

VOCABULARY SECTION: GRADUATE ENTRANCE EXAMS

Students preparing for standardized graduate-level entrance exams like the Graduate Record Exam or the Medical College Admission Test will be particularly interested in these guidelines. Those interested in improving their vocabularies for other purposes should consult LSS's references for general vocabulary improvement or ask the LSS staff for assistance.

TIPS FOR STUDY

Try flash cards

Flash cards are enormously effective for learning vocabulary words. (They are useful for any simple rote memorization task.) Many manuals on how to prepare for graduate exams have word lists. Personalize these lists by crossing out all the words you already know and putting the remaining words on cards.

Put definitions on the card if they help you, but remember that the format of the test questions is multiple choice and will probably look like this excerpt from an *antonym* test:

Temerity: a) hard b) degenerate c) affinity d) panic e) circumspection (Correct answer: circumspection)

Use your knowledge of word parts

If you're studying well in advance of the test, you may find it useful to study Greek and Latin word parts. Your knowledge of word parts may help you decide all or some portion of a word. At the very least, it may help you eliminate some choices on the exam and improve your chances of guessing correctly. Look at this example from an *antonym* test:

Euphony: a) imitative b) colorless c) harmony d) discordance e) salubrious

"Phon" is a Greek word part that occurs commonly in English. It means "sound," but even if you didn't know that, you might have deduced that it had something to do with sound by thinking of several English words containing this root (telephone, microphone, symphony, etc.). "Eu" is a Greek prefix that means "good" or "pleasant." "Harmony" would be a close synonym, so don't be fooled by this distractor; the most appropriate answer is "*discordance*," which means "harsh or unpleasant sounds."

Don't forget single morpheme words

A morpheme is a unit that cannot be further broken down and analyzed but has some meaning in itself. Since you cannot always use your knowledge of word parts to help with these words, you just have to isolate and memorize them. Words like bilge, dupe, quay, wry, filch, deign, etc. are all single morpheme words. Several usually appear on vocabulary tests. It's easy to learn them using the flashcard method and by doing exercises (see sources at end of this paper) and adding the ones you miss to your flash card deck.

How to use time for study

Short, frequent exposures to the words are much more effective than longer study periods. You will learn more from 20 minutes a day taken in widely separated five-minute intervals than from studying the whole 20 minutes at one time. Here's how it works. Take your flash cards in the morning and shuffle them into a "known" pile and an "unknown" pile. Select about 25 "unknowns," put them in your pocket and take them with you. During the day you can look at them at odd moments you probably wouldn't think of using otherwise (like riding the shuttle bus, waiting in a lunch line, or during the few minutes between classes). When you review the cards at night, you'll be amazed to discover how much you've learned from several short exposures to the deck during the day. Try it. It's painless and fun, and think how virtuous you'll feel about having used some "dead" periods of time for such efficient learning.

For additional study, try practicing your words during the same activity each day-brushing your teeth, for example. In your imagination, apply your new words to people passing by ("He is an adipose man."). Post lists of words on the wall by your study place, or on the mirror or refrigerator door. Try thinking up your own ideas

EXERCISES

Exercises in synonyms and antonyms

The best source of exercises is probably the group of practice manuals for the various graduate entrance exams. Use many of them. Even though you may be planning to go to medical school, the test manuals for other types of exams are a further source of vocabulary tests. The material in the manuals overlaps, but the overlap can function as a means of reinforcement for you.

Exercises in unanalyzable morphemes

The best source for these is Chapter Three of the *Harbrace Vocabulary Guide* by D. W. Lee. He includes a good analysis and plenty of exercises

Word parts

Many books heavily emphasize knowledge of word parts as a means of learning vocabulary. *Consider Your Words* by C.B. Jennings et al. has an excellent chapter (Chapter Two) that is not difficult and has many exercises for practice. Slightly more complex and also valuable are Chapters Three through Six in the *Harbrace Vocabulary Guide*.