestigious college his magnanimous uncle helped defray the excessive tuition with a monthly infusion of cash.

Stipend (n.)

Is a regular allowance, usually for a student (yes, it seems that many of these money matters are related to students!). Of course *stipends* aren't just limited to students; governments provide *stipends* to a number of different people.

He was hoping for a monthly allowance loan from the government, but after no such stipend was forthcoming he realized he would have to seek other means of defraying his college tuition.

Pittance (n.)

A small amount of money, *pittance* carries with it a negative connotation: a pittance is inadequate and will do little to take care of one's costs.

Vinny's uncle beamed smugly about how he'd offered his nephew fifty dollars for his Harvard tuition; even twice the amount would have been a mere pittance.

Dupe (n./v.)

This word means to trick or swindle. This word can function as a verb or as a noun. A *dupe* is a person who is easily swindled.

The charlatan mistook the crowd for a bunch of dupes, but the crowd was quickly on to him and decried his bald-faced attempt to bilk them.

Mulct (v.)

This strange looking word also means to swindle or defraud someone. (Though the swindling doesn't always have to relate to money.) *Mulct* can also mean to fine someone.

The so-called magical diet cure simply ended up mulcting Maria out of hundreds of dollars, but not hundreds of pounds.

Fleece (v.)

Don't feel sheepish if you thought this word only pertained to the coat of an ovine. As a verb *fleece* means to swindle or dupe.

The Internet is filled with get-rich-quick schemes that intend only to fleece the Pollyannaish and unsuspecting.

Themed Lists

Vocab from Within

Jaundice (adj./n.)

Jaundice is a condition of the liver that has the side effect of turning the skin yellow. The second definition—and the one you have to know for the GRE—may seem completely unrelated: to be biased against as a result of envy or prejudice. In the 17th Century, being yellow, apparently, was associated with having prejudice. Hence, we have the second definition of the word *jaundice*. It is important to note that yellow now, at least colloquially, means to be cowardly. This definition does not relate to *jaundice*.

Shelly was jaundiced towards Olivia; though the two had once been best friends, Olivia had become class president, prom queen, and, to make matters worse, the girlfriend of the one boy Shelly liked.

Jejune (adj.)

Many people like this word for the simple reason that it's fun to say. After all, how often do we get to see the summery month of June in a word? All this niftiness aside, the definition of *jejune* (sadly) is a letdown. To be *jejune* is to be dull, insipid and lacking flavor. No, it can't be, you think. But yes, *jejune*, our delightful word, means something that literally means lackluster.

But it gets even worse for poor *jejune*: it is derived from the second part of the small intestine, the jejunum, where the inside walls absorb the food's nutrients.

Finally, *jejune* has a second definition. *Jejune*, though, is yet again a victim of bad PR. To be jejune (secondary definition) means to be childish and immature.

Now that I'm done lamenting jejune's debased status, I'm going to have a jejune fit.

Bilious (adj.)

Speaking of nasty stuff in the body, bilious comes from bile—you know, that yellow stuff in your liver that every once in a while makes a very unwelcome gustatory appearance.

To be filled with bile, however, doesn't mean to have a bad taste in your mouth.

According to Hippocrates, he of the bodily humors, if we are filled with too much bile, we are angry. Therefore, to be *bilious* is to be constantly irritable and ready to bite somebody's head off.

Rex was bilious all morning, and his face would only take on a look of contentedness when he'd had his morning cup of coffee.

Choleric (adj.)

Hippocrates, along with the Roman physician Galen, believed that the body was filled with humors, or fluids. The balance of these humors led to certain moods. If a person had too much black bile he (usually not she) would be said to be *choleric*, or highly irascible (*choleric* was more Galen's nomenclature, as Hippocrates stuck to bilious, a synonym for *choleric*).

While a brilliant lecturer, Mr. Dawson came across as choleric and unapproachable—very rarely did students come to his office hours.

Sanguine (adj.)

But not all is bad in the world of bodily humors. Meet *sanguine*, from the Latin *sanguineus,* which comes from blood. Not that most of us would consider blood a humor, but according to Galen, blood, along with bile/choler, was one of the four bodily humors. And while this bloody association doesn't bode well for the definition of *sanguine*, surprisingly, sanguine means to be cheerful, optimistic.

How did this ever come to be? Well, when we are happy the blood rushes to our cheeks turning them red (yes, this seems to me about as valid as yellow meaning prejudice—not that green with envy makes any sense).

While *sanguine* has a positive definition, the word *sanguinary*—note the *sang-* root—means a carnage or bloodbath. Yes, I know English can be a confusing

language. But, if you learn these high-frequency GRE words, you will have something to be *sanguine* about!

With the prospect of having to learn 3,000 words during the course of the summer, Paul was anything but sanguine.

People You Wouldn't Want To Meet

Martinet (n.)

Not to be confused with a doll dangled on strings (that's a marionette), a *martinet* is a person who is a strict disciplinarian. Think of a drill sergeant who barks an order and a platoon of cadets jump to attention—the slightest misstep and its toilet duty. If anything, the *martinet* is the one holding the strings

This military example is no coincidence; *martinet* is an eponym, meaning a word derived from a person's name. The guilty party in this case is the 17th Century French drillmaster Jean Martinet.

The job seemed perfect to Rebecca, until she found out that her boss was a total martinet; after each project the boss would come by to scrutinize—and inevitably criticize—every little detail of the work Rebecca had done.

Curmudgeon (n.)

Probably one of my favorite GRE words—it's great for describing certain folk and it's fun to say. A *curmudgeon* is a grouchy, surly person, one who is always sulking as they grumble about something or another.

Uncle Mike was the family curmudgeon so on Thanksgiving he was plied with copious amounts of wine so that he would finally lose the grouchy demeanor and break into a faint smile.

Misanthrope (n.)

You thought a *curmudgeon* was bad? A *misanthrope*—or hater of mankind—walks down the street spewing vitriol at all those who walk by. College campuses are famous for *misanthropes*, those disheveled types who haunt coffee shops, muttering balefully as students pass by. Some say they are homeless; others that they didn't get tenure. Regardless, steer clear of the *misanthrope*.

Hamilton had been deceived so many times in his life that he hid behind the gruff exterior of a misanthrope, lambasting perfect strangers for no apparent reason.

Reprobate (n.)

This word comes from *reprove*, a popular GRE word, which means (nope, not to prove again) to express disapproval of. A *reprobate* is a noun and is the recipient of the disapproval.

Reprobate is a mildly humorous word, meaning that you would use it to describe some no good soul, but one you have a fondness for.

Those old reprobates drinking all day down by the river –they are not going to amount to much.

Virago (n.)

This word has a real cool origin – the *vir-* comes from the Latin man. *Virago*, however, was coined during the medieval period to describe heroic female warriors. Today *virago* does not have such a noble connotation – it describes an ill-tempered and sometimes violent woman. If you've ever had an old lady scream at you for no good reason, then you've had an encounter with a *virago*.

Poor Billy was the victim of the virago's invective—she railed at him for a good 30-minutes about how he is the scum of the earth for speaking loudly on his cellphone in public.

Religious Words

Cardinal (adj.)

When it comes time to elect the pope who gets together? The cardinals, of course. And when you're watching baseball in St. Louis, and the players all have red birds on their uniforms, which team are you seeing? The Cardinals, of course. And when you are on the GRE and you see the word cardinal? Well it has nothing to do with birds, baseball or popes.

Cardinal means of primary importance, fundamental. That makes sense when you think of the cardinals in the church—after all they do elect the pope. The bird happens to be the same color as the cardinals' robes. As for what St. Louis has to do with cardinals, I have no clue.

As if you needed any more associations – the expression, "cardinal sin", retains the GRE definition of the word, and means primary. It does not refer to naughty churchmen.

Most cultures consider gambling a cardinal sin and thus have outlawed its practice.

Syncretic (adj.)

This is a difficult word, and not one that would go on any top 1000 words you have to know for the GRE. But for those with a robust vocabulary, pay heed: if a I concoct a new religion and decide to take bits and pieces from other religions—I don a cardinal's robe, shave my head a la Buddha, and disseminate glossy pamphlets about the coming apocalypse—I have created a *syncretic* religion, one that combines elements of different religions.

You can probably see where this is going with the GRE definition—which tends to offer a little more latitude. *Syncretic*—more generally speaking—can refer to any amalgam of different schools of thought.

Jerry the shrink takes a syncretic approach to psychotherapy: he mixes the Gestalt school with some Jung and a healthy (or unhealthy, depending on your view) dose of Freud.

Parochial (adj.)

This word comes from parish, a small ecclesiastical district, usually located in the country. *Parochial* still has this meaning, i.e. relating to a church parish, but we are far more concerned with the negative connotation that has emerged from the rather sedate original version.

To be *parochial* is to be narrow-minded in one's view. The idea is if you are hanging out in the country, you tend to be a little cut off from things. The pejorative form—at least to my knowledge—is not a knock at religion.

Jasmine was sad to admit it, but her fledgling relationship with Jacob did not work out because his culinary tastes were simply too parochial; "After all," she quipped on her blog, "he considered Chef Boyrdee ethnic food."

Catholic (adj.)

We have many associations with Catholicism: cardinals at mass, nuns wielding crucifixes at frothing demons. Thus, it is somewhat surprising that a second definition of *catholic*—and the one that will be tested on the GRE—means universal.

Or perhaps not too surprising, considering that Catholicism has a universal reach and, more importantly, the Catholic Church conducts mass in Latin. *Catholic* comes from the Late Latin *catholicus*, which means, as you can probably guess, universal. *Catholic* also implies wide-ranging or all-embracing.

Jonah's friends said that Jonah's taste in music was eclectic; Jonah was quick to point out that not only was his taste eclectic but it was also catholic: he enjoyed music from countries as far-flung as Mali and Mongolia.

Anathema (n.)

A few hundred years ago, many ran afoul of the church, and excommunications (and worse) were typical reprisals. If such was the case, the Pope actually uttered a formal curse against a person. This curse was called the *anathema*.

Today this word, in addition to a broader scope, has taken a twist. If something is *anathema*, he, she, or it is the source of somebody's hate.

The verb form of the word, *anathematize*, still carries the old meaning of to curse.

Hundreds of years ago, Galileo was anathema to the church; today the church is anathema to some on the left side of the political spectrum.

Desecrate (v.)

If a person willfully violates or destroys any sacred place, he (or she) is said to *desecrate* it. Tombs, graves, churches, shrines and the like can all be victims of *desecrations*. One, however, cannot *desecrate* a person, regardless of how holy that person may be.

The felon had desecrated the holy site, and was on the church's Top 10 Anathema list.

Apostasy (n.)

Some believers turn against their faith and renounce it. We call this act *apostasy*, and those who commit it, *apostates*. Today the word carries a slightly broader connotation in that it can apply to politics as well.

An apostate of the Republican Party, Sheldon has yet to become affiliated with any party but dubs himself a "literal independent."

Sanctimonious (adj.)

This is a tricky word, and thus you can bet it's one of GRE's favorites. *Sanctimonious* does not mean filled with sanctity or holiness. Instead it refers to that quality that can overcome someone who feels that they are holier (read: morally superior) to everybody else.

Colloquially, we hear the term *holier-than-thou*. That is a very apt way to describe the attitude of a *sanctimonious* person.

Even during the quiet sanctity of evening prayer, she held her chin high, a sanctimonious sneer forming on her face as she eyed those who were attending church for the first time.

Iconoclast (n.)

This is an interesting word. The definition that relates to the church is clearly negative, i.e. an *iconoclast* is one who destroys religious images. Basically, this definition applies to the deranged drunk who goes around desecrating icons of the Virgin Mary.

The applicability of this definition to GRE is clearly suspect. The second definition, however, happens to be one of the GRE's top 100 words. An iconoclast—more broadly speaking—is somebody who attacks cherished beliefs or institutions. This use of the word is not necessarily negative:

According to some scholars, art during the 19th century had stagnated into works aimed to please fusty art academies; it took the iconoclasm of Vincent Van Gogh to inject fresh life into the effete world of painting.

Words from Political Scandals

Malfeasance (n.)

Malfeasance is wrongdoing, usually by a public official. Oftentimes, you hear the term corporate malfeasance—this type of wrongdoing occurs when somebody in the business world is up to no good. Typically, though, malfeasance is used in the context of politics. And, not to sound too cynical, but one usually doesn't have to look much further than one's local news to find examples of malfeasance—political or corporate.

Not even the mayor's trademark pearly-toothed grin could save him from charges of malfeasance: while in power, he'd been running an illegal gambling rink in the room behind his office.

Lascivious (adj.)

Lascivious, like *lecherous*, *prurient*, and *libidinous*, all refer to perversion. In terms of linking these words to the world of politics...well, given the sordid events that surface every few months, I don't think I need to elaborate.

Jerry's coworkers were confused as to why Jerry thought that the word mango carried lascivious connotations; when he tried to explain, they only became more perplexed.

Embroiled (adj.)

To become caught up in a scandal is to become *embroiled* in it. In the last couple of months, a few well-known politicians (again, not naming any names) have become embroiled in scandals. From the verb *embroiled*, we get the noun *imbroglio*, which is an embarrassing, confusing situation.

These days we are never short of a D.C. imbroglio—a welcome phenomenon for those who, having barely finished feasting on the sordid details of one scandal, can sink their teeth into a fresh one.

Venality (n.)

If you've ever heard of a government taking bribes, well, that is an example of *venality*. To be venal is to be corrupt. Of late, charges of venality tend to be few, though such charges simply don't make the same headlines as scandals of the lecherous kind.

If our legal system becomes plagued with venality, then the very notion of justice is imperiled.

Prevaricate (v.)

If you've ever seen a politician caught in a lie (never!), and that person is trying to wiggle their way out of a pointed question, he (or she) is *prevaricating*. Not that a U.S. president would ever *prevaricate* by talking about the household pet when confronted with charges of *venality* (I'm alluding to Richard Nixon and his dog Checkers).

Bobby learned not to prevaricate when his teacher asked him where his homework was; by giving a straightforward answer, he would avoid invoking the teacher's wrath.

Turpitude (n.)

Sometimes lechery and its synonymous friends are just too soft when describing certain acts of malfeasance. At the far ends of the political spectrum, where outrage is felt most keenly, people feel the need to invoke far harsher vocabulary when condemning

naughty behavior. One such word is *turpitude*, which gained prominence in the late 90's (Google will fill in the blanks). A synonym for depravity, turpitude is only reserved for those acts deemed to be downright wicked and immoral.

During his reign, Caligula indulged in unspeakable sexual practices, so it is not surprising that he will forever be remembered for his turpitude.

Vocabulary from Up on High

Zenith (n.), Summit (n.), Acme (n.), Pinnacle (n.) and Apex (n.)

Strangely, English has five words that mean the top of a mountain (perhaps our first lexicographers were avid alpinists). Spirited hiking, however, is only the half of it. Typically, you will encounter these words in a figurative sense:

At the zenith of his artistic career, Elvis was outselling any other artist on the charts.

The Ivy League is considered the apex of the education system.

At its pinnacle, the Roman Empire extended across most of the landmass of Eurasia, a feat not paralleled to the rise of the British Empire in the 18th and 19th century.

Apogee (n.)

The point at which the moon is farthest from the earth is known as the *apogee*. In terms of accomplishment or achievement, this word can refer to the highest point or culmination of something.

The apogee of the Viennese style of music, Mozart's music continues to mesmerize audiences well into the 21st century.

Apotheosis (n.)

If a person (or a thing) has reached such a point as to be god-like, then that person has reached an *apotheosis*.

As difficult as it is to imagine, the apotheosis of Mark Zuckerberg's career, many believe, is yet to come.

Nadir (n.)

With all these people reaching the tops of their careers, isn't there a word that refers to the bottom or lowest point of a person's career? The answer is, well, of course. Meet *nadir*. *Nadir* doesn't have to refer to just a career, but can be the lowest point.

Mike had walked in cold to the new GRE and was not surprised afterwards that he'd hit a standardized test nadir. After he dedicated himself to GRE prep with the same vigor that Sir Edmund Hillary first scaled the summit of Mt. Everest, Mike scored near perfect—the apogee of his academic career.

Preposterous Prepositions

Untoward (adj.)

You may think that *untoward* has something to do with a direction. But *untoward* does not mean disinclined to walk eastwards. Untoward is an adjective meaning not favorable, inconvenient. A popular GRE synonym for *untoward* is *inauspicious*.

Some professors find teaching untoward as having to prepare for lectures and conduct office hours prevents them from focusing on attaining tenure.

Upbraid (v.)

Upon seeing this word, you may imagine a hair stylist busily braiding patrons' hair. *Upbraid*, however, relates neither to up nor braiding. It means to scold or berate, a meaning it shares with many other words: *reprimand*, *reproach*, *chide*, and *castigate*.

Bob took a risk walking into the "Students Barbershop"—in the end he had to upbraid the apparently hung over barber for giving him an uneven bowl cut.

Underwrite (v.)

If you are writing below the margins of a paper you are not *underwriting*—you are simply writing below the margins of a piece of paper. *Underwrite* means to support financially.

The latest symphony broadcast was made possible with the underwriting from various Arts & Humanities associations.

Overweening (adj.)

What exactly does it mean to 'ween'? To go out on Halloween, perhaps? Making an *overweening* person one who takes a little bit too zealously to candy collecting and wakes up the next morning with a sugar hangover?

The answer of course is none of the above. To be *overweening* is to be presumptuously arrogant. What exactly does that mean? Say the aforementioned trick-or-treater grabs three times as much candy as everyone else, because he assumes he is entitled to as much candy as he wants. He would be *overweening*. Which would make him *overweening* while Halloweening (okay, I'll stop before my humor becomes *overweening*!*).

**Overweening* can also refer to ideas/opinions/appetites that are excessive or immoderate.

Mark was so convinced of his basketball skills that in his overweening pride he could not fathom that his name was not on the varsity list; he walked up to the basketball coach and told her she had forgotten to add his name.

Them's Fighting Words

Bellicose (adj.)

From the Latin root bell-, which means war, we get *bellicose*. Someone who is *bellicose* is warlike, and inclined to quarrel. The word is similar to *belligerent*, which also employs the *bell-* root.

Known for their bellicose ways, the Spartans were once the most feared people from Peloponnesus to Persia.

Truculent (adj.)

A person who is *truculent* has a fierce, savage nature. As I drive a smaller car, I often find trucks—from the 18-wheeler to the 4×4—to be quite truck-ulent when they drive. A silly mnemonic, but next time you are cut off by a truck, instead of giving the proverbial middle-finger, you can just mutter, what a *truculent* fellow.

Standing in line for six hours, she became progressively truculent, yelling at DMV employees and elbowing other people waiting in line.

Pugnacious (adj.)

Pugnacious means having an inclination to fight and be combative. A useful mnemonic is a pug dog—you know, those really small dogs that always try to attack you while releasing a fusillade of yaps.

Nobody wanted to work with Dexter lest he or she become embroiled in some spat; even those who did their best to avoid Dexter eventually had to deal with his pugnacity.

Contentious (adj.)

If you are *contentious*, you like to fight with words. If you know somebody who is always trying to pick an argument about something, no matter how trivial, that person is *contentious*.

She became increasingly contentious, misconstruing even an innocuous statement as a hostile one.

Jingoist (adj.)

Jingoism is what happens when bellicosity meets patriotism, and both drink too much whiskey. A person who thinks their country should always be at war is a *jingoist*. The word is similar to *hawkish*, a word that means favoring conflict over compromise.

In the days leading up to war, a nation typically breaks up into the two opposing camps: doves, who do their best to avoid war, and jingoists, who are only too eager to wave national flags from their vehicles and vehemently denounce those who do not do the same.

Animal Mnemonics

Badger (v.)

For those who have not lived in the U.S., this animal may be as exotic as the lemur is for the rest of us. A badger is basically a weasel on steroids—you wouldn't want to upset one. Curiously, the verb *badger* doesn't carry any menacing connotation. To *badger* simply means to pester repeatedly. Perhaps a buzzing fly comes to mind, however the verb 'fly' was already taken.

Badgered by his parents to find a job, the 30-year-old loafer instead joined a gang of itinerant musicians.

Hound (v.)

A hound usually rears its head in movies in which the bad guy is on the lam. Or I take that back—the hound usually drops its head to the ground, sniffing out the bad guy as he crosses treacherous terrain. Unsurprisingly, the verb form of *hound* is to pursue relentlessly.

An implacable foe of corruption, Eliot Ness hounded out graft in all forms—he even helped nab Al Capone.

Dog (v.)

Man's best friend, right? Well, as long as it's not in verb form. To *dog* means to pursue relentlessly, and is thus a synonym of hound.

Throughout his life, he was dogged by insecurities that inhibited personal growth.

Cow (v.)

The verb form of cow always tickles me, as I imagine the cow to be one of the more placid creatures. Despite such bovine equanimity, *to cow* means to use intimidation to make someone give in. In the 'cheesy' mnemonic department, imagine a cow on steroids (as most tend to be these days) telling you to 'moo'-ve out of the way. Pretty intimidating, huh?

Do not be cowed by a 3,000-word vocabulary list: turn that list into a deck of flashcards!

Ferret (v.)

A ferret is a tiny weasel, one that moves so quickly that it is used to catch rabbits. Apparently it has a knack for digging our long-eared friend out of their burrows. Unlike some of the verbs above, the verb form of *ferret* aptly fits the animal—to *ferret* means to search for something persistently. Usually the verb is coupled with a preposition as in, "ferret something out" or "ferret around".

Ever the resourceful lexicographer, Fenton was able to ferret out the word origin of highly obscure GRE words.

Webster's Favorites

Mellifluous (adj.)

If something sounds as sweet as honey, it is *mellifluous*. The voices of Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Holiday, and even that of Bill Clinton are mellifluous (listen to the way our former President was able to, through turns of locution and his southern drawl, to imbue the mundane with a sense of pleading urgency). Of course, what sounds *mellifluous* is a matter of opinion. As long as it's not Justin Bieber.

Chelsea's grandmother thought Franz Schubert's music to be the most mellifluous ever written; Chelsea demurred, and to her grandmother's chagrin, would blast Rihanna on the home stereo speakers.

Palimpsest (n.)

A long time ago, even before the days when email was popular, people wrote on scrolls. Apparently papyrus wasn't affordable so scribes reused the same scroll over again, writing on top of what had gone before. By extension, any writing material that has been written on numerous times, so that the vague traces of previous writing can be seen, is a *palimpsest*. A poorly erased chalkboard, the manically edited essays of my high school days.

More broadly speaking, a palimpsest can refer to anything that has been changed numerous times but on which traces of former iterations can still be seen.

The downtown was a palimpsest of the city's checkered past: a new Starbucks had opened up next to an abandoned, shuttered building, and a freshly asphalted road was inches away from a pothole large enough to swallow a house pet.

Serendipity (n.)

This morning I wasn't looking for this article, but there it was—a pleasant find. That's an example of *serendipity*: finding something pleasant that you weren't even looking for. The Internet is full of *serendipity*, since something you weren't looking for in the first

place often falls into your lap. Though if such compulsive buying becomes a habit, it may cease to be *serendipitous*.

The invention of the 3M Post It Note was serendipitous, because the scientist who had come up with the idea was looking for a strong adhesive; the weak adhesive he came up with was perfect for holding a piece of paper in place but making it very easy for someone to pull the paper free.

Defenestrate (v.)

Okay, fine...there is a slim chance that this word will pop up on the GRE, but it is one of my favorite words. It's a comical way of saying to throw someone out of a window, which in a sense is comical, as there is nothing comical about getting thrown out of a window.

These days *defenestrate* is really nothing more than a linguistic curiosity, yet there was a time, long ago, when windows had neither panes nor glass. Think of a medieval castle. Apparently, *defenestration* happened enough that someone thought up a word for it. (To see a *defenestration*, check out the movie *Braveheart*, which shows the tyrannical King Edward I defenestrating a hapless lad).

Defenestration is rare in these days of sealed windows.

Rebellious Vocabulary

Invective (n.)

The verb form of *invective*, at least in a loose sense, is *inveigh*. This word popped up a lot on the old GRE, because it was easily confused with *inveigle*, which means to coax. Both words are still good to know for the current GRE. *Invective* is used to describe harsh, critical language.

The Internet has unleashed the invectives in many of us; many people post stinging criticism on the comments section underneath newspaper articles or YouTube videos.

Diatribe (n.)

A *diatribe* is a strong verbal attack against someone or something. The victim of a *diatribe* is typically some organization, whether it be the FDA, the government, or, in this case, Wall Street. It is understood that the person unleashing the diatribe is angry.

Steve's mom launched into a diatribe during the PTA meeting, contending that the school was little more than a daycare in which students stare at the wall and teachers stare at the chalkboard.

Screed (n.)

Screed takes on a more negative connotation, and suggests an abusive rant that has since become tedious and hackneyed. Currently, the Occupy movements have hardly devolved into *screeds*, and may even intensify, if protestors feel their various demands have not been met. However, if the protest fizzles out months from now, except for the lone dude in the park, gesticulating at a passel of pigeons ...well, he is very likely launching into a *screed*.

Joey had difficulty hanging out with his former best friend Perry, who, during his entire cup of coffee, would enumerate all of the government's deficiencies, only to break ranks and launch into some screed against big business.

Tirade (n.)

A *tirade* is an angry speech, one that suggests the person giving the *tirade* has become a little too angry, and should probably dismount the soapbox.

In terms of political change, a tirade oftentimes does little more than make the person speaking red in the face.

Harangue (n./v.)

Harangue can be either a noun or a verb. It is a synonym of *tirade* and *diatribe*. Lest someone *harangue* you for botched phonetics, the pronunciation of this word can be a bit tricky. *Harangue* rhymes with twang, rang, and, for the dessert inclined, meringue.

Tired of his parents haranguing him about his laziness and lack of initiative, Tyler finally moved out of home at the age of thirty-five.

Vituperation (n.)

This word is fun to say. *Vituperating* someone is neither fun for the 'vituperater' nor the 'vituperatee.' When you *vituperate* somebody, or something, you violently launch into an invective or tirade. Spit shoots from your mouth, froth forming at your lips. Understandably, *vituperate* is only used in extreme cases.

Jason had dealt with disciplinarians before, but nothing prepared him for the first week of boot camp, as drill sergeants would vituperate him for forgetting to double knot the laces on his boots.

Vocab from the Lab

Precipitate (adj./n./v.)

There aren't too many words in the English language that, without any change in spelling, can be a noun, verb, or an adjective. *Precipitate*, one such word, conjures up the image of technicians in lab coats, mixing test tubes.

The *precipitate* is part of the solution left inside a test tube (or any other container used in labs these days). This definition, though, is not important for the GRE. The verb and adjective definitions, however, are. To be precipitate is to be hasty or rash. To *precipitate* something, such as a government *precipitating* a crisis, means to make something happen suddenly.

Instead of conducting a thorough investigation after the city hall break-in, the governor acted precipitately, accusing his staff of aiding and abetting the criminals.

Amalgam (n.)

An *amalgam*, in the chemistry sense, is an alloy made of mercury and some other metal (formerly used, before the health scare, as part of our dental fillings). Generally speaking, an *amalgam* is a mixture of two or more things.

The band's music was an amalgam of hip-hop and jazz.

(In)solvent (adj.))

In chemistry, a *solvent* is any substance able to break down or dissolve another substance. Outside the lab, to be *solvent* is to be able to pay off one's debts. To be *insolvent*, on the other hand, is not to be able to pay off one's debts.

Many once-great athletes have become insolvent, as they are unable to pay off their debts or hold down jobs that would potentially free them from debt.

Catalyst (n.)

In chemistry, when one substance speeds up a chemical reaction, that substance is said to be a *catalyst*. Broadly speaking, anything that speeds up (or precipitates) an event is a *catalyst.*

Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her bus seat acted as a catalyst for the Civil Right's Movement, setting into motion historic changes for African-Americans.

Mercurial (adj.)

For those who have since forgotten this slippery word, to be *mercurial* means to change constantly in terms of personality or mood. Typically, we say a *mercurial* person is moody and unpredictable. When you think of actual mercury—you know, that strange liquid inside thermometers, not the planet—it too is slippery and constantly changing (do not put this to the test—mercury is highly toxic). This poisonous quality, though, did not make it into the definition of *mercurial*. Someone who is *mercurial* is just moody.

The fact that Ella's moods were as mercurial as the weather was problematic for her relationships—it didn't help that she lived in Chicago.

Compound Words

Slapdash (adj.)

One word conjures up a relatively violent action, the other what one typically does if they want to escape a dangerous situation. Put them together and you get, voila, a word meaning careless. That's right—*slapdash* means hastily put together.

The office building had been constructed in a slapdash manner, so it did not surprise officials when, during a small earthquake, a large crack emerged on the façade of the building.

Heyday (n.)

About two of the most ordinary words I can think of, and how someone who is generally apathetic might greet the morning. Put them together, and you get something far more exciting. *Heyday* is the pinnacle, or top, of a person, time period or career.

During the heyday of Prohibition, bootlegging had become such a lucrative business that many who had been opposed to the 18th Amendment began to fear it would be repealed.

Hodgepodge (n.)

Okay, I'm not really sure what a *hodge* is, or for that matter, a *podge*. But if you put them together, you get *hodgepodge*, a word that means a confusing mixture or jumble.

Long after his heyday as Germany's pre-eminent visionary philosopher, Nietzsche began to populate his writing with a hodgepodge of aphorisms.

Aboveboard (adj.)

I guess whatever is below the board is deceptive, because *aboveboard* means open and honest. It usually refers to government officials who are honest.

The mayor, despite his avuncular visage plastered about the city, was hardly aboveboard – some concluded that it was his ingratiating smile that allowed him to engage in corrupt behavior and get away with it.

Thoroughgoing (adj.)

If something is thorough it is complete. Therefore, thorough isn't too far from the meaning of *thoroughgoing*, which means absolute.

As a thoroughgoing bibliophile, one who had turned his house into a veritable library, he shocked his friends when he bought a Kindle.

Telltale (adj.)

If I tell a tale, I am telling a story, one that is usually a fib. *Telltale*, however, simply means revealing.

The many telltale signs of chronic smoking include yellow teeth, and a persistent, hacking cough.

Halloween Vocabulary

Cadaverous (adj.)

If someone is so skinny or emaciated that they look like a dead person, then that person is *cadaverous*. This word comes from *cadaver*, which is a corpse. Besides emaciated, a good synonym for *cadaverous* is *gaunt*.

Some actors take challenging roles in which they have to lose so much weight that they appear cadaverous.

Macabre (adj.)

If a story, film, or, for that matter, any description is filled with gruesome details about death and horror, we say that it is *macabre*.

Edgar Allen Poe was considered the master of the macabre; his stories vividly describe the moment leading up to—and often those moments after—a grisly death.

Goosebumps (n.)

I would never have considered this a vocabulary word (let alone a GRE word), until, that is, the New GRE PowerPrep test included a Text Completion in which *goosebumps* was the answer.

Goosebumps describe that sensation on our skin when we become frightened. You know, those sudden pimple-like bumps that suddenly appear when you are watching the first half of a horror movie (the last part of horror movies are typically cheesy, once they show the monster). Well, this is now a good word to remember for the GRE, lest you want to get *goosebumps* test day.

Some people believe that goosebumps result when a ghost brushes up against you.

Diabolical (adj.)

This word comes from the Latin and Greek for devil (for those who speak Spanish, you may notice that the word is very similar to *diablo*). To be diabolical is to be extremely wicked like the devil.

The conspirators, willing to dispatch anyone who stood in their way, hatched a diabolical plan to take over the city.

Phantasmagorical (adj.)

This is a terrifying word, just from the standpoint of pronunciation: [fan-taz-*muh*-**gawr**-ik-al]. The definition is equally frightening: a series of images that seem as though they are out of a dream, whether those images are real or in one's head.

Those suffering from malaria fall into a feverish sleep, their world a whirligig of phantasmagoria; if they recover, they are unsure of what actually took place and what was simply a product of their febrile imaginations.

Talkative Words

Gregarious (adj.)

If you are sociable, you are talkative, right? Well, not exactly. To be *gregarious* is to be likely to socialize with others. A good synonym is *flocking*, like what birds do. But, just as birds do not talk to one another outside of a Pixar flick, people can hang out with each other and not necessarily have to chat. Therefore, do not confuse *gregarious* with *garrulous*, which means talkative.

Often we think that great leaders are those who are gregarious, always in the middle of a large group of people; yet, as Mahatma Gandhi and many others have shown us, leaders can often be introverted.

Ingenuous (adj.)

You may think you've heard someone exclaim, *what an ingenuous plan*! But, it's actually an ingenious plan. To be *ingenuous* is to be naïve and innocent. So, if you are likely to go along with a devious plan, whether or not it is ingenious, you are *ingenuous*.

Two-years in college in Manhattan had changed Jenna from an ingenuous girl from the suburbs to a jaded urbanite, unlikely to fall for any ruse, regardless of how elaborate.

Peruse (v.)

Peruse means to read very carefully. Unfortunately, the colloquial usage not only ignores this definition, but goes so far as to flip this definition on its head. In light conversation, *peruse* means to read over quickly. The GRE constitutes anything but light conversation, so make sure to remember that *peruse* means to read over carefully (*perusing* the first part of this paragraph helps!).

Instead of perusing important documents, people all too often rush to the bottom of the page and plaster their signature at the bottom.

Disabuse (v.)

To *disabuse* is not the opposite of abuse (which would be a strange word to have an opposite for in the first place). To *disabuse* is to persuade somebody that his/her belief is not valid. Often, *disabuse* goes together with the word notion:

As a child, I was quickly disabused of the notion that Santa Claus was a rotund benefactor of infinite largess—one night I saw my mother diligently wrapping presents and storing them under our Christmas tree.

Mettlesome (adj.)

When you poke your nose in somebody else's business, you are being meddlesome. If you are *mettlesome*, on the other hand, you are filled with *mettle* (no, not the hard stuff). *Mettle* means courage or valor. A soldier on the battlefield is *mettlesome* when he runs into enemy fire to save a comrade.

For its raid on Bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Seal Team Six has become, for many Americans, the embodiment of mettle.

By the Letter

A-Words

Amiable (adj.)

Amiable means friendly. It is very similar to *amicable*, another common GRE word. *Amicable*, however, does not refer to a person the way that *amiable* does, but rather refers to relationships between people. You'll notice that *amicable* is, therefore, the opposite of *acrimonious* (see below).

Amy's name was very apt: she was so amiable that she was twice voted class president.

Affable (adj.)

Likable, easy to talk to: *affable* is similar to *amiable*. The differences are subtle, and as far as the GRE is concerned, you can treat them as the same word. Like *amiable*, this word is great to use to describe people we know. After all, everyone knows an affable person.

For all his surface affability, Marco was remarkably glum when he wasn't around other people.

Amenable (adj.)

Amenable means easily persuaded. If someone is cooperative and goes along with the program, so to speak, that person is amenable. *Amenable* can also be used in the medical sense: if a disease is amenable to treatment, that disease can be treated.

Even though she did not like bad weather, Shirley was generally amenable and decided to accompany her brother to the picnic.

Attenuate (v.)

Attenuate means to weaken (in terms of intensity), to taper off/become thinner. *Attenuate* can refer to both abstract and tangible things.

Her animosity towards Bob attenuated over the years, and she even went so far as to invite him to her party.

The stick is attenuated at one end to allow the villagers to forage for ants.

Animosity (n.)

Meaning Intense hostility, *animosity* should be reserved for extreme cases. That is, if you really loathe someone, and that person feels the same way, then you can say animosity exists between the two of you.

A related word, and a synonym, is *animus* (though *animus* can also mean motivation, as in impetus).

The governor's animosity toward his rival was only inflamed when the latter spread false lies regarding the governor's first term.

Anomalous (adj.)

Anomalous means not normal, out of the ordinary, and is simply the adjective—and scarier looking—form of *anomaly*, which is a noun. *Anomalous* can be used in cases to describe something that is not typical, like an unusually cold California spring.

According to those who do not believe in climate change, the extreme weather over the last five years is simply anomalous—average temps should return to average, they believe.

Acrimony (n.)

Acrimony means bitterness and ill will. Don't forget the adjective form, *acrimonious*, which describes relationships filled with bitterness and ill will.

The acrimonious dispute between the president and vice-president sent an unequivocal signal to voters: the health of the current administration was imperiled.

Aberration (n.)

A deviation from what is normal or expected: this word is tinged with a negative connotation. For instance, in psychology there is a subset of behavior known as *aberrant* behavior. So, basically, if you're narcissistic, psychotic, or just plain old cuckoo, you are demonstrating *aberrant* behavior.

Aberrations in climate have become the norm: rarely a week goes by without some meteorological phenomenon making headlines.

Ambiguous (adj.)

Ambiguous means open to more than one interpretation. Let's say I have two friends, Bob and Paul. If I tell you that he is coming to my house today, then that is ambiguous. Who do I mean? Paul or Bob?

The coach told his team, "Move towards that side of the field"; because he did not point, his directions were ambiguous, and the team had no idea to which side he was referring.

Amorphous (adj.)

Amorphous means shapeless. *Morph-* comes from the Latin for shape. The root *a-*, as in atypical, means not or without. Therefore, if something is *amorphous*, it lacks shape.

His study plan for the GRE was at best amorphous; he would do questions from random pages in any one of seven test prep books.

C-Words

Conciliate (v.)

To *conciliate* is to make peace with.

His opponents believed his gesture to be conciliatory, yet as soon as they put down their weapons, he unsheathed a hidden sword.

Corroborate (v.)

To *corroborate* something is to confirm or lend support to (usually an idea or claim).

Her claim that frog populations were falling precipitously in Central America was corroborated by locals, who reported that many species of frogs had seemingly vanished overnight.

Calumny (n.)

Calumny is the making of a false statement meant to injure a person's reputation.

With the presidential primaries well under way, the air is thick with calumny, and the mud already waist-high.

Commensurate (adj.)

To be *commensurate* to is to be in proportion or corresponding in degree or amount

The definition of this word tends to be a little unwieldy, regardless of the source. Therefore, it is a word that screams to be understood in context (for this very reason, the GRE loves commensurate, because they know that those who just devour flashcards will not understand how the word works in a sentence). Speaking of a sentence...

The convicted felon's life sentence was commensurate with the heinousness of his crime.

Churlish (adj.)

Someone who is *churlish* lacks manners or refinement. A *churlish* person lacks tact and civility is often outright rude.

The manager was unnecessarily churlish to his subordinates, rarely deigning to say hello, but always quick with a sartorial jab if someone happened to be wearing anything even slightly unbecoming.

Castigate (v.)

To *castigate* someone is to reprimand harshly.

This word is very similar to *chastise*. They even have the same etymology (word history).

Drill sergeants are known to castigate new recruits so mercilessly that the latter often break down during their first week in training.

Chastise (v.)

Very similar to *castigate*, it also means to reprimand harshly.

Though chastised for his wanton abuse of the pantry, Lawrence shrugged off his mother's harsh words, and continued to plow through jars of cookies and boxes of donuts.

Cogent (adj.)

Something that's *cogent* is clear and persuasive.

His essay writing, while full of clever turns of phrases, lacks cogency: the examples he uses to support his points are at times irrelevant and, in one instance, downright ludicrous.

Contentious (adj.)

Contentious has two meanings: controversial (in terms of an issue); inclined to arguing (in terms of a person).

This word does not mean *content*. It comes from *contend*, which means to argue. Be chary (see below) of this word.

As soon as the discussion turns to politics, Uncle Hank becomes highly contentious, vehemently disagreeing with those who endorse the same positions.

Chary (adj.)

Chary rhymes with wary, and it also means to be cautious. They are also synonyms.

Jack was wary of GRE words that looked similar, because they usually had different definitions; not so with chary, a word that he began to use interchangeably with wary.

Easily Confusable F-Words

Fractious (adj.)

If someone is *fractious*, he/she is irritable and is likely to cause disruption.

We rarely invite my fractious Uncle over for dinner; he always complains about the food, and usually launches into a tirade on some touchy subject.

Factious (adj.)

Factions result when a large group splinters into smaller ones. Anything that causes factions is *factious*. *Factious* is typically not used to describe people.

The controversial bill proved factious, as dissension even within parties resulted.

Factitious (adj.)

A tricky word, to say the least. When I preface a word by saying it's tricky, you can bet that the word's definition is not what you would expect. *Factitious* is no exception, in that it does not relate to fact. Indeed, *factitious* is almost the opposite of fact. *Factitious* means artificial, not natural. A laugh can be *factitious*. A gesture. Your alacrity on the first day of a new job.

F*actitious* can also be used literally to refer to something artificial. The houseplant that never needs watering, for instance. A good synonym for *factitious*—and a word people use frequently—is phony.

The defendant's story was largely factitious and did not accord with eyewitness testimonies.

Vicious Pairs of V's

Vindictive (adj.) vs. Vindicate (v.)

These words look very similar, so their definitions must be somewhat related. Right? Actually, the two words are very different. To be *vindictive* means to have a very strong desire for revenge.

As for *vindicate*, it means to prove oneself right. What, exactly, does this mean? Say you claim to your friends that you will score at the 95th percentile on the verbal. They doubt your claim, and lightly tease you on your lofty and seemingly unattainable goal. Now, it's up to you to prove that you can do it. If you score at the 95th percentile on test day, then you've *vindicated* yourself: you've proven that your original claim was correct. If you score way below that...well, then you may want to avoid your friends for some time.

Vicarious (adj.) vs. Vicissitude (n.)

Isn't travel great? You get to experience other cultures, and see the world. Well, actually, sometimes traveling can be more stressful than a rush-hour commute—lost luggage, stolen items, and inclement weather are just a few of the many woes that can beset the traveler.

So, why not stay at home and watch the travel channel? With just one flick of the wrist, you can journey to the distant lands of Machu Picchu or Angkor Wat. Such travel, in which you enjoy something through another person's experiences—in this case the host of the travel show—is to live *vicariously*. The contexts, of course, can vary widely. Maybe your best friend has told you all about his or her graduate school experiences via weekly blog posts. Now you, too, feel that you've gone through grad school. That's living *vicariously*.

A *vicissitude* is any change in one's circumstances, usually for the worse. That is, life is full of ups and downs that are beyond our control. Those are *vicissitudes*. Speaking of, traveling—especially any of those quit-your-job six-week jaunts through Europe—is full of *vicissitudes*, so again, sometimes it's better to stay at home and tune into the travel station (as long as the remote control doesn't go traveling off somewhere).

Venal (adj.) vs. Venial (adj.)

You definitely do not want to confuse these two. To call someone *venal* is to say they are corrupt, and likely to accept bribes. To be *venial* actually doesn't refer to a person but rather a sin or an offense. A *venial* offense is one that is minor and pardonable.

His traffic violations ran the gamut from the venial to the egregious—on one occasion he simply did not come to a complete stop; another time he tried to escape across state lines at speeds in excess of 140 mph.

Veracious (adj.) vs. Voracious (adj.)

These words not only deviate by only one letter, but they also sound very similar. As for their definitions, you definitely do not want to confuse them. *Veracious* means truthful; *voracious* means hungry, either literally or figuratively.

Steven was a voracious reader, sometimes finishing two novels in the same day.

Venerate (v.) vs. Enervate (v.)

Okay, fine, this one is deviating from the agenda a little. Still, despite not starting with a 'v', *enervate* actually contains all the letters found in *venerate*, only scrambled. As for their meanings, these two words are anything but similar. To *venerate* someone is to respect that person deeply. To *enervate*, on the other hand, is to sap that person of energy.

Dave found the professor's lecture so enervating that not even a potent cup of joe could keep his eyes from drooping.

The professor, despite his soporific lectures, was venerated amongst his colleagues, publishing more papers yearly than all of his peers combined.

"X" words

Excoriate (v.)

To yell at someone is one thing; to *excoriate* them is a whole other. A martinet of a boss whom you've once again upset; a drill sergeant berating a feckless, smirking recruit; now we are closer.

So to criticize really, really harshly is to *excoriate*. Interestingly, the second definition of the word is to tear one's skin from his/her body. To verbally *excoriate*, figuratively speaking, is to rip off a person's skin.

Entrusted with the prototype to his company's latest smartphone, Larry, during a late night karaoke bout, let the prototype slip into the hands of a rival company—the next day Larry was excoriated, and then fired.

Extenuating (adj.)

Extenuating means making less guilty or more forgivable. The phrase "extenuating circumstances" is common courtroom lingo. Say somebody broke into a drugstore to steal some expensive medication. Later we learn that medication was for that person's wife, who was dying of some disease that only the medication could cure. Most of us, presumably, would be more likely to forgive the man. Why? Because of the *extenuating* factor of his wife's disease.

The jury was hardly moved by the man's plea that his loneliness was an extenuating factor in his crime of dognapping a prized pooch.

Execrate (v.)

This word just sounds awful. The good news is the meaning of *execrate* is consistent with the way it sounds. To *execrate* somebody is to curse and hiss at them. For instance a certain American basketball player left his team of many years so he could make more money with another team. Fans of the original team *execrated* the player for his perfidy and, what they claim, were his mercenary motives.

Interestingly, the adjective form of *execrate* is the relatively common GRE word *execrable*. If something is *execrable*, it is so awful that it is worthy of our hissing.

Though the new sitcom did decently in the ratings, Nelson railed against the show, saying that it was nothing more than execrable pastiche of tired cliché's and canned laughter.

Exegesis (n.)

This word refers to a critical interpretation of a scholarly work. If you think that definition is intimidating, the adjective form is *exegetical*.

The Bible is fertile ground for exegesis—over the past five centuries there have been as many interpretations as there are pages in a Gideon.

Exhort (v.)

To *exhort* means to strongly urge on, encourage. The encouragement is for a positive action. So a mentor figure will *exhort* you to make the most of your life, whereas the miscreant will cajole you into doing something you'll regret.

Nelson's parents exhorted him to study medicine, urging him to choose a respectable profession; intransigent, Nelson left home to become a graffiti artist.

High Difficulty Words

Negation Words: Misleading Roots

Insufferable (adj.)

Think of somebody, or something, that you simply can't tolerate. That thing is *insufferable*. A person bleating into their cell phones on a crowded bus is *insufferable*. So is a person who only talks about him or herself, and usually in the most flattering vein possible. Depending on the person, certain television shows or genres can be *insufferable*. This word is derived from the second definition of *suffer*, which means to put up with, or tolerate.

Chester always tried to find some area in which he excelled above others; unsurprisingly, his co-workers found him insufferable and chose to exclude him from daily luncheons out.

Impertinent (adj.)

Impertinent can actually be the opposite of pertinent, but this definition is seldom used. Most of the time, *impertinent* means not showing the proper respect. You can think of it this way – if somebody's behavior is not pertinent to the given social context, e.g. an occasion calling for formality, then you can think of that person as being *impertinent*. The definition usually only applies if a person is being rude where respect is expected, and not staid where frivolity is apt.

Dexter, distraught over losing his pet dachshund, Madeline, found the police officer's questions impertinent—after all, he thought, did she have to pry into such details as to what Madeline's favorite snack was?

Unconscionable (adj.)

If you are thinking of being knocked over the head and lying in a pool of blood on the sidewalk, you have the wrong word (not to mention a vivid imagination). In this case, the correct word is unconscious. If an act is so horrible and deplorable that it makes everyone around aghast, then that action is *unconscionable*. *Unconscionable* can also

mean something that is in excess of what is deemed tolerable. This second definition doesn't have the unethical smear of the first definition.

The lawyer's demands were unconscionable, and rather than pay an exorbitant sum or submit himself to any other inconveniences, the man decided to find a new lawyer.

Immaterial (adj.)

While *immaterial* can describe a ghost, phantom, or run-of-the mill ectoplasm, *immaterial* primarily means not relevant.

The judge found the defendant's comments immaterial to the trial, and summarily dismissed him from the witness stand.

Inflammable (adj.)

Depending on the circumstances, this can be a very important word. That is, if you read that something is inflammable, that means it can easily light on fire. The opposite would be *nonflammable*. Strangely enough, *inflammable* is the same as *flammable* in the sense that it describes anything that can light on fire. *Inflammable*—but not *flammable*—can mean extremely controversial, incendiary.

It only takes one person to leave an inflammable comment on an Internet thread for that thread to blow up into pages upon pages of reader indignation.

Unnerve (v.)

This word does not mean to make less nervous, but it's the opposite. If you unnerve a person, you disconcert him or her to the point he or she is likely to fail.

At one time unnerved by math problems, she began avidly "Magoosh-ing", and soon became adept at even combinations and permutations questions.

Difficult Words that the GRE Loves to Use

Belie (v.)

This is ETS's number one favorite word for harder questions. Period. If ETS needs to make a Text Completion or Sentence Equivalence questions difficult, all it needs to do is throw in *belie*.

The key to answering a text completion question that uses *belie* is to know how the word functions in context. Let's take a look below:

Her surface calm belied her roiling emotions.

The effortless fluidity with which the pianist's fingers moved belied the countless hours he had practiced.

Her upbeat attitude during the group project belied her inherent pessimism towards any collective endeavor.

In each case, note how the outward appearance does not match up with the reality. That contradiction is the essence of belie.

Disinterested (adj.)

Much as the addition of belie is a difficult vocabulary word that tends to make a question harder, the addition of *disinterested* into a text completion can make it a difficult question. Why? Everybody assumes that *disinterested* means not interested. While this is acceptable colloquially, the GRE, as you've probably come to learn by now, is anything but colloquial. The definition of *disinterested* is unbiased, neutral.

The potential juror knew the defendant, and therefore could not serve on the jury, which must consist only of disinterested members.

Equivocal (adj.)

Equivocal does not mean equal. It means vague, undecided.

Equivocal, especially in its more common form *equivocate*, has a negative connotation. If a politician is equivocating, he/she is not answering a question directly, but is beating around the bush.

In the academic GRE sense, if a phenomenon is open to multiple interpretations it is *equivocal.*

Whether we can glean an artist's unconscious urges through his or her art remains equivocal – that we can ever even really tap into another person's hidden motives remains in doubt.

Undermine (v.)

Undermine is common in all sections of the GRE, not just difficult sections. It can pop up in reading comprehension answer choices just as commonly as text completion questions.

Undermine means to weaken and is usually paired with an abstract term, such as authority. It can also have the connotation of slowly or insidiously eroding (insidious means subtly harmful).

The student undermined the teacher's authority by questioning the teacher's judgment on numerous occasions.

Sententious (adj.)

This word looks like it would relate to a sentence. If you know the GRE, you will know this is probably not the case, as the GRE is likely to subvert people's gut reactions. *Sententious* means to be moralizing, usually in a pompous sense.

The old man, casting his nose up in the air at the group of adolescents, intoned sententiously, "Youth is wasted on the young."

Propitiate (v.)

Want to make an angry person less angry? Well, then you attempt to placate or appease. Or, if you like really big GRE words, you *propitiate* them.

The two sons, plying their angry father with cheesy neckties for Christmas, were hardly able to propitiate him – the father already had a drawer full of ones he had never worn before or ever planned to.

Feckless (adj.)

Feck, probably for its phonetic similarity to another word, has been dropped from the language. That or the lexicographers have become *feckless*, which means that they lacked the drive or initiative to include *feck* in the dictionary. *Feckless* means lazy and irresponsible. So, don't get *feckless* and drop the –less, lest somebody totally misinterprets you. In which case, you'll have to do a fair amount of propitiating.

By the way, I'm feckless—I won't include an example sentence (oops, I just walked into a contradiction).

Tendentious (adj.)

If you are likely to espouse a controversial view, you are being *tendentious*. A good synonym for *tendentious* is *biased*, though if you are biased you aren't necessarily leaning towards a view that is controversial.

Because political mudslinging has become a staple of the 24-hour media cycle, most of us, despite proclamations to the contrary, are tendentious on many of today's pressing issues.

Limpid (adj.)

This word does not relate to *limp*, it relates to clarity in terms of expression. *Limpid* is typically used to describe writing or music.

Her limpid prose made even the most recondite subjects accessible to all.

Betray (v.)

To betray means to go against one's country or friends. Right? Well, yes, but not always. Especially on the GRE. *To betray* means to reveal or make known something, usually unintentionally.

As a quick reading break, let's try a Text Completion question for *betray*:

As we age, our political leanings tend to become less _____; the once dyed-in-wool conservative can betray liberal leanings, and the staunch progressive may suddenly embrace conservative policies.

(A) pronounced
(B) obscured
(C) contrived
(D) earnest
(E) diplomatic

In this case *betray* means reveal. As we age our political biases become less obvious/extreme (my own words). Which word is the closest? *(A) pronounced.*

Re- Doesn't Always Mean Again

Remiss (adj.)

Remiss does not mean to miss again. It means to be negligent in one's duty. For some reason, students of mine have always had difficulty remembering this word. Sometimes I chide them, "Don't be remiss as vocabulary scholars by forgetting the word remiss." While arguably clever, this admonishment isn't usually as efficacious as I'd hope it would be. (So don't be *remiss*!).

Remiss in his duty to keep the school functioning efficiently, the principal was relieved of his position after only three months.

Restive (adj.)

Restive sounds like *rest*. It's actually the opposite, and means restless. Though most of the 're-' words are common, *restive* is definitely the *re-* word you are most likely to see on test day. It can be used to describe both people and groups of people.

The crowd grew restive as the comedian's opening jokes fell flat.

Repine (v.)

The verb *pine* means to yearn for. Like *remiss*, however, the addition of the prefix *re-* does not signify again. To *repine* means to complain or fret over something. Note: the verb *pine* can also mean to waste away.

Standing forlornly by the window, she repined for her lost love.

Remonstrate (v.)

You've probably guessed already that this does not mean to demonstrate again. To *remonstrate* means to make objections while pleading.

The mothers of the kidnapped victims remonstrated to the rogue government to release their children, claiming that the detention violated human rights.

Reading to Learn: Recommended Fiction and Non-Fiction

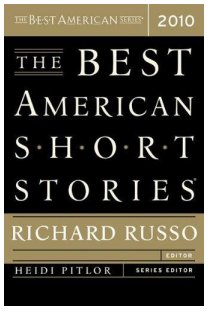
For those of you who live near a bookstore (and my heartfelt condolences to those who live near what is now the carcass of an erstwhile Borders store), to simply walk in and pick up a book that is captivating, and charged with GRE-style language, is tantamount to finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

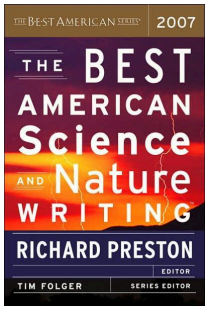
To save you the futility of such a search, I will recommend books that I feel are topical, engaging, and filled with enough GRE vocabulary that you will be underlining words as you go along, and, of course, entering them as you go.

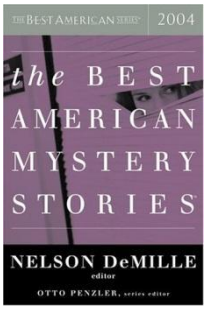
At the same time, make sure your reading is not so laden with vocabulary as to be inscrutable—you want to be reading, not underlining. To avoid this, simply choose a book or article that is less dense with challenging words. Work your way up to challenging writing.

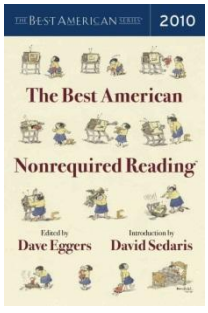
Whether on an eReader or in paper-based form, the books below offer an alternative to sifting through magazines looking for engaging stories. And now, you need not wander through a cavernous bookstore, or click through the endless forest that is Amazon.

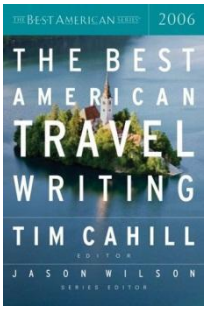
The Best American Series











This annual series selects the best writing from hundreds of journals and magazines. Not only are you provided with engaging and informative articles, but you also can

choose from many different genres. That's right – the Best American Series is not one book, but many books, broken down into different genres.

I recommend the Best American Science and Nature Series. For those who are a little more intrepid, and up for the challenging stuff, then the Best American Essays is for you. The thoughtful, eloquent prose here will help prime your brain for the more difficult verbal section of the GRE.

There is also a Best American Sports Writing (yes, sports writers use GRE vocab as well), a Best American Travel Writing (travel writers love descriptive GRE words) and a Best Short Stories (if fiction is more your thing).

So, whatever your predilections, the Best American Series has something to tickle your fancy. Or, for a potpourri of genres, styles, and voices, you can order the whole bunch. Your reading brain will grow exponentially.

The Classics

In order to learn vocabulary, and become accustomed to an elevated prose style, I do not recommend fiction as highly as I do non-fiction. At the same, we all love a good story. And, staying hooked over the course of 200-300 pages of a protagonist's vicissitudes is far easier than doing the same for science writing.

A great place to start for fiction is the Classics. Pick them up—they are classics for a reason. I lean towards 20th Century literature. Especially from a GRE prep angle, the language, and the way words are used, is more consonant with the language found on the GRE. That doesn't mean that if Jane Austin or Charles Dickens, two prominent 19thCentury authors, make for highly enjoyable reading you should pass them up. Indeed, they use GRE words such as supercilious, peremptory and impetuous, as though those words were colloquial (I presume back then they were).

Otherwise, you can try Modern Library's Top 100 Fiction Works of All Time (they also have a non-fiction list) if you need some guidance on where to start reading. Besides the

odd take on language, namely James Joyce's later works, most of these novels will have many vocabulary words.

Articles from Magazines and Newspapers

Over the last few months, I've declaimed on many occasions that the days of studying only from a deck of flashcards are long over. Instead, The GRE requires us to have a far greater sense of how words function in context. The flashcard, however, strips the word of its context so it is dead and entombed in the stilted wording of a formal definition.

Instead I've recommend learning vocabulary by reading voraciously from prescribed sources. These sources include The New York Times, The Economist, The Atlantic Monthly, and The New Yorker. Most of the writing found within the pages of these august publications is not only replete with GRE-level vocabulary but is also similar in tone and style to that found on the GRE.

Here, I am going to take actual articles from the aforementioned sources. I will highlight important vocabulary and also discuss ways you should approach learning words when you encounter them in context.

Finally, the articles come from a wide variety of fields, e.g. business, science, literature, etc. I've done my best to select pieces that I think a majority will find interesting, a criteria that I recommend you employ when you embark on your own reading quest.

In each case, I've specifically taken excerpts that contain not only GRE words (though these are sprinkled throughout each article) but also engage in analysis of some issue.

Let's start with an article taken from the business section of The Atlantic Monthly.

The Atlantic Monthly

> *Outsider, non-founder CEOs are often overvalued because many corporate boards think the answer to their problems is a superstar CEO with an outsized reputation. This leads them to overpay for people who are good at creating*

outsized reputations through networking, interviewing, and taking credit for other peoples' achievements–all bad indicators of future success.

*Rakesh Khurana has **amply** shown how this **delusion** of the **charismatic** savior creates a **dysfunctional** market for CEOs, allowing the small number of existing public-company CEOs to demand and receive extravagant **compensation.** The myth of the generalist CEO is **bolstered** by the many **fawning*** media portrayals where CEOs say that their key jobs are understanding, hiring, and motivating people–leading board members to believe that you can run a technology company without knowing anything about technology.

This passage is great because it is full of relatively difficult words, many of which are high-frequency GRE vocabulary (fawning, bolstered, ample/amply). This excerpt is also filled with analysis, which will help sync your synapses for the GRE.

The article also scores big points on topics of interest. After all, it's Steve Jobs—revere him or fear him, most of us have an opinion of the company and its ubiquitous products (and now that this tech titan has just stepped down this article is more timely than ever).

Perhaps you find business blah or maybe you like to vary your reading. A great field to draw from is science. Part of the reason is the GRE will typically have one science passage. While it may be drier than the typical fare found in the magazines cited above, often the science writing on the GRE is similar in tone and style to what you'll encounter in these magazines.

So let's take the article Bird Brain, which appeared in the New Yorker last year. It explores the development of language in human beings and whether language is the province only of humans. To do so, it tells the story of an African gray parrot, Alex, and his owner, Irene Pepperberg—namely how she trained Alex to say hundreds of words (though none, I believe, were GRE vocab) so that Alex, by the time he was an adult, was able to form relatively coherent sentences.

Below is an excerpt from the article, which is about 15-pages long. In general I would recommend the entire piece, especially if the above sounds intriguing. The excerpt includes a few vocab words (but of course) and some reflection and analysis.

The New Yorker

> *All children grow up in a world of talking animals. If they don't come to know them through fairy tales, Disney movies, or the Narnia books, they discover them some other way. A child will grant the gift of speech to the family dog, or to the stray cat that shows up at the door. At first, it's a* ***solipsistic*** *fantasy—the secret sharer you can tell your troubles to, or that only you understand. Later, it's rooted in a more philosophical curiosity, the longing to experience the* ***ineffable*** *interiority of some very different being. My eight-year-old daughter says that she wishes the horses she rides could talk, just so she could ask them what it feels like to be a horse. Such a desire* ***presumes****—as Thomas Nagel put it in his 1974 essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"—that animals have some kind of* ***subjectivity,*** *and that it might somehow be* ***plumbed****.*
>
> *In any case, Nagel explained, humans are "restricted to the resources" of our own minds, and since "those resources are inadequate to the task," we cannot really imagine what it is like to be a bat, only, at best, what it is like to behave like one—to fly around in the dark, gobble up insects, and so on. That inability, however, should not lead us to dismiss the idea that animals "have experiences fully comparable in richness of detail to our own." We simply can't know. Yet many of us would be glad for even a few glimpses inside an animal's mind. And some people, like Irene Pepperberg, have dedicated their lives to documenting those glimpses.*

Though you may already know a few of these words, you should definitely look them up, especially if you are inferring the meaning based on the context. Always validate your hunch, don't assume you can always glean the exact definition of the word simply by looking at context.

After looking up these words, you'll notice a word with a secondary meaning, plumbed, and a couple of words from philosophy—subjectivity and solipsistic. After consulting Word Smart, Barron's Words You Need to Know, or other vocabulary lists I've recommended, you'll notice that subjectivity (or subjective) is a very important word; solipsistic, on the other hand, is not as likely to pop up on the test. But if you already have a strong vocabulary, and are looking to score in the top 10%, then definitely learn solipsistic.

You will notice that the definition of interiority isn't very surprising, as it is directly related to interior. You may also notice that it is similar to subjective. Finally, you learn the word ineffable, which, say you've never seen before, and you also find it on a few lists. Write it down on a flashcard along with an example sentence (oh, the irony of ineffable – for to say something is ineffable is undermining the very essence of the word).

Following a process similar to the one above is important. You don't want to simply underline the words and look them up. You want to digest them, so that, much like Alex the parrot, you will be able to use them in a coherent sentence.

Of course reading the entire article is also a good idea. Essentially you are training your brain to read through a long, relatively challenging piece, a skill that is indispensable for the much longer GRE.

Let's say that you read Bird Brain and enjoy it. You are already familiar with a number of words and want something more challenging, maybe something couched in academic jargon or that oozes literary style. (I'm assuming that if you fall into this category, you are also looking to get the difficult verbal section).

A good resource is the New York Times Book Review. Here you will find the truly erudite waxing literary on a recently published novel/book that is just as scholarly (Are these the very writers who craft byzantine Text Completions for ETS?).

Below are two excerpts from the same book review of a biography of Joseph Heller, the reclusive, and frequently irascible, author of Catch-22, one of the great novels of the 20th century.

New York Times Book Review

> *But again, Daugherty is often perceptive about Heller's place in the larger culture, even if the novelist himself rarely comes into focus. For the human aspect, one turns to Erica Heller's frank but loving memoir of her father, "Yossarian Slept Here," which comes as close as possible, I dare say, to deciphering the enigma behind the obsessive, pitch-black fiction. Joseph Heller, the opposite of* ***demonstrative,*** *was given to* ***oblique*** *ways of showing affection...*

*That was the year Heller published his second novel, "Something Happened," which Daugherty **commends** as follows: "Joe stepped beyond Wilson's **sentimentality** and Yates's bitterness to **eviscerate** modern America's success ethic." Such a **pat** comparison to Sloan Wilson, the author of "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," and Richard Yates, the author of "Revolutionary Road," is the sort of thing Daugherty might have **emended** given a bit more time to think about it; at any rate, "Something Happened" is perhaps the one work of postwar American fiction that makes Yates seem positively **Panglossian.** Erica Heller, for her part, describes the novel (probably her father's best) as "569 pages of hilarious but **mordant**, **caustically** wrapped, **smoldering** rage" — though of course it's personal in her case. Primary among the targets of the protagonist Bob Slocum's paranoid, **solipsistic** rant is his family...*

This article is clearly the most challenging of all the ones printed in this post. There are many difficult words, some that may give even the literate amongst us pause (Panglossian is derived from a character in Voltaire's Candide, Dr. Pangloss. The doctor was always optimistic, regardless of the circumstances).

Interestingly, solipsistic makes another appearance. Maybe it's not such an arcane word after all. Higher-frequency words—GRE-wise—include mordant, caustic, emend, enigma, and oblique.

Also, you want to be careful not to rely too much on assumptions. Demonstrative does not simply mean to demonstrate (it means tending to express one's emotions outwardly). And pat, such a diminutive word, so folksy-sounding and innocuous, has many meanings. The adjective form, which is employed in the book review, could easily pop up on the GRE, and cause you to answer a text completion incorrectly. So be sure to look up such words (if an explanation is pat it is superficial/cursory and unconvincing).

Surprisingly, difficult vocabulary words and highfalutin prose aren't only found in the esoteric niche of the book review. Let's take an opinion piece we are far more likely to read: the movie review.

The New York Times

> *At a certain point, though — to say exactly when would ruin a fairly stunning surprise — the cat-and-mouse psychology is **jettisoned** in favor of something more **procedural.** The two halves of "Love Crime" divide according to the words of the title: the first explores the **knotty, feverish, ambiguous** bond between Christine and Isabelle, while the second is all about guilt, innocence, evidence and motive. It is interesting and **ingenious**, even if some of the kinky, **queasy** fascination that had been so intoxicating in the earlier scenes **ebbs** away.*

While the words here aren't as recondite as Panglossian, the prose style is relatively challenging and has echoes of the GRE Text Completion.

GRE Verbal Practice Questions: Test Out Your Vocab Skills

Sentence Equivalence

Select exactly two answer choices that best complete the sentence and produce sentences that are alike in meaning.

A knack for _____, it can be argued, allows one access to a whole range of careers, many of which require one to forsake direct, honest speech.

- [ ] eloquence
- [ ] prevarication
- [ ] equivocation
- [ ] abbreviation
- [ ] discernment
- [ ] openness

The answers are “prevarication” and “equivocation”.

Watch the video explanation for this question here.

Text Completion

For each blank select one word from each column that best completes the sentence.

The movie comprises several vignettes, each presenting a character along with his or her foil: a staid accountant shares an apartment with a(n) _____ musician; a tight-lipped divorcee on a cross-country roadtrip picks up a(n) _____ hitchhiker; and finally, and perhaps most unconvincingly, an introverted mathematician falls in love with a(n) _____ arriviste.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
colorful	garrulous	unpredictable
insatiable	untrustworthy	gregarious
eminent	forlorn	bumbling

The answers are “colorful”, “garrulous”, and “gregarious”.

Watch the video explanation for this question here.

Reading Comprehension

Choose the option that best answers the question.

What little scholarship has existed on Ernest Hemingway —considering his stature—has focused on trying to unmask the man behind the bravura. Ultimately, most of these works have done little more than to show that Hemingway the myth and Hemingway the man were not too dissimilar (Hemingway lived to hunt big game so should we be surprised at his virility, not to mention that of many of the author's—chiefly male—protagonists?). In the last few years, several biographies have reversed this trend, focusing on Hemingway near the end of his life: isolated and paranoid, the author imagined the government was chasing him (he was not completely wrong on this account). Ironically, the hunter had become the hunted, and in that sense, these latest biographers have provided--perhaps unwittingly--the most human portrait of the writer yet.

It can be inferred from the passage that the author considers the latest Hemingway biographies a departure from traditional biographies in that these latest biographies

- ○ focus on a much overlooked aspect of the writer's body of work
- ○ depict Hemingway in a manner that is at odds with the myth of Hemingway
- ○ claim that Hemingway was similar to several of his chief protagonists in his books
- ○ suggest that Hemingway lacked the virility many associated with him
- ○ do not attempt to explore the link between Hemingway the man and Hemingway the myth

The answer is B.

Watch the video explanation for this question here.

GRE Vocabulary: Free Resources on the Internet

The Internet is a great resource for vocabulary. And, I'm not just talking about those *New York Times* articles with challenging words – many sites offer a word of the day, or, better yet, an entire write-up on a word (the latter is courtesy of The New York Times).

By immersing yourself in a world of words, you will allow your brain to pick up more words than when you simply subject it to a deck of flashcards. That is, varying backdrops keep your brain alert, so that it is more likely to hold a vocabulary word in long-term memory.

So, check out these links, and they should help you develop a stronger vocabulary that will definitely come in handy on the day of your exam:

Magoosh GRE Blog

https://magoosh.com/gre
Check in for blog posts about everything on the GRE—not just vocab, but Math and Writing and the rest of the Verbal section as well. Plenty of free study schedules, error log templates, and much more to help you on your GRE prep journey.

Magoosh GRE Flashcard App

http://gre.magoosh.com/flashcards

This is our free 1000+ word vocabulary flashcard site. It's pretty awesome— it includes all of the words in this eBook, and many more. It utilizes adaptive learning to make sure the words really stick! It's also available as an iPhone or Android app, so you can flip through flashcards and review no matter where you are ☺.

The New York Times Word of the Day

https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-word-of-the-day
This helpful word-of-the-day does more than just define a word. It cites the word as used in context from *The New York Times* galaxy of articles. These articles generally

tend to be a trove of other useful words, so your word-of-the-day can become words-of-the-day...make sure, though, to have wordnik.com open, so as to get even more context on a word. Wordnik, you ask?

Wordnik

https://www.wordnik.com/
I'm a big proponent of Wordnik! If you haven't heard of it before, here is the quick rundown: any word (and by any, I mean any) you can think of is defined, along with a plethora of examples taken from a gamut of sources (from Shakespeare to the last Yahoo article). If you want context on a word, this is the place to get it.

Dictionary.com

https://www.dictionary.com/
Their word-of-the-day feature is great—a dictionary.com definition right below the word, along with popular uses of the word in media (this last part is great for getting the sense of context). And, the best part is the word-of-the- day has been archived; so, now you can go all the way back to 2000 or so, and learn words (okay, that may be a tad ambitious – but at least you won't run out anytime soon).

With any word-of-the-day, always use common sense as to whether a word is a GRE word. So, if the word of the day is nares – another name for the nostrils – then you probably don't need to learn it. Likewise, really obscure words – say, words that are from Old English (ferly is a recent one on dictionary.com), then don't learn these words.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

https://www.merriam-webster.com/

This is a dynamic, robust site for vocabulary. Word-of-the-day is just the beginning. There are word games (I like the synonym finder – though it may not be challenging enough for high verbal scorers), and Trend Watch, a feature that shows which words

have gained a sudden ascendancy (pariah, meaning outcast, shot up in the ensuing days of Gaddafi's death).

You can also see what other people have been looking up over the last 24 hours. As I look now, GRE words you have to know, such as pragmatic, didactic, and facetious, are all on the top 10 list (hmm, it seems a lot of SAT and GRE students – and maybe even some Magooshers! – have been visiting this site of late).

Finally – or perhaps not quite finally, as this site offers so much for the vocab hound – a seen and heard column features words people looked up and their respective motivations for doing so (hagiography, apparently, does not describe Steve Job's top-selling biography).

So, avail yourself of the Internet and fill yourself with word-of-the-days. And, don't forget to always check the context.