

**PREVIEW SENTENCE COMPLETION—THE SCARY CHOICE**

More often than you'd like, you can be stumped by the logic of a sentence or the vocabulary in the answer choices. When that's the case, your only hope is that your test-taking savvy will steer you away from wrong choices that look comforting, to strange-looking, scary choices that happen to be right.

Say what? Picking a word you've never seen before feels crazy—I'd rather pick one I think I kinda know, you'd probably reply. Congratulations! You just told yourself why, when you're answering a difficult problem (one that most people are expected to get wrong), the scariest-looking choice is likeliest to be right—and it's going to be shunned by people who don't know how to play the game.

All SAT answer choices are valid English words.

Here we have a bunch of answer choices without sentences. Pick the choice that makes you least comfortable—the one that, if you were in a cave, would be way in the back, in the deepest, darkest corner.

1) [Sentence]

(a) condemnation

(c) plaudits

(e) pathos

(b) sarcasm

(d) irony

2) [Sentence]

(a) condensed

(c) exterminated

(e) transcribed

(b) delineated

(d) expurgated

3) [Sentence]

(a) imaginary

(c) elusive

(e) circumscribed

(b) repetitive

(d) eclectic

4) [Sentence]

(a) irrationality

(c) temerity

(e) anthropocentrism

(b) humanity

(d) serendipity

5) [Sentence]

(a) aesthetic

(c) decorous

(e) avant-garde

(b) partisan

(d) cerebral

- 6) [Sentence]
- |                 |               |                 |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| (a) summary     | (c) consensus | (e) replication |
| (b) fabrication | (d) trove     |                 |
- 7) [Sentence]
- |                  |                 |                  |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| (a) synergistic  | (c) competitive | (e) neutralizing |
| (b) naturalistic | (d) retroactive |                  |
- 8) [Sentence]
- |                |                   |               |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| (a) felicitous | (c) anachronistic | (e) exemplary |
| (b) inevitable | (d) timeless      |               |
- 9) [Sentence]
- |                  |                 |               |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| (a) idealists    | (c) dissemblers | (e) debunkers |
| (b) well-wishers | (d) nitpickers  |               |
- 10) [Sentence]
- |              |                  |                  |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| (a) harassed | (c) bilked       | (e) incriminated |
| (b) sullied  | (d) investigated |                  |



**SENTENCE COMPLETION—THE SCARY CHOICE**

After the test maker writes each sentence, including the correct answer, somebody has to write the wrong answers, right? We'll call that person Julia.

The problem is sent down the hall to Julia's office. She's the one who writes tempting wrong answer choices, the ones that make you feel good when you choose them. Julia laughs a lot.

So, now that we've seen Julia at work, what does that suggest about the right answer choices? Well, since they're right, nobody wants to pretty them up or sugarcoat them. Therefore, they'll often be the strangest, meanest-looking choices on the page—the choices that will be a struggling test taker's last choice. Because they're scary!

**One more thing:** As we will discover and prove during our work together, the right answer in each Sentence Completion problem is perfect: If you *know* what a word means, and that word doesn't fit *perfectly* into the sentence, it's wrong. So, as you work through these Sentence Completion problems, if you don't know the right answer, try staying with The Scary Choice you picked in the preview—and choose it confidently. Doing so here will convince you that Plan B—Scary Choice—is better than anything you're using now.

- 1) Blanchard's sculpture has generated only enthusiastic response: praise from the general public and \_\_\_\_\_ from the major critics.
 

(a) condemnation	(c) plaudits	(e) pathos
(b) sarcasm	(d) irony	
  
- 2) Alanna thoroughly \_\_\_\_\_ the text to avoid any lawsuits that might arise because of the new obscenity law.
 

(a) condensed	(c) exterminated	(e) transcribed
(b) delineated	(d) expurgated	
  
- 3) The art collection of the children's museum is quite \_\_\_\_\_, ranging from furniture to sculpture to finger painting.
 

(a) imaginary	(c) elusive	(e) circumscribed
(b) repetitive	(d) eclectic	
  
- 4) It has been suggested that the detailed listings of animals, plants, and minerals by their usefulness to humans indicate the \_\_\_\_\_ of the ancient Egyptians.
 

(a) irrationality	(c) temerity	(e) anthropocentrism
(b) humanity	(d) serendipity	

- 5) Artists who are described as \_\_\_\_\_ are the first to experiment with new forms or concepts.
- (a) aesthetic (c) decorous (e) avant-garde  
(b) partisan (d) cerebral
- 6) The library's collection is a \_\_\_\_\_ of Asian American historical documents, including rare materials about race relations.
- (a) summary (c) consensus (e) replication  
(b) fabrication (d) trove
- 7) When two chemical compounds are combined, a \_\_\_\_\_ effect can be achieved; the resulting combination can be more potent than either of the individual components alone.
- (a) synergistic (c) competitive (e) neutralizing  
(b) naturalistic (d) retroactive
- 8) The use of gospel music in the modern production of the ancient Greek tragedy is effective, in spite of seeming \_\_\_\_\_ to critics interested only in historic accuracy.
- (a) felicitous (c) anachronistic (e) exemplary  
(b) inevitable (d) timeless
- 9) Contemptuous of official myths about great men and women that had been taught to them in school, many postwar writers, with the skepticism expected of \_\_\_\_\_, advanced the idea that there is no such thing as greatness.
- (a) idealists (c) dissemblers (e) debunkers  
(b) well-wishers (d) nitpickers
- 10) According to the report, the investment firm had \_\_\_\_\_ several hundred customers, swindling them out of millions of dollars.
- (a) harassed (c) bilked (e) incriminated  
(b) sullied (d) investigated



**SENTENCE COMPLETION— THE SCARY CHOICE**

Here are the right answers with minimal comment. I hope that you used either Plan A (you knew the meaning of the right choice and it was perfect) or Plan B (you eliminated every choice you knew wasn't perfect and then chose the scariest of the remaining choices).

- 1) **C.** I would imagine that you know (a), (b), and (d).
- 2) **D.** No, she did not exterminate the text. If you chose (e), your reasoning went something like this: In order to take out the dirty words, she would rewrite (a very loose interpretation of transcribe, which means "to copy") the text. However, if (e) were correct, the sentence would have read, "Alanna \_\_\_\_\_ the text so readers wouldn't be confused by her bad handwriting."
- 3) **D.** If you chose (e), remember this: *circum* (like circumference) refers to a circle. And no, there isn't a "full circle" of artwork.
- 4) **E.** You might have liked temerity or serendipity, but where the heck did (e) come from? (Actually, it means "centered on humans.") Do you think Julia inserts scary wrong choices in order to attract you away from the right answer?
- 5) **E.** Would Julia include *avant-garde* to tempt you away from the right answer? Does she figure you're French?
- 6) **D.** Tell me you've seen *trove* before. Where? (It means "collection of valuables.")
- 7) **A.** We know it's not any of the others, as long as you've used the expression "retro" (and knew what it meant) sometime in your life.
- 8) **C.** Try to give the longest unknown word just a little extra attention.
- 9) **E.** Whether you remember what it means or not, I know you've seen dissemblers before (it means "liars").
- 10) **C.** If a choice causes you to doubt that it's even a real word, it's probably right.

## CRITICAL READING—INTENTION AND CONTEXT A

The following is excerpted from the autobiography of a Turkish-American playwright.

In the fifth grade, shortly after a class trip to see George Bernard Shaw’s play, *Saint Joan*, I embarked upon an aggressive reading program. “Give me the names of important novels and plays,” I would say to startled teachers. They soon found out that I had in mind “adult books.” I ignored their suggestion of anything I suspected was written for children. And whatever I read, I read for extra credit. Each time I finished a novel or a play, I reported the achievement to a teacher and basked in the praise my effort earned. Despite my best efforts, however, there seemed to be more and more books I needed to read. At the library I would literally tremble as I came upon whole shelves of books I hadn’t read. So I read and I read and I read. Librarians who initially frowned when I checked out the maximum eight books at a time started saving novels and plays they thought I might like. Teachers would say to the rest of the class, “I only wish that the rest of you took reading as seriously as Ajda obviously does.”

But at home I would hear my father, who was not an educated man, wondering, “What do you see in your books?” (Was reading a hobby like his darts? Was so much reading even healthy for a girl? Was it a sign of “brains”? Or was it just a convenient excuse for not helping around the house in the evenings?) Always, “What do you see?”

What did I see in my books? I had the idea that they were crucial for my academic success, though I couldn’t have said exactly how or why. In the sixth grade I simply concluded that what gave a novel or play its value was some major idea or theme buried deep within. If that core essence could be mined and memorized, I would become learned like my teachers. I decided to record in a notebook the themes of the books that I read. After reading *Hamlet*, I wrote that its theme was “learning to understand your place in the world.” When I completed *Huckleberry Finn*, I noted how “part of growing up is recognizing injustice.” Rereading these brief moralistic appraisals usually left me disheartened. I couldn’t believe that they were really the source of reading’s value. But for several more years, they constituted the only means I had of describing to myself the educational value of books.

In spite of that frustration, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely good company of books. Early on weekday

mornings, I’d read in my bed. I’d feel a surreptitious comfort then, reading in the dawn quiet. On weekends I’d go to the public library to read, surrounded by old people and college students. Or, if the weather was fine, I would take my books to the park and read and recite in the shade of a tree.

I also had favorite writers. But often those writers I enjoyed most I was least able to value. When I read Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood*, I was immediately pleased by the narrator’s warmth and the charm of the play. But as quickly I became suspicious. A book so enjoyable couldn’t be very “important.” Another summer I determined to read all the novels of Umberto Eco. Reading his fat novels, I loved the feeling I got—after the first hundred pages—of being at home in a fictional world where I knew the names of the characters and cared about what was going to happen to them. And it bothered me that I was forced away at the conclusion, when the fiction closed tight, like a fortune-teller’s fist—the futures of all the major characters neatly resolved. I never knew how to take such feelings seriously, however. Nor did I suspect that these feelings could be part of a novel’s meaning. Still, there were pleasures to sustain me after I’d finished my books. Carrying a volume back to the library, I would be pleased by its weight. I’d run my fingers along the edges of the pages and marvel at the breadth of my achievement. Around my room, growing stacks of paperback novels and plays reinforced my assurance.

I entered high school having read hundreds of novels and plays. My habit of reading made me a confident speaker and writer of English and in various ways, books brought me academic success as I hoped they would. But I was not a good reader. Merely bookish, I lacked a point of view when I read. Rather, I read in order to acquire a point of view. I vacuumed books for epigrams, scraps of information, ideas, themes—anything to fill the hollow within me and make me feel educated. When one of my teachers suggested to her smirking tenth-grade English class that a person could not have a “complicated idea” until that person had read at least two thousand books, I heard the remark without detecting either its irony or its very complicated truth.

1. The author uses the phrase “embarked upon” (line 3) to emphasize which of the following?
  - a. The transient nature of the fictional world
  - b. Her sense of isolation from her classmates
  - c. Her commitment to an exploration of the world of books
  - d. Her realization that literature can change one’s outlook
  - e. The fear she feels about leaving the familiar world of her parents
2. The author initially believed “important novels and plays” (lines 4-5) to be those that
  - a. had been praised by critics
  - b. were recommended by her mother
  - c. did not contain any references to children
  - d. were directed toward a mature audience
  - e. were written by renowned authors
3. The author would “literally tremble” (line 14) at the library because she
  - a. was worried that she would never be able to read all the books
  - b. did not know which books were important
  - c. was intimidated by the librarians
  - d. felt a personal connection to all the authors represented there
  - e. was excited by the idea of being allowed to borrow books
4. The father’s attitude toward the girl’s interest in reading (lines 23-30) can be best described as
  - a. admiration
  - b. exasperation
  - c. indignation
  - d. perplexity
  - e. sympathy
5. In line 37, “mined” most nearly means
  - a. dug out
  - b. followed
  - c. entrenched
  - d. tunneled
  - e. blown up
6. The author states that she was “disheartened” (line 45) because
  - a. she was unable to find books that were of lasting value
  - b. the tragic themes of the books she was reading were depressing her
  - c. her ability to write descriptions was lagging behind her reading ability
  - d. her teachers were not giving her as much encouragement as she needed
  - e. her desire for meaning was not being met by the themes she wrote down
7. The fourth paragraph (lines 50-59) describes the author as
  - a. comfortable only in the company of fellow scholars
  - b. happy with her books despite her isolation from others
  - c. dissatisfied with the rate at which her reading progressed
  - d. lonely because she often had no other children around her
  - e. determined to get outside and enjoy nature
8. The author uses the phrase “the fiction closed tight” (line 74) in order to
  - a. demonstrate that the endings of the novels were not believable
  - b. blur the distinction between fictional works and real life
  - c. indicate how impenetrable some of the novels were
  - d. criticize the artificiality of Eco’s characters
  - e. show her unhappiness at having to part with a fictional world



9. The author uses the phrase “the breadth of my achievement” (lines 83-84) primarily in order to suggest that
- she believes every child should read as much as possible
  - she was confusing quantity with quality
  - the books she had read varied widely in difficulty
  - she should have been prouder of herself than she was
  - no one else knew how much she was reading
10. The author implies that “a good reader” (line 92) is one who
- engages in a structured reading program
  - reads constantly and widely
  - reads with a critical perspective
  - makes lists of books to be read
  - can summarize a book’s theme simply and concisely



### CRITICAL READING—INTENTION AND CONTEXT A

In the Passages Companion, we have discussed how SAT authors pursue one of three agendas: to Inform, to Reveal, or to Persuade. *Please keep the Companion nearby and refer to it when reviewing your answers.*

Here, the author Reveals her inner life—which, if you think about it, is the only thing in an autobiography that could possibly be interesting. What’s the alternative to the author baring her soul—do you think you could work up much enthusiasm for an author’s discussion of the wide selection of cheeses she keeps in her refrigerator? Didn’t think so. In this case, if the author merely compared the relative merits of Eco or Thomas, this wouldn’t be an autobiography but a book review, right? So, since the author is *revealing* herself to us, let’s see how many correct answer choices mirror that intention.

1. **C.** Remembering *The Glass Wall*, we can eliminate any choice, such as (b) and (e), that isn’t discussed explicitly in the passage. Next, this entire Reveal essay is organized around the author’s active relationship with literature. Which Reveals more about the author, that she realized something (d) or that she made a commitment (c)? Answer choice (a) is literary criticism (we’ll see that particular characteristic in several incorrect answer choices).
2. **D.** Staying with the author’s theme, she wants to read “the books that adults read.” The most popular wrong answer choice here is (c). However, don’t many “mature” books, such as *The Lord of the Flies* or *The Catcher in the Rye*, contain references to children? Now that you think about it, isn’t (c) a pretty strange choice?
3. **A.** The clue here comes when the author writes in lines 12-13 that “there seemed to be more and more books I needed to read.” You can put choice (b) aside because the author knew that “adult” books were important—also, she had enlisted the aid of the librarians.
4. **D.** If you’ve read the passage, including the italicized introduction, from the beginning, you can understand why the author’s father, who is the product of a much different culture and tradition, might be *perplexed* by her very American decision. Remember The Reasonable Rule: Authors won’t portray those who can’t respond in a negative light. So, SAT authors don’t vilify their Moms and Dads. If you chose (b) or (c), you said that she did.
5. **A.** Go to line 37. Blacken out the word ~~mined~~. Now, substitute the answer choice words into the sentence. We know the author wanted to *extract* a kernel of truth “buried deep within” each book, so it makes sense that she’d have to *dig* that kernel out. While some find (d) attractive, “tunneled” doesn’t really work because, although it has digging in common with (b), the reasons for digging a tunnel are different than those for digging a mine, wouldn’t you say?



6. **E.** First, please note that only two of the five choices, (c) and (e), fit the author's Intention to Reveal. The rest focus on the books, not herself. Next, what comes right before this sentence? An account of her attempt to reduce great fiction to bumper stickers. Such a practice could not possibly lead to long-term satisfaction—else we should throw out the Great Books. Choice (c) suggests a comparison between her descriptions and reading ability that just isn't anywhere in the text.
7. **B.** "I came to enjoy the lonely good company of books." Pretty much a restatement. Once again, this essay is about the author and her relationship with literature. So, (d) is irrelevant to the point of the essay, and (a) may be true but the author doesn't say so anywhere in the passage.
8. **E.** Here's where having made the effort to understand the author's Intention pays off big time. During a conversation with a college counselor, after explaining the three Intentions, I asked her to answer this question without reading any part of the passage—telling her only that this was a Reveal passage. After laughing at the futility of choosing an answer based only on that knowledge, she scanned the choices for no more than ten seconds and looked up. "It's (e), isn't it?" she asked. It is (e). If you examine the choices, the rest don't fit the Reveal theme.
9. **B.** Again, the correct choice here reveals the author's Intention. Often, students are torn between (b) and (c), but while (c) assesses the books, (b) assesses the author. Interestingly, question 10 clarifies what this question is asking.
10. **C.** It's clear that the author doesn't fully approve of her youthful ambitions. Here, the context comes immediately after the reference: "I lacked a point of view when I read."

