

SEM Education Winter Session

SAT Word Choice Questions

One of the most commonly tested concepts is word choice, choosing the most appropriate word in context. Unfortunately, it's impossible to cover the infinite number of ways this concept can show up. After all, there are hundreds of thousands of words and no formulaic rules for why one word should be chosen over the other. Although you'll have to rely on your fluency in English for a lot of them, the SAT does not make these questions difficult. In fact, the answer must be clear enough so that it's not up to opinion.

Example 1

Mark worked on a farm for many years to sponsor his wife and kids, who stayed at home.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) compensate
- C) fund
- D) provide for

The answer choice that best fits is D. The other choices might make sense in a business context, but not in a family context. Sometimes, the SAT will throw you a word choice question with tougher vocabulary:

Example 2

The immigration office could not handle the amalgamation of applicants trying to escape tyranny in their home country.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) diffusion
- C) prevalence
- D) influx

Amalgamation means a combination or mixture of something. *Diffusion* means a spreading out or distribution. *Prevalence* means being widespread or common. *Influx* means the arrival or entry of large numbers of people or things. The answer is D, *influx*. On some questions like the ones above, you just have to "know it." On others, a few general guidelines will help.

1. Avoid exaggerated, overly dramatic, or high-sounding language

Don't choose overly complicated words when simple words are enough to express the intended meaning. But don't think that an answer choice is high-sounding just because you don't know what it means.

Example 3

The startup didn't become financially beneficial until it reached a critical mass of customers using the app on a daily basis.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) profitable
- C) commercially rewarding
- D) worthy of great compensation

Example 4

The employees put forth a plan to cut spending by fifty percent but their boss rejected their audacious scheme.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) brash industrial action.
- C) bold proposal.
- D) spirited counsel.

3. The answer is B, the simplest choice. All the other choices are high-sounding ways of saying *profitable*.

4. The answer is C. All the other choices are overly dramatic and exaggerated.

2. Avoid casual or informal language

Example 5

Tired from the 20 mile hike, Yasmine retired to her tent and snoozed.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) hit the sack.
- C) slept.
- D) dozed off.

Example 6

A recently passed law requires that public transportation meet new safety standards, forcing state governments to foot the bill for the construction of new railroads.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) pick up the tab
- C) pay
- D) shell out

5. The answer is C. The other answers are too informal.

6. The answer is C. Again, the other answers are too conversational.

3. Avoid vague and wordy language

Vague words to look out for include *people, things, something, stuff, matters, aspects, tons of*.

Example 7

In anticipation of Black Friday, store owners are making sure they have a wide variety of products in stock.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) items for customers
- C) stuff to sell
- D) things that can be purchased

The answer is A. The other answers are unnecessarily vague and wordy.

4. Be aware of commonly confused words

Example 8

Ketchup is a better compliment to french fries then mustard.

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) compliment to french fries than
- C) complement to french fries then
- D) complement to french fries than

The answer is D. A *complement* is something that goes well with something else, whereas a *compliment* is something nice you say to someone. *Than* is used for comparisons; *then* is used to mean *at that time or next*.

Here's a list of commonly confused words you should know:

- accept vs. except
- affect vs. effect
- allusion vs. illusion
- ascent vs. assent
- cite vs. sight vs. site
- complement vs. compliment
- advice vs. advise
- council vs. counsel
- elicit vs. illicit
- altar vs. alter
- eminent vs. imminent
- precede vs. proceed
- access vs. excess
- fair vs. fare
- than vs. then
- allude vs. elude
- waive vs. wave
- respectfully vs. respectively
- discreet vs. discrete
- adverse vs. averse

Keep in mind that the guidelines above are just guidelines. Every question is different and not all of them will apply to every one. Your own judgment will be your best weapon once you've done enough practice.

1. The security company's services are being exited in the short term so that its password algorithms can be reset or strengthened.
A) NO CHANGE
B) winding down in the interim
C) ceasing operations nonpermanently
D) shutting down temporarily
2. Establishing himself as the premier authority on food, David Pine was a harsh critic of any chef who did not conform to his standards.
A) NO CHANGE
B) fall with
C) attach to
D) meet the bar of
3. The police detective was frustrated by the witness's refusal to cooperate potentially valuable information.
A) NO CHANGE
B) chip in with
C) play ball with
D) contribute
4. In his most controversial article, the audacious journalist trashed works widely regarded as classics, ridiculing such literary icons as William Faulkner, Charles Dickens, and Leo Tolstoy.
A) NO CHANGE
B) dismissed
C) dissolved
D) cast aspersions on
5. Korean director Ang Lee is like the American director Katherine Bigelow in his use of vivid imagery, but unlike her, he explores the lighter surfaces of humanity.
A) NO CHANGE
B) strands
C) facets
D) contents
6. The alarm fire burning across the night sky meant that an attack was (*eminent/imminent*).
7. The sight of upside-down turtles struggling to turn over (*elicits/illicits*) a sadness inside me.
8. I sought the (*council/counsel*) for advice on health and safety laws.
9. Many modern movies like Poseidon (*allude/elude*) to famous Greek myths.
10. Be careful when driving under (*adverse/averse*) weather conditions.
11. It's easy to fool your brain with a few cleverly drawn diagrams called optical (*allusions/illusions*).
12. Please be (*discreet/discrete*) with what I tell you because you don't want these dark secrets to ever come out.
13. Bangkok is the (*capital/capitol*) of Thailand.
14. As long as you (*cite/site*) your sources in the bibliography, you should be safe from plagiarism.

15. An avid believer of fate and superstition, Jasmine demanded that the fortune cookie (*precede/proceed*) the Chinese main course.
16. You can (*persevere/preserve*) perishable food items for a long time by putting them in the freezer.

1. D
2. A
3. D
4. B
5. C
6. imminent
7. elicits
8. council
9. allude
10. adverse
11. illusions
12. discreet
13. capital
14. cite
15. precede
16. preserve