



## • Techniques for Solving Synonym and Antonym Questions

1) On harder synonym/antonym questions, beware of trick choices. Can you spot the trick in the following example?

Choose the best antonym.

RESTIVE

- A) patient
- B) rigorous
- C) deceptive
- D) active
- E) cautious

The word, restive, is tricky, because it sounds like it has something to do with rest. Therefore, D) active would be the best antonym. However, this is a trick. Restive actually means restless. So, the correct answer is patient, a good antonym for restless. It is beneficial to familiarize yourself with tricky words like restive, because they are commonly tested on the SAT and GRE.

2) Take note of positively and negatively charged answer choices. It is possible to associate a negative or positive charge with almost any given word. Try to discern whether each word in the following list has a positive (+), negative (-), or neutral (=) charge.

Choose the best synonym.

MALIGNED

- A) beneficent
- B) magnanimous
- C) downtrodden
- D) destitute
- E) elegant

In the example, we are trying to find the best synonym for the word maligned. So, we should begin by ascertaining its charge. The prefix, "mal" is typically used in negatively charged words. Therefore, the answer will likely have a positive charge. Let's go through the list to see how each word is charged. A) beneficent (+) B) magnanimous (+) C) downtrodden (-) D) destitute (-) E) elegant (=) After labeling each, we are left with two words that are positively charged: beneficent and magnanimous. Even if you don't

know the meaning of any answer choices, you have narrowed your choices down to two and are left with a 50% chance of answering correctly. This is a quick technique that can be very beneficial when attempting to answer a question with several words that you are unsure about.

3) Eliminate answer choices that have no clear antonym. This technique only works on antonym questions. So, this is a great technique for use on the GRE because it only contains antonym questions (it doesn't contain any synonym questions). Consider the words rounded or striped. Neither of these words have a clear antonym. While almost every word has a synonym, remember that not all words have antonyms and eliminate them first.

4) Eliminate answer choices that are close synonyms. Spotting synonyms within the answer choices can be valuable because it allows you to narrow your viable answer choices. If two of the answers have very similar meanings, then the correct answer is too ambiguous. Therefore, it is possible to eliminate these choices. The SAT/GRE are tough tests, but they always present one answer choice that is clearly correct. See if you can eliminate two answer choices from the following example.

Choose the best antonym.

FOMENT

- A) mitigate
- B) engender
- C) check
- D) mollify
- E) satiate

The words mitigate and mollify are close synonyms. The both mean "to reduce or soften in pain or intensity, to make less severe." This leaves only three remaining viable answer choices.

5) Try to associate the word with a familiar context. Words on the SAT/GRE are tested for good reason: they are very effective. This being the case, they get included in many proverbial phrases. Note the following examples: "Gail force winds," "The Village Advocate," "Test your mettle", "Road to Perdition", "Patience is a virtue", "Abject poverty", "He made it through unscathed".

6) Use your knowledge of Romance Languages. The roots of many SAT/GRE words have similar meanings in foreign languages. For example, the Spanish word malo means bad. This is a common root for many negatively charged words: maligned malignant malapropos malediction malevolent malicious malefaction In addition, the Spanish word bueno means good. This is also a common root for many positively charged words:

benediction  
beneficial  
beneficent  
benevolent  
benefactor  
benign

But, be careful. Sometimes questions will attempt to trick the test taker by including roots in words that belie their true meaning:

bellicose  
restive  
noisome  
credulous  
fulsome  
adulterate  
craven  
precipitate  
prosaic